

Exploring Parental Perception of Play in Socio-Emotional Development of 3-5 Years Old Children

By

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requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

This study investigates how parents view play and how it affects the socio-emotional development of children aged between 3-5 years. Eight parents participated in in-depth interviews for the study, which focused on their engagement in play, how they comprehend socio-emotional development, and the challenges encountered by them. The findings demonstrate that parents understand the value of play in helping their children grow in social, communication and emotional resilience. They believe that play promotes bonding, confidence, and positive behavior. However, challenges like time constraints and resource limitations affect their ability to engage fully. The study concludes that although parents are aware of the benefits of play, more awareness and support are needed to foster a conducive environment for optimal child development. The findings of this study might be significant for policymakers, educators, and early childhood specialists aiming to enhance parental involvement in play-based learning to foster socio-emotional development.

Keywords: Perception; Play; Socio-Emotional Development

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Chapter I

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Every child's physical, emotional, and social development depends on play. Youngsters consider play as unrestricted and perceive to play with everyone and practically anywhere (Glenn, Knight, Holt & Spence, 2013). According to Garvey (1990, p. 5), play is typically defined in psychology and child development literature as a variety of voluntary, intrinsically driven behaviors that are typically connected to recreational pleasure and satisfaction. It is generally acknowledged that play benefits children's development, especially in the early years, and that play is most frequently connected to children (Howard, Bellin & Reese, 2002, p. 3). Preschoolers benefit much from play because it allows them to explore and comprehend their surroundings, express a range of emotions, develop problem-solving skills, and learn how to work and cooperate with others (Babuc, 2015). Children's emotional development is greatly influenced by their play. Through play, children can express their feelings and learn coping skills for emotions like grief, anger, and fear. Through play, children can adopt social skills including speaking, sharing, and cooperating. For later life stages to be emotionally and socially competent, early childhood social and emotional development is more important (Denham & Burton, 2003).

Child development begins from home, when parents engage with their children on a daily basis. By talking, playing, making eye contact, touching- parents create a friendly bond with the children (Schafer, S. K. et al., 2020). Parents have a significant influence on how children develop both physically and psychologically. Hence, it is critical to look at how parents perceive and comprehend play in socioemotional development of children.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Engaging in play and recreational activities for the optional development of a child has been emphasized in the article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (United Nations, 1989). The Comprehensive Early Childhood care and Development (ECCD) Policy 2013 that was approved by The Bangladesh Government in 2013 give higher priority to the significance of play and early learning activities that contribute to children's development, irrespective of their socioeconomic status.

Play helps children develop strong executive functioning skills, empathy, emotional resilience, and self-control. For children to be able to regulate their emotions and behavior, they must have reached a particular stage of socioemotional development (Aquino et. al, 2019). According to earlier research, one of the key components of a preschooler's social and emotional development is play-based learning (San, N. et. al, 2021; Aquino et. al, 2019). Vygotsky (1966) who is one of dominant developmental psychologists in the field of education stated that play is not only a specific type of activity but rather, in a way, the primary phase of development during the early childhood years (p. 6). Play-based learning allows the child to actively engage with objects, people, and representations that are beneficial for understanding social contexts. White & Walker (2018) claimed that preschool programs that incorporate play-based learning are beneficial to the emotional and social development of a child.

By providing love, guidance, and support, parents play a critical role in establishing the groundwork for their children's physical, emotional and cognitive development from birth through adolescence (Cobham, V.E., et al., 2016; Bolghan-Abadi, M. et.al. 2011). One of the strategic principles of the Comprehensive ECCD Policy 2013 of Bangladesh includes parenting to ensure child development by keeping the family at the center of all initiatives and increasing

the appropriate knowledge and skills of all parents and caregivers. However, most of the parents do not consider the significance of play in their children's language, social, emotional, and physical development. They are not much aware about the idea of learning through play (San, N. et. al, 2021) though one study showed that some parents might have a positive view towards play-based engagement with children (Sultana, A., 2023). However, there is not much information on how parents perceive play in socioemotional development for the children aged 3-5 years. Therefore, this study will aim to comprehend parents' perception of play and what is their belief on play that influences socioemotional development of children aged 3-5 years.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The introduction part focuses on the importance of play or play-based engagement in the holistic development of children, particularly pointing out the socioemotional development and significance of parents' engagement with children through play. The problem statement indicates that despite being recognized for the importance of play from international and national level, parents still lack some knowledge about play.

It is critical to explore how parents perceive play and its association with socioemotional development of children. Hence, the purpose of this research is to investigate parents' understanding of play and if play impacts children's socioemotional development.

1.4 Justification and significance of the study

Play is a universal language of the children and it greatly influences the optimal development of the children (San, N. et. al, 2021; White & Walker 2018). The importance of play and its impact on the child's holistic development is recognized by the United Nations High Commission for

Human Rights (United Nations, 1989). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017 also emphasized to assist the children for the preparation of primary school, every child, regardless of gender, will have equitable access to high-quality pre-primary education, development, and care by 2030. Parents are the first and primary caregiver to their children and studies have examined that there is a strong relationship between parents and child development (Cobham, V. E., et al., 2016; Bolghan-Abadi, M., 2011). When parents actively engage with their children, it increases their cognitive abilities and improve emotional management (Lin and Yawkey, 2013; O'Brien and Md-Yunus, 2007, cited in Sultana, A., 2023). The research of San, N. et al. (2021) and Lungu, S. & Matafwali, B. (2020) claim that parents are unaware of the benefits of play and interaction with children, which may influence and shape those relationships. There are some studies in Bangladesh that focus on parents' perception on play (Sultana, A., 2023; Ali, M. H., et al. 2019). However, there is not much studies on what parents think about play and its influence on socioemotional development of children. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate to understand parental perception on these issues.

