

Kauna

A Character Education Curriculum for Early Childhood Educators

Early Years Nigeria Initiative

2025

Importance of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is...the bedrock upon which a child's intellectual, social, and emotional development is laid and holds transformative power. Nurturing young minds and fostering positive learning environments and experiences sets the stage for a lifetime of success. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024, *A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 10-22)

Access to high-quality early learning experiences is essential for children's development, yielding important academic and lifelong outcomes. (*A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 10-4-10-5)

High-quality early childhood education can promote intellectual, language, physical, social, and emotional development, creating school readiness and building a foundation for later academic and social competence. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020, *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, p. 2)

Decades of research have shown that high-quality preschool is linked to positive social and academic outcomes... These benefits can manifest not only in the short term but persist through adolescence and into adulthood, shaping children's long-term developmental trajectories. (*A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 1-1)

Advances in neuroscience over the last two decades have provided new insights regarding the processes of early brain development and their long-term implications for development and learning. The findings provide robust evidence supporting the **importance of high-quality early learning experiences for young children for promoting children's lifelong success.** (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement*, p. 8)



Teacher-Pupil Relationships

The **relationship an educator establishes with each child is among the most potent predictors of children's early learning and behavior** in these settings. The warmth and responsiveness that characterize the educator-child relationship set the stage for the child's receptivity to learning from that educator. (*A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 5-5)

Children who experience predictable, responsive relationships and responsive interactions with [their teachers] also tend to demonstrate **improved general learning competencies** and executive functioning. (*Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement*, p. 9)

Children's brains will be strong if they have responsive teachers and adults, safe and secure environments, hands-on materials to play with, and gentle support, encouragement, and respect from their teachers. (Federal Ministry of Education & National Commission for Colleges of Education, *Ready, Set, Learn through Play: A Reggio-Inspired Pre-Primary Teacher Training Guide*, p. 8)

Value of Training for Early Childhood Teachers

Teachers who have **specific preparation**, knowledge, and skills in child development and early childhood education are **more likely to engage in warm, positive interactions with children**, offer richer language experiences, and create more high-quality learning environments. (*Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, p. 2).

Developmentally appropriate practice requires early childhood educators to seek out and gain knowledge and understanding. (*Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement*, p. 6)

Supporting the professional needs of this crucial workforce **is critical to ensure high-quality, equitable learning experiences for all children.** (*A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 10-8)

Professional development [for early childhood educators] is key to implementing curriculum to support child outcomes. (*A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, p. 5-11)

Effective early childhood educators are critical for realizing the early childhood profession's vision that each and every young child, birth through age 8, have equitable access to high-quality learning and care environments. As such, there is a core body of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions early childhood educators must demonstrate to effectively promote the development, learning, and well-being of all young children. (*Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, p. 6)

To achieve the commitment to support children's optimal development and learning, early childhood educators need "to be familiar with the knowledge base of early childhood care and education and to stay informed through continuing education and training." (*National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011, Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment*, p. 6)

Status of Training of Early Childhood Teachers in Nigeria

Data collected in Jos Metropolis, Plateau state in 2024 found that only 33% of nursery teachers in private schools received pre-service training in Early Childhood Education (Korb et al., under review)



36% of private schools did not have a single nursery teacher trained in Early Childhood Education (Korb et al., under review)



A research study conducted in Chanchaga LGA in Niger state found that 67% of public school teachers specialized in ECE (Oluwafemi et al., 2014, *Universal Journal of Educational Research* volume 2)



Conclusion

Impactful pre-service and in-service professional development for early childhood educators is urgently needed in Nigeria.

