

## **CURBING SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCES**

Asabe Comfort Ismaila (Ph.D)  
Federal College of Education Technical Gombe  
Department of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education  
[Dubukumamrs50@Gmai.Com](mailto:Dubukumamrs50@Gmai.Com) 08036300884

### **Abstract**

This study investigated the potential of early childhood developmental experiences as a means to address security challenges in North-East Nigeria. The study addressed two research questions with a null hypothesis. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The total population for the study was all the 2,208 teachers from public Pre-Primary/ECD schools/centres in North-East. The sample size was 10 Pre-Primary/ECD schools selected from each of the three states (Adamawa, Gombe, and Taraba), totaling 30 schools using a simple random sampling technique. The instrument for the study was a self-developed questionnaire titled Curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria through early childhood developmental experiences. The data gathered after the deployment of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Frequency counting, percentage and mean were the statistical tools used to answer the research questions while the t-test was the inferential statistical tool used to test the hypothesis. The study revealed that caregivers agreed on the significant impact of early childhood developmental experiences in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria. They recognized the influence of these experiences on brain development, health, and future outcomes. Caregivers also acknowledged the role of the environment and peer interactions in shaping children's outcomes. The study recommends equal involvement and engagement of both genders in promoting activities that enhance early childhood development and address security challenges. It suggested the development of comprehensive programmes accessible to children, focusing on their physical, cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and self-care skills.

**Keywords:** Curbing, Security, Challenges, Early childhood development

### **Introduction**

According to Hamidu (2013), education involves a comprehensive transformation, both mentally and physically, of individuals through structured training, enabling them to become more productive members of society. Education plays a crucial role in equipping citizens with the necessary knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes to foster a united, resilient, and fair society, as outlined in the educational goals stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). Throughout history, education has been recognized as the cornerstone of civilizations, making it a fundamental tool for nations, regardless of their developmental stage, to achieve national security.

Numerous countries allocate resources to education with the aim of fulfilling societal needs. As accurately pointed out by Iyo and Daagu (2013), a well-developed educational system serves as a means for a society to transform its aspirations into tangible outcomes. Unfortunately, many children in the North East region lack the opportunity to access crucial early childhood education (Mefor, 2010). However, it is universally recognized, as emphasized by the World Summit on the state of children worldwide, that every individual has an undeniable right to access quality education. Consequently, the inclusion of Early Childhood

Care and Education (ECCE) in the Education for All (EFA) initiative has become compulsory, reflecting the global commitment to ensuring that every child has access to early childhood education.

Early childhood education, also known as pre-primary education, is the form of education provided to children to prepare them for the primary level of education. It is characterized as the education imparted to children in educational institutions before they enter primary school, as defined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013). Early childhood education represents the initial stage of education and is considered an integral part of basic education. During this phase, children between the ages of 0 and 5, receive proper care while their parents are occupied with work, farming, or business activities. The emphasis at this level is primarily on providing care to the children rather than formal teaching. In Nigeria, the public primary schools typically allocate only one year to the pre-primary section, while other day care centers or nursery schools, operated by the private sector, cater to this age group. The government's role is to supervise and ensure that the established standards are met. Given the tender age range of these children, it is crucial to provide them with adequate attention and care to facilitate a successful transition from early childhood education to formal schooling.

Early childhood education serves two primary functions, namely the custodial function and the preparatory role. The custodial function is advantageous for working mothers and individuals engaged in busy economic activities who may lack sufficient quality time to address the developmental needs of their children at home. By enrolling their children in early childhood education, these caregivers can ensure that their children receive proper care and supervision. Additionally, the exposure to pre-school experiences prepares the child for a seamless transition to the next educational level, minimizing adjustment difficulties (Atakpo, 2020). However, it is important to note that early childhood education encompasses more than just custodial and preparatory functions, as highlighted by Atakpo (2020).

Early childhood experiences provide young children with favorable conditions for their development and learning, increasing their prospects of success in school and preparing them to be well-equipped adults in life (UNICEF, 2019; Aliyu, 2017; Smith, 2013). The exposure of children to pre-school experiences plays a crucial role in preparing them for the next stages of education and even for their future lives (Kazaure, 2013; Nmwamwenda, 2014; Osanyin, 2012). The curriculum implemented during this stage of learning should prioritize a play-based program that emphasizes a pedagogical approach to education. This approach recognizes children's need to learn through hands-on activities and manipulative materials that enhance their learning and fosters the understanding of the value of hard work and the dignity of labor. It is recommended to gradually introduce additional concepts and structure into the curriculum as children progress.

