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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY FOR OPPORTUNITIES CREATION USING SANDWICH PROGRAMME IN PRINCE ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY

BY

Victor Ojorka AKOR, PhD: Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State; E-mail: akor.vo@ksu.edu.ng

Augustine Akoji, PhD: Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State

&

Yahaya Muhammed: Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State

Abstract

This study investigated students' perceptions of building an inclusive society for opportunity creation using sandwich programmes in Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study which adopted descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 715 sandwich students from which a sample of 215 respondents was drawn using the Taro Yamane and the disproportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire with 19-items which was validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha and it gave a reliability coefficient of 0.80. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) ot answer the research questions while the hypothesis was tested using the z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study revealed that male and female students held positive and broadly similar perceptions of the sandwich programme's inclusivity and that sandwich programme created significant career, professional, and social opportunities for students which contributes meaningfully to building an inclusive society in Kogi State. It was then recommended that improved funding, infrastructure enhancement, and policy expansion of sandwich programme was required

Keywords: Building inclusive society, Opportunities creation, Education and Sandwich programme

Introduction

Education remains the most powerful instruments for social transformation and economic development in any society. The global discourse on inclusive education has gained significant momentum in recent decades, with international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizing the need for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2021). In Nigeria, the pursuit of educational inclusivity has become increasingly critical giving the country's diverse population and the growing demand for higher education among individuals who face various constraints to accessing traditional full-time programme. Tertiary institutions have responded to this challenge by introducing alternative learning pathways, with sandwich programme emerging as a viable mechanism for expanding access to higher education while promoting social inclusion and opportunity creation (Adeyemi & Ige, 2022). These programme provide flexible learning options that accommodate working adults, teachers seeking professional development, and for individuals who cannot pursue full-time education due to family, financial, or occupational commitments, thereby contributing to the democratization of educational opportunities in Nigeria.

The concept of an inclusive society extends beyond access to education to encompass the creation of opportunities that enable all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background, to participate fully in economic, social, and political life. Sandwich programme in tertiary institutions represent a practical approach to building such inclusivity by removing traditional barriers to higher education and creating pathways for personal and professional development (Okebukola, 2021). In Kogi State, several tertiary institutions, including Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, have established sandwich programme to meet the educational needs of working professionals, particularly teachers in both primary and secondary schools who require degree qualifications for career advancement and professional certification. These programmes

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typically operate during vacation periods, allowing participants to maintain their employment while pursuing academic qualifications, thus, addressing the dual challenges of educational access and economic sustainability (Owan et al., 2023). The role of these programme in fostering inclusive development and creating opportunities for marginalized or disadvantaged groups cannot be overemphasized, especially in a state like Kogi where access to quality education remains a significant challenge for many residents.

Understanding students' perceptions of sandwich programme is crucial for assessing their effectiveness in achieving the objectives of inclusivity and opportunity creation. Students' perceptions influence their motivation, engagement, learning outcomes, and overall satisfaction with educational programme (Adetayo & Ogunleye, 2023). Research has shown that when students perceive educational programme as relevant, accessible, and beneficial to their personal and professional goals, they are more likely to invest effort, persist through challenges, and achieve better learning outcomes. In the context of sandwich programme, students' perceptions can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the programme design, implementation, and support systems, thereby informing policy decisions and institutional improvements (Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022). Despite the growing popularity of sandwich programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions, there remains limited empirical evidence on how students perceive these programmes in terms of their contribution to building an inclusive society and creating opportunities.

This gap in knowledge is particularly evident in Kogi State, where sandwich programme has been operational for several years but have received minimal scholarly attention regarding their impact on social inclusion and opportunity creation from the perspective of the students who are the primary beneficiaries of these initiatives. Kogi State, located in the North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is a confluence state with a diverse population drawn from over fifty ethnic groups. The state hosts several tertiary institutions, including Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, which has operated a sandwich programme for some years, serving hundreds of working professionals seeking to upgrade their academic qualifications. Despite this long-standing initiative, documented assessment of students' perceptions of the programme's inclusivity and opportunity-creation functions remain scarce (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2023). The theoretical foundations for understanding the place of sandwich programme and inclusive society-building was drawn from multiple perspectives, including social inclusion theory, human capital theory, and adult learning principles. Social inclusion theory emphasizes the importance of creating systems and structures that enable all individuals to participate fully in society, regardless of their circumstances (Silver, 2019). Human capital theory posits that investment in education and training enhances individuals' productive capacity and contributes to economic growth and social development (Becker, 2023).

