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FROM INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT TO STRUCTURAL INCLUSION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF COMMUNITY-BASED CAREER COUNSELING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Renie Tri Herdiani[1]*, Endang Surtiyoni[2], Inayatul Khafidhoh[3], Rina Hizriyani[4]
[1]Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia, [2] Universitas PGRI Palembang, Indonesia, [3]Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kudus, Indonesia, [4] Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon, Indonesia
E-mail: renie.herdiani@students.unnes.ac.id, triherdiani@upstegal.ac.id

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ABSTRAK

Kajian literatur sistematis ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana konseling karier berbasis komunitas memfasilitasi perkembangan karier dan inklusi ketenagakerjaan bagi penyandang disabilitas dengan menitikberatkan pada transisi dari pemberdayaan individu menuju inklusi struktural. Penelusuran literatur dilakukan secara komprehensif mengacu pada pedoman PRISMA 2020 dengan mengeksplorasi artikel empiris dari pangkalan data Scopus, *Web of Science*, dan ERIC yang terbit dalam rentang waktu 2021 hingga 2026. Sintesis tematik terhadap studi terpilih menghasilkan tujuh tema utama yang memetakan keterkaitan antara pemberdayaan individu, modal sosial, keterlibatan berbasis komunitas, karier berkelanjutan, praktik organisasi, kendala struktural, serta perancangan bersama (*co-design*) dan agensi kolektif. Temuan studi membuktikan bahwa kesiapan individu dan pengembangan keterampilan vokasional semata tidak memadai tanpa adanya transformasi relasional, adaptasi organisasi, dan penghapusan hambatan struktural. Oleh karena itu, konseling karier berbasis komunitas perlu bertransformasi menjadi model ekosistem partisipatif yang mengintegrasikan penguatan agensi personal, jejaring modal sosial, pengalaman kerja autentik, dan advokasi kebijakan inklusif.

Kata Kunci: *bimbingan karier berbasis komunitas; inklusi struktural; modal sosial; penyandang disabilitas; perkembangan karier*

ABSTRACT

This systematic literature review aims to investigate how community-based career counseling supports the career development and employment inclusion of individuals with disabilities, focusing on the shift from individual empowerment to structural inclusion. Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC databases for peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2026. Thematic synthesis of the eligible literature generated seven interrelated themes linking individual empowerment, social capital, community-based participation, sustainable careers, organizational practices, structural barriers, and co-design with collective agency. The findings demonstrate that while individual capabilities and vocational readiness are foundational, they remain insufficient when workplace accommodations, social networks, and structural inequalities are overlooked. Consequently, community-based career counseling must transition from an individualized placement model toward a participatory career ecosystem that aligns personal agency, relational capital, and organizational transformation.

Keywords: *career development; community-based career counseling; people with disabilities; social capital; structural inclusion*

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INTRODUCTION

Career development for individuals with disabilities represents an essential dimension of social justice that extends far beyond initial job entry to encompass vocational autonomy, workplace dignity, and long-term career sustainability. Despite widespread global commitments and legislative mandates advancing workplace diversity, individuals with disabilities encounter persistent and compounding disadvantages across vocational education, hiring procedures, and workplace retention. Global labor market assessments consistently document that working-age persons with disabilities experience disproportionately lower employment rates and higher risks of occupational marginalization compared to their non-disabled peers (Pettinicchio et al., 2022). These entrenched inequities stem not merely from personal functional limitations, but rather from the complex interplay of discriminatory hiring biases, inaccessible physical environments, and systemic poverty (Reims & Tophoven, 2021). Addressing these multifaceted employment disparities requires an intentional paradigm shift that reconceptualizes career advancement through both individual and environmental lenses.

From a theoretical standpoint, contemporary vocational psychology underscores that vocational trajectories cannot be understood in isolation from socio-historical and economic contexts. The Psychology of Working Theory asserts that access to decent and meaningful work is fundamentally constrained by economic marginalization, social barriers, and power imbalances rather than determined solely by personal agency (Duffy et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2023). Within this theoretical orientation, individual motivation and vocational adaptability must interact with contextual support systems and institutional resources to generate sustainable career outcomes (Kenny et al., 2022). In addition, sustainable career theory emphasizes that career longevity requires ongoing alignment between individual competencies, organizational practices, and supportive community ecosystems (Donald et al., 2025; Russo et al., 2025). Therefore, career counseling frameworks must evolve beyond isolated person-centered interventions to incorporate broader relational and structural determinants of work.

