Early Childhood Development, Education, and Transition to Work
(Nigeria Context)

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SDSN Thematic Area: GOAL 03: Ensure Effective Learning for All Children and Youth for Life and Livelihood
Keyword: 321
Contact

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ABSTRACT

Children face many important changes in the first eight years of life. This includes but not limited to different learning centres, social groups, mentorship, physiology, parenthood roles and expectations. Their ability to adapt to such a dynamic and evolving environment directly affects their sense of identity when transiting to work and status within their community over the short and long term. Although early childhood development and education (ECDE) is an integral component of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) as contained in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, 2004 and in the UBE Act, 2004. However, ECDE is yet to receive practical and serious government’s attention. The significance or the relevance of ECDE is not yet well appreciated too, except for some selected private schools whose primary aim of involvement in the early childhood education is profit-making. In particular, the key turning points in children’s lives such as ‘graduating’ from kindergarten to primary school up to working age or going through a culturally specific rite of passage provide challenges and opportunities for learning and growth on multiple levels. This paper provides major perspectives in early childhood development, education, and transition to work a Nigeria context and also reveals the predominant areas of focus in both academic and professional studies, as well as important neglected viewpoints and study populations. We first illustrate early child development, education and transition to work in Nigeria. The framework of the study clarifies significance of ECDETW and also captures its relevance to overall growth of the country’s social and economic development. The study further reviews concepts in the developmental theory that preceded child education and transitions to work as well as the logic that determines how child education and transitions to work are structured and reviews current consideration of School-to-Work Opportunities Act. More recent approaches are examined, including systems theories, STWOA and the role of children as future participants in work places. The third part view the various problems of ECDETW are highlighted from both the global and local perspectives. The concluding part identifying possible and workable policy solutions to the problems, citing the need to harmonise early childhood education and transition to work with local education practices, greater transparency in the creation of policy and developmental children programme.

1.0 Introduction

The recognition of education as a right of every child is a global charter derivable from the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus, Eheazu (1998:6) in Okorosaye-Orubite (2008) opined that: “everyone has the right to education. Education shall
be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally accessible to all on the basis of merit." Having recognised this fact and whatever the posture of education before this charter in different countries of the world, provision of education to the citizenry has come to overtake the lethargy and lackadaisical notion or attitude of parents or States or nation about educating their people. Modern education is globally acknowledged as an instrument for individual and societal development, not excluding the array of approaches accruable benefits of social recognition, political relevance and economic prosperity.

The term 'transitions' has a variety of meanings that are not readily captured in a single definition. The view takes an inclusive understanding of transitions as its starting point. We aim to situate different approaches within relevant theoretical frameworks in order to highlight the underlying assumptions about childhood and child development and transition to work that inform them. One generic definition would be that transitions are key events and/or processes occurring at specific periods or turning points during the life course. They are generally linked to changes in a person’s appearance, activity, status, roles and relationships, as well as associated changes in use of physical and social space, and/or changing contact with cultural beliefs, discourses and practices, especially where these are linked to changes of setting and in some cases dominant language.

As maintained above, individuals, communities, State and the Nations of this 21st Century desire development, hence the training of the mind to effect the desired development is inevitable. By this identification of education as a veritable tool to bring about the development of the individuals and the communities, it beholds that the mind be trained early enough to conceive the effective transition ideals of self, work and societal development. Elementary education had long been identified as a starting point for the development of man who will subsequently and potentially develop to the working society and national development. Before the society begins to have influence on the child, the child is better be made to utilise his senses to conceive and perceive how to positively influence the society first. According to a British philosopher John Locke who argues that the only way to apprehend reality is through the experience of the senses. In his major work entitled An Essay Concerning Human Understanding published in 1690, Locke states that the mind of an individual is a tabula rasa, or blank slate, upon which experience imprints knowledge. In short, what the child will grow up to offer the society must be made available early before the society itself bequeaths negative ideals into the child.

In this regard, elementary education which begins at the age 3 to 6 years has no doubt given the child societal influence already, but starting before this period goes a long way to allowing the child conceive and perceive how he can grow to positively influence the society. Starting at an early age makes the child grow and develop into a responsible citizen when provided with the needed orientation, values and supports. Education at this level is aimed at providing the child with the opportunity of exposing their latent skills for development and transition to work. Pre-school age corresponds to a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child. The quality and intensity of care, nutrition and stimulation a child receives during this period determines to a large extent the level of physical and cognitive development a child can attain before transiting effectively to work and societal development.

