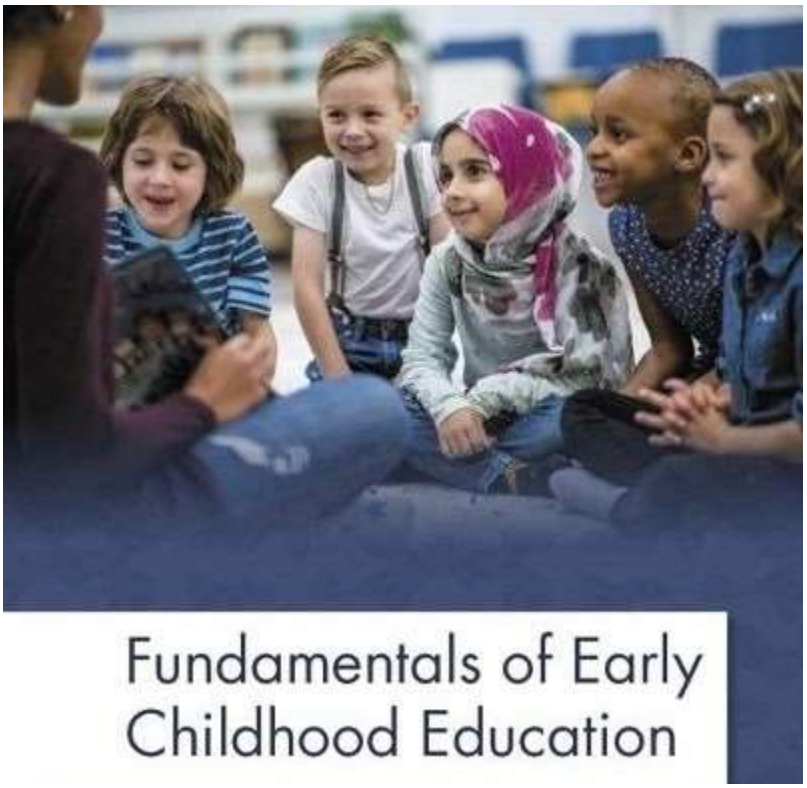

Introduction to Early Childhood Education

Meaning and Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) refers to the formal and informal teaching and care of young children, typically from birth up to around age five or six. In Nigeria, ECE is included in the national education policy as the pre-primary stage for children roughly 3–5 years old. It is recognized as the foundation of the entire educational system, since this early stage lays the groundwork for later learning. In these early years, children engage in play, exploration, and guided activities that spark curiosity and learning.

Quality ECE encourages creativity, basic problem-solving, and early language and counting skills in a safe, nurturing environment. It also helps children get used to routines, listening to teachers, and working with peers – all of which prepare them for primary school. By combining care and learning, early childhood programs foster a child's physical, social, and intellectual growth in a balanced way. In

short, early childhood education is important because it supports a child's overall development at a time when they absorb knowledge rapidly, and it eases the transition into formal schooling.

Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education:

Provides a nurturing, structured setting that prepares children for school.

Stimulates cognitive development (language, memory, thinking) through age-appropriate activities and play.

Builds social and emotional skills like cooperation, sharing, communication, confidence and resilience.

Supports physical health and habits (through nutrition programs, hygiene routines, active play).

Encourages creativity, imagination and curiosity from a young age.

Helps identify and support any developmental delays early on, so interventions can be made.

Role of Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers in the Early Years

A child's early learning and development depend on the combined efforts of caregivers, parents, teachers, and the wider community. In the early years, parents and family caregivers are the child's first teachers. They provide basic care (feeding, bathing, health care) and the emotional security that children need to explore their world. Simple daily interactions at home—talking to the baby, reading to toddlers, encouraging them to solve small problems—are crucial for language development and thinking skills. Parents also pass on cultural values, social norms and basic self-help habits to their children. In many Nigerian communities, extended family members (grandparents, older siblings, aunts/uncles) and neighbors often act as caregivers too, helping with supervision and play when parents are busy.

Teachers and trained childcare providers take on a complementary role by offering guided learning experiences. In pre-schools and nursery programs, teachers design activities (games, songs, stories, crafts) that promote learning through play and exploration. They introduce early literacy and numeracy in fun, age-appropriate ways, and encourage children to ask questions and solve problems. Importantly, teachers help children learn to interact in groups, share, follow simple rules, and express their feelings constructively. A good early childhood teacher pays attention to each child's needs and may work with parents to support a child's development. For example, if a child is shy or has special needs, the teacher can suggest strategies or resources to help. International agencies like UNESCO and UNICEF stress that well-trained teachers are vital; they advocate for teacher training programs that use local languages and materials so that learning is culturally relevant and engaging.

