



*Quality Early Childhood Education: A Panacea for fostering Social Unity and ... Nweze, V. O., Et. al. (2026)*

## **Quality Early Childhood Education: A Panacea for fostering Social Unity and Reduces the Menace of Insecurity Security in Nigeria**

**NWEZE, Vitalis Onyekachi<sup>1</sup>**

Email Address: [nezevitalis2011@gmail.com](mailto:nezevitalis2011@gmail.com);  
Phone Number: 08035715272

**MOHAMMAD, Ibrahim<sup>1</sup>**

Email Address: [Lawanng2014@gmail.com](mailto:Lawanng2014@gmail.com);  
Phone Number: 08075382048

**HAMMA, Robert Arab<sup>1</sup>**

Email Address: [roberto4lynn@gmail.com](mailto:roberto4lynn@gmail.com);  
Phone Number: 07037203600

Department of Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic Kaltungo, Gombe State, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*Early Childhood Education (ECE) forms a fundamental stage of a child's socio-psychological, physical and healthy development and in the long-run contributes immensely in the future growth and development of the child to adulthood. Therefore, the advocacy for adequate and equal accessibility of early childhood education to every child irrespective of socio-economic background, gender, race, religion or tribe has in recent times gained much attention across the globe. This is in-line with its associated positive impacts of ECE in shaping the cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and mental parts of a child. The truth that well trained child from birth tends to turn out more responsible citizen than those without adequate early childhood care and education is unarguably right. Early childhood education promotes a nation's development in terms of qualified manpower and build strong national security. It reduces insecurity by reducing some risk factors that breed insecurity such as poverty, inequality, social unrest, drug abuse, unemployment, among others. This paper examines the early childhood education as a panacea in reducing insecurity in Nigeria. Some hiccups which hinder the effective implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria were unmasked which include poor involvement by the government, inadequate supervision, inadequate educational facilities, and poor-quality teachers. Lastly, the paper proffers some pragmatic measures that would strengthen the implementation of early childhood education as a development strategic in fighting and reducing insecurity in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, National Development and Issues of Insecurity

### **Introduction**

Education apart from being a process of learning, is also a means to achieve sustainable development in all sectors of the society be it – social, economic, technology, environmental, engineering, medicine, among others. This is why the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2006) defined education as the process by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies and behaviors across generation for societal development. The above definition, depicts and summarizes education as a complex system with many interconnected subsystems and stakeholders. In other words, education becomes a pivotal tool through which societal decision-making is gazette to achieve developmental goals. From the wide perspective approach of the World Bank Report of 2024, education is a human right and a powerful driver of development. It is one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and improving health, gender equity, peace, and stability.



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Education delivers large, consistent returns in terms of income, and is the most important factor to ensure equity and inclusion.

Education as we know is the transmission of knowledge, skill, attitude, ideas which will enable an individual to survive in any society (Atakpo, 2014). The expected primary aim of education is to bring a sustainable change and modification in mental, social and behavioral background formations of an individual. Explicitly, Oputa (1998) captures it in his statement when he stated that education is a process that prepares the moral character of a child, teaches the fundamental and basic truth, inspire and directs the child's behaviors in all his/her contacts with fellowmen, enable him/her to make correct choices and act responsibly. Going by the above, the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in any society is unarguably and cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria's educational system is yet to tap the opportunities and advantages in early childhood education to harness the teeming population of the youth from early age to overcome some of the challenges of life such as poverty, unemployment and unequal accessibility to education. The school enrollment in the country is still low with many recorded number of school dropouts (UNESCO, 2007). There is increasing evidence that investing in early childhood education is a strategic imperative for national security as it fosters a skilled and productive workforce, enhances social cohesion and community resilience, supports in early intervention and prevention of social ills, promotes inclusive and equitable development and encourages a culture of peace, tolerance and understanding.

