

Understanding Socioculturalism in Early Childhood Education: Current Perspectives and Emerging Trends

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Abstract

The present scoping review examines the significance of sociocultural perspectives in early childhood education (ECE), exploring implications for practice, policy, and research. Rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding the complex interactions between children and their social environments and considering cultural contexts. The significance of sociocultural perspectives in early childhood education cannot be overstated, directly impacting the inclusivity and effectiveness of educational practices, recognizing that each child's learning is deeply influenced by their cultural background, which shapes their experiences and interactions. Additionally, as societies become increasingly multicultural, the ability to incorporate and respect different cultural values within educational settings is crucial for fostering mutual respect and understanding among young learners. The review explores key concepts such as social interaction, language development, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), highlighting their role in shaping children's learning and development. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges and considerations in implementing sociocultural approaches, including addressing cultural biases, balancing individual and collective learning needs, and overcoming limited resources and institutional barriers. The review also accentuates the importance of integrating sociocultural approaches into ECE curricula, promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) practices, and building partnerships with families and communities. Future research directions include exploring innovative approaches to sociocultural practices, examining the long-term impacts of sociocultural interventions, and addressing gaps in existing literature. Overall, sociocultural perspectives in ECE can create more equitable and inclusive learning environments, empowering all children to thrive and reach their fullest potential.

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1. Introduction

Globally, there is a growing interest in enhancing ECE to ensure a quality education for young learners (Lundy et al., 2024). Also, there is a realization that the early years are a sensitive period marked by rapid changes in children's physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development (Pendergast & Garvis, 2023). Hakimjonova (2022), citing Alexander and Entwisle (1988), agrees, stating that "the early grades may be precisely the time that schools have their strongest effects" (p. 50). Thus, in ECE, sociocultural theory provides a lens to understand the complex interactions between children, their social environments, and cultural contexts, suggesting that learning and development are inherently social processes shaped by cultural tools and social connections (Correia et al., 2023).

Furthermore, there is recognition of the imperative of sociocultural perspectives in understanding how children learn and thrive in educational settings (Amani & Fussy, 2023; Correia et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2023; Hedges, 2022; Kalicki & Koenig, 2021; Kultti, 2024; Leuwol et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2024; Repo et al., 2024; Weldemariam et al., 2022). Sociocultural perspectives in ECE, rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, emphasize the importance of considering children's cultural backgrounds, social interactions, and historical contexts in educational practices (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; El Gazi & Ibrahim, 2024; McLeod, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). The present scoping review explores the theoretical foundations of socioculturalism in ECE, the implications for practice, and avenues for future research. Examining existing literature provides insights into how sociocultural perspectives can inform and enrich future ECE practice.

2. Theoretical Framework of Socioculturalism

Socioculturalism, as a theoretical framework, is deeply connected to the concept of culture (Dai, 2023). Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, norms, customs, behaviors, symbols, and practices that characterize a particular group or society. It encompasses the way of life of a community, including its language, religion, food, art, music, traditions, and social institutions. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another through socialization processes and interactions within the community, shaping individuals' perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, and identities and influencing how they interpret and navigate the world. Yet, culture is considered the most misunderstood in the education construct (Lundy et al., 2024; Trimble, 2007, 2020; Wolf & Avornyo, 2023). Erkan et al. (2021), referring to Alexander and Entwisle's school transition model, identify familial ties and culture as non-academic factors in early childhood development. Culture, then, is dynamic and ever-evolving and reflects

the interactions and exchanges between groups and societies (Alves & Vidal, 2023; González et al., 2024).

Correspondingly, Vygotsky stressed the significant impact of culture on cognitive development, asserting that cognitive functions are profoundly influenced by the cultural context in which individuals develop (Vygotsky, 1978). Cultural practices, beliefs, and values shape the tools that children acquire for intellectual adaptation, thereby influencing their cognitive processes. For example, different cultures may employ distinct memory strategies to aid recall. In some societies, children may be taught note-taking techniques, in which drawing or scribbling may be integrated into activities where children are encouraged to document their observations or ideas. At the same time, in other societies, alternative strategies such as oral repetition or mnemonic devices such as acronyms, songs, rhymes, or visual cues that help to remember information may be prevalent (Gutchess & Gilliam, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). These variations demonstrate how cultural norms influence the development and utilization of cognitive tools (Gutchess & Gilliam, 2022).

Moreover, cultural differences extend to social interactions and learning experiences. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs within sociocultural contexts, where children engage in cooperative dialogue with knowledgeable others (Gaias et al., 2022; Vygotsky, 1978; Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al., 2023). Cultural norms dictate the nature and frequency of these interactions, thereby shaping children's cognitive development. Therefore, understanding the effects of culture on cognitive development is essential for educators and policymakers. Besides, by recognizing and respecting cultural diversity, educational practices can be tailored to accommodate the varied needs and experiences of children from different cultural backgrounds (Baheretibeb & Whitehead, 2024; Dai, 2023). Also, fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in educational settings can promote equitable cognitive growth and development opportunities (Gaias et al., 2022; Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al., 2023).

Thus, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is a foundational framework for understanding how social interactions and cultural influences shape children's cognitive development (Hargraves, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978; Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al., 2023). Vygotsky's contemporaries and philosophical traditions profoundly influenced his work, particularly the Marxist ideology and cultural-historical theory (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Hargraves, 2021). While Vygotsky's ideas were initially suppressed in the Soviet Union, they gained prominence in the West following their dissemination by Western scholars (Sawyer, 2017). To comprehend the significance of socioculturalism, it is crucial to understand the fundamental concepts central to sociocultural theory. These concepts illustrate how social interactions, cultural contexts, and historical factors shape individuals' cognitive processes, learning experiences, and development (Hargraves, 2021; Sawyer, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978; Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al., 2023). Central to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is ZPD (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Irshad et al., 2021).

