

Policy Fulfilment, Curriculum Enactment, and Equity in Nigerian Early Childhood Education: A Systematic Integrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Formal recognition of early childhood education (ECE) does not necessarily secure dependable access to meaningful, equitable learning. This systematic integrative review examined the extent and conditions of Nigerian ECE policy fulfilment, reported gaps, and priorities for renewing the educational social contract. Seven databases and discovery platforms were searched for peer-reviewed English-language literature published from 1 January 2017 to 10 May 2026. Searches yielded 320 records; after six duplicates were removed, 314 records were screened. Twenty-nine sources formed the analytical corpus, 231 contextual records were excluded from the synthesis, and 54 were ineligible. Full texts were examined for 22 core sources; seven were appraised from verified abstracts and publisher metadata. Design-sensitive appraisal rated seven sources as high, 14 as moderate, and eight as limited confidence. Quality-sensitive thematic synthesis indicated partial and uneven fulfilment in the settings studied but could not estimate national policy compliance. Recurrent constraints involved provision, financing, personnel, materials, supervision, professional support, and unequal access. Epistemic, curricular, linguistic, pedagogical, assessment, workforce, equity, and participation gaps were interdependent. A strong local trial demonstrated achievable benefits under supported conditions without establishing routine or system-wide effectiveness. Renewal priorities are coherent implementation, sustained professional support, culturally grounded and locally evaluated multilingual pathways, context-sensitive assessment, equity, community participation, and accountability. The proposed framework is an analytical proposition requiring multisite testing.

Keywords: curriculum enactment, early childhood education, educational social contract, Nigeria, policy implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

UNESCO and UNICEF position early childhood education (ECE) as a foundational setting through which public institutions can translate commitments to equitable access, quality, and children's holistic development into practice.¹ Access matters, but equitable entitlement also depends on knowledge and language recognition, pedagogical opportunities, teacher capacity and working conditions, appropriate assessment, and family and community participation.² From an educational social contract perspective, policy fulfilment concerns not only the expansion of provision but also the governance and institutional conditions through which education is enacted as a common good.³

Nigeria has incorporated early childhood care, development, and education into national policy, including commitments concerning access, curriculum, language, staffing, instructional materials, supervision, quality assurance, and holistic development.⁴ Yet the country's linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and geographical diversity complicates uniform policy enactment. Recent evidence from government schools, community-based programmes, and urban and rural settings indicates that language practices, family participation, professional support, and programme conditions vary across locations and populations.⁵ A common national policy may therefore be translated into different institutional and pedagogical conditions across states, communities, and provider types.

Regional studies report uneven provision, scarce materials, weak supervision, and incomplete policy enactment,⁶ while professional-development evidence identifies

¹ UNESCO and UNICEF, *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education: The Right to a Strong Foundation* (UNESCO, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.54675/FWQA2113>.

² Pauline Dixon et al., "Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 9 (September 11, 2025): 1197, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15091197>; Martin C. Ekeh et al., "Play-Based Pedagogy for Oral Communication in Early Grade and Preschool Classrooms," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (September 6, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.981>; Tolulope Ojo et al., "Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged Children in Nigeria," *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 20, no. 1 (April 12, 2026): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-026-00169-2>; Sharon Wolf et al., "Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria," *Child Development* 96, no. 3 (May 1, 2025): 1128–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14225>.

³ Rita Locatelli, "Renewing the Social Contract for Education: Governing Education as a Common Good," *PROSPECTS* 54, no. 2 (June 28, 2024): 315–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-023-09653-w>; Iyanuoluwa Emmanuel Olalowo et al., "Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: A Praxis for Policy and Research," *Oxford Review of Education*, November 11, 2025, 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2025.2573268>.

⁴ Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, "Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria," *Journal of Contemporary Education Research*, June 12, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.70382/hujcer.v12i8.049>.

⁵ Dixon et al., "Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence"; Ojo et al., "Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged Children in Nigeria"; Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, "Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria"; Wolf et al., "Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria."

⁶ Ayomiposi Rebecca Akinrimisi, Babatunde Adeniyi Adeyemi, and Victoria Ihekerenma Iroegbu, "Assessment of Government's Involvement in Implementation of National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria," *Journal of Early*

workforce needs.⁷ Although descriptive designs cannot estimate national prevalence, their convergence raises an institutional-reliability question: can families expect policy commitments to yield dependable access and quality?

An educational social contract specifies how public institutions pursue equitable learning, participation, and human development while sustaining legitimacy and trust.⁸ In ECE, responsibility is asymmetrical: the state retains primary responsibility for equitable provision. Educators, providers, families, and communities support enactment and accountability, but participation does not transfer public responsibility.⁹ Curriculum determines valued knowledge, languages, outcomes, and participation. Nigerian scholarship proposes contextualisation through indigenous knowledge, ‘accrurriculum’, local resources, and curriculum-and-instruction reform,¹⁰ paralleling African evidence on indigenous games and songs.¹¹ Empirical support remains narrower: local studies indicate engagement, not comprehensive curriculum effectiveness. Enactment depends on teachers, resources, language, assessment, and institutional support.

Language policy illustrates this interdependence. Hausa–English skill relationships align with evidence of cross-linguistic influence,¹² while English dominance reflects aspirations,

Childhood Care and Education 3, no. 2 (January 4, 2021): 72, <https://doi.org/10.26555/jecce.v3i2.2066>; Moyinoluwa Grace Owajori and Taiwo Oladunni Gbenga-Akanmu, “Government Commitments and Teaching Strategies for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education in South Western Nigeria,” *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 15, no. 1 (December 9, 2021): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-021-00090-w>; Lawaloluwaseun Temitope, & Oyewumi, and Nasimot Opeyemi, “ASSESSMENT OF STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA,” *Ife Journal of Theory and Research in Education* 24 (October 20, 2023): 271–79, <http://ijotre.oauife.edu.ng/index.php/ijotre/article/view/97>; Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, “Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria.”

⁷ Katrina A. Korb et al., “Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development,” *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, March 25, 2026, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2026.2617340>.

⁸ Locatelli, “Renewing the Social Contract for Education: Governing Education as a Common Good”; Gunjan Sharma and Yusuf Sayed, “Global Governance and a New Social Contract for Education: Addressing Power Asymmetries,” *PROSPECTS* 54, no. 2 (June 1, 2024): 351–60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-024-09696-7>; Elena Toukan and Sobhi Tawil, “A New Social Contract for Education: Rebuilding Trust in Education as a Common Good,” *PROSPECTS* 54, no. 2 (June 30, 2024): 259–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-024-09702-y>.

⁹ Lara Patil, “Education Governance and Digitization: Inherent Conflicts and Potential Safeguards for a New Social Contract,” *PROSPECTS* 54, no. 2 (June 21, 2024): 323–29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-023-09668-3>.

