

# Potential Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Career Transition Among Students with Visual Impairments

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## Keywords

Career transition  
Career counsellor  
Cold calling  
Employment  
Opportunity scale  
Students with visual impairments  
Vocational rehabilitation

## Abstract

The visually impaired group remains among the most unemployed despite laws designed to facilitate employment opportunities for the disabled population. This review article presents potential strategies for overcoming barriers experienced by students with visual impairments (VIs) during their career transition. An integrative literature review was employed by the authors. The integrative literature review allows authors to produce new frameworks and perspectives on a topic from a range of existing research data and ideas in a significant manner. Results of the literature review suggest that public education, adequate transportation and mobility skills, proper assessment of the students' skill development, the acquisition of relevant social and independent-living skills, adequate training for rehabilitation service providers, adequate access to prints, collaboration among professionals, and early career education and work experience are some of the strategies that can be adopted to help students with VIs overcome most of the challenges they experience in their career transition journey. Adopting the strategies discussed in this article may lead to a successful career transition for these students. One of the implications of this paper is that visually impaired students should be able to adapt to the career environment by acquiring relevant skills and being open to opportunities. Also, specialized job training and placement might make it easier for visually impaired students to find competitive work after earning an academic degree and raise their chances of embarking on a successful career path.

## INTRODUCTION

Students with neurodevelopmental disorders, including those with visual impairments (VIs), often face significant obstacles in terms of employment, salaries, progression, workplace hurdles, adjustments, and assistance (Bouck & Joshi, 2012; Crudden, 2012; Dong et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Being able to find a place in the competitive job market, maintaining a job, receiving earnings and benefits on par with those of non-disabled employees, putting in consistent hours, and being satisfied with one's job are among the commonly intended career transition outcomes for individuals with disabilities including visually impaired individuals. Upon graduation, disabled persons, especially visually impaired individuals, have a significantly higher likelihood of being unemployed than students with other kinds of neurodevelopmental disorders (Newman et al., 2009). Being blind leads to social and economic isolation since it prevents one from accessing resources, exposes one to society's low standards, and prevents one from regularly participating in the economy (World Blind Union, 2011). Therefore, having a promising career is one of the most crucial aspects of life for students with VIs because the quality of their life is improved, financial independence is provided, a sense of contributing to society and overall life satisfaction is felt when they are gainfully employed.

Transition is an internal psychological process through which individuals internalize and accept their current circumstances as a result of a change (Bridges, 2004). This article assumes that students with VIs may have difficulty transitioning from one stage of their lives to another due to their inability to make realistic career decisions and other challenges associated with career transition. Transition theories can assist employers and their employees with VIs in understanding and managing the challenges associated with career transition positively and constructively. Specifically, Schlossberg's transition theory can assist individuals in considering their situation, recognizing their challenges and strengths, and finding support networks that can assist in the development of strategies to facilitate the process of transition (Marcdante et al., 2020). Using this career transition model can be relevant to individuals with VIs in altering their situation, rephrasing their challenges and creating desired support

networks in line with their personal career goals and values. This review article discusses some potential strategies that can be adopted to overcome challenges related to the career transition among students with VIs.

## METHODS

The authors adopted an integrative literature review which allows an author to produce new frameworks and perspectives on a topic from a range of existing research data and ideas in a significant manner. The authors conducted a literature review of empirical and review articles published in peer-reviewed journals as well as online materials and documents that are relevant to the topic. Electronic literature search databases such as DOAJ, JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, Scilit and Scopus were consulted using desired keywords as suggested by a recent review (Eseadi & Diale, 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although there are laws intended to facilitate employment opportunities for people with disabilities, visually impaired people have a high unemployment rate, with just about one-third reporting having worked or been employed at some point in their lives (Agustin, 2010). Some suggested strategies for addressing the barriers students with visual impairment encounter during career transition are demonstrated in Figure 1.