According to Atakpo (2020), Nigeria is actively seeking individuals who possess specific qualities and abilities. These include philosophers who can devise solutions to address the prevalent challenges of poverty, insecurity, dishonesty, and squalor; accomplished scientists who can eradicate diseases and alleviate human suffering; liberators who can free the population from oppression and deceit; leaders who genuinely understand and prioritize the aspirations and desires of Nigerians; and individuals of strong moral and spiritual character who can guide the nation towards ethical and spiritual rectitude. It is against this backdrop that the research aims to investigate the impact of pre-school experiences on a child's readiness for life.

Insecurity is a pervasive issue that is deeply affecting the foundations of our nation. Ismaila and Ogbu (2019) defines insecurity as a state characterized by fear, anxiety, lack of

protection, and inadequate freedom from danger. It reflects a condition where one's life is not safe due to various threats and negative factors. Presently, Nigeria is facing a severe insecurity crisis, and the patterns of insecurity seem to be regionalized. In the southern region, militia groups are causing disturbances, while kidnapping rates are alarmingly high in the east and south, and ritual killings are prevalent in both the east and west. The northern region is plagued by insurgency, and assassinations occur throughout the entire country. Considering the overall situation in Nigeria, it is evident that the country can no longer be considered safe. Many individuals embark on journeys but fail to reach their destinations not due to accidents or natural causes, but because they fall victim to kidnapping. People are abducted from their homes or workplaces for ransom, subjected to torture, and tragically, some are even shot dead. There is no safe haven in Nigeria, be it urban or rural areas (Okobia, 2020). This dire state of affairs may be linked to the widespread poverty experienced by hardworking citizens, while those in positions of power and influence, particularly in politics, seem to be exempt from the suffering and instead contribute to the torment of the citizens.

Okobia (2020) opined that, one of the significant security issues plaguing the North-Eastern region of Nigeria, with detrimental effects on the Nigerian economy, is the presence of Boko Haram insurgency. The term "Boko Haram" originates from the Hausa word "Boko," meaning "Animist," and the Arabic word "Haram," which translates to "sin" or "forbidden" (Onifade, Imhonopi & Urim, 2013). Boko Haram is a highly contentious militant Islamist group in Nigeria that aims to establish Sharia law in the northern states of the country. The group not only opposes Western education but also rejects Western culture and modern science. The activities carried out by Boko Haram pose significant security challenges to the contemporary Nigerian state. Investors have expressed concerns about the safety of their investments in Nigeria due to the actions of this group. These activities include the killing of innocent Nigerians, the rape of women, and the bombing of major cities and police stations primarily in the northern regions of Borno, Kano, Bauchi, Niger, Yobe, Adamawa, and Abuja, among others.

In the North-East region, where the issue of Boko Haram is prevalent, it is noticeable that many of the adult militants did not receive any formal education during their early childhood years. Instead of being actively engaged in meaningful activities, these individuals were left to wander the streets, begging for money and food, due to parental neglect. There is a well-known Chichewa proverb that states, "*M'mwerampoyamba*," which translates to "Catch them while young." This proverb underscores the importance of a child's formative years and how experiences during this early stage can significantly impact their later years. Atakpo (2020) argued that a well-functioning early childhood education program has the potential to instill in children the necessary developmental experiences that will contribute to their growth as responsible and law-abiding citizens. In her research, it was recommended that young children should be actively engaged in activities that promote physical development, language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development, as well as enhance their problem-solving and self-regulation skills.