### **Concept of Early Childhood Education**

The concept of Early Childhood Education (ECE) covers quite a number of training activities and care in a child's life. It is important to approach the concept holistically to bring out its basic trajectories and expectations. Education as we all know is one of the key factors that help in human development. From the psychological point of view, education at infant year starts from the earliest age of a child's birth and as a child grows to interact with his/her environments. The social relationships with his/her immediate families, cultural practices/norms, religious beliefs, etc. are all important in shaping a child's growth and development. From this point of view, Early Childhood Education refers to all formal and informal learning processes and services for the young children as early childhood support (Amough, 2017). This includes all kinds of education taking place before compulsory schooling and provided in different kinds of settings-nurseries, crèches, childcare centres, kindergartens, pre-schools, and other similar institutions (Congress Resolution on Early Childhood education, Kamerman, 2001; Kamerman and Gatenio, 2003; Plantenga and Siegel, 2004). In a similar view, (Maduewesi, 1999) defined it as the education offered to children who have not yet reached the statutory age of beginning primary school. The (FRN, 2004) refers to Early Childhood Education as an education given in an educational institution to children aged 1 – 5 plus prior to their enrollment in the primary school. Early Childhood Education (ECE) provides learning and education activities with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduces young children to organized instruction outside of the family context to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness and to prepare them for entry into primary education (Caillods, 2006).

Early Childhood Education as Ololube, et al., (2009) emphasized provides the foundation of education in the pre-school education which forms an integral part of a child's early education, given formally or informally, in an educational institution to children ages two-five years prior to entering the primary school. Early childhood is the most critical period in human development, thus comprehensive and quality early childhood education can make a significant contribution to the



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physical psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child; including the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Early childhood education might be considered to be education which takes place before compulsory education. The term refers to education in its broadest sense, including childcare and development. This includes early childhood services provided in kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, child-care centers and other similar institutions (Amough, 2017).

### **Objectives of Early Childhood Education**

From the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), the objectives of the Early Childhood Education are:

1. Effect a smooth transition from home to school
2. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
3. Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market or offices)
4. Inculcate social norms
5. Inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys and so on
6. Develop a sense of corporation and team spirit
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habit and
8. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, form and so on through play.

### **Policy Framework for Implementation of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

As a result of the pivotal importance of education to the individual's life and existence as well as societal or national development, Nigeria has keyed into the global partnership to implement policies and programmes aimed towards a sustainable development through early childhood education. Government as the umpire in the management of educational sector has done this through its public institutions and agencies to implement the approved policy guidelines as part of the effort to make Early Childhood Education an integral part of the Nigerian educational system. The policy guidelines for preschool education came into being following the presidential regulation No. 60 of 2013 as stated "implementation of holistic-integrative early childhood development serves toward the realization of healthy, intelligent, cheerful and noble children and the realization of the commitment of all relevant elements, namely parent, families communities, government and local government, in the effort of holistic- integrative early childhood development. The federal government, in collaboration with the world development partners such as UNICEF, UNESCO, World Bank, produced national curriculum for the education of pre-primary education as a guide (Amough, 2017). Also, noted from (Salami, 2016; Agu and Olutola, 2023; Nungala, 2024), in 2014, the government provided a curriculum called one-year pre-primary school education curriculum for the Nigeria children. Besides the curricula, several other policy documents which were enacted to provide to guide the implementation of early childhood Education in Nigeria include:

1. National Policy of Education (NERDC, 2014).
2. National minimum standard for early childhood care centers in Nigeria (NERCD 2007).
3. National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NERDC 2017).
4. Guidelines for implementing a National policy on integrated early childhood development in Nigeria (FME, 2013).
5. Early childhood development standard for Nigeria (FME).

### **The Role of Government in Early Childhood Education**

Government has a critical and essential role to play in the implementation of early childhood education. This is why Ibeh (2012) emphasized that the role of government in ensuring the success



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of the Early Childhood Education is essentially inevitable. In other words, government the key roles in policy implementation are planning, organizing, coordinating, directing and evaluating policy results in line with the set goals (Onah, 2006). To perform these roles, government must work in partnership with all stakeholders. The Federal and State Ministries of Education oversee the responsibilities of issuing approval permits for educational institutions which wish to go into establishment of early childhood education. Also, the moderation of the teaching curriculums, inspection of the intended physical structures to house the children, environmental feasibility assessment as well as the assessment of the human resources to man the preschool centres are on the expected functions of the government. The effectiveness commitment to these roles will guarantee the success of the primary objectives of the Early Childhood Education and national development.

