

Where do We Go from Here? School–To–Work Transition Experiences of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the school-to-work transition experiences among persons with ID in a special school. Fifteen participants, including parents, teachers, and artisans were selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected through focus group discussions. Participants' responses were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The data was analysed using deductive thematic analysis. The findings revealed that although formal transitional plans exist, persons with ID do not go into employment after completing their primary education and vocational training. Instead, they often pursue further training outside the school in batik tie-and-dye, doormat weaving, bead-making, and basketry before their subsequent employment. The study identified several challenges hindering school-to-work transition among such persons, including inadequate skill training, poor transition planning, limited job placement options, lack of parental involvement, and poor societal attitudes toward them. The findings suggest that effective transition programmes require effective policy formulation and implementation, adequate financial and material resources for their training, advocacy, and awareness creation for social acceptance to improve their skill development and employment prospects.

Keywords: School-to-work transition, intellectual disability, employment, advocacy, planning.

INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability (ID) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that occurs during the developmental period and is characterised by chronic impairment in intellectual functioning, adaptive behaviours, and social skills (Lee et al., 2024). It is a discernible decrease in an individual's ability to acquire and utilize new skills (Aston et al., 2021). Persons with ID experience limitations in adaptive functioning across multiple domains such as self-care, language and communication, mobility, self-direction, learning, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. These make it difficult for them to have equal access to social opportunities compared to typically developing peers and those with other forms of disabilities (Andriana & Evans, 2021).

In recent years, the inclusion of persons with ID in the workforce has gained global attention with efforts to equip them with the necessary vocational skills and social competencies for employment (Cimera & Burgess, 2019). However, stigmatization, inadequate vocational training, and the absence of structured support systems make it challenging for individuals with ID to secure and sustain employment (Appiah & Asamoah, 2020). School-to-work transition programmes are therefore required for the economic independence and social integration of persons with disabilities (Owusu-Ansah & Osei, 2021).

Aston et al. (2021) reported that although post-primary education and training offer tailored and personalised assistance to intellectually handicapped students to facilitate their optimal development and achievement, the prospects for these individuals to pursue further education, acquire additional training, and establish successful careers are constrained by the scarcity of avenues for their career advancement. This is the case in Ghana where persons with ID rarely pursue further education beyond primary education. Glover-Akpey (2021) contended that because most learners with ID cannot cope in high schools, and tertiary education in Ghana, transition services

have become necessary to equip them towards independent life after primary education. However, Dogbe (2015) reported that little attention has been paid to school-to-work transition programming for students with disabilities in Ghana which requires research efforts, policy, and advocacy.

School-to-work transition is a process that involves a diverse array of services and experiences, including education and training, work-based learning, career guidance, and social support, that ultimately result in employment (Hart, 2014). School-to-work transition facilitates the student's successful entry into the workforce by equipping them with essential skills required for employment and fostering their integration into society mainstream (Morningstar et al., 2015). The experiences they gather through the apprenticeship programme would lead to opportunities to work after leaving school, and indirectly would also boost the students' self-confidence to enter the workforce in the future (Smith & Patton, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for effective school-to-work transition programmes to enable persons with ID to develop the necessary skills to adapt to the workplace (van der Baan et al., 2022). However, persons with ID often "miss out" on acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge to gain meaningful employment due to several challenges (Walk, 2015). This study extends prior studies by exploring the school-to-work transition experiences of persons with ID in urban Tamale where such studies appear limited.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the school-to-work transition experiences of persons with ID in urban Tamale by considering the school-to-work transition processes, challenges confronting the school-to-work transition process, and measures to improve school-to-work transition for persons with ID.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the school-to-work transition process for persons with ID?
2. What are the challenges confronting school-to-work transition for persons with ID?
3. How can school-to-work transition for persons with ID be improved?

LITERATURE REVIEW

School-to-Work Transition Process

The school-to-work transition process is a crucial period involving preparing students for successful entry into the workforce and adulthood. This process often encompasses various activities including assessment of the student's needs, planning, and the development of specific skills needed for employment. Among the key components of the transition process, researchers such as Carter et al (2018) and Wehman et al (2019) have highlighted the need for individualized planning which should start from school. They espoused that this should entail assessing the student's strengths, preferences, and areas of need entailed in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Luecking (2020) also espoused the need for effective skills development such as communication and teamwork and specific job-related skills such as vocational training, and work-based learning such as internships which equip students to gain practical experiences and improve their employability. Another key focal area in the school-to-work transition process is effective partnerships with employers. Carter et al (2021) highlighted that successful transitions depend on collaboration among schools, families, and employers especially engagement with local businesses. This helps the students to explore various vocations and gain work experiences while at the same time allowing employers to share insights into skills that are most valuable at the workplace.

Equally important in the transition process is community involvement. Community resources such as vocational rehabilitation services are effective in supporting students' transition to work. Such services often offer job coaching, assistive technology, and resources tailored to the needs of the individual (Schall et al., 2018). Equally important is the need for monitoring. The school-to-work transition process should involve regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that plans remain relevant and can be adjusted to the evolving needs of persons with ID

(Zhang et al., 2019).

