

Neglect in Early Childhood Care: The Urgent Need for Nanny Accountability at Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim Demonstration School

Bashari Ibrahim, B.

Department of Psychology & Counselling, School of General Education,
Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim, Nigeria.
basharibaffa@gmail.com

Abstract

This position paper examines neglect in early childhood care, with a specific focus on nanny accountability at the Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim Demonstration School, in Jigawa State, northern Nigeria. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the paper analyses neglect as a phenomenon shaped by interlocking microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem factors rather than as an isolated individual failure. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is universally recognised as foundational for holistic child development; yet, in resource-constrained environments such as northern Nigeria, systemic gaps including inadequate caregiver training, weak accountability frameworks, and gender-driven undervaluation of caregiving work undermine the delivery of quality care. Drawing on established child development literature, national ECCE policy documents, and Jigawa State's socio-institutional context, this paper argues that observed instances of neglect manifested through insufficient supervision, unresponsive caregiving, and safety protocol lapses violate children's rights and compromise the institution's mandate as a model teacher training centre. To address methodological limitations inherent in a position paper, all claims about current practices are explicitly labelled as observationally based or as areas requiring systematic empirical investigation. The paper concludes with targeted, evidence-informed recommendations for administrators, teachers, parents, and policymakers aimed at establishing robust accountability frameworks and elevating ECCE quality in Jigawa State.

Keywords: Early Childhood Care and Education, Nanny Accountability, Child Neglect, Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory, Jigawa State, Demonstration School, ECCE Policy Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is globally recognised as a cornerstone for lifelong learning, health, and socio-emotional development. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) explicitly mandates inclusive and equitable quality education commencing with robust early childhood systems (UNESCO, 2021). Despite this global consensus, significant systemic gaps persist in low-resource settings, particularly in the rural and semi-urban regions of northern Nigeria, where inadequate caregiver training, underfunded facilities, and deficient accountability frameworks converge to compromise children's developmental outcomes.

The Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies (JSCOELS), Ringim Demonstration School serves a dual institutional mandate: as a practical training site for aspiring educators and as a model of pedagogical excellence within the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) framework. Jigawa State, located in the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is characterised by high rates of child poverty, limited female workforce participation in formal caregiving, and socio-cultural norms that tend to undervalue early childhood professionals' factors that collectively amplify the vulnerability of children in institutional care settings (UNICEF, 2021). Observational reports from parents and members of staff at the demonstration school have raised concerns about instances of neglect, including insufficient supervision, unresponsive caregiving, and lapses in basic safety protocols. It must be noted, consistent with the methodological transparency required of a position paper, that these concerns are grounded in observational accounts and professional judgment rather than systematic empirical data collection. Claims about specific institutional practices should therefore be understood as areas warranting urgent investigation rather than established empirical findings.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013) and the Jigawa State Government's ECCE implementation guidelines both affirm the centrality of quality caregiving; however, implementation remains deeply inconsistent, particularly within rural demonstration schools. The systemic disconnection between policy aspirations and ground-level realities in ECCE provision is well-documented in the Nigerian literature (Adewale, 2019; UNICEF, 2021). This paper argues that addressing the drivers of neglect requires a paradigm shift towards stringent nanny and caregiver accountability, anchored in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which conceptualises child development as the product of dynamic interactions across multiple contextual levels. Bridging the implementation gap between ECCE policy frameworks and their practical application in resource-constrained educational environments is not merely an administrative undertaking it is a moral and legal imperative.

II. Theoretical Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

This paper is grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which provides a multi-level analytical lens particularly well suited to understanding the complex, systemic nature of neglect in institutional childcare settings. Bronfenbrenner conceptualises child development as occurring within a series of nested environmental systems microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem each of which shapes the child's experience either directly or indirectly.

At the microsystem level, the immediate caregiving environment encompassing the child's daily interactions with nannies, teachers, and peers within the demonstration school constitutes the most proximal influence on development. Neglectful behaviours at this level, such as unresponsive caregiving, inadequate supervision, or failure to maintain hygiene protocols, directly impair the quality of attachment and stimulation that children receive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

At the mesosystem level, the quality of linkages between the demonstration school and children's families is critical. Weak home-school communication channels reduce opportunities for parents to detect and report neglect, thereby allowing lapses in care to persist undetected (Epstein, 2001). At the exosystem level, institutional policies and resource allocation decisions include school administration's monitoring protocols, caregiver remuneration structures, and professional development investments indirectly shape caregiving quality without the child being a direct participant. At the macrosystem level, broader socio-cultural norms prevalent in Jigawa State, including the gendered undervaluation of caregiving work and economic constraints on nanny employment, create structural conditions that perpetuate neglect as a systemic rather than individual problem. This ecological framing enables the paper to avoid reducing neglect to personal failings of individual nannies and instead to situate accountability within the full web of institutional, community, and policy-level influences.