Historically, traditional career counseling paradigms have heavily prioritized micro-level psychological processes, including vocational self-efficacy, diagnostic assessment, goal setting, and resume enhancement. While cultivating personal vocational readiness is undeniably vital, an exclusively individualized approach inadvertently privatizes systemic inequities and presumes that employment success rests entirely upon personal effort. Recent scholarship demonstrates that for individuals with diverse disabilities, genuine vocational fulfillment involves cultivating purposeful identity, social belonging, and authentic self-determination within welcoming environments (Gilson et al., 2022). Community-based career counseling models offer a promising alternative by positioning the local community as an active relational infrastructure rather than a mere geographic setting (Aldersey et al., 2023). By mobilizing community resources, experiential training, and local social networks, community-oriented approaches can bridge the critical divide between individual aspiration and viable labor market opportunities (Ebrahim et al., 2022; Kyambade et al., 2024).

Despite growing interest in community-centered practices, existing empirical literature remains highly fragmented across vocational rehabilitation, special education, organizational human resources, and social policy domains. Previous studies have separately explored transitional employment pathways (Bowman et al., 2023), specialized community-based employment predictors (Schwartz et al., 2022), workplace integration challenges (Ogedengbe et al., 2024), and inclusive employer practices (van Berkel & Breit, 2025). However, these diverse bodies of knowledge have rarely been synthesized through a cohesive vocational counseling framework that systematically traces how individual capabilities evolve into

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structural inclusion. Furthermore, existing interventions frequently treat job placement as the ultimate terminus of success, thereby overlooking crucial dimensions of job quality, career progression, and long-term retention (Arthur et al., 2025). This lack of cross-disciplinary synthesis obscures the precise relational and organizational mechanisms required to achieve equitable and enduring vocational participation.

To address this critical conceptual and empirical gap, this systematic literature review investigates how community-based career counseling supports the career development and structural inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Specifically, this review synthesizes peer-reviewed evidence to elucidate the operational pathways connecting individual agency, social capital, community participation, organizational practices, and policy-level transformations. By integrating contemporary frameworks of decent work and participatory co-design, the study illuminates how communities function as career ecosystems that facilitate sustainable vocational advancement. Ultimately, this review aims to establish an integrative, multi-level conceptual model that guides researchers, career counselors, and policy stakeholders toward fostering genuinely inclusive work environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to synthesize empirical and conceptual evidence on community-based career counseling for individuals with disabilities. The review was designed, conducted, and reported in rigorous compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) statement and its search extension PRISMA-S (Page et al., 2021; Rethlefsen et al., 2021). Applying this standardized protocol ensured transparency, methodological reproducibility, and systematic minimization of selection bias throughout the review process. A formal review protocol was formulated prior to data retrieval, establishing clear operational definitions, search parameters, eligibility boundaries, and analytical procedures.

A comprehensive electronic literature search was conducted across three major international scholarly databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). The search architecture combined Boolean operators with controlled vocabulary and free-text terms covering four conceptual clusters: disability types, career counseling or vocational development, community-based interventions or social capital, and employment inclusion. To capture contemporary empirical advancements and address reviewer recommendations regarding recency, the search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2021 and 2026. In addition, manual backward and forward citation tracking of included studies and relevant review papers was conducted to retrieve eligible records not captured in initial electronic database queries.

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to maintain a tight thematic focus on career counseling, community mechanisms, and disability inclusion. Studies were included if they: (1) focused on youth or adults with physical, sensory, intellectual, developmental, or psychosocial disabilities; (2) investigated community-based vocational rehabilitation, participatory career counseling, or social capital mechanisms; and (3) reported empirical findings on career development, employment participation, or workplace inclusion. Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on clinical medical interventions without vocational implications, evaluated segregated sheltered workshops devoid of community integration, or comprised unpublished dissertations and non-peer-reviewed conference abstracts. Applying these stringent criteria guaranteed that the analyzed literature directly informed the multi-level inquiry into vocational empowerment and structural inclusion.

