

# Chapter 6

## Formal and Informal Institutional Support for Career Transition Among Students With ASD

### ABSTRACT

*This study examined the formal institutional and informal supports for the career transition of students with autism spectrum disorders (SASD). Based on the data of 88 teachers and parents in private and public schools of urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, the study evaluated the levels of support, the variation of the levels between the demographic groups, as well as the predictive power of the group, type of school and location. Regression models established that none of the demographic variables predicted support levels, hence indicating that institutional support is influenced by larger system practices. Findings indicate the necessity of enhanced capacity, equal distribution of resources, and inclusive institutional cultures that more effectively support SASD.*

### BACKGROUND

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) refers to a developmental disorder that is characterised by challenges in social interaction, communication, and behaviour, which can limit the capacity of individuals to cope with career transition challenges. Students with autism spectrum disorders (SASD) face significant challenges in career transition because of these challenges. These challenges significantly hinder their ability to overcome life transitions such as getting and maintaining jobs upon leaving school. Literature has shown that there is a three to fourfold lower proba-

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bility of adults with ASD being employed compared to adults without a disability (Mpofu et al., 2019), and that unemployment and underemployment are common among SASD after school (Hendricks, 2010; Yarrow et al., 2024). As a result, these students need several support systems to empower their potential at the point of transition from secondary schools. In Nigeria, where educational policies are still being developed to accommodate more students with special needs, there is still a wide discrepancy between formal and informal support systems for the career transitions of SASD. This chapter discusses the formal and informal institutional supports given to SASD in the Nigerian institutions, and how effective they facilitate smooth career transitioning.

Formal institutional support is the structured policy-driven mechanisms and frameworks that are put in place by educational institutions to make sure that SASD are able to bridge the gap between education and employment or subsequent education. Institutional support of SASD entails formal, policy-based processes and structures that are put in place by the learning institutions to ensure the successful career transition of students through education into employment (Davis et al., 2021). These supports are usually institutionalised in policies, procedures and partnerships, and are also designed to meet the unique needs of SASD when it comes to career planning and development. Formal institutional policies guarantee that career transition is prioritised for SASD, and such students are provided with the right support systems. These policies can incorporate an aspect of personalised transition plans, career guidance, and vocational training in order to equip SASD with a job after graduation. A successful transition of SASD needs extensive planning and constant support that targets areas which encompass career exploration, academic goal setting, self-advocacy skills, reasonable accommodations, and interagency cooperation (Roberts, 2010). These policies are in line with wider national and international policies on special education and rights of persons with disabilities (Sefotho & Onyishi, 2021; Nigeria National Policy on Special Needs Education, 2015; Yibakuro, 2025). Schools provide an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for SASD who qualify for the programme. Therefore, parents of the SASD are free to request for free school-based evaluation if their children are qualified for the development of an IEP (Doda et al., 2024).

For the successful implementation of these policies, the institutions with formal institutional support structures usually have a specific office or coordinator that handles the process of career transition among SASD. The role entails the planning, organisation, and execution of career transition programmes, including job shadowing, internships, and placements. The coordinator serves as a point of contact between students, staff, external agencies and families to make sure transition plans are coordinated and implemented (Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020). Some of the professionals at the forefront of coordinating the process are School psychologists. School

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