

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE STUDIES

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY



**Children's Play Experiences and the Social, Emotional, and Cognitive
Behaviors Demonstrated During Play Activities at Gifted Hands Kindergarten**

By

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June 2026

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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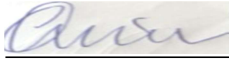
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Declaration

I, Netsanet Nigussie, declare that this research titled “Children's Play Experiences and the Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Behaviors Demonstrated During Play Activities at Gifted Hands Kindergarten” is my own original work, developed under the guidance of Dr. Tadesse Jaleta. No part of this paper has been submitted before in order to qualify for any other academic credits.

Declared by: **Netsanet Nigussie Taye**

Signature _____

Date _____

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Abstract

Play does not only make a child enjoy the moments with peers, but it has a significant contribution to children's social, emotional and cognitive development which has a long-lasting impact on their wellbeing. In many educational environments, especially in early childhood education, play is often undervalued or replaced with academically driven instruction. While western-centric research on play is abundant in the Global North context, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence regarding how practices are perceived and their link with developmental outcomes in the Ethiopian/Global South context.

Play is not merely a leisure activity but a foundational process through which children learn, adapt, and grow. Investigating its impact provides valuable insights for educators, parents, policymakers, and child development specialists.

The study adopted a qualitative observational study to explore how play contributes to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development in an early childhood education center. Data was collected through non-participant observations during classroom and playground activities over three weeks. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that children frequently demonstrated social interaction, emotional expression, communication, creativity, and problem-solving behaviors while engaged in play activities.

Keywords: Play, child development, children, play practices, social development, emotional development, cognitive development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the study and establishes the foundation for the research. It introduces the background of the study, outlines the research problem, presents the research questions and objectives, and explains the significance of the study. The chapter also describes the scope and limitations of the research. Together, these sections provide a clear understanding of the purpose of the study and the context within which the research was conducted. The study focuses on exploring children's play experiences and the social, emotional, and cognitive behaviors demonstrated during play activities within an early childhood education setting.

1.1 Background of the Study

Early childhood is a foundational period for a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Play is a fundamental aspect of childhood and a vital context through which children learn, interact, and make sense of the world (Alkhudiry,2022). Researchers and educators increasingly recognize play as more than recreation; it is a powerful medium for fostering socio-emotional and cognitive development. Through play, children develop skills such as problem-solving, communication, emotional regulation, cooperation, and creativity (Qayyum, A., Fatima, R., & Iram, A, 2024). Play is the vital part, the vehicle by which youngsters impart, entertain, learn about their general surroundings, comprehend themselves as well as other people, manage their issues, and practice a portion of the abilities they will use later on (Harley, 1971). Through play, children learn about cultural norms and expectations, discover the workings of the world, and negotiate their way through their surroundings (Klein, Wirth, & Linas, 2003). Children need a level of socio-emotional development that allows them to regulate their behavior and emotions. These developments in the early childhood stage help with the establishment of their personality and personal character in the future. Therefore, the social and emotional development of children needs to be nurtured, particularly during the preschool years. Play is a key component of early cognitive exercise, which allows children to build crucial skills and provides them the ideal foundation for lifelong learning. From problem-solving to language learning, from social development to creativity, how we play as kids allows us to better understand and interact with the wider world as we grow.

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, play has been initiated by various psychologists and Philosophers like Maria Montessori, Waldorf, Emilia, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Gagne for children's development and learning (Bhagat et al., 2018). They believe play is a center for learning; when children play, they can explore and build curiosity which is a source of learning. Many theories stipulate that children learn better through being active and by play, thus how the activity and play are structured within the early childhood circumstance is a matter of considerable theoretical and philosophical debate (McLachlan et al., 2018). Piaget in his theory of cognitive development emphasizes that learners learn from concrete to abstract through the manipulation of different objects, thus learning by doing (Penn, 2005). He proposed play as the primary way for a child to develop the inner abilities including remembering, memory, intelligence, thinking, problem-solving, creativity, language, arithmetic, attention, reasoning, and curiosity. Currently, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) practitioners and curriculum developers emphasize on the integration of play in teaching and learning (Ogunyemi & Henning, 2020; Phajane, 2019; Uduchukwu, 2011).

Vygotsky highlighted that the children develop in relation to not just their biology, but also the conditions in their environment (Holbrook Mahn, 2015). Therefore, the child should have the environment to develop their social and emotional skills in their early childhood years. The child can develop their emotions through the social process as these are considered as a unified concept. Children develop a variety of abilities through play, including empathy, problem-solving, sharing, initiative, generosity, creativity, aggression, and trust, all of which contribute to the development of their personalities. It is daily experiences that will shape a child's behavior, and these experiences are more likely to stay long-term memory if all senses were involved, as a result, play comes as a technique to enhance that process. Children like playing on their own to explore the world and create meaning for themselves.

1.2 Problem Statement

While the significance of early childhood period for the development of children's social, emotional and cognitive competencies are well understood, not a lot of research has been done in the area as most research focus primarily on immediate public health and survival issues such as nutrition, infectious disease, and under-five mortality rather than developmental psychology or early childhood development (ECD), compared to the need; there are limited amount of trained

personnel in related fields. While these are critical, they often overshadow the "hidden" developmental needs of the child, leaving a void in our understanding of how play, which is a vital primary vehicle for learning is being integrated into early childhood environments. Early childhood development as a research priority has grown, but it still competes with pressing policy needs. Research tends to be funded where there is immediate policy relevance or donor interest.

This study identified two critical dimensions of the problem that remain under-addressed. The first one is, play is merely seen as leisure, its importance in children's development is undervalued. Because of that, the practice is replaced with academically driven instructions. This shift may limit opportunities for children to develop crucial socio-emotional and cognitive skills that are best nurtured through play. There is a need for empirical research that highlights the specific ways play practices support these developmental domains and provides evidence to inform educators, parents, and policymakers.

Second, while western-centric research on play is abundant in the Global North context, there is a notable lack of empirical evidence regarding how practices are perceived and their link with developmental outcomes in the Ethiopian/Global South context.

This study emphasizes the importance of play and its roles in enhancing the socio-emotional and cognitive development that has been overlooked so far. It steps further than asserting the importance of play, by providing an empirical analysis of the functional relationship between different play types and developmental outcomes. By detailing the perceptions of practitioners and the specific play practices in use, the study offered contextualized evidence that will look to bring light to the "hidden" developmental needs of children between the age of 2.5 to 7 years and advocate for increased academic and policy engagement in the subject matter.

This study focused on how play enhances children's social, emotional and cognitive development. Play is meaningful experience. It is also tremendously satisfying for children, a pursuit they seek out eagerly, and one they find endlessly absorbing. The researcher stressed conducting research on this topic for multiple reasons.

- The researcher's deep passion and personal interest to understand children, how they think, how they play, socialize and interact with one another and the overall early childhood education.
- The area needs thorough observation and recognition that play is not merely a recreational activity. The researcher wanted to prove with the findings in place that play significantly plays a crucial role in children's social, emotional, and cognitive development in all settings.
- The researcher seen that through classroom observations and practical experiences as an early childhood educator herself, the researcher noticed that children spend a significant portion of their day engaged in play. This opened a door for the researcher to explore developmental outcomes associated with play activities.
- The researcher wanted to give insights to academicians, early childhood educators, and future researchers on how play-based learning should be applied more in the teaching-learning environment. The study contributes local evidence that may help educators, parents and policymakers better understand the importance of play.

1.3 Research Questions

This research will be based upon the following research questions:

- What types of play activities are most frequently observed during classroom and playground sessions?
- What social behaviors do children demonstrate during play?
- How do children express and regulate emotions during play activities?
- What cognitive and language-related behaviors are demonstrated during play activities?
- How frequently do different forms of play occur in the observed setting?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

To explore how children demonstrate social, emotional, and cognitive behaviors during play activities in an early childhood education setting.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- To identify the types of play activities children engage in during classroom and playground sessions.
- To describe the social behaviors children demonstrate during play activities.
- To explore how children express and regulate emotions during play activities.
- To examine the cognitive and language-related behaviors children demonstrate during play activities.
- To document the frequency and contexts in which different forms of play occur.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is significant because it contributed to a deeper understanding of play as a developmental strategy. Play is not merely a leisure activity but a foundational process through which children learn, adapt, and grow. Investigating its impact provides valuable insights for educators, parents, policymakers, and child development specialists. One recent study highlights how Piagetian play practices promote creativity and memory, which are essential for developing a child's ability to reason about the past, present, and future regardless of the culture and society, play, which is the most effective learning tool of childhood, contributes greatly to the development of the child (Amine Kaplan, 2024). Another study explains the role of play using Vygotskian play practice, in play, creativity is the process of preschoolers implementing their ideas, which also supports their development, since development is contingent on the emergence of new ideas (Veraksa Nikolay, Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson and Yeshe Colliver 2022).

The major significance and intent of studying play lied in its contribution and supporting educators to improve educational system through designing effective play-based learning environment, informing parents and caregivers about the developmental benefits of play, providing evidence to policymakers advocating for play-centered curricula in early childhood education and adding existing academic literature on child development and early learning practices.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focused on exploring the roles of play in children at Gifted Hands Kindergarten in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It mainly stressed on how various types of play contributed to children's

social, emotional and cognitive development within natural environment including playground classroom settings.

The research focused on all students enrolled in the school from Early Preschool to Upper Kindergarten between 2.5 to 7 years of age. The study concentrated on observing children's interactions, communication patterns, behaviors, emotional expressions, and problem-solving skills during indoor and outdoor play activities.