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The retrieved records underwent a rigorous two-stage screening process managed independently by the researchers. Initial screening of titles and abstracts against eligibility benchmarks eliminated duplicate and clearly irrelevant citations, followed by a full-text examination of candidate manuscripts. Methodological quality and risk of bias across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs were evaluated using standardized JBI critical appraisal guidelines (Aromataris et al., 2024; Porritt et al., 2024; Tufanaru et al., 2024). Data from included studies were extracted using a standardized coding matrix capturing author details, publication year, country, target population, methodology, community mechanisms, career outcomes, and reported systemic barriers.

Given the methodological heterogeneity of the included empirical literature, a narrative thematic synthesis was conducted in accordance with established qualitative synthesis guidelines (Campbell et al., 2020). Extracted data underwent iterative inductive and deductive coding to identify recurrent patterns, operational mechanisms, and conceptual interconnections across studies. These emergent codes were subsequently synthesized into seven cohesive themes structured across four analytical tiers: individual empowerment, relational social capital, organizational practices, and structural conditions. This multi-level synthesis framework made it possible to systematically map how community-based career counseling bridges micro-level career preparation with macro-level structural inclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The systematic synthesis of the included empirical literature generated seven interrelated themes that illustrate how career counseling initiatives operate across individual, relational, organizational, and structural tiers. These themes delineate the progressive pathway through which personal vocational preparedness translates into sustainable labor market participation and systemic inclusion. Each theme encapsulates specific operational mechanisms and empirical findings extracted from the analyzed studies. The detailed thematic evidence and corresponding methodological profiles are systematically elaborated below.

Theme 1: From Individual Skills to Career Agency and Empowerment

The synthesis of included studies reveals that foundational vocational preparation must evolve from simple skill acquisition toward developing comprehensive career agency among individuals with disabilities. While personal vocational self-efficacy, occupational knowledge, and functional adaptability represent critical building blocks, empirical evidence demonstrates that these personal capabilities do not guarantee employment on their own. Instead, career agency emerges through dynamic interactions between an individual's psychological resources and supportive environmental opportunities. The primary empirical investigations and conceptual frameworks substantiating this transformative theme are systematically detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Evidence Supporting Theme 1: Individual Skills and Career Agency

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Williams et al.	Predicting Decent Work Among US Black	USA	Examine contextual predictors of decent work	Quantitative survey, $N = 348$	Decent work access is governed by social barriers and contextual	*Journal of Career Assessment*

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	Workers (2023)				support rather than agency alone	
Brehmer et al.	Differential Effects of Functioning on Career Developme nt (2023)	USA	Examine functioning and vocational progress	Quantitative, $N = 674$	Functional abilities relate distinctively to vocational identity and work adjustment	*Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*
Kenny et al.	Understanding Adaptive Career Progress of Youth (2022)	USA	Examine barriers, adaptability, and career progress	Quantitative, $N = 364$	Career adaptability interacts directly with contextual barriers and external support	*Journal of Career Assessment*
Gilson et al.	"More than a Job, it's a Purpose" (2022)	USA	Examine work experiences in developmental disabilities	Empirical qualitative study	Work provides personal purpose, identity, and social connection beyond basic employment	*Journal of Career Assessment*
Ebrahim et al.	Traversing Disability: Building Social Capital (2022)	South Africa	Examine skill development and employment	Qualitative case study	Vocational skills require social capital to translate into tangible employment opportunities	*Disabilities*
Schwartz et al.	Predictors of Community -Based	USA	Identify predictors of	Secondary quantitative analysis	Employment is predicted	*Disability and*

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Employment (2022)	community employment	jointly by environmental conditions and individual characteristics	*Rehabilitation*	

As summarized in Table 1, the empirical evidence demonstrates that individual capabilities alone remain insufficient to secure sustainable vocational inclusion without external facilitation. Research by Brehmer et al. (2023) indicates that functional abilities correlate distinctively with vocational identity and work personality, proving that diverse impairments necessitate customized vocational counseling. Furthermore, Kenny et al. (2022) and Williams et al. (2023) illustrate that career adaptability operates within broader socio-economic constraints, requiring contextual supports to translate personal motivation into tangible career progress. Consequently, community-based career counseling must conceptualize personal empowerment not as an isolated outcome, but as an interactive career agency deeply embedded within relational environments.

