Using career counselling with group life design principles to improve the employability of disadvantaged young adults

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Abstract

This article explores the effects of group life design counselling on unemployed young adults' career adaptability skills. Purposive and criterion sampling were used to select 62 participants involved in a skills programme (mean age = 24.86 years, SD = 6.38 years). A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test comparison group-design, embedded in an intervention framework, was used to gather data. Intervention occurred in the quasi-experimental group. Paired t-tests were used to compare the difference between the pre- and post-test scores obtained on the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). The scores on career concern and career control, as well as the total score on the CAAS, of the quasi-experimental group increased after the intervention. The results suggest that group career counselling interventions with life design principles enhanced the career adaptability in participants as a core element of employability. Future research should focus on more longitudinal research and tracing the long-term progress of participants to establish the value of the approach for diverse clients in (individual and) group contexts.

Keywords: employability, career adaptability, career counselling, socio-economically challenged, unemployed, young adults

Introduction

The Fourth Industrial Revolution predicts great hope for prosperity and future job creation, but many jobs will be taken over by robots/devices and certain jobs will simply cease to exist. The way products and services are utilised will be changed. This needs proactive adaptation by companies, governments, societies, and individuals (Deloitte, 2016). Many occupations will undergo major change, and new job and occupation categories will displace others to various extents. The skill sets needed for many occupations from a variety of industries are likely to be transformed. How and where people work will lead to challenges for management and governing practices (Schwab & Samans, 2016). Deloitte (2016) detects four major global drivers that would force institutions and companies to stay relevant. Demographic upheaval, digital technology, an even faster pace of change, and new social contracts between companies and workers are what drives companies in our current era.

Historically and today still, in South Africa (and in many other developing country contexts), career counselling finds itself in a similar situation. In South Africa, Maree (2009) comments on, and advocates for, a major overhaul of South African career counselling, as "the majority of

black persons are still not receiving adequate career counselling" (p. 437). Many students exit school and enter tertiary institutions without having been exposed to any career counselling whatsoever. Many young people who finish Grade 12 are under the impression that they only need a degree to be employed. Often disappointment awaits them, and they experience unnecessary failure during a sensitive life stage that leaves them unskilled and unemployed at home without knowing what to pursue further (Maree, 2014). South Africa does not have enough counsellors and psychologists to service the need of our diverse cultural population (Maree, 2017a). Moreover, relatively privileged counsellors from different cultures facilitate career counselling without having enough knowledge of, for instance, career beliefs in the particular culture that may silence clients during career facilitation (Maree, 2013a). In addition, assessment methods and practices are other contentious issues in the South African context. Traditional assessment modes often are not standardised for indigenous environments (Maree & Molepo, 2015). As such, much has been done to advocate an integrated qualitative and quantitative approach to optimally serve the community.

Brief theoretical overview

Employability

Employability is a multi-dimensional construct (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Guilbert et al., 2016). In its broadest sense, employability implies the relationship between two role players, the one being the world of work, and the other the person/individual. The first role player – the world of work globally and locally (South Africa) – has challenges especially in deficient socio-economic circumstances; however, it also offers opportunities in this specific time and age. The second role player is the job seeker who has a specific culture, life stage and life role, unique individual characteristics and relationships within his/her family, and a biographical story, and who reacts to the unique developmental opportunities offered as a means to design a future life and career.

Researchers employ different lenses/perspectives in their attempts to grasp the complex mosaic (Forrier & Sels, 2003) that the construct encompasses. Adopting this proposition, in the current article, we explore employability from three perspectives: education, industry, and the person. An educational perspective on employability occupies itself with preparing and developing students to be able to find employment. An industry perspective busies itself with recruiting the best people to benefit the organisation (Maree, 2017a). Often, there is disharmony between these two perspectives. What companies need from tertiary education training is often different from what is offered to students. As markets evolve and the world of work changes, higher education institutions often do not adapt fast enough to accommodate these shifting labour market needs (Maree, 2017b). Between what industry wants from employees and what the education system offers lies the individual perspective – young adults/graduates/employees who try to start making a living amidst ever-changing and unpredictable economic and political situations (Maree, 2016).

Career adaptability

People face a series of employment transitions in their career-lives. These transitions pertain to, for instance, redundancy, retrenchment, relocation of the employer organisation, and strikes (Savickas et al., 2009). The environment and context are constantly changing, which requires individuals to continually choose and adjust (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Super (1976), who originally applied adaptability to adult career development, reflected on the "career decision making readiness" (p. 44) of adults in the workplace where changing occupational opportunities and changes in life-roles required new career decisions (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). The

term "career maturity" was used to evaluate adult individuals' readiness to make career decisions. Since career maturity has an embedded evaluative component (Savickas, 2013) and implies that maturity should be reached, the cyclic and on-going nature of adaptability is undermined. Savickas (1997) states that "career adaptability should replace career maturity as the critical construct in the career developmental perspective" (p. 247).