Agba, Ejekwu and Ndifon (2022) argued that the popular saying, "an idle hand is the devil's workshop," conveys a clear message about the importance of engaging young children in meaningful activities for their growth and development. They further emphasized that this proverb serves as a cautionary message for both individuals who may find themselves idle or unproductive, as well as for caregivers and advisors of children and young adults who should provide opportunities for constructive activities, lest they seek out other potentially harmful ways to occupy their time. Kolesnik (2017) and Oko, et al. (2022) confirm that play is a particularly crucial activity that facilitates children's learning process. It forms the foundation

for future learning and allows individual children to develop a sense of self-worth. They offered the following activities as recommendations for promoting positive early childhood developmental experiences:

1. **Sand play:** Engaging in sand play provides an excellent chance to establish the groundwork for scientific learning and foster self-confidence and physical development. Activities such as scooping, digging, pouring, and sifting enable children to understand the workings of things, while also enhancing their muscle strength and coordination. When children engage in sand play together with their peers, they learn valuable lessons about teamwork, sharing, and social skills.
2. **Water Play:** Similar to sand play, water play enables children to experiment in a safe environment with basic concepts such as volume. Additionally, water play is great for learning consequences of actions. Add in some hand-eye coordination and physical strength, and water play is a firm favourite.
3. **Play Dough:** Play dough possesses significant educational value. It not only helps in strengthening the fingers, preparing them for a lifetime of writing, but it also imparts essential skills such as fine motor skills, creativity, and hand-eye coordination.
4. **Dress-Up and Role Play:** This type of imaginative play enhances children's problem-solving and self-regulation abilities. Children engage in creating scenarios and scenes, acting out social events. This allows them to explore and experiment with new ideas and behaviors in a safe and comfortable setting. Dress-up activities promote creative thinking and foster communication skills in children.
5. **Drawing and Painting:** Engaging in art activities provides children with a valuable opportunity to express their ideas, enhance their observation skills, boost their confidence, cultivate a sense of self-worth, and nurture their creativity and imagination. Additionally, art activities offer children a chance to relax and unwind. Drawing and painting, in particular, are enjoyable and serve as a learning avenue for young children. Through painting, children learn about visual expression, spatial intelligence, and color recognition. Moreover, regular painting practice allows them to develop their creative abilities and improve their motor skills.
6. **Blocks, Jigsaws, and Shape Sorters:** Playing with blocks, jigsaws, and shape sorters all lay the foundations of spatial thinking, logical reasoning, ordering, and recognising various shapes, sizes, and colours.
7. **Music, Dancing, and Singing:** Engaging in singing and music significantly contributes to the development of language skills and lays the foundation for literacy. It also introduces basic mathematical concepts like counting. Additionally, children begin to develop a sense of rhythm and refine their listening abilities through these activities. Dancing, on the other hand, aids in the child's physical development by enhancing strength, flexibility, and coordination.
8. **Running, Jumping, Climbing and Swinging:** Young children have an innate need for physical movement. Allowing them the freedom to move and presenting them with safe and suitable challenges not only helps them build confidence but also fosters resilience through taking risks. It is important to note that engaging in physical activities also greatly enhances their gross motor skills.
9. **Sensory Play:** Sensory play is any play activity which involves touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing. This can be provided with a plate of jelly, aqua beads, ice, rice, or even small world tubs. Sensory play stimulates exploration and the building blocks of science and investigation.
10. **Basic Board Games:** There are so many board games available for even the youngest players, and these should be embraced – not only for their fun factor, but for their

learning potential. In addition to the themes of numbers, colours, shapes, and early phonics, these games are vital for teaching children turn-taking and sharing.

11. **Cooking and Pretend-Cooking:** Engaging in cooking activities, including pretend cooking, serving, and playing shops, offers excellent play scenarios for children. Cooking involves a combination of sensory play, mathematical concepts, understanding home safety, and following step-by-step processes. Pretend cooking, serving, and running toy shops also provide opportunities for children to learn basic mathematical ideas, develop social interaction skills, and cultivate thoughtfulness towards others.
12. **The Cardboard Box:** Cardboard boxes are a cherished plaything for children ranging from toddlers to school-aged kids. They provide an invaluable opportunity for creative play, enabling children to explore new ideas and enhance their problem-solving abilities. According to Mental Floss, the brain's activity when imagining participating in an activity is similar to actually engaging in that activity. Consequently, playing with cardboard boxes mentally transports children to different places and expands their cognitive capacity without the need to physically go anywhere.

