

Africentric-Career Counselling Strategies and the Enhancement of Employability Soft Skills In Persons with Disabilities in Buea Municipality

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of two Africentric career counselling strategies; cultural story telling and mentor-discussion techniques on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities in Buea Municipality. Employability soft skills such as communication, time management, interpersonal skills, planning and resource management skills and adaptability and flexibility are essential for workforce participation and career success yet persons with disabilities in Cameroon often struggle to develop these skills. Through a mixed method approach, a sample of 25 persons (employees) with disabilities and 5 counsellors and 5 employers in Buea municipality were purposively selected as participants in the study. Specifically, an embedded design was utilized to address the various research questions. Quantitative data were collected followed by a qualitative intervention, where a structured employability training program was organized and implemented by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to gather qualitative data from the participants and their employers. The findings revealed that both cultural story-telling and mentor-discussion techniques boost the following employability soft skills in persons with disabilities, communication, time management, interpersonal skills, planning and resource management skills and adaptability and flexibility. The study emphasized the importance of tailoring career counselling services to local contexts to address the unique needs and challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the workforce. It concludes that Africentric strategies do not only enhanced employability soft skills but also promote greater social inclusion and economic participation for persons with disabilities.

Key words: Africentric-Career Counselling Strategies, Enhancement, Employability soft skills, Persons with Disabilities.

Introduction

Employability has evolved significantly in the 21st century, shaped by technological advancements, globalization, and the changing nature of work. The 21st century demands a comprehensive set of employability skills that go beyond traditional academic qualifications to include a diverse range of competencies which could be categorise into soft and technical skills critical for individuals to succeed in an increasingly competitive and dynamic job market. According to OECD, (2019) the following constitute employability skills; soft skills include, communication skills (verbal, non-verbal & listening skills), adaptability and flexibility, emotional intelligence, time management and organizational skills, net working /relationship building, work ethics/ professionalism, problem solving, logical thinking) while the technical skills include; digital literacy, coding and programming, block chain technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning, digital marketing, cloud computing, and data literacy and analytics. The integration of individuals into the workforce especially for those with disabilities is a multifaceted process that involves more than just the technical competencies required for specific jobs. Career counselling is an essential process that helps individuals navigate the workforce, make informed decisions about their career paths, and

develop the skills necessary for success in the labour market (Sullivan & Mahoney; 2018). For persons with disabilities (PWDs), career counselling must be tailored to accommodate their unique needs, providing them with not only guidance but also the tools to develop essential employability skills. Africentric career counselling strategies, grounded in African values and traditions, offer a culturally relevant approach to enhancing the career development process for persons with disabilities. This paper explores how Africentric career counselling strategies can help persons with disabilities build 21st-century employability soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and time management.

21st Century Employability Skills

Lau, & Chan, (2019), holds that employability is a multifaceted concept often used to describe an individual's ability to obtain, retain and succeed in employment. It encompasses a wide range of personal, social, and cognitive factors that contributes to an individual's success in the labour market. Employability anchors on the relationship between an individual's abilities, qualifications and external factors like the market conditions, and policy discussion. It is seen as the combination of various competencies such as stock of human capital which include skills, knowledge, educational attainment, psychological traits, experience and structural and systemic factors such as labour market conditions, employer expectations, and societal norms. Strong professional networks and social support systems help individuals navigate the job market and find employment (Sullivan, & Mahoney, 2018).

According to Baker, & Pumkin, (2021), employability is implicitly related to the concept of "World of Work" (WoW) which refers to the evolving landscape of employment, occupations, and work environments; specifically, it involves an understanding of the changing dynamics of labour markets, employment patterns, and career development, as well as the intersection between work and the broader societal issues such as economic development, technology, and education. It encompasses the systems, structures, and processes through which work is organized, managed, and performed in society (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). The world of work can also be seen as the physical or virtual environment where work is carried out and encompasses various factors such as the location, organizational structure, physical infrastructure, work culture, and technological resources that influence how tasks are completed (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2020). They further elucidate that the concept of world of work has evolved significantly, influenced by shifts in economic structures, technological advancements, and changing societal expectations, decoupling it from a fixed physical location and expanding it to include virtual spaces.

During the 19th century, the era of the industrial revolution, the world of work was predominantly physical constituting factories organized around mass production, rigid working hours, and hierarchical management structures. The 20th century saw a proliferation in office-based workspaces often structured with open spaces and divisions based on job roles and the rise of administrative and managerial positions. The 21st century came with the advent of digital technologies and the internet compelling drastic changes in the traditional workspaces remote work, flexible hours, and telecommuting became more feasible, especially in knowledge-based industries changing the paradigm of employability for all (Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, 2020).

The world of work also constitutes the social and psychological environments which include job autonomy, relationships with colleagues, and the perceived fairness of organizational policies which significantly influence employees' satisfaction, mental health, and overall well-being (Harrison, 2021). The dynamism of the current state of the world of work leaves most workers at a dilemma, with so much uncertainty for the future this is worst for persons with disabilities. The employment patterns, labour market, working conditions and the broader socio-economic implications of work in contemporary society is worrisome for all but most especially for persons with special needs. Most industries and places of work have transformed via the use of robotics and artificial intelligence replacing human labour in certain tasks while creating new demands for skills in technology, data analysis, and cybersecurity (Baker, & Davis, 2021). Traditional employment structures have been disrupted through the gig economy, characterized by short-term, flexible jobs often mediated

through digital platforms by implication making a great demand for change in skills, knowledge and experience requirements for efficiency in today's world of work.

Baker, & Pumkin, (2021) argues that the 21st century demands an amalgamation of both soft and technical competences for smooth functioning and to them the 21st century technical employability skills include digital literacy, coding and programming, block chain technology, artificial intelligence and machine learning, digital marketing, cloud computing, data literacy and analytics. They hold that the rise of automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics requires workers to be proficient in digital tools to perform tasks efficiently. Research by Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) suggests that as automation takes over repetitive tasks as such, the demand for workers with advanced digital literacy and technical skills will continue to rise. As industries continue to evolve, so too must the competencies of the workforce therefore there is need for continuous research and investment in education and professional development to ensure that individuals are equipped with these technical skills necessary to thrive in the future of work.

Binkley, Erstad, Herman, Raizen, & Ripley, (2012) elucidates that soft Skills also known as interpersonal or transferable skills include communication skills (verbal, non-verbal & listening skills), adaptability and flexibility, emotional intelligence, time management and organizational skills, net working /relationship building, work ethics/ professionalism and problem-solving skills (analytical, and logical thinking), leadership, lifelong learning and more. Soft skills enable individuals to navigate workplace dynamics and perform well in diverse and changing work environments.

Effective communication remains one of the most valued employability soft skills for the 21st century. As workplaces become more diverse and collaborative, the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, both in writing and orally, is increasingly critical (Kuhn, 2015). Cross-cultural communication and the capacity to work within global teams are essential in a globalized workforce. The World Economic Forum (2018) highlights that strong communication skills are particularly important for leadership roles and for fostering teamwork in complex, multi-disciplinary environments. Adaptability and flexibility is another vital employability soft skill which is defined as workers' ability to adjust to new challenges and environments (Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth, 2004) which calls for openness to learning new skills. Sargut and McGrath (2011) underscores the role of adaptability in navigating uncertainty and thriving in volatile, complex, and ambiguous environments. The ability to work effectively within teams is fundamental in contemporary work environments, where projects often involve collaboration among professionals with different skills and backgrounds. Kohn and Schooler (2018), assert that teamwork enhances creativity and problem-solving, leading to higher productivity and better job satisfaction. Furthermore, as organizations flatten their hierarchies and promote cross-functional teams, teamwork and collaboration become even more critical for organizational success (Hoch, 2014).