Career adaptability theory developed to become a key construct (Savickas, 2005) in vocational psychology to assist individuals to navigate work transitions and manage their careers (Glavin & Berger, 2013). Whereas Hall (2002) and Maree (2013b) regard career adaptability as a meta-competency to indicate people's ability to identify for themselves those qualities that are critical for future performance and to make personal changes necessary to meet these needs; Bimrose, Brown, Barnes, and Hughes (2011) regard the concept as the capability of an individual for making a series of successful transitions where the labour market, organisation of work, and underlying occupational and organisational knowledge bases may be all subject to constant change. Savickas (2008) regard career adaptability as "an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles that, to some degree large or small, alter their social integration" (pp. 4–5). These definitions embrace one concept; namely "abilities for adjusting to changing work environments" (Stoltz, 2015, p. 266). Career adaptability and employability involve the self: identity and (coping) resources to deal with change and transition. Career adaptability and employability seem to be the result of the narrative of individuals who developed and improved their probability to thrive.

The four C's of career adaptability

As career counsellors realised the importance of career adaptability, Savickas (1997; 2010) developed theory on career adaptability. The authors distinguish between four distinct constructs; namely (Ii) concern for the work role and career; (ii) control to manage the career; (iii) curiosity regarding possible career opportunities and options; and (iv) confidence in making career choices (Maree, 2013c; Savickas, 2010). The theory of career adaptability resulted in the development of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) to measure these four constructs in individuals:

- Career concern shows the individual's involvement in thinking about and planning their careers. If an individual is concerned about his/her career, he/she is likely to think and act pro-actively about this work and career.
- Career control signifies how much responsibility individuals take to build and manage their careers.
- Career curiosity represents the extent to which individuals explore their own personal interests and values but also the extent to which they explore the changing world of work.
- Career confidence explores the individual's confidence to make well-informed career decisions (Glavin & Berger, 2013).

The CAAS – South African form (Maree, 2012) was used quantitatively as the pre- and post-test in this study to determine possible shifts in the career adaptability of participants, based on the intervention to enhance their employability.

A logical question that arises is: How can employability be fostered, given the background and history of the high unemployment rates in South Africa (and elsewhere)? As such, the theory of career adaptability and the means to develop employability skills in individuals (by employing career adaptability knowledge and skills) are briefly explored in the next section.

Career adaptability and employability

Career adaptability is widely regarded as one of the factors to influence employability (Coetzee, Ferreira, & Potgieter, 2015; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Koen, 2013; Savickas, 2005). Coetzee, Ferreira and Potgieter (2015) found a positive relationship between employability capacities and career adaptability based on research conducted with human resource profess-sionals. Koen (2013) describes career adaptability as "preparation" or "preparedness" for instilling employability. It seems that career adaptability positively influences and enhances employability and vice versa. Bimrose and colleauges (2011) describe career adaptability as "the conscious and continuous exploration of both the self and the environment to … achieve synergy between the individual, their identity and an occupational environment" (p. ii). The development of career adaptability supports and encourages individuals to be autonomous and to be prepared to take responsibility for their own career development (Bimrose et al., 2011). Koen (2012) adds that adolescents with higher career adaptability are more successful in career transitions. Career adaptability can be a driver (Bimrose et al., 2011) that complements and extends employability. Employability as an end-goal can be achieved through acquiring career-adaptable competencies and adopting a different mind-set toward learning and personal development (Bimrose et al., 2011).

It should be stated that it has become evident from the literature review that inadequate research has been conducted on the link between career adaptability and employability. Therefore, in an attempt to positively influence their employability skills, young adults from previously disadvantaged backgrounds were exposed to career adaptability skills and concepts in a planned intervention.

Young adulthood

The participants in this study were young adults between the ages of 19 and 40. They were not employed and came from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Their aim was to complete their skills training programme and find a job with the assistance of the organisation (POPUP) where they were studying. These young adults had to be able to take greater control over their lives and careers, and they needed knowledge about the world of work and greater self-awareness to be employable. A question that was asked was whether their age or life stage played a role with regard to the career dilemmas in which they found themselves.