2.1 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

ZPD refers to the gap between learners' current level of ability or understanding and the level they can achieve with the guidance and support of more knowledgeable individuals, typically educators or peers. ZPD is significant in educational settings as it focuses on the potential for learning and development through social interaction and collaboration (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Irshad et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Cultural tools, including language, symbols, and artifacts, mediate children's interactions with their social and cultural environments (Hogg, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023). Furthermore, to facilitate learning and development, scaffolding provides temporary support to children within their ZPD (Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023).

2.2 Scaffolding

Building upon the notion of ZPD, scaffolding involves providing structured support to learners as they engage in activities beyond their current level of competence (Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023). Scaffolding may include cues, prompts, modeling, and feedback to help acquire new skills and knowledge gradually. For example, teachers might scaffold children's writing skills by providing templates or graphic organizers to help structure their thoughts before composing a story independently. Similarly, a teacher might scaffold children's understanding of the scientific method during a science experiment by demonstrating each step and providing verbal cues to guide their inquiry process. Educators who scaffold learning experiences empower children to take on more complex tasks and concepts, fostering development within their ZPD and promoting cognitive growth (Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023; Syrjämäki et al., 2023).

2.3 Cultural Tools

With cultural tools, Vygotsky accentuated the significance of language, symbols, and artifacts in mediating human cognition and behavior (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). These cultural tools are products of culture and are instrumental in shaping individuals' thinking, perception, and problem-solving abilities. For example, when children engage in storytelling activities using language to narrate cultural tales or myths, they enhance their language skills and internalize cultural values, norms, and narratives. Similarly, when children use symbolic play materials like dolls, action figures, or costumes, they enact cultural roles, scenarios, and social interactions, fostering their understanding of societal expectations and roles. Additionally, when children interact with cultural

artifacts such as traditional musical instruments, tools, or artworks, they develop an appreciation for cultural heritage and gain insights into the historical and cultural significance of these artifacts, enriching their cognitive understanding of the world around them (Hogg, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

2.4 Social Interaction

According to sociocultural theory, social interaction is crucial in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Through interactions with peers, adults, and the cultural environment, individuals internalize social and cultural practices, language, and ways of thinking, shaping their cognitive processes. For example, a teacher may guide students through reading about historical events, providing explanations, and asking questions to deepen understanding and foster language development. Through these interactions, which correlate with the *Strive-for-Five* framework for reading comprehension, for instance, children acquire new knowledge, problem-solving skills, and critical and creative thinking skills, which are essential for cognitive development (Cabell & Zucker, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978).

The *Strive-for-Five* framework is a pedagogical approach designed to enhance student engagement and achievement by focusing on five key areas: motivation, engagement, collaboration, metacognition, and authentic learning experiences. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development aligns closely with this framework, emphasizing the importance of social interactions, cultural context, and collaborative learning in shaping cognitive processes and academic achievement (Cabell & Zucker, 2024).

Furthermore, in informal settings such as family gatherings or community events, children can engage in conversations and activities that expose them to diverse perspectives and cultural practices, enriching their cognitive repertoire. In collaborative projects or group discussions, children can acquire new knowledge and learn how to negotiate meaning, express ideas, and consider alternative viewpoints, fostering cognitive flexibility and socio-emotional development (Bernard, 2023; Cabell & Zucker, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978; Zöggeler-Burkhardt et al., 2023).

2.5 Private Speech or Self-Talk

Vygotsky observed that children often engage in private speech or self-talk, talking to themselves as they engage in activities or solve problems (Ebadi & Amiri, 2024; Rezvan et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Ebadi and Amiri (2024), self-talk begins in early childhood, and even adults engage in it. Vygotsky argued that private speech is a self-regulation and cognitive development tool, as children use language to plan, monitor, and guide their behavior. Still, Vygotsky suggested that private speech gradually becomes internalized, forming the basis for inner speech or silent thinking in adulthood. Private speech or self-talk shapes cognitive processes and underscores the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Through social interaction and cultural engagement, individuals demonstrate the ongoing influence of sociocultural factors throughout their lifespan (Ebadi & Amiri, 2024; Ness, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023; Rezvan et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978).

2.6 Cultural Transmission

Sociocultural theory prioritizes cultural transmission, the process through which knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices are passed down from generation to generation (Baheretibeb & Whitehead, 2024). Cultural transmission occurs through social interaction, instruction, and participation in cultural activities within a community. For example, in Indigenous communities, storytelling transmits cultural values, traditions, and historical narratives from elders to younger generations (Riquelme Mella et al., 2023; Ritchie & Phillips, 2023). Similarly, cultural transmission occurs in immigrant communities through rituals, celebrations, and familial practices reinforcing cultural identity and heritage. Moreover, cultural transmission extends to the digital world, where social media platforms and online communities facilitate the sharing of cultural knowledge and experiences among diverse groups (Baheretibeb & Whitehead, 2024; Gaias et al., 2022; Riquelme Mella et al., 2023; Ritchie & Phillips, 2023).