In an era where industries evolve rapidly, workers must commit to continuous development to stay competitive (Sullivan & Mahoney, 2018). Fostering a culture of lifelong learning can enable individuals to manage career transitions and acquire the skills necessary for emerging job roles. Critical thinking, which involves the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesize information, is crucial in navigating such challenges (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). Employers value employees who can approach problems from multiple perspectives, develop innovative solutions, and make data-driven decisions (Lau & Chan, 2019).

Soft skills develop through a combination of innate traits, educational interventions, and real-world experiences. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000), posits that individuals develop soft skills such as communication and adaptability when their basic psychological needs which serves as their intrinsic motivation are met in either the learning or work environments. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) highlights the role of observation, imitation, and modelling in skill acquisition by implication soft skills often developed via observing others, particularly mentors, and mimicking their behaviours. Zimmerman (2000) in supporting Bandura's claim demonstrates how self-regulation and social interactions contributes to the development of

soft skills, such as time management and adaptability where individuals observe and replicate behaviours they see in others, such as problem-solving or conflict resolution in the workplace. Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning occurs through guided participation in cultural practices, with more experienced individuals (teachers, mentors, colleagues) scaffolding the development of soft skills such as communication and collaboration, thus, guidance provided by mentors helps individuals navigate social dynamics in the workplace, thereby enhancing their interpersonal skills. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) suggests that learning through experience, particularly in real-world settings, significantly enhances soft skills thus, students who engage in internships, collaborative projects, or job shadowing are better able to develop employability soft skills, including problem-solving, communication, and leadership.

Daniels, Kelliher, & D'Netto, (2021) holds that the digital transformation of the workplace has created a demand for both technical and soft skills which are missing in most of our traditional educational curriculum for both persons with and without disabilities. Harris & Akpan (2020) holds that many learners with disabilities have been made to understand that they are not qualify enough to acquire knowledge in certain science subjects, these has created gaps in higher-level qualifications for them. As such, there is need for the integration of practical strategies into the school curriculum because soft skills are not static but can be cultivated and refined through targeted practices and continuous feedback, making them crucial for long-term career success. Jackson (2015) states that students who received explicit instruction on soft skills, such as teamwork and communication, performed better in scenarios where such skills are demanded such as during internships and work placements.

According to Mitra, Posarac & Vick, (2013), the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are often constrained by two main factors: the internal and external factors. Internal factors, such as health-related deficiency, particularly body or functional impairments, can significantly impact individuals' social engagement, participation, mobility, and competency in the job market. They also highlighted that workers with disabilities tend to possess lower skill levels due to fewer educational and training opportunities thus acquiring fewer qualifications than those without. They pointed out the following external factors; employer attitudes, transportation accessibility, and neighbourhood characteristics, social stigma, unequal employment opportunities, higher levels of job discrimination, and lower levels of support from supervisors and co-workers as factors that impact the work experiences of individuals with disabilities significantly. Qiu, Jiang, Sun & Du (2023) elucidate that internal or external factors are secondary issues to the employability readiness for persons with disabilities and that the main bone of contention is the fact that persons with disabilities do not have the needed skills for the 21st century job market. They believe that persons with disabilities should be subjected to skill counselling and development training to prepare them for the 21st century world of work, which could be done through the use of career counselling in real world scenarios and using relevant culturally responsive strategies.

Disabilities and employability soft skill

Center for Disease Control (2024) defines disability as any condition of the body or mind that poses significant difficulties for the said person to do certain activities and interact with the world, around them. They hold that disability has three dimensions:

- **Impairment** which is either a loss or limitation in function of a person's body structure or mental functioning and can be structural or functional.
- **Activity limitation** which is limitation in the execution of a task such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking or problem solving
- **Participation restriction** which are restrains in a person's involvement in normal daily activities such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities and obtaining health care and preventive services.

They further added that disabilities can be any condition that may be present at birth or acquired after birth which may affect an individual's ability to function in cognitive, mobility, vision,

hearing, behaviour, later in life. These conditions could be caused by disorders in a single gene, disorder in chromosomes, results from mothers' exposure during pregnancy to infections (such as Rubella) or substances such as alcohol or cigarettes, leads and more. Disability could be associated with developmental conditions that becomes apparent during childhood such as autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit hyperactive disorders. It could also come because of injuries such as Traumatic brain injury and could also be triggered by longstanding conditions such as diabetes which could result in disabilities such as visual impairment or limb loss and more. Persons with disabilities are people who, because of their impairment and the environment, have a reduced capability of activity that causes many difficulties to work, life and studies. The impact of an impairment on life, work and studies is different and depends on the specific context, such as the environment, type of country and cultural/societal norms as related to people with disabilities (WHO 2001). Employability for persons with disabilities is a complex and multifaceted issue that involves a combination of individual capabilities, societal factors, and structural barriers. It focuses on their ability to gain, retain, and progress in meaningful employment and extends beyond their personal skills and qualifications, to external factors such as workplace accessibility, societal attitudes, discrimination, and policies that either facilitate or hinder employment opportunities Davva, (2020).

In 2019, the global employment rate for people with disabilities was found to be around 44%, significantly lower than the 75% employment rate for individuals without disabilities. In many developing countries, the employment rate of people with disabilities is below 10%, reflecting structural inequalities and lack of inclusive policies. In contrast, industrialized countries report employment rates between 50% and 70% (UN 2019 report). The employment landscape for individuals with disabilities globally reflects considerable challenges including discrimination, lack of accessibility, adequate knowledge, skills and competences. The development of employability soft skills is critical for all workers but particularly important for people with disabilities as they face both physical and societal barriers to employment. It can help them overcome stereotypes and highlight the unique contributions they can bring to the workforce. Wehman et al., (2014) and Schur, (2013) reported a 75% employment retention for individuals with intellectual disabilities after a soft skill training session. Thus, individuals with disabilities who develop strong employability soft skills are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and better career advancement compared to those who have not had access to such training.

Employability skills among people with disabilities (PWDs) present unique challenges and opportunities that vary significantly across countries for example in developed nations like the United States and Canada, there are legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) which has been instrumental in promoting workplace inclusion and accessibility (Hernandez et al., 2008). However, despite these supportive legal frameworks, PWDs still face barriers in acquiring and demonstrating employability skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, due to persistent stigma and inadequate support systems (Lindsay et al., 2018). Developing countries on the others hand like in Cameroon, and Ghana more persons with PWDs struggle with systemic issues such as limited access to education, vocational training, and assistive technologies, which further exacerbate their employability skills gap. These disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions to address both structural and attitudinal barriers to skill development (Omar, Saripan, Puad, Rashid, Hussain, Ismail & Kadir, 2025). PWDs in these countries still encounter challenges in securing employment due to perceptions of lower productivity, transitioning from education to employment, and this underscore the need for continuous support and skill building programs.