The comprehensive ECCD Policy 2013 emphasizes on the importance of parenting which includes how parents and caregivers can ensure a child's holistic development through necessary knowledge and skill. Hence, it is imperative to look for the parents' belief on play and its association with child development. Thus, this study's result might be helpful to the policy maker, researchers, early childhood education specialists in developing parenting programs or any other successful initiatives.

1.5 Research questions

1. How do parents engage themselves with children aged 3-5 years through play activities at home?
2. How do the parents' belief that engagement with children through play promotes socio-emotional development of children of 3-5 years old?
3. What are the challenges parents face in engaging children with play and whether it has any impact on socioemotional development?

1.6 Operational Definition

Perception: Perception, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is a belief or opinion that is frequently held by a large number of individuals based on how things appear.

Socioemotional Development: In accordance with, socioemotional development is a significant, wide-ranging, and integrative area of developmental research that focuses on the intersection of social and emotional development.

Chapter II

Literature Review

2.1 What is play

Children are most frequently linked with play. Specially in the early years, play is generally acknowledged to positively impact in the children's development, (Howard, Bellin & Reese, 2002, p. 3). Every child's physical, emotional, and social growth depends on play. Youngsters perceive play as unrestricted and seek opportunities to play literally with any person and any place. Play is typically defined in psychology and child development literature as a variety of voluntarily undertaken, naturally motivated activities that are typically connected to leisure enjoyment and pleasure (Garvey, 1990, p.5; cited in Babuc, Z., 2015). Sluss, D. R. (2005) mentioned in his book named "Supporting Play: Birth through Age eight" that children play with pleasure and fun. They explore their environment through play. Play is a fundamental right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child mentioned in Article 31, and a key component of the 2030 development agenda. (United Nation, n.d.) According to Milteer, R. M. et al. (2012), play is crucial for a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. It is essential as it helps the children to cultivate resilience as they learn to collaborate, deal with other children, and overcome obstacles. Children express their creativity through play. Parents can spend quality time, create healthy relationships and get a chance to learn about their world.

2.2 Socioemotional development of children

According to Malik, F. & Marwaha, R. (2022), two fundamental concepts are included under the umbrella of social-emotional development- attachment and temperament. Attachment that refers to the relationship between parents and child. The parental relationship with a child enables the

mother to comfort their newborn and quickly attend to any need of the child. Throughout the first years of a child, the caregiver builds "basic trust" and confidence in the child by being present frequently. This phase of an infant's life is determined by Erickson as essential trust (1950). The baby looks for its caregivers or parents in any distress or uncomfortable situation or thing which builds trust upon being called as attachment. Another attribute of social-emotional development is temperament which can be characterized as a child's inherent "personality or style". Three main temperamental categories can be used to categorize young children's temperament: Easy, Active, and Cautious. The character called "Easy" comprises youngsters who are sociable and easygoing, follow routines, accommodate to new situations, and maintain a calm demeanor. "Active" describes restless children who do not want stick to routines, have unpredictable eating and sleeping patterns, are terrified to new situations and strangers, react strongly, and become upset rapidly. "Cautious" children are those who are less involved or energetic, are shy around new environments and people, and may retreat or act harshly. They get more at ease and warm up after being exposed to a new area or person on multiple occasions. Specialists in developmental psychology from a range of fields, including medicine, health, education, and child welfare, agree that a child's welfare greatly depends on his ability to grow socially and emotionally (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Preschoolers' ability to conform to societal standards of behavior is influenced by both emotional knowledge and self-regulation. A child gets introduced to the connection system from an early age, that helps him/her acquire emotional intelligence and form unique behavioral patterns (Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). Some investigations demonstrate that executive functions develop in interactions with others, specifically in the child-mother bond (Moriguchi, 2014). According to Carlson (2005), a collection of higher-level cognitive abilities that control awareness and conduct is mentioned as the "Executive Function".

2.3 Socioemotional development through play

Play or playful interaction is the medium from which children can build relationships with other individuals. Children engage in interpersonal relationships while playing. Play provides an opportunity for positive social behavior since it fosters empathy and a sense of compassion for others (Denham, S. A., & Burton, R., 2003). It has been demonstrated that children's subsequent executive processing depends critically on their parents' oral input, which acts as a consistent and meaningful stimulus (Landry et al., 2002). Vygotsky's theoretical works (1978) widely shaped play research in developmental psychology. He explained that children take control of play when it is child-led and automated, selecting suitable tasks and establishing an own "zone of proximal development"—the region where learning is most actively improved. In accordance with, Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development and National Research Council (US), children play to express their imaginative abilities while also enhancing their emotional, physical, and creative resilience (Shonkoff, J.P. & Phillips, D. A., 2000). Children use play to engage and interact with the world from an early age. Youngsters can create and explore their own environment, conquering their fears and practicing adult roles- sometimes in collaboration with other children or caretakers. As children become experts in their world via play, they acquire new abilities that increase their confidence and develop the resilience they will need to face challenges in the future. Since play encourages children to regulate their own behavior, it appears to be a critical stage in the development of self-regulation (Whitebread et al., 2017).

2.4 Parental perception of play

Parents' views on play range from considering it to be a primary function of development to regarding it as simply a means of entertainment (Farver and Howes, 1993). Parents think that by

providing the children with a lot of play support, they could be teaching a variety of abilities, for instance social skills and behavior control. In contrast, some parents feel that play is less vital for child development (Metaferia et al., 2020). Research has also indicated that parents' perspectives on play vary depending on their culture (Babuc, 2015). Anglo-American parents generally think play as critical to their children's early learning and development, Asian parents generally believe that play has limited value (Parmar et al., 2004). They think that play has less value may stem mostly from the tension that exists between learning and play (Howard, 2010). Research by Azlin, Kama, lAzwanie, Normala, and Lukman (2018) found that parents in Malaysia valued unstructured games since it helped their children to grow up. According to Woolnough's (2017) study on parents' perception on play-based early education, most of the Nigerian parents agreed with the concept of play-based learning, but they had questions about how it was carried out in practice. Ali, Chowdhury, and Obaydullah (2019) and Sultana, A. (2023) discovered in their study that although the majority of parents had positive opinions about play, they were not clear about the benefits of playing for children's development.

