

Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of Play Activities in Enhancing the Socioemotional Development of Children in Private Kindergartens in Kuala Selangor

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Abstract

This study was conducted to identify teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing the socioemotional development of children in private kindergartens around Kuala Selangor. The objectives of this study are to determine teachers' perceptions of the importance of play activities in children's socioemotional development, to analyze the types of play activities that can help improve socioemotional skills, and to assess the extent to which play activities contribute to such development. This study employed a quantitative approach using a questionnaire instrument based on the Likert Scale and involved 80 respondents. Section B (play activities) consisted of 10 items, while Section C (socioemotional development) comprised 5 social items and 5 emotional items. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between play activities and the socioemotional development of children. Play activities were found to play an important role in supporting development. This study provides significant implications for teachers, students, researchers, and the field of Early Childhood Education. It is recommended that further research be conducted to explore the role of play activities in other areas of development, such as children's physical development.

Keywords: Play Activities, Socioemotional Development, Private Kindergarten Teachers, Play, Kindergarten Children

Introduction

Early childhood development is a complex and holistic process encompassing cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. According to Xuan and Jamil (2023), socio-emotional development plays a vital role in shaping the foundation of children's future well-being. Socio-emotional competence refers to children's ability to understand and regulate their emotions, build positive relationships with others, and display appropriate social behaviours across various contexts. One of the most natural and effective pedagogical approaches to nurturing these skills is through play. Play is not merely a leisure activity but serves as a critical educational tool in early childhood pedagogy, as it reflects children's intrinsic nature and innate curiosity to explore and learn (Switch & Doe, 2022).

In the Malaysian early childhood education context, play-based learning is recognised as a core component of the national curriculum. Both the Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan (KSPK, 2017) and the Kurikulum PERMATA Negara emphasise the role of play in fostering holistic child development, particularly in shaping character, emotional stability, and social competence. Through structured, meaningful, and enjoyable play activities, children not only acquire knowledge but also develop essential life skills such as empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Hence, the integration of planned and purposeful play within preschool settings is crucial to support children's holistic growth and learning experiences.

However, the increasing academic focus in modern preschool education has resulted in a gradual decline in opportunities for play. Many private early childhood institutions face challenges such as limited space, lack of resources, and inadequate awareness among educators and parents regarding the pedagogical importance of play. These challenges raise concerns about how effectively play-based learning is implemented and understood within early childhood settings, particularly in private kindergartens where emphasis on academic readiness often takes precedence over holistic development.

Given this context, the present study aims to explore private kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the role of play in enhancing children's socio-emotional development. Specifically, it investigates teachers' understanding and appreciation of play-based learning, the types of play activities commonly practiced, and their perceived effectiveness in fostering social and emotional competencies among children. The study also examines challenges faced by teachers in sustaining consistent and quality play experiences in their classrooms. By focusing on private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor, this research seeks to contribute to the enhancement of pedagogical practices in Malaysian early childhood education and highlight the significance of play as an effective approach to socio-emotional development.

Background Study

Socio-emotional development forms the foundation of a child's overall growth, influencing their ability to understand emotions, regulate behaviour, and build healthy social relationships. According to Afizza et al. (2021), socio-emotional competence involves recognising and managing emotions, developing empathy, and interacting appropriately with others. These abilities contribute to effective communication, emotional stability, and lifelong mental well-being.

Play serves as one of the most natural and effective approaches to nurturing socio-emotional skills. Saputri (2020) describes play as an intrinsic element of childhood that allows children to express emotions, imitate real-life experiences, and learn social norms in a safe and enjoyable environment. Similarly, Ramlah (2021) highlights that play supports holistic development, encompassing cognitive, physical, and emotional growth, which are essential to well-rounded learning experiences.

Through play, children engage in social interactions that strengthen emotional control, empathy, and cooperation. Ahmad et al. (2021) and Veiga et al. (2018) found that play-based experiences enhance problem-solving, self-regulation, and perspective-taking skills. These interactions help children develop a sense of belonging and mutual respect—key components of emotional intelligence and social competence.

Despite its proven importance, play is often undervalued in many early childhood settings, especially in private kindergartens. The increasing academic focus and pressure for measurable achievement have led to reduced opportunities for play. Limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of parental awareness further hinder the effective implementation of play-based learning (Nurhayati et al., 2020).

Therefore, ensuring meaningful play in early childhood education requires collaborative support from educators, administrators, and parents. As Razak and Rahman (2024) emphasise, play must be recognised as a pedagogical necessity rather than a supplementary activity. Promoting structured, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate play experiences is essential to strengthen children's socio-emotional growth and ensure holistic development in Malaysia's early childhood education context.

Problem Statement

Socio-emotional development is widely recognised as a foundational aspect of early childhood learning, shaping children's capacity to manage emotions, build meaningful relationships, and engage positively within social environments. Contemporary research in child development and educational psychology emphasises socio-emotional competence as equally if not more important than early academic skills in predicting long-term well-being, school readiness, and social adjustment (Mohammad et al., 2021; Zakaria et al., 2021). This aligns with global educational discourse, including the United Nations SDG4.2, OECD Early Learning Framework, and 21st-century learning competencies, which advocate for emotionally literate, socially resilient young learners.

