

**THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT
AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILL AMONG SPECIAL NEED STUDENTS IN
ANAMBRA STATE**

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Abstract

The study investigated the role of inclusive education on career development and employability skill among special needs students in Anambra State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 120 special needs students comprising those with Visual Impairment, Orthopedic impairment and those with learning difficulties. The study utilized a sample of 40 students. The sample size was obtained using purposive sampling techniques. Two instruments titled “Role of Inclusive Education on Career Development among Special Needs Students Questionnaire (RIECDSNSQ) and Role of Inclusive Education on Employability Skill among Special Needs Students Questionnaire (RIEESNSQ) were used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts in the department of Educational Foundations, faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using Crombachs’ alpha method which yielded the coefficient value of 0.79 for RIECDSNSQ and 0.84 RIEESNSQ respectively. Research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation while the null hypotheses were analysed using t-test. Results showed that inclusive education plays

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extensive role on the career development and employability skill of students with special needs. It was concluded that every student should be provided with supportive settings where they can study and feel appreciated in the wider society. The study recommended among others that the school administrators should put a sincere effort to create awareness and sensitize communities to address drivers of stigma existing among the students with special needs.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Career Development, Employability Skill, Students with Disability, Special Needs Students

Introduction

Inclusive education is a process of integrating individuals with special needs into regular classroom which reflects world commitment to equal educational opportunities as outlined by the united nation for children with disabilities (UNCRPD). Inclusive education emphasized on the importance of embracing diversity and promoting acceptance among students with varied impairment. As Morina (2017) puts, inclusive education support settings where every students can study and feel appreciated in the wider society. However, the idea of inclusive education has become a transformative catalyst for the present day pedagogy. Inclusive education represents a paradigm shift in education because it recognizes that everyone irrespective of their differences has the right to equitable and high quality education. Following the conception of Khasanah and Salin (2018), the aim of inclusive education is to make education accessible to all citizens including those with disabilities. On the same note Ainscow (2020) opined that the goal of inclusive education is to ensure that every student has equal opportunity for involvement, engagement and achievement in their neighbourhood public education institutions thereby enhancing accessibility in the learning environment with great academic opportunities. Additionally, inclusive education and special need education are used interchangeably and the understanding of inclusive education lies on the normalization, zero rejection policy, least restrictive environment and integration.

Further, inclusive education was introduced in 1994 at Salamanca during the international assembly of Governors non-governmental organization conference on teaching children with special needs. It was in that conference that a body associated with the United Nations educational scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) produced a comprehensive document that aimed to address the educational concern of students with special needs. Thus, in the Salamanca statement, there are highlights of significance of inclusive mainstream schools in eradicating prejudice, stigmas, and promoting inclusive settings and guaranteeing fair educational opportunities for people especially those with special academic needs. Salamanca statement was in line with the assertion of Vaghrodia and Petal (2022) who stated that one of the significance of inclusive education is creating an enabling environment that embraces all individuals and nurtures essential qualities such as empathy and kindness as well incorporate students with special needs into traditional educational settings. Likewise, UNESCO (2017) overviewed that every learner is important and equally important which means that every child irrespective of his impairment has a potential to become a remarkable human. UN General Assembly, (2007) revealed that there are about 1 billion people (15%) living with a disability globally.

According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (UNCRPD) people with disabilities include those who have: “long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Consequently, there are different types of disability and the differences may be related to emotional, physical, cognitive and psychosocial factors. According to Adaka, Chia and Tarka (2023), students who have physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional, mental health or learning disabilities that substantially affect their capacity to participate

in normal educational activities are said to be individuals with disabilities. When a student has any kind of these disabilities, it affect their capacity either to see, hear, move, communicate their, learn or process information in ways that are typical for their age or grade levels. In describing individuals with disabilities, Adaka, *et al* (2023) opined that students with disabilities are those with who have difficulties in realizing their full potentials meanwhile their emotional, physical, social or intellectual performance falls below or above average. However, students with special needs include those with impaired hearing, impaired vision, orthopedic impairment, impaired speech, orthopedic impairment, neurological impairment, gifted / talented.

