Exploring Parental Perception towards Children’s Activities

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Abstract—This study aimed to identify parents’ perceptions towards children’s activities such as structured games (puzzles, construction toys, swim and soccer), unstructured games (outdoor play, art, craft, dress-up, pretend play and musical play) and screen time (video game, play stations, smart phone and watching movies or TV). The total number of 333 parents in Malaysia who had children aged of three years old and below had participated in this study. The questionnaire was constructed according to the game perception scales. This study adopted descriptive analysis approach and the findings were recorded using frequency and percentage. The findings revealed that the majority of children under the age of three years old spent approximately 2 hours daily in structured games which equal to 27% (n=91). Meanwhile, the time allocated by the children when playing unstructured games was 3 hours daily rank roughly up to 27% (n=90) and 2 hours 28% (n=93) was utilized daily by the children on screen time. Nevertheless, the development of children can be nurtured by playing games whether it is structured or unstructured because children can easily absorb what is happening around them and turned it into a value that they will later learn. Hence, parents play an essential role in shaping the early growth of their children.

Keywords— Children, parents, play time, Malaysia, perception

I. INTRODUCTION

It is typical for children to play as it is crucial for their growth[1]. It is also an opportunity that can be used by parents to connect with their child[2], [3]. It is believed that parents are the first teachers in their life to teach them through playing[2]. The rights of children is being centralized in the year of 1995, February 17th when the government of Malaysia started to acknowledged their rights during the convention related to this issue [4]. The Convention stated that playing and participating in activities is the fundamental rights for children that can encourage the children to be more creative and innovative, building their personality and social skills, physical and mental growth[4]. In Malaysia, pedagogy’s play has been used in the national curriculum system because it is suitable for children aged 0-4 years old[5]. Pedagogical practices are universally implemented because children; even though unconsciously, can absorb what they learned when playing, hence they are learning not only playing[6]. Therefore, this study will explore the perception of parents on how their children spend time when playing in terms of structured games, unstructured games and screen time. The data being explored here has formed the major first part of this study, where unstructured games are seen as games that support the early development of children under 3 years old. The researcher also focuses on the early stages of the study and gives an early perception to the bigger question which is how many hours a child supposed to spend when playing. The researcher also provided a brief review of literary studies on early childhood education and elucidated the methods of study and the process. Furthermore, this study also found the differences between the hours allocated by children when playing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Through playing, it unconsciously allows children to gain education[1]. Consequently, children will learn how to connect with others, to know the measurement of muscles and body and make them able to think in abstract[7]. Playing is also a pivotal role in pioneering the cognitive development of children[8]. According to Jean Piaget’s view, active children can acquire knowledge through playing or when they are exploring the environment[9]. As for Vygotsky, he mentioned that play is a major source of learning as it allows children to interact with others and hold proximal zones in development where children are learning [10].

Unstructured games has many benefits to the comprehensive development of infants and children that cover the physical, cognitive, language, emotional, social and creativity development of children [11]. There is a study that examines the influence of teacher being directed and played on the cognitive efficiency of kindergarten children. The results of the study found that the unstructured game performed by the children was more conducive to cognitive development than structured games. In the study, 51 children were observed as they were involved in two types of games and were evaluated according to the predetermined cognitive behavioral relationships[12].

In addition, structured games are increasingly popular as this game is believed to be an effective way to promote the development of skills, knowledge and ability specifically[13]. Children living in urban areas significantly spend their leisure time at special centers or play areas as a result from the composition of structured games itself and they are usually accompanied by their guardians[14]. Active involvement of adults in structured experiences should be wisely made so that they can provide a more complex game duration for children to enable them to enlarge and expand their activities and make
strategies for anticipated problems that may arise and overcome challenges[15].

Subsequently, in the 21st century, children nowadays are poor in communication with others especially at outdoors environment[16]. This is because the pattern of children’s games has changed to screen time which is via electronic devices such as video games, playstations and smartphone[17]. Therefore,[18] figured that the screen time of the baby and the children were about 40% out of the 1000 children that were monitored in addition to television viewing time increased from 1 hour or more than 1 hour a day and this amount also increased to 90% for 2-year-old children. However, screening time can have a positive impact on children if it has an educational purpose that can help teachers and children in improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning in early childhood education[19].