¹⁰ John Emenike and) Afamefuna, “APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM THROUGH ‘ACCURRICULATION’ FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES,” *Ife Journal of Science Education and Curriculum Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 29–41, <https://ijsecs.oauife.edu.ng/index.php/ijsecs/article/view/12>; Oluwasegun Samuel Kolade, “Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Early Childhood Education Curricula in Nigeria: Implications for Learning and Cultural Sustainability,” *Real Kiddos: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini* 4, no. 2 (March 30, 2026): 147–64, <https://doi.org/10.53547/jebzdk41>; Augustine Shede . Walakan and David Santos David Santos, “Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Theoretical Foundations, Policy Imperatives, and a Curriculum and Instruction Reform Framework for Transformative Practice,” *Journal of Contemporary Research in Educational Administration and Management* 3, no. 2 (June 28, 2026): 64–83, <https://www.edufdns.ng/jcream/article/view/121>.

¹¹ Beatrice Matafwali and Mubanga Mofu, “Exploring the Feasibility of Outdoor Indigenous Games and Songs to Enhance Play-Based Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education,” *Journal of Childhood, Education & Society* 4, no. 3 (October 10, 2023): 391–405, <https://doi.org/10.37291/2717638X.202343270>.

¹² Dixon et al., “Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence”; Chantal VAN DIJK et al., “Cross-Linguistic Influence in Simultaneous and Early Sequential Bilingual Children: A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Child Language* 49, no. 5 (September 28, 2022): 897–929, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000921000337>.

examinations, provider competition, and perceived socioeconomic value.¹³ No universal sequence follows; language practice reflects learning evidence, incentives, resources, teacher capacity, and community expectations. Pedagogy, assessment, and workforce evidence remains mixed, consistent with evidence on interdependent quality domains.¹⁴ Small professional-development and intervention studies report promise under particular conditions,¹⁵ but vary in design and outcome. A counter-finding showed no independent association between preschool–pedagogy clusters and executive function,¹⁶ requiring distinction between promise and general effectiveness.

Equity and participation are conditions. Targeted programmes benefit marginalised children without demonstrating system-wide implementation.¹⁷ Fathers support play-based learning, but cultural, practical, and institutional constraints limit participation.¹⁸ Participation extends to curriculum, language, inclusion, and accountability; structured partnerships strengthen trust.¹⁹ Nigerian ECE evidence remains fragmented across policy, curriculum, knowledge, language, pedagogy, assessment, workforce, equity, and participation. Separate treatment risks curricular change without enabling governance, workforce, material, and assessment conditions. Integrated, quality-sensitive synthesis is therefore necessary because ECE quality links governance, workforce, and service conditions.²⁰

This review synthesises peer-reviewed literature published from 2017 to 10 May 2026. It assesses the evidence on policy fulfilment without estimating national prevalence; identifies reported gaps and their relationships; and proposes an ECE Educational Social Contract Framework to organise recurrent implementation dependencies. The framework is evidence-informed and testable but not a validated causal model. This review addresses the following research questions:

1. What does peer-reviewed research published between 2017 and 2026 reveal about the extent and conditions of Nigeria’s policy commitments to equitable and quality early childhood education?

¹³ Oluyemisi Idowu Majebe, “Perceptions of Preschool Stakeholders on the Impacts of English as the Dominant Language in Early Childhood Education and Care Centers in Yoruba-Speaking States, Nigeria,” *Global Education Review* 12, no. 1 (April 17, 2025): 46–62, <https://ger.mercy.edu/index.php/ger/article/view/660>.

¹⁴ Patricia Eadie et al., “Domains of Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: A Scoping Review of the Extent and Consistency of the Literature,” *Educational Review* 76, no. 4 (June 6, 2024): 1057–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2077704>.

¹⁵ Ekeh et al., “Play-Based Pedagogy for Oral Communication in Early Grade and Preschool Classrooms”; Korb et al., “Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development”; Wolf et al., “Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria.”

¹⁶ Chika Ezeugwu et al., “Preschool-Level Predictors of Children’s Executive Function: Do Preschool-Pedagogy Clusters Make a Difference?,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 40, no. 1 (January 12, 2026), <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.70155>.

¹⁷ Wolf et al., “Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria.”

¹⁸ Ojo et al., “Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged Children in Nigeria.”

¹⁹ Theresia Gabriele Hummel, Franziska Cohen, and Yvonne Anders, “The Role of Partnership Practices in Strengthening Parental Trust,” *Early Child Development and Care* 193, no. 3 (February 17, 2023): 401–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2022.2093868>.

²⁰ Alicia Phillips, “Supporting Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce and Service Quality Through Governance Practices,” *Education Sciences* 15, no. 3 (February 21, 2025): 267, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030267>.

2. What epistemic, curriculum, language, pedagogical, assessment, teacher capacity, and equity gaps are reported in the Nigerian early childhood education literature?
3. How do policy, curriculum, language, pedagogy, teacher capacity, assessment, and community participation interact, and what integrated priorities for renewing Nigeria's educational social contract emerge from the evidence?

METHOD

This systematic integrative review combined empirical studies, reviews, and substantive conceptual and policy analyses concerning policy fulfilment, curriculum enactment, and equity in Nigerian ECE.²¹ Identification, screening, and selection followed the PRISMA 2020 principles,²² adapted to distinguish the analytical corpus from contextual records.

Searches covered peer-reviewed English-language literature published from 1 January 2017 to 10 May 2026 in JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, African Journals Online, Scopus, PhilPapers, and SABINET African Journals. The terms combined ECE, Nigeria, and the review domains. Database-specific translations, fields, limits, dates, and recorded retrieval accounting appear in Supplementary Table S1, where unpreserved platform totals are also identified. The peer-review status was verified using database indicators, publisher records, and explicit journal statements.

Records were consolidated in a structured matrix. Exact and near duplicates were identified from titles, authors, years, and digital object identifiers. Titles, abstracts, and metadata were screened first, and uncertain records were checked further. Full texts were examined when required and obtainable, and decisions and exclusion reasons were recorded.

Eligible sources directly addressed Nigerian ECE or a separable Nigerian component, concerned children to approximately age eight or relevant educators, families, communities, institutions, or systems, contributed to a review domain, fell within the period, and provided an identifiable empirical or argumentative basis for the review. Exclusions included non-educational clinical or nutritional studies, out-of-period or non-peer-reviewed items, duplicates, irrelevant records, and evidence too incomplete for an analytical claim (Table 1).

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication period	Peer-reviewed work published from 2017 to 10 May 2026.	Before 2017, for the core corpus, earlier work could provide background only.
Population and level	ECE, preschool, pre-primary, or closely related early-primary evidence for children aged approximately eight years and relevant adults or systems.	No meaningful ECE or early-grade educational connections.

²¹ Robin Whittemore and Kathleen Knafl, "The Integrative Review: Updated Methodology," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 52, no. 5 (December 2, 2005): 546–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2005.03621.x>.