Omar, Saripan, Puad, Rashid, Hussain, Ismail & Kadir, (2025) points that there is deficiency in employability skills in most graduates entering their first job placement. Employers are seeking graduates who are thoroughly ready for job and well-prepared for calamity of economic recession. To fulfil market demands and economic changes while the supply of graduates is enormous and employers are criticizing the absent of employability skills among graduates, which is deteriorating

(Jollands et al., 2015), there is a need for the establishment of context-specific strategies to enhance employability skills among graduates especially those with disabilities.

The mismatch of school-to-work transition program and skills-needed by the employers frequently leaves PWDs in an urgent need for aid and mercy when it comes to employment. However, Lenka, (2012) states that in the 21st century employment market, degrees and diplomas have been overshadowed by skills credential. Most institutions are lagging in the production of skill-driven employees, this is often due to the disconnect between employers and educational providers on having meaningful conversations and consensus on what defines a skilled-employee. Omar, Saripan, Puad, Rashid, Hussain, Ismail & Kadir, (2025), highlights that, it is rhetoric to mention about the quality of graduates created by various educational institutions where at the same point, employers lack participation in meaningful dialogue with educational stakeholders in fulfilling what possession of skills they require.

Studies (Baird, 2011; Carnevale & Smith, 2013; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013) have confirmed that knowledge based-economy, profound skills and the development of human capital are the pillars of current employment settings. These pillars contain three criteria which describes the job readiness competence for any who wishes to be employed in the 21st century employment landscape: (a) Work values (individual preferences for work outcomes), (b) Work interest (individual preferences for work environment including artistic, conventional, enterprising, investigative, realistic, and social) and (c) Personal qualities (characteristics that affect how well someone does a job, such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotionality, and extroversion). Thus a 21st century employee must possess an accumulation of knowledge, skills, habits, experiences of professionalism which highly are demanded by employers. Thus, academic qualifications do not guarantee for job placement Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, (2013).

Most employers look at economic productivity, organisation conditions and relates these to the demands of the global market as the bases for employment of any employee. This is the dividing line between most educational institutions and the world of work. Ausman (2008) conducted a review survey to decipher graduates work readiness, he found that graduates lack reading and comprehension skills related to work materials such as memos and policy guidelines, also, graduates' capabilities in solving problem related to work by applying mathematical reasoning is lacking. Most graduates are struggling to calculate basic mathematical skills for example tax redemption for certain goods purchased. Finally, graduates; deficiencies in seeking for, retrieval and handling information are some basic evidences for graduates lack of readiness for the world of work. He further states that this situation is worst-off for persons with disabilities (Ausman, 2008). It is important for educational institutions to embed employability traits in their curriculum, content through the teaching and learning procedures, as well as the implementation of programs like internships and practicum as well as the institution of career counselling programs.

Benson, Morgan, and Filippaios (2014) defines career counselling as a dynamic process designed to guide people through the exploration, planning, and realization of their career goals, helping them align their interests, skills, and values with suitable career paths. It facilitates the exploration of career options, decision-making, goal setting, and the development of strategies for career progression. Its primary purpose is to assist individuals in understanding themselves better that is their skills, interests, personality traits, values and in making informed decisions about their professional life. It encompasses a variety of approaches and techniques, all aimed at facilitating a smooth transition from education to the workforce, as well as supporting ongoing career development throughout an individual's working life. This process not only helps individuals find suitable job roles but also assists them in navigating challenges such as career transitions, changes in the labour market, and obstacles related to discrimination or underemployment and plays a crucial role in enhancing job satisfaction and preventing burnout by encouraging alignment between personal values and professional roles (Meyer; 2018).

According to Nganga, & Hove, (2020), career counselling constitutes helping individuals assess their personal traits, such as their skills, interests, values, and personality, through a process of self-

discovery that leads to a better understanding of their strengths and areas for growth. Counsellors assist them in exploring various career options such as researching specific job roles, industries, and the necessary qualifications for professions with the goal of providing a broad view of the possibilities available, including emerging fields and traditional professions. The client is then subject to setting realistic short- and long-term goals which includes deciding on a career path, setting educational or training objectives, and establishing action steps for job acquisition or career advancement. Counsellors use decision-making models to help clients evaluate their options and make informed choices. Based on the career choice of the client career counsellors helps the client develop technical and soft skills essential for career success in their various domains. This might involve recommending specific courses or certifications, improving communication or leadership skills, and preparing for job interviews. Career counsellors also support individuals in overcoming challenges such as discrimination, lack of experience, and limited access to resources by proposing strategies for overcoming these obstacles, such as networking, seeking mentorship, or utilizing government or community resources (Nganga, & Hove, 2020).

Brynjolfsson, & McAfee, (2014) holds that career counselling plays a critical role in bridging the gap between education and employment, supporting individuals in navigating the complexities of the labour market, and ensuring effective workforce inclusion. As global economies become more diverse and dynamic, career counselling must evolve to address both traditional challenges and emerging trends, such as the rise of gig economies and automation. According to Super's Lifespan, Life-Space Theory (1980), career development is a lifelong process that includes growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement stages. Thus, for an employee to be fruitful and successful in their career he or she must be accompanied all through his or career path by a professional counsellor.

Delgado, & Stefancic, (2017) points out that Western mainstream career counselling can take several forms, depending on the needs of the client and the context of the counselling. Person-Centred Approach, rooted in Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, this approach emphasizes creating a supportive and empathetic environment where clients can freely explore their feelings and thoughts. The counsellor's role is to facilitate the client's self-awareness and self-directed growth, encouraging clients to make decisions based on their own values and goals. Cognitive-Behavioural Approach focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviours that may hinder career success. It helps individuals address career-related anxiety, self-doubt, or procrastination by helping them develop skills such as problem-solving, goal setting, and time management. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) approach, developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett, SCCT emphasizes the role of personal beliefs such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations in shaping career decisions. Counsellors using SCCT work to enhance clients' confidence in their abilities and address any external barriers that might impact career progression.

Nganga, & Hove, (2020), and Tshand, (2017) illustrated that these western mainstream career counselling models often focus on individual interests, skills, and aptitudes, with an emphasis on self-determination and personal achievement. However, such approaches may not always be culturally relevant or adequately address the specific needs of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. For persons with disabilities, career counselling must be tailored to accommodate their unique needs, providing them with not only guidance but also the tools to develop essential employability skills. Africentric career counselling, grounded in African cultural values and perspectives, offers an alternative approach to career development that emphasizes communal values, cultural identity, spirituality, and interconnectedness which are values relevant in the 21st century workplace.

Africentric career counselling draws on African cultural values, community-focused ideologies, and indigenous knowledge systems. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within their community and the importance of family, collective well-being, and respect for heritage (Nganga & Hove, 2020). In contrast to Western career counselling models, which often emphasize individual achievement, Africentric approaches highlight the significance of community support and social responsibility in career development. Incorporating these cultural values, Africentric counselling

encourages students to recognize and nurture their unique talents while respecting societal norms and values. This approach seeks to empower individuals by fostering pride in their identity and capabilities, helping them to overcome barriers such as societal stigma, discrimination, and lack of accessibility (Meyer, 2018).