2.5 Parental relationship to foster socioemotional development

Long-lasting, beneficial relationships with trustworthy and loving adults shapes the healthy growth of children's socioemotional development. The preschooler or the toddlers are very responsive to any social and emotional cues given by the caregiver or other persons. Even very young children may have keen interest and curiosity to learn face-like stimuli (Johnson et al., 1991, cited in San, N. M. H., 2021). In order to help children's early experiences with emotion control, adults look after them (Bronson 2000; Thompson & Goodvin 2005, cited in Ginsburg, 2007). When children are receiving responsive care, it assists them to manage their feelings/emotions and gain a sense of comfort, security, and adaptability in their social

environments. In the developmental phase of a child, early interactions are so fundamental that most academics believe that "constant, fostering, and lasting connections are the key to positive development, growth, and learning" throughout the initial years of life. In a nutshell, early childhood outcomes are more likely to be successful when there are positive connections (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

2.6 Challenges faced by parents to promote socio-emotional development

Research has shown that through the support, participation, and modeling, parents have both direct and indirect impact on their children (Maatta, S., Ray, C., & Roos, E., 2014). The study of Li, D., & Guo, X. (2023) showed that when parents spend less time with their children, their well-being becomes lower. This happens when either only one parent (father or mother) spends less time or both the parents are unable to provide quality time. Their study also revealed that having insufficient time with parents affect academic performance of the children. Qu, X. et al. (2020) noted in their study on the migrant mothers of China that when mothers are leaving their children for employment, children are facing developmental delay which affect their socio-emotional development.

2.7 The context of Bangladesh

Bangladesh government has approved Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development policy in 2013. This approval accelerated different initiative in the field of early childhood development. However, Bangladesh is trying to improve its circumstances of early childhood development. In the evaluation of WHO, Bangladesh is included as one of the ten countries where the poorest children live and they are most likely to have delays in their social-emotional and cognitive development (Irwin, Hertzman, & Siddiqi, 2007). The study of Alam, M. I. et al.

(2021) indicated that when mothers were having medical and/or any mental health problems, it might not impact on their children's physical, literacy and academic, yet, it plays an essential role in the emotional and cognitive abilities. It is critical to look for the risk factors for the socio-emotional issues of the youngsters. This will increase the likelihood that children will follow a healthy development.

Chapter III

Methodology

3.1 Research design

In order to investigate various parental viewpoints, beliefs, understandings, and ideologies regarding play as a means of fostering the socioemotional development of children aged three to five, this study required qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is the most effective method for examining a problem in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a key phenomenon, hence using it to investigate the fundamental phenomena becomes crucial.

3.2 Research site

The study was conducted in different areas of Dhaka city, naming Uttara, Mirpur, Basabo, Badda and Gulshan for the convenience of collecting data for the study.

3.3 Research participants

Eight parents were selected from different areas in Dhaka city who have children aged 3-5 years old for this study. Eight IDI conducted individually with each of the participants.

3.4 Sampling/participant selection procedure

For this study, parents were selected purposefully from different areas of Dhaka city. Eight parents from both genders who have child/children aged 3-5 years old were selected through researcher's convenience.

3.5 Data collection Tools

Three distinct phenomena or research questions on how the parents engage themselves with their children aged 3-5 years through play, what they think about playing with children promotes socio-emotional development and what are the challenges they face while playing with their children - are the main emphasis of this investigation. Semi-structured in-depth interview guidelines were the core sources of data. After preparing, it was reviewed by the academic expert. To strengthen the reliability and validity of the instrument, a pilot interview guideline was employed and then reviewed and revised.

3.6 Data collection methods

Parents took part in semi-structured in-depth interviews through which information on their attitudes, beliefs, and opinions regarding play that support young children's social and emotional development were collected. In order to uphold ethical standards, informed consent papers were sought prior to performing the interview. The purpose of the research and the interview process were shared with each participant. Extensive notes were taken during in-depth interviews. Using a mobile recorder, every participant's response were audio captured.

3.7 Data management and analysis

The content analysis approach was applied in this investigation. Some steps were followed for data management and analysis- i) Data transcription and organization: Data were organized and transcribed using recordings and field notes. Bengali language used to conduct the IDIs with the participants. All of the spoken words turned into written text in order to provide an understandable written transcript. As the in-depth interviews were conducted in Bengali, all the interviews were translated into English in order to analyze data and which helped in writing the

thesis as the language requirement of the thesis is English. Following a comprehensive screening process, the transcriptions were annotated, consolidated into a single file, and electronically preserved. ii) Data familiarization: Reading and re-reading the transcripts were followed in order to completely understand the concepts included in the responses. iii) Coding: After familiarization of data, coding started. This stage involved assigning labels or codes to the text's various sections in a way that systematically captures relevant themes. iv) Findings and developing themes: After the raw data was coded and examined, themes were discovered. Themes offered an examination of the overarching concepts and deductions made from the experiences of the participants.

3.8 Ethical Issues

The whole study, which uses human volunteers, was evaluated and approved by BRAC University. All study participants voluntarily participated in this study, free from undue influence or authority, and their autonomy, rights, and dignity were appropriately protected. During the research, volunteers did not experience any bodily, psychological, legal, or social damage. Clear and intelligible information about the study's objectives, anonymization, methods, and data storage were provided to the Participants beforehand. The study's participants were able to retract their responses at any time. Participants were assured that no information was revealed, and their personal information was handled with absolute confidentiality.