Additionally, students with disabilities may require additional support, resources or accommodations to ensure they have equal access to educational opportunities. This accommodation may include assistive technologies, modified instructional methods, use of sign language interpreters, depending on the nature and severity of the disability. Meanwhile, individuals with disabilities can be detrimentally affected when they made wrong choice of career which determines their employability. Thus, choosing a career requires a very crucial decision which may have a significant impact in the life of the individuals. It supersedes individuals' talents, mental faculties and social interaction involving capacity for adjustment. In so doing, a career choice making requires proper preparation which must be pursued in time because it is greater than a mere job profession. According to Salako and Adediran (2024) the process of choosing a career is one of the tremendous choices an individual must make in life however, choosing an appropriate career can lead to feelings of dissatisfaction in other words resulting to unemployment. This simply means that an individuals' career choice has a significant role to play on his entire life.

Career choice refers to the process a student undergoes to evolve in an occupational status which entails the process of making decisions. According to Olaosebikan and Olusakin (2014), a career can be defined as the trajectory and endeavours pursued by an individual throughout his life time, particularly in relation to the chosen profession. It is a range of jobs, roles or professional activities that an individual engages in throughout his life. It involves selecting a vocation, training for it, starting it and progressing within it (Getanrige & Sagwe 2016). One of the key aspects of career development according to Brown, Rygna and Krane (2000) is the ability to foster self-awareness and goal clarity through workshop, counseling and self-assessment tools. Therefore, for the fact that choosing a career has a long process, it is crucial to begin to think about career choice for students with disabilities from the early years possibly, from Nursery, Primary and Higher education in order to ensure a successful employability.

Just as Ibrahim and Abubakar (2022) rightly stated, students with disabilities face challenges that can affect their career choice such as, inability to access buildings and transportation. For instance, students with physical disabilities such like visual impairment, or hearing impairment. In addition, these challenges can result to significant disparities in career outcomes among these students. It is obvious that students with disabilities experiences higher rates of unemployment and underemployment more than their counterparts. This presumably is because in employment one must consider the location, building, transportation and others of which inconveniences in any of the above factors can make an individual stagnant in a particular working place and position which could eventually affect the persons earning (salary).

According to UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) students with disabilities often experience this stagnation and underpayment because of their impairments. Most of them experience unemployment and

underemployment which could lead to abject poverty. In line to this assertion, World Health Organization (2011) assert that students with disabilities often experience barriers to accessing education and employment and this can lead to an increased risk of poverty and at the same time may face difficulties being included in other aspects of society. Similarly, Omiegbe (2021) noted that people with disabilities are at increased risk of poverty. However, recent study by Shakespeare, Mugeere, Nyariki and Simbaya (2019) in Sub-Saharan Africa indicated that with the right support, people with disabilities can achieve economic success and other human rights. Again, Shakespeare, Mugeere, Nyariki and Simbaya (2019) affirmed that investing in education and employment for people with disabilities should be part of development efforts, as based on an economic rationale, as well as social justice.

Consequently, it is observed that most a times there appear to be gender disparity existing among the males and female students' career development and employability. For instance, during the complex transition from high school to meaningful employment, special needs students seems to face barriers based on both gender stereotypes and disability discrimination creating a "double jeopardy" a situation that restricts career development and limits occupational opportunities for them (Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, & Powers, 2008). According to U.S. Department of Labor, (2011), a study revealed that the barriers faced by the special needs students are especially pronounced in the area of employment. In as much as female students nowadays account for 49% of the total workforce, gender disparities in earnings are still prevalent. Meanwhile, the same report documents stated that female students with disabilities have lower participation in high-skilled jobs and work fewer hours per week than their male counterparts. However, this ought not to be as the rule is stipulated in the inclusive education setting that there should be equal opportunity for all and every student should

be accommodated in order to eliminate barriers and discrimination. It is barriers of this nature that can affect employability and may at the same time lead to stagnation in employment whereas employability is an ongoing procedure in life.