The study applied a qualitative observational approach. Data was collected using non-participant observation and thematic analysis to interpret the outcomes of children's play experiences. Data was collected in three weeks period within the school environment. The study was limited to one early childhood education center and focused mainly on observational data support the findings. Interviews with children, parents, or teachers were not included as the primary intention was to understand children's natural play experience and developmental behaviors through direct observation.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The researcher admits that although the study provides valuable insight into the developmental roles of play among children, several limitations were identified.

First, the study was conducted in only one school, Gifted Hands Kindergarten, which limits the generic nature of the findings to other schools and educational settings. Other schools may have different practices, varying classroom environments and play experiences that influence children's development differently. Second, the study primarily relied on observational data collected in three weeks of time. As children's developmental maturity varies over time, a much longer observation time could have provided much more comprehensive findings regarding developmental features and play experiences. Third, although efforts were made to record observations accurately and objectively, interpretations may still reflect the researcher's perspective as non-participant observations were used to collect data.

Finally, the fact that the study did not include interviews with parents, teachers and children limits the understanding of children's developmental experiences through play and impacts the strength of triangulation of findings of the study.

The three-week observation period provided only a snapshot of children's play experiences and behaviors. Because child development occurs over extended periods, the study cannot determine developmental changes attributable to play. Future studies should employ longitudinal observations across several months and include multiple data sources such as teacher interviews, parent interviews, and developmental assessments.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically reviews literature related to play practices employed by children in contexts. It integrates theoretical frameworks and findings from research about early childhood development, practices, social, emotional, and cognitive development through play, and identifies gaps in the literature with regards to the lived experiences. Previous studies suggest that play enhances children's emotional expression, social interaction, and cognitive flexibility. Socio-emotional development is fostered through cooperative play, role-play, and rule-based games, which help children learn empathy, negotiation, and self-control. Cognitive development is supported through exploratory and imaginative play, which encourages reasoning, memory, language development, and problem-solving. However, gaps remain in understanding how specific play practices influence both developmental domains simultaneously, particularly in diverse educational contexts.

Play also provides opportunities for acquiring many cognitive skills. Although play is often thought of in terms of "free play," dictated by the child, play can also be educationally focused, directed by the teacher or parent to reach specific educational goals. Play is an active engagement in a certain activity that incorporates children's experiences, knowledge, and representations to help them make sense of their experiences and the world around them. Play is the most natural way for children to develop critical thinking and problem solving. Games with an element of sorting, constructing or matching help with pattern recognition and understanding of principles such as cause and effect. Of course, when your little one is at daycare, they're not

being *taught* pattern recognition and cause and effect as such. They're having fun, and the learning is happening as a result. They don't need to be weighed down with heavier concepts.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Play

2.1.1 Psychoanalytic Perspective:

Sigmund Freud developed the psychoanalytic viewpoint, which focuses on the unconscious forces and impulses that underlie human behavior. This perspective holds that play enables schoolchildren to express themselves and find solutions to unconscious problems and desires (Chinekesh et al., 2013). Schoolchildren can find their inner selves, solve difficulties, and develop self-confidence through play, which is a symbolic representation. The psychoanalytic perspective holds that schoolchildren can safely and symbolically express their unconscious desires, thoughts, and emotions through play (Auerbach et al., 2017). Through play, schoolchildren can resolve conflicts, fantasies, and worries, promoting their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

2.1.2 Cognitive Perspective:

According to the cognitive perspective, play is a cognitive activity that fosters children's development of cognitive skills including imagination, creativity, and problem-solving (Weber et al., 2023). Schoolchildren can develop their cognitive abilities, engage in hypothetical thinking, and explore different approaches to problem-solving through play. Cognitive theories emphasize the role of play in fostering mental representations, abstract thought, and metacognition. The cognitive method holds that play gives schoolchildren the chance to practice role-playing, creative thinking, and problem-solving techniques. Through play, schoolchildren can explore cause-and-effect relationships, experiment with novel strategies, and develop more adaptive and flexible thought processes (Weber et al., 2023).

2.1.3 Sociocultural Perspective:

Drawing on Vygotsky's theory, the sociocultural approach emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of play. It views play as a social activity entwined with cultural customs and expectations. Schoolchildren are said to learn and assimilate cultural information, skills, and values through play. Sociocultural theories strongly emphasize the function of social interactions, language, and cultural instruments to shape play experiences and foster cognitive,

social, and emotional development (Alkhudiry, 2022). Play is crucial for social and cultural learning, according to the sociocultural viewpoint. Through play, schoolchildren can develop social skills, practice communication, and assimilate cultural norms and values (Alordiah et al., 2022). Play can foster empathy, cooperation, and compromise, all of which can aid in the development of social skills and intercultural understanding (Parker et al., 2022).

2.2 Integration of Theories to Understand the Role of Play in Promoting Development

The developmental literature is clear: play stimulates social, emotional, and cognitive development in the early years. The multifaceted effects of play on cognitive, social, and emotional components may be fully understood by integrating different viewpoints. Piaget's cognitive development theory strongly emphasizes how play fosters cognitive development, problem-solving abilities, and global awareness. The social aspect of it and its significance in transmitting culture and group learning are highlighted by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Rubtsov, 2019). The psychoanalytic viewpoint highlights the emotional and symbolic components of play, emphasizing its function in expressing emotions and resolving conflicts.

Play engages school children academically, socially, and emotionally, promoting their overall development and well-being (Parker et al., 2022). Any of these aspects may be overlooked, resulting in a faulty view of play's function in child development.

2.2.1 Social Development

The process through which people develop the abilities, perspectives, and ways of acting that are required for relating to others, building relationships, and actively taking part in social groups. Society is known as social development (Ismailova, 2022). Peer relationships occur between people comparable to one another in age and developmental stages. Peer interaction offers chances for social learning, teamwork, and the formation of friendship relationships. Various talents, known as social skills, help people communicate effectively with others. These abilities include active listening, communication, empathy, perspective-taking, collaboration, sharing, and conflict resolution. Prosocial conduct is selfless acts that help others or advance social peace. Prosocial actions include sharing, assisting, collaborating, and demonstrating empathy for others (Shoshani et al., 2022).

Play gives social interactions a rich environment, helping school children to hone and improve their social abilities.

- **Turn-taking:** Schoolchildren must frequently wait in line, share resources, and take turns during playtime. Turn-taking teaches students patience, respect for others' viewpoints, and the value of collaboration and fairness.
- **Cooperation:** As school children participate in cooperative activities, team games, and pretend play situations, play promotes collaboration. Playing together promotes cooperation, problem-solving, and the capacity to collaborate toward common objectives (Jaggy et al., 2022).
- **Negotiation:** To balance competing interests, ideas, and aspirations, school children frequently negotiate and compromise in play scenarios. School children learn to articulate their needs, listen to others, discover common ground, and peacefully settle issues via negotiation.

2.2.2 Emotional Development

Emotional development is the process through which an individual's emotional capacities, such as their capacity to detect, comprehend, and successfully control their emotions, grow and mature (Slot et al., 2017). It includes the following crucial elements:

- **Emotional Awareness:** Understanding one's feelings and those of others is a requirement for emotional awareness. It demands intentional observations to comprehend what emotions are, what patterns they take, and how to distinguish between them.
- **Emotional Regulation:** The ability to control and regulate one's emotions appropriately. It requires applying different techniques for controlling emotional outbursts, managing stress, and finding solace in trying circumstances.
- **Emotional Expression:** The capacity to successfully express one's feelings to self and others. It includes verbal and nonverbal indicators, including gestures, tone of voice, body language, and facial emotions.

Emotional maturity is essential for mental health and general wellbeing. People who learn emotional skills may become conscious of themselves, such as their interests, what emotions are

important to them and how they can develop their strengths while also improving weaknesses. It encourages awareness of, and acceptance of who one is, which are two key elements in forming a robust sense of self-identity and healthy self-concept. Skills of The Emotionally Intelligent Play, on the other hand, teaches kids emotional intelligence, self-regulation and emotional regulation- vital components for emotional development. This allows you to train your children with emotional intelligence, self-control and the ability to regulate emotions: all these are fundamental aspects of emotional development.

2.2.3 Cognitive Development

Cognitive development describes how an individual's intellectual functions and processes evolve and mature. It entails gathering, organizing, and applying knowledge and improving mental abilities and cognitive processes (Abilkassym et al., 2021). The following elements are included in cognitive development:

- **Attention:** The capacity to concentrate and maintain mental effort on particular stimuli or activities is referred to as attention. It entails focusing on important information while ignoring irrelevant information. To digest information and learn, attention is essential (Commodari, 2016).
- **Memory:** Memory is the capacity to encode, store, and retrieve information. It includes both working memory, which momentarily stores and manipulates information, and long term memory, which refers to the retention of knowledge over a longer period.
- **Problem-solving:** The capacity to recognize, assess, and resolve issues is included in problem-solving. It entails using logical reasoning, critical analysis, and inventive strategies to get around hurdles and arrive at desired results (Mehadi Rahman, 2019).
- **Language Acquisition:** The natural, subconscious process by which humans develop the ability to comprehend and produce language. It is the primary way babies and children learn their native tongue, and is driven by daily communication and exposure rather than formal classroom instruction.

Play plays a crucial role in children's cognitive growth and improvement. It promotes creativity, imagination, and problem-solving, encouraging children to master different skills. Through chances for innovative discovery and varied thinking, play promotes creativity. For instance,

pretend play enables kids to invent and assume various characters, play out symbolic play scenarios, and develop original ideas. Playful settings encourage creative expression and inventive thinking, improving cognitive flexibility and thinking beyond the present (Vogt et al., 2021). Play experiences help children develop executive functioning abilities, including organizing, planning, making decisions, and self-control. Planning, organizing, and navigating through scenarios are all part of play activities that help kids set objectives, order actions, and foresee outcomes (Slot et al., 2017). Play also teaches children impulse control, emotional regulation, and inhibitory control as they practice taking turns, following rules, and managing emotions.