2.7 Historical and Human Development

Vygotsky viewed human development as a historical and cultural process shaped by the sociocultural context in which individuals live (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Luria (a Vygotsky contemporary who met in Leningrad in 1923),

It seems surprising that the science of psychology has avoided the idea that many mental processes are social and historical in origin, or that important manifestations of human consciousness have been directly shaped by the basic practices of human activity and the actual forms of culture. (Luria, 1976, p. 3)

Riquelme Mella et al. (2023) and Ritchie and Phillips (2023) agree, accenting the dynamic nature of development and stressing how cultural changes and historical events influence individuals' cognitive development over time. Additionally, the proliferation of digital technologies in the 21st century has transformed learning modalities, necessitating new cognitive skills related to information processing and digital literacy (Abendan et al., 2023). Moreover, cultural shifts, such as globalization and multiculturalism, have led to greater diversity in educational

settings, impacting individuals' cognitive experiences and development trajectories from varied cultural backgrounds. In essence, Vygotsky's recognition of the historical and cultural context of the interplay between societal changes and cognitive growth illustrates how individuals' learning experiences combine with the broader sociocultural landscape (Abendan et al., 2023; Riquelme Mella et al., 2023; Ritchie & Phillips, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

3. Fundamental Tenets of Sociocultural Theory in Learning

The fundamental tenets of sociocultural theory are the guiding principles that emphasize the interconnectedness between individuals and their sociocultural environments, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of learning and human behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). Understanding and applying these tenets can inform educational practices, facilitate effective teaching strategies, and promote inclusive learning environments that honor diversity and foster holistic development. The importance of the fundamental tenets of sociocultural theory lies in its capacity to edify the dynamic interplay between individuals and their sociocultural worlds, enriching the understanding of human cognition and development (De Felice et al., 2023; Ness, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Simanjuntak et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

3.1 Social Interaction in Learning

Since learning is a social activity where students construct knowledge by interacting with their environment and others, De Felice et al. (2023) contend that "social interaction is crucial for optimal development" (p. 3). Through guided participation and internalization, children learn from others, which makes them more knowledgeable about their cultural contexts. In line with this perspective, fostering environments rich in social interaction becomes paramount, as it not only aligns with the principles of sociocultural theory but also directly addresses the fundamental role of social engagement in educational processes (De Felice et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2023; Leuwol et al., 2023; Mukhlisin, 2023; van Aswegen & Pendergast, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). This challenges the Cartesian Dualism philosophical theory and underscores the importance of social engagement in learning and education (Mariani, 2023).

Cartesian Dualism, introduced by the French philosopher René Descartes, posits that the mind and body are fundamentally different entities that exist independently (Mariani, 2023). This philosophical perspective significantly impacts the understanding of human cognition and development, suggesting a separation between mental processes and physical actions. However, sociocultural theory challenges this dualistic view by showing the interconnectedness of mind, body, and sociocultural context as offered by Vygotsky's cognitive processes, which are inherently social and cultural, with the mind and body linked to the social environment in which they operate. This perspective rejects the notion of a detached, autonomous mind and asserts that social interactions, cultural practices, and historical contexts shape cognitive development (Kind, 2023; Mariani, 2023; Maxwell, 2024).

3.2 Language as an Essential Tool in Learning

Language plays a central role in sociocultural theory, serving as a tool for communication, thought, and cultural transmission (Simanjuntak et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Children's language development is intricately linked to their social interactions and cultural contexts, with language evolving from external speech to inner speech (Hogg, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023). This showcases the significance of language-rich environments and meaningful communication in educational settings. Furthermore, research suggests that play-based language learning experiences enhance linguistic abilities and foster socio-emotional skills and cognitive development. Therefore, educators should integrate play-based approaches into the curriculum to optimize language learning outcomes and promote holistic development (Hogg, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023).

3.3 Learning Within ZPD

Educators play a crucial role in scaffolding children's learning within their ZPD, providing support and guidance to help them achieve higher levels of understanding (Alam, 2023; Alghamdy, 2024; Irshad et al., 2021; Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023; Ness, 2023; Syrjämäki et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). This has implications for assessment, instruction, and curriculum design, emphasizing the importance of matching learning activities to children's developmental levels and providing appropriate support. Understanding and applying the principles of the ZPD, educators can effectively tailor their teaching approaches to meet the unique needs of each child, fostering optimal learning experiences and promoting overall development (Alam, 2023; Alghamdy, 2024; Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023; Ness, 2023; Syrjämäki et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

For example, a teacher might guide students in recognizing sight words beyond their current level during literacy activities by providing hints, prompts, or modeling strategies. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson, a teacher might assist students in solving a problem slightly above their current ability by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable steps. Through this collaborative process, children accomplish tasks they could not achieve

alone and develop new skills and understanding, ultimately expanding their ZPD and advancing their cognitive development (Alam, 2023; Alghamdy, 2024; Irshad et al., 2021; Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023; Ness, 2023; Syrjämäki et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

4. Impact of Socioculturalism in Child Development

The impact of socioculturalism on child development is a central tenet of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Educators can enhance cognitive growth by providing meaningful learning experiences within children's ZPD. Language development is closely tied to sociocultural influences, with children acquiring language through social interaction (Irshad et al., 2021), exploring the application of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as an evaluative tool for language learning and social development in early childhood education. Educators can support language development by creating language-rich environments, laying the groundwork for academic success. Sociocultural perspectives emphasize socioemotional development, stressing the importance of positive social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Educators can foster empathy and resilience by promoting cooperation and collaboration. Children's cultural identity is also molded by their social environments (Arndt, 2020). Educators can nurture cultural pride and belonging by celebrating diversity (Arndt, 2020; Irshad et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978).

