

# Improving Career Exploration through Experiential Learning of Students with Impaired Hearing at a Special School

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## Abstract

This paper aims to describe (1) whether experiential learning could improve the career exploration of students with impaired hearing at a special school and (2) how experiential learning as a technique for career exploration should be carried out. The research was a collaborative classroom action research divided into two cycles each of which was conducted based on the experiential learning model. The research subjects were two Grade XI students with impaired hearing at special senior high school SLB-B Wiyata Dharma I in Sleman Regency, Indonesia. Career exploration scales, observations, and interviews were used as research instruments. The data were analyzed by means of the descriptive statistics and trend analysis, and the results reveal the followings. (1) Experiential learning could improve the career exploratory behaviors of students with impaired hearing at the respective special senior high school. (2) This paper suggests that career exploration through experiential learning should go through (a) choosing a career based on the students' needs, (b) observing the activities conducted within the career to capture the students' concrete experience, (c) holding discussions on the career-related information to brainstorm the abstract conceptualization, (d) practicing at minimum one of the career-related tasks as an actualization of the active experimentation, and (e) discussing the acquisition of concepts and concrete career-related experience as an effort of reflective observation.

**Keywords:** *career exploration, experiential learning, impaired hearing*

## A. Introduction

Dreams of individual careers start to grow in childhood. Likewise, children having impaired hearing. In the context of career development, its phase is known as the career development phase (Ginzberg et al. and Super in Brown, 2005). In relation to the phase, Arrington (2000) suggests the term of career awareness. In this phase, students are facilitated in understanding not only the career but also its role in the world of work and in life, in acquiring knowledge for themselves, and in developing their self-confidence. Success in this phase would become the basis of the next phase, namely, the career exploration phase (Arrington, 2000).

The career exploration phase begins at the middle school ages (Muro and Kottman, 1995; Arrington, 2000). In this phase, students are facilitated in discovering themselves in matters of interest, ability, work value, and

identifying the strong and weak points within themselves and the demands of their future career.

Career exploration is a process of learning about one's self and career environment (Atkinson and Murell, 1988; Taveira, et al., 2003). It aims to develop a broad understanding of oneself, career environment, a variety of worker characteristics, the relevance of school subjects with the world of work, and self-evaluation (Studer, J.R., 2005). As a learning process, career exploration needs to be carried out through learning experiences involving the understanding of one's characteristics, career environment, and personal development in making career decisions. The process could be comprehensively facilitated through, among others, experiential learning.

Regarding this, experiential learning could be adopted as a model for career exploration (Kolb, 1984; Atkinson and Murell, 1988; Taveira, et al., 2003). Experiential learning provides for exploration experience by involving all psychic components. The experience resembles a synergic relationship between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and between active experimentation and reflective observation. All these four options make a cycle of learning experience beginning with concrete experience, continued by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

## **B. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. find out whether experiential learning can improve career exploration of students with impaired hearing at the special senior high school SLB-B Wiyata Dharma I, in Sleman Regency, Indonesia, and
2. describe how experiential learning as a technique to improve career exploration should be carried out.

## **C. Theoretical Review**

### **1. Definition of Career Exploration**

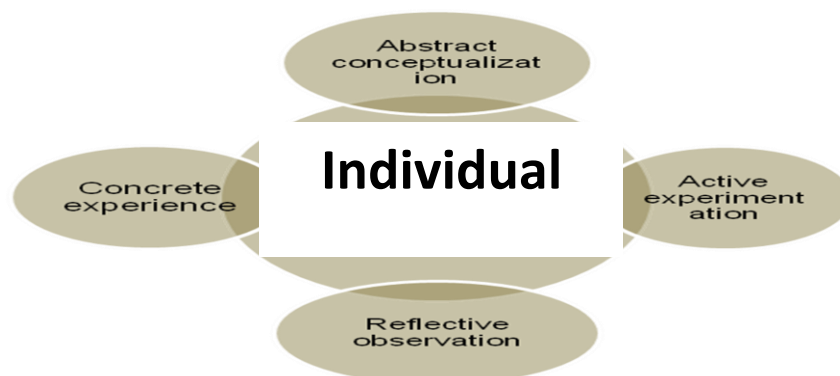
Career exploration, according to Blustein in Wall, J.E. (1994), is an activity of attempting to improve understanding of oneself and of the outside world (one's environment). On a practical level, it aims to obtain information about a child's aptitudes, interests, and values and to attempt to match them with the demands of the specific characteristics of the career chosen. Taveira and Moreno (2003) state a relatively same definition, in which career exploration is an activity whose purpose is to improve knowledge of one and one's environment in one's career, and it occurs continuously throughout the process of one's career development. In line with Taveira, Magnuson, and Starr (2000) add that the experience in career exploration assists the individuals concerned in the process of understanding themselves in terms of their skills and attitudes in relation

