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Middle East Crises and Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Implications for Funding, Access, and Quality

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Abstract: This study examines the implications of recurring crises in the Middle East on early childhood education (ECE) in Nigeria, with particular attention to funding, operational costs, enrolment patterns, acquisition of learning resources, and the state of school facilities. As a mono-product economy heavily dependent on crude oil exports, Nigeria remains highly vulnerable to global oil market fluctuations often triggered by geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. Using a review-based approach, this paper draws on evidence from local and international reports, policy documents, and scholarly analyses to explore how external economic shocks influence the sustainability of early childhood education in Nigeria. The findings reveal that instability in the Middle East contributes to fiscal constraints, inflationary pressures, and reduced household purchasing power, all of which negatively affect access to and quality of ECE. The study concludes that unless proactive funding and policy measures are adopted, early childhood education in Nigeria will continue to face systemic challenges linked to global economic volatility. Recommendations are offered to strengthen resilience and ensure sustainable delivery of ECE in the face of external shocks.

Keywords: Middle East Crisis, Early Childhood Education, Nigeria, Funding, Enrolment, Educational Development

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as a critical foundation for lifelong learning and national development. It plays a significant role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social development during the formative years of a child's life. In Nigeria, ECE has gained increasing policy attention, particularly following its inclusion in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) framework. Despite this recognition, the sector continues to face numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited access, and disparities in quality across regions [1].

In recent years, global geopolitical developments—especially crises in the Middle East—have emerged as indirect but significant factors influencing Nigeria's education system. The Middle East, being a major hub of global oil production, plays a crucial role in determining international oil prices [2]. Conflicts and political instability in countries such as Iraq and Iran often result in fluctuations in oil supply and pricing, which have far-reaching implications for oil-dependent economies like Nigeria. These fluctuations affect

government revenues, exchange rates, and inflation levels, thereby influencing public sector financing and household economic conditions [3].

The Nigerian economy's reliance on crude oil exports makes it particularly susceptible to external shocks arising from Middle East crises. When oil prices fall or become unstable, government revenues decline, leading to budgetary constraints that affect key sectors, including education. Conversely, when crises lead to rising oil prices, the resulting inflation and increased cost of living place additional financial burdens on households and institutions. In both scenarios, early childhood education often un der-prioritized in national budgeting experiences significant strain [4].

Economic instability linked to global crises affects private sector participation in education, which is crucial for ECE provision in Nigeria. Many early childhood centres are privately owned and depend on tuition fees for sustainability. As household incomes decline due to economic pressures, parents may withdraw their children from school or opt for less expensive alternatives, thereby affecting enrolment and retention rates [5]. Similarly, rising costs of imported educational materials and construction inputs hinder the acquisition of learning resources and development of school infrastructure. Given these dynamics, it is important to examine how Middle East crises indirectly shape the trajectory of early childhood education in Nigeria. Understanding these linkages provides valuable insights for policymakers, education planners, and stakeholders seeking to build a resilient and inclusive education system capable of withstanding global economic shocks [6].

Literature Review

Concept of Middle East crisis

The contemporary Middle East crisis, particularly involving Iran, has deep historical and geopolitical roots. One major turning point was the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which overthrew the Western-backed monarchy and established an Islamic Republic under religious leadership [7]. The revolution was driven by opposition to autocratic rule, foreign interference, and socio-economic grievances. Since then, Iran's relationship with Western powers and regional actors, especially Israel, has remained tense, evolving into a prolonged geopolitical rivalry marked by proxy conflicts across the Middle East [8]. In recent years, this long-standing hostility escalated into direct confrontation, with military strikes involving the United States and Israel against Iran in 2026, further intensifying instability in the region. These developments reflect a transition from indirect rivalry to open conflict, rooted in ideological differences, nuclear concerns, and competition for regional influence [9].

The crisis has had profound implications for the global economy, largely due to the Middle East's central role in global energy supply. Recent reports indicate that the conflict has disrupted critical oil transport routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20% of global oil passes, leading to sharp increases in oil prices and energy insecurity . Oil prices have surged above \$110 per barrel, contributing to global inflation and slowing economic growth [10]. The International Monetary Fund has warned that the crisis will lead to slower global growth and higher inflation, while global supply chains for energy, food, and fertilizers have also been disrupted Financial markets have become increasingly volatile, with investors reacting to uncertainty and central banks facing challenges in managing inflation without triggering recession . The crisis has reinforced the vulnerability of the global economy to geopolitical shocks in energy-producing regions [11].