3.9 Limitation of study

Considering availability of the participants, the in-depth interviews were conducted through online, offline and telephone conversation. Among eight IDIs, only three IDIs held face-to-face. Rest of the IDIs followed either online through google meet or telephone. As some IDIs were

held online, it was hard to examine participants' facial expressions and responses while conducting IDI. Managing the time of participants was also challenging over their busy schedule. Some information might be possible to lose as network issues were faced. Other areas of the country were not chosen for this study site which might be another limitation of this study.

Chapter IV

Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study is to investigate how parents view play and how it contributes to children's socioemotional development. The information for this study gathered from eight in-depth interviews conducted with eight participants. Five major themes had been drawn out from the data following the main study questions. The demographic information of the participants displayed below:

Demographic information:

Information	Details
Number of participants	8 (6 mothers and 2 fathers)
Range of age	30-40 years
Residing area	Badda, Basabo, Uttara, Mirpur, Gulshan
Educational qualification	6 are post graduates, 2 are graduates
Occupation	Housewife, Engineer, Psychologist, Architect, worked in developmental sector
Gender of children	5 boys, 3 girls
Total children	8 (all the children were between 3-5 years old)

In this table, it is shown that there were 6 mothers and 2 fathers, altogether 8 parents or participants in this study. The participants were from various zones of Dhaka city, such as Badda,

Basabo, Uttara, Mirpur and Gulshan. Among the participants, two were graduates and six were post graduates. They were from different professional backgrounds like, engineer, psychologist, architect, worker of development sector and housewife. All of them had at least one child whose age is between 3-5 years old.

4.1 Findings

Theme 1: Parental Understanding and Engagement in Play

The data showed that all the parents had some knowledge about play. They shared that they tried to engage with different kinds of play with their children with different frequency and duration. They also shared how they engage with their children. This theme might be divided into three sub-themes as presented below:

Sub-theme 1: Parents' Understanding of Play

The in-depth interviews with parents showed that almost all the parents had some kind of knowledge about playing. One participant shared that *“I think play is a very important exposure to psychological development. They can easily understand a lot of things through play, and develop their gross motor skill a lot. The small things they pick, like small puzzles, cards, develop their gross motor skills. This actually happens through play. Young children can't understand much. While jumping, or playing in the park, their physical and mental development takes place much.”* (IDI#7, 01.09.24).

Most of the participants also viewed play as a learning tool. As one of them shared that- *“Learning takes place greatly through play. Mostly unconscious learning takes place. Until now, all learning of my child takes place through any kind of interaction. Like, alphabet, pictures,*

name of animal, everything is through playing or solving puzzles or assembling lego. Other information like, while telling a story, he can imagine how things are going.” (IDI#3, 29.08.24).

Another parent stressed on playing outside is important- *“Play is very important. I played a lot when I was a kid. Till now, I play a lot. I play with my friend circle at least once a week. I want my boy to grow up like this. As I said before, my child’s outdoor activity is very less. He plays only at home with toys. Actually, that scope has not been created. I want my boy to be taken in an open space or field for playing in my free time, maybe in the afternoon. But this is very rare and sometimes becomes very tough. Also, my child does not have the habit of playing outside. If he plays outside, after a while he wants to go home. I want to overcome it and want my boy to play outside.” (IDI#4, 01.09.24).*

Sub-theme 2: Types of play and Its Frequency and Duration

Almost all the participants shared that they play different sorts of games with their children. For example, playing with small toys, drawing, coloring, hide and seek etc. One of the participants shared that *“We play mostly hide and seek, bat-ball, solving puzzles, playing with blocks, making roads etc. Most of the time puzzles, blocks, hide and seek and bat-ball are played nowadays.” (IDI#8, 02.09.24)*

One participant shared that she played role playing activity mostly with her daughter- *“Yes, I play with my daughter. Interactive play, like any role play activity. We play as I cook in the kitchen, or play different board games. There are some age-related games like fishing games or flash cards. Previously we played flash cards a lot. Nowadays, we play role play. She has a kitchen set. Using this set we play. Like, she is cooking and I am giving more salt here, like this we play.” (IDI #7, 01.09.24).*

Only one participant shared that she mostly interacts with her child- *“As I spend at least 8/9 hours in the office, not particularly playing but I interact with my kid in other ways. Like, what did you do all day? Which game did you play? So, there is a fruitful interaction with my child rather than playing. Then, gradually small play might start.”* (IDI#2, 29.08.24).

All the participants said that they could not spend much time playing with their children because of their business in work space, at home or for any other commitment. Although all of them shared that they tried to spend some amount of time with their children. On the weekend, they spent a lot of time with their children. One participant opined that *“I play every day with him. On the working day, I play at night. Before sleep we play, in the brushing time we play. In the bowl, full of water, he put his brush there and played. He loves to play with water which generally I do not let him to play with.”* (IDI#1, 28.08.24).

Another participant shared that *“During the holidays, like one or two days in a week, we dedicatedly play.”* (IDI#7, 01.09.24).

Sub-theme 3: Parental Influence on Child Development through Play

All the parents agreed that when parents engaged with the children, they became very happy and excited. One of the participants mentioned that *“When the parents are engaged the children are very happy that they are spending time with them. Through play, whether it takes place at home or outside, the child is developing socially, emotionally, and also physically. Language is also developed as the parents are having conversation with the child. As the parents are adults, they share a lot of things that develop a child’s skill. Parents and children- their skill level is different. So, when the parent is playing, the child can grab how they are playing, what they are using. So, their skill level becomes advanced while playing with their parents.”* (IDI#5, 28.08.24).

