

## A Systematic Literature Review on Career Guidance through Thematic Learning in Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract:** Thematic learning is a type of career guidance service that can be applied in early childhood education and is considered effective because its learning themes introduce various kinds of work. This study aims to analyze career guidance services for early childhood through the thematic learning process. The research employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method by reviewing five research journal articles and two undergraduate theses accessible online. Data were collected using documentation techniques and analyzed using grounded theory with the Straussian approach. The findings indicate that career guidance services can be integrated into thematic learning in early childhood education through learning methods and media that are easy for teachers to understand and apply. This approach is particularly effective when implemented by educators with a bachelor's degree in early childhood teacher education, as it helps address the limited involvement of guidance and counseling teachers in PAUD. Furthermore, integrating career guidance principles into thematic learning through systematic lesson planning allows the introduction of work-related concepts to children through themes relevant to their daily environment, fostering structured and focused career development from an early age.

**Keywords:** Career guidance, Thematic learning, Early childhood education, Teacher professionalism, Systematic literature review

### INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is an era of globalization characterized by rapid advances in information and communication technology that influence nearly every aspect of human life, including education. In the field of education, continuous innovation in planning, implementation, and assessment is essential to meet the evolving demands of this era. Beyond academic knowledge, students must also develop a set of essential competencies known as the 4Cs—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity—which form the foundation of life and career skills as well as learning and innovation skills. According to Battelle for Kids (2019), these competencies are crucial for educators, education experts, and industry professionals to cultivate among learners, as they define the abilities, knowledge, and training necessary for students to succeed in work, life, and society in the 21st century.

However, at one level of education—namely, early childhood education (ECE)—there exists a long-standing phenomenon that has become problematic and difficult to change: the practice of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, commonly known as *CALISTUNG*. *CALISTUNG* has become the main focus for some parents, who view it as an essential component of early learning. In reality, ECE should not only emphasize children's ability to read, write, and count but also focus on developing behavioral, cognitive, and psychomotor skills that must be nurtured optimally. This is stated in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of

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Indonesia Number 137 of 2014 concerning the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (which replaced Regulation Number 58 of 2009) (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 137 Tahun 2014 Tentang Standar Nasional PAUD (Menggantikan Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Nomor 58 Tahun 2009, 2014) emphasizing that six aspects of child development must be developed holistically—cognitive, language, physical, artistic, social-emotional, and moral-religious values. Moreover, early childhood education plays an essential role in developing children's character and intelligence; however, the negative impacts of early *CALISTUNG* instruction are often overlooked by parents. Applying reading, writing, and arithmetic instruction to children who are not yet developmentally ready can lead to a “fade-out effect” in grades three and four of elementary school, which decreases children's learning motivation (R. H. Lestari et al., 2024). Therefore, to minimize problems that may later arise during adolescence when determining their future paths (Lestari, 2017), educators at the early childhood education level need to introduce various types of learning experiences that are enjoyable, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with children's individual needs, interests, and talents.

These efforts include providing guidance and counseling aimed at supporting the optimal growth and development of young children, as well as modeling appropriate behaviors through various activities to help them address emerging challenges. Therefore, early childhood educators need to have an understanding of career guidance. However, the term “*career guidance*” is rarely used in the context of early childhood education because the implementation of guidance and counseling—particularly in the area of career development—is not professionally carried out by trained guidance and counseling teachers or counselors. This situation occurs due to the limited placement of guidance and counseling personnel in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institutions, both formal and non-formal. As a result, the responsibility for integrating guidance into teaching and learning activities often falls to early childhood educators themselves, especially in developing countries (Maree, 2018; Rahim et al., 2021).