Developing countries such as Nigeria have been particularly affected due to their economic structure and limited resilience to external shocks. Although Nigeria is an oil-exporting country, fluctuations in global oil prices and domestic economic instability often translate into inflation, reduced purchasing power, and fiscal uncertainty [12]. Reports indicate that vulnerable economies without strong financial buffers are most exposed to

rising energy and food prices, which can trigger social and economic stress [13]. In Nigeria, these pressures have direct implications for the education sector, especially early childhood education. Increased government expenditure on subsidies and debt servicing often reduces funding available for education, while rising operational costs—such as fuel and transportation affect the sustainability of schools. At the household level, declining real income leads to reduced enrolment in early childhood education, as families prioritize basic needs over schooling [14]. Furthermore, inflation and foreign exchange constraints limit the procurement of learning materials and the development of school infrastructure. Consequently, the Middle East crisis indirectly undermines access, quality, and equity in early childhood education in Nigeria, exacerbating existing challenges in the sector [15].

Concept of Early childhood education

Early childhood education has been defined by different scholars and organizations based on scope, purpose, and developmental focus. Sooter (2013) and Nakpodia, (2011) defines early childhood education refers to the structured provision of learning experiences designed to support the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of children from birth to about eight years of age [16]. It emphasizes holistic development through play-based and child-centered approaches that prepare children for formal schooling while Adenike and Peter (2016) and Amadi, (2013) views early childhood education is the organized system of care, instruction, and developmental support offered to young children, typically between ages 0 –5, aimed at fostering foundational skills in language, numeracy, behavior, and social interaction necessary for lifelong learning and participation in society [17].

Early childhood education can be defined as a formal and informal educational process that occurs in early learning settings such as nurseries, kindergartens, and home environments, where young children are guided through activities that promote early brain development, creativity, and readiness for primary education [18]. The Early Child Care Development and Education (ECCDE) according to the National Policy on education (2013) is the care, protection, stimulation and learning promoted in children from age 0 - 4 years in a crèche or nursery [19]. The objectives of ECCDE, as outlined in the National Policy on Education (2013), shall be to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school; prepare the child for the primary level of education; provide adequate care, supervision, and security for the children while their parents are at work; inculcate social, moral norms and values; inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys, etc; develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit; stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits; and teach the rudiments of numbers; letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc, through play [20].

2. Materials and Methods

The Middle East Crises and Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Implications for Funding, Access, and Quality. Thee paper is a position paper that adopted a systematic literature review-based method. The method allows to collect and review the related previous literature from various online sources. With the aid of digital platform, the researcher collected secondary information to generate knowledge on this topic from 2015 - 2025. The position paper followed qualitative narrative design method. The researcher has visited different online sites to collect the previous literature and analyze the Middle East Crises and Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Implications for Funding, Access, and Quality. The previous findings are critically analyzed and presented in different themes as on Middle East Crises and Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Implications for Funding, Access, and Quality.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion

This output of the literatures on the Middle East Crises and Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: Implications for Funding, Access, and Quality presents an in-depth study and result that can infer conclusion on the topic. The study includes: online publication; conference paper, journals sorted from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, Learn Techlib, SAGE, Nebraska and Springer.

Exclusion

Also, the literature review excludes information from edited books, preprints, monographs, information below 2015 and book chapters.

3. Results and Discussion

Impact of Middle East crises on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

The impact of Middle East crises especially conflicts involving major oil-producing countries such as Iraq and Iran extends beyond geopolitics and significantly affects early childhood education (ECE) in Nigeria through economic transmission channels [21]. Nigeria's heavy dependence on crude oil revenue makes its education sector highly vulnerable to global shocks arising from instability in the Middle East. The discussion below examines these impacts across funding, operational costs, enrolment, learning resources, and school facilities, supported by evidence from credible local and international sources [22].

Impact on Funding of Early Childhood Education

Middle East crises often trigger volatility in global oil prices, which directly affects Nigeria's government revenue and, by extension, education funding. Nigeria relies heavily on oil exports for public finance; thus, any disruption in oil markets either through price crashes or unstable supply chains leads to fiscal instability [23]. Studies show that fluctuations in oil prices reduce government allocation to education, as witnessed during previous oil shocks when education budgets declined alongside falling revenues. Recent global tensions linked to the Middle East have again heightened concerns about Nigeria's fiscal sustainability, with policymakers warning of inflationary pressures and economic uncertainty [24]. In such situations, early childhood education often considered less politically urgent than tertiary education suffers disproportionate neglect. Evidence from UNICEF indicates that Nigeria already allocates far below the recommended 15–20% of its budget to education, leaving millions of children underserved. Reduced fiscal space caused by Middle East crises therefore worsens underfunding of ECE programmes, delays infrastructure projects, and limits expansion of pre-primary education [25].

Impact on Operational Cost of Running Early Childhood Education

Middle East crises often lead to rising global energy prices, which translate into higher domestic costs in Nigeria, including fuel, transportation, and electricity. Recent reports show that tensions in the Middle East have already contributed to sharp increases in fuel prices and general inflation in Nigeria. For early childhood education centres, this significantly increases operational costs. Schools must spend more on transporting children, powering facilities (especially where generators are used), and purchasing basic supplies [26]. Private ECE providers, who dominate the sector in urban areas, are particularly affected, often transferring these costs to parents through increased school fees. This creates affordability challenges and reduces access for low-income households [27]. Rising operational costs also affect staff salaries and retention, leading to compromised service delivery and lower quality of early childhood education [28].