Play is essential for language development because it fosters the development of vocabulary, grammar, and communication abilities. It exposes school children to various situations, events, and things, allowing them to improve their language skills and grow their vocabulary (White et al., 2017). Play-based interactions include understanding linguistic structures, creating sentences, and expressing oneself.

2.3 Gaps in Literature

While several studies have emphasized the importance of play in promoting children social, emotional and cognitive development, there is still a lack of information on different aspects of this topic.

A major issue is that the vast majority of prior studies talk about play and child development in a general/theoretical way and do not offer much detailed observational evidence on how children naturally show developmental skills during play activities in classroom and playground contexts. Probably the most important difference is that much of the literature looks at developmental outcomes as a broad construct rather than tracking children's play in real time.

Second, a large number of existing studies explore social, emotional or cognitive development in isolation. Few studies have examined how play supports all three domains of development in unison, across one study. How various types of playful experiences together contribute to children's real-life social, emotional, and cognitive development is not well understood.

Third, most play-based learning literature is reliant upon Western contexts and education systems. Little empirical research has been conducted within Ethiopian early childhood education contexts to explore aspects of children, play and developmental outcomes. Cultural variances, classroom environments, academic and social practices may shape the way children play and develop with still little understanding from an Ethiopian context.

Fourth, numerous reports focus predominantly on quantitative methods (surveys, assessments and standardized measurements) but may ignore the richness of children's natural behaviors, interactions, emotions and communication when they play. Very few studies have taken qualitative observational pathways to elucidate what children actually go through while playing.

Last, there has been scant documentation of the kinds of play practices that are typical in kindergarten classrooms and playground settings as well as how such practices relate to developmental outcomes. Besides, little research focus on how educators intentionally scaffold children play experiences in early childhood settings.

As a result, this research aims to fill the mentioned gaps through using a qualitative observational study of how various types of play practices facilitate the social, emotional and cognitive development of children within a natural environment in an early childhood education context such as Gifted Hands Kindergarten.

2.4 Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review examines the role of play in promoting children's socio-emotional and cognitive development. It highlights that play is a natural and essential activity through which children learn, explore, and make sense of the world around them. A number of research shows that play enhances children's language development, interaction with peers and adults, problem-solving skills, emotional development and boost creativity. Children form meaningful interactions and experiences with peers and adults through free and guided play. These play types contribute to the overall development of children by actively immersing them in various experiences.

The review examines three primary theoretical viewpoints on play. The psychoanalytic viewpoint suggests that play enables children to convey unconscious feelings, address internal

conflicts, and enhance their emotional health. The cognitive viewpoint perceives play as a means for children to cultivate cognitive skills like imagination, creativity, reasoning, and problem-solving. The sociocultural perspective, grounded in Vygotsky's theory, highlights that play is influenced by social interactions and cultural context, aiding children in acquiring communication skills, cooperation, cultural values, and social norms.

By synthesizing these theories, we gain a holistic view of play's role in child development. Play fosters academic, social, and emotional growth through the integration of cognitive challenges, emotional expression, and interpersonal interaction. As this review highlights, social development is cultivated as children engage in group activities that require turn-taking, cooperation, negotiation, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Play plays a vital role in emotional development by fostering awareness, regulation, and expression. Through various forms of play, children learn to identify and manage their feelings, communicate them effectively, and build both self-confidence and self-awareness. Ultimately, this process supports children's mental health and promotes their overall well-being.

The literature review further underscores the vital role of play in fostering cognitive development. Engagement in play helps children enhance their memory, attention span, language skills, creativity, and executive functions, including decision-making and planning. Through imaginative, pretend, and problem-solving activities, children are encouraged to think critically, explore new concepts, and build cognitive flexibility.

In summary, the literature emphasizes that play is essential to early childhood development, as it simultaneously fosters social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Nevertheless, this review highlights a lack of research regarding how particular play practices collectively impact these developmental areas, especially across diverse educational and cultural settings.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to investigate research questions. By detailing the specific qualitative approach, methods of data collection and procedures, research design and analytical framework, it provides a structured blueprint designed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The philosophical foundation guiding this study is interpretivist, a paradigm that seeks to understand personal meanings, contexts and individual experiences. Play has a significant part in children's socio-emotional and cognitive development is the one clear reality in this situation. This is received and seen differently by society depending on individual perspectives and experiences. The selection of the interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to explore how individuals construct meaning and interpret their realities within specific contexts.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into play practices and their developmental impacts. Because the primary goal of this study was to gain a thorough understanding of how educators interpret play and how important it is for children's development, the researcher employed a qualitative research design. This enabled the researcher to explain the meanings, contexts, and perspectives of educators regarding social interaction, relationships, and attitude toward play practices as well as their role in children's development. Through a deep grasp of the study problem in its real-life context, the researcher wanted to demonstrate whether the area has been adequately examined and help unearth meanings that cannot be assessed mathematically.

3.3 Research Approach

The researcher used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the how and whys instead of how many or

how much. This approach was employed by the researcher because of its nature of capturing individualized interpretation of perceptions, meanings, and experiences. It provided abundant descriptive

It provided rich descriptive details that has possibility of revealing the natural, physical and emotional experiences that could be missed by quantitative methods.

3.4 Study Area, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size

3.4.1 Study Area

The research was conducted at Gifted Hands Kindergarten in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The research targeted all the children enrolled in the school, starting from Early Preschool to Upper Kindergarten.

3.4.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select the classroom and participants because the researcher aimed to observe all children actively engaged in play activities. The goal is to gain in-depth understanding of children's development, and the role that play practices have on each development.

3.4.4 Sample Size

The participants included children aged approximately 2.5 to 7 years enrolled at Gifted Hands Kindergarten. The study focused on observing children's natural play behaviors; therefore, children were not interviewed or asked direct questions.

3.5 Instruments of Data Collection

The study employed qualitative measures, primarily, an observational data collection to study how play has a developmental role on children's social, emotional and cognitive development in the natural and social phenomenon. The researcher opted to use a non-participant observation and observed the children without actively engaging in or influencing their play activities. This allowed the children to behave naturally within their usual learning environment, thereby increasing the authenticity and reliability of the data collected.

3.6 Procedure of Data Collection

The data collection started once ethical clearance was secured and occurred in one simple stage. Data was collected through non-participant observation. The researcher observed the children during indoor and outdoor play sessions and recorded detailed field notes about behaviors, interactions, emotional expressions, and problem-solving activities. Indoor observations included activities such as pretend play, puzzles, building blocks, and group games conducted inside the classroom. Outdoor observations focused on activities such as running, climbing, ball games, and social play occurring in the playground. Throughout these sessions, the researcher took a neutral role while monitoring the children's actions and interactions.

Detailed field notes were recorded during each observation session. The notes captured diverse aspects of children's play experiences, communication patterns, interactions with peers and teachers, behavior, emotional expressions, and problem-solving skills. Specific attention was given to how children initiated and sustained play, worked with others, controlled conflicts, exhibited emotions such as joy, frustration, or excitement, and demonstrated cognitive skills such as decision-making, creativity, and reasoning. The field notes served as the primary source of qualitative data and provided rich descriptions that were later analyzed to uncover patterns, categories, and themes connected to the developmental functions of play in children's socio-emotional and cognitive development.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

The study utilized qualitative inquiry to analyze the impact of play on children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Observations were transcribed and thoroughly reviewed. This process began with multiple in-depth readings of the transcripts to gain familiarity with the content and to identify preliminary patterns and recurring themes.

Subsequently, open coding broke the text into smaller segments, each of which was analyzed to identify meaningful statements and expressions relevant to the study's purpose. These starting codes were created and consolidated under more general codes by pattern coding, enabling the researcher to identify recurring patterns that depicted deeper meaning behind the experiences of the participants.

In the last step of the analysis, the emerging themes came together in a detailed and integrated account of the fundamental experience under research. This account captured both the events as they happened and how the participants interpreted those events. Findings were supported by a choice of excerpts from observations and provided a grounded and reflective account of the subject matter.

Method of Data Analysis

The observational data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis involved:

1. Reading observation notes repeatedly
2. Developing themes
3. Creating codes
4. Grouping codes into categories

The researcher first reviewed the observation notes repeatedly to become familiar with the data and gain a deeper understanding of children's behaviors and interactions during play activities. Meaningful behaviors, actions, and interactions relevant to the research questions were then identified and assigned initial codes.

The codes were carefully examined and grouped into broader categories based on similarities and patterns observed in the data. Finally, major themes were developed from these categories to explain how play contributes to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. The thematic analysis helped the researcher interpret children's experiences and behaviors within the natural classroom and outdoor settings.

3.8 Study Setting and Time

The study was conducted in an early childhood classroom and playground setting at Gifted Hands Kindergarten for three weeks. Gifted Hands Kindergarten is a local private early childhood education center located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The kindergarten provides young children educational services in a secure, caring and child-friendly environment that promotes their overall development. Through organized classroom activities and play-based learning

strategies, the center provides a variety of educational opportunities that foster children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are moral principles guiding study design, data collection, and reporting by ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of participants while maintaining scientific integrity. To maintain ethical standards, researchers consider the potential impact of their work on individuals and society and seek approval from research ethics committees. This involved obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing potential harm. Overall, ethical considerations in research are essential for upholding the principles of fairness, respect, and honesty.