The school-to-work transition process is complex and multifaceted requiring several individuals and agencies to make it successful. However, there is no documented preparation of students with ID in Ghana towards exiting the school system after their education and training because of non-existing transition programmes (Glover-Akpey, 2021). She noted the need for effective transition planning to equip them for an independent life beyond primary education since most learners with ID cannot cope with post-primary education in Ghana. However, Dogbe (2015) reported that little attention has been paid to the school-to-work transition process for students with ID in Ghana limiting their access and participation in employment. Similarly, Frimpong and Kwakye (2021) reported that transition programmes in Ghana are not well-structured to meet the needs of students with ID due to several challenges.

Challenges of School-to-work Transition among Persons with ID

Wehman, Schall and McDonough (2017) reported that individuals with ID often face significant challenges in transitioning from school to adulthood because of their difficulties in finding employment and achieving independence. Many school leavers with ID face very limited choices when they complete compulsory schooling since many of them transition from school to adult day centres or localized vocational training centres, where they are often enrolled in courses in which they have little or no interest, but for which they meet the entry criteria (Taylor & Seltzer, 2020; Brown & Greene, 2022).

It has been reported that, persons with ID face challenges in accessing post-primary education and employment positions (Ineland et al., 2021). Despite Ghana's development and ratification of national and international conventions advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs), those with ID face significant barriers in transitioning from school to work (Nkansah & Aikins, 2020). Many individuals with ID who complete their primary education and vocational training in special schools remain unemployed or underemployed due to the lack of coordinated school-to-work transition programmes tailored to their unique needs (Appiah & Asamoah, 2020). Inadequate education and skills training, safety and security concerns, pressure to engage in self-employment, stigmatisation, discrimination, and lack of effective transition programmes have also been implicated in the school-to-work transition challenges for persons with ID (Frimpong & Kwakye, 2021; Bialik & Mhiri, 2022).

Glover-Akpey (2021) reported that special schools face difficulties in preparing learners with ID towards school transition programmes and services resulting in their unmet educational needs and post-primary education outcomes. This is due to inadequate teaching and learning resources (Frimpong & Kwakye, 2021). Transition from school to work has therefore become a topical issue in disability discourse, particularly, for persons with ID because of limited job opportunities, discrimination, lack of skills training, and the need for ongoing support (Patel & Johnson, 2023).

The challenges confronting school-to-work transition for persons with ID are further exacerbated by the lack of strategies to facilitate their progression towards post-primary education and subsequent career opportunities (Norwich, 2020). Among the challenges identified as confronting school-to-work transition among students with ID, it was found that there was poor transitional planning. These findings confirm earlier findings that poor planning affects effective transitioning for students with ID (Olusanya, et al, 2018). Test and Fowler (2022) also reported that passing out ceremonies had little attention and no specific graduation for special needs learners.

Another challenge confronting the school-to-work transition for persons with ID relates to the financial conditions of their families. Many parents of children with ID often express challenges with meeting their child's needs such as transportation fares to school and therapy which often result in financial strain on them (Smith et al., 2020; Johnson & Reed, 2021). This situation is worse for low-income families who have greater difficulties in managing these costs (Anderson et al., 2022). Equally, teachers often report financial challenges in acquiring the necessary materials to train students with ID, adding strain to their professional responsibilities (Garcia & Lopez, 2021; Thompson et al., 2023). Henderson and Patel (2022) also argued that the cost of teaching materials is a frequent barrier impacting the quality of instruction for students who need additional support. The lack of or inadequate instructional materials may impair the quality of education and training for these learners and

possibly impact their transition planning. To foster their proper integration into society and independent or semi-independent adult living, there is the need to adopt appropriate measures to ensure an effective transition from school to work which continues to attract research efforts (Walker & Martinez, 2022).

Measures to Improve School-to-work Transition for Persons with ID

Evidence suggests that researchers and practitioners are continually searching for the best strategies and interventions to improve the outcomes of school-to-work transition for individuals with ID (Walker & Martinez, 2022). School-to-work transition is a complex and multifaceted process requiring careful planning, effective implementation, and adequate support (Williams & Brown, 2022; Johnson & Lee, 2021). Effective transition programmes should focus on enhancing skills development, fostering self-determination, and providing vocational training and support services to facilitate successful transitions for students with ID (Morningstar et al., 2015). These ensure that persons with ID thrive in the workforce with the right support and interventions such as collaboration between schools, vocational rehabilitation agencies, employers, and community organizations to create inclusive and supportive work environments (Carter & Wilson, 2023; Johnson & Roberts, 2021). It has been reported that persons with ID need additional training and support before they can work independently or with minimal assistance (Wehman et al., 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) reports that vocational training in crafts, textiles, and woodworking can benefit individuals with ID. A study by Adomako (2017) found that vocational training in pottery, weaving, and sewing can improve the employability and social skills of individuals with ID in Ghana. Again, research has consistently demonstrated the significance of systematic career counselling and transition planning as students transition from primary education to further education, training, employment, and adult life (Brown & Smith, 2020; Miller & Thompson, 2023). Placements at actual workplaces would give them opportunities to learn about teamwork, responsibilities, and work ethics (Wehman & Carr, 2021; Test & Fowler, 2022). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of knowledge on the school-to-work experiences of persons with ID and the efficacy of their transference from educational settings to community life and employment (Roberts & Green, 2022; Carter & McMillan, 2021).