²² Matthew J. Page et al., "The PRISMA 2020 Statement: An Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews," *BMJ* 10, no. 1 (March 29, 2021): n71, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Geographical relevance	Direct Nigerian evidence; comparative work when Nigerian findings were separable.	There is no Nigerian evidence in the core corpus.
Review domain	Policy, implementation, curriculum, Indigenous knowledge, language, pedagogy, assessment, teachers, equity, or participation.	Clinical, nutritional, medical, or other records without substantive educational questions.
Publication type	Empirical journal articles, reviews, or substantive conceptual or policy analyses with a traceable basis.	News, blogs, promotional material, theses, conference-only records, books or chapters, and non-peer-reviewed items.
Evidence sufficiency	Traceable identity and sufficient full-text or abstract information to classify contribution and evidence.	Insufficient or conflicting information regarding relevance or appraisal.
Record management	Most complete version of each distinct publication.	Duplicate exports or repeated versions of the same articles.

The search yielded 320 records. Removing six duplicates left 314 records for screening; 54 were ineligible. Another 231 contextual records did not directly answer the research questions and were excluded from extraction, appraisal, and synthesis; they did not support the results. The core corpus contained 29 peer-reviewed sources (Figure 1).

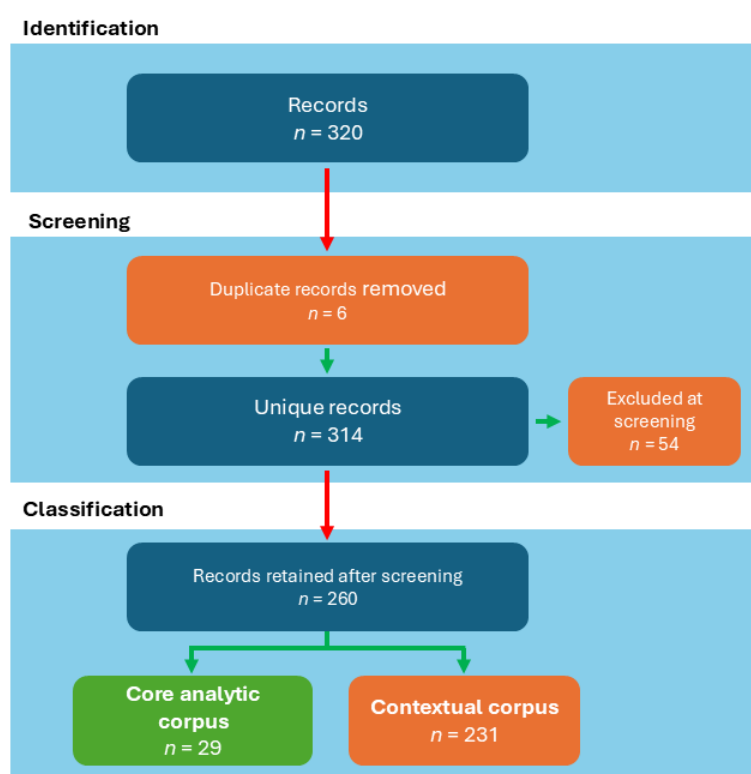


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

A verification audit checked each core source's identity, year, outlet, peer-review, and access status, design, population or evidential focus, setting, findings, and limitations. Full

texts were available for 22 sources; seven were verified through abstracts and publisher or indexing metadata. Those seven contributed only explicitly accessible claims, and none could receive a high-confidence rating. A standardised matrix recorded source identity, design, setting, sample or evidential base, access, findings, limitations, relevance, codes, and confidence. Appendix Table A1 lists all 29 sources. The original quantitative metrics were retained, and local findings were not converted into population estimates.

Confidence appraisal considered design–question alignment, adequacy and transparency of the sample, setting, or evidential base, data-collection or source-selection clarity, analytical appropriateness, and alignment among evidence, conclusions, and limitations. For conceptual work, sampling criteria were applied to the argument’s evidential foundation. High confidence required transparent methods, adequate evidence, coherent analysis, and full reporting. Moderate confidence indicated usable evidence with limitations affecting scope or transferability; limited confidence reflected restricted access, weak reporting or evidential foundations, or multiple methodological limitations. Supplementary Table S2 provides the operational rules.

Hybrid deductive–inductive thematic synthesis²³ began with domains from the research questions and identified recurring conditions, contradictions, and relationships. The codes were consolidated into seven themes: policy and implementation, epistemic recognition and curriculum contextualisation, language and multilingual learning, pedagogy and teacher capacity, assessment and child outcomes, equity and inclusion, and family and community participation.

The synthesis was quality-sensitive rather than vote-counted. Stronger evidence received greater interpretive weight, and weaker sources clarified under-researched propositions. Null findings were retained, and conceptual work informed obligations rather than the effects. Research question number one described patterns across the represented settings, not national compliance. Theme relationships were mapped against obligations concerning public responsibility, curriculum, professional capacity, participation, assessment, and accountability. The resulting framework is a proposition, not a validated causal model. Design and outcome heterogeneity precluded meta-analysis. Public publications contained no identifiable participant data; therefore, institutional ethical approval was not required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The searches identified 320 records; six duplicates were removed, and 314 unique records were screened. Fifty-four were ineligible, 231 contextual records were excluded from the analytical synthesis, and 29 formed the core corpus. Full texts were examined for 22 sources, and seven were appraised from verified abstracts and publisher metadata. Nineteen

²³ James Thomas and Angela Harden, “Methods for the Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Research in Systematic Reviews,” *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (December 10, 2008): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>.

core sources (65.5%) were published in 2025–2026, concentrating the corpus in the two most recent years.

The corpus included quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, participatory, review, policy, and conceptual work. Seven sources were rated high confidence, 14 moderate, and eight limited. Stronger evidence included multisite child assessments, a community-randomised evaluation, large stakeholder surveys, and school-level studies. Limited-confidence sources informed bounded interpretation but not strong causal, effectiveness, or national-prevalence claims. Appendix Table A1 reports all the characteristics and appraisals.

1. Fulfilment of Nigeria's ECE Policy Commitments

Across represented settings, evidence was more consistent with partial and uneven fulfilment than dependable implementation; it does not permit a national compliance estimate. Regional studies have reported overlapping constraints in public provision, financing, personnel, infrastructure, materials, supervision, and professional support.²⁴

Among the 300 Osun State public basic schools, none offered the complete pre-nursery–Nursery 2 sequence, only 10% had a pre-basic section, and approximately 60% of the available materials were reportedly not used regularly.²⁵ In sampled ECCDE centres, curriculum availability coexisted with incomplete material provision, while 54.2% of responses rated supervision and quality control as moderate.²⁶ Other Southwestern studies have reported incomplete government support.²⁷ Ibrahim et al. and Shehu identified similar concerns, but their limited methods reduced their weight.²⁸

Ajayi's review identified inequalities in access, personnel, and quality.²⁹ The strongest intervention evidence came from a matched-pair community-randomised evaluation of 466 marginalised girls in 16 rural Hausa communities. The Preschool Safe Space programme produced large treatment-as-delivered effects across assessed readiness domains ($d_T = 0.89 - 1.52$; composite $d_T = 1.47$).³⁰ These localised comparisons with no schooling or an alternative preschool demonstrated benefits under supported conditions, not routine

²⁴ Akinrimisi, Adeyemi, and Iroegbu, "Assessment of Government's Involvement in Implementation of National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria"; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, "Government Commitments and Teaching Strategies for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education in South Western Nigeria"; Temitope, Oyewumi, and Opeyemi, "ASSESSMENT OF STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA"; Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, "Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria."