to their future careers and tasks. From the definitions above, it could be concluded that career exploration is a learning activity whose purpose is to obtain knowledge about oneself and his/her surrounding environment urging his/her career development.

Taveira and Moreno (2003) affirm that there are four concepts of career exploration. First, career exploration is the behavior of seeking information related to career problems. Second, it is an important phase in the process of making a career decision, including the process of identification and evaluation of career information. Third, it resembles one of the main stages in career life initiating crystallizations and specifications in the context of the task of developing the career choice. Fourth, career exploration is the lifelong learning process to attain career development. According to this fourth concept, career exploration occurs throughout the process of one's career development. Career exploration is the process to gain an understanding of one's skills, potentials, aptitudes, interests, values, and life dreams. It also deals with the understanding of the career concerned, information on the world of work, skill and education requirements, conditions of the work environment, and the specific condition of the career itself.

## 2. Experiential Learning

Career exploration is the process of learning about oneself and one's career environment and therefore Kolb's idea of experiential learning could be adopted as a model for career exploration (Kolb, 1984; Atkinson and Murrell, 1988; Taveira, et al., 2003). Experiential learning is a learning experience providing exploration opportunity by involving all psychic components. The experience is a synergic relationship between concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and between active experimentation and reflective observation. These four components create a cycle of learning experience began with the concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. A picture of the cyclical model is shown below.



**Figure 1: Model of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984)**

There are three domains in the career exploration according to the model suggested by Kolb. Each domain involves the four components in experiential learning. The three domains include (1) exploring the self, (2) exploring the world of work, and (3) personal development.

#### D. Research Method

This is a collaborative classroom action research with two Grade XI students at special senior high school SLB-B Wiyata Dharma I in Sleman, given the initials YAD and AKW as the subjects. The research was conducted in two cycles. Each cycle went through a process of career exploration according to the experiential learning model.

The assessment of career exploratory behaviors was done by using the career exploration scale. The scale measures six aspects, namely, life dreams (2 items), interest on a career (7 items), understanding of the possessed ability and aptitude (10 items), understanding of career information (20 items), (5) understanding of the possessed weaknesses (3 items), and (6) the understanding of the success experience (3 items). The score for each item in each aspect is on a 4-point scale. As instruments for monitoring how the action through experiential learning proceeded, observations on and interviews with the subjects and teachers were conducted. The research data were analyzed by using the descriptive statistics and trend analysis.

#### E. Research Results

Results of the assessment of the two subjects' career exploratory behaviors conducted by administering the career exploration scale to YAD and AKW prior to the action are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of the Before-Action Career Exploration Scale

No	Aspect	YAD	AKW
1.	Life dreams to attain	5	7
2.	Interest on a career	20	15
3.	Acquired ability	25	20
4.	Career Information obtained	56	50
5.	Self-weakness	7	8
6.	Success experience	5	8

From Table 1 it is obvious that prior to the action, both subjects have the same understanding of the five aspects, namely, life dreams, interest on a career, acquired ability, career information obtained, and success experience they had had or read about. Their understanding of these five aspects was "fair" in category. They are aware of the self-weakness, and their understanding of the self-weakness is "good" in category.

## **1. The accomplishment of the First Cycle**

The accomplishment of the first cycle was commenced with an analysis of work interest as the basis. Based on the results of the career exploration scale and interviews, the hairdressing job was chosen to be executed by experiential learning.