Boyle et al (2018) reported that a trans-disciplinary approach to preparing individuals with ID requires effective transition programmes to address the specific needs of individuals, particularly those with ID as they move from one developmental phase to another. Preparing young people with ID for work is crucial in special education and vocational training. Evidence supports programmes and initiatives enhancing employment outcomes for these individuals through innovative and inclusive practices. For example, Luecking (2020) highlighted that integrating career development strategies into the education and training of youth with ID allows them to engage in meaningful work while receiving on-the-job training. These experiences equally provide essential skills and foster connections between educational and training environments and potential employers creating a bridge for students to facilitate their entry into the workforce and enhancing their employability (Luecking, 2020). Also, Wehman et al (2019) espoused the need for comprehensive transition planning which involves collaboration among educators, families, and community-based organizations. They highlighted the importance of structured programmes that focus on individual strengths and career aspirations and are tailored to meet the unique needs of persons with ID. Carter et al (2021) also highlighted the need for inclusive workplace practices where employers are educated about the need to hire individuals with disabilities. These have rippling effects on improving job placement and retention for persons with ID.

McGowan and Evans (2022) argued that the comprehensiveness of transition planning helps to build relevant aspects of students' personalities, such as confidence, independence, and self-direction, hence the need for other professionals such as counsellors to take them through a psychological build-up to prepare them for adjusting themselves to their community or work after training (Frimpong et al, 2021). This study explores the measures for effective transition for students with ID in Tamale.

METHODS

This study was a qualitative study with a case study design. The population of this study included parents (or guardians),

vocational coaches (craftsmen), and teachers of students with ID. Because of their limitations in language and communication, their parents doubled as proxies for their children with ID. In all, 20 persons participated in the study including all the 8 teachers of the school, 6 parents of persons with ID who were undergoing apprenticeship programmes, and 6 craftsmen of the vocational centres where those students were undergoing apprenticeship. These individuals were purposively sampled.

The parents were selected because they had children who had completed their primary education and vocational training and were under apprenticeship in the school or under craftsmen. The craftsmen were also selected because they had persons with ID under apprenticeship. The teachers were also selected because they educate and train them in various vocations and therefore could shed light on the school-to-work transition of their students. Data was collected through a focus group discussion with a semi-structured interview guide. This was constructed to cover the school-to-work transition process, challenges of school-to-work transition, and measures to improve school-to-work transition for persons with ID. The researchers obtained permission from the school and made initial contacts with the parents and masters of the vocational centres to solicit their participation in the study. There were two sessions of the focus group discussion to give everyone enough time and space to speak (Morgan & Hoffman, 2021). The first session involved 4 teachers, 3 parents and 3 craftsmen and it was the same for the second session. Each session was conducted after the students had closed from school.

During the meetings, the researchers introduced themselves to the participants and also outlined the purpose of the research. This was followed by a self-introduction of the participants. The researchers outlined the rules that would govern the discussion and participants were allowed to seek clarification. The sections of the interview guide were made clear to the participants and all the items under each section were thoroughly read for them to be aware of what to anticipate. Informed consent which specified the participants' volunteerism, anonymity and confidentiality was given to each participant to complete (Krueger & Casey, 2018). Participants were made to understand that, participating in the study was voluntary so could exit at any point where they wanted to, however, the benefits of informing policy and practices for persons with ID were outlined and so the participants were encouraged to stay in the study. Also, the researchers obtained permission from the participants to tape-record the session. Participants were encouraged not to mention their names or anything that could make their identity known during the session. They were assured that the information they would provide would not be divulged to external individuals without their permission and that the data would not be used for any other purpose except for academic and publication (Johnson, 2018). The tape recordings, transcribed, and coded data were encrypted to prevent any unauthorized access (Berg, 2018).

