Career Transitioning among Students with Visual Impairments: Educational and Public Policy Perspectives

Chiedu Eseadi[1]*, Shulamite E. Ogbuabor[2]

[1]University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2006, South Africa
[2]University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State 410001, Nigeria
*Corresponding author, e-mail: chiediue@uj.ac.za

Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine the educational and public policy concerns pertaining to career transitioning among students with visual impairments. The authors conducted a narrative literature review. The conceptualization of policy, with a specific focus on educational and public policies, was provided. The article also discussed the roles and concerns of educational and public policies in facilitating career transitioning for these students. The study contributes to an increased understanding of the educational and policy implications of supporting students with visual impairments during career transitioning. The collaboration of career counsellors and policy actors is deemed necessary in order to effectively tackle the challenges associated with facilitating successful career transitioning for these students.

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1. Introduction

Education plays a critical role in cultivating the abilities of individuals within society. The right to education is fundamentally guaranteed to all individuals, sighted or visually impaired. In order to mitigate the effects of their impairment and adequately develop their capabilities and potential, visually impaired students must pursue higher education (Omede, 2015). Ensuring equitable access to educational programmes is consistent with the educational ideology in Nigeria, which seeks to mould individuals into informed and effective members of society. In order to enhance their employability and quality of life, visually impaired students must have access to quality education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). No one ought to be denied educational opportunities on the grounds of any type of impairment, according to a UNESCO's (1996) paper concerning the rights of the disabled in education. The need for educators to create a comfortable environment in which these students will be able to learn has become increasingly important in recent years. Establishing an inclusive environment and providing sufficient pedagogical training can contribute to the school success of visually impaired students. To completely engage in classroom activities, successfully complete academic programs and transition from school to the workforce, these students require supplementary educational support services. Such assistance is crucial because these students often encounter challenges in regular classroom settings, including inadequate access to braille materials. While there are some policies that prioritize the educational rights of visually impaired students and prohibit workplace discrimination against them, their employment rate remains low.

Feasible public and educational policies that foster the development and growth of visually impaired students while promoting inclusive education are required (Erickson et al., 2018). Educational policies and programs must prioritize career transition services for visually impaired students. Visually impaired students have a right to an individualized education plan (IEP) in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IEP must comprise intentional preparations for the transition to adulthood. This includes setting personal objectives pertaining to employment prospects, educational opportunities, and independent living. In addition

to criminalizing discriminatory hiring practices based on disability, some legislations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) establishes criteria and regulations that require employers to provide reasonable accommodations for visually impaired individuals who are actively pursuing employment. Providing guidance on the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is considered critical in the education of visually impaired students as it significantly influences their career transitioning. Instruction on braille usage, autonomous living, orientation on independent mobility skills, proficiency with assistive technology, interpersonal interaction, career development, and self-esteem enhancement are all essential competencies encompassed in the ECC (Lohmeier et al., 2009; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011). The objective of this research article is to identify educational and public policy concerns regarding the career transitioning of visually impaired students.

1.1. Research Questions

1. What are the educational and public policies for visually impaired students?

2. What are the roles and concerns of educational and public policies in the career transitioning of these students?

2. Method

The authors conducted a narrative literature review. A variety of methods were used to perform the literature search. The authors searched relevant materials through databases such as PsycINFO, PubMed Central, and Google Scholar. The author also used the Google Search Engine and Microsoft Edge. The keywords used during the literature search to locate information about the topic include educational policies, public policies, and career transitioning of students with visual impairments. The study process we adopted is shown in Figure 1.
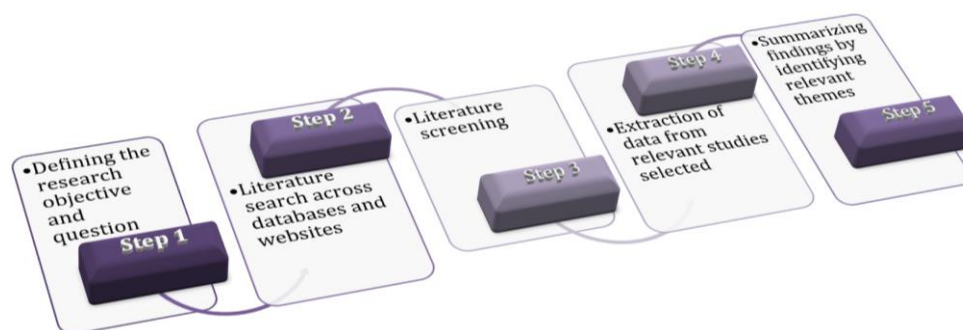