In his theory on psychosocial development in which he identified eight different psychosocial stages, Erikson (1968) described the main psychosocial task in adolescence as identity formation. He defined adolescence as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood (Sokol, 2009), which theorists later calculated to be from 12–18 years of age. Young adulthood, accord-ing to Erikson's theory, is seen as the ages between 19 and 40 years and deals mostly with identity regarding intimate relationships (Sokol, 2009). Traditionally, adulthood was associated with five milestones focusing on completion of school, leaving home, entering the workforce, getting married, and becoming a parent (Settersten & Ray, 2010). However, becoming an adult nowadays seems more challenging than ever before (Lloyd, 2005). Young adults in industrialised societies and developing countries visualise work and life from a dramatically different perspective than 40–50 years ago and they do not regard adulthood in the same way.

Career counselling for young adults from culturally diverse populations

To administer career counselling to clients who are from a different culture than the counsellor poses certain challenges. In order to be more effective, counsellors should take note of nuances

(Pope, 2015) in dealing with culturally diverse clients. Exploring the 13 key points of the Career Counselling with Undeserved Populations (CCUP) model of Pope (2015), and applying these points to our study, was a process of unmasking. The key points reminded us to be sensitive to the dominating mind-set and practices of a Westernised approach to career counselling, which is often implemented exclusively through assessments and beliefs. Culture is a complex term (Pope, 2015) and in this instance refers to specific identifiers that distinguish people; such as ethnicity/race, gender, age, ability, disability, status, wealth, religious beliefs, health, dietary preferences, and so forth. Often, many of these identifiers are surrounded by contentious issues and a loaded history. Some of them are chosen and some are of natural origin. Culturally appropriate career services pertain to how and what to do when counsellors encounter clients who are very different to themselves (Maree, 2017c).

Most of the participants in our study came from black South African ethnic groups who value collectiveness and have a strong group focus (Maree, 2013b), as opposed to individuality. Group career counselling interventions seemed to be an ideal solution to the situation in South Africa where many young people had not been exposed to career counselling at school and had to find their way without any career advice or guidance. Additionally, group career counselling could be a cost-effective way to expose more young people to career counselling services before they leave school.

The use of culturally sensitive career assessments (Pope, 2015) was considered as particularly important in the current study. Very few career assessment instruments are culturally relevant to serve the diverse population of South Africa as a whole (Maree, 2013b). In the intervention for this study, dynamic assessment methods were used together with a South African developed questionnaire, The Career Interest Profile version 5 (CIP) (Maree, 2016) and the internationally developed CAAS – South African form (Maree, 2012) that had been validated for the South African population. We remained cognisant of the fact that "in disadvantaged settings, it is important to adopt a flexible and accommodating approach to enable young people to express themselves truthfully and unreservedly, so as not to curb their self-expression and self-construction" (Maree, 2015, p. 236). This statement accentuates the responsibility that rests on every career counsellor who works with cultures different from his/her own.

To be of optimal use to the participants in this study, we decided to be frank about our possible personal cultural biases – which could be perceived by participants as not being authentic (Pope, 2015). In this intervention, we were from a minority group (white and Afrikaans) who in the previous political dispensation (before 1994) was considered "advantaged" with regard to status and education. These perceptions could still exist in the minds of some of the participants (or our own) because of the way we (the participants and us) had been raised. The represented "culture" of participants in this study lay in the fact that they were from poor, and low-income groups. From our side, we had to manage the complexity with regard to identity and self-esteem that poverty and the lack of opportunities bring, and we had to create a space of equity and worthiness during the contact times of the intervention.

Career counselling with life design principles

The vast majority of counsellors who work in career development only focus on vocational guidance and career education (Savickas, 2011), but ignore life design. In this study, the participants had never been exposed to vocational guidance, career education or life design counselling. Therefore, the intervention contained fragments from all three intervention models to prepare participants for the workplace. Based on the career intervention models advocated by Savickas (2010b), the participants needed enhanced self-knowledge and occupational knowledge

to know where they would "fit" (vocational guidance). They also needed conducive attitudes, beliefs, and competencies (Hartung, 2011) that would assist them to develop themselves and conquer any self-limiting beliefs that might have hampered them due to difficult life circumstances. In addition, they needed to take action, grow their dreams by working hard and, through dedication, take responsibility for their personal career in future (career education). Personal narratives were used to inform students how to take the next steps towards building and constructing their future career (facets of life design).

Rationale for the study

Unemployment has a direct impact on more than a third of South African adults if the expanded unemployment rate of 36% (Ministry of Higher Education and Training, 2016) applies. South Africa is in the top ten countries on unemployment rankings world-wide (Maree, in press). The effect of these figures is devastating to the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities, as well as to the economy of the country (Maree, 2018a). Rising poverty levels add to the skills shortage in South Africa. People often do not have the funds to skill themselves so as to stand a chance to find suitable employment. On the other hand, organisations are often unable to fill certain positions because of the lack of skills of available workers (Maree, 2018b). To our knowledge, no large-scale research studies have been conducted on the influence of using career counselling with life design principles to improve the employability of disadvantaged young adults. In an attempt to alleviate some of the effects of unemployment, we explored possibilities to enhance the employability of young unemployed adults from socio-economically challenged backgrounds.

