

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

### TRANSITION PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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#### **Introduction**

Special Needs Education (SEN) is the process of providing educational support for children with disabilities. It is also a service that is given to children with disabilities or those that require additional support to help them overcome their learning issues and reach their potential. The National Policy on Education, (2013:35) state that “special education is a customized educational programme, designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for”. Some of the aims of special needs education include to provide access to education for all persons, in an inclusive setting and provide adequate education for all persons with special needs in order that they may fully contribute their own quota to the development of the nation. Special needs education prepares children with special needs to overcome their challenges and be able to have the same opportunity to be educated, independent and included in the inclusive education to learn and work with their peers without disabilities in the inclusive society.

Children with special needs are those individuals who need extra help in their learning, who require additional resources and support in their behavioral and accommodation to aid their development. In Nigeria children with special needs encompass a diverse group of individuals with various physical, cognitive, sensory, or developmental disabilities World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). These children face challenges such as negative attitudes, lack of educational services and facilities, limited early diagnostic and intervention services, and high costs of specialized services (Eseigbe, Nuhu, & Izuagbe, 2015). The National Policy on Education (2013:35) recognizes the following categories of children with special needs: “visually impaired (blind and partially sighted); hearing impaired (deaf and partially hearing); physical and health impairment; emotional and behavioral disorders (hyperactive, hypo activity); social maladjusted; speech impairment; learning disabilities (psychological/neurological phobia or challenges, multiply disabilities; the gifted and talented and Albinos (vision and skin problems, lack of self-esteem, myths about Albinism, stigmatization, and stereotype)”. These children are considered special because they require additional support and accommodations to meet their unique educational, developmental, and social

needs. These children with special needs have their different abilities and they need unique learning style and support in their daily routines or areas of challenges to be able to do well in the society.

Transition programming is a planning or things we put in place to help a child with special needs progress with much ease as his/her peers, as they move from one stage in life to another. Transition programming support children to be accommodated in the inclusive education and aid them to become independent and be able to function well in the inclusive society. Ali & Ali (2021) define transition as multiple stages of movement to adulthood and independent life. Transitioning from one educational or developmental stage to another can be challenging for any child. The (American Academy of Paediatrics [AAP], 2019) added that the transition programming for children with special needs aims to facilitate a smooth and successful transition from childhood to adulthood by providing comprehensive and coordinated care.

Inclusive education refers to the putting together of children with special needs to learn in the same place with their peers without disability and be able to participate and perform well in their education with little or no assistance. The inclusive education gives equal opportunity for all children with and without disabilities to engage in educational activities. It also creates awareness about persons with disabilities and their acceptance in the learning places. That is why the transition programming is very vital to help the children with special needs reach their potentials in the inclusive education.

Inclusive society refers to a community where there is love and acceptance of everyone's uniqueness and given the opportunity for each person to learn, grow and showcase their abilities. In the inclusive society, children with special needs are included in the social activities, work places and in all walks of life. Therefore, the aim of the transition programming is to aid the children with special needs to be included in the inclusive education and independently participate in the inclusive society.

The thesis statement of this discussion will include a) components of transition programming, b) transition from home to preschool, b) from preschool to junior secondary education, c) from junior secondary education to senior secondary education, d) from senior secondary education to higher education, e) from higher education to inclusive society, implications, conclusion, and suggestions will end the discussion.

### **Components of Transition Programming**

The literature identified eight components that mark a credible transition programming these include: early identification and intervention, individualized transition plans, collaboration and interagency, ensuring continuity of services and support, familiarization and orientation, assessment and evaluation, vocational and skill development, parental involvement. These shall be briefly explained to give grounding to understanding of transition programming.

Early identification and intervention play a significant role in the transition programming for children with special needs in Nigeria. Early identification refers to the process of identifying potential barriers or challenges that children with special needs may face in their development and learning. (Singh, Khan, Carvajal-Auirre, Brodish, Amouzou, & Moran, 2017). This process allows for proactive measures to be taken to address these needs and provide appropriate support and interventions (Singh et al., 2017). The early identification of these children helps in recognizing their problems and giving them proper intervention and support to help them function well and reach their full potential and participate independently in the society.

Individualized transition plans are targets you set for each child to enable them have a smooth transition at every stage or activities to enable them have the right support and service that they need and be able to do their best. These plans are developed within the framework of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are based on measurable targets (Aktaş, Kot, & 2020). IEP should begin well in advance, involving parents, educators, and relevant professionals. The development of an IEP is vital, outlining specific goals, accommodations, and support services tailored to the child's needs (Aktaş et al., 2020). Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes (2012) emphasize the need for effective collaboration between parents and professionals in developing individualized transition plan. The active involvement of parents or caregivers and other professionals will give two-way feedback. That is, they will be able to share ideas on how to support and manage their behaviour so that they will be accommodated in inclusive education and society.