2.0 Scholars view on Early Childhood Development and Education

ECDE is a pre-primary care and education given to aid physical, social psychological and mental growth and development of the child for proper and effective transition to work. This form of education is the one captured variably as Day care, Playgroup, Crèche, Kindergarten, Nursery, Primary, secondary and university. In his own view, Ojameruaye (2010) sees ECDE basically as that which is the care and education of children from birth to primary school age (5+ or 6years), focusing on children’s survival, growth, development and learning which including health, nutrition, hygiene, as well as cognitive, social, physical and
emotional development. In other words, ECDE is the children’s care, development and education from birth to the period of exposure to primary schooling experience in the formal and informal settings. The care in this context is given from birth and the aspect of education takes off from around the age of two when cognition begins to manifest, i.e. ability to acquire knowledge, the mental faculty or process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception. Both the care and education promote child’s growth and development. In furtherance of this conceptual clarification, Early Childhood Development Education according Ojameruaye (2010), covers very diverse arrangements, from parenting programs to community-based child care, center-based provision and formal pre-primary education, often in school. ECDE programmes typically aim at four age groups: (i) children under 3 years; and (ii) children from age 3 to primary school (usually by age 4+ or 5years in the case of Nigeria) (iii) children from age 10 to Secondary school (usually by age 11+ or 12years in the case of Nigeria) (iv) children from age 17 to University education (usually by age 18+ or 19years in the case of Nigeria) and it continue base on the education priority to transition to work.

Developmental stage theory is epitomised by Piaget’s ideas, especially as these have been enthusiastically taken up by educational theorists and curriculum planners. Broadly speaking, early child development is seen as a natural and universal process of progressive transformations (or stages) in children’s physical, mental, cognitive, socio-emotional and moral competencies. These transformations are driven by the interactions between maturational processes and children’s progressive structuring and restructuring of their experiences, as they gradually acquire more sophisticated capacities for thinking and reasoning. He suggested that children develop schemata to represent their understanding of the world, and that they try to assimilate the world to these schemata until too much external contradiction forces a change and re-equilibration of their world view Lourenco and Machado, (1996: 149). The implication of seeing child development as a series of progressive psychological transformations, from one stage to the next, from infancy to young adult to maturity, is that these stages become crucial reference points for discussing optimal timing for transitions, e.g., from home to pre-school or from more informal to more formal and from education curriculum to work environment.

3.0 Education Transition system and theories

Children’s development transitions are usually defined in terms of the immediate contexts and practices that shape their lives, notably in home, pre-school and school settings and work environment. Systemic approaches recognise that children’s experiences of transition are embedded in wider social structures and processes. For example, early childhood is widely recognised as the period when the most intensive care is needed in order to ensure young children’s well-being, health, learning, profession and play. Within children’s immediate environment, primary caregivers and peers have a pivotal role in guiding young children through early life transitions. Yet in Nigeria, the prevailing economy stress affects modern lifestyles, economic hardship, conflict and other adversities, primary caregivers is not always in the capacity to provide sufficient care, support for children through the process till working age. To further understand the child development transition system, we will look at two theories namely ecological theory Bronfenbrenner, (1979; 1986) and life course theory Elder, (1994)

3.1 Ecological theory

Ecological frameworks offer a comprehensive approach for the study of transitions. Like socio-cultural perspectives, ecological approaches recognise children’s immediate experiences in context, but also capture patterns of interaction between individuals, groups and institutions as they unfold over time (Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 2000: 500). They have the benefit of capturing how, for instance, transitions on the macro level (e.g., economic depression) impact on children via parental unemployment, poverty and poor economy and infrastructure condition (exosystem) with consequences for the household micro and societal macro systems with which children directly engage.

3.2 Transitions and life course theory
Life course theory is closely related to the ecological approach to human development. The model understands human development as a multi-level phenomenon, comprising structured pathways through social institutions and organisations to the social trajectories of individuals (Elder, 1994: 5). More than any other framework, this approach emphasises that human development cannot be detached from family and social history. On the one hand, historical conditions shape the way children grow up. On the other hand, history is produced through the develop agency of children and adults Elder, (1994:5–6); Ryder, (1965: 861).