According to Ismaila (2014), national security refers to a nation's ability to effectively address various threats that jeopardize the well-being of its people and its existence as a nation, regardless of the circumstances. Currently, Nigeria is facing significant consequences of insecurity, with educational institutions being particularly hard-hit. For instance, the continuous attacks by Boko Haram militants in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria have resulted in the closure of numerous schools. In an effort to address the security challenges in North-East Nigeria, this research aims to examine the effects of an activity-based program on early childhood developmental experiences in the region, and explore the implications for addressing security challenges.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria.
2. To identify package of activities that can enhance early childhood developmental experience which will consequently serve as tool in curbing security challenges in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria?
2. What are the packages of activities that can improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria?

### **Research Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The study covered three (3) states from North-East Nigeria. They are Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba. The research was carried out in 10 pre-primary/ECD schools which were randomly selected from each of the three states, and all caregivers/ECD teachers in those schools were the subject for this study.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised of all the teachers from public pre-primary/ECD school/centres in North-East Nigeria. The northeast comprises six states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The number of pre-primary/ ECD teachers in Adamawa is 650 out of which 230 are male and 420 are female, in Gombe State, the number of pre-primary/ ECD teachers is 850 out of which 200 are male and 650 are female and in Taraba State, the number of pre-primary/ ECD teachers is 708 out of which 295 are male and 413 are female. These add up to give a total of 2,208 (ASUBEB 2022, GSUBEB2022, BSUBEB 2022). The researcher randomly selected 10 public early childhood school/centres in each of Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba States and all the caregivers/ECD teachers in the selected schools served as respondents. From Adamawa State, the total number of respondents is 389 (180 male and 209 female); from Gombe State, the total number of respondents is 575 (223 male and 352 female) and from Taraba State, the total number of respondents is 500 (185 male and 315 female). Table 1 shows the summary of distribution of the respondents across the three states.

**Table1: Distribution of the Respondents Across the Three States.**

State	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Adamawa	180	209	389
Gombe	223	352	575
Taraba	185	315	500
<b>Total</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>1,464</b>

*Source:* Field work

### Instrument for Data Collection

A self-developed questionnaire titled “Curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria through early childhood developmental experiences” was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire comprise of three sections: Section (A) gives the demographic information of the respondents, section (B) solicits information on the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria while section (C) seeks for the opinion of the respondents on whether package of some activities can help improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and consequently serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

The instruments were validated by three experts, one from the Department of Early Childhood Education, Gombe State University and two from Department of Early Childhood Education, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State. Corrections were made based on their suggestions Corrections were made based on their comments before the deployment of the instrument. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of 100 teachers from pre-primary/ECD schools, Yobe State that will not be included in the final study. 100 questionnaires split in two halves were distributed to the respondents and the two separate scores of each half were

correlated and analyzed. The Guttman split-half reliability coefficient formula was used and are liability coefficient of 0.88 was obtained which was considered reliable. According to Spieged and Stevens (2009) an instrument is considered reliable if its reliability coefficient lies between 0 and 1, and the closer it is to zero, the less reliable, and the closer it is to 1, the more reliable is the instrument. This therefore confirms the reliability of the data collection instrument.

### Procedure for Data Collection

Written introductory letters were distributed to all the intended schools through the state universal education boards in Adamawa, Gombe and Taraba States in North-East Nigeria. The researcher through the help of research assistants distribute done thousand four hundred and sixty-four (1,464) questionnaires to the respondents from each school. The respondents were adequately briefed on the nature and purpose of the study. The completed questionnaires were retrieved for analysis.

### Procedure for Data Analysis

The data gathered after deployment of the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Frequency counting, percentage and mean were the statistical tools used to answer the research questions while t-test was the inferential statistical tool used to test the hypothesis.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What is the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria?