Interagency and collaboration involves relationships among relevant stakeholders to provide concise plan that will support children with special as they move from stage to another. Interagency and collaboration should provide multidisciplinary support services and ongoing specialized training for staff, facilitating continued interaction with mainstream peers, engaging parental involvement in decision-making, and implementing preplanned transition programmes based on consultation with all stakeholders can enhance collaboration and support successful transitions for children with special needs (Kelly, Devitt, O'Keeffe, Donovan, 2014). Fowler & McCollum (2000) highlight the importance of interagency agreements to facilitate the transition process. Effective communication and coordination among these entities ensure continuity of services and support (Fowler & McCollum, 2000).

Ensuring continuity of services and support is essential during the transition process as well. It ensures that children receive a continuous and appropriate support and care as they move from one stage of development to another. Dunst (2017) emphasizes the need for smooth transitions between programs and settings to facilitate positive child and family adjustments. This includes effective collaboration between transition and receiving programme and agencies (Dunst, 2017). Parental involvement and advocacy are also crucial in ensuring continuity

of service during transitions. Studies have shown that parental involvement in the transition process is associated with greater satisfaction and better outcomes for children with special needs (Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes, 2007). Parents need to be actively involved in transition planning to ensure that their child receives adequate support and services (Janus,).

Familiarization and orientation are important steps in helping the child get use to the new environment. You deliberately create time for the children to go and see the new class, school or watch video of what they will be introduced to so they can become familiar with everything possible there and also for the teachers to see the kind of children they will be working with and get well prepared. Familiarization refers to the process of introducing and acclimating children with special needs to the educational environment, routines, and expectations they will encounter in basic education (Orogbemi, Uzor, & Oduwale, 2020). These programs also involve parents in the transition process, as their perspectives and involvement are crucial for successful transitions (Azizah, Rahmawati, & Purwanta, 2023).

Assessment and evaluation are vital for children with special needs at every stage of transition. It helps in identifying the child's strengths, needs, interest and areas that need support to give the right services and intervention. The assessment process involves bringing together different professionals related to special needs education to assess the child and get more understanding about his abilities and where he needs help. Evaluation has to do with ongoing process that aids to monitor the progress of the transition programming to know how far it has helped the child. Adeyemi (2019) says it is necessary to conduct assessments as this helps gauge each child's current skills and knowledge. Identifying individual strengths and areas for improvement is a key requirement needed in assessing and evaluating learners as this makes tailoring instructions suitable to and for learners' needs easier. (Adeyemi, 2019).

Vocational and skill development is a basic part of transition programming for children with special needs in Nigeria. Vocational and skill development, helps the children acquire a skill in the area of their interest and be able to contribute their building up the society. It is the kind of self-help or practical life skill you provide for these children to help them become independent and to be able to live in the inclusive society. Abdullah, Yasin, & Abdullah, (2015) says that the implementation of vocational education programme can provide children with special needs the vital skills for future employment and independent living. The collaboration between different agencies, such as schools, vocational training centres, and community organisations is necessary for the implementation of vocational educational programme (Abdullah et al., 2015). Nugraha & Mumpuniarti (2019) added, by focusing on these programmes (the use of ICT, collaboration among stakeholders, apprenticeship and skills acquisition programmes, individualized transition planning, and parental involvement) aim to empower children with special needs and promote their successful integration into society.

### **Transition Programming from Home to Preschool**

In preparing a transition programming for children from home to preschool, you interact with your children and tell them what they may experience like staying for some time without you, they will be asked to do different activities and they should be obedient all day. Teach them social behaviours, accept and love them as they are, attend to their needs, take them to the school environment ahead of time and introduce them to the class teachers and other children, provide the child with the important items they need for the class, such as a water bottle, food, and a change of clothes. Sandström, Lundqvist, & Axelson, (2019) say that familiarization with the preschool environment helps the child become familiar with the preschool environment and it can help reduce anxiety and increase their comfort level.

Individualized transition plan should outline specific goals, strategies, and supports to ensure a smooth transition (Aktaş et al., 2020). Myers, (2007) added that parents should maintain an open communication and collaboration with the preschool staff, sharing information about your child's strengths, needs, and preferences. Parents are to collaborate with the preschool team to develop strategies and accommodations that will support your child's successful transition. As mentioned earlier by (Dunst 2017), continuity of services can help maintain consistency in support and interventions for your child. Advocacy and support parents should stay informed about the rights and the available resources and services. Seek support from support groups or organizations that specialize in supporting families of children with special needs (Bailey, Bruder, Hebbeler, Carta, Defosset, Greenwood, & Barton, 2006).

All of these transition programming is to help the children successfully included in the inclusive education and society. Also, it is important to note that monitoring and assessing the child's adjustment, engagement, and progress during this period is essential to providing on-going support and communication channels for parents and caregivers to address any concerns or questions that may arise. A child may be allowed to bring in a comfort item (toy or cloth) from home for settling in and may also start with a shorter stay that can be gradually increased. The use of time targets (countdown strategy) to allow children round up what they are doing and be ready to move for the next activity smoothly is necessary for the benefit of the child.

