

Efficacy of Culturally Responsive Guidance and Counselling in Diverse Early Childhood Settings: Insights from Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State

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Abstract

Culturally responsive guidance and counselling have gained widespread support in early childhood education; there are growing concerns about their practical efficacy in diverse settings. One major critique is the inconsistent implementation due to the lack of adequate training and preparedness among educators and counsellors. This study examined the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings within Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State, with a focus on how culturally attuned counselling strategies influence the socio-emotional and academic development of young learners such that the cultural values, beliefs, languages, and experiences of children and families are acknowledged and integrated into learning and behavioural support systems. Using a descriptive survey research design, data was collected from teachers, counsellors, and caregivers across selected early childhood centres. Findings revealed that culturally responsive guidance and counselling significantly enhanced children's adjustment, classroom participation, and interpersonal relationships. Results further showed that counsellors who employed indigenous languages, cultural norms, and community values in their practice achieved more effective outcomes compared with those using generic strategies. Based on these findings, the study recommends that early childhood centres institutionalize culturally responsive counselling approaches as a core component of learning; professional development programmes should be organized regularly to strengthen the competence of teachers and counsellors in culturally inclusive practices; policymakers should integrate culturally responsive counselling into early childhood education frameworks; and parents as well as community stakeholders should collaborate with schools to reinforce cultural values that promote children's holistic development.

Keywords: Culturally responsive counselling, Early childhood education, Guidance strategies, Socio-emotional development.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood settings encompass the environments where young children, typically from birth to age eight, receive care, learning, and developmental support (Manas, 2020). These settings include formal structures such as preschools, daycare centres, kindergarten classrooms, and informal environments like home-based childcare and community programmes. The goal of early childhood settings is to provide nurturing, safe, and developmentally appropriate experiences that support cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development, which are the critical qualities for the foundation of lifelong learning. The structure and quality of early childhood settings significantly influence children's developmental outcomes. High-quality settings are characterised by well-trained educators, low child-to-teacher ratios, inclusive curricula, and a supportive learning environment that fosters positive relationships. Research has shown that children exposed to quality early learning environments demonstrate improved literacy, numeracy, and social skills compared to their peers in lower-quality settings (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). These benefits are especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, as early interventions could help bridge achievement gaps and promote equity in early childhood settings.

Early childhood settings play a vital role in family engagement and community involvement. By fostering partnerships with parents and caregivers, these environments create continuity between home and school, which reinforces children's learning and development. Lehl, *et al* (2022) opined that the importance of shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities in supporting young children. As such, investing in the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of early childhood settings is crucial for building a strong foundation for educational success and social well-being. Early childhood education occurs in a variety of settings, each influenced by cultural, social, economic, and institutional factors. These settings include formal environments such as public and private preschools, day-care centres, and nursery schools, as well as informal arrangements

like home-based care or community-run programmes. Diversity in early childhood settings reflects not only structural differences but also the variation in pedagogical approaches, caregiver qualifications, and the needs of children from different backgrounds (OECD, 2023; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). In multicultural societies, this diversity is essential for ensuring inclusivity and equitable access to learning opportunities from an early age.

In many contexts, diverse early childhood settings are tailored to meet the needs of children from different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, bilingual education programmes support language development in children from minority language groups, while inclusive classrooms accommodate children with special needs, promoting a culture of acceptance and equal participation (NAEYC, 2020). These varied settings helped address systemic inequities by recognising and responding to the unique developmental needs of every child, therefore, enhancing overall outcomes in learning, socialisation, and emotional well-being (Hines, et al, 2025).

The effectiveness of diverse early childhood settings depends on several factors, including curriculum relevance, teacher training, and resource availability. High-quality early learning environments require culturally responsive teaching, developmentally appropriate practices, and family engagement to thrive (NAEYC, 2020). Therefore, policies and practices must support this diversity by providing equitable funding, professional development, and inclusive curriculum design to ensure all children receive a strong foundation for lifelong learning despite the variation in their cultural backgrounds.