Caregivers also include the staff of day-care centers or community child centers. These caregivers are responsible for the child's safety during the day, providing meals and naps, and engaging children with songs, reading, or guided play. In Nigeria, community-based projects have trained caregiver staff to improve the quality of these services in crowded urban areas. For instance, local initiatives support parents and caregivers by teaching them positive parenting practices (like gentle discipline and effective communication) and by involving them in decision-making for childcare centers.

Organizations such as the Lagos Mums Foundation offer parenting workshops and radio programs to educate mothers and fathers about child development, emphasizing that parenting itself is a skill that can be learned and improved.

Together, parents and teachers must work in partnership. Regular parent-teacher meetings or community events can help parents learn what is taught in preschool and how to reinforce it at home. For example, if children learn counting or letters at school, parents can practice with them using household objects. Governments and communities also play a supporting role by providing safe school facilities, learning materials, and by enacting policies that help caregivers—for instance, policies on maternity leave so a mother can care for her infant before returning to work.

In some Nigerian states, government and NGOs collaborate to supply pre-primary classes with simple play and learning materials made from local resources, and they involve parents in collecting or creating toys. This community involvement ensures that caregivers and teachers have the support they need and

that children benefit from a consistent nurturing environment at home, in school, and in their neighborhoods.

Parents and Primary Caregivers: Provide daily nurturing (food, health, love) and early learning through talking, singing, reading, and playing at home. They lay the emotional and moral foundation by showing affection, setting routines, and teaching basic skills (like speaking, walking, self-care).

Teachers and Preschool Staff: Lead structured early learning activities (games, story-time, arts) that build cognitive and social skills. They introduce basic concepts (numbers, letters, shapes) through play, encourage exploration, and guide children to get along with others. Well-trained teachers can spot any learning difficulties early and work with parents to address them.

Community Caregivers: In daycare centers or community child-care projects, these individuals provide safe supervision, group activities, and sometimes early education. They ensure children have meals, rest, and play when parents are at work. Community programs often train these caregivers on child development and child rights.

Government and Society: Create and enforce policies that support families (e.g. childcare laws, parental leave, nutrition programs). Provide funding and infrastructure for early childhood centers, and run public campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood. In Nigeria, for example, national education policies endorse pre-primary education, and programs are run by the Universal Basic

Education Commission (UBEC) to improve early learning. International bodies and NGOs in Nigeria (UNICEF, UNESCO, local NGOs) also work with communities to train teachers, develop age-appropriate curricula, and involve parents in early learning, underlining that every child's development is a shared responsibility.

Why the First Five Years of Life Matter

The first five years of life are a uniquely crucial period for a child's development, often called the "foundation years." During this time, a child's brain grows and forms connections at an astonishing rate. By some estimates, the brain reaches about 90% of its adult size by age five. In these early years, sensory experiences and learning lay down neural pathways that become the basis for future learning, behavior and health. Positive experiences—loving relationships, rich language exposure, plenty of play and exploration, good nutrition and health care—will strengthen these connections and lead to strong language abilities, social skills and problem-solving talents. On the other hand, negative experiences—such as chronic neglect, malnutrition, or toxic stress (like living with violence or family conflict)—can disrupt brain development. Because young brains are so plastic, severe early stress or deprivation can make it harder for children to learn later and may lead to emotional or cognitive challenges that last into adulthood.

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For example, in Nigeria about 31% of children under five are underweight due to malnutrition. Malnutrition during infancy and early childhood can cause irreversible damage to brain growth and physical health. UNICEF reports that only about 24% of Nigerian infants are exclusively breastfed for six months, even though breastfeeding is known to improve mental and immune development. These facts highlight why focused attention on nutrition and care in the first years is vital. When children receive proper nutrition and nurturing early, they tend to grow into healthier and more capable adults, which benefits the whole society.

Furthermore, these formative years establish a child's pattern of learning and social interaction. Children develop foundational skills—language acquisition, the basics of numbers and literacy, and early social norms—mostly through everyday experiences and play in their first five years. For example, when a child hears words spoken by parents and teachers, they build vocabulary that helps them learn to read later. When they play make-believe with friends, they learn empathy and cooperation. Starting quality early education can magnify these natural learning processes. Studies around the world have shown that children who attend good preschools or have stimulating early home environments are more likely to succeed in later schooling and life. Economists also note that early investments in children tend to yield long-term benefits: as children grow into adults, the country gains a more educated and productive workforce with fewer social problems.

