

Multicultural Career Guidance for Ethnic Minority Students in Realizing Equal Employment Opportunities

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Abstract

Inequality in employment opportunities remains a structural challenge in multicultural societies, particularly for students from ethnic minority backgrounds who face social, cultural, and institutional barriers from early stages of education. Schools play a strategic role in preparing students for the transition to the labor market through career guidance services; however, conventional career guidance approaches tend to be homogeneous and insufficiently responsive to student diversity. This study aims to analyze the role and contribution of multicultural career guidance in promoting equal employment opportunities for ethnic minority students. A qualitative descriptive-interpretative approach was employed through in-depth interviews and document analysis of school-based career guidance practices. The findings reveal that ethnic minority students experience unequal access to career development due to cultural bias, limited social and cultural capital, and experiences of marginalization that affect career aspirations and self-efficacy. The implementation of multicultural career guidance contributes to enhanced job readiness, strengthened career self-efficacy, and expanded access to employment opportunities by adopting culturally responsive and social justice-oriented practices. This study concludes that multicultural career guidance serves as a strategic instrument for advancing equal employment opportunities for ethnic minority students.

Keywords: Career Guidance; Equal Employment Opportunities; Ethnic Minority Students; Multicultural

Introduction

Job opportunity disparities are a structural problem that continues to pose a serious challenge in multicultural societies, both in developing and developed countries. Various studies indicate that ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds still significantly affect individuals' access to education, employment, and social mobility, even though the principle of equality has been widely recognized normatively (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015; Hammond et al., 2017). In this context, students from minority ethnic groups often find themselves at a disadvantage from the early stages of the transition from education to the workforce. These disparities are not only



rooted in differences in individual capabilities but also in social and institutional structures that reproduce inequality through mechanisms such as stereotyping, covert discrimination, and limited access to career development resources (McGee, 2018).

Education plays a strategic role in breaking the cycle of inequality, particularly through the function of schools as institutions that prepare students to face the workforce. Schools are not only responsible for mastery of academic competencies, but also for shaping career readiness, work aspirations, and students' confidence in navigating their future choices (Moote & Archer, 2018). However, the effectiveness of education in preparing students for the transition to the workforce largely depends on how well the education system can respond to the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of students. In multicultural societies, a uniform approach to education has the potential to overlook the specific experiences of minority groups, thereby widening the gap in employment opportunities.

Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are consistently identified as vulnerable groups within the education system and the labor market. Sociological research shows that they often have to negotiate career aspirations amid experiences of discrimination, low social expectations, and limitations in social and cultural capital (Shah et al., 2010; Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015). This situation directly affects the formation of career expectations and professional choices, where ethnic minority students tend to adjust their ambitions according to perceived realistic opportunities rather than their actual potential. Thus, employment inequalities are not only external but also internalized in the form of low self-efficacy and career aspirations.

In this context, career guidance serves as a strategic instrument in developing students' employability readiness. Career guidance services function to help students understand their potential, recognize job opportunities, and plan their educational and career paths systematically (Astuti & Purwanta, 2020). For students from ethnic minority backgrounds, career guidance plays an even more crucial role as it can serve as an intervention space to address the structural and psychosocial barriers they face. However, the effectiveness of career guidance is highly determined by the paradigm and approaches employed in its practice.

Several studies criticize the conventional career guidance approach, which tends to be homogeneous and oriented toward majority cultural norms. Such an approach often assumes that all students have relatively similar access, values, and experiences, thereby overlooking the inequalities experienced by ethnic minority groups (Frigerio et al., 2022). As a result, career guidance services may actually reproduce injustice by encouraging minority students to conform to dominant standards without considering their cultural identity and social context.

The urgency of a multicultural career guidance approach has increasingly come to the forefront in the context of growing ethnic and cultural diversity. Multicultural career guidance emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity, recognition of students' multiple identities, and critical awareness of power relations and structural inequalities in the fields of education and work (Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022). This approach not only focuses on individual development but also on the principles of social justice, aiming to expand opportunities and reduce systemic barriers faced by ethnic minority students.

Previous research has examined various aspects related to the careers of minority students, such as the impact of discrimination on career expectations (Abrahamsen & Drange, 2015), the job search experiences of minority groups (Hammond et al., 2017), as well as the role of



mentoring and institutional support in enhancing career engagement (Nwosu, 2024). Other studies have also highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and social capital in shaping the career aspirations of students from marginalized groups (Carpi et al., 2017; Estrada et al., 2011). Nevertheless, most of these studies still separate the study of career guidance from issues of equal employment opportunities, or discuss them in the context of general policy without in-depth analysis of multicultural career guidance practices at the school level.