Research questions

The aim of this study was to investigate the usefulness of using career counselling with life design principles to improve the employability of disadvantaged young adults. We hypothesised that

- Career counselling with life design principles would improve the employability of disadvantaged young adults in an upliftment programme; and
- The intervention would result in higher post-intervention scores on the four subscale scores as well as the total score of the CAAS – South African form (Maree, 2012).

Method

Research design

The research design was a mixed-methods design, and the paradigm was mainly interpretive with elements of pragmatism. The methodology was a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test comparison group design, embedded in an intervention framework. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analysed to gain a more complete understanding of the research enquiry (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Sampling and context

Both purposive and criterion sampling were used to select participants from the People Upliftment Programme (POPUP); a non-profit organisation that offers market-related as well as cost-effective skills training and development for unemployed and under-privileged people in the city

of Pretoria. POPUP aims to lift people up from conditions such as crime and addiction caused mainly by poverty. Apart from offering specific skills training (e.g. hospitality, trades, computer literacy, day care, and early childhood development), POPUP presents a workplace readiness programme that all students have to complete before being allowed to embark on a specific skills programme. The leadership team of POPUP was disappointed with the results of their previous programme as some of the students who completed both a specific skills programme offered by POPUP and the workplace readiness programme, were not ready for the responsibility required in the workplace, lacked the confidence to be employed, and were unable to anticipate that their lives could take a different direction. After having explained the aims with the planned research intervention to the management team, they were keen to accommodate our involvement as part of their workplace readiness programme. Students are usually selected to join a skills programme (hospitality, sewing, and computer literacy and office administration) if they comply with the minimum numeracy and literacy levels. A formal Grade 12 qualification is not a pre-requisite, but learners need to comply with Adult Education Training (ABET) level 4. Our proposed inter-vention formed part of the workplace readiness module which was a compulsory module for all students at POPUP during their training. The contributing participants were students who complied with the criteria that POPUP had set for proposed students who wished to be part of the workplace readiness programme: Participants should be between the ages of 18 and 45 years and unemployed; should not have a degree or a diploma; and should be willing to be part of the proposed intervention.

Four groups participated in the research project. All four groups attended skills-generating courses at POPUP (Salvokop, March–June 2016) in different disciplines. The first group consisted of 14 individuals who attended the hospitality skills course; the second group consisted of 11 individuals attending the sewing skills course; the third group of 37 individuals attended the computer skills and office administration course (given that this group was much larger than the other two groups, it was decided to split participants into two groups in a random manner), and the fourth/control group (22 individuals) attended the ABET course and did not attend the workplace readiness programme in the next quarter. The last group of individuals served as the control group. However, this group cannot really be seen as a proper control group, due to the size of the group (22) compared to the size of the quasi-experimental group (62). The group consisted of students at POPUP who had not yet been admitted to a skills programme because their numeracy and literacy levels did not comply with the minimum requirements for following a skills programme – even though most of these students had a Grade 12 certificate. They followed a special course on the campus of POPUP to improve their numeracy and literacy levels so as to be admitted to a skills programme in the next intake, should they qualify. There-fore, the control group was a group of participants who completed the CAAS on the same day before and after the intervention as the quasi-experimental group, but they did not take part in the intervention programme.

Assessment instrument: Quantitative

The CAAS – South African form (Marree, 2012) is comprised of four scales (six items per scale), measuring career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. Jointly, the test measures psychosocial resources to manage traumas, transitions, and developmental tasks. Developed through the collaboration of 13 countries (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), the South African version was standardised in 2012 to determine the CAAS-South Africa's properties (Maree, 2012). The South African version demonstrated excellent psychometric properties.

Assessment instrument: Qualitative

The main aim of the CIP (Maree, 2016) is to elicit information on career choice making over and above "traditional" (quantitative) information. The CIP is in line with the view that multiple micro-stories and autobiographies, and careful analysis of such information, is needed for effective career counselling in addition to information obtained through quantitative question-naires that "test" clients' aptitudes and interests. The CIP was developed from the develop-mental and storied (psychodynamic) perspective with elements of the differential perspectives to elicit people's career-life stories and therefore grounded in Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2011). The CIP has four parts (see Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the *CIP*

Part	Information elicited	Associated career counselling paradigm (Savickas, 2011)	Theoretical underpinning
1	Biographical details, family influences, and work-related information	Career education	Developmental
2	Five most and least preferred career preferences	Vocational guidance	Differential
3	Six career-choice questions.	Vocational guidance	Differential
4	15 career-life story narrative questions	Career counselling	Differential and storied

Procedure

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and generated synchronous by the lead researcher and second author of this article. Data analysis commenced after all data had been collected (Ivankova, Creswell, & Plano-Clark, 2016). Qualitative and quantitative data were analysed independently and subsequently linked and merged.