Figure 1. The Study Process for the Current Research

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Understanding Educational and Public Policies for Visually Impaired Students

A policy serves as a foundational framework or support system for all formal activities carried out by an organization. It is a broad directive that establishes the specific parameters and direction within which institutional operations are conducted. It serves as a point of reference for management in determining the operational procedures of the system on a daily basis. In the context of education, educational policy is introduced to provide direction and structure to the development and manage-ment of educational activities (Tukur et al., 2014). Okoroma (2000) posited that educational policies represent the endeavors undertaken by the government to exert influence over the trajectory of the educational milieu. Conversely, a public policy refers to a collection of actions and guidelines that are formulated and implemented by governmental bodies, either singularly or collectively, with the aim of addressing specific issues within a certain societal domain or geographic area. The notion of educational and public policy pertains to endeavors aimed at addressing challenges that may occur within the realm of education.

It is worth noting that educational and public policies often suffer from a lack of effective implementation. This has resulted in the disruption of carefully laid out plans and has consequently undermined the credibility of the education system (Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018). The development and effective implementation of educational and public policies play a significant role in fostering national progress and achieving excellence. However, the implementation of these policies is frequently hindered by various challenges, which have a significant impact on the academic achievements and career transitioning of visually impaired students. The educational and public policy papers which aims at fostering education for all students, regardless of disability status, ultimately center on the concept of inclusive education. Several international policies have been established to highlight the importance of inclusive education. These policies include the United Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All of 1990, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities of 1993, the Salamanca Statement of 1994, and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (Mwakyeja, 2013). The attainment of Education for All objectives is closely linked to the provision of inclusive education that is of a high standard (Eklindh & Van den Brule-Balescut, 2006; Peters, 2003).

Historically, African communities have regarded inclusion as an indispensable component of their everyday existence and diverse activities, including farming and community engagement. While inclusion is being discussed as a novel approach to education delivery, it is already deeply ingrained in these endeavors (Mmbaga, 2002). In developing nations, inadequate infrastructure and resources impede the effective implementation of inclusive education (International Conference Centre, 2008). For Africa and many other developing regions, obtaining adequate funding and support for meaningful inclusive education is a challenge (Abosi, 2000). Additionally, negative attitudes toward individuals with disabilities persist among many individuals. Moreover, educators in conventional educational environments exhibit a limited comprehension of inclusive education. Most schools attempt to implement inclusive education despite the fact that instructors and other educational staff members lack sufficient knowledge of the concept (Miles, 2003). Nevertheless, some national governments are becoming increasingly dedicated to altering the perspectives of educational stakeholders regarding inclusive education so that it more accurately reflects the current state of affairs: a structure that affords equitable academic opportunities to every student, regardless of their unique attributes (Mmbaga, 2002; United Republic of Tanzania, 2008). Several countries have altered or are currently undertaking revisions to their education policies as an integral component of the worldwide initiative known as Education for All (EFA) (Mittler, 2000). This aligns with policies and international conventions that prioritize inclusive education. UNICEF emphasized in its 2014 report that specific legislative support and the government's dedication to EFA are the only means by which inclusive education can be achieved. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) delineates the international legal structure and framework that safeguards the rights of individuals with disabilities. It has been observed that nations that have ratified human rights treaties generally exhibit enhanced human rights practices (Hathaway, 2002). Advocates for better education for people with disabilities, including students with visual impairments, have utilized these legal instruments to successfully campaign for improved legislation and services for this group in a number of countries.

