



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA AND THE UK

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History:

Received 16 August 2023
Revised 19 September 2023
Accepted 22 October 2023
Available online 07 November 2023

ABSTRACT

This research paper comprehensively analyzes early childhood education (ECE) policies in Nigeria and the United Kingdom (UK). It explores the historical context, policy frameworks, implementation strategies, challenges, outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for these two diverse contexts. Both countries are committed to providing accessible, high-quality, and inclusive ECE experiences for young children. Nigeria is addressing disparities in access and striving for cultural sensitivity, while the UK maintains a flexible framework emphasizing inclusivity and quality. Challenges include infrastructure gaps in Nigeria and workforce retention issues in the UK. Lessons learned underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity, professional development, inclusivity, parental engagement, and robust monitoring. Recommendations encourage both countries to invest in teacher training, prioritize equity, and engage parents and communities effectively. By addressing these challenges and building on their successes, Nigeria and the UK can enhance the outcomes and impact of their ECE policies, fostering brighter futures for their youngest citizens and contributing to more equitable and inclusive societies.

KEYWORDS

early childhood education, ECE policies, Nigeria, United Kingdom, comparative analysis, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, parental engagement, professional development, equity

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) stands as a foundational pillar in the development of any society (Alhosani, 2022). The formative years of a child's life are a critical period during which their cognitive, social, and emotional foundations are established. The significance of ECE in nurturing well-rounded, capable citizens cannot be overstated, making it a focal point of educational policies worldwide. This research paper embarks on a journey to explore and critically analyze the ECE policies of two distinct nations, Nigeria and the United Kingdom (UK). We seek to add to the ongoing discussion on improving early childhood education by examining the historical development, policy frameworks, implementation approaches, difficulties, and results of ECE initiatives in these nations.

Early childhood education is universally recognized as essential to a nation's educational landscape. It is the bedrock upon which future educational achievements and societal contributions are built. High-quality ECE programs have been shown to improve school readiness, reduce achievement gaps, and enhance long-term outcomes in terms of employability, health, and social integration (Ahmad and Hamm, 2013; Gormley et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2019). Recognizing the transformative power of early education, governments across the world have adopted ECE policies to ensure equitable access to quality early learning experiences (Gupta, 2018; Moss, 2014b).

However, the approach to ECE policies and their implementation varies widely from one country to another (Connors and Friedman-Krauss, 2017; Zhu, 2009). Factors such as historical context, cultural influences, available resources, and societal priorities shape the design and execution of ECE initiatives. Nigeria and the United Kingdom, although distinct in their backgrounds and educational systems, share the common goal of providing effective ECE programs to their youngest citizens. Yet, their paths to achieve this goal are as diverse as their histories and socio-economic contexts.

To guide our exploration of early childhood education policies in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, this research paper will address the following research questions:

- What historical contexts have shaped the development of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK?
- What are ECE policies' overarching goals and objectives in Nigeria and the UK, and how do they align with international ECE standards?
- What strategies have been employed in implementing ECE policies in both countries and what challenges have arisen during the process?
- What measurable outcomes and impacts can be observed as a result of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK, and how do these outcomes

Quick Response Code



Access this article online

Website:
www.educationsustainability.com

DOI:
10.26480/ess.01.2024.01.11

contribute to broader societal development?

- v. What lessons can be drawn from the experiences of Nigeria and the UK in formulating and implementing ECE policies, and what recommendations can be made for enhancing ECE systems in these nations and beyond?

To address these research questions and provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK, this study employs a mixed-methods research approach such as literature review, documentary analysis and case studies. This research paper offers a comparative perspective on Nigeria's and UK ECE policies. Both nations have invested substantially in early childhood education, recognizing its potential to drive positive societal change. However, the differences in their approaches, outcomes, and challenges present a compelling opportunity for in-depth analysis. Understanding these variations can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers not only in Nigeria and the UK but also in other countries grappling with similar questions about how to optimize ECE systems.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA AND THE UK

To fully grasp the evolution of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK, examining the historical contexts that have shaped their development is imperative. Historical forces, societal changes, and educational ideologies have all played significant roles in molding the ECE landscapes of these two nations. This section of the research paper explores the historical underpinnings of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK, tracing their roots, pivotal moments, and influential factors that have laid the foundation for their current ECE systems.

2.1 Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

2.1.1 Pre-Colonial Era

Early childhood education in Nigeria has deep historical roots, dating back to pre-colonial times (Hogendorn et al., 1975). Traditional African societies strongly emphasized communal child-rearing, where children learned essential life skills, values, and cultural practices within their communities (Mbebeb, 2009). Elders, family members, and village leaders played pivotal roles in educating and socializing the younger generation. These indigenous systems of ECE were grounded in the cultural and societal norms of various Nigerian ethnic groups. While the specific practices and traditions varied across regions, they shared a common commitment to instilling values, knowledge, and social cohesion within the community. The curricula of these early forms of education encompassed practical skills such as farming, hunting, craftsmanship, and moral teachings that were passed down through generations (Gray, 2011).

2.1.2 Colonial Influence

The arrival of European colonial powers in Nigeria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries introduced significant changes to the educational landscape (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2013). British colonial authorities established formal education systems, which initially focused on providing rudimentary literacy and numeracy skills to a select few, primarily the children of the elite and those who assisted the colonial administration (Bude, 1983; Clignet and Foster, 1964). While providing limited access to a formalized curriculum, this colonial education largely ignored the indigenous communities' rich traditional knowledge and practices (Battiste, 2005; Khumalo and Baloyi, 2017).

The colonial period marked a significant shift in the perception of education in Nigeria. Education became a means of upward mobility and access to opportunities, albeit for a privileged few. This period laid the foundation for duality in the Nigerian education system, where Western-style formal education coexisted with traditional informal education practices.

2.1.3 Post-Independence Era

Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, marking a new era in the nation's history (Amah, 2023). The post-independence period saw the emergence of national consciousness and a renewed focus on educational development. The government recognized the need to bridge the educational disparities created during the colonial era. It embarked on efforts to expand access to education at all levels, including ECE.

In 1973, Nigeria took a significant step by introducing the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program, which aimed to provide all Nigerian

children with free and compulsory primary education. While UPE primarily focused on primary education, it indirectly impacted ECE by increasing school enrollment rates and promoting awareness of the importance of early learning (Oyelade and Abolade, 2018; Yamma and Yahuzalzum, 2018).