However, despite this emphasis, many preschool children in Malaysia continue to face socio-emotional difficulties, such as limited self-regulation, peer conflict, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Evidence suggests that these challenges are exacerbated when teaching remains overly academic in focus and lacks meaningful opportunities for guided play and socio-emotional scaffolding.

Although the *Dokumen Kurikulum Prasekolah 2026* (DKP) and *PERMATA Negara* Curriculum highlight play-based learning as a core strategy to foster socio-emotional growth, its implementation in practice remains inconsistent, particularly in private kindergartens. Time constraints, academic pressure from stakeholders, limited teacher training, parental

misconceptions about play, and inadequate learning environments often result in reduced or superficial use of play in classrooms (Mohamad Albaree et al., 2019; Miller, 2018).

This disconnects between curriculum policy and classroom practice reflects a larger contemporary debate in social science and early childhood research. Should early education prioritise academic instruction, or should it foreground holistic, play-driven learning as a developmental. Growing evidence suggests that insufficient exposure to meaningful play may hinder children's emotional resilience, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills (Erikson, 2019; Noordin et al., 2023). This may also contribute to behavioural issues and reduced intrinsic motivation to learn, particularly when academic expectations are imposed prematurely (Haliza & Joy, 2009).

Despite recognition of play as a developmental mechanism, there remains limited empirical understanding of how early childhood teachers, especially in the private preschool sector interpret, value, and apply play-based approaches specifically for socio-emotional development. The absence of this knowledge represents a critical gap that restricts the alignment between curriculum intentions and pedagogical reality.

Therefore, this study is necessary to systematically examine private kindergarten teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding play-based learning for socio-emotional development. Such insights are essential to inform professional development, reshape pedagogical culture, and support Malaysia's movement toward developmentally appropriate, equitable, and holistic early childhood education.

Research Objectives

In general, this study aims to examine teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify teachers' perceptions of the importance of play activities in children's socio-emotional development.
2. To analyse the types of play activities that help enhance children's socio-emotional skills.
3. To evaluate the extent to which play activities contribute to the improvement of children's socio-emotional competencies.

Research Questions

1. What are teachers' views on the role of play activities in children's socio-emotional development?
2. What types of play activities are commonly implemented in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor?
3. How do play activities contribute to the improvement of children's social and emotional skills, according to teachers?

Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide valuable insights for educators and administrators in early childhood education centres, particularly in planning and implementing effective play-based activities. The findings can serve as a practical guide to help teachers design environments that support children's social and emotional development more holistically. By

applying the outcomes of this research, early childhood institutions can enhance their pedagogical approaches to ensure that children not only enjoy learning through play but also build a strong foundation for their overall growth and lifelong learning.

Play has long been recognised as a natural and essential medium for children's learning. As Wan and Farhana (2020) emphasized, learning through play is one of the most effective ways for children to explore, understand, and engage with the world around them. Play is often described as "the work of children," yet it remains a joyful and meaningful process that nurtures curiosity and creativity. Janius et al. (2023) further stated that during play, children use their cognitive abilities to solve problems creatively, while social interactions with peers stimulate imagination and encourage them to experiment with new ideas.

Moreover, Zakaria et al. (2024) highlight that play is closely linked to socio-emotional development, particularly in fostering social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and emotional understanding. These competencies are essential for children to build positive relationships and adapt to various social contexts. Similarly, Norly (2019) found that when children's emotional well-being is nurtured, their social interactions become more confident, balanced, and constructive. This suggests that maintaining emotional stability through play enables children to manage their feelings effectively and develop healthy behavioural patterns.

Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to raise awareness among preschool teachers about the critical importance of play in supporting socio-emotional development. The study also seeks to encourage educators to reflect on their teaching practices and integrate purposeful play as a key pedagogical approach. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader goal of enhancing early childhood education quality in Malaysia, ensuring that play is recognised not merely as a leisure activity but as a vital component of children's emotional and social growth.

Literature Review

This study focuses on three interrelated areas: (1) theoretical perspectives of socio-emotional development, (2) the role of play as a pedagogical approach in early childhood education, and (3) empirical findings that explore the relationship between play and socio-emotional learning. Reviewing these dimensions ensures that the study is grounded in established theoretical models and contemporary evidence, while also revealing inconsistencies, challenges, and gaps that warrant further research.

Recent literature underscores the global recognition of socio-emotional development as a core outcome of early childhood education. Organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and OECD emphasise socio-emotional learning (SEL) as central to 21st-century competencies and lifelong learning, with play identified as a primary developmental mechanism (OECD, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). In Malaysia, policy frameworks including the *Dokumen Kurikulum Prasekolah* (2026 edition) and *PERMATA Negara* Curriculum align with this global direction by positioning play-based learning as essential to nurturing emotionally resilient and socially competent preschool children.

Empirical studies continue to support this alignment. For example, Mohammad et al. (2021) reported that structured play enhances children's socio-emotional regulation, supporting skills such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict management. Similarly, Makantai et al. (2020) found that social interactions during free play strengthen children's verbal and non-verbal communication, enabling them to negotiate, express emotions appropriately, and develop healthy peer relationships. More recent research in Malaysia by Noordin et al. (2023) and Ling et al. (2022) reinforced that children engaged consistently in guided play exhibit stronger self-regulation, emotional expression, and social adaptation.

