Zamfara International Journal of Education (ZIJE)
The Official Journal of the Faculty of Education
Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria
Volume 6, Number 6, October, 2026
pISSN: (Hard Copy): 2814 – 1377
eISSN (Online): 2814 – 1369

www.foefugusau.com.ng
Reviewed Date: 14-10-2026
Publication Date: 31-10-2026
DOI: **https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026635**

Nurturing Creativity Skills in The Early Years: A Panacea for Sustainable Development in Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nurturing creativity skills is a part of teaching with a high value and of an extensive potential to enrich the educational experiences of children. It is the most effective way of education in setting the unity between perception, thinking and application. Children are seen as an environmental, economic and social asset in world civilizations because they play a vital role in any society and they ensure that ethics, values, and culture continue to exist and be passed from generation to generation. Thus, in terms of tools, technology, medicine, health condition, family size, education, and attitude, the world in which the child is growing up now is vastly different. Preschoolers in the twenty-first century are expected to be well equipped, endowed and creative academically successful, and capable of coping with the pressures of the modern world. These expectations can be assumed if preschoolers' creativity skills and talents are well nurtured holistically in early childhood education to meet these demands. As a result, this paper will highlight the necessity of nurturing creativity skills in preschoolers in order to promote a more sustainable growth and development. It will also emphasize the significance and essence of cultivating and nurturing creativity skills in preschoolers for a more sustainable early childhood development, as well as the benefits of doing so. Finally, the author will conclude and make some recommendations.

Keywords: Nurturing, Creativity Skills, Sustainable Development, Early Childhood Education

Introduction

Investing in children is a critical component of eradicating poverty, increasing shared prosperity, and improving intergenerational equity. It is also necessary for them to improve their abilities to realize their full potential as productive, engaged, and capable citizens, contributing fully to their families and societies. Sustainable development entails improving human living conditions and also a task with its own set of difficulties. Sustainable development goal 4 all begins and ends with children who are safe, healthy, and well-educated whose rights and well-being should be at the forefront of the post-2015 agenda. Sustainable education cultivates the knowledge, skills, values, and worldviews that enable young children and adults to engage in ways that contribute to more sustainable living patterns. It allows individuals and communities to consider how they understand and interact with the world. Sustainable development in early childhood education is future-oriented, emphasizing the importance of taking educated action to safeguard the environment and create a more environmentally and socially just world. Environmental, social, cultural, and economic systems, as well as their interconnection, must all be considered when taking actions that encourage more sustainable lifestyles in early childhood. Sustainable Development in Early Childhood Education entails providing children with the knowledge, skills, and tools to plan and manage change towards sustainability within the homes, schools, centres or community. The Sustainable Development goals aim to raise sustainability consciousness and knowledge, as well as to educate children and caregivers that can think critically, innovate, and give solutions for more sustainable living patterns. It is to also enable all pre-schoolers to acquire the required information, skills, and attitudes to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable living situations. Children and communities will be able to consider new ways of interpreting and participating with the world. The sustainable development priority is future-oriented, focusing on environmental protection and informed action to create a more environmentally and socially just world. Environmental, social, cultural, and economic factors must all be considered when taking actions that support children in a holistic sustainable early childhood development and their interdependence. Sustainable development is development that satisfies current needs without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own.

Concept of Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, according to United Nations (2015), provides a shared roadmap for peace and prosperity for people and the planet today and in the future. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are at its

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core, and they represent an urgent call to action for all countries - developed and developing - to work together in a global partnership. They recognize that eradicating poverty and other forms of deprivation must be combined with efforts to enhance health and education, decrease inequality, and boost economic growth. United Nations Children's' Education Fund (2013) also opined that children's rights and well-being should remain at the centre of the post-2015 agenda. Investment in children is a fundamental means to eradicate poverty, boost shared prosperity, and enhance inter-generational equity. It is also essential for strengthening their ability to reach their potential as productive, engaged, and capable citizens, contributing fully to their families and societies. Sustainable development starts and ends with safe, healthy and well-educated children. It is also of the view that sustainable development starts and ends with safe, healthy and well-educated children. The importance of early learning is entrenched in the second target of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure that, by 2030, "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education". Pre-primary education is now considered an essential tool for achieving Universal Primary Education and the SDGs. Ensuring access to quality pre-primary education is a key strategy for improving early learning and education outcomes in the early years as well as the efficiency of education systems (UNICEF, 2018). Primarily, Sustainable Development Goal Number 4 states thus: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all as highlighted by UNICEF (2013):

1. Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
2. Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
3. Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
4. Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
5. Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
6. Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
7. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
8. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
9. substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries
10. Substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states. (UN, 2015).

