

Cover Sheet

For this assignment, I have submitted the following:

Component 1: A 4,000-word portfolio choosing a research project that includes a topic related to children in the early years.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT in July 2026 to help me to find a topic to research.

I used the prompt(s): Please give me some ideas for a research project that is related to children in the early years.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT in September & October 2026 to Harvard-reference my references to ensure they were all accessible.

I used the prompt(s): Please Harvard reference my reference list.

How can effective partnerships between parents and early years practitioners support children's learning and development?

1. Literature Review

Partnerships between parents and early years practitioners are important because children learn in both home and early years settings. Parents know their children well and can share information about their interests, routines, strengths and individual needs. Practitioners bring professional knowledge and observations of children's learning within the setting. Wilson (2025) highlights the importance of positive relationships with parents, carers and families while recognising that families have different circumstances and experiences. Working together can therefore help parents and practitioners develop a greater understanding of the child and how they learn.

Parental engagement has been linked to children's learning and development. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF, 2023) describes parental engagement as early years professionals and settings actively involving parents in supporting their children's learning and development. This can include encouraging parents to read and talk with their children at home, participate in setting activities or receive targeted support where families have additional needs. The EEF (2023) reports that parental engagement approaches have a positive impact, with children making around five months of additional progress on average. However, the EEF also notes that the effectiveness of different approaches varies, meaning settings need to consider which approaches are appropriate for their families and monitor their impact.

The EEF (2023) identifies the home learning environment as an important way that parental engagement can support children's learning. Settings can play an important part in helping parents feel more confident when supporting their child's learning at home. It is also important to recognise that every family has different circumstances. Work and childcare commitments can sometimes make it difficult for parents to get involved, so offering flexible ways to participate can help more families feel able to engage.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest that parental involvement can develop over time, from taking part in the educational setting to becoming more actively involved in supporting their child's learning.

Involvement may include attending meetings or activities, whereas engagement is more closely related to what parents do to support their child's learning. A parent who cannot regularly attend activities because of work or childcare may still support their child's learning at home (EEF, 2023). This suggests that parental engagement should not be judged only by attendance at the setting but also by the relationship parents have with their child's learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

The home learning environment is another important part of children's development. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project identified a positive relationship between the quality of children's home learning experiences and their intellectual and social development (Sylva et al., 2004). Everyday activities such as reading together, singing and playing with numbers and letters can provide valuable learning opportunities. This shows that learning does not only take place through activities planned by the early years setting. Experiences at home can also contribute to children's development.

Ma et al. (2016) provide evidence of a positive relationship between parental involvement and children's learning outcomes. Their meta-analysis examined 46 quantitative studies involving children during early childhood and early years education. The findings suggest that children whose parents are involved in their learning may experience more positive learning outcomes. However, the findings should not be interpreted as showing that parental involvement alone causes better outcomes. Children's learning and development can also be influenced by factors such as family circumstances, educational experiences and socioeconomic background. Therefore, parental involvement should be considered as one factor that can contribute to children's learning and development rather than the only influence on their outcomes.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is useful when considering the connection between home and the early years setting. Bronfenbrenner explains that children's development takes place within different but connected environmental systems. The family and early years setting are part of the child's microsystem, while

the relationship between these environments' forms part of the mesosystem. The relationship between parents and practitioners therefore connects two important parts of a child's everyday life.

Demissie and Pearse (2025) argue that quality in early childhood education and care can be understood through a holistic and relational approach that recognises the connections between children, parents, families and practitioners. Communication between adults can allow information about children's interests, experiences and needs to be shared, which may help adults understand the child more.

Partnership should also involve more than practitioners simply giving information to parents. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) identify communication between families and educational settings as an important part of parental engagement. This allows information about children's learning to be shared between home and the setting and can provide opportunities for parents to contribute their knowledge and experiences. Partnership can therefore be seen as something that involves communication in both directions rather than information simply being passed from the setting to parents.