Impact on Enrolment of Children in Early Childhood Education

Economic hardship triggered by Middle East crises reduces household income and increases poverty levels, which in turn affects children's enrolment in early childhood education. When inflation rises due to global oil shocks, families prioritize essential needs such as food and shelter over education, particularly pre-primary education, which is not compulsory in Nigeria. Nigeria already faces a severe out-of-school crisis, with millions of children excluded from formal education. Economic shocks linked to global crises further

exacerbate this situation by increasing dropout rates and reducing new enrolments at the early childhood level [29]. According to UNICEF, poverty and inequality are major drivers of educational exclusion in Nigeria. Early childhood education becomes one of the first casualties when households experience financial stress, thereby undermining foundational learning and long-term educational outcomes [30].

Impact on Acquisition of Learning Resources

The acquisition of learning materials in early childhood education such as books, toys, digital tools, and teaching aids is heavily dependent on both public funding and importation. Middle East crises disrupt global supply chains and increase the cost of imported goods due to inflation and currency depreciation. As Nigeria experiences exchange rate pressures during global economic instability, the cost of educational materials rises [31]. Schools struggle to procure adequate learning resources, leading to overcrowded classrooms with insufficient teaching aids. Reports indicate that Nigeria's education system is already overstretched, with limited per capita spending and inadequate learning materials. For early childhood education, where play-based and resource-intensive learning is essential, this shortage significantly affects the quality of instruction. Teachers are forced to improvise with limited materials, reducing the effectiveness of early childhood development programmes [32].

Impact on School Facilities and Infrastructure

Middle East crises indirectly affect the development and maintenance of school infrastructure through reduced government capital expenditure. When national revenue declines or inflation rises, governments often cut or delay infrastructure investments, including the construction and renovation of early childhood education centres. Nigeria already faces infrastructure deficits in education, including overcrowded classrooms and inadequate facilities [33]. With economic instability driven by global crises, funding for building new ECE centres or upgrading existing ones becomes limited. Increased costs of construction materials often linked to global supply disruptions further hinder infrastructure development. In conflict-affected and economically vulnerable regions, these challenges are even more severe, as schools may remain under-resourced or inaccessible. This undermines efforts to expand early childhood education and achieve universal basic education goals [34].

4. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that crises in the Middle East, though geographically distant, exert significant indirect influence on early childhood education in Nigeria through economic transmission mechanisms. Fluctuations in global oil prices, driven by geopolitical instability, affect government revenue, inflation rates, and household income levels. These changes, in turn, shape the funding, accessibility, and quality of early childhood education across the country. The analysis shows that reduced government revenue often leads to lower budgetary allocation to education, with early childhood education receiving minimal attention. At the same time, rising operational costs make it increasingly difficult for school proprietors to sustain quality services, while parents struggle to afford school fees. This dual pressure contributes to declining enrolment and reduced access to early learning opportunities.

Additionally, constraints in funding and foreign exchange availability limit the acquisition of learning materials and delay infrastructure development, thereby affecting the overall learning environment. The cumulative effect of these challenges is a weakening of the foundation upon which the entire education system is built. Since early childhood education is essential for cognitive and social development, disruptions at this level have long-term implications for human capital development and national progress. Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1) Increase Dedicated Funding for Early Childhood Education

The government should establish protected budgetary allocations for early childhood education to ensure consistent funding regardless of fluctuations in oil revenue. This can be achieved through legislative backing and improved fiscal planning.

2) Diversify the Nigerian Economy

Reducing dependence on crude oil will minimize the vulnerability of the education sector to global oil market shocks. Economic diversification will provide more stable revenue streams for funding education.

3) Strengthen Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Government should encourage partnerships with private sector actors, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies to support the development of early childhood education, particularly in underserved areas.

4) Subsidize Early Childhood Education for Low-Income Families

Targeted financial support, such as grants or conditional cash transfers, should be provided to vulnerable households to sustain enrolment in early childhood education during periods of economic hardship.

5) Promote Local Production of Learning Materials

Encouraging the local production of educational resources will reduce dependence on imports and cushion the effects of exchange rate fluctuations and global supply chain disruptions.

6) Invest in Cost-Effective and Resilient Infrastructure

Government and stakeholders should adopt innovative and cost-effective approaches to building and maintaining school facilities, ensuring that infrastructure development continues even during economic downturns.

7) Enhance Policy Planning and Monitoring Mechanisms

Education planners should integrate global economic risk assessments into policy design and implementation to ensure that early childhood education systems remain resilient in the face of external shocks.

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