²⁵ Temitope, Oyewumi, and Opeyemi, "ASSESSMENT OF STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA."

²⁶ Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, "Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria."

²⁷ Akinrimisi, Adeyemi, and Iroegbu, "Assessment of Government's Involvement in Implementation of National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria"; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, "Government Commitments and Teaching Strategies for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education in South Western Nigeria."

²⁸ Yakubu Wunti Ibrahim et al., "Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Policy Implementation," *Kashere Journal of Education* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2025): 33–40, <https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kje/article/view/1079>; Hamisu Shehu and Tahir Ahmad H., "Early Childhood Education Policy and Basic Education Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria," *Jigawa Journal of Educational Research* 5, no. 2 (June 7, 2026): 113–23, <https://jjer.com.ng/index.php/jjer/article/view/143>.

²⁹ Hannah Olubunmi Ajayi, "Social Inequality in Early Childhood Care and Education Provision in Nigeria: A Review of Literature," *World Journal of Education* 9, no. 3 (May 24, 2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v9n3p1>.

³⁰ Wolf et al., "Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria."

effectiveness or system-wide fulfilment. Financing, personnel, resources, supervision, professional support, and local implementation recurred as enabling conditions, but predominantly regional and non-experimental evidence did not establish their independent causal effects.

2. Reported Gaps in Nigerian ECE

The first gap concerned epistemic recognition and curriculum contextualisation. Culturally familiar stories, animation, arts, and play were associated with positive engagement or social-emotional indicators, but evidence varied. Storybook exposure was correlational,³¹ and a fixed media sequence confounded local animation with order and time.³² Charles Ogu et al. reported favourable responses among 122 children, but the allocation and analysis were incompletely described.³³ Kolade's findings were limited by insufficient sampling and analytical detail.³⁴

Conceptual proposals for 'accrurriculumation', indigenous knowledge, reconceptualist praxis, and coordinated reform articulated possible principles without demonstrating implementation or effects.³⁵ Evidence therefore supports the promise of familiar resources more strongly than a comprehensive, contextualised curriculum. Language evidence revealed competing considerations. The assessment of 851 children in 158 government schools across nine northern states found Hausa–English relationships consistent with cross-language interdependence but did not test an instructional model³⁶. Stakeholders linked English dominance to aspirations, examinations, status, and enrolment competition; 65% of participating teachers perceived a loss of local meanings.³⁷ Eighty-four per cent of 200 purposively sampled parents preferred English-first or English-medium instruction, a local rather than a national result.³⁸ Barade offered a conceptual discussion without an empirical test.³⁹

³¹ Lawrence Ekpemi Izuagie, "Media and Social-Emotional Learning in 3–6-Year-Olds: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria," *International Journal of Early Childhood* 58, no. 2 (June 4, 2026): 1069–87, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-025-00469-7>.

³² Lawrence Izuagie, "Turning Pages, Building Character," *The International Journal of Early Childhood Learning* 33, no. 1 (December 18, 2025): 117–34, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7939/CGP/v33i01/117-134>.

³³ Jovita Charles Ogu et al., "Imports of Hybridizing Visual and Performing Arts Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria" 26, no. 4 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.53836/ijia/2025/26/4/007>.

³⁴ Kolade, "Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Early Childhood Education Curricula in Nigeria: Implications for Learning and Cultural Sustainability."

³⁵ Emenike and Afamefuna, "APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM THROUGH 'ACCURRICULATION' FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES"; Olalowo et al., "Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: A Praxis for Policy and Research"; Walakan and Santos, "Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Theoretical Foundations, Policy Imperatives, and a Curriculum and Instruction Reform Framework for Transformative Practice."

³⁶ Dixon et al., "Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence."

³⁷ Majebi, "Perceptions of Preschool Stakeholders on the Impacts of English as the Dominant Language in Early Childhood Education and Care Centers in Yoruba-Speaking States, Nigeria."

³⁸ Babatunji Hezekiah Adepoju, "An Appraisal of the Mother Tongue for Early Child Education in Nigeria," *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration* 3, no. 2 (October 1, 2019): 201–20, https://doi.org/10.1386/tjtm_00007_1.

³⁹ Abubakar Bello Barade, "EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE," *KOGI JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY* 4, no. 2 (July 26, 2025): 127–31, <https://kojep.org.ng/index.php/journal/article/view/52>.

Teacher capacity evidence was promising but local. Nine teachers initially struggled to operationalise play for oral communication, and practice-oriented development supported more explicit group play and scaffolding.⁴⁰ Korb et al. randomly assigned 55 educators and found small-to-moderate gains in three targeted character strengths after Indigenous character-oriented development.⁴¹ The sample and educator-level outcomes limit the extrapolation to system-wide child effects. Akinrotimi et al. reported larger gains among 200 children in AI-supported classrooms; however, infrastructure-ready selection, inadequate variance reporting, a mismatched test description, and unadjusted school clustering precluded robust causal inference.⁴² Atakpo recorded the perceptions of 456 female teachers and caregivers about developmental experiences; however, the design could not establish later security effects.⁴³

Assessment remains heterogeneous, with few longitudinal, linguistically appropriate, or contextually validated child measures. Among 120 preschoolers, preschool pedagogy clusters did not independently predict executive functioning; age more consistently predicted working memory and composite performance.⁴⁴ Pedagogical labels or provider types should not be treated as proxies for quality. Equity gaps affect access and the workforce. Besides marginalised girls and unequal provision, interviews with 20 teachers indicated that preschool teaching was perceived as women's work; stigma, low pay, and caregiving norms discouraged men.⁴⁵ These two city perceptions do not measure national attitudes.

3. Interactions and Priorities for Contract Renewal

A cross-theme comparison suggested an interdependent implementation problem without establishing a causal sequence. Shortages of finance, supervision, materials, and professional support coincided with limited capacity to enact indigenous knowledge, multilingual learning, play, and context-sensitive assessment. English dominance also reflected aspirations, examinations, material shortages, and perceived mobility. Curriculum revision alone is therefore unlikely to alter experience when governance, professional, linguistic, and assessment conditions remain unaligned.

⁴⁰ Ekeh et al., "Play-Based Pedagogy for Oral Communication in Early Grade and Preschool Classrooms."

⁴¹ Korb et al., "Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development."

⁴² Adenike A. Akinrotimi, Temilola J. Popoola, and I. E. Udo, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Early Childhood Learning Outcomes in Nigeria," *International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology* 21, no. 2 (2025): 63–79, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1488989>.

⁴³ Theresa Edirin Atakpo, "Early Childhood Developmental Experiences as a Tool for Combating Future Security Challenges in Nigeria," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 10, no. 1 (January 10, 2020): 198, <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2020-0018>.

⁴⁴ Ezeugwu et al., "Preschool-Level Predictors of Children's Executive Function: Do Preschool-Pedagogy Clusters Make a Difference?"

⁴⁵ Chika R. Ezeugwu et al., "'A Woman's Job?' Gendered Perceptions of Preschool Teaching in Nigeria," *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, February 9, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X261417796>.