2.1.4 Contemporary Challenges

Despite these historical developments, Nigeria faces numerous challenges in its ECE system. Access to quality ECE programs remains uneven, with rural areas and marginalized communities experiencing limited opportunities for early learning. Infrastructure deficits, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of standardized curricula contribute to disparities in ECE provision (Briggs et al., 2012).

Furthermore, cultural and linguistic diversity within Nigeria poses challenges to ECE policy development and implementation. Nigeria is home to over 500 ethnic groups and languages, making it essential to adapt ECE policies to the diverse cultural contexts across the nation (Ibekwe, 2006; Zajda, 2021).

2.2 Early Childhood Education in the UK

2.2.1 Pre-Industrial Revolution

Early childhood education in the United Kingdom has a long history dating back to the pre-industrial era. In the centuries leading up to the Industrial Revolution, children in the UK received informal education within their families and local communities (Humphries, 2010). Parents and apprenticeship-based learning played crucial roles in transmitting practical skills and knowledge to the younger generation. Religious organizations also played a pivotal role in early education, establishing charity schools and Sunday schools that provided basic literacy and moral education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.2.2 Industrial Revolution and Educational Reforms

In the 18th and 19th centuries, charitable organizations and private individuals often provided early childhood education in the UK. The Industrial Revolution brought about a shift in societal structures, with more parents working in factories, leading to the emergence of early forms of childcare services (Gillard, 2011; Plumb, 1975). However, these early provisions were often unregulated and of varying quality. The 19th century also saw the emergence of influential educational thinkers such as Friedrich Fröbel and Maria Montessori, whose ideas on child-centered education had a lasting impact on ECE practices (Armstrong, 2006; Gray and MacBlain, 2015). Fröbel's kindergarten movement, which emphasized play-based learning and nurturing a child's natural curiosity, gained popularity in the UK (Kragh-Müller, 2017).

The Elementary Education Act of 1870, commonly known as the Forster Act, marked a significant milestone in the development of ECE in the UK (Burger, 2014). This legislation made elementary education compulsory and led to the establishment of elementary schools, many of which included ECE components. The Act laid the foundation for state involvement in education. The early 20th century witnessed the creation of nursery schools, often associated with the Froebel movement, which provided a more structured approach to ECE. These nursery schools aimed to prepare children for primary education while promoting their social and emotional development (Baader, 2015).

The post-World War II era brought about increased attention to ECE in the UK (Wendt, 2022). The Education Act of 1944 introduced a comprehensive educational system and formalized the role of local education authorities in providing education services, including ECE (Sollars, 2018). Subsequently, the Plowden Report in 1967 emphasized the importance of play-based learning and child-centered education in ECE (Yelland, 2010). The late 20th century and early 21st century witnessed the expansion of ECE services in the UK, with the introduction of government-funded nursery places for three- and four-year-olds and later for disadvantaged two-year-olds (West, 2020). The Sure Start program, launched in 1998, aimed to provide comprehensive support to children and families in disadvantaged areas (Faulkner and Coates, 2013).

The ECE landscape in the UK has continued to evolve with a focus on improving quality, accessibility, and outcomes for young children. Policy developments have included the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008, which sets standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to five years old (Roberts-Holmes, 2012). The government has also introduced initiatives to improve the qualifications and training of ECE practitioners.

2.3 Comparative Historical Overview

Comparing the historical contexts of ECE in Nigeria and the UK reveals both commonalities and differences. In both countries, the early history of ECE was characterized by informal and often community-based education. Colonial influences, primarily from the British Empire, played a pivotal role in shaping the formal education systems and introducing Western educational practices.

Nigeria and the UK both experienced significant policy shifts in the mid-to-late 20th century that recognized the importance of ECE. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education of 1977 marked the first official acknowledgment of ECE (Yisa et al., 2017), while in the UK, the Elementary Education Act of 1870 laid the groundwork for state involvement in education, including ECE (Meehan and Meehan, 2019).

However, disparities exist in the trajectories of ECE development in the two countries. Nigeria's journey toward prioritizing ECE has been characterized by periods of limited attention and slow progress, with more significant efforts emerging in the 21st century. In contrast, the UK has a longer history of ECE provision and policy development, with a series of reforms and initiatives designed to enhance the quality and accessibility of early childhood education.

The historical context of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK sets the stage for examining their contemporary policy frameworks, implementation strategies, challenges, and outcomes. It underscores the importance of understanding the unique paths each country has taken in shaping its ECE system and provides valuable insights into the factors influencing their respective approaches to early childhood education.

3. POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOALS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND THE UK

ECE's policy framework and goals play a pivotal role in shaping the direction and impact of ECE initiatives in any nation. Policies provide the overarching structure that guides the development, implementation, and evaluation of ECE programs. In Nigeria and the UK, the formulation and implementation of ECE policies are influenced by historical, cultural, economic, and educational factors. This section of the research paper examines the policy frameworks and goals of ECE in Nigeria and the UK, shedding light on the objectives, priorities, and strategies that drive these policies.

3.1 Nigerian ECE Policy Framework

The development of ECE policies in Nigeria has evolved over the years, with a growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education in shaping the future of the nation. Nigeria's policy framework for ECE is primarily guided by the National Policy on Education (NPE), which provides a broad framework for educational development in the country (Oyedeji, 2015).

3.1.1 The National Policy on Education (NPE)

The NPE of 1977 marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's approach to education, including early childhood education. This policy document, later revised in 1981, 1998, and 2004, outlines the goals and principles of education in Nigeria, including ECE. Key features of the NPE related to ECE include (Garuba, 2003; Ogunyemi, 2010; Ogunyinka et al., 2015):

- The NPE acknowledges the significance of ECE in providing the foundation for lifelong learning and development. It emphasizes the need to promote young children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.
- The NPE underscores the importance of ensuring universal access to ECE services, particularly for children aged 0 to 5 years.
- The NPE emphasizes the importance of maintaining high standards of quality in ECE programs, including teacher training, curriculum development, and infrastructure.
- The NPE integrates ECE into the first six years of basic education, emphasizing its role as a precursor to primary education.
- The policy encourages the active involvement of parents and communities in ECE programs, recognizing their crucial role in supporting early learning.
- The NPE advocates for inclusive education, promoting the inclusion

of children with disabilities in ECE programs.