Thus, there is a significant research gap, namely the lack of studies that explicitly analyze multicultural career guidance as a strategy to achieve equal employment opportunities for minority students. Existing research tends to focus on individual outcomes, such as motivation or aspirations, without situating career guidance within the framework of social justice and structural inequality. In fact, understanding multicultural career guidance as a social intervention tool allows for a more comprehensive analysis of its role in reducing disparities in employment opportunities. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role and contribution of multicultural career guidance for minority ethnic students in promoting equality of employment opportunities. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to integrate the perspectives of career guidance, multicultural education, and social justice into a single analytical framework, placing the experiences of minority ethnic students at the center of the analysis.

Research methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of multicultural career guidance in the context of the experiences of ethnic minority students. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of meanings, perceptions, and subjective experiences that cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of the study is directed at how ethnic minority students experience career guidance services and how such practices influence their career readiness and aspirations.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and documentation studies on career guidance practices within the school environment. The research informants consisted of students from ethnic minority backgrounds and guidance and counseling (GC) teachers who were directly involved in career services. Informants were selected purposively, taking into account their active involvement in the career guidance process as well as their diverse ethnic backgrounds. This approach allowed the researchers to obtain a rich perspective on the dynamics of interaction between counselors and students in a multicultural context.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, involving stages of open coding, categorization, and the extraction of main themes relevant to the research objectives. The analysis process was carried out iteratively to ensure the alignment between empirical data and the conceptual framework of multicultural career guidance. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and researcher reflexivity, ensuring that the research findings could be methodologically and analytically accountable.



Results and Discussion:

Inequality in Career Development Access and Structural Barriers Experienced by Minority Ethnic Students

Research results indicate that minority ethnic students still face significant disparities in access to career development services within schools. These inequalities do not always appear in the form of formal exclusion but rather manifest through differences in the quality of services, the intensity of guidance, and the relevance of career counseling materials to students' socio-cultural contexts. These findings are consistent with the research of Moote and Archer (2018), which revealed that school career education services are often uneven and more responsive to the needs of students from majority groups.

This inequality of access is exacerbated by the presence of stereotypes and cultural biases that influence social expectations of minority students. In the career guidance process, minority students are often perceived as having more limited career choices or are steered toward certain educational paths deemed "realistic" based on their social background. This phenomenon reflects what Abrahamsen and Drange (2015) refer to as a negotiation process between ambition and discrimination, where minority students' career aspirations are shaped by biased social expectations rather than their actual potential.

In addition, limitations in social and cultural capital constitute prominent structural barriers in the experiences of ethnic minority students. Social capital, such as access to professional networks and career information, as well as cultural capital in the form of implicit knowledge about workplace norms, is generally more limited among students from minority groups (Shah et al., 2010). Interview results indicate that many students lack reference figures or role models in specific professions, making it difficult for them to envision and plan long-term career paths. This situation exacerbates the gap between minority and majority students in preparing for the transition to the workforce.

Experiences of marginalization, whether direct or symbolic, also have a significant impact on students' career aspirations and self-confidence. This study found that experiences of discrimination or differential treatment in the school environment contribute to decreased career self-efficacy, which is students' belief in their ability to succeed in specific fields of work. These findings are consistent with McGee (2018), who emphasized that stereotype threat and stereotype lift can influence the academic performance and career aspirations of students from minority ethnic groups.

The relationship between educational inequality and inequality of employment opportunities becomes increasingly apparent when career guidance fails to function as a corrective mechanism. Rather than reducing disparities, career services that are insensitive to multicultural contexts may actually reinforce the reproduction of social injustice. This underscores that inequality in employment opportunities cannot be separated from social and institutional processes that occur from the school environment onward (Hammond et al., 2017). Thus, the findings of this sub-discussion indicate that the unequal access to career development for minority ethnic students is the result of a complex interaction between structural biases, resource limitations, and experiences of marginalization. This situation emphasizes the urgency of more contextual and equitable interventions through a multicultural career guidance approach.