A. ECCE Policy and Institutional Context in Jigawa State

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2013) provides the overarching framework for early childhood care and development, prescribing that pre-primary education be integrated into formal school structures and that caregivers receive standardised professional training. The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) Minimum Standards further require that colleges of education operating demonstration schools maintain structured observation and mentoring environments that model best practice for student teachers.

Within Jigawa State, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the Jigawa State Ministry of Education have articulated commitments to expanding ECCE access, particularly in rural local government areas. However, the translation of these commitments into funded, operational accountability mechanisms at the school level has remained limited. Demonstration schools affiliated with colleges of education in the state face compounding challenges: skeletal staffing in ECCE units, absence of standardised caregiver performance appraisal tools, irregular supervision by school administrators, and minimal professional development investment for nannies and support staff.

Socioeconomic conditions further constrain ECCE quality in the region. Nannies employed at demonstration schools in Jigawa State are frequently drawn from lower socio-economic strata, often lack formal qualifications in early childhood education, and are remunerated at rates that reflect the broader cultural undervaluation of caregiving work. These structural economic constraints directly affect caregiver motivation, retention, and willingness to engage in professional development. Addressing nanny accountability at JSCOELS therefore necessitates engagement not only with school-level practices but also with the resource and policy environment in which those practices are embedded.

B. Foundational Role of Nannies and the Costs of Neglect

Nannies occupy a pivotal and multifaceted role in early childhood education, extending far beyond basic caregiving to significantly influence children's emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development. Their provision of consistent, individualised attention fosters secure attachments — the cornerstone of emotional stability (Bowlby, 1988). This attachment relationship provides children with a foundation of felt security from which to explore their environment, take risks, and develop self-regulation capacities. Through structured play, storytelling, and guided exploration, nannies stimulate curiosity, language acquisition, and critical thinking, laying cognitive foundations for formal learning (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Nannies also facilitate early socialisation by modelling prosocial behaviours, mediating peer interactions, and establishing consistent routines that afford children a developmentally vital sense of predictability and security.

In the Jigawa State context, where many children enter the demonstration school from households with limited parental education and restricted access to stimulating home learning environments, the role of the institutional caregiver takes on heightened developmental significance. The nanny may represent, for many children, their primary point of contact with structured cognitive stimulation, language-rich interaction, and emotionally responsive care. It is against this backdrop of developmental importance that the consequences of neglect must be understood. Economic constraints on nanny employment in the region including low wages and limited job security and the systemic underfunding of ECCE more broadly in Nigeria create conditions in which caregiver fatigue, low morale, and disengagement may contribute to lapses in care quality. Gender dynamics further compound this picture: caregiving is socially constructed as female work, is economically undervalued, and receives limited institutional recognition, contributing to high turnover and reduced professional commitment.

C. Developmental Impact of Neglect in Early Childhood

Neglect stands as one of the most detrimental forms of childhood maltreatment, profoundly impacting children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002). During the early childhood period when neuroplasticity is at its peak and foundational developmental processes are most sensitive to environmental input, the consequences of inadequate caregiving are particularly severe and may persist in adolescence and adulthood (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Emotionally, neglected children frequently experience anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem attributable to the disruption of secure attachment formation (Cicchetti & Toth, 2016; Bowlby, 1988). The absence of consistent emotional responsiveness from caregivers impairs the development of affect regulation, predisposing children to difficulties in forming trusting relationships with peers and teachers. Cognitively, neglect is associated with lower measured intellectual ability, impaired executive functioning, and reduced capacity for problem-solving, outcomes linked to limited language exposure and insufficient opportunity for guided exploration (McLaughlin, Sheridan, & Lambert, 2015). These deficits translate directly into academic underperformance and school disengagement.