### **Transition Programming from Preschool to Junior Secondary School**

Moving from preschool to junior secondary school is one of the most significant transitions a child will make. As human beings, we all crave predictability and routine in order to feel secure and comfortable. Adjusting to new and unusual settings can cause feelings of stress. This is why transitions are usually stressful. The more that you can increase the predictability of the new situation, and prepare for it, the less stressful it will be. How easy or difficult children find the transition between early years' services and basic school settings partly

depends on the degree of discontinuity they have to negotiate (Margetts, 1997). All preschool and junior secondary schools should create a positive and inclusive learning environment that encourages interagency collaboration, empathy, and emotional well-being. Another vital point to take into consideration is that of parental involvement, during the transition process. Schools can organize workshops or meetings that can guide parents on ways to support their child's academic progress, manage challenges, and activity. Teachers and parents can use time target in preparing the children to move into other activities.

### **Transition Programming from Junior to Senior Secondary School Education**

In this stage there should be adequate planning and encouraging by the school, family, and federal and state ministry of education because the child is moving into more challenging activities. There is preparation for their SSCE examination, giving them orientation and counselling concerning their career choice and skill acquisition, consultation with teachers and therapists to know if the child will need extra support in the higher education. There should be interagency collaboration with government and non-governmental organizations and agencies to help with financial support, resources, shaJanus et al., (2007) further say that collaborating with parents can help create a comprehensive transition plan that addresses the child's individual needs and ensures a supportive and inclusive environment in the senior secondary school. Individualized transition plans should be developed based on measurable targets and focus on the child's functional and academic achievements (Aktaş et al., 2020). The plan should address various aspects of the transition, such as post-school education, employment, adult services, independent living, and community involvement (Aktaş et al., 2020).

### **Transition Programming from Secondary School to Higher Education**

In preparing a transition programming remember that every child is unique and their path to higher education and inclusion will differ. Children should be exposed to activities that will boost their social skills, self-advocacy, academic skill, independence and area of their interest. Parents should learn more about their child condition, teach them how to control their emotion as they relate with others in the society. Create a networking group to support the children financially and also create awareness in the community so that people can employ them with their peers to work together. Zabeli, Kacaniku, & Koliqi, (2021) say that at this stage transition programming can be facilitated through regulatory policy documents, inclusive physical and social environments, innovative technologies, and inclusive program design and delivery.

Interagency collaboration as earlier mentioned by (Kelly, et al, 2014) provide multidisciplinary support services and ongoing specialized training for staff, facilitating continued interaction with mainstream peers, engaging parental involvement in decision-making, and implementing preplanned transition

programmes based on consultation with all stakeholders. Also, collaboration with higher education institutions, federal and state ministry of education

### **Transition Programming from Higher Education to Inclusive Society**

Transition programming at this stage require more support for the children with special needs in the university, employment opportunities and full participation with their peers without disabilities in the inclusive society. There should be collaboration and cooperation among different stakeholders, government and non-governmental agencies, vocational and skill development to provide services and resources that enable them to do well in the inclusion education and better their independent performance in the society. According to Shevlin, Kubiak, O'Donovan, Devitt, Ringwood, Aston & McGuckin, (2020) transition can be challenging for individuals with special needs due to the barriers they face in accessing employment opportunities and achieving economic independence. Transition programming for children with special needs into inclusive society also require careful planning, continuous monitoring, financial support and provision of assistive technology in the inclusive education to enable them function independently in the society.

### **Implications**

The implications for transition programming for children with special needs can either impact the child positive or negatively if not provided.

1. If early identification, intervention and proper individualized education plans is not put in place, there will be delays in reaching developmental milestones which may affect their full participation in the inclusive education and society.
2. These children will encounter challenges in adapting to new educational environments and limited access to educational support and accommodations if adequate transition programming is not provided parents, caregivers and teachers.
3. The assistive technology, vocational skill, collaboration and continuous support will empower children with special needs and promote their successful access to inclusive education into the society.

### **Conclusion**

Transition programming is important for every child particularly children with special needs. It aims to prepare and help the children overcome the changes they will experience as they move from one stage in life to another. Through the early identification and intervention, individualized plans, collaboration and interagency cooperation, familiarization and orientation, assessment and evaluation, vocational and skill development, transition programming is achieved for the children. Providing all these transition programming will help the children

with special needs learn better in an inclusive education and be able to work independently with their peers in the society without much discrimination.

### Suggestions

1. Parents and teachers are urged to make use of the time targets also known as the countdown strategy to allow the child round up his /her activity and get ready for the next one to help in their effective participation in the inclusive education.
2. Federal and State Ministry of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) are urged to provide vocational training curriculum in schools across the country to accommodate children with special needs
3. Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and SUBEB are required to continuously organize training for teachers, parents and peers to promote transition practices
4. UBEC, SUBEB and NGOS should provide financial support, assistive technology, resources, and awareness campaign to aid in the effective transition programming for children with special needs.

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