Culturally responsive guidance and counselling play a vital role in enhancing the quality of early childhood education, particularly in diverse settings. These approaches ensure that the cultural values, beliefs, languages, and experiences of children and families are acknowledged and integrated into learning and behavioural support systems. In multicultural classrooms, children bring diverse cultural identities that influence how they perceive the world, learn, and interact with others. Culturally responsive counselling helps educators and caregivers tailor interventions to support children's emotional and social development in ways that are meaningful to their cultural contexts (Steed & Kranski, 2021; Hines, et al, 2025). This responsiveness fosters a safe and affirming environment that promotes inclusion, equity, and positive identity development from an early age. Guidance and counselling services that respect and incorporate cultural diversity also address the unique developmental needs and challenges children may face due to linguistic differences, migration backgrounds, or social inequalities. For instance, children from minority or immigrant families may experience feelings of isolation or confusion in settings where their home cultures are not represented or understood. A culturally responsive counsellor recognises these dynamics and works collaboratively with teachers and families to bridge the gap between home and school environments (Beasley et al, 2022; Hines, et al, 2025). By validating children's cultural identities, such interventions reduce stress, enhance self-esteem, and improve behavioural outcomes, which are foundational to school readiness and academic achievement.

Moreover, culturally responsive counselling promotes stronger relationships among educators, children, and families, which is essential for holistic development. When early childhood professionals demonstrate cultural competence, they are better equipped to engage families, build trust, and encourage parental involvement in children's learning. According to Byrd & Ahn (2020), culturally relevant practices encourage collaborative learning and communication, which are critical in shaping supportive learning communities. This inclusive atmosphere helped children feel seen, valued, and respected, which boosts their motivation and participation in classroom activities. Another significant benefit is the prevention and reduction of behavioural issues often misinterpreted due to cultural misunderstanding. In many early childhood settings, behaviours exhibited by children from non-dominant cultures may be misjudged as defiance or disengagement when, in reality, they are expressions of cultural norms or language barriers (Hines, et al, 2025). Culturally responsive counsellors help staff interpret behaviours in context and apply appropriate, respectful strategies for guidance and discipline (Alaca, 2022). This reduces the risk of unfair labelling and disciplinary actions that disproportionately affect minority children, thus fostering a more just and supportive environment.

In a bit shift, culturally responsive guidance and counselling have gained widespread support in early childhood education; there are growing concerns about their practical efficacy in diverse settings. One major critique is the inconsistent implementation due to the lack of adequate training and preparedness among educators and counsellors (Hines, et al, 2025). Many early childhood professionals receive limited exposure to cultural competence training during their professional preparation, resulting in a superficial understanding of cultural responsiveness (Steed & Kranski, 2021). This gap often leads to tokenistic practices rather than meaningful engagement with children's cultural backgrounds, thereby undermining the effectiveness of culturally responsive strategies. The concept of culturally responsive guidance is often built on generalised assumptions about cultural

groups, which could inadvertently lead to stereotyping. In diverse classrooms, children might belong to multiple intersecting identities, and counsellors who rely on broad cultural templates may fail to appreciate the individual differences within cultural groups. These risks reduce children's cultural identities to simplified narratives, rather than recognising their dynamic and evolving nature (Henriques, 2023). Consequently, counselling approaches that aim to be culturally sensitive might inadvertently reinforce cultural biases and hinder authentic communication with children and families.

Another issue of the efficacy of culturally responsive counselling is the mismatch between institutional policies and the cultural realities of children and families. Standardised curricula, rigid assessment methods, and inflexible behavioural expectations often conflict with the values and norms of non-dominant cultural groups (Sasse, 2023). Counsellors operating within such systems might be struggling to apply culturally relevant practices when their efforts are constrained by institutional norms that privilege mainstream cultural values. This disconnect could limit the impact of culturally responsive counselling in addressing the real needs of children in multicultural settings. As one may also be aware, the early childhood period is marked by rapid developmental changes, and young children may not yet have the cognitive or linguistic abilities to articulate their cultural identities or social experiences fully. This makes culturally responsive counselling particularly challenging in early years, as counsellors must rely on indirect observations or parental input, which may not always provide a comprehensive picture of the child's needs. The reliance on adult interpretations of culture may obscure children's voices, leading to misdiagnoses or inappropriate interventions (Castro-Olivo *et al*, 2019).