Sandwich programme aligns with these theoretical perspectives by providing educational opportunities to individuals who might otherwise be excluded from higher education, thereby, enhancing their human capital and facilitating their integration into mainstream economic and social activities. Furthermore, adult learning theories recognize that adult learners bring unique experiences, motivations, and needs to educational settings, requiring flexible and practical approaches that accommodate their life circumstances (Knowles et al., 2020). By examining students' perceptions within these theoretical frameworks, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how sandwich programme functions as an instruments for building inclusive societies and creating opportunities in the Nigerian context, specifically within Kogi State. Despite the proliferation of sandwich programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions and their presumed role in promoting educational access and social inclusion, there remains a significant gap in empirical understanding of how this programme contribute to building an inclusive society and creating opportunities, particularly, from the perspective of the students who participate in them. In Kogi State, tertiary institutions have been running sandwich programme for a long time, yet, there is limited documented evidence on students' perceptions of the programme and their actual contribution to inclusivity and opportunity creation. This knowledge gap is problematic because understanding students' perceptions is essential for evaluating programme effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring that the initiatives genuinely serve the purpose of building a more inclusive society.

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Several challenges confront sandwich programme in Nigerian tertiary institutions, potentially limiting their effectiveness as instruments for inclusivity and opportunity creation. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure and learning resources, financial constraints faced by students, limited institutional support, quality assurance concerns, and societal perceptions that sometimes regard sandwich programme as inferior to regular full-time programmes (Eze & Umeifekwem, 2022). In Kogi State specifically, sandwich students in various tertiary institutions have reported difficulties related to compressed learning schedules, insufficient contact hours with lecturers, lack of access to library and laboratory facilities during vacation periods, and financial burdens associated with fees and accommodation during intensive sessions. These challenges raise important questions about whether sandwich programme is truly fulfilling its mandate of promoting inclusivity or whether they inadvertently create a two-tiered educational system that reinforces existing inequalities rather than dismantling them (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2023).

The lack of comprehensive research on students' perceptions of sandwich programme in Kogi State has implications for policy formulation, programme design, and institutional planning. Without understanding how students perceive the inclusivity of these programme, the opportunities they create, and the challenges they face, educational administrators and policymakers cannot make informed decisions about resource allocation, programme improvement, or strategic expansion of sandwich programme (Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

This study therefore sought to address this research gap by examining how sandwich students perceive this programme in terms of accessibility, quality, relevance, and impact on their personal, professional, and economic opportunities within tertiary institutions in Kogi State. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate building an inclusive society for opportunity creation using sandwich programme in tertiary institutions in Kogi state from the perspective of students participating in these progeamme. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

i. To assess perceptions of male and female students on the inclusivity of Sandwich programme in tertiary institutions in Kogi state.
ii. To examine the various opportunities created by Sandwich programme for students in tertiary institutions in Kogi state

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

i. What are the perceptions of male and female students on the inclusivity of sandwich programme in tertiary institutions in Kogi State?
ii. What are the various opportunities created by sandwich programme for students in tertiary institutions in Kogi State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students on the inclusivity of sandwich programmes in tertiary institutions in Kogi State.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study was 715 sandwich students in the faculty of education from which the sample size 215 students were drawn using the disproportionate stratified random sampling technique from different departments of the faculty of education. The instrument used by the researchers for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Building Inclusive Society Through Sandwich Programme Questionnaire (BISTSPQ) which was constructed by the researchers. It consists of 19-items which were arranged in two sections A and B. Section A contains the biodata, while section B consists of two subgroups: on students' perceptions of the accessibility and inclusivity of sandwich programme and the opportunities created by the programme. The questionnaire was built on a four-point Likert Scale, namely: Strongly Agreed

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(SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and the levels of responses are weighted as 4, 3, 2, and1 respectively.