Theme 2: Parents' Understanding of Socio-Emotional Development

Sub-theme 1: Parents' Understanding of Social Development

In the in-depth interviews with different parents, it found that almost all of them were quite aware about the social development of children. They asserted that learning how to interact with others, behave with others, share and form friendships were the main features of social development. One participant shared that *“To me, social development is, at this age, 3-5 years, if a child can interact with other kids, that is enough, or good enough. If any child can interact with others properly, can share anything with others, can learn to be social rather than being aggressive. I try to guide my son to develop these, to interact with other kids.”* (IDI#4, 01.09.24).

Another participant shared that *“What I understand for a child, social development is how to be social. I mean my boy is little now, how he will behave with the grownups and children of the same age. These things need to be learned. My child needs to be taught that share your toys, play with others.”* (IDI#1, 28.08.24).

Only one participant shared that how a child will develop socially mainly depend on genetics. In her words- *“I think it is genetic. I mean how a child will socially develop depends 60%-70% on genetics. The remaining 30% need to be taught. Some are introverts, some are extroverts, it actually depends on genetics. You will see, in some children, if you say only once to give salam, they will give. While in some children, if you say the same thing ten times, they will not listen. Like some are slow learners, some are quick learners. We can't say why that child is like that or why he does that. All these come from heredity.”* (IDI#6, 01.09.24).

Two of them described that playing with other, or being social had some negative side too. In their words- *“There are some bad effects and good effects. Such as, I heard that one child bit*

another on the hand, from this incident my son learned a bad thing. Another day, I heard that one of the students in his class is telling her address very neatly. I thought this little girl could tell the address very nicely! And my son tells me this exactly the way that she told him. So, this is a good thing that she can tell the address properly. So, this is a good thing to learn. After this, I ask my son if he can tell the address. He also shares a lot of things about his school and others. So, these good and bad effects both are helpful for development.” (IDI#6, 01.09.24).

“I think it affects in two ways, both positive and negative. If I talk about social development first, I will talk about the positive side first. They are learning socialization, building relationships and continuing it, learning from others, managing his emotions while facing any problem with others, problem solving etc. There are some negative impacts of socialization like he can receive some negative messages from others. For example, that person beats or shows a stick for beating etc. but there are mostly positive sides of it.” (IDI#8, 02.09.24).

Sub-theme 2: Parents’ Understanding of Emotional Development

Participants showed different concepts about emotional development of children. Some participants said emotional development is how to express emotion- *“I think emotional development is according to the age of the child, to understand the emotion and express it. Any type of emotion, how he is expressing it. Also, controlling it and how he is managing by himself, how his feelings are developing at the right time. So, I think emotional development is according to age, understanding the emotion, expressing it, even how someone is managing it, responding to it in the proper way.” (IDI#8, 02.09.24).*

Another participant had the same view but she stressed on the family environment-*“Family environment is very important. Where the child grows, that is his environment. I think emotional*

development is how freely the child can express his emotions- in the family or outside the family. Also, the family needs to create space for expressing child' emotion. Like, if a child cries suddenly, the family needs to accept his crying and not scold him at this moment. Otherwise, it may happen that the child will not cry for fearing the family member. Emotional development is a space for expressing emotion.” (IDI#2, 29.08.24).

Another participant noted that controlling anger is emotional development- *“Emotional development is controlling anger. If he can hold his emotion. Like, he asks for something, and crying for it, can he control his emotion for this or not. If he screams a lot or not. If he can't get anything, can he hold his emotion for this or not. My son is very emotional, he will be very mischievous at times but you can never scold him. It will take half an hour to make him stop. He cries as if he has been beaten a lot. He can't take it if I tell him to stop or rebuke him.” (IDI#1, 28.08.24)*

Another participant mentioned that being empathetic, showing respect and love are emotional development of children. She also stressed on creating patience. In her words- *“Emotional development is when my daughter is playing with others but her friend doesn't feel good, then if I say you need to play then she is learning to be empathetic, love and show respect. Or maybe in any play, she doesn't win, then take the chance again, it actually boosts them a lot that your friends can do so you also can do. Win can take place with all of us. You can't win today, tomorrow you will win. This is part of mental growth, that we can tell them prior and make them understand to win or we will play later on, so you need to wait. These create a level of patience which is very important nowadays.” (IDI#7, 01.09.24)*

Another participant, as described in sub-theme 1, she mentioned emotional development is also genetic although she also believed that family teaching is important developing emotionally-

“As I said before, I think all are genetics. I have two kids, both of them are sons. They are not the same. Both of them are reared up by me, in a joint family. Nowadays, you will hear that if the child rears up within many people, he can start talking quickly and if he rears up in a few people, he starts talking after a while- I think all are false. Because I nurtured my child among many people, I do not see any difference. Some things are logical like, if a child watches Youtube, he learns to talk later. There are some genetic things that children inherit from parents. Whether the child will be stubborn or fickle, mostly comes from genetics. The rest is from family education or how the family teaches the child. In later life, teaching of family changes the child.” (IDI#6, 01.09.24)

Theme 3: Parents’ Understanding of Importance of Play for Socio-Emotional Development

Sub-theme 1: Perceived Importance of Play

All the parents agreed on the point that play helps to develop socio-emotional development. How to socialize and interact with others, communicate with others, how to express their feelings, etc.

As one participant shared- *“Of course. There are benefits of playing with others. He learns how to communicate, how he is expressing his feelings- these things developed while playing with others. This is not like teaching him that particular moment that if you speak like this your friend will understand. He is finding ways to make his words understandable all by himself.” (IDI#3, 29.08.24).*

Another participant stressed as - *“Playing with other children is a must. My son becomes a bit like himself as he doesn't interact with others. It is something that we parents cannot teach without interacting with others. It cannot simply be taught by discipline or sitting at home. More*

my child mixes with others, the more he will learn which behavior he needs to show.” (IDI#4, 01.09.24).