In analysing the data, the researchers used deductive thematic analysis by approaching the data with some predetermined themes in mind. The data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's six steps in thematic analysis. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data through the transcription of the tape-recordings, playing each audio against the corresponding transcript to make sure no apparent mistakes were made, and reading and re-reading the transcriptions. Initial codes were generated while reading the transcriptions by assigning colour codes to similar ideas. These ideas were grouped and appropriate themes given to them. Efforts were made to identify subthemes under the main themes. The themes and subthemes were reviewed which allowed the researchers to reposition certain themes under more appropriate ones instead of their initial ones. Again, through the reading of the excerpts captured under the themes, some themes were reviewed to reflect what the contents of the excerpt highlighted. The final stage of the thematic analysis was producing the report which was done bearing in mind the literal and latent meanings the participants communicated with excerpts of their responses produced to support the ideas they expressed under each theme or subthemes. In reporting the data, pseudonyms were used such as T1, P2, and C3 for the first teacher, second parent, and third craftsman respectively.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researchers triangulated the data by transcribing, coding, and analysing the data separately. These were later compared to address obvious and subtle differences. Also, the transcripts were sent back to the participants to solicit their feedback on the accuracy of the data. Equally, the researchers had prolonged engagement with the data, reading and comparing separate notes to be sure that participants' literal and latent ideas were accurately represented. To ensure dependability, the researchers maintained objectivity in presenting the data without being influenced by their personal opinions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the study participants, there were 4(50%) male and 4(50%) female teachers. There were also 2(33.3%) male and 4(66.6%) female parents in the study. Among the craftsmen, there were 3(50%) males and 3(50%) respectively. The participants' ages ranged between 21 and 50 years. Aside from the teachers, 2(33.3%) of the parents were farmers while the rest 4(66.6%) were traders. Also, among the craftsmen, 2(33.3%) were smock-weavers, the other 2(33.3%) were shoemakers, and 1(16.7%) each respectively made beads and operated a motor-washing bay.

Analysis of main data

Three main themes were identified in analyzing the main data, each with its subthemes. The main themes were the school-to-work transition process, challenges of school-to-work transition, and measures to ensure improved school-to-work transition among persons with ID.

Theme 1: School-to-Work Transition Process for Persons with ID.

The researchers sought to find out the transition process from school to work among students with ID, it was found that generally there was a formal transition programme in the school. The teachers indicated that once the students complete their primary education, they move on to the vocational class for training in various vocations such as batik tie and die; bead-making, and doormat-weaving. When they have achieved some level of proficiency, the school looks for some vocational or work centres for attachment where they continue their training or to work while the school continues to monitor them. The excerpts below summarise this:

Once they are admitted into the school, we train them in basic literacy and numeracy as well as adaptive skills. That is generally, we provide them with primary education but some of them repeat classes. After primary 6, we move them to the vocational class to train them in basketry, batik tie and die, bead-making, leatherwork and others. They learn this for two or three years and we send them for industrial attachment to continue their training and to work. But the school continues to monitor them as they go out. (T 1)

I know they move from one class to the other just like those in the neighbourhood schools just that they are mostly repeated in one class before they move on. They also do this handiwork and sometimes they move to people who work in town to learn. (P 1 – Translated from Dagbani)

Mostly, their teachers bring them to us to continue their training. Some do stay others are unable to cope so they go back, I don't know whether they go back to school or somewhere else. (C 3)

From the excerpts, it is quite evident that students with ID go through a formal transition process from school, either to work or to continue an apprenticeship. Thus, the school provides the students with primary education, vocational training, industrial attachment and entry into the job market. The subthemes derived from the main theme included; preparation for transition, guidance and counselling services, and effectiveness of the transition process. These are discussed in subthemes 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Subtheme 1 – Preparation for Transition

When participants were asked how the students were prepared for transition, they expressed their views as captured in the following excerpts.

Once the students obtain the basic competence we require of them, I mean in terms of the vocational training either basketry, doormat weaving, or bead-making, we prefer to attach them to places and centres where they can work to gain more experience and also to make way for others to enter the vocational class. So that's what we have been doing. (T 7)

What we do mostly is to train them in the basic skills and competence they need. As you see them, they are not able to do much. It takes a long time for them to get used to doing one thing. Some have been in the vocational class for more than three years and are still struggling. (T 2)

A parent had this to say:

Whatever they do in the school is between them and their teachers. I do not often know what pertains there. You will be there and the teachers will tell you that your child is this or that so they want to move them to the other places to continue their training. Sometimes we're happy other times not because their teachers understand them but because we are not sure whether the places they go, the people will accept to help them continue their training, we become anxious. (P 3)

Once they come up with some basic skills, it means that the teachers are doing well. However, they take time to get accustomed to their new environment making it difficult to know where to begin them from. Also, some do not stay, they go back to the school or stay at home. (C 2)

When participants were asked whether the training the students obtain from the school adequately prepares them for the job market, this is how they expressed their views:

Even though the students learn some skills here, I believe it may not be adequate for them to work, they may need some additional training and that is why we attach them to vocational centres. (T 5)

One of the parents remarked:

Though my child brings home some of the things they do in school, because I am not there, I sometimes doubt whether he is the one who made it. As for work, I think he may be working with others who can provide him with some little assistance. He may not work when he's left on his own. (P 4)

On the part of the coaches, one expressed that;

The students who come here actually need additional support and close monitoring. Also, they easily get tired and are unable to learn continuously for a long time. (C 3)

The excerpts above highlight participants responses to how the students are prepared for their transition. It was apparent that the students learned the vocational skills after which they moved to continue in the centres where their skills can be developed. All the participants believed that these students needed additional training and support before they could work on their own or with minimal assistance. It was apparent that the students mostly moved from the school into apprenticeship programmes rather than the working environment. This means that the students do not enter the labour force immediately they leave the school, they continue their training in the form of industrial attachment to develop enough competence to work on their own or to work with others.