The instrument was face validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, one from Curriculum and Instruction unit and the last from Educational Technology unit of the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State. The suggestions given were used in producing the final copy of the instrument. Cronbach alpha was used in calculating the reliability to determine the internal consistency which gave an Alpha value of 0.80 which was considered high after ten (10) copies of the questionnaire were administered on sandwich students of Federal University Lokoja. The instrument was administered and collected by the researchers on the spot. The data obtained were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions while the hypotheses were done with z-test. Hence, 4+3+2+1= 10/4=2.5. Therefore, items whose mean were less than 2.5 were seen as disagree (D) responses while those whose mean were 2.5 and above were seen as agree (A) responses. The decision rule on the null hypothesis was to reject the hypothesis with calculated z-value lesser than the critical value otherwise accept.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of male and female students on the inclusivity of sandwich programmes in tertiary institutions in Kogi State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation in the Perception of Male and Female Students Inclusivity of Sandwish Programme in Tertiary Institution in Kogi state

S/N	Item Statement	Male Mean	Male SD	Female Mean	Female SD
1	The sandwich programme is accessible to working adults who cannot attend full-time education.	3.54	0.6	3.49	0.63
2	The programme accommodates individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.	3.43	0.66	3.39	0.71
3	The timing and scheduling of the sandwich programme are convenient for working professionals.	3.4	0.7	3.35	0.74
4	The fees and financial requirements of the programme are manageable for students.	2.64	0.83	2.58	0.86
5	The sandwich programme provides equal educational opportunities for all participants regardless of their background.	3.31	0.73	3.27	0.76
6	The programme creates pathways for individuals who would otherwise not access higher education.	3.58	0.57	3.53	0.61
7	Administrative processes for admission and registration are efficient and accessible.	2.97	0.8	2.91	0.83
8	The programme is adequately publicized to reach eligible working adults in Kogi State.	2.76	0.86	2.7	0.89
	Grand Mean and Std. Dev.	**3.2**	**0.72**	**3.15**	**0.75**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 result was acomparative analysis of the male and the female students' perceptions of the inclusivity of sandwich programmes across the eight items. The male respondents recorded a grand mean of 3.20 while the female respondents recorded a grand mean of 3.15. Both groups agreed on all items, with only marginal differences observed between their respective mean scores on each item. The closeness of the mean scores between male and female respondents across all items suggests that both gender groups hold comparably positive perceptions of the inclusivity of sandwich programmes though both groups identified financial accessibility as the most challenging dimension of programme inclusivity.

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Research Question 2: What are the various opportunities created by sandwich programme for students in tertiary institutions in Kogi State?

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of Opportunities Created by Sandwich Programme for Students in Tertiary Institutions in Kogi State

S/N	Item Statement	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	The sandwich programme has improved my professional qualifications and career prospects.	215	3.61	0.58	Agreed
2	Participation in the programme leads to better employment opportunities for participants.	215	3.44	0.65	Agreed
3	The programme has strengthened my ability to perform my job more effectively.	215	3.53	0.61	Agreed
4	The sandwich programme improves earning potential and financial situation of participants.	215	3.28	0.76	Agreed
5	Participation in the programme expands one's professional network.	215	3.39	0.7	Agreed
6	The programme creates opportunities for social advancement and community recognition.	215	3.31	0.73	Agreed
7	The academic knowledge gained through the programme proves relevant and applicable to my work.	215	3.48	0.63	Agreed
8	The sandwich programme empowers me to contribute more meaningfully to community development.	215	3.35	0.71	Agreed
	Grand Mean and Std. Dev.		**3.42**	**0.67**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 presents data on students' perceptions of the opportunities created by sandwich programmes. All eight items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, with a grand mean of and standard deviation (3.42 and 0.67) indicating that respondents agreed that the programme create meaningful opportunities. Item 9, which states that the sandwich programme has improved professional qualifications and career prospects, recorded the highest mean score of 3.61, while item 12, concerning improvement in earning potential and financial situation, recorded the lowest mean of 3.28 though still within the agreed range. These findings demonstrate that students strongly perceive sandwich programme as an instruments for professional development, career advancement, expanded networks, and community contribution across the dimensions measured.