The life design-related intervention employed in the research was based on the intervention promoted by Savickas and colleagues (2009). Life design-related and other techniques from various sources and authors were utilised (See, for example, the body map technique (Vasquez,2004); career genogram, interviews and personal presentations (Bowen, 1978), and the CAAS (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012))

In career counselling, where career construction principles are implemented, and qualitative methods are used; the assessment and the counselling process are "inextricably linked" (Mahoney, 2003; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Patton, 2011; Schultheiss, 2005). The assessment process incorporates counselling as the client becomes more self-aware during the encounter/intervention. Most assessments that were used as part of the intervention were informal and qualitative. These assessments were idiographic and idiosyncratic. The focus was on the meaning making and subjective experience of each participant, rather than to make generalised deductions about an individual compared to a population. The CAAS was used for the pre- and post-test to assess the effectiveness of the intervention in a non-biased way.

The intervention was structured to fit a group situation, and ran over six weeks. The intervention took place in two periods of one hour each, on two different days of the week (12 contact sessions). Moreover, the intervention aimed to be culturally appropriate and avoided discrimi-nation against diversity and culture in any form. All assessments, techniques, and activities that were used proved to be unbiased in respect of race, religion, gender, and so forth. As mentioned earlier, activities served to provide vocational guidance, career education, and life design intervention (see Table 2). The different sessions of the intervention were planned to achieve definite outcomes. Table 2 provides an outline of the sessions that were implemented, with their

eventual outcomes. In sessions 1 and 12, the CAAS (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Maree, 2013b) was administered to serve as the pre- and post-test and to verify the possible value of the intervention for the career adaptability of the participants.

Table 2. Life design intervention details

Session	Content	Activities	Outcomes that influenced employability	Intervention model (Savickas, 2010)
1	Introductory presentation: Current challenges in the world of work and the need for career adaptability.	'Seven habits' rap Biographical information form to be completed Pre-test: Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Maree, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012)	The rap served as an ice-breaker and attitude influencer. Students were introduced to challenges of the current world of work, got to know what career adaptability is, how the scoring for CAAS worked, and why it needed to be adaptable.	Vocational guidance and career education.
2	Self-awareness, self-esteem, and confidence	Body-map technique	Self-awareness The exploration and recognition of personal strengths.	Vocational guidance
3	Family influences	Career construction genogram (CCG) Group discussion	The role family played in individual careers.	Career education
4	Explore interest	Completion of the Career Interest Profile (CIP) (Maree, 2016)	Participants got the opportunity in class to complete the CIP (Maree, 2016).	Vocational guidance
5	Interest	Group discussions on fields of interest as portrayed in the CIP (Maree, 2016) (part 2, 3)	Participants gained knowledge and personal awareness of their interest fields and shared that with their small group.	Vocational guidance
6	Career stories/narratives	Worksheet: role models Facilitated group discussions on Part 4 of the CIP.	Career story-telling. Sharing with the small group their aspirations (what do I aspire to). Group discussion to facilitate career exploration.	Life design
7	Career stories/narratives	Participants completed the life-script template as they had been informed in the previous sessions on the CIP.	Participants reflected and formulated their life-script, e.g. Ideal work setting, I want to keep myself busy with … Self-advice.	Life design
8	Communication: Interview skills	General guidelines on presentation of myself Interview techniques	Group discussion on physical presentation: What to wear, non-verbal communication, projection of voices, etc.	Career education/Practical employability skill
9	Interview skills	Interview simulation	Participants got the opportunity to mimic interview situations to prepare them for real interviews.	Career education/Practical employability skill
10	Communication: One-minute speech recordings	Recordings of speeches	Participants prepared a one-minute speech, they got the opportunity to present themselves and what they aspired to in front of an audience.	Career education/Practical employability skill
11	Communication: One-minute speech playback and feedback	Speeches were played back in class. Participants critiqued themselves.	Participants got the opportunity to see themselves while they presented; they got the opportunity to give feedback to fellow students on their impressions about their speeches.	Career education/Practical employability skill
12	Conclusion Post-test: CAAS (Maree, 2012)	Students watched recordings of themselves and their fellow classmates.	Self-confidence and self-efficacy based on their presentations	Vocational guidance

Ethical issues

The project received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria (EP 16/10/01). Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the management of the organisation that the participants attended, and permission was granted for the anonymous publication of the findings. Written informed consent for the research and publication of the findings was also obtained from the participants.