3.1.2 The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act

Building upon the principles outlined in the NPE, Nigeria enacted the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act in 2004. The UBE Act aims to provide free and compulsory basic education for all Nigerian children for a duration of nine years, with the first six years dedicated to ECE and primary education. Key provisions of the UBE Act include (Aja et al., 2018; Ajuwon, 2008; Bello et al., 2017; Jaiyeoba, 2009):

- The UBE Act makes the first six years of basic education, which includes ECE, compulsory and free for all Nigerian children.
- The Act mandates the establishment of ECE centers, especially in underserved areas, to ensure access to quality early education.
- The Act emphasizes the training and certification of ECE teachers to improve the quality of instruction.
- It encourages the development of appropriate ECE curricula that align with international best practices.
- The UBE Act emphasizes the need to address gender disparities and promote the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged children in ECE programs.

3.1.3 The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)

In recognition of the unique needs of young children, Nigeria developed the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in 2007. The ECCD policy focuses specifically on children from birth to eight years old. It provides a comprehensive framework for their holistic development. Key components of the ECCD policy include (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Alabi and Ijaiya, 2014; Harwood et al., 2013; Salami, 2014):

- The ECCD policy emphasizes an integrated approach that encompasses health, nutrition, education, and social development to provide a holistic foundation for children's growth.
- It encourages collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, communities, and parents in implementing ECCD programs.
- The policy promotes quality improvement measures, including training and professional development for ECCD practitioners.
- The ECCD policy underscores the importance of inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches to ensure all children have equal access to ECCD services.
- It emphasizes the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of ECCD programs.

3.1.4 Challenges and Implementation Gaps

While Nigeria has made significant strides in formulating ECE policies, challenges and implementation gaps persist. For instance, many ECE centers lack appropriate facilities, materials, and resources, hindering the delivery of quality early education. There is a shortage of qualified ECE teachers, resulting in a need for increased training and professional development. Disparities in access to ECE services persist, with urban areas often having better access than rural regions. Adequate funding for ECE programs remains a challenge, affecting the quality and sustainability of services. There is a need for improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact and outcomes of ECE policies (Jacob and Olajumoke, 2021).

3.2 UK ECE Policy Framework

In the United Kingdom, early childhood education policies have evolved over time to address changing societal needs and educational philosophies. The UK's approach to ECE is characterized by a commitment to providing high-quality, accessible, and inclusive early education and care.

3.2.1 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The cornerstone of ECE policy in the UK is the EYFS. Introduced in 2008, the EYFS is a comprehensive framework that sets standards for learning,

development, and care for children from birth to five years old. Key elements of the EYFS framework include (Ang, 2010; Roberts-Holmes, 2012; Wood, 2020):

- The EYFS outlines seven areas of learning and development: communication and language, physical development, personal, social, and emotional development, literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design.
- It provides curriculum guidance to ECE practitioners, emphasizing a play-based approach to learning and the importance of child-initiated activities.
- The EYFS includes a framework for assessing children's progress and development, with a focus on observation and ongoing assessment.
- It promotes inclusive practices and recognizes the importance of meeting the diverse needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- The EYFS highlights the role of parents as partners in their child's learning and development.

3.2.2 Government-Funded Early Education Places

The UK government has introduced measures to improve access to ECE, including government-funded early education places. These initiatives aim to provide free or subsidized ECE to eligible children, typically aged three to four years old. The main programs include (Johnson, 2017; Moss, 2014a; Scourfield et al., 2021; Stewart, 2022):

- **Early Years Free Entitlement:** This program provides 15 hours of free ECE per week to all three- and four-year-olds in England, with some children eligible for 30 hours of free ECE if their parents meet certain criteria.
- **Preschool Education in Scotland:** In Scotland, all three- and four-year-olds are entitled to 600 hours of free ECE per year.
- **Flying Start in Wales:** The Flying Start program offers free part-time childcare for eligible two- to three-year-olds and additional support for children in disadvantaged areas.
- **Preschool Education in Northern Ireland:** Northern Ireland provides free part-time preschool education for children in their final year before starting primary school.

3.2.3 Teacher Qualifications and Training

The UK strongly emphasizes the qualifications and training of early childhood educators. ECE practitioners are encouraged to attain relevant qualifications to ensure high-quality provision. Key aspects of teacher qualifications and training include (Brooks and Murray, 2018; Moyles, 2014):

- **Qualified Teacher Status (QTS):** Many ECE practitioners in the UK hold QTS, demonstrating their competence in teaching young children.
- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD):** ECE practitioners are encouraged to engage in CPD to stay updated with best practices and developments in the field.
- **Quality Improvement:** The government supports initiatives that aim to enhance the quality of ECE provision, including the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in England.

3.2.4 Challenges and Ongoing Reforms

Despite the strengths of the UK's ECE policy framework, challenges and ongoing reforms persist:

- **Funding Pressures:** The funding of ECE programs has been a subject of debate, with concerns about sustainability and funding cuts affecting the sector.
- **Workforce Retention:** Ensuring the retention of qualified and experienced ECE practitioners remains a challenge, especially in the face of budget constraints.

- **Inequality:** Addressing inequalities in access to high-quality ECE services, particularly for disadvantaged children, continues to be a priority.
- **Transition to Primary Education:** Ensuring a smooth transition from ECE to primary education is an ongoing focus, with reforms aimed at improving alignment and continuity in children's educational experiences.

3.3 Comparative Analysis of Goals

Comparing the goals of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK reveals both commonalities and distinctions in their objectives and priorities. At the core of both countries' policies is the recognition of ECE as a critical period for children's development and learning. Key elements of the comparative analysis of goals include:

3.3.1 Universal Access

Nigeria and the UK aim to provide universal access to ECE services. In Nigeria, the UBE Act aims to make the first six years of basic education compulsory and free for all children, including ECE. Similarly, the UK government has introduced government-funded early education places to ensure access to ECE for eligible children. The focus on universal access reflects a commitment to equity and inclusivity in ECE provision (Ighalo, 2015; Moss, 2014a).

3.3.2 Quality Improvement

Both countries prioritize quality improvement in ECE. Nigeria's ECCD policy emphasizes the need for high-quality services, including teacher training and curriculum development. In the UK, the EYFS framework sets standards for learning and development, promoting a play-based approach and assessment of children's progress. The emphasis on quality assurance underscores the importance of providing children with a rich and nurturing learning environment (Adeleke; Nicholson, 2019).