The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria under page 16 outlined that all relevant government ministries and agencies at the Federal and State levels have the following role in the implementation of the policy. These are:

1. Ensuring policy sensitization and advocacy for IECD involvement
2. Making provisions especially for IECD activities and programmes in the ministries' line budget.
3. Active participation in the National/State IECD Coordinating Committee
4. Monitoring and evaluating IECD implementation involvement for effective baseline data inputs and feedback for the National Coordinating Committee
5. Facilitating IECD-related research. However, for the purpose of ensuring impact creation, specific ministries and their agencies at Federal and State levels shall ensure the following specific roles and functions in IECD implementation (National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria, 2017).

### **The Place of Early Childhood Education in Tackling Insecurity in Nigeria**

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is believed to set a solid foundation for cognitive, social and emotional development of a child. This early development is significant in determining the nature of a nation's human capital, social cohesion, economic production, and innovations in science and technology and above all the national security. National security is achieved when both the governed (ruled) and govern (rulers) are respecters of the law. The report of the Council for a Strong America in 2017 on early childhood education states that children who receive adequate care and learning from earliest stages of their lives are likely to follow those positive virtues to adulthood. They are more stable and committed in schooling and building more careers for themselves which make them better personalities in the societies. It further stated that early childhood can reduce problems of crime, drug abuse and other social deviances among children which if not addressed early on in children's live, would put a nation at risk – one that will leave the nation vulnerable for years to come and threaten the strength of the national security. Numerous research studies show that the early years of life have a significant impact on educational attainment, behaviors and health. This helps to explain why high-quality early interventions can help vulnerable children succeed in school, stay on the right side of the law and achieve a healthy weight in the long term. Early Childhood Education comes with a lot of physical and mental learning activities that intend to stay healthy. Teaching of children within the age bracket in the early childhood usually is done through using of toys, music, dancing, playing among others which stimulate them mentally and physically (Agba, et al., 2022; Mallah, et al., 2022; Tanko and Tanko, 2023).

However, random observation shows that most educational centers in Nigeria lack these basic necessities to ensure quality learning environment for the early childhood education. The country in



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recent times has witnessed incessant cases of insecurity. In a study conducted by (Agba et al., 2022) revealed that education in Nigeria has faced a lot of challenges – one of the major challenges being the abduction of students across the states in Nigeria. The abduction of school children applies to all age including those within age 2 -5 years who attend pre-primary schools. The abduction of school children in Chibok, Borno state where over 276 school girls were abducted from their dormitories was one of the big concerns of insecurity in the Nigerian educational system. Also, the kidnapping of 110 Dapchi schoolgirls on 19 February, 2018 from Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yunusari Local Government Area, Yobe State and abduction of 344 school children in Kankara Local Government Area, Katsina state on December 11, 2020 as well as other cases of abduction of school children across the states in Nigeria leave a big question on national security especially in the educational system. Also, recently, there reports of abductions of 287 school children in March 7, 2024 at Government Secondary School Kuriga, Kaduna state, 15 school children were abducted at a boarding school in Gidan Bakuso of Sokoto state in March 9, 2024. In November 17, 2025, 25 students kidnapped in a school in Kebbi state while another 300 school children were take hostage by gunmen on November 21, 2025 in a Catholic School in Niger state (Amnesty International, 2025). Today, many parents are in fear of sending their children to early childhood education for the fear of being abducted. The truth is that most early childhood educational centres have no security guards and other technological security network to checkmate activities within their schools. This has contributed to poor and inadequate supervision of activities in these educational centres leaving a lot unchecked which affect the quality of learning programs and impact created in the lives of the children.