To put it in perspective, experts compare early childhood education to building a house: you cannot build a strong building without a solid foundation. In Nigeria's case, UNICEF has warned that without stronger support for early childhood development, many children are at risk of poor development. This is not unique to Nigeria—countries worldwide acknowledge the importance of early years. For example, many nations now offer free or subsidized preschool because they recognize that universal access at ages 3–5 helps all children start school ready to learn.

Japan, the United States (in some cities), and European countries have expanded free early education programs. These global trends and the neuroscience behind childhood development both show the same message: the learning and care a child receives in the first five years of life have a profound and lasting effect on their abilities, health and opportunities. In sum, because the brain and body of a young child grow so rapidly, and because early habits and skills influence later outcomes, the first five years are a critical window where time spent in nurturing education pays the highest dividends for the individual and society.

Understanding Child Development

Understanding how children grow and learn from birth through age six helps parents, teachers and caregivers give the right support. Children develop in stages – from newborns to toddlers to preschoolers – with each stage building on the last. This module explains those major stages (infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood), plus the key areas of development (physical, social, emotional, language). Practical examples from Nigeria and around the world show how simple games, stories and daily routines help children learn and thrive.

Stages of Growth (Birth to Age 6)

Infancy (0–2 Years)

Infancy, from birth to around age 2, is a time of extremely rapid change. Babies quickly grow in length and weight, often doubling their birth weight by about 6 months. They learn to control their bodies: first holding up their head, then rolling over, sitting, crawling and eventually standing or walking. Infants explore everything by looking, touching and mouthing. They smile at caregivers and soon babble, eventually saying simple words like “mama” or “baba.” In Nigeria, a 1-year-old might clap along to a Yoruba lullaby or imitate a parent stirring soup, showing early understanding of the world. Globally, babies engage in simple games like peek-a-boo, which help them recognize faces and emotions.

Gains head and trunk control, rolls, sits, crawls and may take first steps.

Begins to babble and speak first words (“mama,” “papa”), learning to communicate.

Shows attachment and basic emotions (smiles at family, cries when upset or hungry).

Explores objects by hand and mouth, reaching and grasping small toys.

Toddlerhood (2–3 Years)

Between ages 2 and 3, children become very active and curious. Most toddlers can walk, run, and even climb stairs with help. They fine-tune skills like stacking blocks or scribbling with crayons. Language explodes in this period: two-year-olds say simple sentences (like “want juice”) and understand simple instructions. Toddlers at this stage often insist on doing things themselves (“no!” phase) and explore independently. In Nigeria, a 2-year-old might help pour water from one cup to another or join in family games, while a 3-year-old could recite parts of a Yoruba counting song or engage in a simple chase game with siblings. Around the world, toddlers learn by doing – dressing a doll, building a tower of stones, or pretending to cook with toy pots – combining physical play with new words.

Walks steadily and begins to run, kicks and throws a ball, climbs onto furniture.

Uses two- or three-word sentences (“me eat,” “more milk”) and points to named objects.

Plays simple pretend games (feeding a doll, playing house) and follows easy routines.

Shows strong will and simple independence (tries dressing self, washes hands with help).

Early Childhood (3–6 Years)

Early childhood (ages 3 through 6) is when children grow into confident little learners. They become skilled movers: jumping rope, riding tricycles and even hopping on one foot. Their fine motor skills improve too, so they can draw shapes, use scissors, or button clothes. Language and thinking develop quickly – children at 4 or 5 years ask lots of questions ("Why is the sky blue?") and tell short stories. They learn numbers and letters, often by singing songs or listening to stories. Socially and emotionally, 3– to 5-year-olds play with others, make friends and follow simple rules. For example, a Nigerian child might start preschool, play ayo (a seed-counting board game) with classmates, or count mangoes at a market while practicing Yoruba numbers. A child in another country might sing the alphabet song or build elaborate block cities with friends. At this stage children show pride (flashing a big smile after a drawing) and growing empathy (comforting a crying friend).

Jumps, hops, and balances well; throws and catches a ball with some success.

Draws recognizable pictures (a person or house), uses child-safe scissors, and dresses self.

Speaks in full sentences, learns basic words (numbers, colors, letters), and follows multi-step directions.

Engages in cooperative play with others: shares toys, takes turns and learns game rules.

Developmental Domains

Physical Development

Physical development is about how a child's body grows and gets stronger. In early years this means both growing taller and gaining new movement abilities. Babies first learn to lift their head, then crawl and walk. Toddlers begin running, jumping and climbing. Their arms, legs and hands steadily become more coordinated. Fine motor skills – how they use fingers and hands – improve too, so they can pick up small objects, stack blocks, or start feeding themselves. For example, a Nigerian child might run through a field playing tag or help carry a small basket, building leg strength. Globally, preschoolers might practice throwing a ball in a park or drawing shapes on paper. Good nutrition, enough sleep and safe play all support this growth: a healthy toddler in Lagos who eats porridge and fruits will grow strong just like a child in any city who eats nutritious food.