4.0 Early Childhood Development and Education in Nigeria

In achieving the Millennium Development Goal No. 2 and subsequent Sustainable Development Goal No. 3 will definitely be a mirage without the ECDE. This is even recognised and captured in the UBE Act, 2004. ECDE is inclusive of the scope of UBE as contained in the UBEC Standard Action Plan which was developed in line with the UBE Act, 2004. In fact, the Act according to Ejieh (2009) goes beyond the requirements for meeting these MDGs as it also encompasses programmes for early childhood care. Contributing to the confirmation of ECDE as a component of UBE are Adepoju & Fabiyi (2007) rendering the scope of UBE to include programmes and initiatives for early childhood education, development to higher education and transition to work, the six year primary education, the three year junior secondary education, three years senior secondary and four years university education and transit to work. Nigeria educational system needs to develop and incorporate a way of education that promotes learning in a wholesome, creative and engaging way for all level of students to foster better education for easy of transit to work after graduation.

5.0 Relevance of ECDE in Nigeria

From documentation, youngest children in the society have been neglected world over in terms of care and learning little or no instrument for physical, mental development with many countries having no formal programs for children under 3 year of age. The governments accord relatively low priority to pre-primary education in their spending and ECDE is not a priority for most donor agencies as most allocate less than 2% of what they give for primary education to ECDE, the private sector investor has seize these opportunity to dominate and exploit the sector that provide ECDE in Nigeria and most of sub-Saharan Africa thereby making room for large disparities within the state, countries and international opportunity. Children from poorer and rural households have less access to ECE than those from richer and urban households, The fortunate urban children are most likely to benefit from ECE programs while the poor in urban and rural children are the least likely to be enrolled. The ECDE staff in many developing countries have minimal (often inadequate or none) education and pre-service training, and are often poorly remunerated. Although enrolment in pre-primary education has tripled since 1970, it remains very low in most of the developed world with statistic from National Association for the Education of Young Children (2012) show that, Latin America (60.8%), the Caribbean (100%) and the Pacific (72%) have the highest pre-primary gross enrolment ratios. Regionally, sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest rate of 12.4% below Arab States at 15.7% and Central Asia at 26.9%. Nigeria has no formal ECDE before now because the country was conducive for child’s learning, growth and development. The adult members of the society were readily available and willing to help and guide the child in his developmental processes, even with or without the presence of the parents. Today, the environment is hostile and unsafe, parents are economically engaged and children cannot safely be in the care of neighbours, because of the increasing incidences of child’s sexual molestation; terrorism, kidnapping, food poisoning, child trafficking and ritual killings among others. The formalisation of ECDE has not significantly change the status quo, as reaction and suggestion has place for the total over hauling and promotion of ECDE in the country. Some of the options are thus:

a. ECE is socially cost-effective in the long-term: it is more cost-effective to institute preventive measures and support children early on in life than to compensate for disadvantage as they grow older.

b. Early Childhood development is a period of remarkable brain development that lays the foundation for later learning and transition to work. Therefore, access to ECDE will generally
give children the needed foundations for better performance later in primary and secondary schools, tertiary level and perhaps at the work place.

c. Investment in ECDE yields very high economic returns, offsetting disadvantage, injustice, peaceful coexistence, tolerance and inequality, especially for vulnerable children and poor families in the country.

d. Affordable and reliable childcare provides essential support for working parents, especially mothers, enhances women empowerment, household income and welfare, freedom human right and justice.

e. ECDE is a right, recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child which has been ratified by almost all countries of the world; Nigeria should adhere in totality the resolution of the convention.

f. ECDE can provide the children with crave for imbedding good character, peace, friendship and health habits which ultimately improves their well-being, especially in developing countries where hygienic and fast security response practices are lacking.

6.0 ECDE Situations and Problems in Nigeria

In general, pre-primary facilities can be categorized as Early Child Development (ECD) centres and day care centers for children aged 0–3 years and pre-primary (nursery) schools for children 3–5 years. The privately-owned centres are run on a commercial, fee-paying basis. The fees charged usually depend on the quality of the teachers and facilities provided. However, the UBE Act (2004) integrated pre-school education into UBE Programme as an essential component, Every public primary school is now expected to also include a pre-primary/ECC centre which, like the primary school component, should be non-fee paying and serviced free but it has not yet been attain as at the presentation of this paper. National curriculum is not yet widely operational. Though the NERDC is responsible for this but hitherto, no uniform curriculum has been evolved to cater for ECDE in the country.