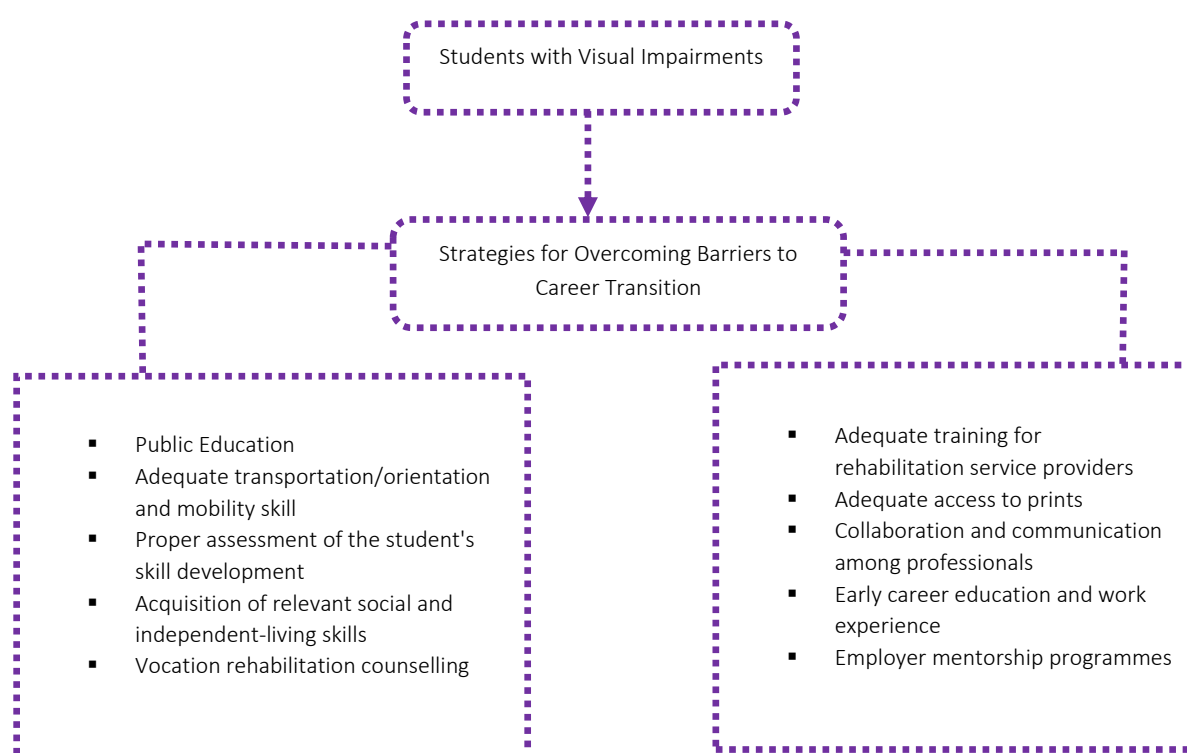


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of The Potential Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Career Transition For Students with VIs

### Public Education

Any plan for combating negative attitudes and stereotypes towards students with VIs should include educating the general public. Creating public awareness campaigns to promote good perceptions of this group of people is an excellent educational technique. In order to create awareness about the abilities of students with VIs in a particular environment, efforts should be targeted at conducting rehabilitation training programmes in public spaces or workplace conference rooms. Employers should be made aware of the presence of students with VIs in the community and the ongoing efforts to support these individuals in joining the workforce (Crudden et al., 2004). To overcome negative attitudes towards career transitioning of students with VIs, helping these students acquire work competencies and competitive skills, teaching employers about their capabilities, and providing supportive career counselling are crucial.