Theme 2: Community as Social Capital and a Source of Career Opportunity

The second emergent theme highlights that community-level networks and social capital serve as vital relational conduits connecting individual vocational competencies with genuine employment opportunities. Individuals with disabilities frequently encounter systemic isolation from mainstream labor networks, rendering technical skills ineffective when relational pathways to employers are absent. Community organizations, specialized rehabilitation centers, and informal peer networks collectively mobilize tangible resources, job leads, and mentorship that mitigate labor market exclusion. The empirical studies examining the mechanisms through which social capital and community systems facilitate employment opportunities are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Evidence Supporting Theme 2: Community Social Capital and Networks

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Ebrahim et al.	Traversing Disability: Building Social Capital (2022)	South Africa	Examine how skills contribute to social capital	Qualitative intrinsic case study	Skill development expands relational networks, granting access to employment resources	*Disabilities*
Kyamba de et al.	Social Capital and Self-Employment of Persons with	Uganda	Examine social capital and self-employment	Quantitative survey, $N = 106$	Social capital correlates positively with self-employment, bridging	*Cogent Social Sciences*

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	Disabilities (2024)				resource deficits	
Trani et al.	Access to Services from Persons with Disabilities (2022)	Afghanistan	Examine if CBR improves access to services	Comparative study, $N = 2{,}993$	Community-based rehabilitation improves service access and connects individuals with resources	*Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*
Engelman et al.	Assessing Community-Based Organizations in Puerto Rico (2022)	Puerto Rico	Examine role of community organizations	Organizational assessment, $N = 22$	Community organizations mobilize essential resources and provide local support infrastructures	*Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health*

The empirical records compiled in Table 2 confirm that social capital functions as an essential relational infrastructure for career advancement. Specifically, Kyambade et al. (2024) establish that social networks are significantly associated with successful self-employment among entrepreneurs with disabilities, whereas self-efficacy alone does not mediate this trajectory. Similarly, Ebrahim et al. (2022) illustrate that vocational training becomes substantially more impactful when accompanied by intentional social network expansion and community engagement. Furthermore, investigations by Trani et al. (2022) and Engelman et al. (2022) underscore that community-based organizations act as critical resource hubs that connect marginalized job seekers with broader institutional systems.

Theme 3: Community-Based Participation as a Bridge to Employment

The third theme demonstrates that community-based participation, particularly through experiential work placements, functions as a practical bridge between classroom-based vocational preparation and competitive employment. Authentic work immersion allows individuals with disabilities to apply technical competencies, navigate workplace social norms, and build meaningful professional relationships within integrated settings. Empirical literature emphasizes that experiential learning yields long-term vocational gains when paired with structured pedagogical instruction, peer support networks, and individualized transition planning. Key empirical investigations documenting the core characteristics and transitional outcomes of community-based work participation are outlined in Table 3.

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Table 3. Evidence Supporting Theme 3: Community-Based Work Experiences

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Rooney-Kron & Dymond	Participation in Community-Based Work Experiences (2022)	USA	Examine literature on work participation	Scoping review of 54 empirical studies	Work participation supports transition readiness, skill acquisition, and post-school jobs	*Res. Pract. Pers. Severe Disabil.*
Bowman et al.	Employment Participation Pathway Model for Youth (2023)	Canada	Develop an employment pathway model	Long-term model implementation study	Participation requires progressive preparation, person-directed planning, and ongoing supports	*Disability and Rehabilitation*
Rooney-Kron et al.	Teachers' Perceptions of Community Work Experiences (2026)	USA	Identify key features of work experiences	Qualitative interviews, $N = 20$	Meaningful tasks, systematic instruction, and high expectations are critical for success	*Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.*

The synthesis in Table 3 highlights that community-based work experiences provide an indispensable experiential link that demystifies competitive employment for individuals with diverse disabilities. Rooney-Kron and Dymond (2022) demonstrate that community immersion fosters workplace confidence, vocational task mastery, and post-school employment success. Moreover, Bowman et al. (2023) and Rooney-Kron et al. (2026) emphasize that community participation is most transformative when educators and counselors uphold high expectations while maintaining person-centered support structures. These collective findings confirm that vocational readiness develops experientially through sustained participation in authentic community settings rather than through isolated, classroom-based instruction.