Stewart & Thomas, (2019) holds that Africentric counselling emphasizes a holistic approach, considering an individual's mental, physical, and spiritual well-being and encourages a sense of balance and harmony, which are crucial for individuals with disabilities who often experience challenges related to communication, and societal expectations. Through culturally relevant discussions, counsellors can help PWDs gain a better understanding of their abilities and limitations while fostering resilience and adaptability. The Africentric counselling makes use of practices that are common within the African society such as collaboration, communalism and collective well-being to empower individuals to recognise their innate abilities and talents. Africentric counselling approach calls for a shift in focus from an individual's deficit to their strength and builds their self esteem and motivation leading to the development of the 21st century soft skills (Meyer, 2018).

Olufemi, (2017) discloses at the heart of Africentric career counselling is the philosophy of Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because we are." This principle emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people and the importance of community and mutual support. It emphasizes communal values, collective responsibility, and interconnectedness. Ubuntu is applicable in career counselling in that career decisions should not only consider individual goals but also how these choices contribute to the well-being of the community. Career development should focus on an individual's role within the broader social and cultural context, emphasizing service to the community and respect for social harmony. In preparing persons with disabilities using the Ubuntu philosophy, they will facilitate the building of a sense of belonging and collective responsibility which are components of teamwork. Rather than focusing solely on the individual's achievements, Ubuntu encourages an understanding that a person's career path is not only about personal success but also about contributing to the well-being of the family and community. Career counselling rooted in Ubuntu can help PWD navigate their disabilities within a framework that values their role in the collective society (Akpan, & Dipeolu; 2011).

Molefe, (2018) holds that Africentric career counselling is based on a variety of principles such as *collectivism and community orientation*: Africentric career counselling emphasizes that career decisions should consider the individual's responsibility to their community. It elucidates that rather than focusing solely on personal gain or self-interest, career development should consider how an individual's work contributes to the well-being of their family, community, and society at large, which reflects the African worldview that emphasizes interconnectedness and collective success. *Cultural Relevance*: Africentric career counselling approach acknowledges the role of culture in shaping career aspirations and goals and encourages individuals to explore careers that align with their cultural values and traditions. It addresses the challenges individuals of African descent may face due to cultural displacement, systemic racism, and societal discrimination, and it encourages individuals to find ways to navigate these barriers while remaining true to their cultural identity. *Holistic Development*: Africentric career counselling advocates for an integrated model of career counselling that looks beyond individual skills and competencies to consider the broader context of an individual's life. This approach encourages the alignment of career goals with personal values, spiritual beliefs, and the collective good.

Effective implementation of Africentric career counselling demands that the counsellor should be culturally aware and sensitive to the unique experiences, values, and challenges faced by individuals from African backgrounds. This is because understanding the importance of cultural heritage, family roles, and communal obligations is key to providing guidance that resonates with African clients. The integration of cultural tools, practices, and narratives into the counselling process, helping individuals explore career options that reflect their cultural identity. Africentric career counselling encourages the incorporation of mentorship programs that pair individuals with role models or community leaders who can provide guidance, advice, and support. These mentors not only provide career advice but also serve as cultural ambassadors, teaching individuals the

importance of community engagement, resilience, and social responsibility. Counsellors may encourage discussions with family members to ensure that career choices align with communal expectations and responsibilities via the use of cultural story telling. Africentric career counselling is often aligned with social justice principles, as it advocates for systemic changes that address barriers to career success. Thus, counsellors are expected to engage in advocacy efforts that challenge societal discrimination, promote inclusivity, and address issues of inequity in the workforce, (Olufemi, 2017).

Statement of the problem

Employability soft skills such as communication, problem solving, adaptability, time management, planning and emotional intelligence are essential for individuals to succeed in the modern workforce. However, persons with disabilities often face significant challenges in developing and showcasing these skills due to social stigma, physical and environmental barriers and limited access to training and development opportunities. As a result, they may experience lower employment rates, job insecurity and limited career advancement compared to their peers without disabilities (Molefe, 2018). The development of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities is crucial for their successful integration into the world of work and for ensuring equal opportunities in the labour market. However, traditional career counselling strategies often fail to consider the unique cultural, social and historical contexts of individuals from diverse African backgrounds which may limit their effectiveness for African workers with disabilities.

While there has been an increasing recognition of the need to improve the employment prospects of persons with disabilities the development of employability soft skills remains an underexplored area. Traditional training programs often overlook the unique needs and abilities of persons with disabilities resulting in programs that may not effectively support their skill development. Furthermore, employers may not always recognise the values of these skills in persons with disabilities contributing to continued exclusion from the workforce. Insufficient attention given to equipping person with disabilities with the necessary employability soft skills thrive in the workplace. There is a critical need for targeted strategies and programs to address this gap ensuring that individuals with disabilities are empowered to enhance their skills, improve their job prospects and contribute meaningfully to the economy. Despite growing recognition of the importance of soft skills in employability, there remains a gap in research and practice regarding the integration of African approaches in career counselling for persons with disabilities. This gap is particularly significant in African context where disability may intersect with cultural, economic and systemic barriers to create a wide gap to employment. This study sought to investigate the impact of Africentric counselling strategies on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities.

Objective: This study sought to find out:

- The impact of cultural story telling technique on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities.
- The impact of mentor-discussion technique on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities

Methodology

A sample of 25 (13 females and 12 males) employees with disabilities, 5 (02 males and 3 females) counsellors and 5 employers (2 females and 3 males) in Buea municipality were purposively selected as participants in the study. Specifically, an embedded design was utilized to address the various research questions. Quantitative data were collected followed by a qualitative intervention, after which a structured employability training program was organized and implemented by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to gather qualitative data from both the employers and the employees who underwent the training. Both quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to uncover the significant impact of Africentric counselling strategies on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities. Prior to the training a scale on

employability soft skill was developed from the following scales Emotional Intelligence scale by Schutte (1998), Employability Skill Framework by the Vocational Education Research (2002) and the Situational Judgment Test for Soft skills by McDaniel & Nguyen (2001). Employability soft skills were measured by the researcher using the adapted employability soft skill scale, and by the counsellors and employers using an employability soft scale observation checklist also developed from the above-mentioned scales. After a three-months training on employability soft skills, the participants were invited to a two-weeks focus group discussion (FGD) to share and reflect on their experiences and opinions on the training program. The participants were highly engaged as they shared their enhanced employability skills after the training program. The feedback from the participants were collected and encoded in Microsoft Excel for documentation. The Excel spreadsheet was then transferred to the Atlas.ti version 9, advanced qualitative analysis software to conduct the thematic analysis. A peer-checking and validation procedure was conducted to cross-check the specifics of the themes and meanings.

Findings

Table 1: Description of respondents with disabilities

Disability Types	Nature of employer			GENDER
	Public	Private	M	F
Visual Impairment	09	01	06	03
Physical disability	09	00	02	07
Speech impairment	02	00	01	01
Hearing impairment	00	04	03	01
SUBTOTAL	20	05	12	13

Table one presents a total of 25 employees with disabilities who participated in this study. Twenty (20) of them worked in the public sector that is they were employees of the government of Cameroon, while five (05) were employed by the private sectors. The table further demonstrates that among the twenty-five employees thirteen (13) were females while twelve (12) were males. The table also brings out the type of disabilities of the various employees as follows visually impaired were nine (09), physically impaired nine (09), speech and language impaired two (02), hearing impaired four (04). It could be concluded that in the Buea Municipality a segment of persons with disabilities have been employed however a stringent comparison cannot be made because the total number of persons with disabilities living within the municipality is not known.