The mushroom establishments of pre-nursery and nursery schools in Nigeria without proper government registration and supervision or inspections by government constituted authorities is a serious security concern considering the alleged atrocities that can occur in these centres. There is tendency that those hired to take care of the children can abuse them either physically or mentally. They have many reported and unreported cases of child abuse, defiling of children, molestation, among others in schools. Observations from some studies revealed that the enrollment of children in pre-nursery and nursery schools in Nigeria shows that about 60 – 70 percent of parents consider enrollment costs (school fees/tuition fees, uniform, instructional materials, etc.), proximity and transportation, and less considerations are placed on the physical structure, environment, sanitation and quality of teachers in most these schools. The implication of this can be negative in the lives of the children where there is poor quality teachers who lack adequate knowledge on what and how to teach and impact knowledge on the children, as well as possessing the compatible socio-psychological behavior to understanding every child under his/her care, maintain a high standard hygiene and devote ample time to watch the activities of these children to avoid any risky activities which may be injuring to their health (Atakpo, 2014; Tanko and Tanko, 2022; Obiweluzor, 2015). All these contribute to increase the level of insecurity in the educational sector in Nigeria owing to the fact that insecurity could be in multifaceted.

### **Implementation Deficiencies in Early Childhood Education in Nigeria**

A number of factors or problems have been identified so far as militating against effective implementation of early childhood education in Nigeria. Some of these factors or problems are:

**Ineffective and inadequate Policy Framework:** The National Policy on Education as well as other supporting policies for the early childhood education do not provide a well detailed policy framework for effective implementation. For example, the policy document at Section 7.0 which contains the



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National and State IECD coordinating committees looks ambiguous about the ministerial sector roles of over ten ministries included in the coordination of ECE.

**Poor Standard Operating Procedures of Educational Institutions:** Most educational institutions that provide early childhood education do not a unified Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure that all activities are strictly followed. This problem stems from the perceived inadequate government participation.

**Poor Quality and Qualification of Teacher:** It is one thing to have teachers, it is another thing to have quality and qualified teachers who can do the job effectively. Early childhood education required well experienced and trained teachers which many of them are graduates from universities and other tertiary institutions. Most educational institutions shortchange the recruitment by engaging persons with lower training and qualifications to cut running costs of hiring manpower which on the other hand, affect the quality of teaching giving to children.

**Inadequate Educational Facilities:** The quality of teaching and learning process is measured from both the availability of educational facilities in an educational institution. Most schools in Nigeria especially those for early childhood education lack basic educational facilities such as enough playing grounds, toys, televisions to display educative movies for children, music equipment, among others that are necessary for build good cognitive, emotional and social development.

**Inadequate Government Involvement and Presence:** There seems to be inadequate involvement and presence of the government at all level – federal, state and local government. The only time government is present is during collection of taxes from the school owners. The aspects of financial obligations by government are neglected and abandoned. The financial responsibilities of the implementation of the National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Education are shared among the stakeholders with the National/Federal Government overseeing the following:

1. Provide adequate funding for basic infrastructures like water, electricity, good roads, and hospitals necessary to support ECD activities nationwide.
2. Meet all costs relating to standard maintenance and supervision of ECD facilities and Pre Schools to ensure quality service delivery.
3. Establish and adequately fund a national specialized resource centre for ECD to serve as a research and information base for ECD.
4. Provide fund to support organization/participation of local ECD professionals in national and international conferences.

On other hand and states and local governments are to provide the following:

**State Government:**

1. Ensure child friendly schooling for pre-school children through provision and funding of infrastructures, play equipment, and other essential learning packages necessary to keep young children happy and stimulate their interest in learning.
2. Provide baby/child friendly hospitals/clinics environment and services for children 0-5 years by equipping hospitals/clinics with up-to-date medical facilities including personnel.
3. Provide fund for all recurrent expenditures relating to operation and maintenance of publicly owned preschool/Day Care facilities (e.g. teachers/caregivers' salaries, salaries of health workers, electricity and water provision)
4. Provide one school meal to children enrolled in public Pre-school facilities

**Local Government:**

1. Fund training requirements of Caregivers and teachers
2. Fund and manage the Health Centres, Clinics and Pre-School/Day Care facilities



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3. Provide fund for establishment of crèches, Day Care Centres as required in the local communities (National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria, 2017).