Data analysis

For the purposes of this article, we only report on the quantitative results (difference pre-post-intervention). IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 (IBM Corp, 2017) was used for the analyses. Shapiro Wilk tests were performed and confirmed that the differences between the pre- and post-tests on the four career adaptability constructs came from a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests could be performed. One-sided paired t-tests were used, and Cohen's d (Cohen,

1988) was used to determine the effect size of the difference between the pre- and post-test scores (Maree & Pietersen, 2016).

Results

Internal consistency

Cronbach alpha scores were calculated to measure the internal consistency of the responses that participants gave to the different items on each construct. Alpha scores (pre- and post-) were acceptable for all four groups individually, for groups 1–4 jointly (quasi-experimental group), and for group 5 (control groups), ranging from 0.526 (concern, pre-) to 0.881 (confidence, post-). Therefore, the test items can be regarded as reliable and internally consistent for the entire group (Goforth, 2017).

Table 3. Paired *t*-test results reporting the differences between the pre- and post-test on each sub-scale of the CAAS per group

Post score – Pre-score	Pre Mean (SD)	Post Mean (SD)	t	df	p-value	Effect size (d)
Quasi-experimental group (Groups 1–4)						
Concern	26.02 (2.42)	27.28 (2.26)	3.649	53	<0.001**	0.50**
Control	24.69 (2.90)	26.48 (3.02)	3.732	53	0.001**	0.50**
Curiosity	23.39 (3.37)	25.24 (3.37)	4.028	53	0.001**	0.54**
Confidence	24.59 (3.27)	25.85 (3.24)	2.885	53	0.003**	0.40*
CAAS overall	98.69 (9.64)	104.85 (9.74)	5.109	53	0.001**	0.70**
Control group (Group 5)						
Concern	25.23 (2.81)	26.44 (3.22)	2.946	17	0.004**	0.69**
Control	24.05 (2.35)	23.94 (3.52)	0.666	17	0.257	0.16
Curiosity	22.23 (4.41)	21.94 (4.05)	0.503	17	0.310	0.12
Confidence	23.77 (4.28)	22.56 (4.85)	−0.446	17	0.330	0.10
CAAS overall	95.27 (14.01)	94.89 (13.23)	1.468	17	0.080	0.35*
Hospitality group (Group 1)						
Concern	25.21 (2.86)	26.80 (2.04)	1.678	9	0.064	0.53**
Control	24.29 (2.64)	26.30 (1.56)	1.824	9	0.050	0.57**
Curiosity	22.36 (2.89)	23.60 (3.02)	1.090	9	0.152	0.34*
Confidence	22.71 (3.42)	23.80 (2.53)	0.719	9	0.245	0.22*
CAAS overall	94.57 (8.03)	100.50 (4.99)	1.844	9	0.049*	0.58**
Sewing group (Group 2)						
Concern	26.42 (2.06)	28.11 (2.97)	2.502	8	0.0185*	0.83***
Control	25.17 (2.29)	28.67 (1.0)	4.346	8	0.001**	1.45***
Curiosity	25.08 (3.65)	27.11 (3.37)	2.042	8	0.032*	0.68**
Confidence	26.67 (2.22)	27.56 (3.94)	1.082	8	0.155	0.36*
CAAS overall	103.33 (8.20)	111.44 (9.79)	2.975	8	0.008**	0.99***
Computer skill and office administration 1 (Group 3)						
Concern	26.33 (2.56)	27.0 (1.96)	0.929	15	0.184	0.23*
Control	25.39 (2.72)	25.50 (3.72)	−0.080	15	0.468	0.02
Curiosity	23.44 (3.48)	24.94 (3.25)	1.554	15	0.070	0.39*
Confidence	24.94 (3.53)	25.88 (2.80)	1.552	15	0.070	0.39*
CAAS overall	100.11 (10.40)	103.31 (9.40)	1.409	15	0.089	0.35*
Computer skill and office administration 2 (Group 4)						
Concern	26.05 (2.21)	27.37 (2.31)	2.732	18	0.007**	0.63**
Control	24.05 (3.51)	26.37 (3.23)	2.941	18	<0.001**	0.67**
Curiosity	23.05 (3.26)	25.47 (3.40)	3.200	18	0.002**	0.73**
Confidence	24.35 (2.83)	26.11 (3.23)	2.796	18	0.006**	0.64**
CAAS overall	97.50 (9.93)	105.32 (10.78)	4.112	18	<0.001**	0.94***

Note. **$p < 0.01$ (convincing evidence of a significant difference between the pre- and post-test results); *$p < 0.05$ (strong evidence of a significant difference between the pre- and post-test results); *$d = 0.2$ (small effect: 0.2 – 0.5 = small to medium effect); **$d = 0.5$ (medium effect: 0.5 – 0.8 = medium to large effect); ***$d = 0.8$ (large effect).