3.3.3 Inclusive Education

Inclusivity is a shared goal in Nigeria and the UK. Nigeria's ECCD policy highlights the importance of inclusive practices, ensuring that children with disabilities are integrated into ECE programs. Similarly, the UK's EYFS framework promotes inclusive practice and recognizes the importance of meeting the diverse needs of all children. Both countries emphasize the value of diversity and the inclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged children (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

3.3.4 Parental and Community Engagement

Both Nigeria and the UK acknowledge the role of parents and communities in supporting ECE. Nigeria's NPE emphasizes the active involvement of parents and communities in ECE programs, recognizing their essential role in early learning. In the UK, the EYFS framework highlights parents as partners in their child's education and development, fostering collaboration between families and ECE providers. The emphasis on parental and community engagement reflects a shared commitment to holistic child development (Ang, 2010).

3.3.5 Training and Professional Development

Both countries prioritize the qualifications and training of ECE practitioners. Nigeria's UBE Act emphasizes the training and certification of ECE teachers to enhance the quality of instruction. In the UK, ECE practitioners are encouraged to attain relevant qualifications and engage in continuing professional development. The focus on teacher qualifications and training underscores the importance of a skilled workforce in delivering high-quality ECE services (Ighalo, 2015; Oyelade and Abolade, 2018).

3.3.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to both countries' ECE policies. Nigeria's ECCD policy emphasizes the need for a monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of ECCD programs. In the UK, the EYFS framework includes provisions for assessing children's progress and development. Both countries recognize the importance of evidence-based decision-making and accountability in ECE (Broadhead, 2006). To summarize, early childhood education policy framework and goals in Nigeria and the United Kingdom reflect their commitment to providing quality ECE experiences for young children. While both countries share common goals, including universal access, quality improvement, inclusivity, parental engagement, teacher training, and

monitoring and evaluation, they also face distinct challenges and opportunities.

Nigeria has made significant progress in recent years, with the introduction of the UBE Act and the ECCD policy, emphasizing the importance of ECE as the foundation of education. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and funding constraints persist, necessitating ongoing policy reforms and implementation efforts. The United Kingdom has a long history of ECE provision, with the EYFS framework at its core, promoting high-quality, inclusive, and child-centered learning. Challenges related to funding, workforce retention, inequality, and transition to primary education require continued attention and reform.

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND THE UK

The successful implementation of ECE policies is vital to achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the policy frameworks of any nation. In both Nigeria and the UK, ECE policies outline a vision for providing high-quality, accessible, and inclusive early education experiences for young children. However, translating policy goals into effective practice requires a well-planned and coordinated set of implementation strategies. This section of the research paper delves into the implementation strategies employed in Nigeria and the UK, highlighting key approaches, challenges, and successes in the delivery of ECE services.

4.1 Nigerian ECE Implementation Strategies

Nigeria has made significant strides in the formulation of ECE policies, as evidenced by the National Policy on Education (NPE), the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, and the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). However, effective implementation remains a challenge, particularly in light of the country's diverse cultural and geographic landscape.

4.1.1 Expansion of ECE Centers

One of the primary strategies for implementing ECE policies in Nigeria has been the expansion of ECE centers across the country. The UBE Act mandates the establishment of ECE centers, especially in underserved areas, to ensure access to quality early education. These centers are designed to provide age-appropriate learning environments for young children, fostering their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Despite this strategy, challenges persist in the form of inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of classrooms, and a lack of resources. Many ECE centers in rural areas lack basic amenities, making providing a conducive learning environment difficult. Additionally, urban areas often benefit from better-funded and equipped centers, exacerbating disparities in access to quality ECE services (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016; Owojori and Gbenga-Akanmu, 2021).

4.1.2 Teacher Training and Professional Development

Teacher training and professional development are crucial components of ECE implementation in Nigeria. The UBE Act emphasizes the training and certification of ECE teachers to improve the quality of instruction. Training programs aim to equip educators with the skills and knowledge needed to facilitate effective early learning experiences.

Teacher training initiatives, however, face challenges related to access and quality. Many ECE teachers in Nigeria lack formal training, and training opportunities can be limited, particularly in remote and rural areas. Professional development programs need to be more accessible and tailored to the unique needs of ECE practitioners (Obiweluzor, 2015).

4.1.3 Curriculum Development and Adaptation

ECE curriculum development and adaptation have been key strategies in Nigeria's efforts to align ECE with international best practices. The National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) strongly emphasizes developing appropriate ECE curricula that promote holistic child development.

The challenge lies in adapting curricula to meet Nigerian children's diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Nigeria's multicultural society necessitates culturally sensitive and contextually relevant curricula that respect and celebrate the country's rich diversity. Striking a balance between a standardized curriculum and localized adaptations remains an ongoing challenge (Sani et al., 2017).

4.1.4 Parental and Community Engagement

Parental and community engagement is considered integral to ECE implementation in Nigeria. The ECCD policy underscores the importance of involving parents and communities in ECE programs, recognizing their essential role in early learning. Engaging parents and communities helps create a supportive and nurturing environment for young children. Challenges in this regard include low levels of parental education and awareness about the importance of ECE. Many parents may not be fully informed about their role in supporting their child's learning or may face barriers to participation due to socio-economic factors.

4.1.5 Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns

Advocacy and awareness campaigns have played a role in ECE implementation in Nigeria. These campaigns aim to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood education and the rights of young children to quality education. Advocacy efforts also seek to mobilize support from policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public. Challenges in advocacy and awareness campaigns include reaching remote and underserved communities, addressing cultural barriers, and securing sustained funding for such initiatives. Effective communication strategies tailored to different regions and cultural contexts are necessary to overcome these challenges (Ogunyemi and Ragpot, 2015).

4.1.6 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

The implementation of ECE policies in Nigeria relies on monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of ECE programs. The ECCD policy emphasizes the need for a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress and outcomes. Challenges include limited data collection and analysis capacity and the need for standardized assessment tools that align with the goals of ECE policies. Effective monitoring and evaluation require investment in data infrastructure and personnel training.

4.2 UK ECE Implementation Strategies

The United Kingdom has a well-established tradition of ECE provision, underpinned by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. Implementation strategies in the UK focus on delivering high-quality early education experiences, promoting inclusivity, and engaging parents and communities.