On the first day of the first cycle, the two subjects had direct experience, or concrete experience, by observing a hairdresser at work. The work activity observed was applying shampoo, cream bathing, head massaging, giving facial care, hair cutting, and hair re-bonding. At this stage, both subjects got to know and observed various equipment and materials needed in beauty salon service and beauty care. At the end of the observation, the researcher, the teacher, both subjects, and two hairdressers had a discussion about the career of being a hairdresser at a beauty salon. At this stage, the researcher attempted to actively invite the subjects to their own discussion in the course of leading to abstract conceptualization. The questions directed to them were about, among others, (a) types of facial care and hair care, (b) the various equipment used in haircutting, cream bathing, hair dyeing, giving facial care, re-bonding, and others, (c) how to serve and treat customers, and (d) the risk of being negligent at doing task. The discussion aimed at enabling the subjects to obtain the understanding of the information about being a hairdresser at a beauty salon.

On the second day, the two subjects did the work as hairdressers in the same beauty salon. YAD chose to do the work of cream bathing from beginning to the end, while AKW chose the hair cutting and hair dyeing. They did their work meticulously and neatly. The researcher asked the customers they served. The customers expressed their satisfaction and thanks. At this stage, the two subjects were doing active experimentation. By having the direct or concrete experience, the subjects felt the joys and woes of being hairdressers. On that second day, the subjects did reflective observation. They deeply felt what they observed on the first day and they made reflections on what they had done on the second day.

At the end of the first cycle, reflections ended. The results of the reflections were that (a) YAD felt happy in practicing the cream bathing and felt satisfied because the customer was satisfied (the customer patted YAD's shoulder with a smile), and (b) AKW turned out to feel different, expressing that in hair dyeing one "must be patient, slow, and careful".

Some notes about the first cycle to be taken into consideration in doing the action of the second cycle were as follows.

- a) The career chosen should fit the students' interest, and therefore in the second cycle, the career of a dressmaker was chosen.
- b) Patience and meticulousness are to be the main attitudes the students should be armed with, and therefore the teacher should inhibit these attitude to gain the optimum results.

## 2. The accomplishment of the Second Cycle

For the action in the second cycle, the career as a dressmaker was chosen. In this opportunity, the research subjects had a concrete experience of being dressmakers. Then, the teacher and the researcher made efforts to arrive at abstract conceptualization through discussions in order that the subjects obtained in a complete way the information about the career of a dressmaker. On the same first day of the second cycle, the researcher continued the action by leading the subjects into a reflective observation on the career of a dressmaker.

On the second day, both subjects had direct sewing practice as a form of their active experimentation. AWK chose to sew a *kebaya*, traditional Javanese blouse, and YAD decorated a *kebaya* with *payets* (consisting of beads, gemstones, crystals, etc) following the motifs already made by the dressmaker mentor. An interesting finding in this second cycle was that AWK turned out to work smoothly in finishing the *kebaya*. Through the in-depth interview, it was found that one of AWK's parents was a dressmaker. AWK often helped her in his spare time. It turned out that AWK liked the career of being a dressmaker.

With a case somehow different from that of AWK, YAD also liked the sewing work but it was because it was because his aunt also worked as a dressmaker. YAD meticulously sewed *payets* following the patterns already drawn by the dressmaker mentor. An interesting finding reveals that YAD suggested the colors of the *payets* to apply on a blouse being worked upon, and it turned out that the suggestion was accepted by the dressmaker mentor.

After the two cycles were completed, discussions with the subjects and the teacher were held. The discussions aimed to confirm the subjects' career exploratory behavior on the two respective careers. At the end of this activity, the assessment of career exploratory behavior was administered on the two subjects. The results of the career exploratory behavior assessment are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of the After-Action Career Exploration Scale

No.	Aspect	YAD	AKW
1.	Life dreams to attain	8	8
2.	Interest on a career	25	26
3.	Acquired ability	30	35
4.	Career Information obtained	70	65
5.	Self-weakness	10	12
6.	Success experience	12	10

From Table 2 it is obvious that four of the six aspects of career exploratory behavior turned out to be relatively the same. They were the

subjects' understanding of their life dreams, interest, self-weakness, and their success experience. Fairly significant differences between the two subjects were found in their understanding on their acquired ability in which AKW felt more competent, particularly in being a dressmaker. In their understanding of obtained career information, it is found that YAD had more career information than did AKW.

### 3. Hypothesis Testing

The aforementioned research hypothesis was as follows: experiential learning could improve career exploration by children with impaired hearing. To test the hypothesis, the line graphs prior to and after action on AKW and YAD in Figure 3 and 4 present the information on each researched aspect.