### Employer Mentorship Programmes

Another effective strategy that can be used is employer mentorship programmes. The rehabilitation providers can create portfolios that contain references from happy employers, newspaper stories, and testimonies from those employers. Employers that receive these portfolios are urged to get in touch with employers in related industries. An employer with pleasant experience working with visually impaired employees may offer mentoring to prospective employers; this can be achieved by

visiting the workplace and meeting current visually impaired employees (Crudden et al., 2004). Consequently, students with VIs would have the privilege of meeting employers willing to accommodate them in their workplace based on referral. Also, some rehabilitation organizations usually educate prospective employers about blindness by utilizing professional service providers like rehabilitation teachers. Although the tactics mentioned above are employed to facilitate employer contact, cold calling is still a common strategy used to facilitate career transition for visually impaired persons. In this context, cold calling is a method of reaching out to potential employers who have yet to show any interest in hiring the services of a visually impaired person. Employers and the general public can also learn more about visually impaired students through placement committees comprising the organization's staff and volunteers, among others.

### **Adequate Transportation/Orientation and Mobility Skills**

In order to overcome the challenges of travelling to and from work, visually impaired persons should be given access to alternative transportation services. It would be helpful for them to learn about available transit options in the area and accessible accommodations and receive an orientation from experts serving as a resource person for clients, businesses, and educational institutions attempting to mitigate challenges related to the career transitioning of disabled groups. Regarding the place of work mobility and orientation, issues about exigent physical settings may be addressed by training students and builders about assistive technology. A change in transportation networks to facilitate the career transitioning of these students is necessary and would call for extensive involvement of the students, educational institutions, family members, rehabilitation centres, employers, and the government. Employer involvement in promoting the construction, alteration, or extension of transportation initiatives is one way that the public transportation system could be changed to overcome the transportation barrier to facilitate these students' career transition (Crudden et al., 2005).

### **Proper Assessment Of The Students' Skill Development**

By carefully evaluating visually impaired students' strengths, limitations and choices, inadequate skills that could hamper the successful career transitioning of students with VIs may be identified and addressed. Improved skill evaluation programmes, independent living skills, and personal skills for students with VIs, and increasing community vocational programmes by rehabilitation specialists are other strategies for overcoming the barriers to career transition for students with VIs. Accordingly, private agencies should address the dearth of skill sets by offering short-term training and services to make up for training gaps in academic and personal abilities and by implementing supportive employment models to increase the job readiness of visually impaired students (Hopf, 1991). In order to encourage successful integration or transitioning of visually impaired students into the workplace, on-the-job training programmes and job counselling are strongly suggested. Ideally, initiatives that teach visually impaired students on-the-job skills result in long-term employment. The financing for on-the-job training can ensure that visually impaired employees are fully effective in the workplace by the time the business takes on full pay obligation (Crudden et al., 2005).

### **Adequate Training for Rehabilitation Service Providers**

It is essential to provide rehabilitation service providers with a quality training program, recognize placement as a professional and specialized practice, and improve the skill assessment process in order to remove administrative barriers impacting career transitioning of visually impaired students within the rehabilitation system (Agustin, 2010). By considering the disparities in impairment and demographic categories when creating employment service programmes, VR counsellors could expand access to competitive job possibilities for students with Vis (O'Neil et al., 2017). Also, establishing connections between firms and providers of rehabilitation services, altering policies in the light of pertinent demographic data, and redesigning the rehabilitation system would contribute to the career transitioning of visually impaired students.

### **Adequate Access to Prints**

An essential component of removing obstacles to print access is the link between the employer's computer network and the visually impaired employee's assistive equipment (Crudden et al., 1998). Some visually impaired students in a study mentioned that having access to a technology professional from an agency who could come to the office and help with this process, or hiring technical consultants or using the employer's technology specialist is essential in overcoming challenges in accessing print (Crudden et al., 2005) and this can enhance their career transition as they are able to function properly in the work environment.

### **Collaboration and Communication Among Professionals**

It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in the process of rehabilitation have frequent and open discussion and collaboration in order to support successful job outcomes for students with VIs (Crudden, 2012). Such communication and collaboration would include programme administrators, managers, assistive technology experts, rehabilitation teachers, family members, counsellors, and visually impaired students. This is important in order to create policies and processes that can minimize redundancy and inefficiency, enhance training and adjustment initiatives, make the most of available funding sources,

and support the successful career transitioning of students with VIs. Another strategy is for professionals to learn about the communication methods used by blind or visually impaired students so they may point schools and potential employers in the direction of specialized training resources to promote career transitioning for this category of students.