Ethical approval was obtained before conducting the study. Informed consent is secured from school administrators and educators. Children's identities remained confidential, and participation is voluntary. All data is used strictly for research purposes. Permission was obtained from the school administration and teachers before conducting observations. Children's names were not recorded to maintain confidentiality.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, thematically to portray how play has a role in children's social, emotional and cognitive development. The results are arranged in accordance with specific goals of the research: (1) types of play observed, (2) social interaction during play, (3) emotional expression and regulation through play and (4) cognitive development and language use through play. The purpose of this study is to explore children's play experiences and the social, emotional, and cognitive behaviors observed during play activities. Through quoted words and close analysis, this chapter shed light on the findings.

The data were collected from each class students comprised of four different classes with an average age group clusters starting from Early Preschool with 8 students between the age of 2.5-3.5 years old, two Preschool classes with 18 and 16 students between the age of 3.5-4.5 years old, Lower Kindergarten with 32 students between the age of 4.5-5.5 years old and Upper Kindergarten with 16 students between the age of 5.5-7 years old respectively, that sums up to 90 students overall the campus.

4.1.1 Daily Schedules and Routines

The school opens at 7:30 a.m. Children are welcome to come in. Children come in and put their bags, lunchboxes, and water bottles in the designated places before starting to play. The children play up to 8:30 a.m. before gathering for line-up time.

The line- time consists of different activities where children are exposed to teacher-guided play/activities. They do daily physical exercises, choose songs to sing together, dance and finally sing the Ethiopian National Anthem before heading to their respective classes in lines singing "I like my class, I like my teachers, I like my friends...". The classroom schedule, snack and play time routines differ in each class.

The table below shows each classroom's daily schedule. It shows the amount of time children spend in the classroom as well as the time they spend outdoors for play activities.

Sections	Arrival /play time	Line-up time	Class time	Snack time	Recess	Class time	Lunch time	Recess	Nap/ quite time	Class time	Play/ home time
Early Preschool	7:30- 8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00- 9:30	9:30- 10:00	10:00- 11:00	11:00 - 11:30	11:30- 12:00	12:00- 1:00	1:00- 2:00	2:00- 2:50	2:50- 9:10
Preschool	7:30- 8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00- 9:50	9:50- 10:10	10:10- 11:10	11:10 - 11:50	11:50- 12:20	12:20- 1:00	1:00- 2:00	2:00- 2:50	2:50- 9:10
Lower Kindergarten	7:30- 8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00- 10:20	10:20- 10:40	10:40- 11:20	11:20 - 12:20	12:20- 12:50	12:50- 1:20	1:20- 2:00	2:00- 2:50	2:50- 9:10
Upper Kindergarten	7:30- 8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00- 10:30	10:30- 10:50	10:50- 11:30	11:30 - 12:30	12:30- 1:00	1:00- 1:40	1:40- 2:00	2:00- 2:50	2:50- 9:10

Following the designated daily schedule, children go through their everyday accordingly with the help of the teachers. The school administers the Ethiopian curriculum mixing it with other developmentally appropriate classroom pedagogies. The Early Preschool class uses play-based learning system where children are mostly exposed to hands-on activities rather than structured classroom routines. They have more play time in the classroom as well as in the playground.

4.2 The Formation of Initial Codes, Categories, and Themes

The observational data were analyzed using thematic analysis. After repeated reading of the field notes, meaningful behaviors, actions, interactions, emotional expressions, and communication patterns observed during play were identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories based on recurring patterns. Finally, categories were synthesized into overarching themes that addressed the research questions.

4.2.1 Initial Codes

The researcher used an inductive coding approach to ensure that the findings emerged directly from the observational data. The following initial codes were identified:

Types of Play Observed

Pretend play	Physical play
Free play	Constructive play
Indoor play	Rule-based play
Cooperative play	Creative play
Solitary play	Teacher-guided play

Social Interactions During Play

Sharing materials	Communication
Turn-taking	Group participation
Cooperation	Friendship formation
Helping peers	Exclusion
Conflict	Peer encouragement
Conflict resolution	Leadership

Emotional Expression and Regulation During Play

Laughing	Confidence
Frustration	Empathy
Patience	Comforting peers
Emotional control	Anger expression
Crying	Calming down
Joy and excitement	Pride in achievement

Cognitive and Language-Related Behaviors During Play

Asking questions	Decision-making
Storytelling	Memory
Following instructions	Imaginative thinking
Explaining ideas	Vocabulary use
Problem-solving	Role assignment
Planning	Concentration

4.2.2 Categories

The identified codes were grouped into broader categories according to their similarities and relationships.

The following are the categories for each initial coding:

1. Types of play observed:

- Pretend play, role play- *Imaginative play*
- Running, climbing and chasing- *Gross motor play/physical play*
- Cooperative play and team games- *Social/group play*
- Solitary play- *Independent play*
- Constructive play and educational games- *Educational and constructive play*

2. Social interactions during play:

- Sharing, teamwork and helping- *Cooperative behaviors*
- Talking and negotiation- *Social communication*
- Conflict and exclusion- *Social challenges*
- Friendship and group participation- *Peer relationships*

3. Emotional expression and regulation during play:

- Happiness and excitement- *Positive emotional expression*
- Patience and calming down- *Emotional regulation*
- Frustration and anger- *Emotional challenges*
- Empathy and comforting others- *Emotional awareness*

4. Cognitive and language-related behaviors during play:

- Problem solving and planning- *Cognitive engagement*
- Language use, vocabulary and storytelling- *Language development*
- Imagination and pretend play- *Creative thinking*
- Attention and memory- *Learning behaviors*

4.2.3 Themes

The categories were further synthesized into four major themes that addressed the research questions and guided the presentation of findings.

Theme 1: Types of Play Observed

This theme focused on identifying the different forms of play in which children engaged, including the frequency, setting, materials used, and whether activities were individual or group-based.

Theme 2: Social Interactions During Play

This theme examined how children demonstrated social behaviors such as cooperation, communication, leadership, group participation, conflict, and conflict resolution during play.

Theme 3: Emotional Expression and Regulation During Play

This theme explored how children expressed and regulated emotions through play, including emotional reactions, self-control, empathy, comforting behaviors, and responses to success and failure.

Theme 4: Cognitive and Language-Related Behaviors During Play

This theme focused on how children demonstrated cognitive and language-related behaviors during play, including problem-solving, creativity, decision-making, attention, imagination, communication, and language use.

4.3 Interpretation of Themes

This study explored the developmental roles of play among children at Gifted Hands Kindergarten through observational data. The findings revealed that children engaged in diverse forms of play during which social interaction, emotional expression, communication, creativity, and cognitive behaviors were frequently observed. The themes identified through thematic analysis are discussed in comparison and in relation to existing literature on the roles of play on children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

4.3.1 Types of Play Observed

During the three weeks of observation of the children at Gifted Hands Kindergarten, the researcher observed that children are engaged in different forms of play. There are pretend play, cooperative play, solitary play, physical play, constructive play, rule-based play, teacher-guided play, free play, indoor play, creative play and exploratory play. The most frequently observed

forms of play were free play, physical play, pretend play, and social play. Solitary play occurred less frequently.

The following are brief interpretations of each play type observed while children are engaged.

4.3.1.1 Pretend Play:

Also known as dramatic play, pretend play is the type of play where children use their imagination and engage in acting out roles and play scenarios. It is one of the most observed types of play with children, especially the Early Preschoolers.

Observation 1- During recess, children were playing with leaves and dirt. One child picked up the bigger leaf and said, “This is injera, come everyone, let’s eat.” The other child followed and replied, “no it is not, this is a leaf”, making sure everyone was looking at her and nodding in assurance.

Analysis 1- This observation illustrates children’s engagement in pretend and imaginative play, where ordinary materials from the environment were transformed into symbolic objects with cultural meaning. The child’s use of a leaf as “injera” displays symbolic thinking and creativity, demonstrating the ability to represent one object as another. This supports the cognitive perspective of play, which explains that play promotes imagination, abstract thinking, and problem-solving abilities in children (Weber et al., 2023).

The observation illustrates how the children actively employ everyday experiences and past knowledge to make sense of their surroundings while they play. The play scenario represents Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, which contends that children's play is influenced by their social and cultural environment, because injera is a familiar and culturally relevant dish in the children's everyday lives (Alkhudiry, 2022). The observation also shows peer interaction, communication, and negotiation during play from the standpoint of social development. The children tried to affect group comprehension, responded to each other, and shared ideas. This supports research showing that play fosters peer engagement and improves social interaction, communication, and perspective-taking abilities. Additionally, the exchange shows how children may work through disagreements while engaging in group activities.

The psychoanalytic theory of play, which sees play as a secure and symbolic setting for children to communicate their inner ideas and experiences, can also be connected to the observation

(Chinekeshe et al., 2013). Children's emotional comfort and familiarity with experiences from home and daily life may be reflected in their creative usage of common cultural objects like food.

Observation 2- During recess, children were playing in one of the play structures. Underneath the play structure is a little toy house with a door. One of the older children came in and started calling out for her babies, posing as their mother saying, “kids, where are you? I am waiting for you”. Three children followed the direction and responded back “Mommy(emaye), we are here, and we are hungry. The mother then replied, “come my babies, I’ll make you food.” They pretended to eat food before going out to play some other game.

Analysis 2- This observation shows how the children engage in role-playing and pretend play, using their imaginations to mimic real-life social situations and family duties. By reenacting well-known family interactions in the play setting, the child who pretended to be a mother and called out for her "babies" demonstrated symbolic thinking. The children showed that they could mentally reflect memories from their daily lives and turn them into meaningful play situations by giving roles and playing out caring duties.