Therefore, employability is not a static achievement but an ongoing process of skill development and knowledge acquisition (Jones & Brown 2019). Employability involves collection of accomplishments that make individuals more likely to get employment and successful in their chosen career which benefits them, the economy, the labour force and the community at large. According to Jones and Brown (2019), for an individual to go beyond academic knowledge and technical expertise which encompassed personal, interpersonal and professional competencies that contribute to the persons' effectiveness in workplace adaptation an employability skill is crucially needed. Further, employability skill is a feature that can help an individual to transit from the closed training environment that characterized educational institutions to a dynamic and ever-changing corporate world. However, the skill plays essential role in the individuals' ability to secure and retain employment.

To Smith, Zikic and Arthur (2018), employability skills are transferable skills that can enable students maintain a meaningful employment which is beyond academic qualification in other words involved communication teamwork, adaptability, creativity, leadership and even critical thinking. Similarly, Lee and Harvey (2017) noted that employability is a learning process and not a product, in other words it is a spectrum of experiences and traits generated through higher level of learning and not mere collection of abilities. Moreover, employability skill is often shaped by the career development. This in every indication shows that, by combining skill assessment practical experiences and strategic career planning, the program will empower students to navigate the complexity of the career choice with confidence and readiness. Thus, this confidence and

readiness can be very much achieved if every student is fully accommodated in the training, therefore, given equal opportunity for all to participate and access the training is very much essential.

Further, Rousso, (2008), Wagner, Newman, Cameto, and Levine, (2005) in a study observed that female students with disabilities always faced unique challenges in gaining employment, accessing postsecondary education, living independently, and fully participating in their communities. Similarly, Betz, (2005) and U.S. Department of Labor, (2011), noted that in 2010 female full-time year round workers earned on average 19% less than male full-time employees, and many female students remain clustered in a limited number of low-paying traditional female occupations. Additionally, U.S. Department of Labor, (2011) opined that female students graduating from high school continue to earn less than their male counterparts. In the same vain, the U.S. Department of Education in a study revealed that the median income for a male high school graduate in 2009 was US\$32,900 compared with US\$25,000 for a female high school graduate as retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/>. This means that gender gaps in employment also impact female students with disabilities entering the workforce.

Further, Employment Provision in the National Disability Act stipulates that all public and private organisations should reserve 5% of their workforce for persons with disabilities. The law has given employers five years (until January 2024) to implement this. However, the enforcement of the 5% employment quota would strengthen students with disability inclusion and enable more persons with disabilities to gain decent work in Anambra State and in the society at large. Therefore, it is against this background that the study seeks to find out the role of inclusive education on career development and employability skill among special needs students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study intends to find out;

1. The role of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state.
2. The role of inclusive education on employability skill of special need students in Anambra state

The study was guided by two research questions and they are;

1. What is the role of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state.
2. What is the role of inclusive education on employability skill of special need students in Anambra state.

Two null hypotheses (Ho) were also formulated viz,

1. Inclusive education has no significant role on career development of special need students in Anambra State.
2. Inclusive education has no significant role on employability skill of special need students in Anambra State

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A design that involves collecting and analyzing of data obtained from a few group of people considered as representative sample of an entire group. The study was carried out in Anambra State which is one of the states in South-East Region, Nigeria. The population of the study was 120 special needs students comprising those with Visual Impairment, Orthopedic impairment and those with learning difficulties. The study utilized a sample of 40 students. Two instruments titled “Role of Inclusive Education on Career Development among Special Needs Students Questionnaire (RIECDSNSQ) and Role of Inclusive Education on Employability Skill among Special Needs Students Questionnaire (RIEESNSQ) were used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three

experts in the department of Educational Foundations, faculty of Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was obtained using Crombachs' alpha method which yielded the coefficient value of 0.79 for RIECDSNSQ and 0.84 RIEESSNSQ respectively Research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation while the null hypotheses were analysed using t-test.