A pragmatic perspective on Nurturing Creativity Skills

The idea in young children's natural creativity is long-held and widespread among early years' educators hence, the need to inculcate in the child, the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, arts, music and the use of toys (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). However, in the sphere of creativity research, the topic becomes more complicated. Numerous definitions exist among creativity academics that define the creative person, the creative process, or how a range of factors interact over time in a specific environment to produce a creative product. Extreme case studies of creativity may reveal exceptional abilities or aberrant, occasionally insane conduct. There are also definitions

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that attribute extraordinary creativity to esoteric powers such as divine power or spirituality. Some even say that creativity cannot be defined since it is unknowable and unknown.

Jean Piaget's and Lev Vygotsky's theories of development, two of the most influential, support the idea that young children are creative in some ways. They also believe that lasting creative contributions can only be made after childhood and early adolescence. The early childhood educator is interested in a variety of questions about creativity. These are a few of them: What role does childhood have in the creative process? Is it true that all young children are creative, or is it a talent reserved for a chosen few? What, if any, role should teachers and parents have in fostering creativity? Is it worthwhile to try to find and nurture creativity skills in children, or is the link between childhood effects and adult creativity minimal or nonexistent? Although definite solutions to these concerns are unlikely for some time, the discipline of creativity studies has aided our understanding and, more importantly for the sake of this discussion, the relationship between creativity and early childhood education for sustainable development. In recent decades, notable early childhood practitioners have applied the developmental theories of Arnold Gesell, Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and, most recently, Lev Vygotsky to carry on the traditions of the child study movements. Each of these theories emphasized the importance of children's creativity, albeit their interpretations differed. Theory and research have been interpreted by early childhood educators. Each of these theories emphasized the importance of children's creativity, albeit their interpretations differed. In turn, they have interpreted these theories and research in light of their own goals, attitudes, and practices. Piaget and Vygotsky's constructivist theories still impact early childhood education and are frequently used in descriptions of developmentally appropriate practice. Individual knowledge constructs are emphasized in Piaget's theory of cognitive development, while Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of social and educational factors in development.

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development is also a major contribution to the body of education literature. According to Bartlett (2011), Vygotsky stressed that; "in the right environment, with the right guidance, children can perform successfully". For example, when a child is trying to count how many trains he has in order to share with all his friends, another more knowledgeable peer or adult who may be watching might notice that this child counted wrong. When noticing this, the more knowledgeable other could guide him in trying again by holding his finger and helping him count or redirecting him to double-check. Therefore, having another person to work alongside the learner could help assist the learning process. Both theories, on the other hand, stress the importance of play (though distinct kinds of play) in enhancing cognitive development and preparing children for adulthood and sustainable development. Piaget believes that the formation of symbolic cognition at the age of two coincides with an explosion of language and the beginnings of pretend, symbolic play - the quintessence of early childhood creative activity. Piaget's account of equilibration, the process that drives cognitive development, contains qualities that are easily associated with current notions of creativity in early childhood with include exploration, creativity and imagination. Piaget's theoretical cognitive framework originally came from the observations he made of his own children playing and learning. He thought in terms of an individual's learning by building concepts in memory to keep information. According to Powell and Kalina (2009), Piaget's main focus of constructivism has to do with the individual and how the individual constructs knowledge. Cognitive constructivism came directly from Piaget's work. Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposes that humans cannot be given information which they immediately understand and use; instead, humans must construct their own knowledge. Piaget's (1953) four stages are: Sensorimotor stage which a child goes through from ages zero to two; preoperational stage-two to seven years old; concrete operational stage - seven to eleven years old; and formal operational stage - eleven years old to adulthood. In the first stage, children learn about their environment. In the second stage, children are egocentric where they feel as though the world evolve around them. In the third stage, children begin to think more logically, and in the final stage, children think abstractly. As children move through Piaget's stages of development, they initially explore their world to construct knowledge through the use of their senses, by manipulating objects in the environment, and by bringing meaning to complex concepts in a rich environment under the supervision of the teacher (Kauser, 20I0). Freud's psychosexual theory linked early childhood to creativity by highlighting that children's mental processes are not subject to logical rules, which is a key aspect of adult creativity, and by creating a link between cognition and powerful emotion, which is a driving force