Table 2: Description of participants in the study (employer and counsellors)

Owner of Institution	Employing Institutions	Participating Employers			Counsellors	
		No of Respondents	Gender		Gender	
			M	F	M	F
Public owned institutions	University of Buea	01	01	00	01	00
	Government Teacher Training College Buea	01	00	01	00	00
	Government Technical High School Molyko	01	00	01	01	00
	Government Bilingual High School Molyko- Buea	01	01	00	01	01
Privately owned	Biaka University institute of Buea	01	01	00		01
TOTAL	05	5	03	02	03	02

Table 2 above carries information on the employers and counsellors, the institution where they work and the nature of the institution. The table shows four (04) participants in this study were public owned institutions while one (01) was privately owned. The following constituted the publicly owned institution; University of Buea, Government Teacher Training College Buea, Government Technical High School Molyko, Government Bilingual High School Molyko- Buea, while the privately owned was the Biaka University Institute of Buea. In each of these institutions one (01)

with a total of five (05) employers and one (01) with a total of five (05) counsellors were sampled for this study.

Table 3: Educational status of employees with disabilities and job type

Disability Types	Educational Attainment					Nature of job		
	A Level	Professional certification	Bachelor	Masters	PhD	Teaching		AA
						SEC	HEI	
Visual Impairment	00	02	02	02	03	07	02	00
Physical disability	00	03	04	03	00	05	02	02
Speech impairment	01	00	01	00	00	00	00	02
Hearing impairment	00	00	02	02	00	05	00	00
Total	01	05	09	07	03	17	04	04

Table 2 brings out information on the educational attainment for each of the employees with disabilities sampled for this study. Among the participants in the study one (01) was a holder of the advance level certificate, five (05) had professional certificate in various professional domains, ten (09) out of the 25 respondents had bachelor's degree in various fields of study, while seven (07) had master and three (03) had PhD. The table also reveal the nature of jobs these persons with disabilities were employed to do. In the teaching domain the were a total of seven (07) visually impaired, five (05) physically impaired and five (05) hearing impaired teaching in secondary schools within the Buea municipality. Still in the teaching domain, two (02) persons with visual impairments, and two (02) others with physical impairment were teachers with some higher institutions of learning within the Buea municipality sampled for this study. The table also shows that a total of four (04) persons sampled for this study worked as administrative assistance. It is obvious that with due educational levels persons with disabilities could be given a chance across various sectors of employment within the municipality, the employees for the most, have jobs that are commensurate to their obtained certificates.

Table 4: Employability Soft skills prior to employability soft skill training by employees

Soft skills	Averagely Competent	Incompetent
Communication skill	23 92%	02 08%
Time management skill	10 40%	15 60%
Interpersonal Skill/Teamwork	19 76%	06 24%
Planning and Resource Management Skill	15 60%	10 40%
Adaptability and flexibility skill	17 68%	08 32%

Table three above points out the employability soft skills persons with disabilities possessed prior to the employability training. Out of the 25 participants it was realised that 23 (92%) of them were averagely competent in communication skills while 2 (08%) were incompetent. Incompetence in communication for employees may render the organisation or institution handicap in many domains. As far as time management was concern 10 (40%) of employees were averagely competent while 15 (60%) were incompetent. Time management entails the ability to set goals, prioritization, task breakdown, time blocking, avoiding procrastination and time tracking. It is finding balance between efficiency and effectiveness ensuring tasks are completed on time while also maintaining high quality, fostering productivity and minimising stress. As far as interpersonal skills which constitutes communication, empathy, conflict resolution, collaboration, respects, negotiation abilities, social awareness, assertiveness, problem solving and critical thinking, it was realised that out of the 25 participants in this study 19 (76%) were tested averagely competent, 6 (24%) were incompetent. Planning and resource management skills in employees are critical for the

efficient and effective execution of tasks, projects, and organizational goals. They involve the ability to anticipate needs, allocate resources appropriately, set clear objectives, and monitor progress to ensure optimal outcomes and they are deeply efficiency, and productivity. Prior to the employability skill training it was realised that 15 (60%) of the participant were averagely competent in planning and resource management, while 10 (40%) not competent. The participants who were rated as averagely competent demonstrated average performance in all components of planning and resource management skills which included goal setting, time management, resource allocation, prioritization and decision-making, risk management and contingency planning, monitoring and adjustment.

Adaptability and flexibility skill in employees refer employee's ability to manage change, uncertainty and new challenges and constitute openness to change, learning agility, problem solving and innovation, willingness to take a new role, resilience and stress management ability to work in dynamic environment, and customer focus. Before the employability soft skill training 17 (68%) of employees with disabilities were rated averagely competent and 08(32%) incompetent at adaptability and flexibility skill. It is obvious that employees with strong personal qualities are generally more effective in their roles thus inefficiency can stem from the employees' lack of personal qualities. The employees were subjected to three months of employability soft skill training and after which the following score were obtained:

Table 5: The impact of cultural story telling technique on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities.

Soft skills	Competent	Averagely competent	Incompetent
Communication skill	23 92%	1 04%	1 04%
Time management skill	20 80%	05 20%	00 00%
Interpersonal Skill/Teamwork (ISTW)	25 100%	0 00%	0 00%
Planning and Resource Management Skill (PRMS)	17 68%	03 12%	05 20%
Adaptability and flexibility skill	23 92%	02 8%	00 00%

Table 5 shows that employees demonstrated a mark increase in their ability to communicate after the employability soft skill training was done using cultural story telling technique 23(92%) of the employees were competent in their communication abilities, 01(04%) demonstrated an average performance due to the fact he was inconsistent during the training session 01(04%) was still incompetent because he was present just once for the training. The specific communication skills measured were verbal, non-verbal, written, both in traditional and digital forms, active listening, empathy, and feedback. There was also an increase in the trainees' time management skills as 20(80%) of them demonstrated an excellent ability and 05(20%) demonstrated an average competence in communication due to inconsistency in attendance during the training. As far as interpersonal skill/teamwork is concerning all trainees 25 (100%) demonstrated competence in it. There was also a mark increase in planning and resource management skill 17(68%) while 03(12%) demonstrated average competence and 05(20%) were still incompetent at planning and resource management. The study also recorded an increase in competence in adaptability and flexibility 23(92%) were competent while 02(8%) were average. It could be concluded that the training for employability soft skills using the cultural story telling technique brought about an overall increase in the manifestation of these skills in employees with disabilities who were subject to the training.

Table 6: Mentor-discussion technique on the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities

Soft skills	Competent	Averagely competent	Incompetent
Communication skill	24 96%	1 04%	00 00%
Time management skill	23 92%	02 08%	00 00%
Interpersonal Skill/Teamwork (ISTW)	25 100%	0 00%	0 00%
Planning and Resource Management Skill (PRMS)	20 80%	05 20%	00 00%
Adaptability and flexibility skill	25 100%	00 00%	00 00%

With the use of mentor-discussion technique there were tremendous improvement in the employability soft skill abilities for most of the trainees with disabilities as seen above. In communication skill 24 (96%) recorded a far above average performance which qualified them as competent, only 1(4%) person recorded an average score. As far as time management skill is concern 23 (92%) of the trainees recorded scores that qualified them as competent, 02 (08%) had an average score in thinking skill. All trainees 25 (100%) demonstrated a far above performance in interpersonal skill which qualified them as competent after the training. As far as planning and resource management is concern 20(80%) participants were competent while 05 (20%) demonstrated an average performance. And lastly the study recorded a 100% competence rate in adaptability and flexibility skill after the training using the Mentor-discussion technique.