4.1 Cognitive Development

Cognitive development shapes children's learning experiences and overall development (Vygotsky, 1978). It delineates how young minds grasp, internalize, and manipulate information, thus shaping their cognitive schema and worldview. Educators can facilitate cognitive growth by scaffolding learning experiences within children's ZPDs. Educators provide a support scaffold that enables learners to venture into areas of learning beyond their current capabilities. This dynamic interplay between challenge and support cultivates a rich ground for cognitive growth, nurturing the acquisition of knowledge and the refinement of higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving abilities (Irshad et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978).

4.2 Language Development

Supporting language development occurs by creating language-rich environments, laying the groundwork for academic success (Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023). For example, children learn language through interactions, absorbing vocabulary, syntax, and communicative norms from their cultural environment. Educators support language development by creating optimal environments where children have ample opportunities for meaningful communication. Engaging in conversations, storytelling, and other language-rich activities, children enhance their linguistic skills and develop critical literacy skills necessary for academic success (Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023).

4.3 Social-Emotional Development

Sociocultural perspectives highlight the significance of social interactions in shaping children's socioemotional development (Bernard, 2023; Fettig et al., 2022; Martikainen et al., 2023). Positive social interactions, cooperation, and collaboration are essential for fostering empathy, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Educators can create classroom environments that promote these qualities by encouraging peer interactions, cooperative learning activities, and conflict-resolution strategies. Cultivating positive relationships and providing emotional support contribute to children's overall well-being and social competence (Bernard, 2023; Fettig et al., 2022; Martikainen et al., 2023).

4.4 Cultural Identity Formation

Children's cultural identities are influenced by interactions with diverse social and cultural contexts (Arndt, 2020; Simpson, 2021). Recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity can enhance children's cultural pride, belonging, and identity. Educators can incorporate multicultural perspectives into their curriculum, integrating diverse perspectives, traditions, and experiences. Acknowledging and valuing the cultural backgrounds of all students, educators foster inclusive learning environments where children feel respected, understood, and empowered to explore and express their cultural identities (Arndt, 2020; Simpson, 2021).

5. Sociocultural Approaches in ECE

Sociocultural approaches in ECE prioritize creating collaborative learning environments and fostering meaningful interactions among young children and adults to promote cognitive growth and language acquisition (Langa & Lazar, 2024). Educators integrate cultural diversity into the curriculum, incorporating children's backgrounds and traditions to nurture a sense of belonging and cultural pride. For Maplethorpe (2023), language-rich environments support children's linguistic development, encouraging expressive communication and dialogue. Collaborative learning strategies like group projects and peer tutoring enhance cooperation and problem-solving skills, while

CRT practices honor diverse identities and create inclusive classrooms. Addressing diversity involves challenging biases, promoting equity, providing opportunities for cross-cultural learning, and fostering environments that celebrate and embrace individual differences, as provided in Langa and Lazar (2024), Maplethorpe (2023), and Seltzer and O'Brien (2023).

5.1 Role of Social Interaction in ECE Learning and Development

The critical role of social interaction in young children's learning and development underscores the importance of creating environments that foster rich, collaborative exchanges among peers and adults (Allman, 2020; Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Correia et al., 2023; Hedges, 2022). Within these contexts, young children engage in dialogues, joint activities, and shared problem-solving endeavors, stimulating cognitive growth and enhancing socioemotional competencies such as empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, these interactions expose young children to diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives, facilitating language acquisition and promoting cultural understanding and appreciation.

Notably, the social exchanges within these environments provide opportunities for young children to scaffold their learning as they observe, imitate, and receive guidance from more knowledgeable peers and adults, thereby expanding their cognitive capabilities and repertoire of skills. Establishing social, collaborative learning environments in ECE lays a solid foundation for lifelong learning as children develop the capacity to engage meaningfully with others, navigate social complexities, and continuously construct knowledge through social interaction and dialogue (Allman, 2020; Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Correia et al., 2023; Hedges, 2022).

ECE is instrumental in fostering social interaction, a critical component for the learning and development of young children. The basic principles underlying the Vygotskian framework, as asserted by Bodrova and Leong (2024), are: (1) Children construct knowledge, (2) Development cannot be separated from its social contexts, (3) Learning can lead development, (4) Language plays a central role in mental development. Thus, educators in ECE settings play a leading role in nurturing positive social interactions among children, facilitating the formation of friendships and the mastery of social skills from an early age. Moreover, social interaction in ECE contributes significantly to child development, enabling them to connect with peers, cooperate effectively, and enhance communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution abilities. These interactions also serve as effective learning and skill acquisition mechanisms through peer learning, reciprocal teaching, and behavior modeling (Bodrova & Leong, 2024).

5.2 Integration of Cultural Context into the ECE Curriculum

Integrating cultural context into the curriculum involves more than acknowledging diversity; it entails actively incorporating young children's cultural backgrounds, traditions, and lived experiences into all teaching and learning, as stressed in Kaiser (2019). Infusing the curriculum with culturally relevant content and perspectives, educators create inclusive learning environments where young learners see themselves reflected and valued, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. Additionally, celebrating cultural diversity promotes cultural pride and appreciation among children, empowering them to embrace and respect their heritage and the diversity of others. This intentional integration of cultural context enriches the learning experience and deepens young children's understanding of the world around them, nurturing their capacity for empathy, tolerance, and global citizenry. Embracing cultural diversity in the curriculum creates a more equitable and inclusive educational experience for all children, where every voice is heard and every culture is celebrated (Kaiser, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Kurian, 2023).