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behind creativity. Psychoanalytically oriented views demonstrated how some of the inherent impulses of young children may play out in adult creativity by emphasizing the importance of symbolic and imaginative play, during which children leave reality. Gesell's normative age/stage theory established a timeline for the establishment of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual qualities, as well as creative manifestations like imagination and representational play.

It is critical to nurture and instill creativity skills in preschoolers as part of their early childhood education. It is also critical for their healthy and long-term growth and sustainability. Children that are creative are more likely to succeed in the future. From coloring to reading, nurturing creativity skills in preschoolers encourages children to explore their learning settings and construct their dreams. When children are being taught and nurtured with creativity skills, they will learn something new every day. Children need a healthy educational environment to learn suitable problem-solving abilities and understand how to deconstruct their conditions in order to reach their full potentials. It is not necessary for preschoolers to excel in the arts if they have a creative mind. Creativity skills can help children succeed in professional domains later in life for sustainable development. No child is intended to be left behind in early childhood education. More educational activities that actually touch the core of a child's creativity are needed at the early phases of early childhood education to make room for a sustainable development future.

Importance and benefits of nurturing creativity skills for sustainable development

Creativity skills are activities that actively engage children's imagination through art, dance, dramatic play or theater, puppetry, and music. The creativity skills engage children across all domains - cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical. Activities are deliberately open-ended (not prescriptive), foster divergent thinking, and support the process without particular attention on the product (Mills, 2014). However, Mayesky (2013) highlights ways teachers can help children express their natural creativity that can sustain them throughout their lifetime:

1. Help children accept change. Fear and anxiety are the enemies of creativity.
2. Help children realize that some problems have no easy answers.
3. Help children recognize that many problems have many possible answers. The goal is to explore and discover.
4. Help children monitor and accept their own feelings.
5. Value children's creativity, even when it's messy.
6. Recognize and acknowledge children's joy in all creative endeavors.
7. Help children appreciate their own unique characteristics and expressions.
8. Help children persevere. Encourage them to explore, discover, and explore again.

Mayesky's ideas provide an appropriate template for examining creativity skills across all developmental domains. Completing creative activities, for example, may foster the growth and maturation of children's fine and gross motor skills. Also, benefits and importance of nurturing creativity skills among preschoolers in early childhood towards a sustainable development are highlighted thus:

Imaginative and creative play: Creativity and imagination are essential for a child's growth during the early years of life and even in the future. It is here that a child's imagination and out-of-the-box thinking begin, as well as their learning about the world. For example, encouraging a child's creativity allows them to express themselves verbally and nonverbally, plan, act, communicate, and react to various situations. It also promotes their cognitive and social growth, which will be important when they enter the workforce in the future. Imagination and creativity is the gateway to new possibilities. Imagination is where children's creativity, resourcefulness, and thinking beyond the box begin. It is how children acquire knowledge of the world. Children handle things, express themselves verbally and nonverbally, plot (intentionally or unwittingly), act, communicate, react, and try on various roles during imaginative play. When preschoolers engage in imaginative play with dolls, vehicles, blocks, rocks, cardboard, or boxes, they can learn a lot. Playing with play dough, mixing earth and water to make recipes, working with art materials, splashing in puddles, or pretending to fly can all help children develop and acquire their creativity skills.

Imagination promotes cognitive and social growth. Everyone wants to raise children that are intellectually and socially/emotionally developed to their full potential. Children's development goals in early childhood education include critical thinking skills and creative problem-solving talents. Imagining, trying new things, and experimenting with new

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ideas help children develop critical thinking skills and stimulate creative problem solving. Furthermore, imaginative and creative thinking promotes socio-emotional development by allowing the preschoolers to consider many resolutions, so increasing their confidence, which may be employed in social interactions. Our children will also require imagination and innovation when they enter the workforce of the future which aids sustainable development.