Paired t-test results

Paired *t*-test results reporting the differences between the pre- and post-test on each sub-scale of the CAAS for the four individual groups, the total quasi-experimental group, as well as the control group are presented in Table 3.

Discussion

The study hypothesis assumed that the quasi-experimental group would display improved results on the different constructs of career adaptability as measured by the CAAS (Maree, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) after the intervention. The control group (which was not part of the intervention) was expected not to display significant changes on the career adaptability sub-scales (quasi-experimental group) as measured in the post-test.

Analyses of the pre-test results and of the differences between pre- and post-intervention scores (discussed within a literature control framework) follow below. Literature related to career adaptability and employability related counselling, as well as a group career counselling intervention, especially during early adulthood, is used to compare the study findings to previous findings.

Pre-test results only for all six groups

The pre-test for all participants revealed career curiosity to be the lowest career adaptability sub-scale. This means that participants needed development to explore and investigate the self (ability, interest, and values) and the environment of the world of work around them (Del Corso, 2013; Glavin & Berger, 2013). Furthermore, all participants seemed to already have been concerned about their careers, as scores on career concern were the highest in all groups. This means that participants were ready to engage in the intervention and that they were prepared for change (Barclay, Stoltz, & Chung, 2011; Del Corso, 2013). Putting these results into perspective, it seems as if participants were ready and open for the intervention once they could appreciate its benefit for their careers.

Post-test differences

Career adaptability is regarded as preparation for establishing employability in individuals (Koen, 2013) and it enhances people's employability (Maree, 2015; Savickas, 2005). In the current turbulent employment climate, individuals need to focus on their capability to live and last in the job market and to be employable. "Employability, therefore, requires individuals to adapt to change – to develop 'career adapt-ability'" (Wright & Frigerio, 2015, p. 7). The quantitative part of our study focused solely on detecting trends of career adaptability and we used the CAAS (Maree, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) to develop the employability skills of the participants. All groups – except for the computer skills and office administration group 1 (Group 3) – showed statistically significant score changes between the pre- and post-tests. In the discussion that follows, we draw special attention to the effectiveness of the four career-adaptability sub-scales (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) in detecting the career adaptability needs of participants (before the intervention) and the extent to which each sub-scale was influenced by the intervention.

Career concern

Career concern involves a positive and optimistic attitude towards the future (Wright & Frigerio, 2015), anticipates future career progress (Spurk, Kauffeld, Meinecke, & Ebner, 2016) and implies awareness of, involvement in, and preparedness (Savickas, 2005) for career development. Participants scored the highest on career concern in the pre-test, which suggests that they were already concerned about their career development. Nonetheless, the intervention significantly influenced the quasi-experimental group with a medium effect size difference.

Career control

The sub-scale of career control refers to engagement with the future career and the degree to which control is exerted to change this career (Savickas, 2005). Control involves taking personal responsibility and being persistent (Spurk et al., 2016). Decision making, determination, and agency (Savickas, 2005) are portrayed by high scores on control in the CAAS (Maree, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Sample items that measure control include "making decisions by myself" and "doing what is right for me" (Glavin, & Berger, 2013, p. 5). The quasi-experimental group showed medium effect size (0.5) differences on control, which indicates significant change.

Career curiosity

Career curiosity, which gained the lowest career adaptability score in the pre-test for all participants, refers to taking the risk to broaden personal horizons and to explore social opportunities (Wright & Frigerio, 2015) for career development. Career curiosity is needed to be employable, as it suggests a lifelong eagerness to learn about the self and the work environment (Del Corso, 2013; Liu, Englar-Carlson, & Minichiello, 2012). This area seemed to be in most need of development, and participants needed to grow their career adaptability potential in order to counter the negative systemic influence that a lack of exposure to vocational guidance and career counselling may have. The post-test results of the quasi-experimental group on curiosity changed with medium effect (0.54) size results, which attests to the fact that the intervention significantly influenced participants to be more adaptable in their careers.

These findings are in line with findings in the study that Koen (2013) conducted on re-employment in the Netherlands. Career control and career curiosity were positively influenced by a similar experiential intervention that assisted participants to find quality re-employment. Curiosity and persistence are distinguishers for career development in today's knowledge economy (Watson, 2017). Watson represents former Stanford professor Sebastian Thrun's company Udacity, which aims to develop careers by offering free online courses in different technical fields. Watson translates curiosity into the skills we learn, the knowledge we acquire and the experience we gain to be of value both to the self and to employers. He links curiosity to having a growth mind-set (Dweck, 2006), being persistent, and augmenting the idea of lifelong learning. Therefore, it seems that higher curiosity ratings translate into employability competence.