Specific to ECE, curriculum is fundamental for shaping teaching approaches and enhancing learning outcomes, as shown in Edwards (2021). Culturally influenced components have historically played a significant role in shaping the ECE curriculum, emphasizing the dissemination of knowledge about positive and negative cultural norms, behaviors, and etiquette to positively influence children's cognitive development. Culturally responsive pedagogy in ECE entails deep engagement with diverse cultural backgrounds, leveraging children's cultural heritages to create equitable opportunities and transform teaching practices. ECE curriculum planning must incorporate cultural components to effectively transmit society's cultural heritage to younger generations, fostering functional membership within the community. Culturally responsive teaching validates and affirms students' cultures, enhancing their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes by integrating their cultures into various aspects of learning to create meaningful and inclusive educational experiences (Edwards, 2021; Kaiser, 2019; Kim et al., 2023; Kurian, 2023).

5.3 Promoting Language Development in ECE Through Sociocultural Practices

In promoting language development through sociocultural practices, educators go beyond merely teaching vocabulary and grammar; they create immersive language-rich environments that foster communication and interaction (Irshad et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Providing opportunities for children to express themselves, engage in dialogue, and participate in collaborative activities, educators facilitate the development of language

skills in meaningful contexts. Through conversations with peers and adults, young children acquire vocabulary and syntax and learn the pragmatics of language use, such as turn-taking and politeness conventions. Moreover, sociocultural practices acknowledge the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, valuing children's home languages and incorporating them into the learning environment (Irshad et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021).

In ECE, play, for example, is a powerful tool for facilitating language learning and development. According to Hogg (2023), incorporating play into the curriculum can significantly aid the learning of oral language skills among young children. Play-based activities allow children to engage in meaningful social interactions, explore language in authentic contexts, and experiment with linguistic structures and expressions. Prins et al. (2023) highlight the importance of play in natural environments, noting that outdoor play settings offer rich opportunities for language development. In natural environments, children are exposed to diverse sensory experiences and stimuli supporting language acquisition and vocabulary expansion (Hogg, 2023; Prins et al., 2023).

Additionally, outdoor play encourages physical activity and movement, which is closely linked to language development. Furthermore, Rahmita et al. (2023) emphasize using educational game tools to improve language development in young children. Educational games provide interactive and engaging learning experiences that promote language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, and verbal communication. On the other hand, Wood (2022) contends that tensions and challenges surround play and learning in ECE, exploring the complexities of integrating play-based approaches with formal learning goals in educational settings. However, educators can create dynamic learning environments that foster language development and support children's growth and learning by integrating play-based activities and educational games into the ECE curriculum (Rahmita et al., 2023; Wood, 2022).

Montoya-Fernández et al. (2024) systematically reviewed developmental play-based assessment in ECE. The study explores how play-based assessments evaluate children's development and learning in educational contexts. This aligns with socioculturalism, as it acknowledges the importance of play in children's development and emphasizes the socio-cultural context in which learning occurs. Socioculturalism underscores the significance of play as a tool for scaffolding children's learning experiences, accentuating the role of educators in guiding and supporting children's play to promote cognitive, social, and emotional development (Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024).

5.4 Collaborative Learning Strategies in ECE

Collaborative learning strategies, rooted in sociocultural theory, strengthen children's academic skills and social and emotional competencies (Amani & Fussy, 2023; Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). For example, children develop essential skills such as cooperation, communication, and problem-solving by engaging in group projects, peer tutoring sessions, and cooperative learning activities. Furthermore, collaborative learning encourages active participation and shared responsibility, allowing children to contribute their unique perspectives and talents to achieve common objectives. Through collaboration, children learn to respect diverse viewpoints, negotiate differences, and work toward consensus, preparing them for success in collaborative endeavors later in life. Moreover, collaborative learning experiences allow children to develop leadership skills as they take on roles within groups and guide their peers toward shared goals (Amani & Fussy, 2023; Erdemir & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023; Syrjämäki et al., 2023).

For example, early childhood teachers may engage children in tasks that align with their ZPDs during constructive play activities, offering assistance and encouragement to scaffold their learning (Loizou & Olymbiou, 2023). Similarly, in inclusive ECE settings, educators may adapt their instructional approaches to accommodate the diverse needs of children with exceptionalities, ensuring that learning activities are appropriately challenging yet achievable within ZPDs (Graham et al., 2023; Simpson, 2021; Syrjämäki et al., 2023). Leveraging the principles of the ZPD, educators can foster a supportive learning environment where children are empowered to reach their full potential and engage in meaningful learning experiences tailored to their developmental levels and strengths.

5.5 CRT Practices in ECE

Culturally Responsive Teaching is often attributed to Geneva Gay based on the book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, published in 2000 and in the 2018 edition, CRT is defined as “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them” (Gay, 2018, p. 36). CRT practices go beyond merely recognizing cultural diversity; they actively incorporate cultural perspectives into all aspects of teaching and learning. Centering marginalized voices and experiences, CRT practices can promote social justice and equity in education, challenging dominant narratives and systems of oppression. (Lang et al., 2024; Stormont et al., 2022; Volk & Miller, 2020).