Kambouri et al. (2022) identified communication, collaboration, time, commitment and trust as important aspects of parent practitioner partnerships. Their research also showed that there can be differences between how partnership is described in theory and how it works in everyday practice. This suggests that effective partnerships cannot simply be assumed to happen because a setting offers opportunities for parents to become involved. Relationships need to develop over time. Demissie and Pearse (2025) similarly found that positive and trusting relationships could have a transformative effect on children and families.

Parents' knowledge is an important part of partnership working. Sims-Schouten (2016) found that parents were positioned as their children's first and foremost educators, while early years professionals were viewed as supportive and willing to work alongside families. Parents have knowledge gained from everyday routines and experiences with their children, while practitioners bring professional knowledge and observations from the setting. Effective partnership should recognise the value of both forms of knowledge rather than treating practitioners as the only experts.

Partnerships can also be affected by social and cultural differences. Murray et al. (2018) explored parent practitioner partnerships in England, Hungary and

Kazakhstan and found differences in how partnerships were understood across different contexts. This suggests that there may not be one approach that works for every family. Social and cultural experiences can influence communication, expectations and relationships with early years settings.

Families also have different circumstances that can affect how they communicate and engage. Wilson (2025) discusses effective partnerships, communication and reflective practice when working with parents, carers and families. Parents can provide information about family routines, culture, communication and experiences, while practitioners contribute observations and professional knowledge. Settings could therefore offer different ways for parents to communicate, such as informal conversations, digital communication, translated information and alternative meeting arrangements.

Power is another issue that needs to be considered when looking at parent-practitioner partnerships. Practitioners have professional knowledge and may have more influence over when and how parents are invited to participate. If the setting controls the partnership completely, parents may become people who mainly receive information rather than equal contributors.

Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) distinction between involvement and engagement is useful here because it focuses on parents' relationship with their child's learning rather than simply what they do for the setting. Parents should therefore have opportunities to contribute their knowledge and experiences. Demissie and Pearse (2025) also found that early years provision could support parents' wellbeing and social connection, showing that family experiences are relevant when considering the quality of early years provision.

Overall, the research provides a clear reason for the proposed study. Research has identified a relationship between parental involvement and children's learning outcomes (Ma et al., 2016). Parents' knowledge is also important because they are closely involved in their children's everyday lives and have been described as their first and foremost educators (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Social and cultural differences can also influence how partnerships are understood in different contexts (Murray et al., 2018). This suggests that partnership working may be experienced differently by families and practitioners. Therefore, there is a reason to explore how parents and

early years practitioners experience partnership working in everyday practice and whether their views are similar or different.

A specific gap is the need to understand more about how partnerships are experienced by both parents and early years practitioners in everyday practice. Existing research provides useful information about engagement, communication and trust, but there is less focus on how parents and practitioners describe successful partnership, the difficulties they experience and whether their views differ. Looking at both perspectives within one setting could provide a more detailed picture of partnership working and identify practical factors that support or prevent parents from becoming involved in children's learning and development.

2. Methodological Considerations

Methodology refers to how a research question is investigated and why particular research choices are made. In early childhood research, it is important to consider how the research question connects with participants, methods and ethical responsibilities. Nolan, Cartmel and Macfarlane (2013) emphasise that early childhood research involves making decisions about the research process, including the choice of methodology, ethical considerations and methods of collecting and analysing data, while Walker and Solvason (2014) highlight the importance of having a clear research question and an appropriate research approach.

A qualitative approach would be used because the main purpose of the study is to understand how parents and early years professionals experience and understand partnership working. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss qualitative and quantitative approaches to educational research and the different ways these types of data can be collected and analysed.

The research would focus on understanding how parents and early years practitioners experience partnership working, recognising that people can experience the same situation differently. For example, a practitioner may believe communication with parents is effective, while a parent may have a different experience. The research would therefore focus on participants' own views and experiences rather than assuming there is one correct understanding of partnership working.