Subtheme 2 – Guidance and Counselling Services

Guidance and counselling services are essential and are required for most transition programmes. Therefore, the researchers were curious to know whether there were guidance and counselling services during the school-to-work transition process. The excerpts below highlight the participants responses:

As part of the school curriculum, guidance and counselling services are rendered to students although it's not any separate subject that is taught, because the children need to be counselled and motivated so guidance and counselling services are rendered by the school and it's very effective. For example, if a student comes to school and he or she is not happy as a teacher you need to talk to him or her. (T 8)

Since I joined the school in 2016, I haven't seen anything of that sort, I haven't come across anything like guidance and counselling services offered by the school to the kids. Sometimes, when there is a need for counselling students, we the teachers will bring the student to see how to counsel him or her. So there hasn't been any effort by the school on counselling or any department in charge of cancelling services. (T 6)

On the part of the parents, they appeared unaware of counselling services in the school. One parent said:

I think the teachers give them advice before they take them out. But I don't know, I believe they advise them. (Parent 1 – Translated from Dagbani)

Another participant said:

I don't know what happens in the school but I believe they advise them before they bring them. And even when they bring them to us, they advise them to stay just that mostly they don't stay. I'm told sometimes they go back to their school or stay at home. (C 6)

A teacher retorted:

Yes! Some of them come back to us in the school and we find it difficult to convince them to go back to the centres. (T 6)

The excerpts of the participants' responses reveal that there were no guidance and counselling services in the school. It was revealed that the teachers advised the students but there were no professional counsellors in the school to prepare the students' minds for proper transition. This requires serious attention to address the needs of students with ID not only during their transition but while they are in the school.

Subtheme 3 – Effectiveness of the Transition Process

It was inferred from the participants' responses that; the transition process was effective since some students had the skills to make products patronised by the public. One parent said:

They will patronise especially those who sympathise with their condition, some can even buy it just to put a smile on their faces and not that they need those things at that moment. (P 3)

One teacher also said this:

I can say boldly I have students who make doormats and they buy them. (T 6)

Another teacher said:

I cannot say it is not effective, at least once the students can learn something, it is better if they were just left in the house. But maybe we need to do more especially follow up on their industrial attachment. I think parents should help us with this. (T 5)

It can be inferred from the excerpts above that parents and teachers believed the transition process was effective once the students develop the skills to make products patronised by the public. Despite this, others thought more could be done to make the transition process more effective. The next major theme presents the challenges confronting school-to-work transition among persons with ID.

Theme 2: Challenges Facing School-to-Work Transition among Students with ID.

Evidence from the interviews proved that students with ID face several challenges in moving from school to the work environment. These included; poor transition planning, difficulty in job placement, lack of tools and equipment, poor societal attitudes, and limited parental involvement. These are discussed below as subthemes. These are summarised in this excerpt by one of the teachers.

We don't have a formalised transition programme for the students. Even in private schools, they organise graduation ceremonies for their students moving from one class to another but we don't have such a thing here. Sometimes, getting people who will accept to train them is a problem and even here, we do not have much of the materials we need to train them. It is challenging when even their parents refuse to cooperate with us. (T 4)

Subtheme 1 – Poor Transition Planning

One of the challenges mentioned was the poor planning for effective transition. One parent said:

The teachers only inform us about sending them for the industrial attachment but we hardly witness any formal

ceremony to pass these students out to be received in the communities. I think the way they just move the students is a challenge and that is why they do not stay. I think they should be done well, currently it's not the best. (P 2)

Maybe we do not do much for them before they leave us. I think we can do much with our "Passing out" ceremonies where we invite stakeholders to witness what we do here and the skills the students have acquired. If we showcase these, I think people can even come to our aid and society will know that the students we train here have skills that can be developed to make them useful. (T 1)

I think they are comfortable when they are with their peers. So instead of moving them individually if efforts can be made to group them, it would help. Also, just as their bus picks and drops them to and from school, if they can include those in apprenticeship programmes, it will help, sometimes parents complain about not getting money for their wards to come to work and also the fear that they might miss their way if they are left on their own. (C 2)

The excerpts above show that the participants felt the transition planning was inappropriate and that more should be done. This requires a collaborative effort of teachers, parents and society in general.

Subtheme 2 – Difficulty in Job Placement

Despite the perceived ability to work in some establishments, it was revealed that persons with ID have difficulties with job placement and even apprenticeship programmes. Some craftsmen were not ready to accept the students because of their disability. Below are some excerpts from the teachers:

Some shop owners don't want to interact with them, some people think it's contagious. (T 2).

They come back to the school after enrolling them in apprenticeship, and it's not been easy because when we go looking for craftsmen, some of them reject them (T 7)

Also, it is stigmatization, as you can see some of them, their physical appearance and some of those they are to learn from will say they will chase their customers away especially from restaurants and eateries so during the planning, the areas should be considered. (P 5)

We also have a challenge when people don't see why you should accept these individuals in your establishment. Some customers even want to switch and we have to talk and talk and talk. (C 2)

It is evident from the excerpts that, the school has a challenge finding places for the students to do their industrial attachment and possibly to work. Societal acceptance of persons with ID just like other forms of disabilities has been poor and people might fear that accepting these persons into their shops to work or to learn may cause them to lose their customers.