Discussion

This study demonstrated the impact of Africentric-Career Counselling Strategies on the enhancement of the 21st century employability soft skills in persons with Disabilities in Cameroon. Specifically, it demonstrated the significance of cultural storytelling and mentor-discussion techniques on the enhancement of 21st century soft skill in employees with disabilities.

Cultural storytelling and the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities

The study found that cultural storying telling enhanced the employability soft skill competences of employees with disabilities. Specifically, there was a mark increase in the demonstration of communication skill y these employees and this is in line with Thorne and McKelvey (2016) who asserted that storytelling involves both verbal and non-verbal communication, which enhances active listening, clarity, and the ability to convey complex ideas in a structured manner. Cultural storytelling technique is rooted in the traditions of various cultures, and it serve as an effective medium for transmitting both individual and collective experiences, which can lead to the development of key competencies required in the workplace. It encourages individuals to engage with diverse perspectives, which improves their ability to articulate ideas and listen attentively, which are key aspects of effective communication in professional settings. To him when participants share and listen to stories, they practice crafting narratives that resonate with others, which sharpens their ability to communicate purposefully and empathetically. Jansen (2019), as a pedagogic tool storytelling allows individuals to refine their ability to express ideas clearly, listen actively, and engage with others in meaningful ways. He further states that story telling enables individuals to learn the art of crafting narratives, which requires the use of clear language, appropriate pacing, and effective use of tone and expression as such enabling the individual to become more adept at organizing their thoughts and presenting them in a coherent and compelling manner. This result in an enhanced ability to communicate verbally in public speaking, interviews, and team meetings, where clarity and engagement are crucial.

Gordon (2021) also elucidated that in the context of cultural storytelling, listeners play an active role by interpreting the message, reflecting on the storyteller's experiences, and response thoughtfully which enhances their ability to listen attentively and respond appropriately, a skill that is crucial in both personal and professional interactions. Fiedler and Tyszka (2017), says cultural storytelling make use of non-verbal cues to enrich the narrative, create atmosphere, and convey emotion which impact how a message is received, thus mastering non-verbal communication through storytelling can improve a person's ability to convey emotion, intention, and emphasis, thereby making their overall communication more effective. Byram (2018) noted that cultural storytelling provides an opportunity for individuals to understand and appreciate diverse communication styles; by engaging with stories from different cultures, individuals learn to adapt their communication techniques to suit various cultural norms and expectations which is important in a globalized world.

Berberoglu (2016) states that many cultural stories involve characters who face complex problems or challenges and used critical thinking to resolve them. Engaging persons with disabilities in such narrative can stimulate problem-solving abilities by encouraging them to think creatively and develop strategies for overcoming their various challenges. Cultural storytelling encourages individuals to assess situations, identify key issues, and consider various solutions, these are essential skills in the workplace, where problem-solving and adaptability are highly valued. Through cultural storytelling, individuals with disabilities can enhance their cognitive flexibility, learn how to approach complex tasks systematically, and develop effective problem-solving skills. Leung and Cheung (2020) articulate that many cultural stories feature characters who must adapt to changing circumstances or environments. These narratives can serve as models for individuals with disabilities, teaching them how to remain flexible and adaptable in the face of challenges. Adaptability is a critical soft skill that enhances employability, as it allows individuals to respond effectively to changes in job requirements, team dynamics, or workplace environments. Cultural storytelling can help individuals with disabilities develop a growth mindset and learn how to adjust their approaches when faced with new or unexpected situations.

This study also found that cultural storytelling techniques significantly enhanced the time management capabilities of employees with disabilities via the sharing of stories, traditions and experiences which provides a framework for understanding time as cyclical or relational depending on the cultural perspective. This is in line with Berberoglu (2016), who holds that through story telling goal formulation competences can be inculcated in the listeners. He says by hearing how characters in stories overcame obstacles and achieve goals employees internalised similar strategies for managing their own time and accomplish tasks. Schoenfeld (2016) added to this by stating that story telling reduces cognitive overload by providing a structured way of thinking about time. The narrative structure of story telling makes the passage of time and task progression more digestible for employees with executive function deficit and Attention deficit hyperactive disorders. Cultural storytelling often presents complex narratives that require listeners to interpret underlying themes, recognize biases, and evaluate the motivations of characters. This process encourages individuals to engage in critical thinking by analysing the story's structure, identifying patterns, and drawing inferences from the narrative Nganga, & Hove, (2020). Engaging with such narratives strengthens cognitive skills related to evaluation, analysis, and synthesis, which are essential components of time management. Considering how characters from diverse backgrounds make decisions, overcome obstacles, or respond to challenges in a story enable individuals develop greater cognitive flexibility Molefe, (2018). This ability to shift between multiple viewpoints is a core component of effective thinking skills which results in effective time management as it helps individuals approach problems from various angles and generate more innovative solutions. Schoenfeld (2016), holds that storytelling encourages metacognitive reflection, where individuals not only engage with the story but also reflect on their thinking processes. This reflection allows individuals to evaluate how they arrived at conclusions, identify biases in their thinking, and assess the effectiveness of their problem-solving strategies and set goals and timelines in solving real life and other work-based challenges.

Through the practice of storytelling, individuals engage with narratives that offer diverse perspectives, foster connection, and enable them to better navigate social interactions, all of which are essential for developing strong interpersonal relationships in both social and professional settings. According to Johnson and Vasquez (2020), stories provide rich emotional content that encourages individuals to experience the feelings, struggles, and triumphs of characters, which enhances their ability to empathize with others in real life. Empathy is a key interpersonal skill, as it enables individuals to connect with others on a deeper emotional level, facilitating trust and cooperation. When engaging with stories, individuals are exposed to a range of emotional experiences, helping them to develop a greater awareness of their own emotional responses and better recognize emotions in others. According to Goleman (2017), individuals who develop emotional intelligence through cultural storytelling are better equipped to navigate complex social situations, resolve conflicts, and build strong interpersonal connections. Emotional intelligence is a fundamental interpersonal skill that enhances communication, conflict resolution, and the ability to influence others positively.

Cultural storytelling techniques have a significant impact on the enhancement of planning and resource management skills by providing individuals with frameworks for organizing, prioritizing, and utilizing resources effectively. These techniques, often embedded in traditional narratives, emphasize strategic thinking, foresight, and the efficient use of available resources to overcome challenges. Thus, through storytelling, individuals learn essential skills related to project management, decision-making, and resource allocation, which are crucial for success in both personal and professional settings Smith and Jackson (2018). According to Brown and Green (2019), cultural stories often depict characters who must make decisions about how to allocate limited resources, whether it be time, money, or physical materials. These narratives teach individuals how to prioritize tasks, make the best use of available resources, and optimize outcomes. For instance, traditional stories about agricultural societies often focus on how communities plan for seasons, manage crops, and distribute resources to ensure survival. Engaging with such stories helps individuals recognize the importance of resource management and teaches them how to assess and allocate resources efficiently. As noted by Omar et al. (2025), storytelling provides an avenue for understanding the dynamics of teamwork, where individuals can see how successful resource management relies on shared responsibility and communication. Smith and Jackson (2018) hold that exposure to these narratives encourages individuals to think strategically by considering not only immediate solutions but also long-term outcomes and potential consequences. Cultural storytelling helps individuals understand the value of planning ahead and anticipating challenges, thus enhancing their ability to manage projects and resources effectively.