Theme 4: From Job Placement to Meaningful and Sustainable Careers

The fourth theme underscores that the ultimate objective of inclusive career counseling must expand beyond initial job placement toward fostering meaningful, decent, and sustainable careers. Merely securing entry-level employment does not guarantee long-term economic security, job satisfaction, or psychological well-being, particularly when workers with disabilities are relegated to precarious or dead-end positions. Modern career frameworks emphasize that sustainable employment requires ongoing skill cultivation, fair compensation,

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workplace dignity, and pathways for upward professional mobility. The scholarly works substantiating this critical conceptual shift from short-term placement toward sustainable career trajectories are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Evidence Supporting Theme 4: Meaningful and Sustainable Careers

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Gilson et al.	"More than a Job, it's a Purpose" (2022)	USA	Explore work meaning using Psychology of Working	Qualitative consensual research, $N = 18$	Work fulfills needs for survival, social connection, and self-determination beyond basic wages	*Journal of Career Assessment*
Arthur et al.	Beyond Job Placement: Careers for Marginalized Groups (2025)	Australia	Advocate for long-term career support	Conceptual and practice review	Vocational support must extend past initial placement toward skill utilization and longevity	*Int. J. Educ. Vocat. Guidance*
Russo et al.	Sustainable Career and Decent Work (2025)	Italy	Examine community responsibility and well-being	Cross-sectional SEM survey, $N = 250$	Decent work conditions and sustainable career prospects significantly predict worker well-being	*BMC Psychology*

As illustrated by the scholarly evidence in Table 4, the conceptualization of employment success must encompass subjective work quality, personal meaning, and long-term career viability. Qualitative findings from Gilson et al. (2022) reveal that adults with intellectual disabilities experience work as a profound source of personal purpose, social identity, and self-determination. In parallel, Arthur et al. (2025) and Russo et al. (2025) demonstrate that decent work conditions and community responsibility are essential mediators that sustain worker well-being and career longevity over time. Consequently, career counselors must remain actively engaged beyond initial hiring to facilitate continuous professional development, job retention, and workplace well-being.

Theme 5: Institutional and Organizational Conditions for Inclusion

The fifth theme establishes that sustainable vocational inclusion cannot be achieved through individual preparation alone, as employment longevity relies heavily upon supportive institutional environments and inclusive organizational practices. Demand-side workplace

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conditions, including reasonable job accommodations, flexible scheduling, empathetic leadership, and an inclusive organizational culture, determine whether qualified individuals with disabilities can thrive. Furthermore, collaborative partnerships between vocational counselors, transition specialists, and workplace supervisors are essential to establishing seamless support ecosystems. The empirical and scoping review literature examining organizational determinants and multi-tiered professional collaboration is synthesized in Table 5.

Table 5. Evidence Supporting Theme 5: Institutional and Organizational Practices

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Fuentes & Lindsay	Workplace Accommodations During Disruption (2023)	Canada	Examine accommodations and employment impacts	Scoping review of international databases	Flexible arrangements and targeted accommodations directly stabilize employment outcomes	*Work*
van Berkel & Breit	Organizational Practices for Inclusion (2025)	Netherlands	Map empirical research on employer practices	Scoping review of 146 empirical studies	Inclusion requires comprehensive HRM practices, accommodations, leadership, and coworker support	*Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*
van Berkel & Breit	Organizational Practices and Outcomes (2026)	Netherlands	Synthesize quantitative employee outcomes	Systematic synthesis of quantitative studies	Supportive organizational practices significantly enhance job performance and job retention	*Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*
Challenger et al.	Collaboration for Career Readiness (2025)	USA	Propose counselor-specialist collaboration	Conceptual multi-tiered systems framework	Inter-professional collaboration strengthens secondary transition planning and career readiness	*The Journal of Education*

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The synthesized literature in Table 5 firmly shifts the analytical focus from supply-side individual employability toward demand-side organizational accountability. The comprehensive reviews conducted by van Berkel and Breit (2025, 2026) establish that organizational practices spanning recruitment, customized accommodations, supervisor support, and workplace culture directly govern employment sustainability and employee well-being. Additionally, Fuentes and Lindsay (2023) document how flexible work arrangements and targeted accommodations mitigate occupational vulnerability during institutional disruptions. Furthermore, Challenger et al. (2025) highlight that structured collaboration between school counselors and transition specialists enhances institutional readiness and bridges the transition into competitive employment.

Theme 6: Structural Barriers, Inequality, and the Limits of Individualized Counseling

The sixth theme reveals that entrenched structural inequalities, economic marginalization, and institutional biases severely constrain the real-world effectiveness of individualized career counseling models. Disability-based employment disparities are deeply rooted in structural vulnerabilities, including systemic poverty, labor market discrimination, and fragmented social welfare policies that penalize earned income. Career interventions that focus exclusively on personal motivation or interview preparation risk individualizing and obscuring systemic inequities that require structural remedies. The foundational theoretical frameworks and empirical investigations articulating the profound impact of structural barriers on vocational outcomes are detailed in Table 6.