Subtheme 3 – Lack of Equipment and Tools

The excerpts below throw more light on this:

As the teachers said, they do not have enough of the materials they need for their training. It is not easy to get tools for him because my earnings aren't much looking at my family but if others want to help, they will help looking at their conditions. (P 2)

A teacher also said:

The school is not resourced to provide the students with tools and equipment when they are passing out for industrial attachment and parents have refused to help in that regard. Therefore, it becomes difficult to get the tools they need for them. (T 2)

Sometimes, they come to the shops empty-handed, without any tool. But our work is not like that, the apprentice must have some basic tools but these come with nothing. (C 3)

The students go out there with no tools or equipment required for the job. They cannot go with the school's tools

and equipment therefore, if parents refuse to buy the basic tools for them then the students will be handicapped in terms of getting the needed tools for their work or their apprenticeship programme. This can make the entire transition process very difficult.

Subtheme 4 – Poor Societal Attitude

Another challenge that was identified as confronting school-to-work transition among persons with ID was poor societal attitudes. The following excerpts highlight this.

Societal attitude has always been a challenge to us, we have been trying to see how we can also help in that regard. For instance, there was one of them who was learning carpentry and later stopped and another too who was with a washing bay also stopped and the reason was that, when they go there, those they were working with teased and made fun of them and that always discouraged them from going to learn so we are working on how to resolve it. (T 6)

Another teacher said that:

Some people in our society don't want to be with them whilst some don't want to even get closer to them and it has always been the majority of the people in our society still don't want to have anything to do with them. I remember one day I met one of my students and by their nature, when they meet you, they always want to run and hug you and after that experience, the one I was going with asked me why I should be doing that and I made him to know that was my student and its normal we always show them love. So, I think we may need advocacy programmes to educate the public. (T 1)

Sometimes it is difficult especially when your customers come, they might not tell you but their facial expressions will tell you that they are not happy seeing the person in your shop. (C 1)

My son has gone back to the school because he says when he goes to work the people there will be laughing at him and they want to send him even though he was there before them. We've tried but he says he will not go so maybe their masters can help in that regard. Other people may also not want to buy their products and it discourages them. (P 2)

It can be deduced from the excerpts that, poor societal attitude may affect the transition process when people on the job mock them, or customers feel uncomfortable with them or are unwilling to patronise their products, it will be difficult to integrate them into society.

Subtheme 5 – Low Parental Involvement

The researchers also found out that parental involvement was a challenge hindering the school-to-work transition process. Below are the excerpts:

Some of us support our children and get involved in whatever he does but others do not, if he can do something on his own, as a mother I will be very proud of him and it will also be beneficial to him soon. (P 4)

It's always difficult with the involvement of the parents in the sense that, when it's time for admission, parents will come and worry us about the admission for their wards when they get the admission for them, we find it very difficult to contact them and that makes it difficult involving them. (T 3)

That one too is a big challenge, for instance, last year our school bus broke down and we held Parent Association meeting where parents were urged to bring their children to school till they worked on the bus, and not even a single parent brought his or her ward to school during that time. So it is when they go for the industrial attachment, the parents do not send them and do not even make follow-ups to see how their child is coping, it's sad. (T6)

When the students are taken to the vocational centres, our staff monitors the students there, parents seem not to care about them. Hardly do you find or hear of a parent visiting them to find out how they are faring with their

training. Parents give little attention to these students just as they do for those without much needs. (T5)

It is evident from the excerpts that, low parental involvement makes the entire transition process very challenging. Parents are the first teachers of their children before they go to school and once children start schooling, parents become second teachers to ensure continuous learning among children. If parents do not directly involve themselves in the education and training of children who have additional needs, the entire process will be very difficult. Parents should provide the needed finances, equipment and tools and also follow up to the centres to see their children are faring there. Failure to do this will mar the entire transition process and little can be achieved in the training of the students and their future employment opportunities.

Subtheme 5 – Financial Challenges

Another key challenge identified was funding. The excerpts below highlight this.

We don't have anything here and no motivation for the teachers. Once in a while, some few nongovernmental organizations come to help, the recent one was when Miski, producers of cowbell milk came to support us with their products and that is what we use to produce breakfast for them. (T 3)

We need a lot of materials here to train the students. We need papers, materials, sewing machines, and other tools and equipment to help in training them, but we don't have. So, it is a challenge that people need to help us. If the school authorities do not have the money to buy them, it ends there. (T4)

We also have financial difficulties because we need money to pay for transportation and other needs. (P 5)

These excerpts show that the parents claimed that they had financial difficulties paying for their children's transport fares. Teachers also felt financial challenges in terms of money to buy the materials they need to train the students. The next theme presents the measures to promote effective school-to-work transition among persons with ID.