Results

Research Question One: What is the role of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on the role of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state (N= 36)

| S/N | Item Statement | X | SD | Remarks |
|-----|--|-------------|------|--------------|
| 1 | Provide students with a sense of belonging | 2.67 | 0.82 | Agree |
| 2 | Offer an open and welcoming environment | 2.71 | 0.76 | Agree |
| 3 | Promote active listening | 2.59 | 0.86 | Agree |
| 4 | Create policies within the school, professional development to educate staff | 2.62 | 0.64 | Agree |
| 5 | Actively work to combat biases | 3.29 | 0.62 | Agree |
| 6 | Focus on boosting and maintaining student motivation | 3.66 | 1.03 | Agree |
| 7 | Create a safe learning environment Diversify learning material | 2.81 | 0.68 | Agree |
| 8 | Taking into account students' needs | 2.64 | 0.65 | Agree |
| 9 | Make it easy for all students to participate | 2.93 | 0.88 | Agree |
| 10 | Develop a rapport with each student | 2.99 | 0.79 | Agree |
| 11 | Engaging with Parents and the Community | 3.35 | 0.58 | Agree |
| 12 | Consider the Perspectives and Consequences | 2.87 | 0.82 | Agree |
| 13 | Account of Students' Strengths and Needs | 2.77 | 0.52 | Agree |
| 14 | Maintain Awareness of Classroom Diversity | 2.58 | 0.82 | Agree |
| 15 | Incorporate Diversity into the Curriculum | 3.11 | 0.93 | Agree |
| 16 | Consider Universal Design Principles | 2.59 | 0.62 | Agree |
| 17 | Solicit Student Feedback | 3.12 | 0.64 | Agree |
| 18 | Provide Support | 3.28 | 0.77 | Agree |
| | Grand Mean | 2.92 | | Agree |

Data presented in Table 1 reveals the item by item analysis of the roles of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state. The result revealed that all the items (1 – 21) with their respective mean scores of 2.67, 2.71, 2.59, 2.62, 3.29, 3.66, 2.81, 2.64, 2.93, 2.99, 3.35, 2.87, 2.77, 2.58, 3.11, 2.59, 3.12 and 3.28

were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 2.92 summarized that respondents agreed on the roles of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state. The standard deviation scores of 0.58 – 1.03 show that respondents do not vary too much in their mean ratings.

Research Question 2: What is the role of inclusive education on employability skill of special need students in Anambra state?

Table 2: Respondents’ ratings on the role of inclusive education on employability skills of special need students in Anambra State (N = 36)

| S/N | Item Statement | X | SD | Remarks |
|-------------------|--|-------------|------|--------------|
| 19 | Inclusive education improves communication skills among special needs students. | 3.08 | 0.89 | Agree |
| 20 | Special needs students in inclusive settings develop effective teamwork skills for workplace environments | 2.71 | 0.91 | Agree |
| 21 | Inclusive education enhances problem-solving abilities in special needs students, making them more employable | 3.91 | 0.72 | Agree |
| 22 | Special needs students gain adaptability skills through participation in inclusive classrooms. | 3.22 | 0.64 | Agree |
| 23 | Career counseling services are available to special needs students to guide them toward employable skills. | 3.58 | 0.70 | Agree |
| 24 | Participation in inclusive education improves confidence and independence of special needs students. | 3.75 | 0.90 | Agree |
| 25 | Teaching methods in inclusive classrooms effectively address the diverse learning needs of special needs students. | 2.82 | 0.81 | Agree |
| 26 | Inclusive education incorporates practical activities that enhance workplace-relevant skills for special needs students. | 3.04 | 0.76 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | 3.26 | | Agree |

Data presented in Table 2 shows that items 19 – 26 with their respective mean scores of 3.08, 2.71, 3.91, 3.22, 3.58, 3.75, 2.82 and 3.04 were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 3.26 summarized that respondents agreed on the role of inclusive education on employability skill of special need students in Anambra state. The standard deviation scores of 0.64 – 0.91 show that respondents do not vary too much in their mean ratings.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the career development of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State.

Table 3: t-Test analysis on significant difference in the career development of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State

| Variables | N | X | SD | Df | t-cal | p-value | α | Remarks |
|-----------|----|-------|------|----|-------|---------|----------|-----------------|
| Male | 11 | 23.86 | 5.21 | 34 | 8.568 | 0.082 | 0.05 | Not Significant |
| Female | 25 | 27.44 | 5.49 | | | | | |

Data presented in Table 3 reveals that at 0.05 alpha level, $t(2, 34) = 8.568, p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the career development of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the employability skills of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State.