Guidance and counseling that can be provided to young children, namely, personal-social guidance, study guidance, and career guidance through various types of services and supports as learning facilitators and assistance based on the norms imposed by the environment (Leksana, 2020; Dasweni et al., 2023). One of the guidance and counseling that will be discussed is related to the skills that need to be mastered by 21st century education which will be discussed is career guidance. According to Lestari (2017), career guidance has two definitions, namely to provide assistance from mentors to those being guided to 1) understand and accept their abilities and character and 2) understand and adapt to the real world of work according to their desired expectations. Another definition put forward by Leksana (2020) is that career guidance is an effort to help introduce and understand one's potential, introduce various kinds of worlds of work, develop multiple kinds of abilities expected by the environment in the future, and be able to determine and make decisions appropriately and responsibly for the various actions that have been carried out. Therefore, with career guidance introduced in early childhood education, educators can prepare learning plans systematically so that career paths will be more focused (Rahim et al., 2021).

The implementation of career guidance in early childhood education (PAUD) can be integrated through thematic learning. Thematic learning is a child-centered approach that focuses on children's needs and provides meaningful learning experiences based on well-planned activities. This approach helps deepen children's understanding of learning materials while fostering their curiosity and engagement (Samad et al., 2023). According to Apriyanti (2017), thematic learning for young children should align with the holistic nature of early childhood education, allowing learning activities to simultaneously develop multiple domains of ability. A well-structured thematic learning model—organized into themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes—can effectively use career guidance to cultivate 21st-century educational skills through a variety of integrated and supportive learning experiences.

Based on this background, the general objective of this study is to provide written insights regarding the implementation of career guidance in early childhood education through thematic learning as part of the learning process.

## METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative approach to analyze research findings published in academic journals. The focus of the review is on studies related to career guidance and early childhood, which serve as the main keywords in the article search process. The review follows several stages, namely identifying, evaluating, and interpreting previous studies in the form of journal articles and theses that are accessible online through Google Scholar. Based on the search results, five journal articles and two theses were identified using the keywords career guidance and early childhood. After obtaining the data sources, the materials were analyzed by examining and aligning the research titles, objectives, methodologies, and findings, as research on career guidance in early childhood education remains limited. The data sources used in this SLR are presented in Table 1 below.

**Tabel 1.** Sumber Data SLR

No	Data Source Identity	The Title of Research
1.	Rahim, M., Hulukati, W., & Madina, R. (2021).	Bimbingan karir bagi anak usia dini
2.	Hakim, O. L. (2023)	Bimbingan dan Konseling Karir Di PAUD
3.	Leksana, D. M. (2020)	Media Bimbingan Karir Cerita Bergambar Untuk Menumbuhkan Kesadaran Karir Anak Usia Dini
4.	Suciati, A. D. (2019)	Bimbingan Karir Melalui Teknik Role Playing Untuk Mengembangkan Pemahaman Karir Anak Usia Dini
5.	Fitriana, N. (2024)	Efektivitas Layanan Informasi Untuk Bimbingan Karir Anak Usia Dini Kelompok B1 Di Tk Kartika Xiv-11 Banda Aceh
6.	Dasweni, S., & Apriliyanti, A. (2023)	Metode Field Trip Dalam Pengembangan Bimbingan Karir Anak Usia Dini
7.	Anesty, E., Fatihaturrosyidah, F., & Putra, J. (2022)	Knowledge and ability of early childhood teachers in delivering career guidance for preschooler

Based on the evaluated data sources, this study concludes that learning through a thematic approach is one of the effective strategies that can be applied in career guidance for early childhood. Before data analysis, the validity of the data was ensured. This study employed data triangulation to verify the credibility and validity of the findings. This form of triangulation involved examining the data sources—namely, research objects consisting of both indexed and non-indexed research articles, as well as theses—by comparing the results of the selected studies with other relevant research through documentation techniques (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020).