Career confidence

Career confidence was least influenced by the intervention. Although the purpose was to achieve increased or improved career confidence ratings for the participants, the statistical significance of the effect of the activities (e.g. recorded one-minute speech, body-map exercise) was smaller than expected. The initial and unusually high pre-test score on career confidence of the quasi-

experimental group (just below 25) could also serve to explain the smaller change in participants' career confidence results. Lower confidence levels are associated with unemployment and lower socio-economic status (SES), as was found in the South African study by Tele (2016). A sense of inadequacy and loss of independence and self-reliance were found to be present in NEET (not in education employment or training) youth (Tele, 2016).

All students at POPUP go through a 15-day life skills programme based on Christian principles before they start with their skills training programme. Participants had just completed their life skills programme a week before the intervention started and they sometimes referred to the meaning they found from the life skills programme regarding forgiveness and their personal connectedness with God. Scioli (2007) found hope (that is rooted in spiritual belief) to be a more important factor for life satisfaction than SES. Participants started to see their situations as less problematic and were hopeful to overcome their obstacles through their faith – which could translate into higher confidence levels. Confident individuals have an attitude that they can and will succeed in new tasks (Glavin & Berger, 2013). It seemed that the confidence of participants in our study was not necessarily linked to their career curiosity but rather based on their hope and faith for a better future, as they were busy working on it. Overcoming adversity teaches individuals what they are capable of, and builds self-esteem (SE). According to Spurk and colleagues (2016), this is directly related to individuals' self-evaluation. The increased confidence level that participants in the current study demonstrated represents the degree of SE that would support them to implement career objectives (Savickas, 2005) in spite of stressors in the work or world of work (Del Corso, 2013). Additionally, low SES may be a precursor of physical and mental illness (Caribbean Development Bank, 2015; Koen, 2013; Paul & Moser, 2009; Ryff, 2014). People who can find and sustain well-being despite existential life challenges appear to be physically and phenomenologically healthier (Ryff, 2014) than those who have lost their sense of well-being in similar challenges.

The overall CAAS score (mean of the four sub-scales) reflected a medium to large effect size (0.7) between the differences of the pre- and post-test. This change and its effect, as portrayed in the overall CAAS results, confirm that career adaptability is a malleable construct that entails behaviours that can be learnt (Savickas, 1997; 2005; Koen, 2013).

Summarised comments

In summary, all groups were significantly influenced on the sub-scale of career concern. Career control was significantly influenced in the hospitality group, the sewing group, and Group 4 (computer skills and office administration group 2). The latter two groups also displayed significant changes on career curiosity, while only the computer skills and office administration group 2 (Group 4) showed differences on career confidence. The overall CAAS score of the hospitality group, sewing group, and computer skills and office administration group 2 (Group 4) was significantly influenced by the intervention.

Apart from the central role that career adaptability plays in equipping people to be employable, other aspects that influenced employability in participants were self-awareness and confidence, attitude, communication and interpersonal skills, lifelong learning awareness, and work ethic. These aspects were assessed qualitatively (Gerryts, 2018).

Recommendations for future research

Future research is needed to explore the changes in young adults across cultures and socio-economic contexts on the question of sustainability. Moreover, exploring dispositional employ-ability (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008) with the aim to develop young unskilled and unemployed adults seems important to verify results reported on in the current study. In addition, longitudinal research should shed light on the sustainability of participants' newly-gained sense of career adaptability and employability. Lastly, a different measure may be included to examine the nature of the changes that take place in the participants more carefully (e.g. the CAAS – Cooperation scale (CAAS+C: Savickas & Porfeli, 2015)).

Limitations of the study

First, although this group was valid in respect of similarity (age, background, Grade 12 certifi-cates) to the quasi-experimental group, the size of the control group (22) versus the size of the quasi-experimental group (62) was too small to be considered a valid control group. Second, the participants were selected as a purposive (non-random) sample and therefore the data cannot be generalised. Third, the subjective nature of the data sources (e.g. reflection papers) also impeded the generalisability of the data.

Conclusion

Career adaptability as a major driver of employability (Bimrose et al., 2011; Coetzee, Ferreira, & Potgieter, 2015; Del Corso, 2013; Koen, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) was assessed before and after the career and employability-counselling intervention. The outcomes of the research show it was possible to positively influence the career adaptability and employability skills of the young adults in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts through career and employability counsel-ling. Once these skills had been more developed, the participants displayed confidence to publicly present the first steps on their new-found career identity path as developed through the intervention.

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