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Research Article

# Impact of Early Childhood Learning Experiences on Civic Tolerance and Social Integration Among Upper Basic School Students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:**

**Background of Study:** Early childhood learning experiences are crucial in shaping students' social behavior, moral values, and civic attitudes. In diverse societies such as Nigeria, early educational exposure is essential for promoting civic tolerance and social integration. However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding this relationship among upper basic school students in northern Nigeria.

**Aims and Scope of Paper:** This study examined the impact of early childhood learning experiences on civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State, Nigeria. Guided by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study focused on the role of early social and educational interactions in fostering empathy, cooperation, and civic responsibility.

**Methods:** A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted. A sample of 384 upper basic school students was selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions, while Independent Samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA were employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

**Results:** The results showed that students with richer early childhood learning experiences demonstrated significantly higher levels of civic tolerance and social integration than those with limited exposure. Significant differences were observed between students with high and low early learning experiences, while ANOVA results indicated a strong association among early learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that early childhood education plays a vital role in fostering civic tolerance and social integration. Enhancing early learning environments can contribute to social cohesion and the development of tolerant and civically responsible citizens. The study recommends strengthening early childhood curricula with socio-emotional and civic learning components, improving teacher training, and reinforcing education policy implementation in northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Civic tolerance, Early childhood education, Social integration, Sociocultural theory, Zamfara State

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a vital stage in a child's development, during which cognitive, social, and moral foundations are established. Recent studies highlight that experiences gained at this stage have lasting effects on individuals' civic attitudes and inclusive behaviours (Erickson & Thompson, 2024).

Exposure to diverse peer groups, inclusive learning environments, and structured social interactions during early education reduces the likelihood of prejudice and nurtures essential values such as empathy, respect, and openness core elements that promote civic tolerance and social integration in later school life. However, in Nigeria both policy reports and empirical studies emphasize the urgent need to strengthen early childhood education as a key strategy for achieving national social and developmental objectives. National and global reviews reveals disparities in the accessibility and quality of early childhood programmes, particularly in the northern regions. These gaps underscore the importance of improving early learning experiences to foster socially responsible citizens who can contribute meaningfully to peace and unity in the country (Ria & Hijriati, 2025).

Furthermore, research on civic education indicates that teaching approaches and curricula designed to build civic knowledge, attitudes, and skills have a strong impact on learners' civic tolerance and behaviour (Sumadi et al., 2021). Similarly, youth development studies suggest that early learning experiences serve as a foundation for later civic engagement and social participation, highlighting a developmental connection between early education and the civic and social maturity of adolescents.

Significant role that early childhood learning experiences play in shaping children's civic tolerance and social integration

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(Kaya et al., 2025). Empirical evidence demonstrates that educational settings which promote diversity, inclusion, and social emotional learning (SEL) exert a lasting influence on children's moral and interpersonal development (Macfarlane & Honeck, 2023). When young learners engage in classrooms that value multiculturalism, encourage peer collaboration, and foster nurturing teacher child relationships, they are more likely to internalize empathy, respect for differences, and openness to new perspectives attributes that later translate into civic tolerance and responsible social behaviour during adolescence (Haris & Mufidah, 2025). Structured early interventions aimed at enhancing social emotional competence lead to measurable improvements in children's cooperative play, peer acceptance, and overall sense of belonging, all of which form the bedrock of social integration in later schooling (Macfarlane & Honeck, 2023). Longitudinal evidence reinforces this, indicating that early exposure to environments rich in social and moral engagement cultivates teamwork, inclusive attitudes, and harmonious coexistence among students (Zakso et al., 2021). Advanced statistical analyses such as multivariate and path modeling have also revealed that multicultural and emotionally responsive early childhood programs indirectly promote civic tolerance and social cohesion by developing mediating traits like empathy, perspective-taking, and moral reasoning (Tyas & Naibaho, 2020).

Within the Nigerian educational landscape, both national and international policy frameworks have increasingly recognized early childhood education as a crucial foundation for nurturing socially responsible, civically minded, and peaceful citizens (Garba & AHMAD, 2025). However, despite these policy commitments, there remains a paucity of empirical research exploring the linkage between early learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration especially within the socio-cultural context of northern Nigeria. This gap underscores the timeliness and importance of the present study, which seeks to investigate these developmental connections among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State.