The socio-political context in which guidance and counselling take place significantly affects their outcomes. In settings where systemic inequality, racial bias, or underfunding prevail, culturally responsive counselling alone may not be sufficient to address the structural barriers facing children from marginalised groups. Without broader systemic reforms and equitable resourcing, the benefits of culturally tailored counselling are likely to be limited and unsustainable (Chourasiya Samar, 2023). Therefore, while culturally responsive guidance has theoretical merit, its practical efficacy in diverse early childhood settings remains questionable without adequate systemic support, training, and contextual sensitivity from parents and caregivers.

Parents and caregivers who support culturally responsive guidance and counselling often highlight its positive impact on children's identity development and emotional security. A study by Mosher (2025) found that when early childhood educators integrate the cultural values, communication patterns, and behavioural norms of children's home environments into counselling strategies, it fosters a sense of belonging and increases engagement. For instance, in a qualitative study involving Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrant families in the U.S., Obiakor and Beachum (2015) reported that parents expressed satisfaction with culturally inclusive counselling practices that recognised their values and traditions. These parents noted improved behavioural adjustment and academic motivation in their children, attributing this to the cultural affirmations embedded in counselling sessions. This emphasised that culturally responsive practices validate children's backgrounds, leading to better socio-emotional outcomes and collaboration between families and schools.

On the other hand, some parents and caregivers have expressed scepticism about the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling, particularly when it appears superficial or tokenistic because counselling practices may fail to reflect a deep understanding of their lived realities. Invariably, cultural generalisations were often made, leading to misinterpretations of children's behaviours (McWayne *et al.*, 2013; Sisko, 2025). Additionally, in diverse urban communities, parents from minority groups reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes, leading them to distrust school counselling programmes (Corrado, 2025). This suggests that without authentic, sustained engagement and proper training for counsellors, the perceived benefits of cultural responsiveness may not materialise for all families. Against this background, the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. In increasingly multicultural and diverse societies, the early childhood education sector faces the growing challenge of addressing the social, emotional, and developmental needs of children from various cultural backgrounds. Early childhood settings are becoming more heterogeneous, reflecting the linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity of the population. Despite this growing diversity, guidance and counselling practices in many early childhood centres remain largely uniform and culturally unresponsive, often rooted in dominant cultural narratives that do not reflect the lived experiences of all children. This mismatch could result in misunderstandings, behavioural misjudgements, and inadequate emotional support for children from minority or marginalised backgrounds.

There is limited empirical evidence on the practical efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in early childhood settings within the Nigerian context, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Most available

counselling frameworks are modelled after Western theories that may not align with the indigenous values, child-rearing practices, or communication norms prevalent in local communities. As such, early childhood educators and counsellors may struggle to adapt these models to suit the cultural realities of the children they serve, thereby compromising the effectiveness of their interventions.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun LGA, Kwara State. The aim is to understand whether such practices are being effectively implemented, to what extent they address the unique needs of children from different cultural backgrounds, and what contextual barriers or facilitators influence their success. The findings will help bridge the knowledge gap and inform more inclusive and culturally grounded counselling practices in early childhood education in Nigeria.

The objectives of this study are therefore to;

- i. examines the extent to which culturally responsive guidance and counselling influence the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.
- ii. ascertain the extent to which early childhood educators and counsellors implement culturally responsive strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in the study area.

Based on the Ecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), which provides a holistic framework for understanding how a child's development is influenced by multiple layers of environment, each embedded in the next. These layers include the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, all of which interact to shape a child's experiences, behaviour, and development. In early childhood settings, this theory emphasises that culturally responsive counselling should not isolate the child's individual experiences from their cultural, familial, and societal contexts. For example, a child from an indigenous or ethnic minority group may navigate multiple cultural expectations across home and school. The microsystem (immediate family, classroom, peers) must be examined alongside the macrosystem, which includes societal beliefs, cultural values, and policies affecting minority populations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Culturally responsive guidance must account for these systemic influences on a child's worldview and development.