In order to answer this research question, the total scores for each item on the 4-points Likert scales were calculated and then divided by the total number of respondents (i.e. 1,464) to get the mean. The overall mean is then calculated by dividing the sum of means by the total number of items (i.e. 10). If the overall mean scores is higher than 2.5, the mean score for any 4-point likert scale, then, the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria is positive i.e. early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Analysis of perceptions of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Mean score	Decision
1.	The experiences children have during their early childhood have a tremendous impact on the development of their brains, their health, and their future as adult.	524	601	221	118	3.05	Agree
2.	Children who grown up in vulnerable environments have tendency of becoming terrorists in the future.	718	610	72	64	3.35	Agree
3.	Early childhood children who grew up among peers who are morally upright have tendency of becoming independent useful adult in future.	581	566	191	16	3.09	Agree
4.	Children who had good early childhood experiences such as proper parental care have better career opportunities, improved health, and lower levels of dependence and crime rate than those who did not have.	631	590	126	117	3.19	Agree

5.	Children whose physiological/basic needs such as food, shelter clothing etc. are not being provided end up suffering from lack of self-esteem, emotional disturbance, disorientation etc. and are prone to committing crimes .	584	537	202	141	3.07	Agree
6.	Early childhood children should not be exposed to war play, war films and war related toys as these might influence their adulthood and thought that aggression is an efficient way to solve conflict and that aggression in social interaction is acceptable.	603	599	183	79	3.18	Agree
7.	Children who lack opportunity to be educated or attend any former school might grow up to become irresponsible adult and terrorists in the future.	634	640	98	92	3.24	Agree
8.	Children in their early childhood stage should be prevented from drug abuse and alcoholism so that they don't become hooligans in the future.	527	638	121	178	3.03	Agree
9.	Children who are raised with some measures of religion tend to behave in an ethical way when they grow into adult.	711	598	73	82	3.32	Agree
10.	Children who are not always engaged with activities at home but allowed to roam around the street might grow up to become rabble-rouser adult.	622	483	218	141	3.08	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>3.16</b>	<b>Agree</b>

Table 2 shows the mean response of the caregivers on whether early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria. 524 respondents strongly agreed, 601 agreed, 221 disagreed and 118 strongly disagreed to item 1. The mean response to item 1 is 3.05. In item 2, 718 respondents strongly agreed, 610 agreed, 72 disagreed and 64 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 2 is 3.35. In item 3, 581 respondents strongly agreed, 566 agreed, 191 disagreed and 16 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 3 is 3.09. In item 4, 631 respondents strongly agreed, 590 agreed, 126 disagreed and 117 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 4 is 3.19. In item 5, 584 respondents strongly agreed, 537 agreed, 202 disagreed and 141 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 5 is 3.07. In item 6, 603 respondents strongly agreed, 599 agreed, 183 disagreed and 79 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 6 is 3.18. In item 7, 634 respondents strongly agreed, 640 agreed, 98 disagreed and 92 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 7 is 3.24. In item 8, 527 respondents strongly agreed, 638 agreed, 121 disagreed and 178 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 8 is 3.03. In item 9, 711 respondents strongly agreed, 598 agreed, 73 disagreed and 82 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 9 is 3.32. In item 10, 622 respondents strongly agreed, 483 agreed, 218 disagreed and 141 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 10 is 3.08.

The table reveals that the mean response to each of the ten items is above 2.50 while the average mean of the ten items is 3.16. This indicates that early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

**Research Question Two:** What are the packages of activities that can improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria?

**Table 3:** Analysis of response of the caregivers on the package of activities that can improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1.	Movement activities such as dancing, jumping, running around, balance, walk climb etc. are great ways to promote and improve physical development of a child.	498	477	148	141	2.77	Agree
2.	Play dough experiences support the development of children's fine motor strength and control which are essential for early drawing and writing.	644	440	105	275	2.99	Agree
3.	Activities like "sand play and water play" provide opportunity for the foundations of scientific learning, developing sel-confidence and physical development.	589	248	505	121	2.91	Agree
4.	Activities like "dress up and role play" is an imaginative play that improve problem-solving skills and self-regulation skills in children.	515	361	338	250	2.78	Agree
5.	Babbling and cooing are language development activities that are crucial part of early childhood skill that promote expression in children.	460	290	561	153	2.72	Agree
6.	Puzzle, sorting and identification of shapes and colours are important memory booster activities that lay a good foundation for spatial thinking, logical reasoning and creative thinking for early childhood developmental experiences.	582	277	138	467	2.67	Agree
7.	Social and emotional skills of early childhood children can be improved using activities like reading story books that feature relatable character and teaches social-emotional skills.	557	421	437	49	3.02	Agree
8.	Teaching children age-appropriate skills of brushing, hand-washing, bathing and elf-dressing techniques are important for developing independence and confidence.	582	305	303	274	2.82	Agree
9.	Children can learn better through sing-along activities such as singing a song to recite letters, numbers, days of the week and body parts to melodies.	459	565	368	72	2.96	Agree
10.	Music, dancing and singing help early childhood children to develop, strength, flexibility, coordination, listening skills, literacy skills as well as basic mathematical concepts such as counting.	709	370	348	37	3.20	Agree
<b>Overall Mean</b>						<b>2.88</b>	