While the literature affirms the benefits of play, it also highlights a critical implementation gap. Numerous studies have reported that early childhood education settings particularly in private kindergarten sectors continue to prioritise academic instruction over play, often due to parental expectations, school readiness pressures, and limited teacher training (Mulia et al., 2021; Wong & Tee, 2023). This mismatch between curriculum intent and classroom practice reflects an ongoing debate in early childhood education: whether preschool should prioritise academic preparation or holistic developmental learning through play. Despite growing advocacy for socio-emotional competencies, research examining how teachers conceptualise, implement, and assess play-based socio-emotional learning especially in the private preschool context remains limited.

Given these trends, there is a clear need to further investigate teachers' understanding and practices related to play-based socio-emotional development within Malaysian private kindergarten settings. This literature review, therefore, not only consolidates current evidence but also establishes the rationale for examining this topic, positioning the present study to address a meaningful and timely research gap.

Research Methodology

The design of this study employed a quantitative approach to examine teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development. The research utilised a survey method, where data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers in private kindergartens across Kuala Selangor.

The questionnaire served as the main instrument for gathering data related to teachers' perceptions, types of play activities implemented, and their effectiveness in promoting socio-emotional skills. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, allowing for quantitative assessment of teachers' attitudes and experiences.

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27, applying descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to summarise the findings. These analyses provided a clear understanding of the overall perceptions of teachers and the extent to which play contributes to children's socio-emotional development.

The results from this study are expected to validate the importance of play-based learning as an effective pedagogical strategy in early childhood education and to offer practical insights for improving socio-emotional support in preschool environments.

Research Sample

Determining an appropriate population and sample is a crucial component of research methodology, as it directly affects the validity and reliability of the study's findings. According to Subhaktiyasa (2024), accurate sampling enables researchers to make meaningful and generalisable inferences about the population under study. In this research, the target population comprised private kindergarten teachers in the district of Kuala Selangor, as they are directly involved in implementing play-based learning activities and observing children's socio-emotional development.

The main objective of sampling was to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in supporting children's emotional growth and to identify how their knowledge and practices can be enhanced through professional development. Socio-emotional learning is a critical component of early childhood education, as it fosters children's ability to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and adapt effectively to their social environment (Abdul et al., 2022). Therefore, selecting teachers who actively apply play-based methods provided valuable insights into how these practices contribute to children's holistic development.

A total of 80 teachers from private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor were selected as the study sample. The selection process employed a purposive sampling technique, a non-probability approach that involves the deliberate selection of participants based on predefined criteria. Teachers chosen for this study were required to have teaching experience in early childhood education and direct involvement in conducting play-based activities in the classroom. This method ensured that participants were highly relevant to the research objectives, particularly when a complete list of the population was not readily available.

Data collection was conducted through both physical distribution of questionnaires to selected kindergartens and online surveys using platforms such as Google Forms, WhatsApp, and phone interviews. This multi-channel approach facilitated data collection and improved response rates by offering flexibility for participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience.

In determining an appropriate sample size, the researcher referred to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which provides statistical guidance for ensuring representativeness based on population size. This reference helped ensure that the number of respondents selected was sufficient to achieve reliable and generalisable results. Consequently, the sample selected is expected to represent the target population accurately and contribute to the validity and credibility of the study's findings.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher to examine teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development. This instrument consists of several constructs related to "Play-Based Learning and Socio-Emotional Development."

The constructs are supported by three main components, which include:

- Demographic Information, covering background details of respondents such as gender, teaching experience, and qualification.
- Play Activities, focusing on the types and frequency of play-based activities implemented in the classroom.
- Socio-Emotional Development, which includes two sub-constructs:
 - *Social Development* – interaction, cooperation, and communication skills among children.
 - *Emotional Development* – the ability of children to recognise, manage, and express emotions appropriately.

Each item in the instrument is measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The constructs and sub-constructs in this questionnaire are aligned with the National Preschool Curriculum Standards (KSPK, 2017), which emphasise holistic development through play-based and child-centred learning approaches.

Research Finding

Respondents' Demographics

The demographic data presented in this study were derived from Section A of the questionnaire. It includes information on respondents' gender, age, educational qualifications, and teaching experience. A total of 80 respondents participated in this study, all of whom were teachers from private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor.

The results indicate that the majority of respondents were female teachers (88.7%), while male teachers (11.3%) represented a smaller proportion. In terms of age, most respondents were below 30 years old (72.5%), followed by those aged 31–35 years (16.3%). Regarding academic qualifications, the majority held a Diploma (47.5%), followed by Bachelor's Degree (38.8%) holders. Most respondents had 1–5 years of teaching experience (41.3%), showing that the sample largely consisted of young educators in the early phase of their careers.