The finding also emphasized how collaboration and group involvement foster social growth. Together, the children bonded with play scenarios, took on their designated roles, and behaved in accordance with the shared hypothetical circumstance. This exemplifies cooperative play, in which children negotiate meaning, react to each other, and uphold a shared objective throughout the action. According to the literature study, play fosters social interaction abilities such as cooperation, communication, taking turns, and developing relationships (Jaggy et al., 2022). The development of these social skills is demonstrated by the children's coordinated responses and eagerness to engage in the hypothetical family structure.

From the standpoint of emotional development, the observation shows caring behaviors, empathy, and emotional expression. While the other children conveyed their needs by declaring they were hungry, the child posing as the mother showed concern and responsibility by inviting the "children" to eat. Children may be expressing emotions of attachment, stability, comfort, and emotional connection that they encounter in real life by pretending to be caregivers. As the children practiced attending to the needs of others in a hypothetical situation, the observation also shows emotional awareness and empathy.

Observation 3- During recess, pretending to act like animals and chasing prey is much more frequent in pretend play games. The children pretend to be lions, tigers, cheetahs, and sometimes dinosaurs. They would scream out roars and chase their friends and peers as their prey all over the school compound.

Analysis 3- The observation showed children actively engaging in pretend, imaginative, and physical play by taking on the roles of animals such as lions, tigers, cheetahs, and dinosaurs. The children transformed the school compound into an imaginative environment where they created symbolic roles and acted out fantasy scenarios through role-playing and movement.

The observation also demonstrated communication, collaboration, and group participation. Although the game appeared energetic and spontaneous, the children followed a shared understanding in which some children acted as predators while others acted as prey. This suggests that children negotiated and maintained play roles while interacting with one another throughout the activity.

In addition, the children expressed excitement, enthusiasm, and enjoyment through roaring, chasing peers, and acting out animal behaviors. The play activity provided an opportunity for children to express these emotions within a socially accepted context. The observation further showed that children distinguished between playful actions and harmful behavior while interacting with their peers.

Observation 4- During recess around the play structure, one child asked the other child, “Are you making a cake or cookies?” The other child replied, “Cookies for your birthday and screamed out happy birthday!” The other child smiled and thanked her friend for the cookies. They then went to play with their peers.

Analysis 4- The children used the play environment to simulate a birthday celebration, with one child pretending to make “cookies” and the other responding positively to the imaginative gesture. The children maintained a shared imaginary situation through conversation and mutual understanding. One child initiated the interaction by asking a question, while the other responded happily and continued the play scenario. This exchange illustrates turn-taking, active listening, and conversational engagement—all essential components of social communication.

The observation further demonstrated emotional expression and emotional awareness. The girl pretending to prepare birthday cookies expressed kindness and affection toward her peer, while the other girl responded with happiness and appreciation.

Observation 5- During recess, the boys from one of the Preschool sections were talking about how they all have guns, and they started comparing whose gun was the largest. They were using their hands as a gun and going pew pew pew...

Analysis 5- The boys created an imaginative play scenario in which their hands symbolized guns and they compared the size of their imaginary weapons. Through symbolic actions, dramatic expressions, and sound effects such as "pew pew pew," the children maintained a shared pretend-play scenario.

The observation also illustrated social interaction among peers, as the children collectively participated in the imagined situation and responded to one another's ideas. Maintaining the shared play scenario required communication and mutual understanding among participants.

The play activity further reflected themes that have been discussed in literature regarding gender-related play preferences and children's exposure to social and cultural influences. The observation is consistent with sociocultural perspectives that describe how children incorporate ideas, roles, and experiences from their environment into play activities.

Observation 6- During recess around the sandbox area, one of the children from Early Preschool said: "I locked this door, pretending the box has a door, and told her peers, you can't come in here, no one will open it for you." One of her peers would not stop trying to go inside, she had to call her friends first to leave the scene. After that, she called a teacher and told her the whole situation happened with the boy.

Analysis 6- This observation illustrated how children engaged in pretend and social play by assigning symbolic meaning to objects and creating imaginary situations. The child transformed the sandbox structure into a private space with an imagined door that could be locked and controlled. This demonstrated imaginative thinking and symbolic representation during play.

The interaction also revealed that social play may involve disagreements and competing interests. The child's attempt to establish rules regarding access to the imagined space was

challenged by a peer who repeatedly attempted to enter. This resulted in a conflict that required social negotiation.

When the disagreement continued, the child chose to leave the area with friends and later sought assistance from a teacher. This observation demonstrated one way children respond to interpersonal conflicts by seeking social support from trusted adults. The child also expressed frustration regarding the situation and communicated her concerns verbally rather than physically.

Observation 7- During class time in the Early Preschool classroom, the children were playing with the materials they had in the classroom. They have little corners where each material goes, and they roam from one corner to the other to explore with the materials. The children made tea and food, and they give it to their teachers to eat or drink. They pretend to be a doctor by wearing the doctor's gown and using a stethoscope to listen to their friends' and teachers' heartbeats. The girls are mostly occupied with in-house chores such as ironing clothes, making food and drinks, pretending to feed a toy baby as mothers do. One girl went to her teacher and said, "Here is a biscuit and a milk for you." The other girl asked the teacher, "is it yummy?" The teacher replied, "Yes, very much, thank you!" The girl replied, "I'll make you a pizza later, okay?" The boys were more interested in the toy cars, acting like a police officer and saying, "Look at me, I am a police and I have a car and a gun, and I can shoot the gun". The teacher called one of the boys and told him to put the toy cake one of the girls gave her in the fridge. The boy mistook the fridge for a microwave and pushed the buttons on the toy and said, "Miss, I am warming it for you". His teacher then explained to him what the toy was and its function. When it was time to clean up, the teacher told the children to put everything back where it belongs, the children did so with ease and cooperation.

Analysis 7- The observation showed children actively engaging with different classroom materials and transforming them into meaningful objects and situations through pretend play. Children acted as doctors, parents, cooks, and police officers while using available materials to create imaginative scenarios.

Throughout the activity, children communicated with peers and teachers, shared ideas, assigned roles, and maintained shared imaginary situations. For example, children offered pretend food to teachers, discussed their plans, and interacted with one another through role-play. The clean-up

activity also demonstrated cooperation and children's ability to follow classroom expectations collectively.

The observation further revealed expressions of care, affection, and concern for others. Children fed toy babies, prepared pretend meals, and engaged in helping behaviors within their play scenarios. Positive interactions between children and teachers contributed to a supportive and engaging play environment.

Observation 8- During recess, one of the older children said, “I used to be a dog,” her peers laughed hysterically. Then one of her classmates asked her, “what are you now?” She replied and said, “I am human now.” One the other classmates stood up and said, “I am a zombie and I am going to chase you and eat your heads!” That’s when everyone stood up and started running screaming out zombie zombie...

Analysis 8- The children creatively moved between different imaginary identities, including animals, humans, and fictional characters such as zombies. Statements such as "I used to be a dog" and "I am human now" reflected imaginative thinking and children's ability to participate in symbolic and fantasy-based play.

The observation also demonstrated social interaction and shared participation. Children maintained a common play scenario by asking questions, responding to one another, laughing, and participating in the zombie chase game. Their participation suggested a shared understanding of the roles and expectations within the activity.

Children expressed excitement, humor, anticipation, and enjoyment through laughter, running, and dramatic play. Although the scenario involved fictional threats, the activity remained within a playful and socially accepted context among peers.

Observation 9- During recess, one child from Preschool was running looking for his friends, they were hiding from him. He went to a nearby teacher and asked her “have you seen anyone running by because I just ate 18 people and I am looking for the rest of them, because I am not full” before the teacher could answer he spotted one of his friends and chased after him roaring.

Analysis 9- The child created and maintained a fantasy scenario in which he pretended to be a creature searching for additional victims after "eating 18 people." The observation demonstrated imaginative thinking, storytelling, and the ability to sustain a complex pretend-play role.

The child communicated his imaginary role to a teacher and later incorporated peers into the game by chasing them around the playground. The actions of the other children suggested that they understood and participated in the shared play scenario.

The observation also illustrated the expression of excitement, humor, and dramatic engagement through storytelling, chasing, and role-play. Although the language used appeared aggressive in content, it occurred within a playful context that was understood by the participants.

4.3.1.2 Cooperative Play:

This is a social stage of child development typically emerging around ages 4 to 7 where children actively collaborate to achieve a shared or common goal. This type of game is the least observed one as it involves higher order communication, negotiation, organized roles and teamwork. It is observed on the Upper Kindergarten classroom students.

Observation 10- During recess, children were playing the 'run, dance, and freeze' game without any supervision from adults whatsoever. They take turns to say the words. When someone screams run, they all run, not too far from each other. When someone else screams dance, they all dance. When someone screams freeze, they all freeze and stay where they are.

Analysis 10- The children independently organized the "run, dance, and freeze" game, took turns giving instructions, and followed the agreed-upon rules. Participation in the activity required children to listen carefully, remember instructions, and respond appropriately to changing directions.

The observation demonstrated children's ability to coordinate their actions with peers and participate in a structured group activity. Children alternated leadership roles by giving commands and responding to the instructions provided by others.

The game also provided opportunities for children to manage their actions according to the rules of the activity. For example, when instructed to "freeze," children stopped their movements

immediately despite their excitement and physical activity. Similar behaviors have been described in literature examining children's participation in rule-based games.

Observation 11- During class time, the Upper kindergarteners were playing in the classroom with Legos in two different groups. One of the children from the first group said, “Look, our building is bigger than yours.” Another child from the second group replied, “That’s ok, because we are not making a big building, we are making a dream house where we will all live in.” Then, she looked at her teammates and asked, “What do we need to make it more cool?” One of her teammates replied, “I know, we can have a swimming pool in the back.” Another girl from the same team replied, “yay, I love swimming” they carried on with the building after. The first team kept on making their building and made a rooftop helicopter parking.” They were so proud of what they made, they kept asking their teachers to see their work. It was observed that everyone took part in the play.