The study would mainly produce qualitative data because it is interested in people's experiences rather than numerical measurements. Interviews could provide detailed information about communication, trust, relationships and respect. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss qualitative approaches to educational research and the ways qualitative data can be analysed.

A quantitative approach could measure issues such as how often parents communicate with the setting or attend activities. However, numerical results would not explain why people communicate in particular ways or what those interactions mean to them. A qualitative approach would allow participants to explain their experiences in their own words and provide greater detail about what partnership means to them.

Interviews could not prove that effective partnerships directly cause improvements in children's learning and development. Findings would therefore be presented as participants' experiences and interpretations rather than evidence of direct cause and effect (Hammond and Wellington, 2021).

The research would take place within one early years setting supporting children aged approximately three to five years. A purposive sample of around eight to ten adults would be recruited, including approximately four early years professionals and four to six parents or carers.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss sampling as an important part of planning educational research and consider issues involved in selecting participants. Including both groups is important because speaking only to practitioners would provide limited information about parents' experiences, while speaking only to parents would provide less information about challenges faced by practitioners and settings.

There are limitations to using a small sample. Eight to ten participants from one setting would represent a limited range of experiences, and the findings could not be statistically generalised to all parents and early years professionals. The purpose would therefore be to gain detailed information about experiences within the setting rather than make claims about all parents and professionals.

Self selection could also affect the sample. Robinson (2014) identifies self selection as a possible issue in interview-based qualitative research because people who volunteer may have different experiences from those who do not participate. In this study, parents with positive relationships with the setting may be more willing to participate, while parents who have experienced difficulties may be less likely to volunteer. This could mean that some experiences are not represented in the findings. To reduce this possibility, the research opportunity would be offered openly to all eligible parents rather than approaching only those who are regularly involved.

Individual semi structured interviews would be used as the main research method. Interviews are useful when the researcher wants to understand people's experiences and opinions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss interviews as an important method of collecting data in educational research and consider methodological issues involved in their use. Lambert (2019) also identifies interviews as a useful method in educational research and highlights the importance of careful planning and conduct.

Parent interviews would focus on communication, involvement in children's learning, trust, barriers to engagement and possible ways of improving relationships. Practitioner interviews would explore partnership experiences, communication methods, difficulties engaging families and ways these difficulties are addressed. Interviews would last approximately 20–30 minutes and would take place in a suitable private environment.

One advantage of semi structured interviews is that the researcher can ask to follow up questions. For example, if a parent described communication as “good”, the researcher could ask what makes it good and request an example. This could provide more detailed information about the participant's experience. Walker and Solvason (2014) emphasise the importance of choosing methods that fit the research question, supporting the use of semi structured interviews in this study.

There are also disadvantages. Participants may give socially desirable answers if they are worried about how their responses could affect their relationship with the setting. Practitioners may feel they need to describe practice positively, while parents may be uncomfortable criticising a setting that provides care for their child.

Participants would therefore be told that the research is interested in their experiences rather than evaluating individual staff members.

The researcher also needs to think about how their own actions may influence participants' responses. The way questions are asked, along with the researcher's tone, reactions and follow up questions, could affect what participants feel comfortable sharing. Keeping a reflexive diary can help the researcher reflect on their decisions and consider how their own views and experiences may have influenced the research.

Although the research concerns children's learning and development, children would not be directly interviewed or observed. Instead, the research would focus on the experiences of parents and early years practitioners, as they are directly involved in the partnership being explored.

Harcourt, Perry and Waller (2011) discuss the ethical and methodological issues involved in researching young children's perspectives, including children's participation, rights and representation. The research question focuses on relationships between parents and early years professionals, so parents and practitioners have direct experience of the relationships being investigated. Involving children directly would introduce additional ethical and methodological considerations without being necessary for this small scale study. This does not mean children's views are unimportant. A future study focusing on children's experiences would need child appropriate methods and consideration of children's participation, communication and power.

A questionnaire was considered as another possible method. Questionnaires could collect information from a larger number of participants and make comparisons easier. Bell, Waters and Johnson (2024) highlight the importance of considering questionnaire purpose, wording, question type and distribution.