Which highlights the profound influence of social interaction and cultural context on children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Vygotsky posits that learning is not an isolated process but one that occurs through meaningful engagement with others parents, teachers, peers, and the broader environment. Social exchanges, children internalize shared values, norms, and behaviours that shape their moral reasoning and social identity (Jumiatmoko et al., 2024). The theory suggests that early childhood experiences play a vital role in building the foundations for empathy, cooperation, and tolerance, as children learn to understand perspectives different from their own. Within inclusive and culturally diverse learning environments, guided participation and collaborative activities help young learners develop civic-mindedness and a sense of belonging (Grindheim et al., 2019). In relation to this study, Vygotsky's theory provides a useful framework for explaining how early learning experiences particularly those enriched with social interaction, cooperative problem-solving, and multicultural exposure (Chen & Khoso, 2025). Solid conceptual foundation for understanding the developmental link between early childhood education and the cultivation of socially responsible and civically engaged individuals (Salleh et al., 2021).

Recent scholarly discourse highlights that early childhood learning experiences play a foundational role in shaping children's civic orientation, moral judgment, and social conduct (Silaban et al., 2019). Researchers consistently affirm that exposure to inclusive and interactive early learning environments where children engage with peers from diverse backgrounds and participate in social emotional learning activities fosters empathy, cooperation, and respect for others (Siregar et al., 2024). These elements form the bedrock of civic tolerance and social integration in later years. Global evidence also demonstrates that well-structured early childhood education enhances peaceful coexistence, reduces discrimination, and strengthens learners' sense of belonging and collaboration (Álamo-Bolaños et al., 2024). However, in many developing nations such as Nigeria, the focus of early childhood education remains largely confined to literacy and numeracy outcomes, with minimal attention given to its civic and social development roles (Casmana et al., 2023). While studies in southern Nigeria have explored themes like early childhood pedagogy, teacher quality, and academic achievement. A little research has delved into the long-term civic and social implications of early learning experiences (Muhammad, 2025). In the northern region particularly Zamfara State there is an even more pronounced lack of empirical evidence linking early learning exposure to civic tolerance and social cohesion among adolescents (Muhammad et al., 2023).

This research gap is alarming considering the increasing cases of intolerance, peer hostility, and social disconnection reported among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. These challenges may be associated with inadequate early exposure to multicultural learning, limited emotional and social learning content, and insufficient teacher capacity in promoting civic-minded values (Ziemes, 2024). The National Policy on Education Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019 underscores the significance of early childhood education in building unity and responsible citizenship, implementation setbacks and a lack of empirical follow-up have hindered its full realization (Tunfang & Jackson, 2025). Therefore, this study seeks to examine how early childhood learning experiences influence civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for enhancing early childhood education practices and strengthening national policy interventions toward peace, inclusion, and social development (Ugobueze, 2024).

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This research employed a quantitative design, specifically the correlation survey approach, to examine how early childhood learning experiences affect civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed the researcher to collect data from a broad population and assess existing relationships between variables without any manipulation. The descriptive survey method also made it possible to apply inferential statistics in determining the strength and nature of the relationship between early learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration among the participants. The target population for the study consisted of all Upper Basic School (UBS) students in Gusau Local Government Area, numbering 14,231. From this population, a sample size of 384 students was selected, following the Research Advisors' Sample Size Determination Table which provides an acceptable sample at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. However, to ensure balanced representation, a stratified random sampling technique was utilized, categorizing students by school, gender, and class level. This method was appropriate

as it ensured inclusivity across different subgroups and enhanced the representativeness, validity, and generalizability of the research findings. A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher served as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of three sections A, B, and C corresponding to the key variables of the study: early childhood learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration. All items were rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument underwent expert validation by academics in Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Early Childhood Education from Federal University Gusau to ensure both content and face validity. To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted using 40 students from schools outside the study area. Data from the pilot were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability method, which produced a coefficient value of 0.87. This index indicated a high degree of internal consistency and confirmed the instrument's suitability for the main study.

Data collection was carried out through direct administration of questionnaires to the sampled schools, with the assistance of class teachers to enhance comprehension and ensure a high retrieval rate. Ethical standards were strictly upheld throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation of all respondents. For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while inferential statistics were applied to test the hypotheses. Specifically, the independent samples t-test was used to test hypotheses one and two, whereas a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test the third hypothesis, all at a 0.05 level of significance. The outcomes of these analyses provided empirical insights into how early childhood learning experiences shape civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Result

**Table 1.** Weighted Mean Interpretation

| S/N | Mean Range | Extent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | 3.50 – 5.00 | High Extent |
| 2. | 2.50 – 3.49 | Moderate Extent |
| 3 | 1.00 – 2.49 | Low Extent |

The responses were categorized as 20–36 (very low extent), 37–52 (low extent), 53–68 (moderate extent), 69–84 (great extent), and 85–100 (very great extent).

