

Chapter 2

School-Based Professionals' Roles and Theoretical Orientations in Promoting the Career Transition of Students With ASD

ABSTRACT

This paper explored the roles and theoretical orientations of school-based professionals (SBPs) in promoting the career transition (CT) of students with autism spectrum disorders (SASD). The data analysed included one hundred and twenty SBPs who were chosen via a multi-stage sampling process. We co-designed the measures that assessed the role clarity, role conflict, role efficacy, role breadth, theory-based transition support, theory-based reflective practice, and CT involvement of the SBPs. The role-related variables had weak and no significant relationships with the CT of SASD. In contrast, theory-informed transition support and, in particular, theory-informed reflective practice were important predictors of CT of SASD, and the model accounted for 52.6 per cent of the variance. The results show the importance of theoretically underpinned reflective practices in improving CT practices in Nigerian schools.

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BACKGROUND

School-Based Professionals (SBPs) encompass a multidisciplinary group of trained personnel operating within educational settings whose roles are crucial in promoting academic, behavioural, and socio-emotional development of students. These professionals, such as special educators, educational psychologists, school counsellors, and social workers, are instrumental in addressing the needs of students with autism spectrum disorders (SASD) throughout the career transition (CT) process (Teresa Rani et al., 2025; Carter & Schutz, 2022; Challenger et al., 2025). They are responsible for transition assessments, designing individualised transition plans, guiding career-related instruction, facilitating vocational and community-based learning, and coordinating transition activities with families and external agencies (Lairson, 2022; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). SBPs perform a variety of interconnected functions that are grounded in professional expertise and collaborative practices and within dynamic institutional frameworks where roles as theorised by Biddle (1979) shape their engagement in inclusive support services. Special educators are often at the forefront of CT support due to their foundational training in improving social communication and adaptive skills (Teresa Rani et al., 2025). They work with families, schools, and community organisations in order to develop individualised transition plans that consider the strengths and needs of students (Lee & Park, 2020). They build essential life skills such as self-advocacy, social competence, vocational readiness, and negotiate accommodations and services necessary for post-school integration of these students (Barrio, 2022; Almalky & Alqahtani, 2021). School counsellors, grounded in a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), collaborate with transition specialists to individualise postsecondary planning (Challenger et al., 2025). They contribute meaningfully to the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) by aligning it with the student's needs, strengths, and aspirations (Laghi & Trimarco, 2020). Through tailored support, they help to mitigate developmental delays in career planning (Dipeolu et al., 2015).

Educational psychologists are designated to appraise the academic, behavioural and social achievements of SASD. Their activities involve the identification of strengths and the areas that need reinforcement, which is critical in the development of effective transition plans and design of the IEP, which contains transition goals which are founded on the exclusive needs of the SASD (Laghi & Trimarco, 2020). Their engagement with special educators, speech-language therapists, and occupational therapists creates an interdisciplinary model that ensures a holistic CT ecosystem (Perryman et al., 2020; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2013). Social workers, in turn, anchor CT by facilitating work readiness and intersectoral collaboration. Their interventions include strengths-based transition plans, early work exposure, and family-centred counselling to foster resilience and self-esteem (Dente & Parkinson Coles, 2012;

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