III. METHODOLOGY

This research study was using a quantitative approach in descriptive form to identify parents’ perception on how children spend their time to play in Malaysia. The process of the collection of data took exactly a month (30 days) which was officially started from July 07, 2018 until August 05, 2018. The respondents needed to answer the questionnaire were 333 parents who have children under 3 years old. The questionnaire only took between two to five minutes for them to complete the entire section provided in the questionnaire. In average, the number of respondents who gave daily feedback were 11 people. The researcher clarified the data and linked all the required questions. Thus, descriptive statistics has been used to illustrate the basic characteristics of the data in this study and the researcher only need to explain and show the analyzed data. This descriptive statistic is also used to obtain the frequency and percentage of respondents’ information to certain demographic categories such as age, gender, education level, ethnicity and number of children.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In total, there are 333 respondents were required in this study who have children under 3 years old. The majority of the respondents were female (mothers) 80% (n = 265) and 20% (n = 68) were male (father). In terms of age, the majority consisted of 20-29 years old 51% (n = 177) and majority of them were Malays 96% (n = 321). In terms of the respondents’ education level, the majority of them have a degree and above 50% (n = 165), and most of them have 1-2 children between 67% (n = 224). (Refer to Table 1).

### Table 1: Respondents Demographics

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Structured Games, Unstructured Games and Screen Time

The majority of children under the age of three years old allocated their time for 2 hours 27% (n = 91) daily in structured games, while for unstructured games they also spend 3 hours 27% (n = 90) daily. Figure 1 also reports that the average daily hours allocated by children in the screen are 2 hours 28% (n = 93).

Figure 1: Structured game time, unstructured game and children’s screening time on daily basis

The study found that the majority of children under the age of three years are less involved in structured games on daily basis. Most parents are emphasizing less on the importance of structured games. This is because they prefer and appreciate unstructured games in order to encourage the development of their children. Parents also acknowledge that unstructured
game will give children freedom to create a child-led experience for their interests and agendas and to cultivate their own creativity and imagination[20]. According to[21], unstructured games can also be regarded as amain part of children to grow creatively so that they can contribute to their social and academic development. [22], also noted that if children have the opportunity to engage themselves in creativity through imaginary games, they can develop basic cognitive skills that can lead to the thought of abstract messages and high order thinking for their childhood enhancement[23].

The results that was analyzed from the survey through the game perception scales found that the number of hours of children’s involvement in unstructured games were 3 hours that is equal to 27.03%, where it indicates that parents and children in Malaysia appreciated the shape of this game more than structured game which only took 2 hours as 27.33% daily. The National Association of Young Adult Education (NAEYC) also strongly agreed on children play freely or unstructured games over structured games, because they believed that this game will bring more positive results if children are actively involved with games on their own without the help of adults[24].

Screen time is the time used in the form of screens like smartphones, tablets, televisions, video games, computers and so on[25]. Thus, the results of the study found that 27.33% of children had spent 2 hours on screen time each day. According to[26], the agreeable amount of screen time that is suitable for children; in their previous research, is supposed to be less than 1 hour. This suggests that overtime of screen time for children can jeopardize the physical, cognitive and psychosocial health[27]. However, screen time also has a positive effect if the provided content has a quality that can improve the social and language skills for children aged 2 years and above[25].

V. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, playing is the best way to support the development of children under the age of three years old [13], [28]–[30]. The types of game rated in this study are structured, unstructured, and screened games. The playing perception scale has been used to identify parents’ perceptions of the importance of playing these games respectively. The findings of parents’ perceptions about how children spend their time playing in Malaysia found that parents' beliefs can influence their children. This is because parents have a vital role to their children's lives, that every belief and knowledge need to be recognized and understood so that it can provide valuable insights during their early childhood experiences and development in learning[10], [26]. Additionally, the results of the study also found the majority of parents stated that their children spend more time in unstructured games than in structured games and children also prefer spending their time in screen time. However, these three types of games have their own special features and benefits for the development of children for 3 years old and below.

REFERENCES