Within the CRT framework, educators strive to create inclusive learning environments where children's cultural identities are acknowledged and celebrated (Gay, 2018). This may involve incorporating culturally

relevant literature, music, art, and traditions into the curriculum to make learning experiences more meaningful and engaging for all students. Additionally, CRT practices prioritize using instructional strategies that resonate with diverse learners, ensuring every child feels represented and empowered in the classroom. Additionally, educators engage in ongoing self-reflection and professional development to deepen their cultural competence and understanding of diverse perspectives (Brunsek et al., 2020; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023). In fostering a culturally responsive learning environment, educators can cultivate mutual respect, empathy, and understanding among students, preparing them to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world (Gay, 2018; Lang et al., 2024; Stormont et al., 2022; Volk & Miller, 2020).

5.6 Addressing Diversity in Early Childhood Settings

Educators attempt to address diversity in early childhood settings by challenging cultural biases and stereotypes, promoting equity and inclusion, and creating opportunities for young children to learn from each other's experiences (Kurian, 2023; Lang et al., 2024). They aim to create inclusive learning environments where children from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and represented. This involves challenging cultural biases and stereotypes that may exist within the educational system and society at large. In promoting equity and inclusion, educators strive to create opportunities for all children to learn and thrive, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Furthermore, addressing diversity in early childhood settings involves fostering meaningful interactions and collaborations among children, allowing them to learn from each other's unique perspectives and experiences (Kurian, 2023; Lang et al., 2024).

For example, educators could organize activities and lessons focused on different cultures throughout the year, highlighting the contributions of diverse communities to society. With Black History Month, children might learn about influential figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks and engage in discussions about segregation and "Peace Heroes" (NAEYC, 2024). Similarly, during Hispanic Heritage Month, children can explore Hispanic culture through traditional food and stories (Cycyk & Hammer, 2020). In embracing sensitivity to diversity, educators create environments where all children feel valued, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among students from various cultural backgrounds, leading to positive academic and social outcomes for all (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Correia et al., 2023; Garcia-Peinado, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

5.7 Professional Development for ECE Educators

Continuous professional development and support are necessary for educators to effectively implement sociocultural approaches in early childhood settings (Arndt, 2020; Brunsek et al., 2020; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023). This may involve training in CRT practices, strategies for promoting social interaction and collaboration, and methods for addressing diversity and cultural biases in the classroom. Arndt advocates for reimagining traditional perspectives on play to accommodate diverse backgrounds and promote inclusivity. Arndt also offers strategies for educators to create culturally responsive learning environments that celebrate diversity and ensure all children feel valued and respected. Investing in professional development opportunities, institutions can empower educators to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for all children settings (Arndt, 2020; Brunsek et al., 2020; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023).

5.8 Involving Families and Communities in Children's Learning

Sociocultural approaches recognize the importance of involving families and communities in children's education (Correia et al., 2023; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). Correia et al. provide a theoretical overview of children's participation in ECE, exploring its significance and implications. On the other hand, Rey-Guerra et al. focus on family engagement in early learning opportunities, examining the roles of families both at home and in ECE centers. Educators collaborate with families to understand and respect children's cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs and build meaningful partnerships supporting children's learning and development. Actively involving families and communities in children's education, educators can create cohesive learning environments that extend beyond the classroom walls and promote children's holistic development education (Correia et al., 2023; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022).

6. Challenges and Considerations

Educators face the challenge of addressing cultural biases and stereotypes in educational settings by fostering inclusive environments through reflection and dialogue (Gaias et al., 2022). This involves balancing individual learning needs with collective goals, recognizing students' strengths, and promoting collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). Challenges like limited resources and institutional barriers require educators to advocate for equitable access and establish community partnerships (Jana et al., 2023; Prusinski et al., 2023; Varela et al., 2023). Building trusting relationships with families and communities, involving them in decision-making, and forming strong partnerships are essential for creating cohesive learning communities that support children's holistic development (Gaias et al., 2022; Jana et al., 2023; Prusinski et al., 2023; Varela et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

6.1 Addressing Cultural Biases and Stereotypes

Addressing cultural biases and stereotypes within educational settings is not merely a recommendation but a critical necessity for educators in today's diverse classrooms (Gaias et al., 2022). It demands a commitment to ongoing reflection, learning, and dialogue to identify and challenge implicit biases that may affect teaching practices and student interactions. In cultivating cultural humility, educators can acknowledge their own limitations and biases while striving to understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. This process is essential for establishing inclusive learning environments where every child feels valued, respected, and represented. Actively confronting cultural biases and stereotypes is not only ethically imperative but also crucial for creating a more equitable and supportive educational atmosphere that celebrates diversity and fosters the holistic development of all students (Gaias et al., 2022).

6.2 Balancing Individual and Collective Learning Needs

In educational practice, educators are tasked with striking a delicate balance between catering to each child's individual needs and fostering collective learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). This entails acknowledging and respecting individual children's unique strengths, interests, and learning styles while simultaneously promoting collaboration, cooperation, and shared learning experiences that contribute to the collective growth of the entire group. Leveraging peer interactions and group activities, educators can harness the power of collective learning experiences to enhance academic achievement and promote social-emotional growth among students. Effectively navigating this balance, educators can create inclusive learning environments catering to diverse learners while fostering a sense of community and mutual support among students (Vygotsky, 1978).

6.3 Limited Resources and Institutional Barriers

Many early childhood settings, particularly those serving marginalized communities, face limited resources, funding constraints, and institutional barriers that may impede the implementation of sociocultural approaches (Jana et al., 2023; Prusinski et al., 2023; Varela et al., 2023). These challenges exacerbate existing disparities and hinder the implementation of sociocultural approaches essential for fostering equitable learning experiences. To address these systemic inequities, educators must demonstrate creativity and resilience in finding innovative solutions to resource constraints. This may involve advocating for equitable allocation of funding and resources, forging partnerships with community organizations and local businesses, and leveraging available support systems such as parent involvement programs or government grants. Actively engaging with stakeholders and mobilizing community resources, educators can mitigate the impact of limited resources and institutional barriers, working towards establishing inclusive learning environments that prioritize the diverse needs of all children (Jana et al., 2023; Prusinski et al., 2023; Varela et al., 2023).