4.2.1 EYFS Framework and Practice

EYFS framework is central to ECE implementation in the UK, which sets standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to five years old. EYFS is designed to guide ECE practitioners in creating rich and stimulating learning environments that are responsive to children's individual needs and interests. Practitioners in the UK are encouraged to implement the EYFS framework through play-based learning, observation, and assessment. The framework provides a flexible and child-centered approach that allows educators to adapt their practices to meet the unique needs of each child (Drake, 2013).

4.2.2 Government-Funded Early Education Places

A key strategy in the UK's ECE implementation is the provision of government-funded early education places. Programs such as the Early Years Free Entitlement in England and similar initiatives in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland aim to improve access to high-quality ECE for eligible children, typically aged three to four years old. These programs provide parents with free or subsidized ECE options, reducing the financial barriers to accessing quality early education. The availability of government-funded places has significantly increased the number of children benefiting from ECE services in the UK (Hayes, O'Toole, and Halpenny, 2022).

4.2.3 Workforce Development and Continuous Improvement

The UK strongly emphasizes workforce development and continuous improvement in ECE. ECE practitioners are encouraged to attain relevant qualifications, with many holding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS). Additionally, courses, training, and networking opportunities support ongoing professional development. Continuous improvement is promoted through initiatives such as the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) in England. These organizations provide resources, guidance, and support to ECE practitioners and settings, with a focus on enhancing the quality of provision (Hudson et al., 2022).

4.2.4 Inclusivity and Support for Vulnerable Children

The UK is committed to promoting inclusivity in ECE settings. EYFS emphasizes the importance of meeting the diverse needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). ECE practitioners are trained to provide individualized support and adapt their practices to accommodate the needs of children with SEND. Additionally, programs such as Flying Start in Wales and other targeted interventions in the UK aim to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children. These initiatives provide additional resources and support to children and families in areas with higher levels of deprivation (O'Keefe, 2017; Wilson, 2003).

4.2.5 Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is considered a cornerstone of ECE implementation in the UK. The EYFS framework highlights parents as partners in their child's education and development. ECE practitioners are encouraged to build strong relationships with parents, involving them in their child's learning journey and sharing information about progress and development (Lindon, 2012). Parents are provided with guidance and resources to support their child's learning at home. Parental engagement helps create a seamless transition between home and ECE settings, fostering a holistic approach to child development (Traunter, 2017).

4.2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

The UK places a strong emphasis on monitoring and evaluation in ECE. Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services, and Skills) inspects and regulates ECE settings in England. Similar agencies exist in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Regular inspections ensure that ECE settings meet the standards outlined in the EYFS framework and provide high-quality education and care. Inspection reports are publicly available and provide transparency about the quality of provision in ECE settings (Castro-Kemp and Melander, 2023; Gambaro et al., 2015).

4.3 Comparative Analysis of Implementation Strategies

Comparing the implementation strategies of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK reveals both similarities and differences in approaches, challenges, and successes.

4.3.1 Expansion of ECE Centers

Both Nigeria and the UK recognize the importance of expanding ECE centers to increase access to early education. However, the challenges faced in each country differ significantly. In Nigeria, the challenges include inadequate infrastructure, classroom shortages, and disparities between urban and rural areas. In contrast, the UK benefits from a well-established network of ECE settings, but funding and workforce retention challenges persist.

4.3.2 Teacher Training and Professional Development

Both countries prioritize teacher training and professional development, recognizing the critical role of skilled educators in delivering quality ECE. Nigeria faces challenges related to the shortage of trained ECE teachers and the need for accessible and tailored training programs. In the UK, the focus is on maintaining and further enhancing ECE practitioners' qualifications and continuous development.

4.3.3 Curriculum Development and Adaptation

Curriculum development and adaptation are central to ECE implementation in both Nigeria and the UK. Nigeria emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive and contextually relevant curricula to meet the diverse needs of its multicultural society. The UK focuses on the implementation of the EYFS framework, which promotes a flexible and child-centered approach to curriculum delivery.

4.3.4 Parental and Community Engagement

Both countries recognize the importance of parental and community engagement in supporting ECE. In Nigeria, challenges include low levels of parental education and awareness, while in the UK, efforts are made to build strong partnerships between ECE practitioners and parents. Strategies differ but aim to foster collaboration between families and educators.

4.3.5 Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns

Advocacy and awareness campaigns are strategies employed in both Nigeria and the UK to raise awareness about the importance of ECE.

Challenges in Nigeria include reaching remote communities and addressing cultural barriers, while in the UK, campaigns focus on mobilizing support from policymakers and the public. Effective communication tailored to local contexts is crucial in both countries.

4.2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluation are integral to ECE implementation in both Nigeria and the UK. Challenges include limited data collection and analysis capacity in Nigeria and the need for standardized assessment tools. In the UK, regular inspections ensure that ECE settings meet quality standards, providing transparency about provision quality.

5. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES

Early childhood education (ECE) is a critical stage in a child's development, laying the foundation for future learning and success. While both Nigeria and the UK have made significant strides in formulating ECE policies, they also face a range of challenges and barriers that impact the effective implementation of these policies. This section of the research paper explores the multifaceted challenges and barriers encountered in the provision of ECE services in Nigeria and the UK, shedding light on the complexities of early childhood education on a global scale.

5.1 Challenges and Barriers to Nigerian ECE Policies

Nigeria's efforts to implement ECE policies are impeded by several challenges and barriers, which hinder the realization of its goals and objectives in early childhood education.

5.1.1 Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources

One of the primary challenges in Nigeria's ECE sector is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources. Many ECE centers, especially those in rural and underserved areas, suffer from inadequate facilities, lack of age-appropriate learning materials, and poor sanitation facilities. Insufficient funding has resulted in a significant infrastructure gap, hindering the provision of quality early education experiences (Folorunsho and Palaiologou, 2019; Hayab et al., 2023).

5.1.2 Teacher Shortages and Qualifications

A shortage of trained ECE teachers is a critical barrier to the effective implementation of ECE policies in Nigeria. The demand for qualified ECE educators far exceeds the supply, leading to an overreliance on untrained personnel. The inadequate training infrastructure and limited opportunities for professional development in the ECE sector exacerbate this shortage (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016).