**Table 2**. Result of Descriptive Statistics of Level of Early Childhood Learning Experiences

| Variables | N | Mean | Standard Dev. | Minimum | Maximum | Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Early Childhood Learning Experiences | 384 | 77.86 | 15.74 | 24 | 100 | 76 |

Table 1 presents the result of descriptive statistics of sampled level of early childhood learning experiences among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The mean score of 77.86 falls within the "great extent" range, indicating that students in the study area had substantial exposure to positive early learning experiences. This suggests that early childhood education in the area provides a strong foundation in areas such as social interaction, inclusivity, and moral learning, which significantly influence later civic and social behaviours.

**Table 3.** Result of Descriptive Statistics of Level of Civic Tolerance among Students.

| Variables | N | Mean | Standard Dev. | Minimum | Maximum | Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Civic Tolerance among Students | 384 | 75.94 | 16.18 | 24 | 100 | 79 |

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics of civic tolerance among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. The mean score of 75.94, which lies within the "great extent" category, suggests that the respondents possess a high level of civic tolerance. This indicates that students generally demonstrate understanding, respect, and acceptance of differences in beliefs, backgrounds, and opinions, a development that can be linked to the quality of their early childhood social and moral learning experiences.

**Table 4.** Result of Descriptive Statistics of Level of Social Integration among Students

| Variables | N | Mean | Standard Dev. | Minimum | Maximum | Range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social Integration among Students | 384 | 78.41 | 15.92 | 24 | 100 | 77 |

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the level of social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. The mean score of 78.41, which also falls within the "great extent" category, implies that students are well-integrated socially, showing cooperation, teamwork, and a sense of belonging in school and community life. This reflects the role of early learning experiences in shaping students' capacity for empathy, collaboration, and harmonious coexistence with peers and teachers.

There is no significant influence of early childhood learning experiences on civic tolerance among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. To test this hypothesis, an Independent Samples t-test

was conducted to compare the civic tolerance mean scores of students with high early childhood learning experiences and those with low early childhood learning experiences.

**Table 5.** Independent Samples t-test Showing the Influence of Early Childhood Learning Experiences on Civic Tolerance

| Group | N | Mean | SD | df | t | P-Value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High Early Learning Experience | 192 | 3.48 | 0.57 | 382 | 4.72 | 0.000 | Rejected $H_{01}$ |
| Low Early Learning Experience | 192 | 3.12 | 0.64 | | | | |

The findings show that students with high early learning experiences (Mean = 3.48, SD = 0.57) had higher civic tolerance scores compared to those with low early learning experiences (Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.64). The calculated t-value of 4.72 with df = 382 and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis ($H_{01}$) which states that there is no significant influence of early childhood learning experiences on civic tolerance is rejected. This implies that early childhood learning experiences have a significant positive influence on students' civic tolerance.

There is no significant effect of early childhood learning experiences on social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. To test this hypothesis, another Independent Samples t-test was used to examine differences in social integration based on early learning exposure.

**Table 6.** Independent Samples t-test Showing the Effect of Early Childhood Learning Experiences on Social Integration.

| Group | N | Mean | SD | df | t | P-Value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High Early Learning Experience | 192 | 3.61 | 0.52 | 382 | 5.19 | 0.000 | Rejected $H_{01}$ |
| Low Early Learning Experience | 192 | 3.25 | 0.58 | | | | |

The result reveals that students with high early learning experiences (Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.52) had higher social integration scores compared to those with low early learning experiences (Mean = 3.25, SD = 0.58). The computed t-value of 5.19 with df = 382 and a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis ($H_{02}$) which states that there is no significant effect of early childhood learning experiences on social integration is rejected. This implies that early childhood learning experiences have a significant positive effect on students' social integration in upper basic schools.

There is no significant differences between early childhood learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether a significant difference exists among the three variables.

**Table 7**. One-Way ANOVA Showing the Differences Between Early Childhood Learning Experiences, Civic Tolerance, and Social Integration

| Source of Variation | SS | df | MS | F | P-Value | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 9.284 | 381 | 4.642 | 7.316 | 0 .001 | Rejected $H_{03}$ |
| Within Groups | 241.016 | 381 | 0.633 | | | |
| **Total** | **250.300** | **383** | | | | |

The analysis shows that the differences between-groups sum of squares (SS) = 9.284, within-groups SS = 241.016, with a total SS of 250.300. The computed F-value of 7.316 with df = 2 and 381, and a p-value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that there is a statistically significant differences among the three variables. Since the p-value (0.001) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis ($H_{03}$) which states that there is no significant difference between early childhood learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration is rejected. This result implies that early childhood learning experiences are significantly difference to both civic tolerance and social integration, suggesting that children exposed to richer early learning environments tend to develop stronger civic values and social integration skills as they progress through upper basic education.