Furthermore, cultural storytelling techniques have been recognized as powerful tools for enhancing personal qualities such as self-awareness, emotional resilience, identity development, empathy, and moral understanding which forms the foundation for efficient adaptability and flexibility. Through stories, individuals learn about the histories, values, and beliefs of different cultures, which helps them prepare and plan for better adaptation and flexibility in any and every context of work. According to Harter (2016), engaging with cultural narratives enables individuals to explore diverse cultural perspectives which helps them define who they are, what they value, and how they relate to others, ultimately contributing to the development of a strong and coherent adaptable and flexible personality. Narvaez (2019), postulate that cultural stories often contain moral lessons and ethical dilemmas that encourage individuals to reflect on right and wrong, justice, and fairness. These stories can challenge individuals to think critically about their values and how they apply them in real-life situations these are inbuilt principles to adaptation. Exposure to the moral lessons embedded in cultural stories enhances moral development by encouraging individuals to think about the consequences of their actions, the importance of ethical behavior, and the impact of their decisions on others Leung and Cheung (2020). By engaging with these stories, individuals develop a stronger sense of morality and are better equipped to make ethical decisions in their personal and professional lives.

It is therefore obvious that cultural storytelling techniques significantly enhanced employability soft skills in persons with disabilities. Engaging individuals in narratives that encompass diverse perspectives, challenges, and personal growth, can foster the development of critical employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence. The process of engaging with storytelling, particularly from a cultural context, help individuals with disabilities overcome challenges, build on their strengths, and improve their overall readiness for the workforce. By fostering communication skills, emotional intelligence, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, self-confidence, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability, storytelling equips individuals with disabilities to navigate the demands of the workplace more effectively.

Mentor-discussion techniques and the enhancement of employability soft skills in persons with disabilities

The findings of this study revealed that Mentor-discussion techniques enhanced the employability soft skills for employees with disabilities who were involved in the training program. Through structured mentorship and guided discussions, individuals acquired critical soft skills such as communication, time management, interpersonal/teamwork skills, planning and resource management skills, and adaptability and flexibility. Mentorship not only provides individuals with disabilities the opportunity to engage in reflective and goal-oriented conversations but also supports their professional development by offering personalized guidance and feedback Leung and Cheung (2020).

The study revealed that mentor-discussion techniques foster effective communication, which is a key employability soft skill. Through one-on-one mentoring sessions, individuals with disabilities have the chance to practice articulating their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations in a supportive environment. This is in accordance with findings of Hargie (2017), who states that mentoring provides a safe space for individuals to build their communication skills, receive constructive feedback, and refine their ability to convey ideas clearly. For persons with disabilities, these discussions improve verbal and non-verbal communication, ensuring that they can express themselves more confidently in professional settings. This practice is particularly beneficial for individuals with speech, hearing, or cognitive disabilities, helping them overcome communication barriers. According to Brownell (2012), mentors often provide constructive feedback, which helps mentees refine their communication by identifying areas for improvement. This feedback loop allows mentees to adjust their communication approach, enhancing both their listening and speaking abilities. Active listening involves focusing on the speaker, understanding their message, and responding thoughtfully, which improves both interpersonal communication and professional relationships. According to Goleman (2017), clear verbal communication is a key element of emotional intelligence, as it helps individuals express their ideas in ways that are understood by others, leading to more effective collaboration and decision-making. Furthermore, mentors often model non-verbal communication cues, such as body language, facial expressions, and eye contact, which mentees observe and internalize. Non-verbal communication is critical for conveying emotions, intentions, and engagement during conversations (Knapp & Hall, 2010). Mentors, through their guidance, help mentees recognize the importance of body language and tone of voice, which complements verbal communication and enhances overall communication effectiveness.

The study also showed that mentor-discussion techniques was instrumental in developing critical thinking and analytical skills in employees with disabilities which are foundations to time management. During mentor-mentee discussions, individuals are often encouraged to examine problems from various perspectives, evaluate evidence, and challenge assumptions by developing goals and attaching timeline tot he attainment of the goals. As noted by Facione (2015), time management involves the ability to think logically and analytically, considering all available information and potential consequences before drawing conclusions. Mentors guide mentees through complex thought processes, asking probing questions that encourage deeper reflection and more comprehensive analysis. This process helps mentees strengthen their ability to evaluate arguments, identify biases, and make informed decisions, which are key components of effective thinking in professional and personal contexts Gordon (2021). Mentors according to Brown and

Green (2019), provides tailored time management techniques like setting reminders, using task management creating visual schedules to enable them stay focused. They further stated that in acknowledging small successes mentors instil effective time management abilities in employees with disabilities. Most mentors educate their mentees on the process of setting Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) goals and through the establishment of accountable schedules and sessions mentees stay on track with their time management goals.

In mentor-mentee discussions, mentors often encourage mentees to reflect on past experiences, analyse their thought processes, and plan on how they could improve their approach in future situations. According to Harris & Akpan (2020), reflective thinking helps individuals deepen their understanding of complex issues, recognize patterns in their thinking, and develop more effective strategies for future decision-making. This process of reflection is crucial in time management as it allows individuals to learn from past experiences and refine their cognitive abilities over time.

It was realised during this study that mentor-discussion significantly foster the interpersonal skills, which are essential for effective collaboration, conflict resolution, and building professional relationships. Through structured, one-on-one mentoring sessions, individuals engage in discussions that foster the development of key interpersonal skills, including active listening, empathy, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and conflict management. According to Brownell (2012), by engaging in mentor-discussions, individuals develop the ability to focus on the speaker, ask clarifying questions, and provide thoughtful responses, which improves their ability to engage in meaningful conversations in varied context. In mentorship, individuals are guided on how to navigate group dynamics, manage diverse personalities, and contribute to collective goals. According to Olufemi, (2017), collaboration involves both cooperation and coordination with others to achieve shared objectives, and as individuals develop these skills through mentoring, they become more adept at working with others in diverse and often challenging environments, improving their interpersonal effectiveness and group cohesion. Mentor-discussion techniques also promote assertiveness and self-confidence, which are important interpersonal skills. Through mentoring, individuals gain the confidence to express their ideas, needs, and boundaries clearly and respectfully. According to Narvaez (2019), assertiveness involves the ability to communicate one's thoughts and feelings directly and honestly, without aggression or passivity. Mentor-discussion techniques have a profound impact on the enhancement of interpersonal skills, including active listening, empathy, emotional intelligence, collaboration, conflict resolution, assertiveness, and trust-building. Through structured discussions with mentors, individuals develop the tools and strategies necessary to navigate complex social dynamics, resolve conflicts, and build strong professional relationships.