The initial global policy and legislative instrument that exerts a substantial influence on inclusive education is the United Nations General Assembly's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). One fundamental tenet of the declaration posits that differences among individuals are commendable and ought to be leveraged to advance services that cater to their specific requirements in an unbiased manner (UNESCO, 1996). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, established in 1989, is the second legislative and international policy instrument to advocate for inclusive education for students with disabilities. As per the policy, every student with an impairment, including those with visual impairments, is entitled to receive an education in an environment that is conducive to their development and allows them to reach their maximum capabilities in the same way as their sighted counterparts. Moreover, the policy promoted the integration of students with visual impairments into mainstream classrooms, rather than establishing specialized educational facilities (MoEVT, 2009; United Nations [UN], 2007; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989). The Thailand-hosted Jomtien World Declaration

on Education for the entire year of 1990 is the third legislative framework that promotes inclusive education. The World Declaration on Education for All stands as one of the pioneering initiatives in worldwide advocacy for inclusive education. The United Nations Development Program, UNESCO, and UNICEF all provided support for the declaration. Promoting education among disabled groups, including students with visual impairments, is one of the numerous objectives outlined in the Jomtien Declaration, which was endorsed by 155 countries (Eklindh & Van den Brule-Balescut, 2006). The Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Standard Rules of 1993 constitute the fourth policy pertaining to inclusive education. In particular, the policy's sixth principle promotes the entitlement of children with disabilities, including visual impairments, to equitable access to regular educational settings for the acquisition of primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Possi, 1996).

The fifth international policy on inclusive education, the Salamanca Framework for Action of 1994, mandates the integration of children with disabilities, including visually impaired pupils, into regular educational environments. In drafting this document at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, inclusive education was emphasized. The document provides a framework for fostering an environment conducive to the development of an equitable society and the realization of the objective of EFA (Eklindh & Van den Brule-Balescut, 2006). It contributes to the elimination of prejudice based on disability. The establishment of a sense of social inclusion for visually impaired students facilitates their transition from education to the workforce. The Dakar Framework for Action, which endorsed a global Declaration on Education for All (EFA) in 2000 to ensure that all children have access to education, is the sixth legal instrument. Inclusive education has been identified as a successful strategy for achieving EFA goals (Eklindh & Van den BruleBalescut, 2006; Peters, 2003). Implemented in 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is another global legal and policy framework designed to advance inclusive education. Countries that have ratified the CRPD principle are obligated to ensure inclusive education across all educational tiers. Additionally, the principle stipulates that children with disabilities ought to be granted complimentary basic and secondary education, and that they must be protected from any form of discrimination on the basis of their disabilities. It is vital to provide suitable classroom accommodations for students with disabilities, including visual impairments. To aid them in preparing for a successful career transition, alternative learning methods such as braille instruction or alternative communication devices capable of converting lectures to audio should be implemented (UN Division for Social Policy and Development, 2006). In 2015, the Sustainable Development Goal emphasized the importance of inclusive education. The document delineates a number of ambitious objectives that nations are obligated to achieve within the forthcoming 15 years. Disability is a topic that is addressed in two of the education-related objectives of SDG 4 (UN Division for Social Policy and Development, 2016). By 2030, the initiative aims to eradicate inequities and disparities in educational access across all levels. This will be achieved through the establishment of an inclusive learning environment that effectively supports the academic progress of students with visual impairments.

In light of its global recognition, inclusive education is regarded as a means to ensure that students with visual impairments have the opportunity to receive education in the least restrictive environment possible. Institutional policies that foster inclusivity provide a foundation for universities to establish an environment that values and embraces the diversity of its student body. In recent decades, the discourse has transitioned from developed countries like the United States and Canada to resource-constrained regions like Nigeria. Schools at every level must become more inclusive in order to foster the development of inclusive practices; that is, they must improve their ability to instruct students without prejudicial consideration of their neurodevelopmental conditions. Assistive technologies that cater to the learning requirements of these students will contribute to their preparedness for prosperous career prospects in the future. This will provide these students with the personal growth opportunities and social skills necessary to navigate their career transition

3.2. Roles and Concerns of Educational and Public Policies in Career Transitioning

The acquisition of a higher level of education is advantageous for the progress of humanity and nations. According to Omede (2015), individuals with visual impairments are strongly encouraged

to pursue higher education as a means of mitigating the consequences of their disability and enhancing their skills and opportunities. For instance, the educational policy in Nigeria is focused on the cultivation of individuals into competent and productive citizens, while also ensuring that education is available to all people of the nation across primary, secondary, and university levels, both within and beyond the traditional classroom environment (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Consequently, there is a need for increased opportunities for higher education to facilitate effective career transitioning (Farouk, 2003).