5.1.3 Disparities in Access

Disparities in access to ECE services persist in Nigeria, with significant gaps between urban and rural areas. Urban centers often have better access to ECE centers with better resources, while rural communities face limited access to quality early education. These disparities contribute to educational inequalities, with children in rural areas often having reduced opportunities for ECE (Agupusi, 2019).

5.1.4 Socio-economic Inequities

Socio-economic inequities play a role in the provision of ECE services in Nigeria. Families with lower incomes may struggle to access quality ECE programs, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds face barriers to participation. This inequity in access perpetuates disparities in educational outcomes and contributes to the cycle of poverty (Agupusi, 2019).

5.1.5 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Nigeria's rich cultural and linguistic diversity poses challenges in implementing standardized ECE curricula. The country is home to hundreds of ethnic groups and languages, so adapting curricula to local contexts is essential. Striking a balance between a standardized curriculum and localized adaptations that respect cultural diversity remains a significant challenge (Ogunyemi and Ragpot, 2015).

5.1.6 Funding Constraints

Funding constraints are a common challenge in Nigeria's ECE sector. Adequate financial resources are essential to provide quality early education experiences, including teacher salaries, infrastructure improvement, and the procurement of learning materials. Inadequate

funding affects ECE programs' overall quality and sustainability (Akinrotimi and Olowe, 2016).

5.2 Challenges and Barriers to UK ECE Policies

Despite the well-established ECE framework in the UK, the sector also faces challenges and barriers that impact the delivery of early education services.

5.2.1 Funding Pressures

Funding pressures are a significant concern in the UK's ECE sector. Maintaining high-quality provision, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and addressing the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) require adequate financial resources. Ongoing debates about funding levels and sustainability impact the sector's ability to provide quality ECE services (White and Friendly, 2020).

5.2.2 Workforce Retention

Workforce retention is a persistent challenge in the UK's ECE sector. High turnover rates among ECE practitioners can disrupt continuity of care and negatively affect children's development. Retaining skilled and experienced educators remains a priority, and strategies to improve job satisfaction and compensation are ongoing (Totenhagen et al., 2016).

5.2.3 Inequalities in Access

Despite efforts to improve access to ECE services, inequalities persist in the UK. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds may face barriers to accessing high-quality early education, resulting in variations in school readiness and long-term outcomes. The challenge lies in addressing these inequalities effectively (Melhuish, 2014).

5.2.4 Curriculum Alignment and Flexibility

While the EYFS framework provides a flexible and child-centered approach to curriculum delivery, challenges exist in achieving alignment and flexibility across all settings. Variations in practice and interpretation can impact the consistency of experiences for children. Striking a balance between flexibility and adherence to standards remains an ongoing challenge (Reid et al., 2019).

5.2.5 Inclusive Practices

Promoting inclusive practices in ECE settings, particularly for children with SEND, presents challenges. Ensuring that all children receive appropriate support and accommodations requires skilled practitioners and resources. The sector must continue to work toward inclusive policies and practices (Zabeli and Gjelaj, 2020).

5.2.6 Parental Engagement

While parental engagement is emphasized in the UK's ECE policies, achieving meaningful partnerships with all families can be challenging. Barriers include language barriers, cultural differences, and varying levels of parental involvement. Strategies to engage hard-to-reach families are essential for fostering collaboration between home and school (Grace et al., 2014).

5.3 Comparative Analysis of Challenges and Barriers

Comparing the challenges and barriers in the ECE policies of Nigeria and the UK reveals both shared and distinct issues.

5.3.1 Infrastructure and Resources

Both Nigeria and the UK face challenges related to infrastructure and resources, albeit to varying degrees. Nigeria struggles with inadequate facilities and resources in many ECE centers, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, the UK benefits from better infrastructure but faces funding pressures that affect the quality of provision.

5.3.2 Teacher Shortages

Teacher shortages are a common challenge in both countries. Nigeria grapples with a severe shortage of trained ECE teachers, while the UK faces issues related to workforce retention and high turnover rates among practitioners.

5.3.3 Disparities in Access

Both Nigeria and the UK grapple with disparities in access to quality ECE services. Nigeria's disparities are largely urban-rural, while the UK faces

challenges related to socio-economic inequalities and variations in access for disadvantaged children.

5.3.4 Funding Constraints

Funding constraints impact both countries' ECE sectors. Nigeria struggles with overall funding inadequacy, while the UK faces pressures to maintain funding levels and address disparities in resource allocation.

5.3.5 Curriculum Adaptation

While both countries recognize the importance of adapting curricula to local contexts, they face distinct challenges. Nigeria's multicultural diversity necessitates culturally sensitive adaptations, whereas the UK focuses on maintaining flexibility and consistency within its framework.

5.3.6 Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is emphasized in both countries, but they encounter different barriers. Nigeria faces issues of parental awareness and education, while the UK grapples with reaching hard-to-reach families and fostering meaningful partnerships.

5.3.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Both countries prioritize monitoring and evaluation, but they have different challenges. Nigeria struggles with limited data infrastructure, while the UK faces issues related to variations in inspection regimes and ensuring consistent quality assurance. In conclusion, the challenges and barriers in implementing early childhood education policies in Nigeria and the United Kingdom underscore the complexities and nuances of providing quality ECE services on a global scale. While these countries share common goals of providing accessible, high-quality, and inclusive early education, they face distinct challenges rooted in their unique contexts.

Nigeria grapples with infrastructure issues, teacher shortages, disparities in access, and funding inadequacy. Its diverse cultural and linguistic landscape compounded these challenges, necessitating localized adaptations of ECE policies. In the United Kingdom, a well-established ECE framework faces challenges related to funding pressures, workforce retention, access inequalities, and curriculum flexibility. The sector also seeks to enhance inclusivity, parental engagement, and accountability mechanisms.

6. OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA AND THE UK

The provision of quality ECE has a profound impact on children's development and future outcomes. In this final section of the research paper, we explore the outcomes and impact of ECE policies in both Nigeria and the UK. Through a comparative analysis, we assess the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their intended goals and the long-term impact on children's lives and society as a whole.