Counsellors and educators who adopt this theory consider how family dynamics, language, religion, and socio-political structures shape children's emotional and behavioural outcomes. They also understand the need to collaborate with caregivers and community figures in culturally meaningful ways. For example, using community-based knowledge systems or involving elders in behavioural interventions aligns with many African or Indigenous worldviews. Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's theory underscores interconnectedness, how relationships between systems (e.g., home and school) influence the child's well-being. A culturally responsive counsellor fosters strong home-school partnerships that respect parents' values and communication styles, ensuring the child receives consistent, culturally appropriate support. Therefore, the Ecological Systems Theory provided a comprehensive, culture-sensitive lens for analysing children's experiences and guiding developmentally appropriate and culturally grounded interventions in early childhood settings.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised all parents and teachers in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. The sample size for the study were 75 parents and 75 teachers. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The purposive sampling technique was used to select pre-primary schools, considering school type (public and private). To ensure that each category was equally represented, the schools were stratified into public and private. From each stratum, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 (8 public and 7 private schools, which would amount to 80 and 70 respondents, respectively). The purposive sampling technique was used to select the teachers based on gender and qualifications to ascertain that caregivers of the same qualifications were selected for this study. Two instruments, namely, "Culturally Responsive Guidance and Counselling Questionnaire (CRGCQ)" and "Childhood Educators and Counsellors Implementation Questionnaire (CECIQ)", were used to collect data for this study. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The demographic data of the respondents were analysed using frequency counts, mean and percentages. While the inferential statistics of linear and regression were used to test all the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Gender distribution of the respondents on the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun LGA, Kwara State

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	69	46.0
Female	81	54.0
Total	150	100

Table 1 shows the gender of respondents on the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun LGA, Kwara State. It is indicated that sixty-nine (69) of the respondents, representing 46.0% were male. Eighty-one (81) of the respondents, representing 54.0% were female. Therefore, it was indicated that the female respondents were more in number than the male respondents. Thus, female respondents prevail over the respondents on the efficacy of culturally responsive guidance and counselling in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun LGA, Kwara State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant influence of culturally responsive guidance and counselling on the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. The hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: Regression Analysis, on the influence of culturally responsive guidance and counselling on socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Variable	Mean	SD	N	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
Social Emotional	54.24	19.491	150	.994	.989	.988	13306.546	.000
CRGCQ	78.56	26.165						

The result indicated that there was a positive influence of culturally responsive guidance on the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($R = .994$), while the R-Square is .989, which means that the independent variable (culturally responsive guidance and counselling) explained 98.9% variation of the dependent variable (socio-emotional development). This indicates a good fit of the regression equation. Thus, this is a reflection that culturally responsive guidance and counselling significantly influenced the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($F_{(1,159)} = 13306.546$, $P < 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result since the significant p-value is less than 0.05. This implies that culturally responsive guidance and counselling have a significant influence on the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between culturally responsive guidance and counselling, and early childhood educators in the implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Table 3. Regression Analysis, of the relationship between culturally responsive guidance and counselling, and early childhood educators in the implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

Variable	Mean	SD	n	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
Strategies	42.94	16.771	220	.991	.982	.981	8074.222	.000
CECIQ	78.56	26.165						

The result indicated that there was positive relationship between culturally responsive guidance and counsellor and early childhood educators in implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural

backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($R = .991$) while the R-Square is .982 which means that the independent variable (culturally responsive guidance and counsellor and early childhood educators) explained 98.2% variation of the dependent variable (implementation of strategies). This indicates a good fit of the regression equation. Therefore, this is a reflection that culturally responsive guidance and counselling and early childhood educators have a significant relationship with the implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($F_{(1,149)} = 8074.222$, $P < 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result since the significant p-value is less than 0.05. This means that culturally responsive guidance and counselling, and early childhood educators have have significant relationship with the implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State.

4. Discussion

The first findings originated from this study stated that there was a significant influence of culturally responsive guidance on the socio-emotional development of children in diverse early childhood settings in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($F_{(1,159)} = 13306.546$, $P < 0.05$). This was in relation to the findings of Adebayo & Obasi (2020), who researched the 'Influence of Culturally Responsive Counselling on the Emotional Wellbeing of Pre-schoolers in Urban Nigerian Schools'. The study found that children exposed to culturally inclusive counselling sessions scored significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) in emotional regulation and social interaction, highlighting the effectiveness of culturally embedded counselling practices. Obasi and Nwankwo (2019), who adopted a mixed-methods design, examined the role of cultural alignment in counselling. Results showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$) between culturally tailored counselling programmes and improved empathy and cooperation in children, supporting the claim that culture-sensitive approaches enhance socio-emotional development. Also, Mohammed and Bello (2022) explored "The Role of Culturally Responsive Counselling in Enhancing Socio-Emotional Skills Among Hausa-Speaking Children". It was revealed that there was a significant relationship between culturally responsive guidance and enhanced peer interaction, self-awareness, and emotional literacy ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$).