An inventory of ECC facilities in Nigeria conducted by FGN/NERDC/UNICEF in 2003 showed that most of the ECC facilities are privately owned (42% of the sample population) and 34% by the government, followed by 21% by local communities. These findings are consistent with the ESA 2003 study, which also indicated a greater private ownership (57%) of ECC facilities, compared to ownership by the government (42%). Now that the Early Childhood Development programme is covered by the UBE law, government ownership at state/LGA/community levels is certain to increase, particularly regarding centres catering for the 3-5 year olds. However the challenge remains as to the role of UBEC and SUBEBs on issues relating to the 0-3 year olds and who, beyond caregivers and communities, should assist on those issues be experienced.

Studies have shown that many parents in Nigeria do not value pre-primary school education due to distrust, poor quality, high cost and the notion that the child must be close to the warmth of the mother before primary school age. As an integral part of the National Policy on Education, ECDE was labeled as pre-primary education and defined as “education given to children aged 3 to 5 plus years prior to their entering primary school”. The policy document states the objectives of pre-primary education in the country and measures to ensure their achievement. However, very little has been done so far to realize the objectives other than the 1991-1995 and 1997-2001 FGN/UNICEF Cooperative Agreement in Basic Education through which UNICEF provided assistance to some States for ECDE activities. Under this program, about 2,045 low-cost ECDE centers were established in 12 States catering for only 174,748 children aged between 3 and 5 years out of an estimated population of over 35 million children below the age of 6 years in the country.

The FGN/UNICEF ECDE program is an example of best practice that needs to be replicated throughout the country. The centers are run with NGOs and combine education for children with lessons on health and education, nutrition and sanitation for their mothers. Adoption and acceptance of ECDE in Nigeria is characterised by the good and the bad. According to UNICEF/EFA Report (2000): “Though appreciable progress has been made in early childhood care and education in the past four years due to government policy requiring every public school to have a pre-primary school linkage, the proportion of children enrolled in pre-
primary Early Childhood Care Centres still remains low at approximately 2.3 million children. This represents about 21 per cent of the population of children in this age group. It has been found that the caregivers of these centers are generally unqualified. About 85 per cent of them do not possess basic qualifications and more than half have no formal education. Another major issue in Nigeria's early childhood care development and education is the poor state of the infrastructure, equipment, facilities and learning resources. Essential learning resources are lacking in most facilities their by making it difficult to archive its ultimate goals of effectively transition from stages to work place.

The National Policy on Education of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) clearly highlights the purposes of ECDE as thus:

1. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school and to work place.
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education as he or she anticipate transiting further;
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, Offices, etc);
4. Inculcate social norms;
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys;
6. Develop a sense of co-operation, friendship and team spirit;
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habits, and
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc, through play.

This has created awareness of the recognition of its existence in the country but no significant progress has been achieved to the effect.

7.0 Suggestion, recommendation and Policy Implication

In addressing a number of identified problems and other areas requiring attention in ECDETW, Government has to be more responsive and pragmatic in imbibing a culture of implementing her educational policies. From the foregoing, ECDE has been identified as a very important segment of education, then Government should therefore not allow ECDE to be left only in the hands of the private establishments which are now actively developing this segment by massive establishment and development of pre-primary education, but with the aim of making profit. Furthermore, Government should redouble her efforts in the promotion and sustenance of this segment of education for national development. In South south region of the country for instance, Governments has to recognise the importance of ECDE by being proactive about it, whereas in some other region of the Federation, ECDE is entirely in the hands of the private, no Government’s involvement at all. Though, only 50 transition classes (Kindergarten) are attached to the established model schools by the South south regional Governments which even the number is not enough to rejoice about until all the primary schools in the region and of course in the Nigeria are transformed in full scale to accommodate ECDE section in developing the child to it working age.

The UBE Act (2004) has an expanded scope which includes programmes and initiatives for early childhood care development and education. The UBE Programme has made provision for every public primary school to have a Pre-Primary school linkage to cater for children aged 3-5 years, secondary and up to university education. The act is silent on early childhood care development and education in the age group 0-3 years (UNESCO, 2006). The negligence of the Nigerian Government about ECDE goes beyond UNESCO’s submission of only age group 0-3years. This negligence is extended to age 3-5 year, because nothing is practically, seriously and operationally happening in response to the provisions of the policy and UBE Act. The Foster realisation of universal child rights in culturally sensitive ways Early years transitions research and policy is especially important to realising the rights of young children, as this phase of life is generally acknowledged as a period of accelerated and intense change, usually involving multiple developmental, social, and (for increasing numbers of children), institutional transitions, each of which has implications for current well-being and long-term outcomes. In line with the above, and to
address the ECDE situation in Nigeria, certain policy adjustment and readjustment most be consider:

Other concern areas of the EFA Report of 2000 about ECDE as view by this paper that require attention for the promotion of ECDE as an integral part of UBE, UNESCO, and UNICEF. These are thus:

i. Policy: Formulation of implementable policy that will include ECDETW in key government documents such as the national/state/local government plans, budget and education plan as support by various international policy which include School-to-Work Opportunities Act STWOA (1994). Also, broadening or reviewing the policy to involve all by specifying the roles and responsibilities of key players as well as fulfilling budgetary commitments across sectors and levels of government.

ii. Political Will: Develop interest in the full implementation and promotion of ECDE through a high level political will and support.

iii. Standards and regulation: Well-enforced national quality standards, Supervision, control and regulation by government in covering public and private provision for all age groups. The redevelopment of uniform curriculum on ECDETW which is presently non-existent to cover technical and other areas for child development and social well been to transit to work place; identify opportunities to align ECDE, elementary and tertiary curriculum and pedagogy.

iv. Partnership: Parental and community involvement as well as strong partnerships between government, CSO, and the private sector.

v. Data: Effective data collection system for effective policy formulation, implementation, intervention and decision making e.g. National MICS surveys calculate an overall Index Score. programs that can influence the political environment by conducting thorough stakeholder analyses, providing policymakers with sound data on child development outcomes, and highlighting strategies for reducing the vulnerabilities of young children and their caregivers.

vi. Funding and adequate budgetary allocation: Increased and better-targeted public funding of ECDE, with particular attention to poor children in urban and rural areas and children with disabilities on one hand and on the other, increased allocation of funds to ECDE programs by partnering donor agencies and the private sector to reduce the cost of fees for private school givers. The fund should also cover transition to work grant as a social inclusion scheme.

vii. Staffing: Access to appropriate training, quality standards and remuneration that retains trained staff; staff developmental programme and continuity in staffing.

viii. Training: Mainstreaming of the early childhood education course into pre-service teacher training from the 2008/2009 session is expected to provide strategic solutions to some of the itemised problems. (EFA 2000 Assessment Country Report).

ix. Policy on governments at various level of the Federation should be enacted to establish Departments/Units of Early Childhood Development, Education and Transition to Work (ECDETW) in the various education ministries, Faculties of Education of their Universities, Universities of Education and Colleges.

8.0 Conclusion
The demand may come in part for economic, social and even religious reasons. Economically, mothers may want a child-minding/minder’s service so that they can go out to work. Importantly too, the issue parallels the question of providing enriched environments and of identifying and realising the individuals learning potentials. Ejieh, (2009) pointed out that the first five years after birth were vital to the personality development of the child. It now seems that there is sufficient evidence to justify a claim for the first five years of life being vital to the cognitive development of the individual, particularly vital being the quality of the child’s experiences within that period. Evidence is being gathered from psychology laboratories throughout the world, from community studies and studies of families in their homes. The investigators have concluded, almost without exception, that the child is a highly capable and sophisticated learning organism and that the functioning begins at birth. The child is not simply the focal point for a food and drink supply, he needs stimulation from an interesting environment full of both objects and people.
The results show that evaluations of ‘good’ outcomes of development are always defined socially and differ according to a community’s culture, which includes its economic surpluses, its system of subsistence and tools of survival, and its political, social, ethnic and religious systems. The central message of this paper is that greater transparency is needed to make more explicit the underlying assumptions regarding childhood and child development that inform policy and programming in Nigeria education system. Developmental practices around early childhood transitions centres largely on institutional transitions, work transition, particularly in relation to formal care, education and work place. Political, economic, cultural, and psycho-social factors interact in shaping children’s ability to access quality basic services and societal well being. ECDETW policy has the potential to unravel these factors at micro, meso-pelagic, and macro levels that explain why some children have opportunities for development while others do not, as well as the directions of sustainable development and their impact on life course trajectories in Nigeria development. In closing note this paper hope to ignite the Nigeria and international governments effort to further explicit and underline the concepts and visions of childhood and transition to work development that drives current policy, programmes and reality of global situation on early childhood transition processes.

Reference


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Association_for_the_Education_of_Young_Children