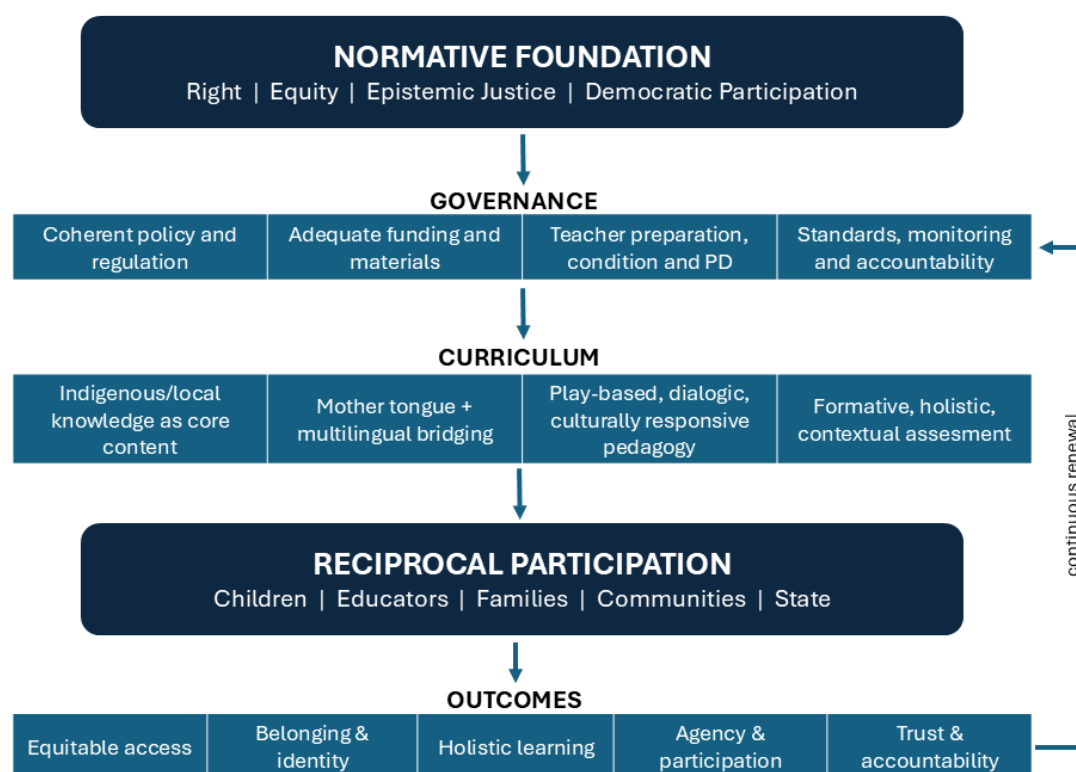


Figure 2. Proposed Renewed ECE Educational Social Contract Framework

Community participation intersected with these conditions. Across 16 sites, 160 fathers valued learning through play and expressed willingness to help, while provider-role expectations, time, norms, and weak channels constrained involvement.⁴⁶ A small Greek–Nigerian comparison found context-specific engagement patterns,⁴⁷ and Olanibi and Meroyi supplied a normative argument for fairness rather than outcome evidence.⁴⁸

Table 3. Themes, representative findings, sources, and social-contract obligations

Theme	Calibrated representative finding	Social-contract obligation
Policy, governance, and implementation	Regional evidence has reported uneven provision, resources, supervision, staffing, and enactment without establishing national prevalence. ⁴⁹	Provision, coherence, resourcing, and

⁴⁶ Ojo et al., “Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged Children in Nigeria.”

⁴⁷ Konstantina Rentzou and Adefunke Ekine, “Parental Engagement Strategies in Greek and Nigerian Preschool Settings: Cross-Country Comparison,” *International Journal of Early Years Education* 25, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 30–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1275529>.

⁴⁸ Segun Adenipekun Olanibi and Samuel Idowu Meroyi, “Imparting Fairness as a Democratic Value through Early Childhood Education in Nigeria,” *Papers in Education and Development* 43, no. 2 (2026): 285–96, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/26650746-20250016>.

⁴⁹ Akinrimisi, Adeyemi, and Iroegbu, “Assessment of Government’s Involvement in Implementation of National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria”; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, “Government Commitments and Teaching Strategies for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education in South Western Nigeria”; Temitope, Oyewumi, and Opeyemi, “ASSESSMENT OF STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA”; Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, “Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria”; Ibrahim et al., “Early Childhood Education

Theme	Calibrated representative finding	Social-contract obligation
		accountable implementation
Epistemic recognition and curriculum contextualisation	Local studies associate familiar resources with engagement; broader conceptual reforms remain untested. ⁵⁰	Epistemic recognition, cultural relevance, and curriculum coherence
Language and multilingual learning	Cross-language relationships coexisted with strong institutional and socioeconomic incentives for using English. ⁵¹	Linguistic access, conceptual continuity, and cultural identity
Pedagogy and teacher capacity	Small studies reported promising changes; however, the designs, samples, and analyses constrained generalisation. ⁵²	Pedagogical quality, professional capability, and enabling conditions
Assessment and child outcomes	A local trial reported large readiness effects, while validated contextual and multilingual measures remained uncommon in the literature. ⁵³	Holistic development and valid, context-sensitive assessment
Equity and inclusion	Unequal access, marginalised girls, and gendered workforce norms have been reported without national prevalence estimates. ⁵⁴	Equal access, non-discrimination, and compensatory support
Family and community participation	Families expressed their willingness to support learning, while norms and weak channels constrained reciprocal participation. ⁵⁵	Participation, reciprocity, voice, and public trust

in Nigeria: Policy Implementation”; Shehu and H., “Early Childhood Education Policy and Basic Education Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria.”

⁵⁰ IA Salami and CIO Okeke, “Transformation and Decolonisation of Mathematics Education for Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Its Learning Trend in Nigeria,” *Perspectives in Education* 35, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v35i2.4>; Emenike and Afamefuna, “APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM THROUGH ‘ACCURRICULATION’ FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA FOR PROMOTING CHILDREN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES”; Charles Ogu et al., “Imports of Hybridizing Visual and Performing Arts Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria”; Kolade, “Integrating Indigenous Knowledge into Early Childhood Education Curricula in Nigeria: Implications for Learning and Cultural Sustainability”; Olalowo et al., “Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: A Praxis for Policy and Research”; Walakan and Santos, “Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Theoretical Foundations, Policy Imperatives, and a Curriculum and Instruction Reform Framework for Transformative Practice”; Izuagie, “Media and Social-Emotional Learning in 3–6-Year-Olds: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria.”

⁵¹ Adepoju, “An Appraisal of the Mother Tongue for Early Child Education in Nigeria”; Barade, “EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: LANGUAGE, TECHNOLOGY AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE”; Majebi, “Perceptions of Preschool Stakeholders on the Impacts of English as the Dominant Language in Early Childhood Education and Care Centers in Yoruba-Speaking States, Nigeria”; Dixon et al., “Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence.”

