

Gender Class and Disability Intersections: Enhancing Employability and Sustainability for Equitable National Development

^{†††}*Adewale Adedamola Adekunle*

Abstract

The intersectionality of gender, class, and disability has been recognized as a critical factor in shaping the experiences of marginalized groups in the labour market. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity and equity, individuals with disabilities, women, and low-income individuals continue to face significant barriers to employability and sustainability. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the intersections of gender, class and disability in the context of employability and sustainability. The objective is to examine the experiences of individuals with disabilities, gender and class in labour market; as well as identify key barriers to employability and sustainability faced by these groups in order to investigate the impact of intersectionality on employability and sustainability outcomes. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. A survey was administered to 1,200 participants combining men, women with disabilities and as well low-income pay workers. In-depth interviews were conducted with 60 participants to gather more detailed and nuanced information. The findings of the study reveal significant disparities in employability and sustainability outcomes across the intersections of gender, class and disability. For instance individuals with disabilities faced significant barriers to employment, including inaccessible workplaces and lack of accommodations and as well low-income individuals faced significant challenges in accessing education and training, which limited their employability and sustainability outcomes. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made: thus contributing to the existing literature on intersectionality, employability and sustainability.

^{††††} *Department of Adult and Continuing Education
Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo
adewaleadekunle33@gmail.com*

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Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable development and equitable national growth has become a pressing global concern. However, the intersectionality experiences of individuals with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and identities often remain overlooked in development initiatives. The study then aims to explore the intersections of gender, class and disability in the context of employability and sustainability, shedding light on the complexities and challenges faced by marginalized groups. By examining the interplay between these social categories, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for sustainable development.

Background to the Study

Sustainable development and employability are inextricably linked together, as decent work and economic empowerment are essential for achieving sustainable livelihoods. However, existing research highlights significant disparities in employability outcomes and as well, sustainable development benefits, with the marginalized groups facing an unwarranted barriers. Gender, class and disability intersect to shape individual experiences, influencing access to education, employment, and resources. Despite the growing recognition of intersectionality, there still remains a dare need for nuanced understanding and targeted interventions of gender, class and disability. This study then seeks to address this knowledge gap, informing inclusive development policies and practices that promote equitable national growth and sustainable development.

X-ray of Class, Gender and Disability Intersections in Work Place

A high level of unemployment is a key social problem in many countries. For individuals, unemployment is usually an undesirable state that increases economic insecurity and when prolonged, has negative effects on a wide variety of life opportunities and living

conditions. Yet, the risk of unemployment is not equal; it is more pronounced among those in lower socio-economic groups. Social class, based on an individual's occupation is therefore, intimately connected to economic activity and the labour market position of an individual, can act as a natural stratifying element in the risk of becoming unemployed. However, understanding of the link between social class and unemployment remains incomplete in several ways. Although, social class differences in unemployment are recognized, most previous studies have only discussed the topic as part of a broader focus on the social distribution of economic opportunities (Bihagen and Hallerod, 2000).

However, on the gender divide, previous studies on the link between social class and unemployment have mostly considered men only, (Lytle et al. 2018). Traditionally, social class has been considered a more suitable indicator of the social position of men or households, and regarded as less relevant when based on the occupations of women (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). Although, contemporary research has questioned this idea, it is still sometimes argued that social class is essentially a male-centred indicator of social stratification and, thus, captures inequality among men better than among the women folk (Bihagen, 2008).

Although the overall difference in unemployment is small between genders, at least this century, the unemployment rate is more sensitive to economic cycles among men than among women. This is partly explained by differences in the industry composition of male and female occupations (Albanesi and Sahin, 2013). From the foregoing then, men are more typically employed in the private sector and their women counterpart in the public sector. Male overrepresentation in highly unemployment sensitive occupations can also lead to more polarized social class differences in the risk of unemployment among men, at least during downturns in the economy.

On the disability divide, previous research have shown that up to 96% of the people with disabilities have an "invisible dis-ability" which translate to the fact that, employers and their colleagues may not really see (Respect Ability, 2016). As a result of this, it is possible that employers have already met, hired, and promoted people with

disabilities without knowing it. Little wonder, (Martinez, 2013; Novak, Feyes, and Christenson, 2011) opines the use of disability awareness and sensitivity programmes to educate all employees on how to reduce negative attitudes towards employees with disabilities. Hence, collapsing the range of characteristics, capabilities and limitations of people with disabilities into a single category may perpetuate stereotypes and hinder the increased hiring and advancement of people with disabilities. The academic literature suggests that employers have expressed ‘greater concerns’ related to hiring an applicant with a mental or emotional disability as opposed to one with a physical disability (Khalema and Shankar, 2014).

However, literatures on industry shows that employers are making efforts to address negative stereotypes of offering mental health services through employee assistance programmes, thus increasing awareness by incorporating mental health and behaviour health services into newsletters, and training supervisors about mental health of employees (Andora, 2010; Miller, 1996). Employer strategies and interventions should actually include discussion on the different types of disabilities, as opposed to referring to disability in a uniform sense.

Statement of the Problem

Not minding the increasing efforts to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, individuals, both male and female from the marginalized groups continue to face significant barriers to employability and sustainability respectively. However, the intersectional experiences of class, gender and disability can exacerbate these challenges, leading to limited access to education, employment, and social mobility. Sorrowfully though, existing research has largely focused on single aspect of identity, but neglecting the complexity of interactions of an between class, gender and disability. This study therefore, aims to address this knowledge gap through exploring the intersectional experiences of employability and sustainability among individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive and mixed-methods study is to explore and showcase the intersectional experiences of employability and sustainability among individuals from diverse backgrounds via focusing on the intersections of class, gender, and disability. However, the main aims is to:

1. identify the complex relationships between intersectional identity, employability outcomes, and sustainability factors.
2. develop an understanding of how individuals navigate the intersectional challenges in the work place.
3. generate and inform policy and practice to promote inclusive and equitable employability and sustainability outcomes.

Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There will be no significant relationship between staffs' welfare generally and the job security challenges resulting from class, gender and disability.

Ho₂: There will be no significant relationship between staff job performance and their employment security challenges resulting from class, gender, and disability.

Methodology

The study has a descriptive survey design that utilized questionnaires to obtain data from respondents. According to Nwankwo (2011), descriptive surveys aim at collecting data from a given sample of population and described probably certain features of the sample as well as generalizing them to the entire population. This study is descriptive using a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data from 1,200 participants and in-depth interviews with 60 individuals/staffs from Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo. The snow-balling sampling technique was used to select sixty (60) staffs (academic and non-academic) on the variables of gender, job type and cadre type. The questionnaire used was titled: Questionnaire on Staff Knowledge and Perception on Insecurity in Employment as Relates to Class, Gender and Disability in Work Place (QSKPIECGD).

The instrument was self-developed by the researcher with the Likert 4-point rating. A scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) was adopted. The instrument had two sections: Section A, based on the demographic information of the respondents, while Section B contained items on the major objectives of the study. The face validity of the instrument was ensured by some experts in research items generation in the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan. However, a pilot test was carried out on twenty (20) staffs from the State Ministries, Secretariat Ibadan (other than the school used for the study) twice within an interval of two weeks to determine the reliability of the instruments. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient result of its reliability test indicated 0.83.

Results

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between staffs' welfare generally and the job security challenges resulting from Class, Gender and Disability

Table 1: Staffs Welfare and Challenges from Class, Gender and Disability Comparison Distribution

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-cal	re-tab	P
Staffs' welfare		17.20	2.89				
Challenges from class, gender and Disability	60	19.41	3.66	58	0.509	0.164	0.05

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The table shows that the calculated correlation coefficient $r = 0.509$, while $r\text{-table} = 0.164$ at $P < 0.05$, $r\text{-calculated} > A$ significant relationship was found between staffs' welfare management and job security challenges from class, gender and disability. The null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there was a significant relationship between management of staffs' welfare and job security challenges from class, gender and disability.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between staff job performance and their employment security challenges resulting from class, gender and disability.

Table 2: Staff Job Performance and Employment Challenges from Class, Gender and Disability Comparison Distribution

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-cal	re-tab	P
Staffs' Job Performance		17.20	2.89				
Challenges from class, gender and Disability	60	29.90	5.02	58	0.479	0.180	0.05

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

From table 2 above, it is shown that the calculated correlation coefficient $r = 0.562$, while $r\text{-table} = 0.180$ at $P < 0.05$ r – calculated $>$ table value; a significant relationship exists between staff job performance and employees challenge stemming from class, gender and disability. Therefore, the earlier stated null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Results

The obligation to safeguard the continued existence and healthy labour market via employability and sustainability of staffs, not minding class, gender and disability is germane in this 21st century. The effectiveness of any labour force/market is dependent on proper planning, efficient administration, adequate organization and structure, control, inspection and supervision are all aspects of administration of any system, and hence their management and day-to-day running and operations, must emerge from the life and social ethos of the communities they serve.

Intersectionality is a way of understanding how individuals are differently impacted by inequality on the basis of factors such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, citizenship, ability, and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, K. 1990). Evidence abounds that many organizational initiatives who tends to promote diversity and

inclusion tend to benefit one race, class and even gender in particular, and no other under-represented groups (Apfelbaum, E.P., Stephens, N.M. & Reagans, R.E., 2016).

A study carried out by (Fudge, J. and Strauss, K. 2013) posited that compared to any other group, immigrant women and those from racialised backgrounds are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed in jobs that do not reflect their education or experience”, and often times spending long periods of time in precarious work can have lasting negative effects on the employment outcomes of racialised immigrant women. Little wonder then, that poverty rates for visible and vulnerable minority families are three times higher than for non-visible minority families.

Conclusion

To ensure the safety, employability, and sustainability of employees in the world of work system, employers of labour, be it, public or private should not only develop preventive measures, but also be proactive, imaginative, and dynamic in their hiring qualities and policies towards preventing intersectionality resulting from class, gender and disability. Employers of labour are sitting on a ticking time bomb when it comes to concerns about the issues of intersectionality. If the threat is not addressed, maintaining a productive workforce that will eventually leads to national prosperity and development will continue to be a mirage.

Recommendations

Some of the traditional methods for addressing organisation diversity are not sufficient for addressing intersectional inequalities. For example, bias training in the workplace can create backlash if trainees resent being selected for training and perceive it as punishment for prior behaviour (Kalev, A., Kelly, E., & Dobbin, F. 2006). Management therefore, can consider some of the following recommendations as starting points:

1. Integration of intersectionality and sustainability into education and training programmes in schools and universities.

2. Develop and validate intersectionality-aware measurement tools.
3. Explore effective interventions for promoting inclusive organizational culture.
4. Establish partnerships between academia, industry, and community organisations to promote an inclusive employability practices.
5. Management can post job listing on job sites geared towards helping underrepresented groups find employment e.g. the Aboriginal Job Board.
6. Many firms do not collect data on the diversity of their employees. This oversight makes it harder to identify underrepresentation along the intersection of class, gender, race and disability. By tracking demographic data, firms/organisations can better determine whether and how they need to alter practices to mitigate discriminatory behaviour.
7. “Diversity” has become a catchall phrase that can be misappropriated, to mean, for example, hiring in order to achieve “diversity of thought”, which may preclude for instance, the hiring of women and visible minorities. Management can focus explicitly on addressing gender and racial/ethnic discrimination.

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