However, questionnaires would provide fewer opportunities to explore answers in depth. A participant might give a short answer without explaining their view, and the researcher could not immediately ask for clarification. Bell, Waters and Johnson (2024) also discuss careful question wording, piloting and non response. For this research, interviews would therefore be more suitable because they allow participants to explain their experiences in greater detail.

The interviews would be recorded conversations with participants' permission, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a way of identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. The process involves becoming familiar with the data, creating codes, developing possible themes, reviewing themes and producing the final analysis.

These would develop from participants' accounts rather than being fixed in advance. Braun and Clarke (2021) explain that the researcher is actively involved in making sense of data when using reflexive thematic analysis. Themes may therefore develop as the researcher works through the data. A coding record and reflexive diary would be used to document this process.

Triangulation means using more than one method or source of information to look at a research topic from different perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). This study would use data source triangulation by interviewing both parents and early years professionals. Comparing responses could show where experiences are similar or different. For example, practitioners might feel that digital communication is effective while parents prefer face to face conversations. Alternatively, both groups might identify lack of time as a barrier. Looking at both perspectives could provide a fuller understanding of partnership working.

The research would not use different methods such as interviews, questionnaires and observations because this would create too much data for a small scale project. Instead, both parents and early years practitioners would be interviewed, providing two different perspectives on partnership working while keeping the research manageable.

3. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are particularly important because the research involves parents, professionals, children and relationships within an early years setting. Ethical research involves more than completing an ethics form or obtaining signatures. BERA (2024) highlights the importance of protecting participants and respecting their rights throughout research. Palaiologou (2012) identifies informed consent, children's participation, vulnerability, safeguarding and appropriate research methods as important aspects of ethical practice in early childhood. The study would follow

university ethics procedures, with approval obtained before recruitment or data collection.

Potential participants would receive an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, why they were invited, what would happen during the interview, whether it would be recorded, how information would be used, possible risks and how they could withdraw. They would then provide informed consent before taking part.

Bos (2020) explains that consent is an important part of ethical social research and should mean that participants understand what they are agreeing to rather than simply signing a form. Participants would have time to read the information, ask questions and decide whether to participate.

Power relationships also need consideration. Practitioners may feel pressure to participate because a manager has agreed to the research, while parents may worry that refusing could affect their relationship with the setting or their child's care. Participants would be told that participation is voluntary and would not affect employment, care or relationships with the setting. Permission would also be obtained from the setting manager as gatekeeper, but this would not replace individual consent.

Consent would be treated as an ongoing process. Participants could choose not to answer a question or stop the interview. If someone became uncomfortable or distressed, they could pause or end the interview.

Participants would also be given a clear withdrawal deadline. Once information has been anonymised and included in the analysis, it may no longer be possible to identify and remove an individual's contribution.

Although children would not take part directly in the research, their rights and wellbeing would still be considered because the research concerns partnerships intended to support their learning and development. Mayne, Howitt and Rennie (2018) highlight the importance of considering children's rights, power and agency in early childhood research. Parents and practitioners may describe how they believe partnership affects children, but their opinions should not be presented as children's own views. In this study, the research focuses on parents' and practitioners'

experiences, so it would not be necessary to collect information directly from children. Not involving children directly is based on the research question and the small scale of the project, rather than a belief that children's perspectives are unimportant (Mayne, Howitt and Rennie, 2018).

The research question can be explored through parents' and professionals' experiences, so collecting information directly from children is not necessary. Participants would also be asked not to identify children, other parents or colleagues unnecessarily. Only information relevant to the research question would be collected, helping to avoid unnecessary intrusion (Mayne, Howitt and Rennie, 2018).

Confidentiality and anonymity are important because the research would involve a small number of people from one setting. Bos (2020) explains that removing names does not always make information completely anonymous, as people may still be identifiable from their role or circumstances. Participants would be given codes or pseudonyms, such as Parent 1 or Practitioner A, and the setting would also be given a pseudonym. Identifying details would be removed or changed where they were not needed. For example, describing someone as "the only male practitioner" or "the deputy manager" could make them identifiable.