These findings are summarised in Table 1, which presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1

Respondents Demographics

Demographics		Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	9	11.3
	Female	71	88.7
Age	Below 30 years	58	72.5
	31–35 years	13	16.3
	36–40 years	5	6.3
	41–45 years	3	3.8
	Above 46 years	1	1.3
Educational Qualification	SPM Certificate	9	11.3
	Diploma	38	47.5
	Bachelor's Degree	31	38.8
	Others	2	2.5
Teaching Experience	Less than 1 year	23	28.7
	1–5 years	33	41.3
	6–10 years	18	22.5
	11–15 years	2	2.5
	16–20 years	2	2.5
	Above 21 years	2	2.5
Total Respondents		80	100.0

These findings indicate that most private kindergarten teachers involved in this study are early career or mid-career educators who may still be in the process of developing their skills and deepening their understanding of early childhood pedagogy, including the use of play activities to support socio emotional development.

Study Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions of play activities in relation to children's socio-emotional development. In addition, the study sought to determine whether play activities can enhance children's social and emotional skills as well as strengthen their self-confidence.

To achieve these objectives, descriptive statistical analyses such as percentages, means, and standard deviations were employed to interpret and discuss the data collected. The findings and discussions presented in this section are based on the research questions formulated in Chapter 1. These results were derived from descriptive statistical analysis and frequency distribution normality tests for each research variable.

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the study variables were normally distributed. The data analysis was guided by the interpretation of mean scores, which were categorised into five levels as a basis for evaluating teachers' perceptions of the role of play activities in enhancing socio-emotional development among children.

Questions Related to Play Activities

Descriptive analysis was conducted to obtain statistical results for Section B, titled "Play Activities." The data were analysed based on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. A total of ten items were tested to assess teachers' level of knowledge regarding

play activities implemented during teaching and learning sessions. All data were analysed using a Likert scale, as shown in the table 2.

Table 2

The interpretation of mean scores

Range of Mean Scores	Evaluation Level	Interpretation
1.00–1.80	Very Low	Respondents strongly disagree, or the level of achievement is very low.
1.81–2.60	Low	Respondents disagree, or the level of achievement is low.
2.61–3.40	Moderate	Respondents are neutral, or the level of achievement is moderate.
3.41–4.20	High	Respondents agree, or the level of achievement is high.
4.21–5.00	Very High	Respondents strongly agree, or the level of achievement is very high.

*Pallant, J. (2020)***Data / Information Study Findings***Findings from Section B: Play Activities*

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Interpretation of Teachers' Perceptions toward Play Activities

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
B1	I allocate specific time for play activities in the classroom.	4.46	0.61	High
B2	I believe that play has a positive effect on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.	4.66	0.50	Very High
B3	I believe that play is important for children's social development during learning sessions.	4.61	0.51	Very High
B4	I believe that play is important for children's emotional development during learning sessions.	4.66	0.50	Very High
B5	I believe that play enhances children's ability to socialise with their peers.	4.66	0.50	Very High
B6	I have access to resources that help children integrate play into learning activities.	4.33	0.63	High
B7	I plan play activities that support socio-emotional development on a regular basis.	4.39	0.58	High
B8	I understand that through play, children learn how to interact with others.	4.65	0.55	Very High
B9	I know various play activities that can be implemented with children.	4.51	0.57	Very High
B10	I incorporate play activities in every teaching and learning session.	4.29	0.73	High
Overall Mean		4.52	0.57	Very High

The findings indicate that teachers strongly recognise the value of play as an essential pedagogical approach in early childhood education. Item B1 ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 0.61$) shows that most teachers consistently allocate specific time for play in the classroom, suggesting structured time management that integrates play into daily teaching practices.

Items B2 to B5 record the highest mean values ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.50\text{--}0.51$), demonstrating that teachers strongly believe play has a positive impact on cognitive, social, and emotional development. This indicates a deep appreciation of play not merely as a leisure activity but as a significant contributor to children's holistic growth, particularly in socialisation and emotional regulation.

Item B6 shows a slightly lower mean ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.63$), though still categorised as high. This may reflect some challenges in resource availability, such as teaching aids or classroom facilities to support effective play integration. Meanwhile, Items B7 and B8 ($M = 4.39$ and 4.65 , respectively) highlight teachers' awareness of the need to plan play activities regularly and their understanding of how play facilitates children's interaction skills.

Item B9 ($M = 4.51$) indicates that teachers possess broad knowledge of different types of play activities suitable for preschoolers, which is crucial for age-appropriate and engaging learning experiences. Finally, Item B10 ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.73$) suggests that teachers attempt to embed play in every session, albeit with possible constraints in full implementation.

In summary, the overall results demonstrate that teachers hold very positive perceptions toward the implementation of play activities in preschool classrooms. Their responses affirm a strong understanding of the benefits of play for children's socio-emotional and holistic development.

Questions Related to Children's Social Development

Descriptive analysis was conducted to obtain statistical results for Section C, which focuses on "*Children's Social Development in Private Kindergartens in Kuala Selangor*." The data were analysed based on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. A total of five items were provided to teachers to assess aspects of children's social development.

Social development refers to children's ability to interact with others, share, cooperate, take turns, and demonstrate empathy toward their peers. Teachers are able to observe this development through children's behaviours during group activities, structured play, or spontaneous communication and conflict resolution within the classroom. Observations of these aspects enable teachers to evaluate the extent to which play activities contribute to the formation of essential social skills among children. All data were analysed using a Likert scale, as shown in the table below.