After the comparison process, the data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, which involved carefully coding the obtained data and interpreting each code. The coding process followed the Straussian Approach proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) (Kristjansson-Nelson, 2020), consisting of three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding stage, the contents of articles and theses were analyzed to identify similarities and differences within the data, resulting in approximately 50 initial codes. The results of open coding were then categorized into four axial categories, which were subsequently integrated during the selective coding stage to develop a theoretical framework for learning. The axial and selective coding results from the seven data sources are presented as follows:

**Table 2.** Coding Analysis at the Axial Coding and Selective Coding Stages

Selective Coding	Axial Coding
Career guidance services can be implemented through an early childhood thematic learning approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Determination of Learning Themes as a Career Guidance Service for Early Childhood Education.</li> <li>2. Early Childhood Learning Methods as a Career Guidance Service Approach.</li> <li>3. Challenges Faced by Early Childhood Teachers in Providing Career Guidance Services.</li> <li>4. Teachers’ Educational Background and Its Relation to Career Guidance Services in Early Childhood Education.</li> </ol>

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Result**

Data analysis using the grounded theory approach revealed that career guidance services can be implemented through a thematic learning approach at the early childhood education level. This finding is supported by the studies of Rahim et al., (2021), Hakim (2023), & Dasweni et al., (2023) which explain that the determination of learning themes indirectly exposes early childhood teachers and learners to various occupations. Introducing children to a range of occupations is considered an integral part of career guidance services for early childhood (Khassanova et al., 2023).

Furthermore, by determining the learning theme, teachers can design learning activities that explain various theoretical concepts related to the selected theme, as well as develop learning media that support the implementation of the theme. In Leksana (2020) study, pictorial media were used to narrate the story associated with the learning theme, whereas in Hakim (2023) study, the learning media consisted of children’s worksheets and professional costumes as concrete learning tools.

The teaching methods used in implementing learning, as examined by Suciati (2019) & Dasweni et al., (2023), include role-playing and field trip methods. Through the role-playing method, children are encouraged to engage in various professions according to the selected theme, whereas the field trip method involves visiting specific locations outside the school to introduce and observe real-world occupational activities. The selection of teaching methods should be adjusted to align with the chosen learning theme.

Based on the results of previous studies on learning media and teaching methods, it can be (Suciati, 2019) concluded that the planning and implementation of learning activities constitute integral stages of career guidance services at the early childhood education (PAUD) level. This is further supported by Anesty et al., (2022), who emphasize that the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning in early childhood education are considered part of career guidance activities aimed at assessing teachers’ abilities to deliver career-oriented instruction. This is particularly relevant because there is currently no standardized assessment instrument for evaluating career guidance practices at the PAUD level.

In conclusion, the research findings of Suciati (2019), Leksana (2020), Rahim et al., (2021), Dasweni et al., (2023) & Hakim (2023) indicate that learning activities can serve as guidance and counseling services, particularly in the form of career guidance. Career guidance services in early childhood education (PAUD) can be integrated into thematic learning as an initial stage in the learning process. However, only professional teachers who fully understand the integration of thematic learning and career guidance services are able to effectively plan, implement, and assess learning activities in early childhood settings.

Nevertheless, the understanding of PAUD teachers regarding career guidance services remains limited. According to Anesty et al., (2022), the ability of most respondents to plan career guidance services is still at a low level, while their ability to implement such services is generally at a moderate level. Furthermore, in terms of

evaluating career guidance services, most respondents demonstrated beginner-level abilities. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that, in general, the knowledge and competence of PAUD teachers in providing career guidance for early childhood are still relatively low.

This situation highlights another issue raised by Rahim et al., (2021) & Hakim (2023) namely the absence of specific positions for Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers in both formal and non-formal early childhood education (PAUD) institutions. As a result, guidance and counseling services in PAUD are generally carried out by regular PAUD teachers. However, when a PAUD teacher's educational background meets the qualifications of a professional educator—specifically holding a bachelor's or master's degree in Early Childhood Teacher Education (PG-PAUD)—their understanding of the concepts related to PAUD and guidance and counseling, such as thematic learning and career guidance services, tends to be higher than that of teachers without a bachelor's degree (Anesty et al., 2022).

## Discussion

Based on the results of axial coding, which describe four categories, it can be seen that these categories are interrelated, leading to the conclusion that career guidance services, as a concept of guidance and counseling, can be implemented through thematic learning as a learning approach in early childhood education (PAUD). This is because thematic learning is designed with consideration of the principles of early childhood education, which aim to develop life skills by introducing children's talents, interests, aspirations, cognitive abilities, physical abilities, and attitudinal competencies (Mustofa et al., 2018; Rahim et al., 2021).