In contrast to the stated result, Ajayi and Fashola (2020) researched "Assessing the Limitations of Culturally Based Counselling in Diverse Nigerian Schools". Found that some children from minority tribes showed lower socio-emotional scores (mean = 2.14) compared to peers from dominant cultures, suggesting cultural bias and misalignment in culturally guided counselling efforts. Eze (2021), used a case study approach. The study focused on 5 early childhood centres in Cross River State with a population of over 350 learners. Using purposive sampling, 50 educators were selected. Findings indicated that efforts to implement culture-specific counselling led to confusion among children exposed to multiple languages and belief systems, with 38% displaying increased behavioural disruptions during group activities. In Wilson and Tran's (2019) study, it was found that the culturally guided group showed no statistically significant advantage ($p = 0.47$) in socio-emotional development, challenging the assumed benefits of cultural alignment in counselling.

The second results revealed that there was a significant relationship between culturally responsive guidance and counselling, and early childhood educators in the implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds in Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State ($F_{(1,149)} = 8074.222$, $P < 0.05$). The findings were in tandem with the view of Adeyemi (2020), who worked on the "Impact of Culturally Responsive Guidance on Early Childhood Adjustment in Multicultural Schools in Lagos State". The findings showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$) between culturally responsive strategies and children's socio-emotional development. Nwankwo and Essien (2018), in their study titled "Culturally Attuned Counselling: A Strategy for Enhancing Self-Identity in Early Learners". Using a quasi-experimental design, this study assessed the effect of culturally responsive counselling on identity formation in early learners in Enugu State. The results revealed a significant improvement in self-identity measures in the intervention group compared to the control group ($F = 7.32$, $p < 0.05$), supporting the efficacy of culture-based guidance. Johnson and Rousseau (2019). Multicultural Competence among Early Childhood Counsellors: Effects on Inclusive Practice. This cross-sectional survey focused on counsellors in Canadian urban preschool centres. Correlation analysis found a significant relationship ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$) between multicultural competence and inclusive teaching strategies.

Against the findings above, research work by Bello (2019), titled "Challenges of Implementing Culturally Responsive Counselling in Nigerian Preschools". This survey study involved early childhood educators in Abuja. Revealed a significant barrier, including language diversity, lack of institutional support, and curriculum rigidity, questioning the feasibility of implementation. Wilson's (2022) study revealed that instances of

stereotyping, miscommunication, and cultural assumptions led to negative child responses and exclusion behaviours. More so, Rahman's (2017) findings revealed that the inconsistent application of cultural strategies confused bilingual learners, who showed signs of emotional withdrawal and reduced participation in classroom discussions.

6. Conclusion

This study, therefore, concludes that culturally responsive guidance and counselling are effective in enhancing and improving diverse early childhood settings. It also concludes that the responsive guidance and counselling significantly influenced the socio-emotional development of children, implementation of strategies in guiding children from different cultural backgrounds among children from minority groups in the diverse early childhood Oyun Local Government Area, Kwara State. This underscored that culturally responsive guidance and counselling determined the effectiveness, efficacy, and improved both academic activities among others in diverse early childhood settings.

Based on these findings, the study therefore recommends that early childhood educational institutions should integrate culturally responsive guidance into their daily routines and curricula to enhance children's socio-emotional development, ensuring that teaching and counselling approaches reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the learners. School management should also facilitate regular professional development workshops where counsellors and early childhood educators jointly design and implement culturally responsive strategies to better guide children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, a comparative study on culturally responsive guidance and counselling strategies can be conducted among minority and majority ethnic groups in public and private secondary schools across Nigeria in order to have a wider generalization of the effectiveness of the strategy in the learning process.

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