



# **Achieving The Goals Of The Early Childhood Education Through Cultural Understanding Of The Local Children In Nigerian Context**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the importance of achieving the goals of early childhood education through the cultural understanding of local children in the Nigerian context. Early childhood education plays a crucial role in the holistic development of children, and understanding their cultural backgrounds is essential for effective teaching and learning. By embracing cultural diversity and incorporating it into educational practices, educators can create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. This paper examines the significance of cultural understanding in early childhood education, the challenges faced in achieving this goal, and proposes strategies to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in Nigerian early childhood education settings.

**Keywords:** Early childhood education, learning environments, counselling programmes

## **INTRODUCTION**

American School of Paris (2023) argued that Early childhood education is a critical phase in a child's development, laying the foundation for their future academic success and overall well-being. In the context of Nigeria, a culturally diverse country with various ethnic groups and languages, it becomes imperative to recognize and embrace the cultural backgrounds of local children to achieve the goals of early childhood education effectively, (America School of Paris, 2023; Goodwin University, 2023; Study.com, 2023; University of Massachusetts, 2023). Cultural understanding allows educators to create meaningful connections with children, foster inclusive learning environments, and promote positive identity development. The goals of early childhood education include promoting cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, as well as nurturing a love for learning and preparing children for future educational experiences. To achieve these goals, it is essential to consider the cultural context in which children grow and learn. Cultural understanding enables educators to tailor instructional approaches that are culturally relevant and responsive, ensuring that children's unique experiences, values, and traditions are acknowledged and respected, (America School of Paris, 2023; Goodwin University, 2023; Study.com, 2023; University of Massachusetts, 2023).

However, achieving cultural understanding in early childhood education in Nigeria comes with its own set of challenges. These challenges include language barriers, limited cultural resources and materials, and the need for professional development and training for educators. Overcoming these challenges requires a collaborative effort among educators, families, communities, and policymakers to prioritize cultural understanding and inclusivity in early childhood education. This paper aims to explore strategies that can be implemented to promote cultural understanding and inclusivity in early childhood education in the Nigerian context. These strategies may include incorporating culturally diverse literature and resources, engaging families and communities in the learning process, providing professional development opportunities for educators, and fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. By embracing cultural understanding, early childhood education in Nigeria can become a transformative experience that empowers children to embrace their identities, appreciate diversity, and become active participants in their communities, (America School of Paris, 2023; Goodwin University, 2023; Study.com, 2023; University of Massachusetts, 2023).

The objectives of the UBE initiative were stated at the outset, with some measurable targets and some less well-defined objectives, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004):

- i. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion.
- ii. Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age.
- iii. Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality, and efficiency)
- iv. Cater for the learning needs of young people who, for one reason or another, have had to interrupt their schooling, through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education.

Ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as the ethical, moral, and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning, (Austine et al., 2015; FRN, 2014, 2004).

Key goals of early childhood education include promoting school readiness, fostering a love for learning, supporting social-emotional development, and cultivating a positive attitude towards education. It recognizes the unique needs and characteristics of young children, providing age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate experiences that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Early childhood education also emphasizes the importance of partnerships with families and communities. It recognizes that parents and caregivers play a vital role in a child's early development and seeks to involve them in their child's educational journey through open communication, parent education programs, and collaborative decision-making. Overall, early childhood education aims to provide a solid educational foundation, promote holistic development, and set children on a path towards lifelong learning and success.

### **Relationship between Education Culture**

Education and culture are closely intertwined and have a significant impact on each other. Here are a few ways in which education and culture are related:

1. **Transmission of Cultural Values:** Education plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural values from one generation to another. Through the educational system, cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions are passed down, ensuring their continuity and preservation, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023)
2. **Cultural Awareness and Understanding:** Education helps individuals develop an understanding and appreciation of different cultures. By learning about diverse cultures, histories, and traditions, students gain a broader perspective and develop respect for cultural differences, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
3. **Language and Communication:** Language is an essential aspect of culture, and education is instrumental in teaching language skills. Language not only enables communication but also carries cultural nuances, values, and ways of thinking. Education helps preserve and promote different languages,

contributing to cultural diversity, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

4. Socialization and Identity Formation: Education plays a vital role in socializing individuals into their respective cultures. It helps shape their identities by providing knowledge about their cultural heritage, history, and societal norms. Education also helps individuals develop a sense of belonging and cultural identity, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

5. Cultural Innovation and Adaptation: Education can foster cultural innovation by encouraging critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It equips individuals with the tools to adapt to changing cultural contexts and contribute to the evolution of their culture, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

It's important to note that education can both reinforce existing cultural norms and challenge them, depending on the educational system and its approach to cultural diversity and inclusivity. Making early childhood centers culturally relevant to kids is essential for their holistic development and fostering a sense of belonging. Here are a few ways to achieve this:

- i. **Diverse Curriculum:** Incorporate diverse books, toys, and learning materials that represent different cultures, languages, and ethnicities. This helps children learn about and appreciate different cultures from an early age, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- ii. **Celebrate Diversity:** Organize cultural events, festivals, and celebrations that highlight the traditions, customs, and holidays of various cultures. Encourage families to share their cultural practices and stories with the children, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- iii. **Multilingual Environment:** Create an environment that supports multilingualism. Display signs, labels, and greetings in different languages to promote language diversity and inclusivity, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- iv. **Staff Training:** Provide professional development and training for staff members on cultural competency and sensitivity. This helps them understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of the children and their families, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- v. **Family Engagement:** Involve families in the center's activities and decision-making processes. Encourage parents to share their cultural experiences, traditions, and languages with the staff and other children, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- vi. **Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with local community organizations, cultural centers, and ethnic associations to bring in guest speakers, performers, or volunteers who can share their cultural knowledge and experiences with the children. (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023)
- vii. **Inclusive Environment:** Ensure that the physical environment of the center reflects diversity and inclusivity. Use inclusive artwork, photographs, and decorations that represent different cultures and ethnicities, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

By implementing these strategies, early childhood centers can create a culturally relevant and inclusive environment where children feel valued, respected, and connected to their own culture and the cultures of others.