Data / Information Study Findings*Findings from Section C: Children's Social Development*

Table 4

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Interpretation of Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Social Development

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
S1	I observe that play activities help children become more self-confident.	4.43	0.70	High
S2	I find that children show improvement in communication skills after engaging in play activities.	4.45	0.59	High
S3	I find that play can foster stronger peer relationships among children.	4.43	0.65	High
S4	I find that children develop better problem-solving abilities when working in groups.	4.43	0.67	High
S5	I find that children become more capable of resolving conflicts with their peers.	4.26	0.72	High
Overall Mean		4.40	0.67	High

Based on Table 4, the overall mean score for teachers' perceptions of children's social development through play activities is 4.40, with a standard deviation of 0.67, indicating a high level of agreement. These results suggest that preschool teachers hold very positive views regarding the significant role of play in enhancing children's social development.

Item S1 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.70$) demonstrates that teachers strongly agree that play helps boost children's self-confidence, a key aspect of social and emotional growth. Item S2 ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.59$) further highlights teachers' observations that play activities contribute to improved communication skills — a fundamental element of effective social interaction.

Similarly, Item S3 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.65$) indicates that teachers perceive play as an avenue for fostering closer peer relationships and promoting social bonding among children. Item S4 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.67$) reveals that play enhances children's ability to collaborate and solve problems within group settings. Lastly, Item S5 ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.72$) shows that teachers believe play activities assist children in developing greater competence in resolving peer conflicts independently and constructively.

Overall, these findings reinforce the notion that play is a powerful medium for nurturing children's social competence. Teachers recognise that through play, children not only learn to interact and communicate effectively but also cultivate confidence, empathy, and teamwork essential components of holistic socio-emotional development.

Questions Related to Children's Emotional Development

Descriptive analysis was conducted to obtain the statistical results for Section C, which focused on "Children's Emotional Development in Private Kindergartens in Kuala Selangor." The data were analysed based on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. A total of five items were provided to teachers to assess the aspects of children's emotional development.

Emotional development refers to children's ability to identify, understand, and regulate their own emotions, as well as to respond appropriately to the emotions of others. Teachers can observe this development through facial expressions, reactions to specific situations, the ability to manage anger or frustration, and how children calm themselves when facing stress or conflict.

Additionally, teachers may observe how children express affection, sympathy, or concern toward their peers in various learning situations. Observing these behaviours enables teachers to evaluate how play activities contribute to the development of emotional stability and children's ability to adapt effectively within their social environment. All data were analysed using a Likert scale, as presented in the table below.

Data / Information Study Findings

Findings from Section C: Children's Emotional Development

Table 5

Mean, Standard Deviation, and Interpretation of Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Emotional Development

Item	Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
E1	I find that play activities help children understand and manage their emotions.	4.33	0.75	High
E2	I find that children show positive behavioural changes after engaging in play activities.	4.33	0.75	High
E3	I find that play activities help children recognise their own feelings and regulate emotions.	4.43	0.74	High
E4	I find that play activities influence how children communicate with their peers.	4.56	0.57	Very High
E5	I interact with children during play to help them understand their socialisation skills.	4.54	0.52	Very High
Overall Mean		4.43	0.66	High

Based on Table 5, the overall mean score for teachers' perceptions of play in supporting emotional development among children is 4.43, with a standard deviation of 0.66, indicating a high level of agreement. This suggests that teachers strongly acknowledge the importance of play in helping children manage emotions, behaviour, and social skills effectively.

Item E1 and E2, both scoring a mean of 4.33 (SD = 0.75), indicate that teachers agree play helps children understand and regulate their emotions while promoting positive behavioural changes. These findings imply that teachers recognise the direct influence of play on shaping emotional stability and self-control in children. Item E3 (M = 4.43, SD = 0.74) further highlights teachers' confidence that play enables children to identify and manage their own feelings better, which is a crucial aspect of developing emotional intelligence from an early age.

Item E4 achieved the highest mean score (4.56, SD = 0.57), showing a very high level of agreement among teachers that play significantly influences how children communicate with peers. Play provides an essential avenue for children to practice verbal and non-verbal

communication, handle conflicts, and express emotions in socially acceptable ways. Lastly, Item E5 ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.52$) reveals that teachers actively engage with children during play to help them understand and strengthen their socialisation skills. This demonstrates that teachers not only observe but also facilitate emotional learning experiences through guided interactions during play.

Overall, the results emphasise that play serves as a powerful and effective medium for fostering children's emotional competence. Teachers' positive perceptions affirm that structured and interactive play activities can cultivate empathy, self-awareness, communication, and emotional regulation, all of which are essential foundations for holistic socio-emotional development in early childhood.

Discussion

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive and in-depth discussion of the findings obtained and analysed in Chapter 4. This study was conducted to examine teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. The findings are supported by relevant discussions, research implications, recommendations for future studies, and a conclusion that summarises the overall discussion presented in this chapter.

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted with the primary objective of exploring teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. Adopting a quantitative approach, the research utilised descriptive statistical methods to analyse systematically collected data through a well-structured questionnaire designed to obtain relevant and valid information related to the research topic. The scope and boundaries of the study were carefully defined to ensure the precision and reliability of the findings.