Gross motor: Rolling, sitting up, crawling, walking, running, jumping and climbing as strength and coordination improve.

Fine motor: Grasping tiny objects, stacking blocks, using spoons or crayons, drawing circles or letters.

Health factors: Proper nutrition, hygiene and sleep help the body grow. Physical play (outdoor games, dance, sports) builds muscles and coordination.

Social Development

Social development involves learning to interact with other people. From birth, children form bonds: an infant in Abuja recognizes and smiles at a parent and feels safe when hugged. Toddlers start to play alongside or with other kids, learning to share and take turns (even if they still say “mine!” at age 2). By ages 3–5, children can follow simple group rules and enjoy games. For example, a 4-year-old in Nigeria might greet an elder politely (saying a local “good morning” or kneeling in respect) and play cooperative games like hide-and-seek or singing call-and-response songs with neighborhood friends. Children elsewhere similarly line up at preschool, share toys at snack time, or use words like “please” and “thank you.” These social experiences teach children empathy and fairness – when one child comforts another who fell down, or when they smile and wave hello, they practice understanding feelings and respect.

Learning to share toys and take turns during play (for example, passing the ball).

Engaging in group games (like ring-around-the-rosy, board games) and following simple rules.

Making friends and playing cooperatively (helping build a block tower together).

Understanding basic social norms: greetings, polite words (“hello,” “thank you”), and classroom routines.

Emotional Development

Children’s emotional development is about understanding and managing feelings. Even babies express emotions: they may cry when upset or hungry and smile when happy, forming a basic trust in caregivers. As toddlers, children often show big emotions because they are still learning self-control. A Nigerian 2-year-old may cry loudly at bedtime but calm quickly once comforted; a Nigerian 5-year-old might feel proud when showing a new drawing. By ages 3–6, children begin to recognize more complex feelings – they can say “I’m sad” or “I’m scared.” They learn empathy too: a child might pat a friend on the back if that friend is crying. Adults support this by naming feelings (“You look excited!” or “It’s okay to be upset”) and by gently guiding behavior. Praising efforts (for example, “You worked so hard on your puzzle!”) helps build confidence. In every culture, children need safe relationships: a child who is hugged when upset learns trust and will feel more secure exploring the world.

Identifies basic feelings (happy, sad, angry, scared) in self and others.

Starts to soothe themselves (taking deep breaths or hugging a toy when upset).

Shows empathy: comforts others (brings a tissue to a crying peer, or pats a hand).

Gains self-confidence: takes pride in achievements (smiling at a completed puzzle) and tries new skills.

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Language Development

Language development is how children learn to communicate with words. Infants begin by cooing and babbling, then say first words (often “mama” or “dada”), and gradually speak more. A Nigerian baby might say their first word in English or in a local language like Yoruba or Hausa, depending on what they hear at home. Toddlers use two- and three-word sentences (“I want juice,” “Where ball?”). By age 4 or 5, children form clear sentences and can tell a simple story about their day. They ask many questions (“Why is the cow brown?”) and learn vocabulary from songs and conversations. In Nigeria’s multilingual environment, some children learn words in several languages simultaneously, which is common around the world too. Caregivers support this by talking often – naming objects, singing nursery rhymes or reading folk tales. For example, counting games with beans or reciting an Igbo family rhyme teach new words naturally. By the time a child starts primary school, they often know hundreds of words and can use language to explain ideas and feelings.

Babies: Babble and say first words, respond to name, make sounds like “mama.”

Toddlers: Use short sentences, follow simple questions (“Go get shoes”), and begin to name objects and actions (ball, eat, sleep).

Preschoolers: Speak in full sentences, tell short stories, ask “why” and “what” questions, and talk about experiences.

Vocabulary: Rapidly increases from a few words to hundreds of words by age 5. Bilingual children easily pick up multiple languages through play and talking.

How Children Learn through Play and Daily Experiences

Children learn best by doing and playing. Play is work for young learners: it builds knowledge and skills without formal lessons. When a child pretends to cook (even with pretend food or mud), they practice counting, language and social roles. For instance, a Nigerian child playing “market” with fruit builds math skills (counting mangoes or kola nuts) and language skills (learning names in English and a mother tongue). Simple games like hide-and-seek teach problem-solving and spatial awareness. Moving to catch a ball or jump in a puddle develops balance and coordination. Creative activities like drawing with sticks on the ground or dancing to a local drum tune foster expression.