6.4 Engaging Families and Communities as Partners

Engaging families and communities as partners in children's education demands intentional collaboration and effort (Gaias et al., 2022). Educators must prioritize building trusting relationships, communicating openly and effectively, and actively involving families and communities in decision-making that influences children's learning and development. Nurturing strong partnerships, educators can establish cohesive learning communities that comprehensively support children's success within the classroom and beyond. Through these collaborative efforts, educators can leverage families' and communities' collective resources and expertise to enhance all children's educational experiences and outcomes (Gaias et al., 2022).

7. Strengths and Limitations in Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory offers significant strengths in education (Bodrova & Leong, 2024). Firstly, it emphasizes the profound impact of social, cultural, and historical factors on children's learning and development, prompting educators to design meaningful learning experiences that honor diverse backgrounds (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Li et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Secondly, sociocultural approaches prioritize sensitivity to diversity, aiming to create inclusive environments that foster positive outcomes for students from various cultural backgrounds (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Correia et al., 2023; Garcia-Peinado, 2023; Slaughter et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). Lastly, the theory underscores the integration of learning and development, recognizing the interconnected nature of children's growth across multiple domains (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Mcleod, 2024; Saracho, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

However, sociocultural theory also faces limitations. Firstly, it remains incomplete due to Vygotsky's premature death, leaving gaps in understanding and development of the theory (Bodrova & Leong, 2024). Additionally, the concept of ZPD has been criticized for its vagueness and challenges in the application, leading to inconsistencies in educational practice (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Irshad et al., 2021; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, sociocultural theory could benefit from greater cultural relevance to ensure authentic resonance with diverse experiences and backgrounds, fostering more equitable and inclusive learning environments (Correia et al., 2023;

Lang et al., 2024).

8. Instructional Design Implications

Sociocultural perspectives advocate a shift from traditional instructional design to a learner-centered approach, emphasizing children's active engagement and collaboration in learning (Xu & Stefaniak, 2021). This approach prioritizes individual learners within collaborative learning environments and communities, fostering cooperation and peer learning opportunities (Vygotsky, 1978). Educators attend to children's funds of knowledge, incorporating their cultural backgrounds and experiences into the curriculum to scaffold learning effectively (Spiteri, 2024). Implications extend to assessment, instruction, and education reform, emphasizing equitable practices recognizing children's strengths and promoting active engagement and inclusion (Lang et al., 2024; Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024; Spiteri, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978; Xu & Stefaniak, 2021).

8.1 Shift from Traditional Instructional Design to Learner-Centered Approach

Encouraging a departure from traditional instructional design, sociocultural perspectives promote a learner-centered approach, emphasizing children's active participation, collaboration, and meaningful engagement in the learning process (Xu & Stefaniak, 2021). In prioritizing children's interests, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, educators can develop learning experiences that are more pertinent and captivating, facilitating deeper comprehension and learning outcomes. Xu and Stefaniak (2021) suggest integrating children's voices into pedagogical decision-making in early childhood classrooms. This shift towards a learner-centered approach empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, fostering a sense of agency and intrinsic motivation while promoting a more inclusive and effective educational environment (Vaughn, 2023).

8.2 Focus on Individual Learners, Collaborative Practice, and Communities of Learners

Instructional design implications stemming from sociocultural theory emphasize supporting individual learners within the framework of collaborative learning environments and communities of learners (Bodrova & Leong, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). Educators tailor learning experiences to accommodate the diverse needs, interests, and learning styles of children while also fostering opportunities for collaboration, cooperation, and peer learning. Through nurturing a culture of collaboration and collective learning, educators create dynamic educational settings where students receive individualized support and benefit from their peers' insights and contributions, ultimately enhancing their overall learning experience and outcomes.

8.3 Attention to Learner's Funds of Knowledge

The significance of acknowledging and utilizing children's funds of knowledge – their cultural, linguistic, and experiential resources within the learning environment is vital to sociocultural theory (Spiteri, 2024). Instructional design implications entail integrating children's interests, experiences, and cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, offering opportunities to tap into their existing knowledge and skills, and providing scaffolding for their learning through meaningful and relevant experiences. For example, ECE teachers could collaborate with local community members, such as farmers, environmental activists, or Indigenous elders, to integrate authentic and culturally relevant perspectives on climate change into the curriculum. Incorporating learners' funds of knowledge into instructional design ensures educators can create more engaging and effective learning experiences that build upon students' strengths and promote deeper understanding and connection to the material being taught.

8.4 Implications for Assessment, Instruction, and Education Reform

Sociocultural theory significantly impact assessment, instruction, and education reform in early childhood settings (Mligo, 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). Assessment practices should focus on understanding children's development within their cultural contexts, recognizing their strengths and capabilities, and providing opportunities for growth and learning. Instruction should be responsive to children's needs, promoting active engagement, collaboration, and social interaction. Education reform efforts should prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion to create learning environments that empower all children to succeed (Lang et al., 2024; Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978).