The respondents consisted of teachers serving in private kindergartens within Kuala Selangor who possessed educational backgrounds in early childhood education and practical experience in managing classroom learning activities. The questionnaires were distributed using two methods online via Google Forms and physically to teachers at selected locations. This dual approach ensured a high response rate and facilitated data collection from a diverse range of participants.

The data analysis process was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27, which enabled systematic and accurate generation and interpretation of data. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were employed to identify patterns and trends in teachers' perceptions of the role of play in children's socio-emotional growth.

The results revealed meaningful insights into the extent to which play activities influence children's emotional and social development and how teachers recognise and implement play-based approaches in their daily teaching practices. Overall, the findings contribute to a better understanding of teachers' perspectives on play as a critical pedagogical

tool and provide valuable input for improving child-centred teaching strategies in private kindergartens, particularly within the Kuala Selangor region.

Respondent Demographic Discussion

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic data of the respondents who participated in this study. A total of 80 respondents were involved, and the demographic information gathered includes four main aspects: gender, age, academic qualification, and teaching experience. The purpose of analysing these data is to offer a general understanding of the respondents' backgrounds, which may influence their perceptions and approaches toward the implementation of play activities in supporting children's socio-emotional development.

In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female (71 respondents, 88.8%), while only 9 respondents (11.3%) were male. This reflects the current trend in Malaysia's early childhood education sector, particularly in private kindergartens, which is predominantly staffed by female teachers. The predominance of women in this field may shape pedagogical approaches, especially in aspects involving children's emotions and social relationships, as female teachers tend to exhibit nurturing, caring, and empathetic characteristics in their teaching practices.

Regarding age, most respondents were under 30 years old (58 respondents, 72.5%), indicating that the majority of teachers involved in this study were young educators still in the early stages of their careers. This younger demographic tends to be more open to innovative and contemporary teaching methods, such as structured play-based learning, to promote holistic child development. Only a small proportion of respondents were from older age groups, suggesting that experienced teachers remain a minority in the private kindergarten sector studied.

In terms of academic qualifications, the data revealed that most respondents possessed formal educational backgrounds related to early childhood education. A total of 38 respondents (47.5%) held a Diploma, while 31 respondents (38.8%) had a Bachelor's Degree, indicating that 86.3% of the teachers had tertiary-level qualifications. This high level of education suggests that the teachers were capable of understanding both the theoretical and practical aspects of child development. Consequently, they are more likely to design play-based activities that are not only enjoyable but also meaningful and beneficial for children's socio-emotional growth. A smaller proportion of respondents held only SPM certificates (11.3%) or other qualifications (2.5%), possibly gaining their skills through workplace training or hands-on experience.

With regard to teaching experience, the majority of teachers had between 1 to 5 years of experience (41.3%), followed by less than 1 year (28.7%). This means that nearly 70% of the respondents were relatively new to the profession. Their shorter teaching experience indicates that many are still adapting to the pedagogical requirements of early childhood education and developing a deeper understanding of the importance of play in supporting emotional and social development. Only a small group of teachers had over 10 years of experience (7.5%), representing a minority within the sample. However, these experienced

educators can play a valuable role by sharing best practices and mentoring novice teachers in implementing play-based activities effectively.

Overall, the demographic findings reveal that the majority of private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor involved in this study are young, qualified female educators who are still in the early stages of their careers. This background significantly influences how they plan and conduct play-based learning, as well as how they perceive and support children's socio-emotional development in preschool settings. Therefore, these demographic characteristics should be considered when developing interventions, professional training programmes, and policies aimed at enhancing teacher development and improving the quality of early childhood education.

Discussion of Study Findings

This section provides an in-depth discussion of the research findings presented in Chapter 4. The discussion covers both the analysis of the respondents' demographic data and the examination of the research questions established at the beginning of the study. The findings are systematically analysed to identify patterns and trends among private kindergarten teachers in the Kuala Selangor district. The main purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development.

Through this research, the study sought to address three key questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the role of play activities in the socio-emotional development of children?
2. What types of play activities are commonly implemented by teachers in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor?
3. How do play activities contribute to the enhancement of children's social and emotional skills according to teachers' perspectives?

These three questions formed the foundation of the research framework and guided the process of data collection and analysis.

To achieve these objectives, the researcher conducted quantitative analyses based on the questionnaire responses collected from kindergarten teachers. The results were then discussed in detail to determine the extent to which teachers' perceptions align with the importance of play activities in fostering socio-emotional growth among children.

Furthermore, this discussion is supported by previous studies reviewed in Chapter 2 (Literature Review). Comparing the current findings with prior research helps to identify both consistencies and differences, thereby strengthening the validity of the conclusions and providing justification for the study's outcomes. Overall, this section not only presents a comprehensive understanding of the findings but also highlights their implications for current practices in early childhood education, particularly in promoting play-based learning as a key pedagogical approach for socio-emotional development.

Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of the role of play activities in children's socio-emotional development?

Based on the findings from Section B of the questionnaire, it is evident that private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor have a highly positive perception of the role of play activities in promoting children's socio-emotional development. The overall mean score of 4.52 with a standard deviation of 0.57 falls within the *very high* category according to the Likert scale interpretation.