Developing life skills can be integrated into thematic learning, as the selection of learning themes requires teachers to consider the principles of thematic learning—namely, proximity, simplicity, attractiveness, relevance, and incidental learning (Mustofa et al., 2018). This is reflected in the learning themes of the 2013 curriculum for the first semester, which begin with themes closest to children's everyday lives, such as *Myself, My Environment, My Needs, Animals, and Plants* (Nasution, 2019). In contrast, during the second semester, the themes become more distant from children's immediate experiences but remain engaging and relevant to their interests, including *Vehicles, The Universe, and My Country* (Anggraeni et al., 2014).

These themes do not explicitly reflect a relationship with career guidance services, as career understanding is generally associated with various types of occupations (Rahim et al., 2021). However, upon closer analysis, the themes outlined in the curriculum development document designed by the Ministry of Education and Culture remain too broad and can be elaborated further into sub-themes and specific topics. This can be illustrated through the *Family* theme with the sub-theme *Professions of Family Members*, where teachers can design teaching materials that include simple conceptual explanations, learning media, teaching methods, learning activities, and assessment instruments related to professions. Moreover, within the *family* theme, introducing different professions begins with family members, who serve as the child's closest educational environment.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that thematic learning in early childhood education (PAUD) can serve as a form of career guidance service at the early childhood level. From an early age, children begin to show signs of interest in certain fields through learning activities related to aspirations, during which they often mention specific occupations that appeal to them. These interests are shaped by their learning experiences at home, in school, and within the community, as the family, school, and community environments play an important role in influencing children's career choices (Leksana, 2020; Rahim et al., 2021).

However, teaching and learning activities in early childhood education (PAUD) have undergone a curriculum revision with the introduction of the *Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)*, which serves as an update to the 2013 Curriculum. This revision has affected the determination of learning themes. The learning themes now refer to the *Pancasila Student Profile (P5)* project, which each school adapts to suit its specific needs. The P5 learning themes applicable to PAUD include (1) I Love the Earth, (2) I Love Indonesia, (3) Play and Work Together / We're All in This Together, and (4) My Imagination / My Imagination and Creativity.

When compared to the 2013 curriculum, the P5-based learning themes appear similar in that they are not explicitly detailed for the implementation of career guidance services. Instead, the themes are presented in a general form that allows them to be developed into more specific topics that can inspire project-based learning activities. Among the four themes provided, the theme "My Imagination" or "My Imagination and Creativity" can be applied to career guidance services, as it encourages children to imagine something they have never seen or experienced.

In PAUD learning, this theme can be implemented through hands-on learning experiences that involve the use of real learning media (Lestari et al., 2023) or by organizing visits to interesting places such as museums, markets, stations, galleries, craft centers, parks, and other relevant sites (Hidayati, 2017; Widyastuti, 2022). Both imagination-based activities and educational visits serve as effective learning methods that can support the implementation of career guidance services. Furthermore, through the theme *My Imagination/My Imagination and Creativity*, teachers can design learning experiences that introduce various types of occupations, aiming to nurture and develop children's interests and talents from an early age.

The implementation of thematic learning as a form of career guidance service can assist educators in identifying children's talents, interests, abilities, intelligence, and character from an early age. In early childhood education, learning serves as a fundamental introduction to various types of occupations or professions, enabling children to begin developing the ability to plan and determine their future life paths (Rahim et al., 2021; Syahfitri et al., 2022).

If the introduction of occupations or professions within thematic learning is systematically integrated through career guidance activities, it is expected to foster the development of a positive self-concept in career decision-making. When young children experience enjoyable learning, particularly in activities that are meaningful and engaging, these experiences can contribute to optimal development in adulthood—resulting in mature career readiness and the ability to work effectively or even create employment opportunities for a stable life (Rahim et al., 2021; Hakim, 2023).

Therefore, the concept of career can be broadened to encompass everything acquired through one's learning experiences as part of an individual's life journey, including children's experiences in pursuing education (Rohmah, 2018).