Theme 3: Measures to Improve School-to-Work Transition among Learners with ID

The participants of this study revealed several things that can facilitate the school-to-work transition process for students with ID. Key among them were policies, transition planning, parental involvement, and change in societal attitude. These were the major subthemes identified and they are discussed as follows:

Subtheme 1-Policies

The participants expected the government to make policies to ensure an effective transition from school to work for persons with ID. The excerpts below highlight this:

I think if we can get some policy guidelines that will guide us during the transition it will help, the kind of jobs they can do if all those things are spelled out in those policies it will help. Society should be educated and be patient with them so that they can cope. There should also be procedures to follow up on them from wherever the classroom teachers stop. (T 4)

The government should put up policies that will allow children with special needs to get more attention from the public which will make them useful to society. (P 2)

The excerpts above indicate that the participants believed that proper transition policies may help to bridge the gap for persons with ID.

Sub-theme 2-Parental Involvement

Another key factor considered was parental involvement. The excerpts below highlight this.

Parental involvement is very important here, because, it's not everything a teacher can do, as a teacher, you only have some limited hours to be with the student and even after the close of work, if the child goes home and

doesn't turn up for the workplace, how will the teacher know that he or she didn't turn up, so it's the duty of the parents to let their child go to the workplace. (T 3)

The parents are the owners of these children and if they aren't in agreement with whatever we do, I don't think we can force them, the parents can also help financially when the school is facing financial problems and I think there should be collaboration between the parents and the school authorities. (T 6)

One parent also said this:

We also have a role to play. The teachers alone cannot do it but sometimes, the motivation is not there. Other times too, we face financial difficulties so we are not able to do what we are supposed to do. (P 3)

Parents should show commitment. I know it is not easy having such children but with the little support, we are also trying our best to help them acquire a skill for a living. (C 6)

Parental involvement in the education and training of children with ID has mostly been poor. Parents often do not see why they should spend on these students and may even consider it a waste. Particularly, in poor and large size families, these persons may be the last to be considered in terms of the distribution of family resources. Therefore, they do not show commitment to providing their needed material, financial, and sometimes social support needs which may affect any attempt to ensure their proper integration into society and the world of work. Parental involvement is therefore necessary to ensure their effective transition.

Subtheme 3 – Transition Planning

Some of the respondents believed that effective planning can ensure effective and useful transitioning for the students. These are highlighted in the excerpts below:

There should be proper planning by the teachers during the transition. (T 3)

We will need materials all the time to plan transition and when new teachers come, they will be able to continue. (T 4).

The curriculum for normal students shouldn't be the same and looking at the current curriculum it isn't helping them (T 5).

The parents should also be part of the transition planning so that we can suggest other interests of my child. (P 4)

It could be inferred from the excerpts that parents and teachers required effective transition for persons with ID in planning, curriculum, and parental involvement.

Subtheme 4 – Attitude on the Job Market

The researchers found that the attitude of people on the job market for students with ID may promote effective school-to-work transition. Excerpts from the interview:

I think when they are sent there to learn and to work, the bosses where they will be working should caution against those people who will discriminate and stigmatize against them it's God that has created them that way. (P 1)

There should be awareness creation so that they can easily be accepted in the job market. (T 3).

We all have to accept them. Sometimes they can be interesting to be with. They just need a little support and people in society should be educated to accept them. I think it will help. (C 1)

From the excerpts above, it can be deduced that societal acceptance is very key in the transition process for students with ID. Society should develop positive attitudes toward these persons to ensure their proper transitioning.

Subtheme 5 – Financial Support

The study also found that students with ID need finance to promote a smooth transition from school to work.

Excerpts from the interview highlight this:

They should offer us financial support for us to buy training materials to train them then it will go a long way in helping them
(T 3)

There should be enough tools and equipment to even start the training at the schools so that finally when they transition, it will be very easy for them. And you know you can't get these tools and equipment without financial support so money is key.
(T 6)

When the tools and equipment are provided it will help them to pay more attention to whatever they are learning.
(P 3)

The school could establish its workshop outside the school because the school still follows up on them every term to see how they are coping. After all, they are still the students of the school though they are not with the school. (P 2)

It is evident from the responses that, financial assistance will help in the proper transition as it will help the schools to buy the needed equipment for training them. Some believed that if the school had its workshop for training its students, it would have been better for them than sending them outside where they are mostly stigmatized and discriminated against.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from Research Question 1

Findings from the study indicate that students with ID go through a formal transition process from school mostly to continue their vocational training. This process involved education, training, industrial attachment and apprenticeship programmes, and follow-up services. This means that the students do not enter the labour force immediately after they leave school, rather, they continue their training in the form of industrial attachment and apprenticeship to acquire adequate skills and develop enough competence to work independently or with others. This corroborates earlier literature that the transition process should focus on planning, and development of specific skills needed for employment to prepare them to work on their own or with minimal assistance (Carter, et al., 2018; Wehman et al., 2019). There is no doubt that persons with disabilities generally have limited opportunities for employment with persons with intellectual disabilities being the most affected. It is therefore important that transition programmes should focus on training and developing their skills for self-employment within their local communities. Their education and skill training in school should therefore equip them with adequate foundational skills to prepare them for effective apprenticeship programmes which would lead to opportunities to work after their training (Wehman & Carr, 2021; Test & Fowler, 2022).