### 3.1 Discussion

The first major finding revealed that early childhood learning experiences exert a significant influence on civic tolerance among students. Learners who participated in inclusive, interactive, and well-structured early education settings displayed higher levels of empathy, cooperation, and appreciation for diversity. Social interactions and cultural contexts are fundamental to human development. Essentially, children internalize civic-oriented values such as respect, fairness, and openness through activities like collaborative play, storytelling, and moral discussions during early learning. Civic-oriented pedagogies in early education nurture inclusive citizenship and tolerance by strengthening the emotional and social foundations necessary for democratic participation (Dwintari & Murdiono, 2023).

The second finding indicated that early childhood learning experiences have a notable effect on students'

social integration. Those who had access to quality early education exhibited stronger peer relationships, teamwork, and a sense of belonging within the school environment. Structured early learning programs that prioritize social-emotional development improve children's ability to cooperate, interact positively, and participate actively in group activities (Cabrera, 2022). Inclusive early learning systems are vital for enhancing social cohesion and reducing exclusion in developing contexts. The implication is that early childhood experiences which promote empathy, shared learning, and interpersonal understanding create a strong basis for peaceful coexistence and long-term social unity (Li et al., 2025).

The third finding, derived from the ANOVA analysis, established a significant relationship among early childhood learning experiences, civic tolerance, and social integration. This suggests that these constructs are closely connected and reinforce one another. Improvements in early learning not only enhance academic preparedness but also foster civic virtues and social connectedness (Sumadi et al., 2021).

Consequently, in the Nigerian context, these findings highlight the urgent need to strengthen early childhood education policies and implementation, particularly in northern regions such as Zamfara State, where insecurity and educational inequality hinder children's holistic development. Consequently, this study provides empirical justification for integrating civic and socio-emotional learning components into early childhood curricula to promote tolerance, cooperation, and national cohesion.

### 3.2.1 Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational policy, curriculum development, and pedagogical practices in Zamfara State and Nigeria at large. Firstly, it underscores the critical role of early childhood learning experiences in shaping students' civic tolerance and social integration during later stages of schooling. This suggests that early childhood education (ECE) should not only focus on cognitive development but also intentionally incorporate moral, civic, and social values that promote coexistence and respect for diversity. Secondly, the study provides valuable insights for teachers and school administrators on how early learning experiences can foster peaceful relationships and reduce tendencies toward intolerance among students. It implies the need for continuous teacher training on value-based education, social-emotional learning, and inclusive classroom practices.

Furthermore, the results hold policy relevance for educational planners and government agencies, indicating the necessity of integrating civic education principles into early childhood curricula to nurture responsible, tolerant, and socially integrated citizens. The study also has sociological implications, as it highlights how foundational learning can contribute to long-term community cohesion and peaceful coexistence in conflict-prone regions like Zamfara State.

### 3.2.2 Research Contribution

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection between early childhood education and civic development in Nigeria. Specifically, it provides empirical evidence linking early learning experiences with the development of civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students. The research advances theoretical understanding by supporting developmental and sociocultural learning theories that emphasize the influence of early experiences on moral and social behavior formation. It also contributes contextually by addressing a gap in literature regarding how early childhood education practices in northern Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara State, affect students' civic attitudes and interpersonal relations. Additionally, the study serves as a useful resource for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers seeking to enhance civic education frameworks. It introduces practical recommendations that can guide the restructuring of ECE programs to foster inclusive citizenship and social harmony.

### 3.2.3 Limitation

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the research was geographically limited to Gusau Local Government Area of Zamfara State, which may restrict the generalization of findings to other regions with different cultural or educational contexts. Secondly, data were collected primarily from upper basic school students, and therefore, the study may not fully capture the broader spectrum of early childhood learning experiences across different age groups or educational levels. Thirdly, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias or limited recall accuracy regarding early childhood experiences. Furthermore, due to time and resource constraints, the study employed a cross-sectional design rather than a longitudinal one, making it difficult to establish causality between early learning experiences and later civic outcomes.

### 3.2.4 Suggestion

1. The early childhood curriculum should be enriched with civic and socio-emotional learning elements to nurture children's empathy, respect for diversity, teamwork, and tolerance from the foundational stages of education.
2. Educators should be well-trained and equipped with innovative, child-centered instructional methods that encourage inclusivity, moral growth, and positive social interaction among young learners.
3. The government and relevant education authorities should strengthen the enforcement of early childhood education policies, ensuring sufficient funding, close monitoring, and alignment with national objectives aimed at fostering unity, peace, and sustainable development.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that early childhood learning experiences are instrumental in developing civic tolerance and social integration among upper basic school students in Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State. The research findings indicate that learners exposed to interactive, inclusive, and well-structured early learning environments exhibited greater

empathy, mutual respect, teamwork, and a stronger sense of community. This outcome highlights early childhood education as the cornerstone for cultivating civic values and fostering social harmony, in line with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social engagement and cultural context in human development. Moreover, the study confirms a significant interconnection among early childhood learning, civic tolerance, and social integration.