Implementation of Multicultural Career Guidance in Responding to the Diversity of Student Backgrounds

The implementation of multicultural career guidance in the context of secondary education demonstrates a paradigm shift from a universal career approach to one that recognizes the diversity of students' identities, experiences, and social positions. The findings of this study indicate that the multicultural career guidance approach is viewed as a more relevant response to the needs of minority students, as it explicitly takes into account cultural backgrounds, experiences of marginalization, and structural barriers that affect their career choices and aspirations. These findings align with Souto and Sotkasiira (2022), who emphasize that multicultural career guidance must be oriented toward social justice and critical awareness of inequality.

The role of guidance and counseling (BK) teachers or counselors becomes a key factor in the implementation of this approach. Counselors with multicultural competence not only serve as providers of career information but also as facilitators of critical reflection, helping students understand the relationship between self-identity, social structures, and employment opportunities. Interview results indicate that counselors' understanding of cultural values, language, and the family dynamics of minority students contributes to the creation of more equitable and supportive counseling relationships. These findings reinforce the results of Yosef et al. (2022), which state that counselors' perceptions and attitudes toward multiculturalism significantly determine the quality of career guidance services.

The implementation of multicultural career guidance is also reflected in the adjustment of assessment methods and career planning. Culturally sensitive career assessments not only evaluate individual interests and talents but also take into account limitations in social capital, economic barriers, and cultural norms that influence students' career decision-making. This approach differs significantly from conventional assessments, which tend to be culturally neutral and assume that all students have the same starting point (Frigerio et al., 2022). Thus, multicultural career guidance allows for a more contextual and realistic mapping of students' potential. To clarify the differences in characteristics between conventional and multicultural approaches in career guidance practice, Table 1 presents a comparison of the main dimensions of implementation of both approaches.

Table 1. Comparison Between Conventional and Multicultural Career Guidance Approaches

Dimension	Conventional Career Guidance	Multicultural Career Guidance
Cultural Orientation	Culture-neutral, majority-based norms	Culture-sensitive and identity-aware
View of Students	Homogeneous individuals	Diverse individuals with contextual backgrounds
Career Assessment	Standardized and individual-focused	Contextualized and culturally responsive
Role of Counselor	Information provider	Facilitator and advocate for equity



Treatment of Barriers	Largely ignored or individualized	Explicitly addressed as structural issues
Main Goal	Career matching	Career equity and empowerment

The table shows that the differences between the two approaches lie not only in technique but also in value orientation and service objectives. Multicultural career guidance explicitly positions equal opportunity as its primary goal, whereas the conventional approach focuses more on matching individuals with the workforce without considering the unequal social context. This distinction explains why the multicultural approach is more relevant for minority students who face structural barriers in accessing employment opportunities. The inclusive career guidance strategies identified in this study include the use of role models from minority ethnic backgrounds, the strengthening of mentoring programs, and the creation of safe spaces for dialogue to discuss experiences of discrimination and career aspirations. These practices have been shown to increase student engagement and strengthen their career self-efficacy, as also noted in the studies by Nwosu (2024) and Carpi et al. (2017). By observing figures with similar backgrounds who have successfully navigated the professional world, minority students gain positive representation that broadens the horizons of their career aspirations.

Nonetheless, the implementation of multicultural career guidance still faces various challenges. The lack of formal training related to multicultural competencies for school counselors, minimal support from school policies, and high administrative burdens are the main obstacles to the sustainable application of this approach. This condition aligns with the findings of Jonck and Swanepoel (2019), which indicate that inequalities in institutional resources directly affect the quality of career guidance services. Overall, the results of this study indicate that multicultural career guidance has strong potential as a more equitable and contextual approach in responding to the diversity of students' backgrounds. The success of its implementation heavily depends on the readiness of counselors, support from educational institutions, and the integration of multicultural values and social justice into school policies and practices.

The Contribution of Multicultural Career Guidance in Realizing Equal Employment Opportunities

The contribution of multicultural career guidance in realizing equal employment opportunities for minority ethnic students is most evident in the comprehensive improvement of job readiness, which encompasses not only technical skills but also psychosocial aspects. Job readiness from a multicultural perspective includes the ability to recognize personal potential, understand the structure of opportunities and barriers in the labor market, and develop adaptive strategies that align with the student's identity and cultural values (Yamamoto et al., 2025). The findings of this study indicate that minority ethnic students who receive multicultural career guidance tend to have a more realistic and empowered understanding of careers, as the guidance process explicitly addresses the context of disparities and ways to navigate them, rather than concealing them with ahistorical meritocratic narratives.