Table 3 shows the mean response of the caregivers on the packages of activities that can improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria. 498 respondents strongly agreed, 477 agreed, 148 disagreed and 341 strongly disagreed to item1. The mean response to item 1 is 2.77. In item 2, 644 respondents strongly agreed, 440 agreed, 105 disagreed and 275 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 2 is 2.99. In item 3, 589 respondents strongly agreed, 248 agreed, 505 disagreed and 121 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 3 is 2.91. In item 4, 515 respondents strongly agreed, 361 agreed, 338 disagreed and 250 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 4 is 2.78. In item 5, 460 respondents strongly agreed, 290 agreed, 561 disagreed and 153 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 5 is 2.72. In item 6, 582 respondents strongly agreed, 277 agreed, 138 disagreed and 467 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 6 is 2.67. In item 7, 557 respondents strongly

agreed, 421 agreed, 437 disagreed and 49 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 7 is 2.98. In item 8, 582 respondents strongly agreed, 305 agreed, 303 disagreed and 274 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 8 is 2.82. In item 9, 459 respondents strongly agreed, 565 agreed, 368 disagreed and 72 strongly disagreed to the item. The mean response to item 9 is 3.00. In item 10, 709 respondents strongly agreed, 370 agreed, 348 disagreed and 37 strongly disagreed. The mean response to item 10 is 3.20.

The table reveals that the mean response to each of the ten items is above 2.50 while the average mean of the ten items is 2.88 which also indicates that the package of activities identified are able to improve early childhood developmental experiences positively and serve as a tool for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

In order to test the hypothesis, Kolmogorov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality was first performed to ascertain if the data is parametric or not. Table 4 below shows the result of the normality test.

**Table 4: Tests of Normality**

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Mean of items 1 to 10	.193	1464	.000	.842	1464	.000
Mean of items a to j	.159	1464	.000	.908	1464	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

From table 4, a p-value of 0.00 was gotten for both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the data is non-parametric; hence, non-parametric test was conducted.

**Table 5:** Summary of t-test analysis of difference between the perception of male and female caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	172.39	0.056	17.53	1462	0.065	0.731	0.042
Equal variances not assumed			19.97	1363.13	0.072	0.731	0.037

Table 5 revealed a p-value of 0.072 with equal variances not assumed. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 (standard level of significance), the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents on how early childhood developmental experiences can help in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria is not rejected.

## Discussion

The findings of Table Two concluded that caregivers overall agree on the perception that early childhood developmental experiences have a significant impact on curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria. Caregivers believed these experiences influence brain

development, health, and future outcomes. Caregivers also acknowledged that vulnerable environments increase the likelihood of children becoming future terrorists, while morally upright peers contribute to independent and useful adulthood. Additionally, they recognized the importance of good early childhood experiences for better career opportunities, improved health, and reduced crime rates, and highlight the negative consequences of neglecting children's needs. They suggested that exposure to war-related media during early childhood promote aggression, emphasize the significance of education and religious influences in fostering ethical behavior, and express concerns about unengaged children growing up as disruptive individuals. The research hypothesis one that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents on the impact of early childhood developmental experiences in curbing security challenges in North-East Nigeria is directly related to research question one, which examined the significant impact of early childhood developmental experiences on curbing security challenges in the same region. The findings showed that there is significant gender-based differences in the perceptions of respondents regarding the impact of these experiences on addressing security challenges.