**Strategies to guide counselling programmes in early childhood education to become more culturally sensitive to the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of Nigerian children:**

- i. **Cultural Competence Training:** Policymakers can prioritize cultural competence training for guidance counsellors and early childhood educators. This training should focus on developing an understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices

- of the children and families they serve, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- ii. **Collaboration with Local Communities:** Policymakers can encourage collaboration between early childhood education institutions and local communities. This collaboration can involve engaging community leaders, parents, and cultural experts to provide insights and guidance on culturally appropriate counselling practices, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - iii. **Culturally Relevant Materials and Resources:** Policymakers can ensure that guidance counselling programs have access to culturally relevant materials, resources, and literature. This includes incorporating diverse stories, illustrations, and examples in counselling materials that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of Nigeria, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - iv. **Language Access:** Policymakers should prioritize language access in guidance counselling programs. This may involve providing multilingual counsellors or interpreters to facilitate effective communication with children and families who may have limited proficiency in the dominant language, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - v. **Flexibility in Counseling Approaches:** Policymakers should promote flexibility in counselling approaches to accommodate different cultural perspectives and practices. Guidance counsellors should be encouraged to adapt their strategies and interventions to align with the cultural values and beliefs of the children and families they serve, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - vi. **Respect for Cultural Differences:** Policymakers should emphasize the importance of respect for cultural differences in guidance counselling programs. This includes promoting an inclusive and non-judgmental environment where children and families feel comfortable expressing their cultural identities and beliefs, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - vii. **Continuous Evaluation and Feedback:** Policymakers should establish mechanisms for continuous evaluation and feedback from children, families, and educators to assess the cultural sensitivity of guidance counselling programs. This feedback can help identify areas for improvement and inform policy decisions, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

By implementing these strategies, policymakers can ensure that guidance counselling programs in early childhood education are culturally sensitive, respectful, and responsive to the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of Nigeria. This will help create an inclusive and supportive environment for all children and families. Moreover, there are ways a cultural competence training can play a crucial role in helping guidance counselors and early childhood educators better understand and appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds of children and families in Nigeria:

- i. **Developing Cultural Awareness:** Cultural competence training helps counselors and educators develop awareness of their own cultural biases, assumptions, and beliefs. It encourages self-reflection and recognition of personal biases that may influence their interactions with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- ii. **Understanding Cultural Values and Norms:** Cultural competence training provides insights into the cultural values, norms, traditions, and practices of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. It helps counselors and educators understand how these cultural factors shape the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of children and families, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- iii. **Enhancing Communication Skills:** Cultural competence training equips counselors and educators with effective communication skills to engage with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. It emphasizes active listening, empathy, and the ability to ask culturally

- sensitive questions to facilitate meaningful and respectful interactions, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
- iv. Promoting Respect and Inclusion: Cultural competence training fosters an understanding of the importance of respecting and valuing diverse cultural backgrounds. It promotes an inclusive environment where children and families feel accepted, appreciated, and understood for their unique cultural identities, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - v. Adapting Counseling Approaches: Cultural competence training helps counselors and educators adapt their counseling approaches to align with the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of children and families. It encourages the use of culturally appropriate strategies, interventions, and counseling techniques that resonate with the cultural backgrounds of the individuals being served, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - vi. Collaborating with Families and Communities: Cultural competence training emphasizes the significance of collaborating with families and communities in the counseling process. It encourages counselors and educators to involve parents and community members as partners in supporting the social-emotional development of children and respecting their cultural values, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).
  - vii. Addressing Bias and Stereotypes: Cultural competence training provides strategies for recognizing and addressing biases and stereotypes that may impact interactions with children and families. It promotes a non-judgmental and unbiased approach to counseling, fostering a positive and supportive environment, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

By undergoing cultural competence training, guidance counselors and early childhood educators can gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to better understand and appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds of children and families in Nigeria. This, in turn, enhances their ability to provide culturally responsive and effective guidance and support.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Achieving the goals of early childhood education through cultural understanding of local children in the Nigerian context is crucial for their holistic development. This paper explores the significance of cultural understanding in early childhood education, the challenges faced, and proposes strategies to promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Early childhood education plays a vital role in the holistic development of children. Understanding their cultural backgrounds is essential for effective teaching and learning. By embracing cultural diversity and incorporating it into educational practices, educators can create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. In the Nigerian context, with its diverse ethnic groups and languages, recognizing and embracing the cultural backgrounds of local children is imperative. Cultural understanding allows educators to create meaningful connections with children, foster inclusive learning environments, and promote positive identity development. However, achieving cultural understanding in early childhood education in Nigeria comes with challenges, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

These challenges include language barriers, limited cultural resources, and the need for professional development for educators. Overcoming these challenges requires a collaborative effort among educators, families, communities, and policymakers to prioritize cultural understanding and inclusivity. To promote cultural understanding and inclusivity in Nigerian early childhood education settings, strategies can be implemented. These strategies may include incorporating culturally diverse literature and resources, engaging families, and communities in the learning process, providing professional development opportunities for educators, and fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment. By embracing cultural understanding, early childhood education in Nigeria can become a transformative experience that empowers children to embrace their identities, appreciate diversity, and become active participants in their communities, (Cole, 2019; Chourasiya, 2023; Henriques, 2023; Johnson, 2013; Pias 2023).

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