The study also elucidates that mentor-discussion technique plays a pivotal role in enhancing planning and resource management skills, crucial abilities in both professional and personal contexts. These skills involve the capacity to organize tasks efficiently, allocate resources effectively, and anticipate potential challenges to meet goals. Through structured, reflective dialogue with experienced mentors, mentees can gain valuable insights into how to plan strategically, manage time and resources efficiently, and navigate the complexities of task execution Qiu, Jiang, Sun & Du (2023). The discussions between mentor and mentee facilitate the development of these skills by providing real-world examples, offering guidance, and fostering critical thinking about how to approach complex situations in a structured manner. According to Sullivan & Mahoney (2018), goal-setting theory suggests that setting clear, measurable goals increases motivation and performance. Mentors help mentees set realistic and achievable goals while providing feedback on how to break down larger tasks into manageable segments. This structured approach to goal setting enhances mentees' ability to plan effectively, increasing their chances of success in both their personal and professional lives. Additionally, mentors often use the discussion technique to help mentees prioritize their tasks based on urgency and importance. This encourages mentees to develop decision-making skills that optimize their planning process and help them focus on what truly matters. By engaging in discussions about time management,

prioritization, and adjusting plans as needed, mentees can learn how to set goals and execute them in a more organized and efficient manner (Nganga, & Hove, (2020).

Effective resource allocation is one of the core components of planning and management, and mentor-discussion techniques can significantly improve this skill. In mentoring discussions, mentees learn how to assess available resources whether they are human, financial, technological, or time and allocate them in ways that maximize efficiency and minimize waste. A study by Kroll (2014) shows that effective resource management involves the ability to assess both the tangible and intangible resources needed to achieve organizational goals. Mentors guide mentees in understanding how to allocate these resources based on the scope of the tasks at hand and the timeline available. Time management, a critical aspect of resource management, is also enhanced through mentor-discussion techniques. In a mentor-mentee relationship, mentees are encouraged to reflect on their time management practices, identify areas of improvement, and receive advice on how to allocate time more efficiently. According to Lau, & Chan, (2019), time management involves setting clear priorities, minimizing distractions, and planning tasks in a way that avoids procrastination. Through mentor discussions, mentees learn practical strategies for improving their time management, which ultimately leads to better planning and resource allocation.

Effective planning and resource management also rely on strong problem-solving and decision-making skills, which are nurtured through mentor-discussion techniques. During discussions, mentors often present mentees with scenarios that involve complex planning and resource allocation challenges. Mentees are encouraged to consider different solutions, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and make decisions based on available information. This helps mentees develop a more analytical approach to planning, where they learn to anticipate potential challenges and devise solutions to overcome them (Meyer; 2018). Mentors also assist mentees in evaluating the effectiveness of their decisions and adjusting their plans when necessary. According to Thomas and Fink (2000), effective decision-making involves the ability to recognize when a change is needed, analyse the consequences of different decisions, and make informed adjustments to plans and resource allocations. Through mentor-discussion techniques, mentees gain experience in decision-making processes, learning to consider both immediate and long-term outcomes in their planning, thereby fostering leadership skills. Overall, mentor-discussion techniques provide valuable support for individuals seeking to enhance their planning and resource management abilities, equipping them with the tools and strategies necessary for success in professional and personal contexts.

The results of this study also revealed that mentor-discussion technique plays a significant role in enhancing personal qualities of adaptability and flexibility by offering individuals the opportunity to engage in reflective, structured conversations with more experienced mentors. This approach helps mentees cultivate key personal traits such as self-awareness, resilience, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, and adaptability and flexibility, all of which are essential for both personal and professional growth. Through meaningful discussions, mentors guide mentees to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set personal goals, and develop strategies to improve their overall character. By facilitating a process of introspection and personal growth, mentor-discussions lead to the enhancement of adaptability and flexibility which are crucial for navigating challenges and succeeding in various contexts. These results are inline with Goleman (2017), who states that self-awareness the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses is the foundation of adaptability and flexibility in human relation. Mentors help mentees reflect on their past experiences, successes, and failures, which encourages them to evaluate their actions and make conscious decisions for adaptation in varied context (Harrison, 2021). Mentors often ask open-ended questions and provide feedback that challenges mentees to think critically about their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations. This reflective process enhances self-awareness by allowing mentees to identify patterns in their behavior and make informed changes. Through consistent engagement in mentor-discussions, individuals become more attuned to their emotional states and internal thought processes, leading to better decision-making and enhanced personal growth. According to Masten (2001), resilience involves the ability to maintain psychological stability

despite stress or adversity, mentors guide mentees in building resilience by providing emotional support, offering perspective, and helping them reframe negative experiences as opportunities to become flexible. By learning from their mentors' experiences, mentees develop more effective coping mechanisms, adaptability, and flexibility strategies which enhance their ability to persevere in the face of adversity. This process contributes to the development of greater emotional strength qualities that are essential for personal growth and success (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000).

Mentor-discussion techniques contribute to the enhancement of self-confidence and assertiveness by providing a supportive environment where mentees can express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. According to Bandura (1997), self-confidence is the belief in one's abilities to succeed in specific situations. Through regular discussions, mentors encourage mentees to set goals, overcome self-doubt, and take risks that build confidence. They provide positive reinforcement, celebrate achievements, and help mentees see their potential. Assertiveness, which is the ability to express one's needs, opinions, and desires confidently and respectfully, is also enhanced through mentor-discussions. Mentors often teach mentees how to assert themselves in various situations, from standing up for their ideas in a meeting to managing difficult interpersonal interactions. Through feedback and guidance, mentees develop the skills necessary to communicate their thoughts clearly and effectively, without being overly aggressive or passive. This leads to improved interpersonal interactions and greater self-assurance (Daniels, Kelliher, & D'Netto, (2021). Adaptability, or the ability to adjust to new circumstances and environments is built by discussing challenges such as shifting goals, changing priorities, or new work environments, mentors help mentees develop strategies for becoming more flexible and adaptable. According to Choudhury, Foroughi, & Larson, (2020), adaptability is an important characteristic for success in fast-paced, dynamic environments.

The mentor-discussion technique plays a significant role in enhancing personal qualities such as self-awareness, resilience, emotional intelligence, self-confidence, adaptability, integrity, and leadership. Through reflective, supportive conversations, mentors guide mentees in developing a deeper understanding of themselves, overcoming personal challenges, and improving their decision-making skills. These discussions foster personal growth by encouraging mentees to develop and refine the traits that are essential for success in both personal and professional contexts.

Conclusion and recommendation

Africentric career counselling strategies focused on integrating African cultural values tradition, and perspectives into career guidance process. These strategies are effective in enhancing employability soft skills as seen in this study. This study examined the effectiveness of Africentric career counselling strategies specifically the use of cultural storytelling techniques and mentor-discussion techniques on the enhancement of employability soft skills in employees with disabilities in the Buea Municipality of the southwest region of Cameroon. Twenty-five employees with disabilities were subjected to the employability soft skill training using two Africentric counselling techniques; cultural storytelling techniques and mentor-discussion techniques and all two were effective in enhancing the employability soft skills of communication, time management, interpersonal, planning and resource management and adaptability and flexibility in these employees. This study therefore recommends that:

- Counsellors should integrate Africentric counselling strategies as technique in counselling persons with disabilities. Helping clients understand how their background influences their work behaviour via story telling and mentorship will help them leverage cultural strength in their workplaces.
- Counsellors should stress the importance of community network and collective success by establishing mentorship programs that are grounded in communal relationships and respects for elders.
- Counsellors should integrate indigenous knowledge systems and informal apprenticeship models into their counselling practices.

- There is need for the organisation of periodic workshops and training sessions on soft skills using various Africentric approaches such as story telling, group discussions, and more to counselling.

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