⁵² Atakpo, “Early Childhood Developmental Experiences as a Tool for Combating Future Security Challenges in Nigeria”; Ekeh et al., “Play-Based Pedagogy for Oral Communication in Early Grade and Preschool Classrooms”; Akinrotimi, Popoola, and Udo, “The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Early Childhood Learning Outcomes in Nigeria.”; Izuagie, “Media and Social-Emotional Learning in 3–6-Year-Olds: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria”; Izuagie, “Turning Pages, Building Character”; Korb et al., “Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development”; Ezeugwu et al., “Preschool-Level Predictors of Children’s Executive Function: Do Preschool-Pedagogy Clusters Make a Difference?”

⁵³ Wolf et al., “Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria”; Charles Ogu et al., “Imports of Hybridizing Visual and Performing Arts Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria”; Izuagie, “Turning Pages, Building Character”; Izuagie, “Media and Social-Emotional Learning in 3–6-Year-Olds: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria”; Ezeugwu et al., “Preschool-Level Predictors of Children’s Executive Function: Do Preschool-Pedagogy Clusters Make a Difference?”

⁵⁴ Ajayi, “Social Inequality in Early Childhood Care and Education Provision in Nigeria: A Review of Literature”; Wolf et al., “Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria”; Ezeugwu et al., “‘A Woman’s Job?’ Gendered Perceptions of Preschool Teaching in Nigeria.”

⁵⁵ Rentzou and Ekine, “Parental Engagement Strategies in Greek and Nigerian Preschool Settings: Cross-Country Comparison”; Ojo et al., “Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged

Five priorities emerged: financed implementation, sustained teacher preparation, culturally grounded, locally evaluated multilingual pathways, alignment of play and context-sensitive assessment, and equitable participation. Figure 2 maps a feedback system connecting commitments, governance, enactment, participation, outcomes, evidence, and accountability. The proposed framework is an analytical proposition, not a validated causal model. Table 3 links themes, evidence, and obligations.

Discussion

1. Uneven Policy Fulfilment

The evidence is more consistent with partial and uneven fulfilment than dependable enactment but is not nationally representative of the data. Most implementation studies were regional, descriptive, or stakeholder-based. The conclusion concerns convergence across available settings, not the proportion of Nigerian children whose entitlements are fulfilled. Within these limits, formal ECE recognition and curriculum availability coexist with deficiencies in provision, materials, personnel, supervision, and professional support ⁵⁶. The central issue is institutional reliability: whether commitments generate conditions that families can reasonably expect across locations and providers.

The existence of a policy does not guarantee its fulfilment. Classes and prescribed curricula establish formal obligations; substantive fulfilment also requires staffing, resources, supervision, inclusion, professional capability and meaningful learning. Variations in these conditions produce unequal entitlements within a system. Wolf et al. (2025) show both possibility and limit ⁵⁷. Large treatment-as-delivered effects arose among 466 girls in 16 communities under a supported program compared with no schooling or another preschool option. The study demonstrates achievable readiness gains, not routine public-sector effectiveness, national compliance, or effects at scale. It is evidence of a specific implementation arrangement. Other interventions are promising but inconsistent. Korb et al. used random allocation with 55 educators;⁵⁸ Ogu et al. insufficiently described allocation and analysis;⁵⁹ Izuagie confounded local media with time;⁶⁰ and Akinrotimi et al. did not

Children in Nigeria”; Olanibi and Meroyi, “Imparting Fairness as a Democratic Value through Early Childhood Education in Nigeria.”

⁵⁶ Akinrimisi, Adeyemi, and Iroegbu, “Assessment of Government’s Involvement in Implementation of National Policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria”; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, “Government Commitments and Teaching Strategies for Effective Quality Early Childhood Education in South Western Nigeria”; Temitope, Oyewumi, and Opeyemi, “ASSESSMENT OF STATE GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN ENHANCING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA”; Adelowo Joel Peter and Toju T. Eyengho, “Assessment of Implementation of the National Policy on Education (2013) on Curriculum Related Issues in ECCDE Centres in Southwestern Nigeria.”

⁵⁷ Wolf et al., “Impacts of the Preschool Safe Program on Marginalized Girls in Northern Nigeria.”

⁵⁸ Korb et al., “Kauna: Enhancing the Teacher-Student Relationship Through Indigenous Character-Based Professional Development.”

⁵⁹ Charles Ogu et al., “Imports of Hybridizing Visual and Performing Arts Pedagogies for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Nigeria.”

⁶⁰ Izuagie, “Media and Social-Emotional Learning in 3–6-Year-Olds: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria.”

adequately model clustering.⁶¹ Together, they support feasibility more strongly than the general effectiveness.

2. Curriculum Enactment as an Interdependent Institutional Process

Curriculum enactment depends on governance, materials, language, teacher knowledge, assessment, and community expectations, not just prescribed content. These gaps condition one another, although predominantly cross-sectional and qualitative evidence cannot establish a causal order. Conceptual work makes a strong case for recognising local knowledge, stories, arts, games, and environments. Empirical studies show local engagement with familiar resources but do not demonstrate sustained effects of a comprehensive indigenous curriculum. Such resources are pedagogically promising; comparative implementation studies with contextually valid outcomes are needed before stronger effectiveness claims can be made.

Contextualisation is more than the addition of local artefacts. It requires curricular discretion, suitable materials, practical preparation, and assessment that recognises culturally and linguistically situated learning. The epistemic gap concerns the institutional conditions through which knowledge becomes educationally legitimate. Language findings resist a simple Nigerian-language/English binary. Dixon et al. provide strong observational evidence of cross-language relationships, not a policy trial.⁶² Majebi shows that aspirations, examinations, status, and competition sustain English dominance;⁶³ Adepoju's preference estimate is local.⁶⁴ Neither attitudes nor cross-sectional assessments prescribe a single national sequence.

Locally evaluated multilingual pathways can reconcile conceptual continuity with aspirations for English proficiency. Home-language resources can support early participation while English is introduced systematically; however, implementation requires trained teachers, usable terminology, materials, and aligned assessment. Otherwise, either formal home-language commitments or children's demonstrated knowledge may remain unclear. Teacher capacity should not be reduced to individual deficiencies. Teachers are expected to deliver play-based, multilingual, culturally grounded, inclusive education despite limited preparation, materials, time, or support. Ekeh et al. provide useful local process evidence⁶⁵. Capacity is relational; professional judgement depends on organisational conditions that permit its use.

Assessment determines which outcomes are visible. Few studies have used longitudinal or culturally and linguistically validated child measures, restricting claims for particular pedagogies. The null independent association between preschool pedagogy clusters and

⁶¹ Akinrotimi, Popoola, and Udo, "The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Early Childhood Learning Outcomes in Nigeria."

⁶² Dixon et al., "Evidence for Language Policy in Government Pre-Primary Schools in Nigeria: Cross-Language Transfer and Interdependence."

⁶³ Majebi, "Perceptions of Preschool Stakeholders on the Impacts of English as the Dominant Language in Early Childhood Education and Care Centers in Yoruba-Speaking States, Nigeria."