Table 4: t-Test analysis on significant difference in the employability skills of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State

| Variables | N | X | SD | Df | t-cal | p-value | α | Remarks |
|-----------|----|-------|------|----|-------|---------|----------|-----------------|
| Male | 11 | 23.04 | 4.26 | 34 | 6.458 | 0.105 | 0.05 | Not Significant |
| Female | 25 | 20.68 | 5.44 | | | | | |

Data presented in Table 4 reveals that at 0.05 alpha level, $t(2, 34) = 6.458, p > 0.05$, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the employability skills of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State.

Discussion

Based on the findings, in Table 1, the result revealed that all the items (1 – 21) with their respective mean scores were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 2.92 summarized that respondents agreed on the roles of inclusive education on career development of special need students in Anambra state. Whereas the standard deviation scores of 0.58 – 1.03 show that respondents do not vary too much in their mean ratings. The results also

agreed with the opinion of Ainscow (2020) that that stated that the goal of inclusive education is to ensure that every student has equal opportunity for involvement, engagement and achievement in their neighbourhood public education institutions thereby enhancing accessibility in the learning environment with great academic opportunities. The findings also agreed with the assertion of Vaghrodia and Petal (2022) who stated that one of the significance of inclusive education is creating an enabling environment that embraces all individuals and nurtures essential qualities such as empathy and kindness as well as to incorporate students with disabilities into traditional educational settings.

Table 2 shows that items 19 – 26 were rated agreed. The cluster mean of 3.26 summarized that respondents agreed on the role of inclusive education on employability skill of special need students in Anambra state. Whereas the standard deviation scores of 0.64 – 0.91 show that respondents do not vary too much in their mean ratings. The findings agreed with the assertion of Morina (2017) who stated that inclusive education support settings where every student can study and feel appreciated in the wider society. It also supports the opinion of Khasanah and Salin (2018), who stated that the aim of inclusive education is to make education accessible to all citizens including those with disabilities.

Table 3 reveals that at 0.05 alpha level, $t(2, 34) = 8.568, p < 0.05$, shows that there is a significant difference in the career development of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State. The findings succinctly agree with Hogansen, Powers, Geenen, Gil-Kashiwabara, and Powers, (2008) who observed that there are gender disparity among the males and female students' career development and employability. According to them, during the complex transition from high school to meaningful employment, special needs students seems to encounter barriers based on

both gender stereotypes and disability discrimination which creates double jeopardy; a situation that restricts career development and limits occupational opportunities for these students.

Table 4 reveals that at 0.05 alpha level, $t(2, 34) = 6.458, p > 0.05$, shows that there is no significant difference in the employability skills of male and female special needs students in inclusive education settings in Anambra State. From the results, it shows a disagreement to the findings of U.S. Department of Labor, (2011) which stated that female students graduating from high school continue to earn less than their male counterparts. It also disagree with the assertion of U.S. Department of Labor, (2011), which noted that in 2010 female full-time year round workers earned on average 19% less than male full-time employees, and many female students remain clustered in a limited number of low-paying as in traditional female occupations.

Conclusion

It was concluded that inclusive education plays extensive role on the career development and employability skill of students with special needs. Therefore, the researchers concluded that every student should be provided with supportive settings where they can study and feel appreciated in the wider society. They also concluded that efforts should be made by the school administrators in creating an enabling environment that embraces all individuals and nurtures essential qualities such as empathy and kindness as well incorporate students with special needs into traditional educational settings environment.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide infrastructural changes and improvement in order to facilitate responsible accommodation for students with special needs.

2. The school administrators should put a sincere effort to create awareness and sensitize communities to address drivers of stigma existing among the students with special needs.
3. Government should provide a wider range of interventions and financial support options to match the aspirations of students with special needs and opportunities.
4. Government should put a stronger policy implementation and enactment of law so as to increase inclusiveness of students with special needs.

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