Analysis 11- During the cooperative building activity, children demonstrated social, cognitive, emotional, and language-related behaviors simultaneously. Working in groups, the children used Lego blocks to create imaginative structures such as a dream house with a swimming pool and a building with a rooftop helicopter parking area.

The observation showed children discussing ideas, planning constructions, negotiating suggestions, and making decisions collectively. Children shared responsibilities, encouraged one another, and remained engaged in the activity while pursuing different design goals.

The children's excitement and pride in their creations were evident through their frequent requests for teachers to view their work and their enthusiastic comments about the structures they had built. Statements such as "yay, I love swimming" reflected emotional involvement in the shared activity.

Language was used throughout the play experience to explain ideas, assign meanings, negotiate plans, and maintain group interaction. The observation is consistent with literature describing the frequent use of communication and expressive language during cooperative play activities.

Observation 12- During class time, the Upper Kindergartners were playing with puzzles. They had two groups working together as a team. In the making of the puzzle, they would say “let me do this” or “I want to do this myself,” even though their teacher kept on reminding them that

they have to work as a team or she will take away the puzzles, so they had no choice but to work as a team. There's an exchange of lots of words. One boy complained to the teacher about his teammate by saying, "she is thinking I am sabotaging our work." The teacher called out her name and asked if she thinks that way, the girl replied, "I didn't think that way, he is lying". They were all frustrated because the puzzle was hard to complete. It became harder to work together because every student was trying to put the puzzles together on their own and the more that created differences. The teacher then asked them to put the puzzles away as means of resolving the uprising conflict.

Analysis 12- The observation showed children working together to complete puzzles while attempting to balance individual preferences with group expectations. The activity required communication, problem-solving, concentration, and cooperation among team members.

Children actively examined puzzle pieces, tested possible solutions, and discussed how to complete the task. At the same time, disagreements emerged as several children preferred to complete the puzzle independently rather than collaboratively.

Statements such as "I want to do it myself" reflected children's desire for autonomy and control over the activity. The disagreement regarding "sabotaging our work" illustrated how misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts may arise during group activities.

As the activity became more challenging, children expressed frustration through complaints, disagreements, and verbal reactions. The observation demonstrated how emotional responses and social challenges may emerge during collaborative tasks, particularly when participants have differing goals and expectations.

4.3.1.3 Solitary Play:

Also known as independent play, a stage of early development where a child plays alone and focuses entirely on their activity without seeking interaction with others. While it is important for children to interact with their peers, there are benefits to playing independently, too. Solitary play is the least observed in children at Gifted Hands Kindergarten. The children are usually either in pairs or in groups most of the time, even in classroom activities.

Observation 13- During recess, there's one boy who's always by himself and is not bothered about being by himself and doing anything by himself. He is usually either in the classroom

roaming around and touching things while other students are outside, or he is outside but not interacting with anyone and does what he wants. This is his everyday routine.

Analysis 13- This observation illustrated solitary or independent play, in which the child consistently chose to engage in activities alone rather than participating in group play. The child appeared comfortable exploring the environment independently, moving around the classroom, examining objects, and engaging in self-directed activities without actively seeking peer interaction.

The observation suggests that children do not always prefer group play and may choose independent activities based on their interests, temperament, or immediate preferences. Although solitary play was observed less frequently than group-based play within the kindergarten setting, it remained one of the forms of play demonstrated by children during the observation period.

The observation is consistent with literature describing solitary play as a common play behavior in which children engage independently while focusing on their own interests and activities.

4.3.1.4 Physical Play:

Any active movement-based including activity play (e.g. jumping, climbing, dancing, crawling, skipping, bike riding and ball play), fine-motor practice (e.g. sewing, coloring, cutting, junk modelling and manipulating action toys and construction toys) and what is usually referred to as ‘rough-and-tumble’ (play fighting with friends, siblings or caregivers). Physical play is the most frequent and recurrent type of play of all.

Observation 14- Because of its outdoor nature, children experience physical play on the playground using all the materials in the compound, including the play structure, the monkey bar, the marry-go-round bicycle, as well as activities that does not involve materials but just body movements, including running, jumping, climbing...Children from all sections are very active, exposed, and experienced in the game. They all enjoy the physical activities without holding back. They could be extra daring sometimes because they test and challenge themselves up to their limits. Sometimes, it gets dangerous because it seems like they get overconfident and get lost in the games they play without thinking about the consequences of their actions.

Analysis 14- The observation showed that children frequently participated in movement-based activities such as running, climbing, jumping, balancing, and using playground equipment

including monkey bars and merry-go-round bicycles. Children across different age groups actively engaged in these activities and displayed high levels of physical energy, enthusiasm, and participation.

While using playground equipment and engaging in movement activities, children demonstrated behaviors related to balance, coordination, speed, body control, and spatial awareness. Children were observed testing different movements, adjusting their actions, and exploring the possibilities and limitations of their physical abilities.

The observation also showed considerable social interaction. Children watched one another, joined shared activities, imitated actions, negotiated space, and participated in group movement games. These interactions occurred naturally as children engaged in physical play together.

Children frequently expressed excitement, enjoyment, confidence, and enthusiasm while participating in physical activities. At the same time, some children appeared willing to take risks by attempting challenging movements or pushing themselves beyond their comfort level. The observation suggests that physical play provided opportunities for children to explore movement, challenge themselves, and interact with peers in an active outdoor environment.

Observation 15- During recess, two children were playing on the merry-go-round. One of the students said “faster faster, like Flash (a superhero character)” the other student tried his best to go faster and finally said “here you go” sighing with exhaustion.

Analysis 15- The observation showed that the children combined physical activity with imaginative play by incorporating the superhero character "Flash" into their merry-go-round experience. By comparing the speed of the merry-go-round to the speed of the superhero, the children connected their play experience with familiar characters and ideas from popular culture.

The interaction also demonstrated communication and peer responsiveness. One child requested that the merry-go-round move faster, while the other attempted to meet that request. The exchange reflected cooperation, attention to a peer's request, and active participation in a shared play experience.

Throughout the activity, the children expressed excitement, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. The second child's sigh of exhaustion also illustrated the verbal and non-verbal communication of

feelings during play. The observation highlights how children incorporated imagination, communication, and physical activity within a shared play context.

4.3.1.5 Constructive Play:

Is any activity where children intentionally manipulate objects or materials to build, create, or assemble something new. The researcher observed that children's ability to manipulate objects and be creative with what they have has yet to be developed. They mostly use materials as they are and for their exact function.

Observation 16- During class time in the Preschool classroom, children were playing with the materials in the classroom, such as blocks, puzzles, dolls, cubes, and construction materials. Some would use the building blocks as a phone and go to the class corners and pretend to call each other. They play alongside each other as well as together, but not for a common goal. The girls are more into cooking, pretend talking on the phone, and serving others, while the boys are building, making a toy gun, and shooting their friends. The girls are quieter and more communicative, the boys are more energetic, loud, and focused on smashing, driving, and shooting. They had a hard time cleaning up when the teacher said "clean up time" because they were occupied with the games and they were very loud.

Analysis 16- The observation showed that children used classroom materials in both conventional and imaginative ways. While some children used blocks, puzzles, dolls, cubes, and construction materials for their intended purposes, others assigned new meanings to these objects, such as using building blocks as telephones and pretending to call one another.

Children engaged in both parallel play and shared play activities. Although they often played alongside one another and occasionally interacted, they were not always working toward a common goal. The observation demonstrated different play preferences among children, with many girls engaging in cooking, serving, and caregiving scenarios, while many boys focused on construction activities, pretend weapons, and action-oriented play.

The activity also illustrated children's ability to assign symbolic meanings to objects and create imaginative scenarios based on familiar experiences. Through communication, role-play, and interaction with classroom materials, children maintained a variety of self-directed play experiences throughout the activity.

4.3.1.6 Social Play:

Involves children to interact with others, learning vital life skills like sharing, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution. It is observed that this type of play is not frequent but does happen occasionally.

Observation 17- During recess, the Upper Kindergarteners were playing on the monkey bar, one of the boys congratulated the other for climbing and spinning on the poll with his body and said, “everyone clap for him, he has done it finally, then he looked back to his friend and said, I taught you well.”

Analysis 17- The observation demonstrated children's participation in a cooperative activity that involved encouragement, communication, and shared attention. Children observed one another's actions, responded to their peers' achievements, and expressed approval through verbal encouragement and applause.

The statement, "everyone clap for him," reflected peer recognition and positive social interaction. The child acknowledged another child's accomplishment and encouraged classmates to participate in celebrating the achievement. The interaction illustrated social awareness, group participation, and supportive peer behavior.

The observation also showed emotional expression through excitement, encouragement, and pride. Children responded positively to the success of their peers and appeared engaged in the shared activity. Similar forms of encouragement and positive peer interaction have been described in literature examining children's cooperative play experiences.

4.3.1.7 Teacher-guided Play:

Also called guided play for short, is a pedagogical approach where educators carefully design a playful environment and join in to scaffold learning. Teachers use this type of play to carefully and playfully observe children's learning, how they interact with their peers, to see if they follow instructions and rules, to understand their emotional intelligence in empathizing, sharing and cooperating with peers. Children are mostly left by themselves to play; however, it is observed that play happens occasionally.