**Inadequate and Ineffective Supervision:** Supervision is one of key management function to ensure seamless flow of work activities, ensure effective management of both human and material resources, identify management gaps or lapses and work towards surmounting the lapses. Supervision of educational activities except the provision of educational curriculums by government in Nigeria is still very poor. Many schools exist with poor state of physical infrastructures, toilets, portable drinking water, safety guides, and other healthcare requirements like first aids and hygiene practices. Also, there poor supervision of monetary charges, text books and instructional materials given to children by school owners from parents.

### **Strategic Pathways to Ensure Effective Implementation of Early Childhood Education**

This paper is invincible that early childhood education in Nigeria will yield more positive results and strength national security if the proffered measures are taking into cognizance by policymakers in all educational system.

1. Increasing Government Active Participation: Government must increase its activities, involvement and presence in the implementation of early childhood education. The role of government in ensuring that the objectives of the early childhood education are realized in Nigeria is inevitable and cannot be overemphasized. The ministries of education both at federal and state level should take adequate responsibilities in all ramifications to ensure effective implementation of the policy guidelines.
2. Ensuring Adequate Funding of Early Childhood Education: There is need to ensure adequate funding of early childhood education in all tier of the government. Enacting policies without ensuring adequate funding or financing leads to failure. Good financial commitment by all stakeholders is important. Government can establish and make available special intervention funds to assist school owners owing to the fact that most early childhood education centres in the country are owned and managed by private sector. For example, countries like United States of America has funded the early childhood education through Preschool Development Grants (PDG) and Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).
3. Training of Teachers: Training is an important aspect of career development which must be provided for teachers in all educational institutions especially teachers and caregivers in early childhood education centres. This is because early childhood education requires special care, teaching styles and psycho-social relationships with children both those who physically normal and physically challenged to learn.
4. Motivation of Teachers and Caregivers: Both government and school owners should see the need to motivate the teachers and caregivers to children in early childhood education. This is owing to the fact that teaching and taking care of the children at this age bracket is not an easy task. Both the teachers and caregivers are saddled with the responsibilities of feeding, changing of diapers, washing of hands, clothes, singing children to sleep, carefully taking them to play, etc. which are really tasking and demanding cautions.
5. Regular Inspection of the Educational Centres by Government Agencies: Regular inspection and supervision are required to ensure that all the required standards of learning activities are maintained by school owners. It is expected that when government agencies are up and doing in their inspectional and supervisory responsibilities, school owners would also take active



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supervisory roles to avoid being fined by government or even risked closing down their schools because of unscrupulous activities.

6. Provision of Adequate Security: Last but not the least is provision of adequate security in schools and study centres. Security is important to safeguard lives and properties of both children, teachers, caregivers and properties of people providing teaching and care to the children. With adequate security network, the enrollment of the children will increase especially from parents who have refused to enroll the children on the fear of being abducted and on the fear of other activities which might be harmful to their children.

## Conclusion

Our discussion so far on early childhood education focuses building a solid foundation for children through education. The integration of early childhood education into the National Policy on Education serves as a strategic pathway to ensure equal access to quality high care education for Nigerian children. However, the targeted aims or objectives this integration has not yielded the desired results as preparatory ground and solid foundation for Nigerian children when compared with other countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom, and many other African nations. The primary reasons being the inadequacy and ineffective involvement of government in the implementation of policy guidelines as contained in the National Policy on Education. Also, incessant cases of kidnapping of school children has also contributed to low enrollment of children in pre-nursery and nursery schools by many parents on the fear of their children being abducted or kidnapped. The issue of poor educational facilities and supervision are seriously affecting the early childhood education in Nigeria. There have some reported cases of some schools giving children sleeping pills, poor sanitized learning environment which endangers the health of these children kept under the watch and care of the school owners. The uncoordinated and porosity in granting permissions for anybody who wants to establish preschool centre without a detailed profiling background checks contributes to insecurity issues which affect early childhood education in Nigeria.

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[www.foefugusau.com.ng](http://www.foefugusau.com.ng)  
[des@fugusau.edu.ng](mailto:des@fugusau.edu.ng)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.2026339>

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