9. Best Practices and Recommendations

Best practices for integrating sociocultural approaches into ECE curricula involve incorporating culturally relevant materials and activities that reflect children's backgrounds and promote a sense of belonging (Volk & Miller, 2020). Educators should build partnerships with families and communities, engaging them as partners in children's education to support their learning at home and school (Lang et al., 2024). Professional development opportunities are essential for educators to deepen their understanding of sociocultural theory and implement CRT practices (Brunsek et al., 2020; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023). Also, advocacy efforts should promote policies that support

diversity, equity, and inclusion in ECE, including increased funding for ECE programs. Also, advocating for policies that foster family and community engagement in children's education is crucial. Championing these initiatives, stakeholders can work towards creating more equitable and inclusive ECE environments that support the diverse needs of children and families (De Felice et al., 2023; Fettig et al., 2022; Lang et al., 2024; Martikainen et al., 2023).

10. Future Directions for Research

Future directions for research in Early Childhood Education (ECE) encompass targeted interventions addressing specific developmental needs, including language and social-emotional skills, to ensure a solid foundation for learning (Bernard, 2023; Prins et al., 2023; Rahmita et al., 2023). Alternative assessment methods, such as play-based assessments, are being explored to gain a deeper understanding of children's strengths and areas for growth (Montoya-Fernández et al., 2024). Moreover, researchers predict increased technology integration in ECE, facilitating personalized learning experiences (Kim et al., 2023). Emphasis is placed on nurturing social-emotional skills like empathy and problem-solving, as evidence suggests their correlation with academic success (Bernard, 2023; Fettig et al., 2022; Martikainen et al., 2023). Parental involvement is recognized as pivotal, with programs facilitating active participation through workshops and home-based activities (Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). Lastly, there is a focus on cultural diversity and inclusivity, aiming to expose children to various cultures and languages to foster appreciation, tolerance, and global awareness (Kurian, 2023; Lang et al., 2024).

10.1 Emerging Trends and Areas for Further Investigation

The emerging trends in early childhood education reflect a multifaceted landscape of innovation and development. Particularly, there is a surge in the incorporation of technology, including educational apps and iPads, to enrich learning experiences (Kim et al., 2023). Learning through play is gaining momentum, fostering various types of play to bolster brain development (Arndt, 2020; Hogg, 2023). Additionally, nature-based activities are rising, promoting outdoor exploration and a connection to the natural world (Johnstone et al., 2022). Early literacy programs are prioritized to nurture foundational skills (Kim et al., 2023; Maplethorpe, 2023), while approaches emphasize parent and student involvement in learning (Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). Moreover, there is a growing emphasis on enhanced professional development, with qualifications correlating to improved opportunities and wages within the industry (Brunsek et al., 2020; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023).

10.2 Innovative Approaches to Sociocultural ECE Practices

Researchers should explore innovative approaches to sociocultural ECE practices that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (Lang et al., 2024; Vygotsky, 1978). This may involve developing new pedagogical strategies, interventions, and programs that leverage children's cultural assets and strengths to enhance their learning and development. The importance of innovative approaches to sociocultural ECE practices that aim to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion. These approaches involve developing new pedagogical strategies, interventions, and programs that leverage children's cultural assets and strengths to enhance their learning and development.

In exploring innovative methods in ECE that incorporate sociocultural perspectives, educators can create learning environments that are engaging, relevant, and tailored to each child's unique needs and interests. These approaches may include integrating concepts like STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), play-based learning, Montessori education principles, exposure to diverse cultures, and involving parents in their child's education through technology and workshops. Such innovative practices prepare children academically and foster their social, emotional, and physical well-being, setting the stage for a lifetime of learning and growth (Lang et al., 2024; Rey-Guerra et al., 2022; Vygotsky, 1978).

10.3 Long-Term Impacts of Sociocultural Interventions

Future research in the field of ECE should focus on investigating the long-term impacts of sociocultural interventions on children's academic achievement, socioemotional development, and overall well-being. The research suggests the need for longitudinal studies that track children's progress over time to understand how sociocultural approaches influence their short- and long-term development. Furthermore, to address gaps in the existing literature on sociocultural approaches to ECE, researchers are encouraged to conduct meta-analyses and systematic reviews to synthesize current research findings, identify areas that require further investigation, and generate new knowledge to advance the field. In filling these gaps and conducting comprehensive studies, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of how sociocultural interventions impact children's learning outcomes and overall development in early childhood education.

11. Conclusion

The global interest in advancing Early Childhood Education (ECE) is driven by recognizing its critical role during a crucial developmental period marked by rapid physical, cognitive, and socioemotional changes. As highlighted

by scholars, particularly those influenced by sociocultural theory, understanding the complex interplay between children, their social environments, and cultural contexts is paramount in ECE. This perspective emphasizes that learning and development are inherently social processes shaped by cultural tools and social interactions. Furthermore, educators and researchers have a growing consensus on integrating sociocultural perspectives into ECE practices.

Rooted in the seminal work of Lev Vygotsky, these perspectives underscore the significance of considering children's cultural backgrounds, social interactions, and historical contexts in educational approaches. The present scoping review has highlighted the significance of sociocultural perspectives in ECE and its implications for practice and policy while also identifying avenues for future research. Future research focuses on exploring innovative approaches to sociocultural practices, examining the long-term impacts of sociocultural interventions, and addressing gaps in existing literature. Embracing sociocultural principles, educators can create inclusive, culturally responsive environments that cater to every child's diverse needs and potential. Moving forward, ECE professionals must continue integrating sociocultural perspectives into their practices, fostering environments that support the holistic development of young learners.

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