Socially, neglected children often display behavioural difficulties including aggression, social withdrawal, or oppositional behaviour attributable to the absence of consistent social learning within

the caregiving relationship (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002). Physically, chronic neglect is associated with malnutrition, poor hygiene, developmental growth delay, and weakened immune function, all of which reduce children's capacity to participate meaningfully in educational activities (Dubowitz et al., 2005). The long-term trajectory of neglect extends into adolescence and adulthood, with evidence pointing to elevated rates of school dropout, unemployment, and social exclusion among individuals who experienced early neglect (Widom, Czaja, & DuMont, 2008).

In the Jigawa State context, these developmental risks are amplified by existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Children from households facing poverty or food insecurity who are simultaneously exposed to neglectful institutional care face a compounding of disadvantage that, without intervention, may foreclose developmental and educational opportunities at the earliest stages of course in life.

III. The Imperative for Accountability: A Systemic Argument

The evidence reviewed in this paper supports a clear argument: early childhood is a critical developmental period, and neglect understood as a systemic rather than merely individual failure demands a systemic response. The current absence of standardised caregiver performance monitoring at JSCOELS Ringim Demonstration School is not simply an administrative oversight; it reflects the broader failure of institutional and policy systems to translate commitments to ECCE quality into operational accountability mechanisms.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework clarifies why individualising responsibility blaming individual nannies for care failures is both analytically insufficient and ethically unjust. Nannies operating without adequate supervision, professional development, job security, or institutional support cannot be held solely accountable for systemic care failures. Accountability frameworks must therefore engage all levels of the ecological system: the caregiving microsystem, the home-school mesosystem, the institutional exosystem of school administration and policy, and the macrosystem of socio-cultural norms and economic structures that shape the value assigned to caregiving work.

This paper further acknowledges the limitations inherent in the position paper methodology. The absence of primary empirical data means that specific claims about the prevalence or severity of neglect at the demonstration school cannot be substantiated with the rigour required for causal inference. Every claim about current institutional practices should be understood as observationally or anecdotally grounded pointing to a compelling research agenda rather than constituting definitive evidence. Future research employing structured observational methodologies, caregiver surveys, and institutional document analysis would substantially strengthen the evidentiary basis for the accountability reforms proposed here.

IV. Gaps in Literature and Directions for Future Research

Several significant gaps in the existing ECCE literature inform the research agenda that this paper advocates. First, while the international literature on child neglect and its developmental consequences is well-developed (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; McLaughlin et al., 2015), context-specific research examining neglect within Nigerian college of education demonstration schools is virtually absent. The applicability of findings from high-income country contexts to the socioeconomic and institutional realities of northern Nigeria cannot be assumed without validation studies conducted within the Nigerian setting.

Second, the existing literature on ECCE quality measurement has been critiqued for its reliance on instruments developed and validated in Western contexts, which may fail to capture the specific cultural dimensions of quality caregiving in sub-Saharan African settings (UNESCO, 2021). Methodological debates about what constitutes "quality" in ECCE and how it should be measured, particularly in low-resource environments remain unresolved. Developing culturally validated observation tools for use in Jigawa State demonstration schools represents an important methodological contribution that future researchers should pursue.

Third, the gendered dimensions of caregiving work in Nigeria remain under-examined in relation to ECCE quality and accountability. The intersections of gender, economic marginalisation,

and professional identity among female nannies in northern Nigerian institutional settings constitute an important area for feminist educational research. Fourth, the economics of early childhood investment including the long-term human capital returns of quality ECCE relative to remedial educational interventions provide a compelling evidence base for advocacy with policymakers (Heckman, 2006; 2011), but Nigerian-specific cost-benefit analyses of ECCE investment are limited.

V. Recommendations

Ensuring quality early childhood care requires the concerted and collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders operating at different levels of the ecological system. The following recommendations are targeted at each stakeholder group.

School Administrators

- Develop and implement standardised, written job descriptions and codes of conduct for all nannies and caregiving staff, with explicit performance indicators aligned to NCCE minimum standards.
- Institute structured, scheduled supervisory observations of caregiving practice, complemented by unannounced monitoring visits, with findings documented and communicated to staff.
- Commission structured observational studies of nanny practices within the demonstration school to generate primary evidence of care quality, areas of strength, and gaps requiring intervention.
- Establish mandatory and continuous professional development programmes for nannies and caregiving staff, incorporating modules on child rights, responsive caregiving, safety protocols, and culturally appropriate caregiving practices.
- Develop and enforce clear disciplinary procedures for substantiated cases of neglect, with transparent reporting mechanisms accessible to parents and staff.
- Advocate to the Jigawa State Ministry of Education and SUBEB for improved funding, appropriate staffing ratios, and enhanced remuneration for ECCE caregiving staff.