Career guidance services aimed at early childhood have been implemented by early childhood educators through thematic learning. Thematic learning that is planned and implemented in teaching and learning activities incorporates abilities that lead to career guidance abilities, especially on the theme of professional or occupational learning. This theme introduces various kinds of work ordered according to the child's closeness to his environment. In introducing jobs or professions, teachers indirectly develop various kinds of life skills because the terms used by teachers are abilities, indicators, or learning objectives. Not only do they develop life skills, but educators indirectly use the main material from career guidance.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that thematic learning in early childhood education (PAUD) can be utilized as a form of career guidance service at the early childhood level. From an early age, children begin to show signs of interest in certain fields through learning activities related to aspirations, where they often mention particular professions that appeal to them. These interests are influenced by their learning experiences at home, school, and within the community, as family, school, and environmental factors play an important role in shaping children's career awareness (Leksana, 2020; Rahim et al., 2021).

The existence of thematic learning as a medium for career guidance helps educators identify children's talents, interests, abilities, intelligence, and character from an early age. During early childhood, learning serves as an initial introduction to various kinds of jobs and professions, enabling children to begin imagining and planning their future paths (Rahim et al., 2021; Syahfitri et al., 2022). When the introduction to jobs or professions in thematic learning is carried out in a structured way through career guidance, it is expected to foster a positive self-concept in career choices. Pleasant and meaningful learning experiences in early childhood contribute to optimal

development in adulthood, leading to mature career readiness and employability, as well as the capacity to create jobs and live an independent life (Rahim et al., 2021; Hakim, 2023). Therefore, the understanding of career development can be broadened to mean that all learning experiences are part of one's life journey, including children's early educational experiences (Rohmah, 2018). The main components of career guidance that can be applied at the PAUD level include:

1. An initial introduction to the world of work, aimed at helping children understand the concept of working and earning to meet daily needs. Thematic learning can introduce various types of occupations without focusing on income or numerical values.
2. Simple orientation and career information, aligned with the principles of thematic learning, which begins with simple and familiar themes. Thus, explanations about occupations are presented in general, age-appropriate terms, considering that young children think concretely and learn effectively through imitation.
3. Early self-introduction and understanding of career tendencies. Through optimal stimulation of various abilities, thematic learning—especially themes related to work or professions—can nurture children's interests and talents (Leksana, 2020; Nuralmasari & Erdiantoro, 2020). Consequently, guidance and counseling services, even when implemented indirectly, play a vital role in providing direction and motivation for children to understand themselves, adapt, and position themselves appropriately within their social environment (Ghoziyah, 2022; Syofiyanti & Mahyatun, 2022; Hawari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, guidance and counseling services in PAUD contribute to the development of qualified human resources aligned with national and global education goals—specifically to end poverty, reduce inequality, and protect the environment, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Amanah et al., 2023).

Therefore, professional teachers are essential in the field of early childhood education to ensure a deep understanding of thematic learning, as are professionals in the field of guidance and counseling who comprehend the principles of career guidance services. The findings of this study indicate that PAUD teachers often play dual roles as both educators and counselors. However, some PAUD teachers hold educational backgrounds that are not aligned with early childhood education, such as being graduates of junior high school, senior high school, or bachelor's degree programs outside the Early Childhood Teacher Education field. This is supported by research conducted by Srihartini et al., (2021), which found that observations in PAUD institutions in Bogor revealed that only 23% of early childhood teachers held undergraduate qualifications. Similarly, Syofiyanti & Mahyatun (2022) reported that in an Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) in Indragiri Hulu Regency, Riau Province, none of the teachers graduated from the Early Childhood Teacher Education or Guidance and Counseling study programs. This issue warrants attention because teacher professionalism is achieved when educators are capable of designing learning experiences that meet children's developmental needs. Such professional competence reflects teachers' responsibility in optimizing various abilities in accordance with the intended learning objectives (Apriyanti, 2017; Marfuah, 2023).