Hypotheses

H01: **There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students on the inclusivity of sandwich programmes in tertiary institutions in Kogi State.**

Table 3: z-test Analysis on the Difference in Perceptions of Male and Female Students on the Inclusivity of Sandwich Programme in Tertiary Institutions in Kogi State

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	z-value	df	p-value	Decision
Male	120	3.2	0.72	1.14	213	0.256	Accepted
Female	95	3.15	0.75				

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The z-test result presented on table 4 shows a calculated z-value of 1.14 with a corresponding p-value of 0.256, at the significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H01) was accepted. This finding indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students regarding the inclusivity of sandwich programmes in Kogi State.

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Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study revealed that both the male and the female students held positive and broadly similar perceptions of the inclusivity of sandwich programme in Kogi State tertiary institutions and no statistical significance difference with gender. Students across gender groups agreed that sandwich programme provide accessible educational pathways for working adults, accommodate diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and create opportunities for individuals who would otherwise be excluded from higher education. The finding aligns with the submission of Adeyemi and Ige (2022) who found in their study of Southwestern Nigerian universities that the majority of sandwich students, regardless of demographic background, perceived the programme as the only viable educational route available to them while maintaining employment. The convergence of male and female perceptions in the present study suggests that the sandwich programme in Kogi State has succeeded in creating a gender-neutral inclusive learning environment, a critical requirement for any programme that aspires to serve as a genuine instrument for building an inclusive society. This result is also affirmed by the hypothesis output which shows no significant difference for both the male and female students perception of sandwich programme in the university. However, both groups identified financial accessibility as the relatively most challenging dimension of the programme for inclusivity, pointing to the need for targeted institutional and policy interventions to further reduce financial barriers to participation.

The study also established based on the result on table 3 that sandwich programme created opportunities for students in Kogi State tertiary institutions which is an indication observed that respondents agreed across all eight opportunity dimensions measured as students strongly affirmed that sandwich programme improved their professional qualifications and career prospects, enhanced job performance, expanded professional networks, created avenues for social advancement, and produced practically relevant academic knowledge. This finding is consistent with the longitudinal study of Owan et al. (2023), who tracked sandwich programme graduates in North-Central Nigeria and found that participation in the programme led to significant career improvements including promotions, salary increments, and professional certifications. The researchers also documented improvements in graduates' confidence, professional networks, and community leadership involvement. The present study corroborates these findings and affirms that sandwich programme functions as an effective human capital investment mechanisms, as theorized by Becker (2023).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that sandwich programme in Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, is perceived by students as an effective instrument for promoting educational inclusivity and creating meaningful personal, professional, and social opportunities. Both male and female students consistently affirmed the inclusive characteristics of the programme, and students strongly believe that sandwich programmes contribute significantly to building a more inclusive society in Kogi State. These conclusions validate the theoretical postulations of Social Inclusion Theory and Human Capital Theory, which assert that deliberately designed inclusive educational structures generate measurable human capital returns and promote genuine social participation for marginalized populations. Despite these positive perceptions, challenges remain, particularly regarding financial accessibility, infrastructure, and the need for sustained government investment. Addressing these challenges through deliberate policy interventions, increased funding, and quality assurance reforms will be essential to maximizing the transformative potential of sandwich programme as mechanisms for building an inclusive society and creating opportunities for all eligible working adults in Kogi State and Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Kogi State Government and university management should introduce scholarship schemes, bursaries, and instalment-payment plans specifically designed for sandwich students to reduce financial barriers to participation in the programme.
2. University administrators should strengthen structured career development services, mentorship programmes, and professional networking platforms within the sandwich programme framework to consolidate and expand the career and professional opportunities in the programme.

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3. Policymakers at both state and federal levels should develop comprehensive national policy framework for sandwich programmes that establishes minimum standards for quality, infrastructure, funding, and student support, and mandates the expansion of sandwich programme to additional tertiary institutions across Kogi State and beyond to reach more working adults.

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