Observation 18- During greeting/play time, children were asked to sit down to play “mehareben yayachihu” an organized social play with rules similar with the duck, duck goose game. The children know and understand the rules of the game, when the younger children struggle with speaking loud and/or get shy, the teachers help them and run with them when it’s their turn to be chased.

Analysis 18- Children participated in a teacher-guided group game called "mehareben yayachihu," which involved following rules, waiting for turns, listening to instructions, and responding appropriately when selected. The observation demonstrated children's participation in a structured play activity with clearly established expectations.

The children showed familiarity with the rules of the game and generally followed them throughout the activity. Participation required children to pay attention, remember the sequence of events, and respond when it was their turn. These behaviors were observed repeatedly during the game.

The activity also involved cooperation and group participation. Children sat together, waited for their turns, and responded to the actions of their peers. The game created opportunities for interaction within a shared and organized play experience.

Some younger children appeared shy or hesitant when speaking loudly in front of the group. Teachers responded by providing encouragement and support, including running with children when it was their turn to be chased. The observation demonstrated how teacher support helped children participate in the activity and remain engaged in the group experience.

Children expressed excitement, anticipation, and enjoyment throughout the game, particularly during the chasing portion of the activity. These emotional responses were visible through verbal expressions, laughter, movement, and active participation.

4.3.1.8 Free Play:

Is unstructured, child-initiated activity driven by a child's natural interests rather than adult-directed goals. It is considered fundamental for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth, allowing children to build independence, explore creativity, and develop critical problem-solving skills. Every child is unique and has a different way of expressing

themselves, one way of expressing their uniqueness is through free play. Free play is one of the most frequent and recurrent types of play at Gifted Hand Kindergarten.

Observation 19- Children play with anything and everything during all outside activities, such as greeting/play, recess, and home time. They experiment, create new game rules, run, jump, scream, crawl, make goofy and amusing faces and noises, and use objects from their surroundings to create something. Children are constantly investigating their surroundings from the moment they arrive until they go.

Analysis 19- This observation revealed a highly active environment of free play in which children engaged in continuous self-directed exploration throughout outdoor and transitional periods of the school day. Children interacted with their surroundings through running, jumping, crawling, making sounds, experimenting with objects, and creating their own games and play rules.

The observation showed the presence of free play, physical play, imaginative play, and exploratory play occurring naturally throughout the day. Children frequently modified activities, introduced new ideas, and incorporated available materials into their play experiences.

Social interaction was also evident during free play. Children formed groups, negotiated roles, joined ongoing activities, responded to one another's actions, and participated in shared imaginative scenarios without direct adult instruction.

Children frequently expressed excitement, enjoyment, enthusiasm, and curiosity through laughter, movement, vocalizations, and active engagement with peers and the environment. The freedom to move and explore appeared to encourage high levels of participation and involvement.

The observation further demonstrated children's use of both verbal and non-verbal communication while planning games, sharing ideas, negotiating participation, and interacting with peers. Communication occurred naturally throughout the play experience and formed an important part of children's interactions with one another.

4.3.1.9 Indoor Play:

Is any structured or unstructured recreational activity that takes place indoors. Children explore with materials they have in their classrooms. This type of play is mostly used in the younger children's classroom/Early Preschool, as their learning expectations are less academic compared to the other older students' classes. It is presented well above in the pretend play and cooperative play sections.

4.3.1.10 Exploratory Play:

Children's developing explorations of the world and the objects they find within it. It has interesting and important links to physical play particularly in fine motor development and acting, when it involves building models of real or imaginary objects and creatures and imagining a scenario or narrative.

Observation 20- Though this type of play is the less frequent type of play as it requires children to grasp something on their hands constantly to relate it to their world, it is observed that the children are very resourceful when it comes to using any materials around them. They use leaves as "injera" to serve friends, dirt as "sauce and stew", and little rocks or lid of a bottle as a "ball" and anything they can find in their environment.

Analysis 20- This observation demonstrated children's creativity and imaginative use of materials available in their environment. Children assigned symbolic meanings to everyday objects by using leaves as "injera," dirt as "sauce" or "stew," and small rocks or bottle lids as play objects. Through these actions, children transformed ordinary materials into meaningful elements within their play scenarios.

The observation also showed symbolic thinking and imaginative representation. Children collectively agreed on the meanings assigned to different objects and used those shared meanings to maintain play activities. Similar behaviors have been described in literature examining symbolic and imaginative play among young children.

Social interaction was also evident, as children shared ideas and participated in common play scenarios using the materials they had identified. The shared understanding of what the objects represented enabled children to engage in collaborative play experiences.

Children appeared excited, engaged, and enthusiastic while using natural materials in creative ways. The observation further demonstrated language use, as children verbally assigned names

and meanings to objects and communicated these ideas to others. Through conversation and shared understanding, children used language to maintain and expand their play activities.

Overall, the observation illustrates how children used imagination, communication, symbolic representation, and social interaction while engaging with materials available in their environment.

4.3.2 Social Interactions During Play

The researcher observed that children demonstrated cooperation, sharing, negotiation, turn-taking, friendship formation, leadership, conflict resolution, and communication.

The following are brief interpretations of each interactive domain.

4.3.2.1 Communication:

Refers to how children understand language and express their thoughts, feelings and needs using both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Observation 21- From the beginning of the data collection up to the end of all observations, the researcher observed that the ability, interest and exposure to language use is very high in children. Though the prevalently used language is English, the teachers and children use both English and Amharic language to communicate. The use of both languages helps the children to understand and retain verbal communication and information. It is observed that the Early Preschool class children use simple 2-4 phrases sentences while play to communicate including, it's yummy, eat, its warming, it grows, I am ironing a cloth, I'm a policeman, I see you, who are you?, hi, how are you?, I am fine, I like you, let's play, let's play together, what are you doing? I want this, give me, and bye. These word phrases are frequently used to express self and wants and needs.

Analysis 21- This finding emphasized how important early expressive language development, bilingual communication, and language exposure are to children's play and everyday interactions. In every scenario that was observed, children regularly spoke to teachers and classmates in both Amharic and English, demonstrating a flexible bilingual environment that promotes understanding, participation, and meaning-making. The frequent use of simple phrases like "it's yummy," "let's play," "I want this," and "what are you doing?" demonstrates

how toddlers are actively developing basic communication skills through play-based learning and everyday interactions.

This observation is relevant to early language acquisition, memory development and cognitive ability to associate words with actions and meanings. According to the literature review, language acquisition, which includes vocabulary growth, sentence formation, and understanding meaning in context is an essential component of cognitive development (Abilkassym et al., 2021). The children's use of short, practical phrases indicates that they are in the early stages of forming linguistic frameworks to express desire, ideas and observations. Regular exposure to bilingual communication enhances cognitive processing, comprehension, and language memory. Frequent use of phrases like "let's play together," "hello, how are you?" and "I like you" demonstrates the growth of social communication skills, friendship-building, and cooperative involvement. Communication is actively assisting the children's social integration, as seen by their use of language to start playing and convey social intents.

Phrases like "I like you," "I am fine," and "give me" show that children are learning to communicate their feelings and wants through words rather than just their actions. When children use language to convey irritation, affection, or requests, it helps them control their emotions.

From the perspective of cognitive and linguistic development, children often employ telegraphic speech to convey fundamental meaning during early childhood language development stages, which are reflected in the limited sentence structure (2-4-word phrases). Repetition of basic functional sentences improves communication confidence, pronunciation, and fluency.

Observation 22- The researcher observed that Preschoolers' language use while play is more developed and advanced than the Early Preschoolers. They use full sentences to express themselves, their wants and needs. They use words and sentences such as, I wanted to play with him but he said he doesn't want to play with me, I am your mommy and you're my little baby, come on guys let's play in our house, it's time to go to class, Pre-KG class time, I am a lion and I am going to chase you, where did you come from?, why are you here?, do you have sisters and brothers?, where is your mommy?, your dress is pretty, I like playing with you, I am full, I don't want to play anymore, I am going to my cousin's house on the weekend and we are going to eat

ice-cream, my mommy will take me to the playground later, I love ice-cream, my daddy is so big that he can pick me up.

Analysis 22- The observation showed that Preschool children used longer and more complex sentences than the Early Preschool children. During play activities, they communicated their ideas, experiences, preferences, and feelings through complete sentences and extended conversations. Children used language for a variety of purposes, including role-play, storytelling, asking questions, describing events, expressing opinions, and interacting with peers.

The observation demonstrated children's ability to communicate about both real-life and imaginary situations. Statements such as "I am your mommy and you're my little baby" reflected imaginative role-play, while comments about visiting relatives, eating ice cream, and spending time with family reflected children's use of personal experiences during conversations.

The children also used language to initiate social interaction, invite peers to participate in activities, organize play scenarios, and express feelings. Statements such as "come on guys, let's play in our house" and "I like playing with you" demonstrated communication and social engagement during play.

In addition, children expressed preferences, emotions, and personal experiences through conversation. The observation showed that language served as an important tool for maintaining social interaction, sharing ideas, and participating in both real and imaginary play situations.

Observation 23- Some of the children's vocabulary and articulations are much more advanced compared to their peers. One child approached a guest teacher who came that day and asked him "what are you doing here? the teacher replied, "I am observing you all play" He followed and asked, "why are you observing us play, are you a detective? The teacher replied, "I am not, I just want to see what kind of play you play so I can learn it for myself too" The students continued, "but you are an adult, aren't you supposed to know everything? The teacher followed, "not everything, I want to learn your way of playing" The student replied, "I can help you if you like, I am actually pretty good at everything." They went to play after.