⁶⁴ Adepoju, "An Appraisal of the Mother Tongue for Early Child Education in Nigeria."

⁶⁵ Ekeh et al., "Play-Based Pedagogy for Oral Communication in Early Grade and Preschool Classrooms."

executive functioning⁶⁶ cautions against using labels or school types as quality proxies and directs attention to implementation and measurement validity. Across 16 sites, fathers valued play and expressed willingness to contribute, while practical and normative constraints limited involvement.⁶⁷ Low formal participation should not be equated with disinterest. Institutional channels can enable families to contribute knowledge and influence language, inclusion, curriculum, and accountability, rather than merely supplying resources.

3. Proposed Framework

This review reframes policy fulfilment as alignment among obligations. Recent systems research similarly shows that curriculum standards, examinations, and classroom instruction can remain incoherent, and that improvement in early childhood development requires attention to interacting system conditions rather than isolated interventions.⁶⁸ Financing, curriculum, language, professional capacity, assessment, equity, and participation operate through one another: curriculum without support may remain unenacted; multilingual policy without aligned curricula, materials, and assessment may exclude,⁶⁹ and access without minimum quality or adequate public provision may reproduce inequity.⁷⁰

Figure 2 represents the proposed feedback system: commitments require governance and resources; these shape enactment; participation and outcomes generate evidence; and evidence and the public voice inform accountability and renewal. This feedback logic is consistent with recent systems thinking approaches to early childhood development and rights-based accounts of young children's participation in decisions about educational quality.⁷¹ However, the included studies did not validate the direction, magnitude, or stability of these relationships. The framework organises recurrent dependencies and generates testable propositions.

The framework also preserves asymmetrical responsibilities. Young children do not carry obligations equivalent to those of the state; participation is a right to be heard, not a duty to decide, and its exercise requires adult enablement,⁷² whereas the right to early

⁶⁶ Ezeugwu et al., "Preschool-Level Predictors of Children's Executive Function: Do Preschool-Pedagogy Clusters Make a Difference?"

⁶⁷ Ojo et al., "Perspectives of Fathers on the Importance of Learning through Play among Pre-Primary-Aged Children in Nigeria."

⁶⁸ Julius Atuhurra and Michelle Kaffenberger, "Measuring Education System Coherence: Alignment of Curriculum Standards, Examinations, and Teacher Instruction in Tanzania and Uganda," *International Journal of Educational Development* 92 (July 2022): 102598, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2022.102598>; Kate M Milner et al., "No Time for Business as Usual: Can Systems Thinking Help Us to Accelerate Recovery for Early Child Development?," *BMJ Global Health* 8, no. 5 (May 17, 2023): e012327, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2023-012327>.

⁶⁹ Angeline M. Barrett et al., "Multilingual Education for Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Epistemic Inclusion," *PROSPECTS*, July 14, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-025-09731-1>.

⁷⁰ Lisa Janssen, Dieuwke Zwier, and Herman van de Werfhorst, "Privatization of Preschool Education: The Implications for Educational Inequalities in Cross-National Perspective," *Acta Sociologica* 67, no. 3 (August 9, 2024): 282–300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00016993231205201>.

⁷¹ Laura Lundy et al., "Young Children's Right to Be Heard on the Quality of Their Education: Addressing Potential Misunderstandings in the Context of Early Childhood Education," *British Educational Research Journal*, January 17, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3968>; Milner et al., "No Time for Business as Usual: Can Systems Thinking Help Us to Accelerate Recovery for Early Child Development?"

⁷² Lundy et al., "Young Children's Right to Be Heard on the Quality of Their Education: Addressing Potential Misunderstandings in the Context of Early Childhood Education."

childhood care and education entails state duties to make provision affordable, accessible, inclusive, adequately resourced, and of sufficient quality.⁷³ Public institutions retain the primary duty of equitable provision, whereas educators, providers, families, and communities contribute to enactment and accountability. Reciprocity means participation and responsiveness, not shifting financial or organisational responsibility to families. This distinction is consistent with cross-national evidence suggesting that the equalising pattern associated with preschool participation may be weaker in more privatised systems, although the relevant interaction was not statistically significant.⁷⁴

4. Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy implications are priorities for piloting and evaluation, not for proven national interventions. First, a costed implementation compact should clarify federal, state, and local responsibilities and establish monitorable minimum conditions for staffing, materials, infrastructure, supervision, inclusion, safeguarding, and professional support. These proposed conditions correspond to recent work identifying teacher qualifications, class size, teacher–child ratios, curriculum, physical environment, developmentally appropriate materials, safety, and professional development as important dimensions of structural and process quality.⁷⁵ Reporting should be disaggregated by geography, gender, disability, language, socioeconomic status, and provider type because national aggregates and administrative data may conceal unequal access and omit unregistered or non-state provisions.⁷⁶

Second, curriculum, language, pedagogy, and assessment should be developed simultaneously. Evidence from the wider Nigerian primary education system shows that curriculum, instruction, and assessment can be substantially aligned yet remain concentrated on low cognitive demand and coexist with weak performance, indicating that formal coherence alone is insufficient.⁷⁷ Locally adaptable multilingual resources, enquiry, play, and community knowledge, therefore, require pilots in contrasting settings. Assessment should be linguistically appropriate, developmentally defensible, and useful for teaching rather than premature ranking. Although derived from K–12 classrooms rather than ECE, recent research illustrates how multilingual assessment can be integrated with teaching, draw on learners’ linguistic repertoires, and generate formative evidence to guide instructions. Its application to Nigerian ECE would consequently require contextual adaptation and evaluation.⁷⁸

⁷³ Sandra Fredman et al., “Recognizing Early Childhood Education as a Human Right in International Law,” *Human Rights Law Review* 22, no. 4 (September 7, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngac024>.

⁷⁴ Janssen, Zwier, and van de Werfhorst, “Privatization of Preschool Education: The Implications for Educational Inequalities in Cross-National Perspective.”

⁷⁵ Abbie Raikes et al., “Global Tracking of Access and Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education,” *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 17, no. 1 (May 2, 2023): 14, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-023-00116-5>.

⁷⁶ Raikes et al.

⁷⁷ Adedeji Adeniran et al., “Instructional Alignment in Nigeria Using the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 114 (April 2025): 103256, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2025.103256>.

⁷⁸ Saskia Van Viegen, Nancy Bell, and Noah Khan, “Creating a Multilingual Assessment Ecology in the Classroom,” *TESOL Quarterly*, February 4, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.70071>.