Everyday routines are learning moments too: helping to pour water or sort laundry teaches practical math (full/empty, big/small). In Nigeria and globally, caregivers and teachers can make ordinary tasks

educational: they might sing a counting song while climbing stairs, or ask a child to describe colors of vegetables at market. In preschool classrooms worldwide, play corners and story time are used instead of rigid drills because young children absorb lessons through exploration. The key is to encourage curiosity, allow safe exploration, and make each play activity an opportunity to learn about the world.

Pretend play: Playing house or shop helps with language, imagination and understanding daily life.

Physical play: Running, climbing, and ball games develop strength, coordination and teamwork.

Creative play: Drawing, building with blocks, or playing music encourage expression, problem-solving and fine motor skills.

Everyday learning: Counting items while cooking or cleaning, naming animals or colors during walks, and using stories or songs in local languages turn routines into lessons.

Experiential learning: Engaging a child's senses (through sand, water, textures) and natural environment (gardens, animals, markets) creates rich learning experiences.

By following children's natural growth stages and including play and real-life activities, caregivers and teachers help every child learn in all areas. Whether in Nigeria or anywhere else, joyful play and daily experiences are powerful tools that guide each child toward healthy physical, social, emotional and language development.

Creating Safe and Nurturing Environments

Basic Child Safety at Home, School, and Play Areas

Children thrive when their surroundings are free from harm. At home, this means childproofing the space (for example, securing furniture, covering electrical outlets, and locking away medicines or cleaning supplies) and always supervising young children. Outside, ensure playgrounds and play equipment are well-maintained, appropriate for the child's age, and have safe surfaces underneath. In school and community settings, adults share responsibility: teachers, caregivers, and coaches should watch for hazards, enforce safety rules (like wearing helmets on bikes), and have emergency plans in place.

Importantly, teach children basic safety rules too – such as how to cross streets safely, not to talk to strangers, and how to call for help in an emergency. Clear communication (encouraging kids to speak up about dangers) and consistent supervision form the foundation of a secure environment.

Ensure the home is hazard-free (cover outlets, lock cabinets, secure heavy furniture) and keep poisonous or dangerous items out of reach.

Teach safety rules and practice them (road safety, playground etiquette, and fire drills) so children know what to do in risky situations.

Supervise playtime carefully, especially around water (like pools) or street traffic; choose age-appropriate playground equipment and watch for unsafe conditions (broken equipment, sharp edges).

Create a safe school setting by supporting attentive staff, enforcing no-bullying policies, and maintaining secure facilities.

Make sure children know emergency procedures and contacts (when to dial emergency numbers, who to call if they feel unsafe).

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Providing Love, Care, and Protection

A nurturing environment goes beyond physical safety. Children need emotional support, affection, and a sense of being valued to feel truly secure. This means caregivers (parents, teachers, relatives) should spend quality time with children: listening to their concerns, praising their efforts, and showing consistent affection. Responding with empathy to a child's feelings helps them trust adults and opens communication. It also involves meeting basic needs reliably – providing nutritious meals, regular health care, and plenty of sleep – so children feel cared for. Protection also includes setting gentle but firm boundaries: kids understand right from wrong through consistent, age-appropriate discipline. In such a loving atmosphere, children learn that they are cared for and protected, which builds their confidence and emotional well-being.

Show unconditional love and encouragement (hug often, celebrate achievements, and listen without judgment) to build a child's self-esteem.

Meet physical needs (healthy food, clean clothes, routine medical checkups) so children feel cared for and healthy.

Protect children from harm by setting clear boundaries (for example, bedtime routines or screen-time limits) and by monitoring their relationships (ensuring friends and caregivers treat them kindly).

Keep lines of communication open so kids feel they can talk about anything (this protects them emotionally and lets adults know if something is wrong).

Be a reliable, consistent caregiver: when rules, routines, and care don't suddenly change, children feel safe and trust that someone will always look out for them.

Building Routines and Structure for Children's Well-Being

Predictable daily routines help children feel secure and in control. When kids know what to expect – like fixed wake-up times, regular meals, playtime, homework time, and bedtime – they tend to be calmer and more cooperative. Consistent schedules reduce anxiety and give a child a sense of stability, even if other parts of life are changing. For example, a regular bedtime story or family dinner can become a comforting ritual. Along with schedules, clear rules and responsibilities (such as simple chores or homework routines) teach children self-discipline and independence. Involving children in these routines (letting them choose clothes in the morning or pack their bag) helps them practice decision-making. It's also important to explain any changes in advance (if bedtime changes, tell them ahead of time) so they can adjust without stress. Overall, a structured environment – balanced with some flexibility – helps children manage their day and nurtures their emotional and behavioral development.