The function of the law differs considerably between nations. Prior to taking action, formal law may be mandatory in some nations; in others, the purpose of legislation may be more limited. Legislation pertaining to career transition services typically concentrates on a specific subset of these services, in addition to concerns that are intertwined with more extensive matters concerning workforce policy, education, and training (Watts, 2000). However, a policy containing crucial components of career transition counselling can be ineffective due to financial constraints. Rather than segregation, the trend in education for persons with disabilities, including visually impaired students, is toward inclusion. Inclusive education policy is recognized as a component of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria and the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Early enrollment of visually impaired students in inclusive academic institutions is crucial for their future career preparation and success. Standards for Special Education (2004) state that students with visual impairments require an inclusive learning community, parental and family involvement, accommodations, access to materials in alternative formats, assistive technology, and a comprehensive plan for transitioning into a career.

Career transitioning concerns have received little attention in the realms of education and public policies. Meaningful interactions between career transition professionals and policymakers are crucial for the profession's continued expansion and growth. It is essential that policymakers have a deeper understanding of career transition. It is the responsibility of both parties to initiate and sustain this dialogue (Watts, 2000). The relevance of the transition from school to work in policy initiatives is growing steadily, as both public and education policies strive to expand opportunities and establish systems capable of responding to the diverse demands of society (Mittler, 2000). In an effort to expand individual opportunities and develop adaptable systems that can accommodate a wide range of life demands, career counselling for visually impaired students becomes an increasingly vital component of public policy and career transitioning programmes (Farthing, 2004; Thompkins & Deloney, 1995). Career counselling must address, among other policy concerns, the improvement of the knowledge and skill set of individuals, the maintenance of a low unemployment rate, and the provision of education and employment opportunities to all without regard to disability.

The ineffective execution of public and academic policies negatively affects the ability of students with visual impairments to transition into new careers. There have been concerns regarding the correlation between the academic performance of visually impaired students and the effectiveness of transition plans that outline their means of accessing employment, postsecondary education, community living opportunities, and postsecondary education. While articles 9, 21, and 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRDP) guarantee individuals with visual impairments the same time, cost, and quality of access to books, knowledge, and information as non-disabled persons (United Nations, 2007), it has been widely recognized for quite some time that students with disabilities continue to face a variety of exclusionary practices that differ according to their disability, place of residence, lifestyle, or social class (United Nations, 2007). Furthermore, resistance exists to educational and public policies that aim to ensure the inclusion of students with visual impairments during their career transition (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Aigner, 2013). Visually impaired students frequently encounter educational isolation, which not only gives rise to impoverished circumstances but also restricts the full expression of their identities and capabilities (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). With the implementation of the 1990 IDEA Act, transition services ought to be predicated on students' needs and preferences, as well as their interests. Schools could provide the necessary training location, tools, and materials to aid in the career transitioning of these students. One of the challenges that educators face is locating a suitable site for their students' internships, which serve as valuable opportunities for experiential learning and career development, while also enhancing their visibility and prospects for recruitment (Benz et al., 2000).

4. Conclusion

Educational equity and career transitioning can be facilitated for students with visual impairments through policies that promote inclusive education. In order to resolve the educational and public policy concerns linked to the career transitioning of students with visual impairments, there is a need to involve more stakeholders in the conversations about how to improve the career transitioning of these students. The students, parents, teachers, school administrators, employers of labour, government agencies, curriculum planners, career coaches, school counsellors, and transition agencies should all be involved in such conversations. In other words, to achieve meaningful progress in the career transitioning of these students, a broad-based dedication to their training as well as creating significant partnerships among relevant stakeholders at all levels of education and government is required to resolve existing educational and public policy issues.

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Transisi Karier di Kalangan Siswa Tunanetra: Perspektif Pendidikan dan Kebijakan Publik

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji kebijakan pendidikan dan publik yang berkaitan dengan transisi karier di siswa tunanetra. Penulis melakukan tinjauan literatur naratif. Konseptualisasi kebijakan, dengan fokus khusus pada kebijakan pendidikan dan publik, juga diberikan. Artikel tersebut juga membahas peran dan keprihatinan kebijakan pendidikan dan publik dalam memfasilitasi transisi karier bagi para siswa. Studi ini berkontribusi pada peningkatan pemahaman tentang implikasi pendidikan dan kebijakan dalam mendukung siswa tunanetra selama transisi karier. Kolaborasi antara konselor karier dan pelaku kebijakan dianggap perlu untuk mengatasi tantangan yang terkait dengan memfasilitasi transisi karier yang sukses bagi para siswa secara efektif.