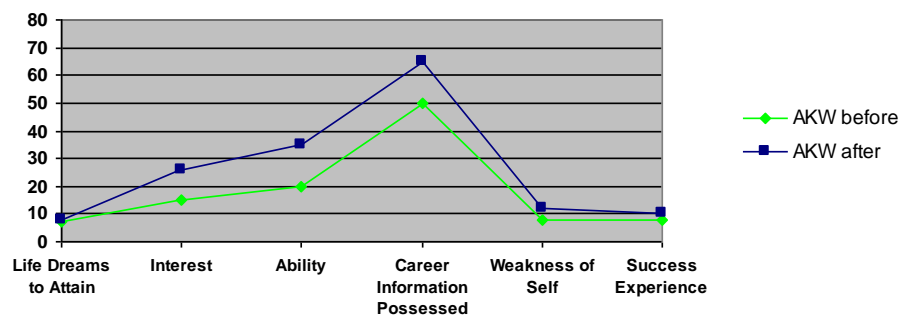


Figure 3. AKW's Career Exploratory Behavior Prior to and After Action

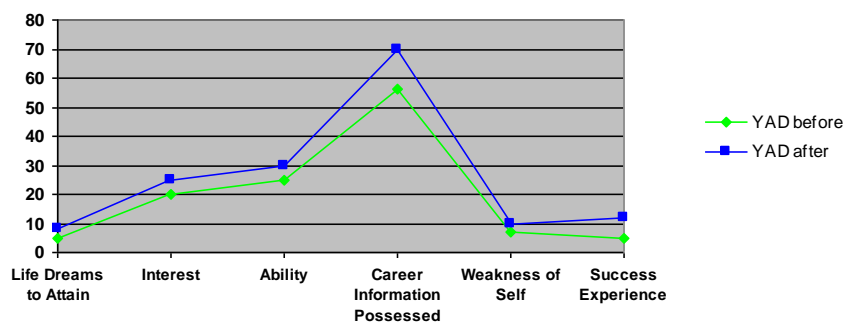


Figure 4. YAD's Career Exploratory Behavior Prior to and After Action

Observation on and comparison between the two line graphs for AKW and those for YAD, with the graphs with star signs (◆) showing pre-action career exploration behavior and those with square dot signs (■) showing post-action career exploration behavior, indicate that all the six aspects of career exploratory behavior increased. Thus, the hypothesis that experiential learning can improve the career exploratory behaviors of students with impaired hearing is accepted.

## **F. Conclusion and Discussion**

### **1. Conclusion**

Based on the research results and the analysis, this study concludes the followings.

- a. Experiential learning could improve the career exploratory behaviors of students with impaired hearing at special senior high school SLB-B Wiyata Dharma I in Sleman Regency, Indonesia.
- b. The procedure of conducting career exploration through experiential learning consists of:
  - 1) choosing the career matching the students' needs,
  - 2) observing the activities conducted within the career to capture the students' concrete experience,
  - 3) holding discussions on the career-related information so that abstract conceptualization would be formed,
  - 4) practicing at minimum one of the career-related tasks as an actualization of active experimentation, and
  - 5) discussing the acquisition of concepts and concrete career-related experience as an effort of reflective observation.

### **2. Discussion**

As found in the research, it has turned out that experiential learning could improve the effort of students with impaired hearing in understanding career exploration. The trend analysis has revealed that there have been increases in the six aspects of career exploration. A significant increase has occurred in obtaining information. The study also believes that direct or concrete experience make the students easier to feel what happens within the career. In addition, they become more familiar with the various career information dimensions related to the career they choose. This is in line with Sugarman's opinion in Atkinson and Murrell (1988) that Kolb's (1988) idea of experiential learning is a learning process to improve students' career exploration.

Another finding is that there is an effect of parents' career on the students' career exploration process. AKW has been interested in the career of being a dressmaker and it has been revealed that AKW's mother worked as a dressmaker. In YAD's case, however, the influence comes from his aunt. Another finding supporting the parents' role in career exploration and choice is a result of research by Otto (2000) on the career choice of middle-school children in the United States of America. Otto (2000) found that 81% of students agree to choose a career conforming to their parents' career and 48% of them frequently discuss their parents' career and also the career they would choose. Likewise, Esters and Bowen (2005) support that parents' role in children's career exploratory behavior indicates, among others, that (1) parents (father and mother) constitute the first factor influential to their



children's career choice and (2) parents (father or mother) job is significantly related to their children's career choice.

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