Participants also shared that playing with other children is beneficial for expressing their needs and language development- *“The main base of socialization is created when they play with other kids. While they are playing with other kids, the children come from different family backgrounds and experiences. They share their different experiences. Maybe the child doesn’t know that this need he can express/say in the family, when he is playing with another child, he sees that other children are saying this need at home. Then he understands that he can also share at home. There are a lot of games that a child alone can’t play or discover. And playing in a group is enjoyable, they understand it when they play together at school, or any other place. Playing with other kids also benefits language development.” (IDI#5, 28.08.24).*

Sub-theme 2: Emotional Expression While Children Playing with Parents

All the parents stated that their children became very happy when they played with or spent time with them. One participant mentioned her child’s expression as below-

“She becomes very excited. When I am at home, new games are being played. Like, while playing ludu, ludu is not very common to play with young children as it may be a bit boring for them. But the picture on the ludu board, showing a snake’s picture, sometimes turns into talking about animals. And yes, she is very excited when I agree to play and she wants to continue to play, one play by another one. She enjoys it most.” (IDI#2, 29.08.24).

Parents also shared when they could not give time as their children wanted what they did-

“There is a lot of change in his behavior when I can’t give time. He is a bit hyper. For example, he wants my time and I am busy like I am cooking or in a meeting. If I say, I am cooking, can’t

come this time. He will turn off the gas or increase the flame or he will take something in his hand and say, "I am pouring water on the floor." That's how he reacts. If I am in a meeting or working for a long time on my laptop and he is trying to get my attention, suddenly he will shut down my laptop. That's how he reacts and wants my attention. Or, he wants something and I am taking time, telling him to wait a bit, he will wait for a while, then he will grab some and say I will throw it. His behavior changes like this, reacts very much." (IDI#1, 28.08.24).

Theme 4: Developing Different Attributes of Socio-Emotional Development Through Play

Sub-theme 1: Play with peers

The participants shared many features of playing with peers or other children. For example, one of the parents stated that *"The benefits of play I already shared earlier. Like, when he is playing with another child, he is getting new ideas from him. Creativity, getting to know each other, when any problem arises, he becomes upset, and he is trying to manage it. Hence, his tolerance power is increasing- these are all benefits of playing with others."* (IDI#8, 02.09.24).

Parents also asserted that playing with peers helps them to create bonds with others- *"When she plays with others or plays in the playground with others, she makes a bond with others. Sometimes her friend wants to play another game and my child wants to play another, then they play turn by turn. They also play racing. If anyone wants to do cycling then they do it. Benefits are creating mutual bonding, emotional growth takes place, like, now she talks a lot, shares a lot."* (IDI#7, 01.09.24).

Sub-theme 2: Making friendship

The parents shared about how their children learn many things through making friendship with others- *"My son goes for prayer to the mosque with his father. There he got another boy in his*

same age. At first, they mischief a lot. When I asked my husband, how was he in the mosque? He said he was quite a good boy. My mother asked my child if he did any mischief. He said, no, I prayed nicely. Only did a few naughty things with my friend when the Imam was talking. His friend gives him chocolate. So, he also takes some from his father and keeps them in his pocket long before going to the mosque to give them to his friend. He follows his friend and try to imitate him. As his friend is not doing any mischief and presents him chocolate, my son does the same thing for his friend.” (IDI#1, 28.08.24).

Sub-theme 3: Decision making

One participant stated that she observed that her child could make decisions through play- *“I think accepting the decisions of others and listening to others are great things to learn. At the same time, she can adapt with the environment. Like, she understands that as I listen to her and she needs to listen to me too. She also gives some decisions like; this one will be good not that one.” (IDI#2, 29.08.24)*

Sub-theme 4: Self-awareness

One of the participants opined that play helped to develop self-awareness. She explained in her words as - *“I think socio-emotional development also refers to the fact that I can express my emotion properly, I am self-aware. Maybe my child does not understand this heavy term but as a psychologist I understand this when I see her playing. She is expressing her emotion through play, like, if she does not like any toy, she expresses it nicely. So, playing is a place for expressing emotion. In socio-emotional development, it is a very big thing that she likes or what things she likes is keeping and whichever she doesn't like keeping away. The things she doesn't like, she expresses through play.” (IDI#2, 29.08.24)*

Sub-theme 5: Social Interaction

All the parents agreed that their children learn social interaction through play. Such as, one of the participants shared that *“While playing with others, he learns interaction. While playing, I saw that they created a team of two or three children and played with the team. In this way, he also learns teamwork. That’s how development starts.”* (IDI#4, 01.09.24).

Another parent shared about how her elder son struggled to be social in the school while talking about social interaction- *“I think play affects social and emotional development. I saw that my elder son didn’t have a chance to play. He spent two years in the school crying, he couldn’t get accustomed to it. Then covid started. So, he couldn’t go to school for 2/3 years, completely trapped at home. So, he didn’t get a chance to play with other kids which my younger child gets. I think as my elder one didn’t get a chance to play with others, he could not easily get mixed up with others. He also could not talk properly. He was not born with a stutter but he used to stutter a bit while speaking. Then I visited a doctor for this. Doctor said that as he could not talk for a long time for covid, that’s why this problem took place. After Covid, when he started school again, it all started from the very beginning. He did go to school for two years, then did online class in covid time, still, after covid starting school felt very new to him. He started crying in school, whereas he had already finished five years of his schooling. After covid, he was in class 1. If I was just five minutes late to get from the school, he started crying. Some other social problem I faced with my elder one, like he could not mix with others, talk to others.”* (IDI#6, 01.09.24).

Theme 5: Challenges in Parental Engagement

Sub-theme 1: Time Constraint

From the in-depth interview with the parents, I found that as they committed to work, it might be office work or household chores, sometimes it became hard for them to give time to their children. One of the participants shared that *“My son has a set of hot wheels. It is a car game. It has a catalog and using this catalog, roads need to be created and then cars will be played. It requires a long time, like two or one hour. and I can’t give much concentration on that as I need to take rest. But my child wants to play with me. I feel like this is kind of a challenge to me.”* (IDI#6, 01.09.24).