Problem-solving, imagination, critical thinking: Cognitive abilities are required to maintain a competitive edge in today's ever-changing world and the creative process is crucial to this growth. Experimentation during creative activities encourages children to explore diverse choices and build new solutions and enhances building blocks to cognitive development.

Divergent Thinking: Divergent thinking is the ability to think in unique ways, and it is critical for the development of creativity. "Creativity" is frequently associated with artistic endeavors, yet it is an important component of everyday life. Divergent thinking is a thought process that distinguishes the child from the rest in an ever-changing world of unlimited possibilities.

Self-confidence and Happiness: We all want the best for our children - for them to have a childhood where they feel loved, understood and acknowledged for who they truly are. But mostly, we just want them to be happy! By giving children the space and the encouragement to pursue their own passions and dreams, you will help instill self-confidence as well as an overwhelming feeling of love and acceptance. This creates a natural culture of happiness that will have lasting effects well into their adulthood.

Nurtures Emotional Health & Self-expression: When children are able to express themselves fully and without judgment, it is one of the most rewarding and liberating experiences they can have. It allows them to make something real out of their personal sentiments and experiences—a lovely representation of their individual imaginations. It's also an excellent way to support their mental well-being and improve their overall quality of life.

Strengthens Family Bonds Turning off the television, video games, and phone in favour of doing something creative with children will not only make them feel special, but it will also help improve family relationships. We frequently recall feelings from our upbringing rather than objects. As a result, ensuring that the child remembers the unwavering love and admiration can have long-term effects well into adulthood for a more sustainable development.

Participation and Kindness: As caregivers, it is our responsibility to develop and encourage a child's innate desire to help so that it becomes a lifelong habit. Being a good role model is vital so that preschoolers learn to be helpful by watching us. When preschoolers are taught to be kind, they are better able to control their emotions, regulate their behaviors, and demonstrate empathy and self-control. With deliberate support, kindness can be actively nurtured and encouraged towards a sustainable development in early childhood education and beyond.

Resilience: Resilience has long been recognized as a necessary component of excellent learning, and everyone requires some measure of resilience to get through difficult circumstances. It helps children think more flexibly and realistically, be more creative, and avoid despair or anxiety when caregivers cultivate such a critical trait in preschoolers in early childhood. Caregivers strive to protect their children from painful circumstances, yet teaching resilience allows them to attempt new things.

Trust: Trust is instilled in the child from the moment he or she is born. Caregivers may bond with the preschoolers in a way that gives her/him a deep sense of security and, in turn, confidence in him/herself which holistically lead to more sustainable development. Responding to his/her basic needs is what this entails in infancy. A child's ability to need and depend is nurtured early childhood, allowing them to grow and develop relationally without fear.

Empathy and Adaptation: Empathy is a crucial component in teaching a child about bullying. The fact that empathy is a skill that can be taught rather than something we are born with boosts a child's emotional intelligence and confidence. For example, a child's emotional needs must be satisfied in order for them to experience and express empathy for another person. As a result, caregivers must nurture and provide emotional support and assist their children in coping with negative feelings. Children who are taught to respond positively to a situation are more likely to develop high emotional empathy towards sustainability. Adaptation gives the preschoolers the room to adjust to situations now and in later years which eventually boosts their sustainable growth and development.

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Avenues to nurturing creativity skills in the early years for sustainable development

When teachers and caregivers provide rich environments that stimulate creative experiences, children's physical, social, moral, creative, and motor skills abilities are enhanced (Madray & Catalano, 2010). They have choices and control over what they choose to do, which allows for risk taking and increase in confidence; Children are empowered and taken ownership in what they are doing. According to Mayersky (2013), there are many avenues and ways to instill and nurture creativity skills among preschoolers in the following keys ways to so:

1. Imagining and creating case scenarios. When the child creates a scenario, the child gets to play a variety of parts and organizes his/her thoughts while honing his/her social and language skills. Encouraging preschoolers to pretend to be a doctor, a zookeeper, a farmer, a space station, a school, or a storekeeper can help champion their sustainability for future living. Making the preschoolers take part in the imaginative play by assuming and allowing the child to lead the way.to be a character can augur well for them towards achieving the sustainable development goal.
2. Verbal interactive activities can excite and nourish creative minds through rhymes, riddles, amusing sounds, phonics, games and making up lyrics to popular tunes. At the same time, these activities assist the children to learn phonics and acquire vocabulary. These games are also a great way to pass the time on long vehicle drives.
3. Spending time outdoors has tremendous advantages of being in nature for a child's growth towards sustainable development. Nature gives many chances for inquiry, creativity, and problem solving since it is constantly changing. Children are inspired by the natural world to ponder, question, create assumptions, and develop creative brains. Children can sketch in the sand, fashion designs out of twigs, construct forts out of branches, or simply lie on the ground and gaze up at the sky.
4. Stakeholders should encourage artistic endeavours. Art is a form of imaginative expression, not a lesson in following instructions. Art is a tool for children to work through emotions, make decisions, and express themselves through painting, sculpture, collage, clay, sketching, or any other medium. Manipulation of creative materials fosters focus and concentration while also providing a sense of independence and chaperone them for sustainability.
5. Keep screen time to a minimum (television, movies, computer, tablet, smart phone, handhelds, video games, etc.). In the digital age, it might be difficult to foster creativity. Preschoolers learn passively by concentrating on a screen. Encourage preschoolers to make something fresh and interesting as an alternative. Using their complete bodies and their femurs to engage children in a kinesthetic manner.
6. Caregivers should use the child's imagination to discuss various possible scenarios or endings for the story during reading time. Make up stories with the preschoolers, sometimes with her as the central character, and other times with moral concerns in mind. Take turns making up a story that goes on and on.
7. Pose open-ended, thought-provoking inquiries. Inviting your child to express his ideas and share his dreams by asking questions that stimulate imaginative and creative thinking is an effective method to send the message that his ideas matter. "How do you suppose things would turn out if?" "How do you distinguish between a dog and a cat?" "Can you think of any other options?"

Conclusion

In Conclusion, the discourse of this paper has shown clearly that nurturing creativity skills in the early years is quite vital. It is critical to nurture and instill creativity skills in young children as part of their early childhood education. It is also critical for their healthy and long-term growth and sustainability. Children that are creative are more likely to succeed in the future. From coloring to reading, nurturing creativity skills in the early years encourages young children to explore their learning settings and construct their dreams. When children are being taught and nurtured with creativity skills, they will learn something new every day. Children need a healthy educational environment to learn suitable problem-solving abilities and understand how to deconstruct their conditions in order to reach their full potentials. It is not necessary for preschoolers to excel in the arts if they have a creative mind. Creativity skills can help children succeed in professional domains later in life for sustainable development. No child is intended to be left behind in early childhood education. More educational activities that actually touch the core of a child's creativity are needed at the early phases of early childhood education to make room for a sustainable future. Conclusively, it should be noted that the incorporation of the creativity skills in early childhood has many benefits, and children's involvement in programmes and activities will enable them

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acquire their cognitive, creative, social and emotional skills playing large part in their optimal sustainable development in early childhood and their adulthood.

Recommendations

The paper recommends as follows:

1 That to achieve the sustainable development goals, governments, schools, teachers, caregivers and individuals must all work together to adopt the 2015 goals which will be all encompassing for the children towards a more sustainable development so it becomes imperative to train and educate colleagues, caregivers, school administrators, decision makers, the educational impact that nurturing creativity skills has on early childhood development that can promote sustainability.

2 That since children learn through their environments and with one another, providing opportunities for collaboration, discovery, and exploration creative experiences will foster the preschoolers levels of cognition, which in turn may promote their physical, social, and emotional well-being for a more sustainable development in the future.

3 That the gains children derived from creativity skills are ones that will sustain and last into adulthood, therefore, caregivers, educators, parents, and administrators must advocate for the importance of nurturing creativity skills for children in all early educational settings

4 That in order to ensure the enrichment and nurturing of creativity skills among preschoolers for optimal sustainable development, it is necessary for caregivers and stakeholders to develop an organisational culture that is conducive enough to promote creativity skills and imagination by having a strong creative professional disposition, sound experience and qualifications.

5 That government should provide instructional materials that enable the caregivers teach, nurture and inculcate creativity skills in preschoolers for a well-rounded sustainable development in early childhood education.

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