Establish a predictable daily schedule (consistent times for waking up, meals, playing, doing homework, and going to bed) so children know what to expect.

Set clear family rules and routines (for example, homework before screen time or chores before play), and apply them consistently.

Involve children in planning routines (letting them help set the table or pick out clothes) to build their responsibility and confidence.

Use calming rituals at key times (like reading together before bed or doing a quick check of the day over dinner) to reinforce security and family bonds.

Be consistent but adaptable: keep the overall structure the same even when life changes, and explain any adjustments ahead of time to avoid confusion.

Supporting Learning Through Play

Play is more than just fun for young children – it is how they learn about the world. When children play, they practice thinking and solving problems, build language and social skills, and strengthen their bodies. Play leads them to new ideas, helps them express feelings, and lets them learn by doing. This module explains how play supports a child's growth, gives simple examples of games, songs, and stories caregivers can use, and shows how adults can encourage children to be curious, creative, and confident through open-ended play and guided interaction.

The Role of Play in Learning

Play is a natural way for children to develop important skills. When children solve puzzles, build with blocks, or sort objects, they practice thinking and problem-solving. Pretend play – for example, imagining they are doctors, shopkeepers, or teachers – helps children use their imagination and work out ideas. These activities help children understand cause and effect (for example, what happens if a tower of blocks falls) and learn to think creatively. Play can also introduce simple math and science ideas, like counting blocks or noticing shapes, without it feeling like a lesson.

Play also boosts language development. Singing songs, learning rhymes, and telling stories introduce new words and ideas. When children talk while they play – whether they are playing house or building a toy city – they practice forming sentences and expressing themselves. Group games often involve listening to rules and asking or answering questions. All this talking and listening during play expands vocabulary and helps children understand how to use words to communicate with others.

Children's motor skills improve through active play. Running, jumping, climbing, and dancing strengthen large muscles and coordination (these are called gross motor skills). Handling small toys, drawing, or putting together puzzles builds fine motor skills (control of small hand and finger movements). For example, playing a ball game can help a child learn to throw and catch, while threading beads or stacking small blocks helps their fingers and hands work together. Developing these motor skills is important for everyday tasks like eating, dressing, and eventually writing or drawing.

Play also helps with social and emotional skills. In games with other children, kids learn to share, take turns, and cooperate. If one child is the "shopkeeper" and another is the "customer," they practice conversation and polite behavior. Pretend play with friends encourages understanding of others' feelings – for example, a child might say, "I will take care of the baby" or "Let's be a team." Through winning and losing games, children learn to handle strong feelings like joy or disappointment in a safe way. These experiences build confidence and kindness.

Simple Games,

Songs, and Storytelling Activities

Outdoor and Movement Games: Games like tag, hide-and-seek, or follow-the-leader are fun and help children move their bodies. For example, hiding and seeking encourage children to think about where someone might hide. Clapping games like the Yoruba game ampe (children jump and clap in a pattern) or jumping rope (like Ten-Ten in Nigeria) build coordination and rhythm. Simple games like hopscotch (drawing squares on the ground and hopping through them) teach balance and early number skills. Counting games like Ayo (a board game played with small seeds) also help with thinking and basic math.

Action Songs and Rhymes: Singing is a playful way to learn language and rhythm. Traditional songs in local languages are great: for example, children enjoy Yoruba alphabet songs or counting rhymes, and Hausa or Igbo folk songs about animals or daily life. International nursery rhymes like “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” or “If You’re Happy and You Know It” also work well for young children everywhere. These songs often include hand motions or dancing, so children learn body parts (as in “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes”) or practice patterns of movement. Making simple instruments (like clapping hands or a homemade shaker) can make singing even more fun and interactive.

Storytelling and Reading: Telling stories captures children’s imagination and teaches language skills. Parents and teachers can share folk tales from local culture, such as a Nigerian fable about a clever tortoise or a talking animal.

These stories often have repeating phrases or songs that children can learn to say. It is helpful to use pictures or props (like toys or puppets) so children can see and touch as the story is told. Reading simple picture books together also supports language: it shows children how written words match pictures, and introduces them to new ideas and cultures in a fun way.