It was revealed that the students even though needed guidance and counselling services, this was not effective in the school since they had no professional counsellors and ambiguity among the teachers as to who was responsible for their transition planning (Aston, Banks & Shevlin (2021). This supports earlier reports that there is a lack of understanding of the guidance and counselling services that are required to ensure successful transitions for students with disabilities (Wehman & Carr, 2021; Test & Fowler, 2022). Students with ID require effective therapeutic sessions to identify their vocational needs and aspirations and to guide them toward careers where they would likely succeed. Again, counselling services would engender effective community-based rehabilitation programmes where persons with ID are attached to various vocational centres within their local communities. The lack of guidance and counselling services would perpetuate the denial of these individuals into the local industries as difficulties in finding places for attachment were reported by the participants.

Findings from Research Question 2

Among the challenges identified as confronting school-to-work transition among students with ID, it was found that there was poor transitional planning, difficulty in finding places for the students to do their industrial

attachment and possibly to work, and lack of tools and equipment. These findings corroborate earlier studies that reported poor transition planning (Olusanya, et al. 2018), a lack of graduation and passing out ceremonies for special needs learners (Test & Fowler, 2022), and fewer resources to cater to the needs of individuals with ID forcing them to undertake any vocation contrary to their interests (Frimpong et al, 2021). This may result from the lack of coordinated efforts between the school, families, and local industries leading to the lack of transition programmes tailored to their unique needs (Appiah & Asamoah, 2020).

Some parents expressed financial concerns regarding paying for their child's transport fares to school and training centres which support earlier reports that parents from low-income families experience financial challenges in meeting the needs of their children with an ID (Anderson et al., 2022; Johnson & Reed, 2021). It should however be noted that, sometimes it is not because the parents are financially handicapped, but rather, the result of their poor attitude towards the education and training of individuals with ID. Many parents hold limited expectations for the child with ID and would not want to invest in their education. They prefer to hide them in their homes or perhaps to leave them on the streets to solicit for alms. Those who enroll their children at school also show reluctance to any financial commitment for the education of their child with ID. Parents must therefore be responsible for the education and training of students with ID much the same way as they do for their non-handicapped children. Policies and legislation in this regard must be fully enforced without exceptions.

It was also evident that poor societal attitudes toward persons with ID contribute to their difficulty in job placement and apprenticeship programmes. This may be a result of the lack of an inclusive and supportive work environment due to poor collaboration among stakeholders (Carter & Wilson, 2023; Johnson & Roberts, 2021). There is therefore a need for awareness creation in society mainstream on the skills and abilities of persons with ID which can be harnessed to the benefit of society rather than their being perceived as liabilities to their families and society in general.

Findings from Research Question 3

The findings from this study revealed that, measures that can ensure effective school-to-work transition should include proper transition planning, parental involvement, positive societal attitudes, and effective transition policies. These support earlier views that the most important practices to facilitate the transition of learners with ID from school to work should include parent involvement, interagency collaboration, and individual transition planning (Carter & Wilson, 2023; Johnson & Roberts, 2021). This highlights the need for stakeholder involvement, systems and policy, and effective communication and collaboration. The findings corroborate that of Boyle et al (2018) that a trans-disciplinary approach to preparing individuals with ID requires effective transition programmes to address the specific needs of individuals with ID as they move through the course of their lives. The findings that proper transition policies may help to bridge the gap for persons with ID support the views of De Weerd et al (2016) that innovative programmes help to prepare youth with ID for work. McGowan and Evans (2022) argued that the comprehensiveness of transition planning will help in building some relevant aspects of students' personalities, such as confidence, independence, and self-direction, hence, the need for other professionals such as counsellors to take them through a psychological build-up to prepare them for adjusting themselves to their community or work after training (Frimpong et al, 2021). This also will help to provide essential skills needed to bridge the school-to-work transition gap for such persons (Lueking, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Persons with ID suffer several challenges in their developmental milestones. They are less represented in education and skill training, poorly integrated into social life, and encounter many challenges as adults. Evidence has proven that effective transition planning and programmes facilitate their movement into adult life and the world of work. Findings revealed that though there is formal transition planning for an individual with ID, there are several challenges confronting this transition and their proper social integration. Such challenges included poor transition planning, lack of job placement, inadequate parental involvement, and poor funding. It was therefore concluded that transition programmes for special schools in general and schools for persons with ID should be made effective. This can be done through the provision of adequate financial and material resources, advocacy and awareness creation for social acceptance, and effective skill development among these individuals.

When these measures are put in place, persons with ID would obtain the needed skills for the job market either from their school or through their apprenticeship programmes. Therefore, it is recommended that government should develop effective transition programmes for persons with ID not only for their primary skill training but also for their post-primary training in various occupations. Also, government and non-governmental organizations should supply the needed materials to the schools to support the training of such individuals with adequate skills and competencies that will make them employable. Finally, effective home, school, and community collaboration will help in planning effective transition programmes for such learners.

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