The increase in work readiness is closely related to the strengthening of career self-efficacy. Career self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief in their ability to make career decisions and succeed in the workplace, is often hindered in minority ethnic students due to experiences of stereotypes, discrimination, and a lack of positive representation (Pambudi & Kesuma, 2016; McGee, 2018). Through multicultural career counseling, counselors help students reflect on experiences of marginalization as structural phenomena, rather than personal failures. This approach has been shown to reduce the internalization of stigma and increase students' confidence in pursuing broader career aspirations, as also demonstrated by Carpi et al. (2017) in the context of STEM education.

In addition to individual aspects, multicultural career guidance contributes significantly to bridging the school-to-work transition for minority students. This transition often represents a critical phase where inequalities are most apparent, as minority students generally have limited access to labor market information, professional networks, and early work experiences (Hammond et al., 2017). Research findings indicate that multicultural career guidance practices that integrate mentoring, network mapping, and collaboration with external communities can expand students' access to career resources that were previously difficult to reach. Thus, career guidance functions as a connecting mechanism between education and a more inclusive labor market.

Another equally important contribution is the role of multicultural career guidance as an instrument of social justice in the education system. Unlike conventional career approaches that tend to be normatively neutral, multicultural career guidance explicitly acknowledges structural inequalities and positions career services as part of corrective efforts against such injustices (Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022). Within this framework, counselors not only act as facilitators of career choices but also as advocates who help students access opportunities and challenge exclusive institutional practices. This approach broadens the meaning of equal employment opportunities from merely formal access equality toward substantive justice that takes into account different starting points. Another equally important contribution is the role of multicultural career guidance as an instrument of social justice in the education system. Unlike conventional career approaches that tend to be normatively neutral, multicultural career guidance explicitly acknowledges structural inequalities and positions career services as part of a corrective effort to address these injustices (Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022). Within this framework, counselors not only serve as facilitators of career choices but also as advocates who help students access opportunities and challenge exclusive institutional practices. This approach expands the meaning of equal employment opportunities from merely formal access equality to substantive justice that considers different starting points.

Long-term implications of multicultural career guidance are evident in the potential increase in social mobility for minority students. With stronger job readiness, enhanced self-efficacy, and broader access to opportunities, students are more likely to enter professions that match their potential and achieve better socio-economic positions (Estrada et al., 2011). This social mobility not only affects individuals but also minority communities collectively through increased social capital and representation across various employment sectors. In the long term, these conditions contribute to reducing structural inequalities in the labor market.



Nevertheless, this study also shows that the contribution of multicultural career guidance to equal employment opportunities is not automatic. Its effectiveness heavily depends on consistent implementation, school policy support, and the integration of a multicultural approach into the curriculum and educational evaluation system. Without strong institutional commitment, multicultural career guidance risks becoming a symbolic practice limited to discourse rather than structural transformation. These findings are in line with Moote and Archer (2018), who emphasize that career education reform requires systemic support to have a real impact.

Overall, this subsection emphasizes that multicultural career guidance has a strategic contribution in realizing equal employment opportunities for minority ethnic students. This contribution is multidimensional, encompassing the strengthening of individual capacities, the expansion of structural access, and the promotion of social justice. By placing career guidance within a multicultural framework, education not only prepares students for employment but also for equal participation in a diverse society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the inequality of employment opportunities for minority ethnic students is a structural issue rooted in the educational phase, particularly in the transition from school to the workforce. This inequality is influenced not only by individual factors but also by limited access to career guidance services, cultural biases, low social and cultural capital, and experiences of marginalization that affect students' career aspirations and self-efficacy. The research findings indicate that conventional, homogeneous career guidance approaches have not been able to adequately address the complex needs of minority ethnic students, thus potentially reproducing employment opportunity disparities.

Multicultural career guidance has proven to play a strategic role in promoting equality of employment opportunities through enhancing employability, strengthening self-efficacy and career aspirations, as well as expanding students' access to resources and career networks. By integrating cultural sensitivity and principles of social justice, multicultural career guidance functions not only as an instrument for individual development but also as a corrective mechanism against structural inequalities in the education system and labor market. Theoretically, this study contributes to strengthening research on career guidance and multicultural education by positioning the issue of equal employment opportunities as the main focus of analysis.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools and education policymakers strengthen the multicultural competencies of guidance and counseling teachers through continuous training and integrate multicultural career guidance approaches into school policies and institutional practices. Further research needs to be conducted in more diverse social contexts and using longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term impact of multicultural career guidance on the employment opportunities and social mobility of minority students, thereby supporting the development of inclusive career services with stronger empirical evidence.



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