Sub-theme 2: Resource Challenges

Almost all the parents said that they did not find any challenge while playing with play materials or resources. Only one participant stated that she faced challenges while using any resources. She shared that *“Whenever I give any toy or any other thing to my son, he breaks it. Sometimes, I can’t even check which one is broken. Broken toys may become dangerous for him. Sometimes, I repair it. But I can’t throw away without telling him because he will look for it. It also happens that he plays with the broken toys for a long time but break any new toy at once. Another challenge is playing with water. He usually fills the basin with water and then play there. He may slip there. Now he can control himself but my little one can’t. As he plays with water, the younger follows him. The younger one doesn't know that there is water there, so it becomes risky for him.”* (IDI#1, 28.08.24).

4.2 Discussion

This study investigated how parents perceived play in their children's socioemotional development between the ages of three to five. In-depth interviews were conducted with both mothers and fathers to gather necessary data.

Parental understanding in play

The findings showed that most of the parents had some knowledge about play and the importance of play. Some parents mentioned specifically what play is and its importance. They have also shared different benefits of play. All the participants agreed that play is great for learning alphabets, numbers, names of animals etc. and also, telling stories or reading books are helpful for the children to imagine. They also develop their language. According to the phenomenological research of Abdolmaleki et al. (2023), the majority of parents considered play as something to be achieved. First and foremost, they recognized play for its ability to foster development and attain academic learning.

All parents recognized the significance of engaging in play with their children. They noted that when they participate in play, it helps foster various skills in their children, such as communication and more. Additionally, parents observed that without their involvement, a child's development may not progress properly. Some parents highlighted that through engagement, children form strong bonds with their parents and gain confidence, good behavior, manners, and values. Moreover, a study by Rahman et al. (2019) found that playing with parents supports both learning and growth in children while allowing them to have fun. In their early years, children learn more from their parents than from anyone else in society. For understanding parental engagement with children through play, all the parents tried their best to accompany

their children almost every day. They played different games like hide and seek, playing with ball, ludu, uno, football, etc. Some read story books, did drawing and coloring.

Parents Perception on Socio-Emotional Development

All the parents admitted that when children are playing with other children, it has a lot of benefits. They learn socialization and communication. They also learn how to behave with others, what to say and what not to. Some parents stressed that playing with other children is so essential that it is something that cannot be taught alone or by sitting at home. Children need to mix with others, have conversations and play with them. Some parents also emphasized on sharing. Children learn to share in a social environment, while playing with other children. It helps the children to adopt this behavior in future. Anderson, B. (2017) asserted in his empirical research on different forms of engagement of young children that they learn collaboration and share various play materials as well as ideas with others. His research also indicated that young children are able to develop and sustain their different forms of play with their peers. Following different advantages of playing with other children, a few parents also noted some negative sides of socialization. This included receiving negative messages, bad behavior such as biting other children. However, despite these all the parents agreed on being social by playing with other children.

The findings of in-depth interviews showed that parents had some basic knowledge about emotional development. Some stated it as an expression of emotion, some said controlling anger, some participants emphasized on the family environment, such as, how the family is accepting the child is very important. Another one stressed on learning empathy, being respectful and showing love to others are considered as emotional development. The findings of Brophy-Herb, H. E. et al. (2009) suggested that parents are somewhat aware of basic emotions of young

children yet they are prone to misunderstanding children's display of emotions. The article of Von Salisch, M. (2010) mentioned that parents are crucial for the emotional development of their children as they are skilled in cognition and emotion both. They can also teach their children how to use emotion regulating techniques. One participant mentioned that how a child will develop emotionally depends on genetics. Research also found the same notion about it. The study of Wang, M., & Saudino, K. J. (2013) revealed that model-fitting analyses demonstrated heredity and nonshared environment factors had a significant impact on working memory and emotion regulation.

Parents' Perception about the Influence of Play for Socio-Emotional Development

All the parents agreed that play is very important for the socio-emotional development of their children. They can express their emotions properly, interact, learn how to talk, how to behave, develop language etc. Parents also shared that children become antisocial or puzzled about what to do if they do not develop socially and emotionally. Research has also found out similar findings on the impact of play for socio-emotional development. Study of San, N. M. H., Myint, A. A., & Oo, C. Z. (2021) stressed that all children must play to achieve their optimal development. They have also stated that play creates an environment where children learn their social and emotional skills independently which ultimately delve into their development. The investigation of Martinez, C. (2019) stated that children achieve emotional regulation, self-control, conflict resolution and communication through play.

Different Attributes of Socio-Emotional Development Through Play

From the in-depth interviews with the parents, it has been found out that they have shared different attributes of socio-emotional development that can be achieved through play knowingly

or unknowingly. Some shared them as a benefit of playing with others. While playing with peers, the children develop sharing toys or play materials. They also create beautiful bond with their friends which leads to making friendships with others. One participant specifically mentioned that children learn making decisions and become self-aware through play. Another parent who had two children, shared that the elder son faced challenges to start preschool physically after covid though he did his online class in this period, also attended physical class before covid. Different studies indicated that Play is essential for social and emotional development of children. Vygotsky's theory suggested that children achieve emotion regulation, and learn the scaffolding from peers and adults through play by enabling children to accomplish more complex tasks (Berk, 1994; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1986) also explains why children's play habits and development are so greatly influenced by their surroundings.

Challenges in Parental Engagement

According to this study, even though parents want to spend more time with their children, they could find it difficult. It also demonstrated that parents' hectic work pressure and housekeeping schedules left them with little time for playing with their children. Despite this, every parent stressed the value of spending quality time with their young ones. Other research claimed that child development greatly depends on the time they spend with their parents. Additionally, it enhanced their well-being (Li, D., & Guo, X., 2023).