Teachers

- Participate in training programmes that build capacity to recognise early indicators of neglect and understand mandatory reporting obligations under Nigerian law and school policy.
- Establish collaborative working relationships with nannies to ensure continuity of care across the school day, sharing observations about individual children's welfare.
- Cultivate inclusive, emotionally safe classroom environments that can serve as protective contexts for children who may be experiencing inadequate care.

Parents and Families

- Maintain regular engagement with class teachers and school administrators, providing and seeking updates on children's physical and emotional well-being.
- Observe children for behavioural or physical indicators that may signal inadequate care and raise concerns promptly through established school reporting channels.
- Engage actively in parent-school governance structures to advocate for improved caregiving standards and transparency in institutional accountability processes.

Policymakers and Government Agencies

- Jigawa State Government should develop and enforce a state-level ECCE regulatory framework with minimum caregiver qualification requirements, caregiver-to-child ratios, and regular institutional inspection mechanisms.
- SUBEB and the Ministry of Education should allocate ring-fenced funding for ECCE professional development in demonstration schools affiliated with state colleges of education.
- The NCCE should integrate ECCE caregiving quality indicators into its accreditation and re-accreditation processes for colleges of education, ensuring that institutional mandates for demonstration school quality are operationally enforced.
- Policymakers should commission and fund longitudinal studies on ECCE quality in Jigawa State, generating context-specific evidence to guide future investment and regulation.

VI. Conclusion

The situation at the JSCOELS Ringim Demonstration School illuminates a critical vulnerability in Nigeria's early childhood education systems. Neglect in institutional childcare settings is not merely an unfortunate oversight by individual caregivers; it is a systemic failure rooted in inadequate institutional oversight, under-resourced professional development, the gendered economic undervaluation of caregiving work, and the persistent disconnection between national ECCE policy commitments and their operational implementation at the school level. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, this paper has argued that accountability must be conceptualised and enacted across all levels of the ecological system from the individual caregiving relationship to state-level funding and regulatory frameworks.

This paper has been transparent about the limitations of the position paper methodology: the claims advanced here regarding current institutional practices are grounded in observational and anecdotal accounts and should be understood as propositions for empirical investigation rather than established findings. The proposed research agenda encompassing structured observational studies of nanny practice, culturally validated ECCE quality measurement instruments, and gender-sensitive analyses of caregiving work in northern Nigeria represents the next necessary step in building a rigorous evidence base for ECCE reform in Jigawa State.

The time for passive observation has passed. With the lives and developmental futures of young children as the stake, urgent, coordinated, and evidence-informed action is required to transform demonstration schools from sites of potential neglect into genuine models of child-centred pedagogical excellence in Nigeria.

References

- Adewale, A. (2019). Caregiver accountability in early childhood education in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Early Childhood Studies*, 15(2), 123–135.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Parent-child attachment and healthy human development*. Basic Books.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Cicchetti, D., & Toth, S. L. (2016). Child maltreatment and developmental psychopathology: A multilevel perspective. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 12(1), 409–438. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093006>
- Dubowitz, H., Black, M. M., Starr, R. H., & Zuravin, S. (2005). A conceptual definition of child neglect. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 22(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854895022001005>
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Westview Press.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2013). *National policy on education* (6th ed.). NERDC Press.
- Heckman, J. J. (2006). Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children. *Science*, 312(5782), 1900–1902. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1128898>
- Heckman, J. J. (2011). *The economics of early childhood investments*. National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Hildyard, K. L., & Wolfe, D. A. (2002). Child neglect: Developmental issues and outcomes. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(6–7), 679–695. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134\(02\)00341-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00341-1)
- McLaughlin, K. A., Sheridan, M. A., & Lambert, H. K. (2015). Childhood adversity and neural development: Deprivation and threat as distinct dimensions of early experience. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 47, 578–591. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2014.10.012>
- Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/9824>
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2010). *Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16): Final report from the primary phase*. Department for Education.
- UNESCO. (2021). *Right from the start: Build inclusive societies through inclusive early childhood care and education*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378076>
- UNICEF. (2021). *Early childhood development in Nigeria: A situation analysis*. UNICEF Nigeria.
- Widom, C. S., Czaja, S. J., & DuMont, K. A. (2008). Intergenerational transmission of child abuse and neglect: Real or detection bias? *Science*, 347(6229), 1480–1485. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259917>