Third, teacher development should operate as a professional infrastructure through coaching, collaborative planning, classroom experimentation, observation, feedback, and relevant materials. A systematic review found positive effects of coaching on teachers' knowledge and instructional competencies and emphasised that professional learning should be situated in actual teaching contexts. However, most of the included evidence came from the United States, making local testing important before its wider adoption in Nigeria.⁷⁹ Evaluation should also examine workload, class size, planning time, remuneration, and supervision so that reform does not assign responsibility without changing the restrictive conditions. Evidence from Finland associates general and emotional workload with turnover intentions and indicates that educators' participation in planning and decision-making may mediate these relationships, supporting the evaluation of organisational conditions rather than attributing implementation difficulties solely to individual teachers.⁸⁰

Fourth, equity and participation should be designed from the beginning. Areas with the weakest provision need targeted support because aggregate indicators can conceal disparities associated with geography, income, disability, language, and the provider type.⁸¹ Formal channels are also needed through which educators, families, communities, and—through age-appropriate means—children can scrutinise provisions and shape decisions. Recent ECEC research conceptualises participation as a culture in which community members can be heard, initiate action, express their views, and influence practice.⁸² Participation supplements public responsibility; it does not substitute adequately financed, equitably provided, and publicly accountable ECCE.⁸³

5. Limitations and Research Priorities

Future research should test the proposed mechanisms through multistate longitudinal and implementation studies linking finance, supervision, materials, and professional support to implementation outcomes, classroom practices, and child outcomes. Implementation research continues to lack sufficient hypothesis-based tests that connect implementation strategies, implementation outcomes, and downstream service or individual outcomes. In ECE, educator readiness and investment in professional development have been associated with intervention fidelity, although these relationships cannot be assumed to operate identically in Nigeria.⁸⁴ Trials should report allocation procedures, baseline characteristics,

⁷⁹ Weipeng Yang et al., "Coaching Early Childhood Teachers: A Systematic Review of Its Effects on Teacher Instruction and Child Development," *Review of Education* 10, no. 1 (April 4, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3343>.

⁸⁰ C. Heilala et al., "Work Demands and Work Resources: Testing a Model of Factors Predicting Turnover Intentions in Early Childhood Education," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 50, no. 3 (March 24, 2022): 399–409, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01166-5>.

⁸¹ Raikes et al., "Global Tracking of Access and Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education."

⁸² Elina Weckström, Anna-Leena Lastikka, and Sari Havu-Nuutinen, "Constructing a Socially Sustainable Culture of Participation for Caring and Inclusive ECEC," *Sustainability* 14, no. 7 (March 26, 2022): 3945, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14073945>.

⁸³ UNESCO and UNICEF, *Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education: The Right to a Strong Foundation*.

⁸⁴ Dorthe Bleses et al., "Early Childhood Educator's Implementation Readiness and Intervention Fidelity: Findings from a Person-Centered Study," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 63 (2023): 156–68, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.12.006>; Enola K. Proctor et al., "Ten Years of Implementation Outcomes Research: A Scoping Review," *Implementation Science* 18, no. 1 (July 25, 2023): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-023-01286-z>.

attrition, missing-data assumptions and handling, fidelity, and costs, and should account for clustering in their design and analysis.⁸⁵ Cost analyses should transparently specify the resources included, valuation methods, analytical perspective, time horizon, and uncertainty.⁸⁶ Outcomes should be developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically validated for the intended populations, given the limited availability of adequately validated early childhood measures in low- and middle-income countries.⁸⁷ Analyses should also be disaggregated across prespecified equity dimensions, where sampling and statistical power permit.⁸⁸

The corpus was rapidly emerging and uneven: 19 of the 29 sources appeared in 2025–2026, much of the evidence was regional or conceptual, and the topic and geographical coverage remained incomplete. Seven sources were available only through abstracts and metadata, limiting the appraisal of their methods and evidential strength. English-only searching, differences in database coverage and functionality, the restricted reproducibility of Google Scholar searching, and missing platform-level retrieval totals further constrained the replication. Recent metaresearch indicates that fully reproducible database searches remain uncommon, even among published systematic reviews, reinforcing the need to interpret the retrieval boundaries of the present review cautiously.⁸⁹

This review could not estimate the magnitude of national provision or quality gaps, establish causal relationships among system components, or identify optimal policy packages. Instead, it offers a testable proposition: policy commitments should be examined through the material, institutional, professional, and participatory conditions that enact and distribute curricula.

CONCLUSION

Across the represented settings, evidence indicates that Nigeria's commitment to equitable and quality ECE was enacted partially and unevenly. Formal recognition was not consistently accompanied by adequate provisions, financing, qualified personnel, materials, infrastructure, supervision, inclusion, safeguarding, or professional support. This review does not provide a national compliance estimate or quantify the national provision and quality

⁸⁵ Sally Hopewell et al., "CONSORT 2025 Statement: Updated Guideline for Reporting Randomised Trials," *BMJ* 389 (April 14, 2025): e081123, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2024-081123>; Siqi Wu, Richard M Jacques, and Stephen J Walters, "How Is Missing Data Handled in Cluster Randomized Controlled Trials? A Review of Trials Published in the NIHR Journals Library 1997–2024," *Clinical Trials* 23, no. 1 (February 4, 2026): 75–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17407745251378117>.

⁸⁶ Don Husereau et al., "Consolidated Health Economic Evaluation Reporting Standards 2022 (CHEERS 2022) Statement: Updated Reporting Guidance for Health Economic Evaluations," *BMJ* 376 (January 11, 2022): e067975, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2021-067975>.

⁸⁷ Bernardita Munoz-Chereau et al., "Measuring Early Child Development across Low and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 19, no. 4 (December 14, 2021): 443–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X211020031>.

⁸⁸ Z. W. Taylor et al., "Building Equitable Education Datasets for Developing Nations: Equity-Minded Data Collection and Disaggregation to Improve Schools, Districts, and Communities," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 4 (March 28, 2023): 348, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040348>.

⁸⁹ Melissa L. Rethlefsen et al., "Systematic Review Search Strategies Are Poorly Reported and Not Reproducible: A Cross-Sectional Metaresearch Study," *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology* 166 (February 2024): 111229, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2023.111229>.

gaps. Rather, it offers a quality-sensitive synthesis of predominantly regional evidence, indicating that policy fulfilment depends on alignment among governance, resources, workforce capacity, curriculum, assessment, and local implementation. Given the rapidly emerging and uneven evidence base, including seven sources assessed only through abstracts and metadata, these conclusions are provisional.

The reported epistemic, curricular, linguistic, pedagogical, assessment, workforce, equity, and participation gaps are all interdependent. Culturally responsive, play-based, and multilingual approaches warrant local adaptation. However, the available studies do not establish their general effectiveness or identify optimal reform packages. However, developmentally and linguistically validated child assessments remain scarce. Policy renewal should therefore be approached as a set of priorities for piloting and evaluation: costed and accountable implementation, sustained professional support, coordinated development of curriculum, language, pedagogy, and assessment, targeted equity measures, and formal channels for public participation. Public institutions retain the primary responsibility for equitable provision, while participation by educators, families, communities, and children should strengthen responsiveness and accountability, rather than transferring financial or organisational responsibility to them.

The proposed ECE Educational Social Contract Framework organises these dependencies and advances a testable proposition: policy commitments should be examined through the material, institutional, professional, and participatory conditions that enact and distribute curricula. It does not establish the direction, magnitude, or stability of these relationships, validate a causal reform model, or prescribe proven national interventions. Multistate longitudinal and implementation studies are required to test how financing, supervision, materials, and professional support shape classroom practice, equitable participation, and child outcomes.

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