Complete anonymity would not be promised if it could not realistically be guaranteed. Participants would receive an honest explanation of confidentiality and the possibility that someone familiar with the setting could recognise details.

Safeguarding is not the main focus of the research, but a participant could disclose information suggesting that a child or vulnerable person was at risk. Participants therefore could not be promised absolute confidentiality. Participants would be told before consenting that confidentiality might need to be broken if a serious safeguarding concern was disclosed.

If a concern was raised, the researcher would not investigate it themselves or ask unnecessary questions. University procedures and the setting's safeguarding policy would be followed, including reporting the concern to the appropriate designated safeguarding person. This would ensure participants understood the limits of confidentiality and how information might be handled (Bos, 2020).

Although there would be little physical risk, emotional, social or professional risks could occur. Parents might feel uncomfortable discussing negative experiences, while practitioners might worry that criticism could affect their professional relationships or employment.

Interview questions would be neutral and respectful, allowing participants to discuss their experiences openly. Questions would focus on areas such as how communication and partnership could be improved rather than asking participants to criticise the setting. Participants could choose not to answer any question.

Individual responses would not be shared with managers or other participants. Findings would be presented anonymously and organised around themes rather than individuals. The researcher's safety and wellbeing would also be considered throughout the research. If any concerns arose, support and advice would be sought from the university.

Participants might discuss difficult experiences or concerns about children's wellbeing. The researcher would need to maintain clear professional boundaries and remember that their role is to conduct research rather than provide counselling or resolve disagreements. Mayne, Howitt and Rennie (2018) highlight the importance of researchers recognising their position and responsibilities. Similarly, Bos (2020) highlights the importance of responsible research conduct and integrity. A reflexive diary could help the researcher reflect on their assumptions or emotional responses.

There could be reputational risks for the setting or university if participants or the setting were identifiable or findings were presented unfairly. The setting would be anonymised and findings reported carefully. Individual comments would not be presented as representing all parents or practitioners.

Research integrity is also important. Bos (2020) discusses bias, plagiarism and fabrication and the need for responsible research practice. Findings would be reported honestly, including information that does not support the researcher's expectations. Quotations would not be altered to change their meaning, and sources would be acknowledged.

The research would involve personal information through consent forms, audio recordings and interview transcripts. The Data Protection Act 2018 sets out

principles for how personal information should be processed and requires data to be handled lawfully, fairly and transparently. It also states that personal data should be collected for specific purposes, be relevant and limited to what is necessary, and be kept securely for no longer than needed (Data Protection Act 2018). The research would also follow the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), helping to ensure that participants' personal information is handled appropriately throughout the research process.

Consent forms containing identifying information would be stored separately from interview data, and participants would be given codes to help protect their identity. Audio recordings would be stored securely and removed from the recording device once they had been transferred. Access to the research information would be limited, and it would not be stored on shared computers, unsecured USB drives or personal cloud storage. Bos (2020) highlights the researcher's responsibility to protect participants' information and maintain confidentiality. Data protection would therefore be considered throughout collection, analysis, storage and disposal. Information would be kept only for the period required before being securely destroyed or anonymised.

Ethical considerations would be important throughout the research rather than being treated as a separate administrative task. Wright (2020), drawing on the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, identifies equal respect, fairness and reducing suffering as important values in ethical research. Research involving young children also requires consideration of their rights and participation (Harcourt, Perry and Waller, 2011). Mayne, Howitt and Rennie (2018) emphasise the importance of considering power and children's agency within research. Consent, confidentiality, data protection and research integrity would also need to be maintained throughout the project (Bos, 2020). Together, these principles would help ensure that the research respects participants' rights and experiences while reducing potential risks to participants, the researcher, the early years setting and the university. The research would therefore provide an opportunity to explore how parents and early years practitioners experience partnership working in a respectful way.

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