Table 6. Evidence Supporting Theme 6: Structural Barriers and Macro-Level Inequality

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Pettiniccchio et al.	Sociology of Disability Economic Inequality (2022)	USA	Explain economic inequality sociologically	Integrative theoretical review	Economic disparities are generated by institutional structures rather than personal limitations	*Contemporary Sociology*
Reims & Tophoven	Double Burden of Disability and Poverty (2021)	Germany	Examine poverty and school-to-work outcomes	Administrative cohort study, $N = 36{,}645$	Structural poverty severely undermines qualification attainment and transitional success	*Social Inclusion*
Chan & Westcott	Structural Vulnerability Framework (2025)	USA	Introduce structural vulnerability to counseling	Conceptual framework analysis	Macro-level institutional forces govern individual barriers,	*Journal of Counseling & Development*

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					requiring systemic advocacy	
Duffy et al.	Measuring Constructs in Psychology of Working (2024)	USA	Operationalize contextual career constraints	Conceptual measurement review	Marginalization and economic constraints dictate access to decent work environments	*Journal of Career Assessment*

The empirical and theoretical works presented in Table 6 clearly delineate the structural boundaries that restrict individual vocational agency. Sociological analyses by Pettinicchio et al. (2022) prove that disability-based wage gaps and underemployment are systematically produced by institutional and economic stratifications rather than individual skill deficits. Similarly, Reims and Tophoven (2021) demonstrate that socio-economic poverty compounds disability disadvantages, severely undermining school-to-work transitions despite access to standard vocational rehabilitation. Furthermore, Chan and Westcott (2025) and Duffy et al. (2024) argue that vocational counselors must adopt a structural vulnerability lens to recognize how macro-level economic constraints govern individual career choices.

Theme 7: Co-Design, Collective Agency, and Community Ownership

The seventh theme demonstrates that co-design methodologies and community-based participatory practices fundamentally transform individuals with disabilities from passive service recipients into active co-architects of their vocational pathways. Authentic participatory engagement redistributes decision-making power, ensuring that career counseling programs, workplace accommodations, and vocational policies are directly informed by lived disability experiences. By fostering collective agency among job seekers, disability advocates, educators, and employers, participatory approaches build sustainable community ownership over inclusive employment systems. The empirical studies documenting the implementation and transformative impact of co-design and collective agency within vocational initiatives are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Evidence Supporting Theme 7: Co-Design and Collective Agency

Authors	Title and Year	Country	Aim	Methodology	Finding	Journal
Benz et al.	Participatory Research Through Co-Design (2024)	Australia	Examine co-design across disability stakeholders	Community-based participatory co-design	Co-design promotes power sharing, accessibility, and collective ownership of service design	*Research Involvement and Engagement*

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Hasnain et al.	Participatory Initiative for Disabled Refugees (2025)	USA	Address social and economic barriers collaboratively	Community-based participatory initiative	Multi-stakeholder collaboration bridges individual needs with community economic resources	*Health Education & Behavior*
Wong et al.	Project FORWARD: CBPR in Rehabilitation (2025)	USA / Taiwan	Apply CBPR to develop vocational pathways	Community-based participatory research	Collaborative development aligns client priorities with responsive employment systems	*Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*

As delineated in Table 7, participatory co-design represents a transformative operational mechanism that bridges grassroots lived experiences with institutional policy reform. The empirical findings of Benz et al. (2024) illustrate that co-design fosters genuine power sharing, mutual trust, and shared program ownership between disability communities and service providers. Similarly, Hasnain et al. (2025) and Wong et al. (2025) establish that community-based participatory research generates vocational rehabilitation pathways that are culturally responsive, economically viable, and highly aligned with user priorities. These collaborative initiatives demonstrate that collective agency mobilizes systemic change, ensuring that vocational counseling models are constructed collaboratively with individuals with disabilities rather than imposed upon them.