The above study agreed with the findings of Shonkoff (2016) who emphasized the significance of early childhood experiences in shaping brain development and future outcomes. According to the findings, experiences children have during their early years have a tremendous impact on the development of their brains, their health, and their future as adults. This aligns with the caregivers' perception in Table 2 that early childhood experiences play a crucial role in curbing security challenges. The notion that early childhood experiences have long-lasting effects on brain development and subsequent behaviours supports the understanding that investing in positive early experiences can contribute to reducing the risk of security challenges in the future. Furthermore, the connection between early childhood experiences and the risk of future terrorism aligns with the work of Moffitt and Caspi (2001). Their research findings focused on the impact of adverse childhood experiences on the development of violent behaviours. This suggested that children growing up in vulnerable environments, characterized by adverse experiences, may be more prone to engaging in behaviours associated with security challenges, including terrorism. Therefore, the caregivers' perception in Table 2 that children who grow up in vulnerable environments have a tendency to become future terrorists is supported by the findings of Moffitt and Caspi (2001).

The findings from Table 2 suggested that a variety of activities can positively improve early childhood developmental experiences and potentially serve as tools for combating future security challenges in North-East Nigeria. The findings indicated that movement activities such as dancing, jumping, and running around are effective in promoting and improving the physical development of children. Play dough experiences support the development of fine motor strength and control, which are crucial for early drawing and writing skills. Activities like sand play and water play provide opportunities for scientific learning, self-confidence, and physical development. Dress-up and role play activities enhance problem-solving skills and self-regulation in children. Babbling and cooing are important language development activities that promote expression. Puzzle-solving, sorting, and identification of shapes and colours contribute to memory boosting and lay a foundation for spatial thinking, logical reasoning, and creative thinking. Reading storybooks featuring relatable characters improves social and emotional skills. Teaching age-appropriate skills such as brushing, hand-washing, bathing, and self-dressing techniques foster independence and confidence. Sing-along activities help children learn letters, numbers, days of the week, and body parts through melodies. Music, dancing, and singing aid in the development of physical strength, flexibility, coordination, listening skills, literacy skills, and basic mathematical concepts.

Hypothesis Two revealed that there is no significant difference in variances between the perceptions of male and female caregivers on the packages of activities that can improve early childhood developmental experiences and serve as tools for combating future security challenges in the region. This finding implied that both male and female caregivers share similar views on the activities that positively improve early childhood development and can serve as tools for combating security challenges. It implies that the identified packages of activities hold equal significance for both genders in promoting positive early childhood developmental experiences and addressing future security challenges in North-East Nigeria.

These findings are consistent with existing literature. For example, the findings of this study align with the results of a research conducted by Oko et al (2022). Atakpo's research revealed that an effective early childhood education program has the potential to instill developmental experiences in children that will benefit them in the future. The early childhood stage is a critical period for building character, shaping personalities, and establishing the foundation upon which children will build throughout their lives. The findings of Ismaila and Ogbu (2019) reaffirmed the widely supported notion that research findings from various fields of study consistently highlight the importance of providing children with adequate care and support in terms of health, nutrition, psychosocial care, and security. These packages are crucial for the development of intellectual, behavioural, and social skills, underscoring the significance of early child development. Similarly, the findings of Ismaila (2014) supported the present study by stating that, a child's development is influenced either positively or negatively by their early childhood experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Nigerians especially people from North-East are passing through series of security challenges and unrest which has caused destruction of lives and properties and has forced a lot people to be internally displaced persons (IDPS). In this regard, this paper presents the perception of caregivers on how early childhood developmental experiences can serve as a tool for curtailing future security challenges in North-East Nigeria. Responses gotten from the respondents shown that adequate and well-design early childhood instruction packages can instill in children's developmental experiences will make them grow-up and become responsible, beneficial, independent and dependable adults in the society.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government should ensure that both genders are equally involved and engaged in efforts to promote and implement activities that enhance early childhood development and address security challenges.
2. It is recommended that comprehensive programmes be developed, designed and made accessible to children to foster their physical, cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and self-care skills.
3. To effectively combat future security challenges, government should engage the community and raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development and its role in addressing security challenges.
4. It is recommended that collaboration between caregivers, educators, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders should be strengthened to ensure the effective implementation of early childhood development activities and to develop comprehensive strategies that address both developmental and security challenges in the region.