6.1 Outcomes and Impact on Nigerian ECE Policies

Nigeria has made significant strides in formulating ECE policies. However, assessing their outcomes and impact presents unique challenges due to diverse contexts and limited data availability. Nonetheless, several key areas highlight the potential impact of these policies on Nigerian children and society. One of the notable outcomes of Nigerian ECE policies is the increased access to ECE services. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act, along with the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), aims to provide universal access to ECE. Although challenges remain, progress has been made in expanding the number of ECE centers, especially in underserved areas. The impact of improved access includes a higher number of children benefiting from early education, potentially leading to improved school readiness and academic achievement in primary school. Accessible ECE services also contribute to a reduction in educational inequalities and offer a foundation for lifelong learning.

While challenges persist, Nigerian policies emphasize the importance of providing quality early education experiences. Initiatives such as teacher training and curriculum development aim to enhance the quality of instruction. The impact of improved quality can be seen in children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. High-quality ECE is associated with better school readiness, improved language and communication skills, and enhanced social and emotional competence. These outcomes can translate into better educational and life outcomes, including higher educational attainment and reduced rates of delinquency and incarceration.

Nigerian ECE policies emphasize inclusivity, particularly through the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), which highlights the importance of integrating children with disabilities into ECE programs. The impact of inclusive practices can be observed in the improved educational experiences of children with disabilities, who benefit from early intervention and support. Inclusivity and equity in ECE contribute to social cohesion and reduce discrimination and stigma associated with disabilities. These policies can also positively influence attitudes toward diversity and inclusivity in society at large.

Engaging parents and communities is a central goal of Nigerian ECE policies. This outcome strengthens the partnership between families and ECE providers, fostering a supportive learning environment for children. The impact of parental and community engagement can be observed in children's learning outcomes, as involved parents are better positioned to support their child's development at home. Engagement also creates a sense of ownership and investment in the education system, leading to more significant advocacy and support for ECE at the community and national levels.

Nigeria's multicultural and linguistic diversity necessitates cultural sensitivity in ECE policies. Curricula adaptation to local contexts ensures that children receive relevant and meaningful learning experiences. The impact of these adaptations can be seen in children's sense of identity, belonging, and cultural pride. Culturally sensitive ECE policies promote intercultural understanding and tolerance, fostering unity and social cohesion among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. While monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are still evolving in Nigeria, their impact is essential for evidence-based policymaking. Effective monitoring can identify areas of improvement and assess the success of ECE programs. The impact of robust monitoring and evaluation can lead to more targeted interventions, resource allocation, and policy refinement.

6.1 Outcomes and Impact on UK ECE Policies

The United Kingdom has a well-established tradition of ECE provision underpinned by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. The impact of UK ECE policies is evident in various aspects of children's development and societal outcomes. One of the primary outcomes of UK ECE policies is improved school readiness among children. The EYFS framework emphasizes school readiness as a core goal, and children participating in high-quality ECE programs are better prepared for formal schooling. The impact of improved school readiness includes smoother transitions to primary education, reduced adjustment difficulties, and a stronger foundation for future learning. High-quality ECE experiences in the UK contribute to enhanced cognitive and language development among young children. The impact can be observed in children's literacy and numeracy skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving skills. These early gains often translate into better academic achievement in later years.

UK ECE policies prioritize inclusivity and support for vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The impact of these policies is evident in improved outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Early interventions and tailored support help bridge educational gaps and reduce inequalities. Strong emphasis on parental engagement in the UK's ECE policies significantly impacts children's development. Engaged parents are better equipped to support their child's learning at home, leading to improved outcomes. Parental engagement also fosters a sense of partnership between families and educators, promoting holistic child development.

The impact of workforce development and continuous improvement in the UK's ECE sector is evident in the quality of provision. Well-qualified and trained ECE practitioners are crucial in delivering high-quality early education experiences. Continuous improvement efforts, such as those led by the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA), contribute to the sector's ongoing commitment to excellence. Regulatory mechanisms, including inspections by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services, and Skills), significantly impact the quality of ECE provision in the UK. The accountability and quality assurance measures ensure that ECE settings meet established standards, leading to higher quality services. Transparency and public access to inspection reports empower parents to make informed choices about their child's education.

6.2 Comparative Analysis of Outcomes and Impact

Comparing the outcomes and impact of ECE policies in Nigeria and the UK reveals both shared and distinct achievements and challenges.

6.2.1 Access to ECE Services

Both countries have made progress in expanding access to ECE services, albeit at different levels. Nigeria has focused on addressing disparities in access, especially in underserved areas. In contrast, the UK has prioritized improving access for disadvantaged children through government-funded early education places. The impact of improved access includes enhanced school readiness and a reduction in educational inequalities. Expanding access has the potential to contribute to improved academic outcomes and social mobility in both countries.

6.2.2 Quality of Early Education

Both Nigeria and the UK emphasize the importance of providing quality early education experiences. Nigeria has made strides in teacher training and curriculum development, while the UK maintains high standards through the EYFS framework and workforce development efforts. The impact of improved quality includes enhanced cognitive and language development, better school readiness, and improved long-term educational outcomes for children. High-quality ECE also contributes to reduced disparities in achievement.

6.2.3 Inclusivity and Equity

Inclusivity and equity are priorities in both countries, with Nigeria focusing on integrating children with disabilities and the UK addressing inequalities through targeted interventions. The impact of inclusivity and equity efforts includes improved outcomes for vulnerable children and a reduction in disparities in access and achievement. These policies also contribute to social cohesion and inclusive societies.

6.2.4 Parental and Community Engagement

Both Nigeria and the UK recognize the importance of parental and community engagement. Nigeria aims to involve parents and communities in ECE programs, while the UK promotes strong partnerships between families and educators. The impact of parental and community engagement includes improved learning outcomes for children and a sense of shared responsibility for their education. Engaged parents are better equipped to support their child's development, leading to positive long-term outcomes.

6.2.5 Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is essential in both countries, with Nigeria adapting curricula to local contexts and the UK emphasizing flexibility within the EYFS framework. The impact of cultural sensitivity includes a sense of cultural pride and identity among children, as well as intercultural understanding and tolerance. These policies foster unity and social cohesion in diverse societies.

6.2.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

While monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are still evolving in Nigeria, both countries recognize their importance. Robust monitoring and evaluation impact includes evidence-based policymaking, targeted interventions, and resource allocation based on identified needs. Effective monitoring ensures the accountability of ECE providers and contributes to continuous improvement.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of conducting a comprehensive review of early childhood education (ECE) policies in Nigeria and the UK, several lessons have emerged from the successes and challenges encountered in the development and implementation of these policies. In this final section of the research paper, we distill the key lessons learned from the experiences of both countries and offer recommendations to guide future policymaking and improvements in ECE provision.