Encouraging Creativity, Curiosity, and Exploration

Children are naturally curious and creative, and play can make these qualities grow. Open-ended activities are play opportunities that don't have one right answer or outcome. For example, give children paper and crayons and say, "Draw anything you like!" or offer blocks without telling them what to build. They might draw a favorite animal, make a tall castle, or invent a funny monster. In these moments, adults can encourage children by asking questions like, "Tell me about your drawing," or "What else could you build with these blocks?" This kind of support helps children use their imagination and gain confidence as they see what they can invent.|

Play also sparks curiosity and exploration about the world. Children naturally want to touch, smell, and examine things around them. A nature walk can become a learning playtime: let children collect leaves or stones, compare sizes and colors, or talk about how a plant grows. Simple experiments turn into playful science: for instance, mix water with different colors of paint to see what new color appears, or let children discover which objects sink or float. Caregivers can encourage questions by saying things like “I wonder why this leaf floats?” or “What do you think will happen if we add more water?” This gentle guidance turns wonder into learning and helps children become more confident in trying new things.

Finally, guided interaction by adults can support all of this growth. Teachers and parents should join in play as helpers and friends, not just as bystanders. That might mean acting out a story character with a child, or showing them a new way to play with a toy. When a child plays a game or tells a story, an adult can add new words to expand language (for example, saying, “Yes, that is a big, red ball!”) or ask gentle questions to deepen thinking. It’s important to let children take the lead in play, but also to praise their effort and ideas. Over time, these positive experiences in play lay a strong foundation for future learning.

Working with Families and Communities?

Early learning happens best when educators, families, and the wider community work together. Young children grow and learn not only in the classroom, but also at home and in their neighborhoods. By

building strong partnerships with parents and guardians, respecting each family's culture, and drawing on community resources, educators create a more supportive environment. This module explores practical ways to include families in children's learning, honor diverse family values, and connect schools with community groups and leaders. Together, these efforts help children feel understood and supported in all parts of their lives.

Partnering with Parents and Guardians

Children thrive when parents and teachers work as a team. To partner effectively, educators keep communication open and two-way. A brief daily report or phone call to a parent, a welcome newsletter, or a classroom app can share successes and concerns. When teachers and families talk regularly, everyone understands the child's needs and routines. For example, knowing how a child likes to learn at home lets the teacher plan similar activities in class. Open, friendly communication builds trust: parents feel valued, and teachers gain insight.

Educators involve parents by inviting them into the learning process. Jointly setting simple learning goals – like which letter sounds or counting skills to practice – makes both home and school share responsibility. Teachers can send home fun activity ideas or books related to classroom lessons so parents know how to reinforce learning. Parents might volunteer in the classroom by reading a story, helping with crafts, or joining field trips. School events (like playdays or snack times) are great chances for parents to visit and see their child learning. A classroom that welcomes families (for example, putting up photos of children with their parents, or greeting parents at the door) sends a message that parents are partners, not outsiders.

Educators respect parents' expertise about their child. Each parent knows their child's temper, interests, and daily habits. Teachers can ask parents about family routines (meal times, bedtimes, favorite games) and adapt the school day accordingly. For instance, if a child comes from a home where they say a prayer before meals, the teacher might include a moment of gratitude before snack time. When challenges arise (such as a behavior issue), talking with parents calmly and respectfully helps find solutions together. Using positive language – like describing what a child did well – encourages parents to stay involved. In short, when schools and families share information and work together, children benefit. They see the same values and expectations at home and at school, which builds confidence and supports learning.

Ways to build strong parent partnerships include:

Two-way communication: Use newsletters, phone calls, group chats or meetings to exchange information. Listen actively to parents' ideas and questions.

Shared goal-setting: Invite parents to help set learning goals for their child and discuss progress. (For example: "Let's both help Reuben learn the alphabet this month.")

Family involvement in class: Ask parents to share a skill or tradition (like storytelling or cooking) or to join on outings. Hold open houses or family activity days.

Welcoming environment: Create a warm school culture: greet parents by name, display family photos or home art, and thank them for support (no matter how small).

Home learning support: Send simple games, songs, or books home related to classroom lessons. Encourage parents to read to children or practice counting at home. Provide tips on child development during workshops or casual chats.

Partnering with parents is about respect and teamwork. When parents and educators celebrate a child's successes together, the child feels proud and motivated. A teacher might praise a new skill in front of the parent ("I loved how Mary greeted everyone at circle time today!"). Parents, in turn, learn ways to

support learning – for example, by teaching new words during play or by encouraging drawing and counting at home. Over time, this collaboration helps children do better in school, feel confident, and enjoy learning.

Working with Families and Communities

https://youtu.be/6hWu5ptoewM

Kindly click on the link to watch this video

Respecting Cultural Values and Family Practices

Each child comes from a family with its own culture, language, and parenting style. Good educators learn about these differences and honor them in the classroom. When teachers respect family values, children feel safe and included. For example, in Nigeria there are many ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and others) each with distinct languages, festivals, and customs. A child's family might dress a child in special clothes for a cultural holiday, or have certain foods and songs at meals. Recognizing these practices—rather than expecting all children to do things the same way—shows respect.