## References

- Agba, R. U., Ejekwu, P. O. & Ndifon, F. O. (2022). Early childhood care education and the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development*, 31(1), 1- 9.
- Aliyu, U. D. (2017). *History of early childhood education in Nigeria: An overview in basic education in Nigeria*. Onitsha: West and Solomon Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Atakpo, T. E. (2020). Early childhood developmental experiences as a tool for combating future security challenges in Nigeria. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 10 (1), 198-205.
- Beland, D. (2005). Insecurity, citizenship and globalization: The multiple faces of state protection. *Sociological Protection*, 23(1), 234-246.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National policy on education* (6<sup>th</sup> edition). Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Ismaila, C., A & Ogbu E. (2019). The Role of Play in Enhancing Creativity and Leisure in Childhood Education: *Journal of Research and Practice in Childhood Education Vol. 5 Association for Childhood Educators Nigeria (ACEN) 2019 Enugu*
- Ismaila, C., A., Ogbu E. (2019). Safe School Initiative (SSI): Appraisal of monitoring and mentoring of pre-primary school Teachers' provision of quality education in Gombe State: *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Primary Education (KOJEP)2: (1)*
- Ismaila, C., A (2014). Teachers' use of play way method and play materials at the Lower Basic (LB) level of education in Gombe North Senatorial District: *Gombe Technical Education Journal (GOTEJ). TETFUND 2014 V. 8:2(Pp 32-41*
- Iyo, J. A. & Daagu, J. H. (2013). Regulating early childhood care and education for poverty eradication self-reliance and nation building. *Journal of Teacher Perspective*, 7(2), 428-437.
- Kazaure, M. R. (2013). Early childhood intervention, education and development for special needs children: The way forward. In A. Olabisi (ed.), *Child Care and Special Needs Education in Nigeria*, 4, 140-148. Abuja: Centre for Learning Disabilities and Audiology.
- Kolesnik, K. (2017). *Early childhood education in Nigeria: Issues and problems*. <https://www.legit.ng/1128157-early-childhood-education-nigeria-issuesproblems.htm>.
- Mefor, C. (2010). *Nigerian: Child education- a case for an imposed system*. <http://www.gmfc.org/en/action-within-the-movement/africa/regional-news-in-africa/957>.
- Moffitt, T. E. & Caspi, A. (2001). Childhood predictors differentiate life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial pathways among males and females. *Development and Psychopathology*, 13(2), 355-375.
- Nmwamwenda, T. S. (2014). Early childhood education in Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Childhood Development Navigation Rapides*. Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation.
- Obiwelozor, N. (2015). Early childhood education in Nigeria, policy implementation: Critique and a way forward. *African Journal of Teacher Education*, 4(1).
- Okoh C. N. E., Agah, J. J., ,Ibiam J. U., Ifeluni, C.O., Njoku F. Okonkwo N.C., **Ismaila, C. A.**, Yusuf, A., & Akpokiere U. R (2022). Predicting preschoolers' task persistence

based on their involvement in indoor and outdoor learning activities. *Webology* Vol. 19. No.2 2022 Pp 7260-7271 <http://www.webology.org>

- Okobia, F. N. (2020). Combating the scourge of security challenges in Nigeria through religious education for sustainable national development. *UJAH (Special Edition)*, 21 (3), 27-46.
- Onifade, C., Imhonopia, D. & Urim, U. M. (2013). Addressing the insecurity challenge in Nigeria: The imperative of moral values and virtue ethics. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Political Science*, 13 (2), 53-63.
- Osanyin, F. A. (2004). Facilitating effective child care delivery. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Association of Nigeria (JECAN)*, 1(2), 42-54.
- Pateri, B. (2014). *National security*. [http://en-wikipedia.org/wiki/national\\_security](http://en-wikipedia.org/wiki/national_security). 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023.
- Smith, P. K. (2013). Play why: Should play be part of all children's life? *Encyclopaedia on Early Social Sciences*, 5 (20), 1403–1412.
- Sutapa, P., Pratama, K. W., Rosly, M. M., Ali, S. K. S. & Karakauki, M. (2021). Improving motor skills in early childhood through goal-oriented play activity. *Children (Basel)*, 28(11), 994.
- UNICEF (2019). *Early children care and education in Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education>. 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2023.