Most items related to teachers' understanding and beliefs about the importance of play scored very high means. For instance, items such as:

- *"I believe that play has a positive impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development"* (M = 4.66),
- *"I believe that play is important for children's emotional development"* (M = 4.66), and
- *"I understand that through play activities, children can learn how to interact with others"* (M = 4.65).

These results indicate that teachers not only understand the function of play in learning but also recognise its significant impact on children's social and emotional balance.

Furthermore, teachers demonstrated a proactive attitude in planning and implementing play activities during teaching and learning sessions. Although there were some limitations in resource accessibility (M = 4.33), this did not hinder teachers from integrating play into their pedagogical approaches. This reflects a strong awareness of the pedagogical value of play in early childhood education.

Overall, these findings suggest that teachers hold *very positive perceptions* and fully support the implementation of play activities as an essential tool in fostering children's socio-emotional development. They view play not merely as recreation, but as an *integral and effective learning medium* for holistic child development.

Research Question 2: What types of play activities are commonly implemented in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor?

Analysis of Section B also revealed that teachers frequently incorporate various types of play activities as part of their daily teaching practices. This is supported by high to very high mean scores in items related to their knowledge and implementation of play activities. For example:

- *"I know various types of play activities that can be conducted with children"* (M = 4.51), and
- *"I integrate play activities into every teaching and learning session in my classroom"* (M = 4.29).

These findings indicate that teachers are not only aware of the diversity of play activities but also apply them consistently in the classroom. The types of play referred to may include guided play, dramatic or role play, creative arts, outdoor physical play, and social games that involve peer interaction. Although the questionnaire did not specify types of play in detail, teachers' responses reflect broad knowledge and practical experience in implementing diverse play forms that support child development.

Additionally, the high mean score for the item "*I plan play activities that support socio-emotional development regularly*" ($M = 4.39$) demonstrates that teachers design play sessions intentionally to meet learning objectives and developmental needs rather than conducting them spontaneously.

In summary, this question can be answered by concluding that private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor regularly implement a variety of structured and developmentally appropriate play activities that are aligned with children's socio-emotional needs. This reflects a holistic and child-centred pedagogical practice.

Research Question 3: How do play activities contribute to children's social and emotional growth according to teachers?

Findings from Section C, which covered two key subcomponents — *social development* and *emotional development* — indicated that teachers perceived play activities as having a highly positive contribution to children's socio-emotional growth. The overall mean scores were 4.4 for social development and 4.43 for emotional development, both within the *high category* on the Likert scale.

For social development, items such as:

- "*I observe that play activities help children become more confident*" ($M = 4.43$),
- "*I find that children show improvement in communication skills after engaging in play activities*" ($M = 4.45$), and
- "*I find that children can enhance their problem-solving abilities when working in groups*" ($M = 4.43$),

illustrate that teachers view play as an essential medium for cultivating social skills such as confidence, cooperation, communication, and tolerance among children.

Regarding emotional development, items such as:

- "*I find that play activities help children recognise and manage their emotions*" ($M = 4.43$),
- "*I find that play activities influence how children communicate with their peers*" ($M = 4.56$), and
- "*I interact with children during play to help them understand socialisation skills*" ($M = 4.54$),

Show that play significantly supports children's emotional intelligence helping them to regulate feelings, show empathy, understand others' emotions, and respond appropriately in social situations.

Overall, teachers perceive play as a crucial element in fostering balanced emotional stability and strong social competence. They recognise that through play, children naturally and spontaneously learn about social roles, conflict resolution, and positive character formation.

Thus, this study concludes that according to teachers' perspectives, play activities play a vital role in enhancing children's social and emotional development, serving as a key pedagogical approach in early childhood education.

Summary of the Study

Overall, this chapter presents the findings of the research conducted to examine teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. The study successfully addressed the stated research objectives and questions through a detailed analysis of the collected data. The chapter began with an overview of the findings, followed by a summary of the study, discussion of the data analysis, and an explanation of respondents' demographic profiles. Subsequently, the discussion focused on analysing findings related to the three main research questions, each elaborated based on data derived from the research instrument. The chapter concluded with a summary and recommendations for future research to strengthen the study's outcomes and guide subsequent investigations in this area.

Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the key findings that successfully met the research objectives through the analysis of Likert scale data, mean scores, and standard deviations. These findings provided a clearer understanding of how private kindergarten teachers in Kuala Selangor perceive and evaluate the role of play in supporting children's socio-emotional growth. The results not only answered the research questions but also contributed to a deeper understanding of the significance of play activities within the context of early childhood education.

Indirectly, this study established a solid foundation for improving teaching and learning approaches that prioritise holistic child development. The insights gained from this research can inform educational practices, curriculum design, and professional training programmes, ensuring that play-based learning continues to be recognised as an essential pedagogical strategy in fostering children's emotional, social, and cognitive development.

Impact and Implications

This study provides several important implications for pedagogical practices in early childhood education, particularly concerning teachers' approaches to play-based learning. The findings revealed that teachers who understand the educational value of play are more likely to design learning experiences that simultaneously support children's emotional and social development. Activities such as role play, group games, and structured play allow children to express emotions, develop empathy, and manage feelings more effectively. This aligns with the findings of Mohammad, Osman, and Abdul Aziz (2021), who asserted that role-playing activities help children improve self-control and social interaction skills.