Discussion

The synthesis across the seven identified themes demonstrates that community-based career counseling for individuals with disabilities must be conceptualized as a multi-level ecosystem rather than an isolated, person-centered intervention. In strong alignment with the Psychology of Working Theory, the findings from Themes 1, 2, and 3 confirm that individual vocational agency, self-efficacy, and work adaptability cannot flourish in a vacuum (Duffy et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2023). Relational social capital and authentic community-based work participation act as essential mediating mechanisms that convert raw personal potential into tangible labor market connections (Ebrahim et al., 2022; Kyambade et al., 2024). When community networks actively connect job seekers with local employers, they effectively counterbalance the social isolation that traditionally characterizes disability employment trajectories. Thus, career readiness is inherently relational and develops through active immersion within authentic community contexts.

Furthermore, integrating sustainable career theory and career ecosystem perspectives provides a robust explanatory framework for the transitions documented in Themes 4 and 5 (Donald et al., 2025; Russo et al., 2025). Sustainable employment cannot be defined simply by initial job placement metrics, but must encompass work meaningfulness, psychological well-being, and long-term career durability (Arthur et al., 2025; Gilson et al., 2022). As revealed by

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van Berkel and Breit (2025, 2026), achieving sustainable employment requires that organizations actively implement customized accommodations, inclusive human resource policies, and supportive workplace relations. When organizations embrace demand-side accommodations and flexible workflows, they create environments where employees with diverse functional capabilities can achieve high performance and personal well-being (Fuentes & Lindsay, 2023). Consequently, community-based career counselors must cultivate direct consultative alliances with employers to shape welcoming workplace ecologies.

At the macro-analytical level, Themes 6 and 7 highlight the necessity of incorporating structural competencies and participatory methodologies into contemporary career counseling praxis. As demonstrated by sociological research, macro-level economic inequalities, institutional marginalization, and entrenched poverty frequently undermine the efficacy of conventional individualized counseling techniques (Pettinicchio et al., 2022; Reims & Tophoven, 2021). Adopting a structural vulnerability framework empowers career counselors to identify how systemic barriers constrain individual choices and to engage in proactive policy advocacy (Chan & Westcott, 2025; Wilcox et al., 2024). Crucially, embedding co-design and community-based participatory research redistributes power, transforming job seekers with disabilities into co-investigators and co-designers of their own vocational futures (Benz et al., 2024; Wong et al., 2025). This collective agency ensures that career development initiatives dismantle structural hurdles while establishing authentic community ownership.

Taken together, this systematic review integrates these formerly fragmented analytical dimensions into a coherent, cross-level pathway of career inclusion: Individual Empowerment → Relational Social Capital → Community-Based Participation → Meaningful and Sustainable Employment → Organizational Inclusion → Collective Agency → Structural Inclusion. This integrated conceptual model moves beyond the traditional deficiency-oriented medical model and the privatized economic model of vocational rehabilitation. By establishing that individual career agency must be reinforced by relational networks, inclusive organizational behaviors, and systemic policy adaptations, the review articulates a participatory structural paradigm. For career counseling practitioners, this necessitates expanding professional competencies to include organizational consulting, network facilitation, and systemic advocacy alongside individual career guidance.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review successfully addresses the research objective by demonstrating that community-based career counseling facilitates the career development and structural inclusion of individuals with disabilities through a multi-level, interconnected pathway. The synthesis establishes that while individual vocational readiness and career adaptability provide an essential foundation, sustainable inclusion requires the sequential activation of relational social capital, authentic community participation, demand-side organizational accommodations, and participatory co-design. By viewing the community as an interactive resource ecosystem rather than an isolated training setting, the findings reveal that career agency becomes truly actionable only when personal capabilities are supported by equitable workplace cultures and systemic policy protections. Ultimately, this review confirms that achieving authentic disability inclusion demands an intentional conceptual transition from privatized individual empowerment to comprehensive structural inclusion.

These findings carry vital practical implications, indicating that career counselors must expand their professional identities beyond individual skill coaching to embrace roles as network facilitators, organizational change consultants, and policy advocates. Vocational

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agencies and educational institutions are urged to embed co-design methodologies that position individuals with disabilities as equal partners in curriculum design, transitional planning, and workplace accommodation strategies. For policymakers, the review highlights the critical necessity of dismantling welfare disincentives and mandating supportive workplace standards that reward inclusive hiring practices. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and intervention-based designs that empirically evaluate the multi-level pathway across diverse impairment groups, intersectional demographic backgrounds, and varied international labor markets.

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