### Early Career Education and Work Experience

Making career education a crucial component of visually impaired students' learning can help ease the transition from school to employment (Ferris, 1991). Additionally, studies have emphasized the value of early job experience in promoting the career transitioning of students with VIs (McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; Nagle, 2001). Early exposure of students with VIs to workplace experiences (either paid or unpaid) is beneficial to create an opportunity scale of ideal jobs that can bring about competitive job readiness and successful career transition (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Early exposure, which could be a volunteer or internship experience, would provide them with the opportunity to acquire first-hand workplace experiences.

### Acquisition of Relevant Social and Independent-Living Skills

Visually impaired students with strong social skills—including knowing when to set boundaries in relationships within and outside the workplace, being self-assured and confident, successfully communicating their disabilities and the accommodations they require, and presenting themselves positively—are more likely to succeed in their career transitioning. There is a necessity for the timely completion and implementation of evaluations that can help recognize career transition problems; the evaluation outcomes can be helpful in developing strategies for addressing problems related to the student's social and independent living skills (Connors et al., 2014). In order for students with VIs to successfully transition to a meaningful career, they must be able to carry out the essential tasks of everyday living on their own. By promoting effective communication, finding visually impaired role models, interacting with students as well as taking part in community service activities, visually impaired students can develop positive social skills that may assist them in overcoming barriers associated with their environment, which could contribute to a successful career transition.

### Vocational rehabilitation (VR)

Vocational rehabilitation counselling has been highlighted as a crucial element to assist transition-age disabled students in finding jobs, which will enhance employment outcomes for such students. According to a research study, 76% of those who obtained an employment outcome as a result of VR services were continuously employed 3 years after departure, as opposed to 37% of those who qualified for such services but could not get them (Hayward & Schmidt-Davis, 2005). It has been discovered that a good disposition demonstrated by vocational rehabilitation counsellors was essential to accomplishing work placement goals in a study of these counsellors (Young, 1996). VR counsellors must show to clients their own view that students with VIs can compete in the employment market. In order to maintain high expectations from clients, counsellors must genuinely express these expectations to clients. In order to facilitate the career transitioning of students with VIs, rehabilitation counsellors may also incorporate counselling strategies designed to foster students' entrepreneurial intentions (Eseadi et al., 2023) and promote the setting up of a business venture into the counselling process. The allotment of adequate resources for obtaining required adaptive equipment for vocational rehabilitation is another recommendation.

### CONCLUSIONS

This research paper targeted an important topic of rehabilitation of visually impaired people in order to promote the provision of more comprehensive and useful rehabilitation services in preparation for the labour market. The review article identified and discussed potential strategies for overcoming barriers related to career transition among visually impaired students. During the career transitioning of visually impaired students, social interaction may determine their career choices. These students should be able to identify their areas of strength that can make a meaningful contribution to the workplace and be able to relate it to their VR counsellor for better career transition outcomes. Visually impaired students should also be able to adapt to the career environment by acquiring relevant skills and being open to opportunities. Specialized job training and placement might make it easier for visually impaired students to find competitive work after earning an academic degree and raise their chances of embarking on a successful career path. Taking into cognizance the suggested strategies in promoting the career transitioning of visually impaired students could contribute to overcoming significant barriers encountered by these students.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This is a review article and therefore did not require approval from an ethics review board.

### FUNDING

This article is part of a more extensive study titled "Perspectives on Career Transitioning of Students with Neurodevelopmental Disorders", conducted with funding provided via the Global Excellence and Stature Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (University of Johannesburg, South Africa).

## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

CE conceptualized the study, conducted the literature search and synthesis, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript. Writing of the final draft, proofreading and revisions were performed by CE. A final version of the manuscript was approved by CE.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest among the authors.

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