Competencies of Effective Early Childhood Teachers

National Minimum Standard for Early Childhood Care and Development and Education Centres in Nigeria (Federal Ministry of Education, 2023, p. 45-48)

- Knowledge of relevant principles in child development and how young children learn
- Knowledge about each individual child in the classroom
- Knowledge of best practices in early child care and education
- Skills in preparing culturally and developmentally appropriate activity plans
- Ability to implement culturally and developmentally appropriate activities to achieve curricular goals
- Ability to implement playful activities that support holistic learning and development for all children
- Ability to evaluate children's progress and needs
- Maintain children's confidentiality

Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020, p. 9-10)

- Understand the developmental period of birth through age 8 across developmental domains
- Apply knowledge of child development to making evidence-based decisions
- Effectively use a broad repertoire of developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant teaching approaches
- Understand and demonstrate positive, caring, supportive relationships and interactions
- Know the content that young children need to learn in each academic disciplines and the pedagogical methods appropriate for each discipline
- Use assessments to document children's progress and plan learning experiences based on the findings
- Know and use ethical guidelines
- Develop and sustain the daily habit of reflective and intentional practice
- Engage families and communities as partners in children's development and learning



Professional Development for Early Childhood Teachers

Professional development is an ongoing process. **All early childhood professionals – no matter how qualified – need to continue to incorporate into their professional repertoire new knowledge and skills** related to working with young children and their families. (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993, *Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development*, p. 7)

Pre-Service Training

Training that occurs before an individual enters the early childhood education profession, typically a Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) or degree level in a full-time, part-time, or sandwich programme.

Continuous Professional Development

Ongoing learning opportunities and reflective practices that empower teachers to identify areas of improvement and refine their instructional strategies. (Federal Ministry of Education, *Education for Renewed Hope: Roadmap for the Nigerian Education Sector (2024-2027)*, p. 94)

Examples of Continuous Professional Development

- **Workshops/Seminars**
- **Online Courses**
- **Educational Coaching/Mentor:** An educator is paired with a typically more experienced educator who provides guidance in improving teaching practice. An effective component of this is the coach/mentor observing the mentee teacher and providing specific feedback for improvement
- **Professional Learning Community:** Group of educators who share their knowledge, insights, and observations to improve teaching practice. One way to do this is identifying a topic to learn more about, selecting a reading or video, and discussing what they learned and how to put it into practice
- **Self-Reflection:** A teacher sets goals for improving teaching practice, makes plans for accomplishing their goals, and subsequently reflects on their progress toward the goal. It also involves a teacher examining their underlying beliefs about teaching and learning and their alignment with their actual classroom practice

KAUNA

Kauna is a character education curriculum for teachers of young children. In the early years, a warm and supportive teacher-pupil relationship can be more impactful on learning and development than teaching methods. The goal of *Kauna* is to help early childhood educators improve their teacher-pupil relationships, thereby enhancing pupils' learning, development, and achievement.

Character Strengths Taught in Kauna



Each character strength has eight lessons. Each module includes:

- A facilitator's guide with detailed lesson plans to teach that character strength. Activities include traditional stories, proverbs, songs, games, and handcrafts.
- A workbook for participants to guide their studying and provide space for them to record what they have learned and changes they plan to make in their teaching responsibilities.

Praise for Kauna

- "Because of *Kauna*, [my teacher] is more committed, intentional, and zealous in her work." Administrator of a Primary School in Angwan Rukuba, Jos, Nigeria
- "Kauna programme has brought positive changes to the teacher and the pupils are also keying into it." Administrator of a Nursery School in Vom, Plateau State, Nigeria
- "[My teacher] consistently makes better choices as he relates with both teachers and students." Administrator of a Primary School in Terminus, Jos, Nigeria

Our Recommendations

- One of the best investments that governments, NGOs, and individuals can make is in improving the quality of early childhood education. High-quality early childhood education has many short-term and long-term benefits for children, their families and communities, and society.
- Teacher pupil relationships profoundly impact brain growth, learning, and a child's well-being.
- Investment of effort, expertise, and resources is needed in providing high-quality pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers of young children.
- Professional development should aim to enhance:
 - Knowledge of child development
 - Skills of developmentally and culturally appropriate teaching approaches
 - Knowledge of developmentally-appropriate academic content
 - Skills of ethical practices
 - Skills in using assessments to plan learning experiences
 - Ability to engage in reflective and intentional practice
 - Skills in developing positive teacher-pupil relationships

Conclusion

Kauna is a culturally-relevant curriculum for teachers that improves teacher-pupil relationships and can be used in both pre-service and continuous professional developments.



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