7.1 Lessons Learned

7.1.1 Cultural Sensitivity and Local Adaptations

Lesson: One of the critical lessons from this comparative analysis is the recognition that a country's cultural and contextual nuances significantly influence the success of ECE policies. Nigeria's multicultural and linguistically diverse society requires tailored, culturally sensitive curricula and approaches to reach all children effectively. The UK's flexibility within its EYFS framework allows settings to adapt to children's unique needs and interests.

Recommendation: Policymakers should prioritize cultural sensitivity and local adaptations when developing ECE policies. This includes involving diverse communities in policy development, providing resources for localized curriculum development, and fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

7.1.2 Investment in Teacher Training and Professional Development

Lesson: Both Nigeria and the UK recognize the pivotal role of ECE educators in delivering quality early education experiences. Nigeria has made efforts to improve teacher training, while the UK places a strong emphasis on continuous professional development for ECE practitioners.

Recommendation: Policymakers should continue investing in teacher training and professional development to ensure educators have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide high-quality ECE services. This includes expanding training opportunities, offering incentives for educators to attain higher qualifications, and promoting ongoing learning and collaboration among ECE practitioners.

7.1.3 Equity and Inclusivity Are Fundamental

Lesson: The importance of promoting equity and inclusivity in ECE policies cannot be overstated. Both Nigeria and the UK have recognized the need to address disparities in access and outcomes. Nigeria aims to reduce disparities between urban and rural areas, while the UK targets inequalities related to socio-economic status and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Recommendation: Policymakers should prioritize equity and inclusivity in ECE policies by implementing targeted interventions for vulnerable populations, providing additional resources and support to underserved communities, and actively engaging with families and communities to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to access and benefit from ECE services.

7.1.4 Parental and Community Engagement Enhances Outcomes

Lesson: Engaging parents and communities in ECE programs significantly impacts children's development and outcomes. Nigeria and the UK have recognized the value of strong partnerships between families and educators.

Recommendation: Policymakers should continue to prioritize parental and community engagement by providing resources and guidance to facilitate active involvement, fostering two-way communication between families and ECE providers, and recognizing the valuable role that parents and communities play in supporting children's early learning.

7.1.5 Data-Driven Decision-Making and Monitoring Are Essential

Lesson: Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to assess ECE policies' success and identify improvement areas. Nigeria is working to establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, while the UK benefits from established regulatory mechanisms.

Recommendation: Policymakers should prioritize data-driven decision-making and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of ECE programs. This includes investing in data infrastructure, developing standardized assessment tools, and regularly reviewing policies to ensure they align with evidence-based practices.

7.2 Recommendations

Building on the lessons learned from the experiences of Nigeria and the UK, we offer a set of recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders in both countries to enhance the quality and impact of their ECE policies. Nigeria should prioritize the improvement of ECE infrastructure, especially in underserved areas. This includes investing in constructing and maintaining ECE centers, ensuring access to age-appropriate learning materials, and addressing infrastructure gaps to provide a conducive learning environment for young children. Nigeria should continue its efforts to address teacher shortages by expanding training opportunities, establishing ECE teacher certification programs, and offering incentives for educators to attain higher qualifications. Additionally, ongoing professional development should be made more accessible to ECE practitioners, especially in remote and rural areas.

Both Nigeria and the UK should prioritize adequate funding for ECE services. Nigeria should allocate sufficient resources to provide quality early education experiences, including teacher salaries, infrastructure improvement, and learning materials. In the UK, policymakers should address funding pressures to maintain the quality of provision and ensure that government-funded early education places remain accessible to

eligible children.

Nigeria should continue to promote inclusive practices in ECE centers, particularly for children with disabilities. This includes providing training and resources for educators to support children with diverse needs and ensuring that ECE centers are physically accessible. In the UK, efforts to enhance inclusivity should be sustained, focusing on supporting children with SEND and promoting inclusive policies and practices.

Nigeria should encourage the development of culturally sensitive and contextually relevant curricula for ECE. This involves collaboration with diverse communities to adapt curricula and materials to local contexts. The UK should maintain its flexibility within the EYFS framework to allow settings to adapt to children's unique needs and interests, ensuring that cultural sensitivity remains a priority.

Both Nigeria and the UK should continue to prioritize equity in ECE policies. Nigeria should implement targeted interventions to reduce disparities in access and outcomes, particularly in underserved areas. The UK should address socio-economic inequalities and disparities related to SEND by providing additional support and resources to children and families in need.

Nigeria should invest in strategies to increase parental and community engagement, particularly in underserved communities. This includes providing resources and training for educators to effectively engage with parents and communities and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for children's education. In the UK, efforts to engage hard-to-reach families should be expanded, and strategies for building strong partnerships between families and educators should be further developed.

Nigeria should continue to develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress and outcomes of ECE programs. This includes investing in data infrastructure, developing standardized assessment tools, and building data collection and analysis capacity. The UK should maintain its rigorous inspection and regulatory mechanisms to ensure the quality of ECE provision, with a focus on transparency and accountability.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper has comprehensively analyzed ECE policies in Nigeria and the United Kingdom (UK). Through an exploration of historical context, policy frameworks, implementation strategies, challenges, outcomes, and lessons learned, we have gained valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of ECE provision in these diverse contexts. Nigeria and the UK are committed to providing accessible, high-quality, and inclusive ECE experiences for their youngest citizens. They have made commendable strides in expanding access, improving quality, promoting inclusivity, and engaging parents and communities in the early education journey. However, challenges persist, with each country facing unique obstacles rooted in their distinct contexts. Nigeria grapples with issues such as infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages, and funding constraints, while the UK faces workforce retention challenges, funding pressures, and the need to address disparities in access.

The lessons learned underscore the importance of context-sensitive approaches, cultural sensitivity, professional development, inclusivity, parental engagement, and robust monitoring and evaluation in shaping effective ECE policies. The recommendations offered aim to guide policymakers and stakeholders in both countries toward further enhancing their ECE policies. By addressing these challenges and building on the successes, Nigeria and the UK can continue to improve the outcomes and impact of their ECE policies, fostering brighter futures for their youngest citizens and contributing to more equitable and inclusive societies. Early childhood education is not just an investment in education; it is an investment in the future of nations.

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