The study highlights the need for professional training for preschool teachers focusing on strategies for implementing play-based activities that promote socio-emotional growth. Such training should include skills in observation, emotional guidance, and holistic child assessment. According to Rizalina Mat Radzi (2014), teachers should play multiple roles as planners, implementers, and evaluators of play activities. This reinforces the importance of teacher competency in facilitating balanced socio-emotional development among young children.

From a policy perspective, this study supports the enhancement of the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK), which already places strong emphasis on play as a core strategy for nurturing children's character and emotional stability. Nadiyah Noordin et al.

(2023) found that play-based approaches significantly influence preschoolers' socio-emotional development and should therefore serve as a foundational element in curriculum planning. Consequently, education policies must remain responsive to the emotional development needs of young children by strengthening the integration of play within the curriculum.

The study also underscores the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents. A strong partnership between these two parties ensures continuity in supporting children's socio-emotional development both at school and at home. As suggested by Rizalina Mat Radzi (2014), parental support—through communication, supervision, and engagement in children's play—plays a crucial role in reinforcing the emotional benefits of play-based learning. This cooperation enhances the overall impact of play on children's social and emotional well-being.

Lastly, this study contributes to the development of structured learning modules that focus on socio-emotional aspects. Such modules can serve as a comprehensive guide for teachers to plan play activities that are not only enjoyable but also systematically designed to build social and emotional skills. With structured modules in place, teachers can conduct consistent and effective play-based sessions, fostering well-balanced emotional and social development among children.

In conclusion, the implications of this study extend beyond classroom practice they call for holistic efforts involving educators, policymakers, and parents to strengthen play-based pedagogy as a foundation for nurturing emotionally intelligent, empathetic, and socially competent young learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study successfully addressed the three research questions that were posed. However, like most empirical studies, this research has certain limitations that warrant further refinement and exploration. Therefore, several recommendations are proposed to guide future researchers in expanding and strengthening the understanding of teachers' perspectives on the role of play in enhancing children's socio-emotional development.

Future research could include children themselves as direct participants to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the actual effects of play activities. While this study focused on teachers' perspectives, subsequent studies could explore changes in children's behaviour and socio-emotional development through systematic observation, age-appropriate interviews, or case studies. Such approaches would provide stronger empirical evidence about the real impact of play on children's experiences, emotional expression, and social interactions.

This study was limited to private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. Future studies could expand the research scope to include government preschools, community-based preschools, or institutions in rural and urban settings to allow for comparative analysis. Broader sampling would enable researchers to identify differences and similarities in pedagogical approaches, institutional contexts, and resource availability in implementing play-based learning across diverse educational settings.

It is recommended that future studies employ intervention or experimental research designs, such as developing a play-based learning module aimed at improving socio-emotional skills and evaluating its effectiveness before and after implementation. Through this approach, researchers can measure the actual impact and effectiveness of structured play activities on social and emotional development quantitatively. The findings could contribute significantly to establishing evidence-based best practices in early childhood teaching and learning.

Future research could also examine the relationship between play activities and children's physical and motor development. Activities such as running, jumping, climbing, kicking a ball, and playing musical instruments can enhance gross motor skills, while tasks such as block-building, cutting, drawing, and colouring can strengthen fine motor coordination. Collaborative studies involving physiotherapists or occupational therapists would allow for more detailed analysis of how play influences physical coordination and self-regulation. Such research would ensure that play is recognised as a holistic developmental tool that supports emotional, social, and physical growth.

Finally, qualitative studies using methods such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions with preschool teachers could be conducted to gather richer, contextual data. This would enable researchers to explore teachers' real-life experiences, the challenges they face, their creativity in conducting play activities, and their perceptions of play's impact on children's development.

In conclusion, these recommendations are expected to guide future researchers in strengthening the body of knowledge in early childhood education, particularly regarding the integration of play as an effective pedagogical approach. By broadening research perspectives across various dimensions participants, methods, settings, and developmental aspects future studies can further validate the crucial role of play in fostering children's social, emotional, and physical development in a more comprehensive and impactful manner.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has thoroughly examined teachers' perspectives on the role of play activities in enhancing children's socio-emotional development in private kindergartens in Kuala Selangor. The research focused on how teachers perceive and implement play-based approaches to support emotional and social growth among preschool children aged four to six during teaching and learning sessions.

The findings of this study indicate that well-planned and structured play activities have a significant positive impact on children's socio-emotional development. Through group play, role-play, and creative games, children learn to interact with peers, regulate their emotions, and build self-confidence. Teachers play a crucial role as facilitators and observers, guiding children throughout these activities and helping them recognise their emotional strengths and individual needs.

Moreover, the study reinforces the importance of play as an effective pedagogical strategy in early childhood education. Play-based learning not only makes the classroom

environment more enjoyable but also contributes to the development of positive character, empathy, and essential social skills.

Ultimately, this research underscores the need for teachers to receive continuous support and professional training to design play activities that are not only engaging but also purposeful in promoting holistic child development. By integrating play meaningfully into daily teaching practices, educators can foster a nurturing and balanced learning environment that supports the emotional, social, and overall well-being of young children.

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