A professional teacher is an educator who has completed a specific educational study program relevant to their field of expertise, one of which is the Early Childhood Education (PG-PAUD) study program. This requirement is stipulated in Article 25, Paragraph 1, Points (a) and (b) of the *Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education* (which replaces *Regulation Number 58 of 2009*). The regulation states that the academic qualifications for Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teachers include holding a Diploma IV (D-IV) or Bachelor's degree (S1) in education obtained from an accredited study program, or a D-IV or S1 degree in another relevant field such as education or psychology from an accredited study program, and possessing a PAUD Teacher Professional Education (PPG) certificate issued by an accredited university.

Based on this statement, it can be concluded that PAUD teachers should hold an undergraduate degree, particularly from the Early Childhood Education (PG-PAUD) study program. In higher education, prospective teachers are equipped with various theories related to early childhood education, such as learning planning,

implementation, assessment, approaches, models, methods, and media, to develop pedagogical competencies and a comprehensive understanding of PAUD theories. During the learning process, lecture materials indirectly cover the planning, implementation, and evaluation of guidance and counseling services, especially career guidance. This is supported by the findings of Anesty et al., (2022), which indicate that educational background influences the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services as well as early childhood learning. Therefore, PAUD teachers play an essential role, and these qualification requirements must be met to ensure that teaching and learning activities run optimally and produce graduates who are competitive, innovative, and creative. The higher the teachers' academic qualifications, the more skilled they will be in achieving the learning objectives in early childhood education (Nazidah, 2021).

With the skills acquired during their college education, prospective teachers are expected to become more professional in understanding the concept of early childhood education (PAUD), including the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning as a form of guidance and counseling (BK) services, particularly in career guidance through thematic learning. The early childhood learning methods and media obtained through lectures in the PG-PAUD study program enable them to design and implement career guidance services aligned with learning themes, such as the theme of occupations. The curriculum of one state university in Bandung includes an elective course in the Guidance and Counseling study program that focuses on early childhood guidance and counseling. The course, which is available online, discusses play techniques and activities in child counseling, as well as the use of drama, storytelling, and drawing as creative and expressive art techniques in counseling for children. This is supported by the findings of Suciati (2019), Leksana (2020) & Mohamed et al., (2020), which show that PAUD teachers generally have a positive perception of career understanding in early childhood, enabling them to support optimal development.

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that thematic learning implemented in early childhood education (PAUD) is one of the most appropriate learning approaches to be applied through the stages of career guidance services. This approach aims to help children contemplate what they want to do in the future, as career guidance provides understanding and support to children in developing career awareness. It helps them understand various types of jobs or professions in their surroundings, recognize their interests and preferences, identify their talents, and foster a sense of cooperation and responsibility related to the professions being studied (Mohamed et al., 2020; Dasweni et al., 2023). Therefore, early childhood educators need a clear concept of career guidance so that development strategies, theme selection, and learning activities based on the main components of career guidance materials can be designed accurately and coherently, considering the concrete nature of early childhood learning (Sari & Mahyuddin, 2023). This is evident from the strength of thematic learning applied in PAUD, which is based on children's interests and needs and focuses on developing children's problem-solving and thinking skills, as well as their social skills such as cooperation, tolerance, and communication (Apriyanti, 2017).

## CONCLUSIONS

Introducing career understanding to young children is essential, as it represents an ability that needs to be nurtured and developed to help them become successful individuals, community members, and workers in the 21st century. Therefore, this study, which employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, aims to provide written information as supporting and confirmatory evidence related to early childhood career guidance through the implementation of thematic learning in PAUD. The goal is to enable teachers to design appropriate learning activities within career guidance services. Career guidance refers to a deliberate effort to assist individuals in understanding and accepting their own abilities and characteristics as potential assets that can meet future societal expectations. It also involves helping them understand and adapt to the real world of work in alignment with their aspirations. In implementing career guidance in early childhood education, teachers can integrate career guidance principles with thematic learning models through systematic lesson planning to create a more focused career development pathway. Thematic learning is considered suitable because it introduces the concept of work or



profession through themes that are familiar and relevant to children's everyday experiences, aligning naturally with the goals of career guidance.

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