Teachers can involve families by asking parents to share their traditions or daily routines. They might invite a grandmother to teach a folk song, or a father to explain a local craft or market visit. When children see their home life reflected in class, they connect more easily to learning. For instance, a teacher could include counting games or lullabies from different Nigerian languages, or read folktales that children's parents told them. If many children in class are Yoruba-speaking, the teacher might learn a few Yoruba words or celebrate a Yoruba festival such as Ogun Festival in simple ways, and also explain it to others. Doing this for many cultures (and comparing them) teaches all children that every culture is interesting and worth respect.

Respecting culture also means adapting classroom routines. For example, if some Muslim children pray at specific times, the teacher can schedule quiet moments for them. If certain families do not eat pork or have special fasting days, the teacher can plan snacks and meals accordingly and avoid forcing participation. A classroom library should include books that show diverse characters—African families, Asian families, children with different skin tones, etc.—so every child sees themselves. During craft time, include materials like fabric or decorations from different traditions. During learning games, use symbols or props (flags, clothing, musical instruments) that reflect many countries.

Strategies for valuing family culture include:

Learn from home: Ask families about their beliefs: favorite stories, holidays, or home customs. Incorporate these into lessons.

Use diverse materials: Include books, posters, music and toys that show children from various backgrounds. For example, have dolls with different skin colors or traditional Nigerian dolls.

Celebrate traditions: Mark cultural events: invite families to share food or music from their cultures during “cultural days.” Simple activities like making Diwali lamps, Ramadan greetings, Christmas carols, or a Yoruba dance can let children take pride in their heritage.

Accommodate practices: Provide time and space for religious prayers or quiet reflection if needed. Adapt activities to fit clothing or dietary rules (for instance, allowing headscarves or providing halal meals).

Respect parenting styles: Be aware that families may have different discipline or care practices. If a parent has a certain way of guiding behavior, try to work within that style. Discuss calmly with parents if school rules differ, finding a solution together.

Welcome extended family: In many cultures, grandparents or older siblings help raise children. Invite them to school functions or ask grandparents to share wisdom or stories with the class.

When teachers learn about and respect each child’s background, children learn better. They feel that their family’s way of life is important. At the same time, children learn about each other’s differences and grow more understanding. A preschool that includes songs in Hausa, or counts in Igbo, or shows a map of Nigeria alongside a world map, teaches respect. Over time, this inclusive approach helps all children—Nigerian and from other countries—feel valued and ready to learn.

The Role of Community Support in Early Childhood Education

Schools flourish when they reach beyond the classroom and engage the whole community. Local groups, leaders, and resources can enrich early learning in many ways. Community support means creating partnerships so that families and schools have help and children have broader learning experiences. This can include working with local leaders, community organizations, or businesses to support the child’s growth.

Ways schools and families can link with the community:?

Local leaders and organizations. Village chiefs, religious leaders, or community elders can be allies for children’s education. For example, a chief or imam might speak at a school assembly about why education matters, encouraging attendance. Local clubs or organizations (like women’s groups or scouts) can run reading programs or play groups. These leaders and groups often help raise funds or awareness for the school.

Parent-Teacher Groups. Form a simple committee of parents and teachers (a PTA or school committee). These groups can plan events (fun runs, school clean-ups), raise money for books and repairs, and discuss how to improve the classroom. When parents take charge of such projects, they build community pride. For example, parents might build a small garden at school or buy paint and decorate the classroom, turning fundraising into community effort.

Health and Social Services. Link with local clinics or health workers. A community health nurse can visit the class for a checkup or teach kids about hand-washing and nutrition. If the community has social workers or NGOs focusing on children, they can run parenting classes or immunization drives using the school as a meeting place. This way, families get needed services easily and schools show they care about children's well-being.

Nonprofit and Volunteer Programs. Many communities have charities that support education. For instance, a foundation might provide free school supplies or scholarships to needy children. Invite such groups to hold weekend classes (after-school tutoring, arts or sports camps, summer programs). Older students or local professionals can volunteer to mentor young children. A high-school student might read a book to the class or help with counting games, giving the children more attention and older role models.

Local Businesses and Resources. Small businesses in town can support schools. A shopkeeper might donate pencils or toys. A carpenter could help build classroom furniture. A farmer could let children visit the farm to learn about plants and animals. Even a community radio station can read children's stories or announce school events. Libraries, if available, can arrange book-lending programs for preschoolers.

Today's session has come to an end.

How was the class?

hope you find it Educative and interesting?

Please ensure you take a moment to reflect on the key points and insights gained today. Your active participation has been invaluable.