4.3 Conclusion

After the findings and discussion of this study, it might be concluded that the parents had a good understanding of play and its influence on socio-emotional development of their children. They believed that play is crucial for the development of a child as it encompassed enjoyment, amusement, fun, and joy. Children learn best when any activity becomes fun to them. Parents are the significant individuals in a child's life. Therefore, in order to equip the parents to promote and foster children's development, it is critical to gain a greater comprehension of how parents perceived play and its impact on socio-emotional development.

There might be a slight gap about the knowledge of emotional development though all the parents agreed on the importance of play about building emotional skill for the children. This is quite usual in the context as it is very uncommon that all the parents will give detailed notion about emotional development.

The findings of this study also showed that the concept of social development, what it is, how it occurs, why it is important, etc. were relatively well-known to them. All of them were able to identify and connect what was required to support socio-emotional development. It was very regrettable that even though they tried their best to give enough time to their children out of their busy schedule in both work and at home, they were unable to put their knowledge into practice in their daily lives. Most parents shared that they sent their child to school where their children get a chance to play with others. Only one parent shared that his child liked to stay alone and at home. The parents also shared the possible reason behind it that the child did not get any chance to mix with other children as he did not attend any day care or school.

The findings of this study might be used to the greater exposure of the significant aspect of different domains of child development. More comprehensive research might be conducted from different socioeconomic groups across the country including more parents at large scale.

4.4 Recommendation

The findings of this research and knowledge gained from the literature, it is essential to address socio-emotional development of children. To create a nurturing environment for the children, collaboration among different stakeholders, such as parents, Early Childhood Development (ECD) professionals, and policymakers, is crucial to make significant improvement. Every group is essential to establishing an atmosphere of care that is needed for the wellbeing of children. The following actions or recommendation are meant to doable steps that can contribute to make the atmosphere where children can explore and flourish-

For Early Childhood Development (ECD) professionals/researcher:

- It is recommended to study in the vast population in all socioeconomic backgrounds to study more about the perception of parents of play and its impact on socioemotional development. Different literature evidenced the importance of socioemotional development of children through play. This study focused on the same socioeconomic group of parents therefore, it is essential to study in a different population from all socioeconomic groups to obtain diverse data.

For Policymakers and Urban Planners:

- The findings also showed that there was dissatisfaction among the parents for their lack of providing enough time to their children. To encourage the parents, high quality day care or child care centers might be introduced in a cost effective way. Strong

administration might be developed for quality assurance. Additionally, parents might be able to avail flexible hours in both inside and outside of home with these facilities.

- Parenting sessions or awareness building programs might be launched at the community level focusing on different domains of child development, so that parents can provide quality time in their busy schedule. Additionally, this initiative might be taken in the workplace as well. This will support the implementation of current ECCD policy of Bangladesh.

For Parents:

- Parents can speak up or advocate for their involvement in playing with children for their socio-emotional development. If they have any ideas or concerns, they can interact with local officials or urban planners.

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Appendix A

In-depth interviews guideline

Research Title: Exploring Parental Perception of Play in Socio-Emotional Development of 3-5 Years Old Children

Section A: Demographic information

- a. Name of the participant
- b. Age
- c. Sex
- d. Educational Qualification
- e. Occupation
- f. Location
- g. Age of child
- h. Gender of the child

Section B: RQ 1: How do parents engage themselves with children aged 3-5 years through play activities at home?

1. Do you engage in play with your child? What sort of game do you and your child play?
2. How often do you and your child play together?
3. How many hours a day do you spend playing with your child?
4. What kind of game does your child like to play?
5. Does your child play by taking the initiative? If so, then how?
6. While playing, does your child share any toy/play material with you?
7. In your experience, how do the children behave differently when you play with them compared to when you don't?
8. What do they do when you play or interact with them?

Section C: RQ 2: How do the parents' belief that engagement with children through play promotes socio-emotional development of children of 3-5 years old?

1. What do you know about playing?
2. Do you believe that "play" is crucial for the children's early years? If yes, how?
3. What does social development mean to you?
4. What does emotional development mean to you?
5. Does your kid play with any child/children?
6. Does playing with other kids have any advantages? If so, what are those?
7. How is your child learning about friendship and sharing while playing?
8. Do you believe that your child's social and emotional development is impacted by play? If so, how?
9. Do you think if a parent is engaged with a child through playing, it helps the child's development? If so, then how?

Section D: RQ 3: What are the challenges parents face in engaging children with play and whether it has any impact on socioemotional development?

1. Do you face any challenges while playing with your child? If so, then how do you overcome it?
2. Do you find any materials or resources challenging while playing with your child? If so, then what type of challenge is that and how do you overcome it?

Appendix B

Consent Form for In-depth Interview

Participation in the study "Exploring parental perception of play in socio-emotional development of 3-5 years old children" is kindly requested. You can choose not to accept. You are humbly asked to participate in an In-Depth Interview (IDI). The IDI will take about 50 to 60 minutes to complete. The IDI will be audio recorded and will take place in a comfortable location close to your home, or if it's feasible, can take place online or by phone conversation. You will be asked a series of questions during this interview. Additionally, you will be requested to fill out a demographic sheet with inquiries and information about the participation.

Purpose of the study: The aim of this research is to investigate how parents view play and how it affects the socioemotional development of their three to five-year-old children.

Confidentiality: To safeguard your identity, you will be asked to give a codename during the interview. For the audio recording, the codename you select during the interview will be utilized.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Consent: By signing, you attest that you have read and understood the information provided before choosing to participate.

I, thus consent to participate in the IDI and provide permission for my interview to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant

Date:

Brac Institute of Educational Development

Brac University