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The authors (SM and BM) solely conceived, designed, and conducted the study, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The author also prepared, revised, and approved the final manuscript for publication in the Journal of Early Childhood Development and Education, published by CV Media Inti Teknologi.

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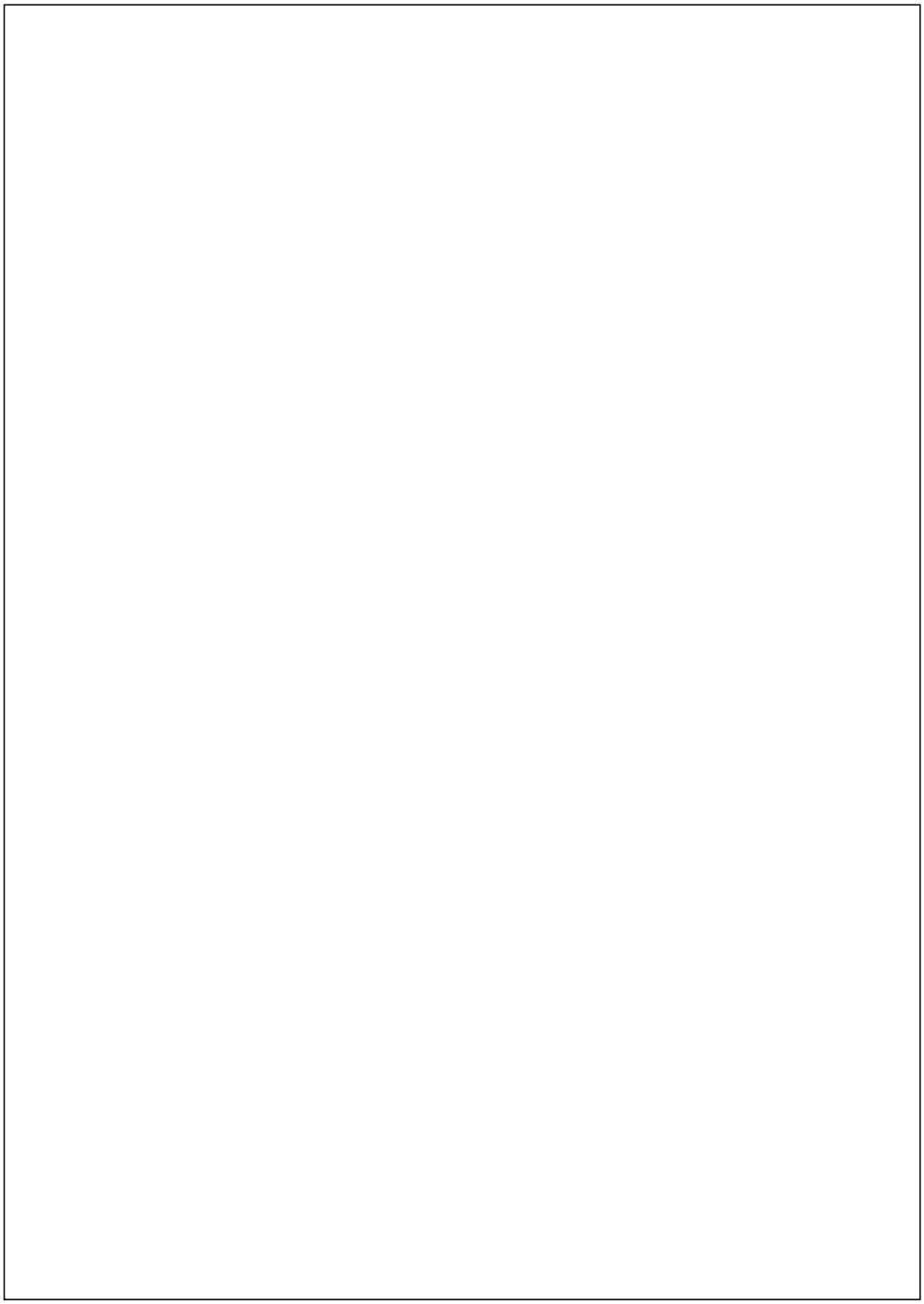
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