Analysis 23- This observation highlighted some preschool-aged children's advanced language use, cognitive thinking, and developing metacognitive awareness, especially when interacting with an unknown adult (guest teacher). The boy demonstrated a comparatively high degree of

verbal and cognitive development in comparison to classmates by challenging adult authority assumptions, asking follow-up questions, and initiating conversation with complex, interrogative words.

In cognitive development, this interaction shows complex cognitive skills such as deduction, reasoning and early metacognition. His question, Why are you watching us play, and are you a detective? showed his ability to make creative deductions from the scant information and to metaphorically interpret the situation. In addition, the child displayed curiosity-driven inquiry, a key indicator of precognitive development and cognitive involvement. Moreover, the idea that adults know everything and the subsequent criticism of that idea point to the early emergence of epistemic understanding, or the understanding that knowledge is not absolute and that it can be shared and acquired by anyone.

The boy demonstrated increasing social competence and self-efficacy by actively interacting with a new adult, questioning presumptions, and offering help ("I can help you if you like") Strong social curiosity and decreased social inhibition are also indicated by the child's eagerness to engage with an adult stranger. The child showed no signs of hesitation or fear when speaking to an unfamiliar adult, suggesting emotional security and comfort in communication. The child's assertive tone reflected developing self-esteem and identity formation.

Observation 24- The researcher observed that communication amongst the Kindergartners is much more advanced as they are the oldest children in the school. They use long sentences, listen to each other while speaking, and have a back-and-forth conversation. They talk about their likes and dislikes, about their environment, the birds in the sky, the color of the flowers and their leaves around the compound. Some examples include- one girl started talking about the change of color in the sky saying "the sky is not blue anymore, it's all covered in clouds." The second girl followed and said "maybe it's going to rain." The third girl asked the second girl "how do you know?" then the second girl replied, "because rain comes from the clouds." They all stared at the sky with curiosity.

Analysis 24- This observation demonstrates advanced language development, social communication, and cognitive reasoning among the kindergarten children. Compared to the younger age groups, the Kindergartners engage in longer conversations, actively listen to one another, respond appropriately, and build upon each other's ideas. Their discussion about the sky,

clouds, and rain reflects not only strong verbal communication skills but also developing scientific reasoning and environmental awareness.

Rather than merely labeling objects in their environment, the children are making logical connections between observable events and prior knowledge. The statement "maybe it's going to rain" followed by the justification "because rain originates from the clouds" is an illustration of cause-and-effect reasoning and an understanding of natural processes. The children's ability to recognize and describe changes in their environment is a clear indication of their developing analytical thinking and comprehension skills.

The girls demonstrated their awareness of conversational standards by waiting for responses and directly responding to each other's comments. Additionally, the discussion demonstrated shared interest and involvement, which improves peer relationships and a sense of community.

Confidence and emotional stability in communication are demonstrated by their readiness to exchange ideas, pose queries, and react to one another. A supportive social setting where children feel comfortable expressing their curiosity and opinions is indicated by the casual verbal interchange.

The girls take turns in talking, utilize complete and coherent words, and ask pertinent follow-up questions. Higher-level linguistic functioning and conversational maturity are demonstrated by the children's use of descriptive language ("the sky is no longer blue"), explanatory language ("because rain comes from the clouds"), and inquiry ("how do you know?").

4.3.2.2 Cooperation:

Refers to the ability to work with others for a common goal rather than just solely to compete.

Observation 25- The researcher observed that during play time children are left by themselves to play. That on its own has its advantages as they are free to do whatever they want. They play together no matter which class they're from. The oldest children support and play with the younger ones. Whether it is to achieve a common goal or just to support peers, they cooperate and follow one another during play times as well as classroom activities.

Analysis 25- This finding highlighted how crucial unstructured, mixed-age play is for fostering children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Children are allowed to plan their own

activities, engage with peers of all ages, and take part in cooperative activities during playtime without strict adult supervision. The observation demonstrated how children instinctively build relationships, assist younger classmates, and work together during play and educational activities.

Regardless of age or class section, the children's willingness to play together demonstrated social flexibility and inclusivity. The growth of prosocial activities including assisting, mentoring, and encouraging others is also seen by older children aiding younger ones.

While older children gain confidence and responsibility through leadership positions, younger children are likely to feel encouraged and included when older peers engage them in play. Peer relationships are strengthened and pleasant emotional experiences are facilitated by the supportive partnerships that arise during mixed-age play.

4.3.2.3 Group Participation:

Refers to children's active and voluntary involvement in group activities that include collaborative work and decision-making processes.

Observation 26- This section was observed mostly during free play time as children are left to play on their own without any rules or teacher-guided activities. One child could scream lion, and the others follow, one child could chase his friend and the rest of them willingly run behind. They form groups without realizing they are, they don't discriminate, they just go with the flow. They all know each other even though they're from different sections, they exhibit togetherness, they understand each other even when they speak different languages or even when they're not speaking at all but screaming. They're like a herd but anyone can lead the group.

Analysis 26- Children naturally form groups during unstructured play, follow creative ideas that are shared, and cooperate on their own without the help of an adult. Children form social bonds, moving as a group while maintaining flexibility in leadership and participation, according to the observation.

The children "go with the flow," organizing into groups organically without discrimination or strict rules. The idea that "anyone can lead the group" illustrated how leadership during play is shared and dynamic rather than under the control of a single child, enabling several kids to participate and have an impact.

As they yell, chase, and react together, the children seem to be emotionally coordinated. Peer acceptance and emotional stability in the play setting are suggested by the lack of discrimination and the readiness to include one another regardless of section or language.

4.3.2.4 Leadership Behavior:

Is the capacity to inspire, guide and influence peers toward common/different goals. Rather than focusing on authority or control, it is rooted in traits like empathy, collaboration, communication, and taking.

Observation 27- It is observed that while children play, they exhibit leadership behaviors. Children learn and imitate one another in the way they talk, act, play and learn. They are seen to communicate, collaborate and empathize with others. The most highly anticipated observation falls on how the oldest children try to help the younger ones in how they play, move around, talk, guide, support and influence them in what they do. The younger children follow the leads and are seen become example for their peers by pointing out the acts and deeds of the older children. This was seen on the playground mostly as everyone is outside and playing. One example for this scenarios is- one child from the Preschool class was trying to help one of the children in the Early Preschool to climb the play structure, she asked assistance from her peers by saying “come help me, I am helping (calling the boy’s name) climb this like (called a boy from Upper Kindergarten) help us.” Three other girls came and help her push the boy up so he can climb.

Analysis 27- The observation showed cooperative interaction between children of different age groups during playground activities. When a younger child had difficulty climbing the play structure, an older child sought assistance from peers and coordinated a group effort to help him.

The interaction demonstrated cooperation, communication, and group participation. The child who initiated the assistance communicated clearly with peers, requested support, and encouraged others to participate in helping the younger child.

The observation also illustrated helping behavior and responsiveness to the needs of others. Several children willingly joined the activity and worked together toward a shared goal. Their actions demonstrated sensitivity to the situation and a willingness to assist a peer who required help.

The younger child accepted the assistance provided by the group and participated in the activity with the support of older children. The interaction reflects how children frequently engage in cooperative behaviors and peer support during play activities.

4.3.2.5 Conflict:

Refers to a clash of interests, disagreements and differing opinions and breakdown communication in children.

Observation 28- Conflicts happen as children play, when they have different opinions about things and they want to prove that they are right. When they like the same things/materials and they're too eager to keep it for themselves and refuse to share.

Analysis 28- The observation showed that disagreements frequently emerged when children had different opinions, wanted the same materials, or attempted to maintain control over preferred objects and activities. These situations often resulted in verbal disagreements, competition for resources, and efforts to persuade peers.

Children expressed their viewpoints, defended their opinions, and attempted to explain their actions to others. The observation demonstrated that conflict was a recurring part of children's social interactions during play.

The disagreements also revealed different emotional responses, including frustration, determination, disappointment, and possessiveness. Children often communicated these feelings verbally while interacting with peers.

The observation further showed that conflict situations involved communication, negotiation, and attempts to influence others. Children frequently tried to justify their actions, explain their perspectives, and convince peers that their ideas were correct. These interactions formed part of the everyday social experiences observed during play activities.

4.3.2.6 Conflict Resolution:

The process where children understand others interests and opinions from theirs, building empathy, recognizing feelings of themselves and others and communicating effectively to resolve disputes and disagreements. This section from all the areas is the one that shows limitations on children's ability to manage conflicts.

Observation 29- It is observed that whenever children have a misunderstanding, a conflict of interest or disagreements, they tend to look for an adult to complain to instead of trying to work it out with their friends. Children are not encouraged to exercise conflict resolution on their own, instead teachers are the ones to resolve it for them. Because of that, the children think it's the adults' job to resolve any situation they present to them. The other matter that was observed is that when adults are resolving the issues children present for them, they tend to focus on just appeasing the children and "make" them say sorry to each other without explaining the situation and letting the children take responsibility for their actions.

Analysis 29- The observation showed that children frequently sought assistance from teachers or other adults when disagreements, misunderstandings, or conflicts occurred. Rather than attempting to resolve disputes independently, many children preferred to report the situation to an adult and wait for guidance.

The observation suggests that adult involvement played a significant role in managing conflicts within the kindergarten setting. Teachers were commonly responsible for listening to concerns, interpreting situations, and determining appropriate solutions when disagreements arose.

Children appeared comfortable seeking support from adults and often viewed teachers as the primary source of assistance when interpersonal difficulties occurred. This pattern was observed repeatedly across different classrooms and age groups.

The finding highlights the prominent role of adults in conflict management within the observed setting and indicates that children frequently relied on teacher intervention during challenging social situations.

Observation 30- During recess, one child from kindergarten was trying to slide down the pole around the play structure, she figured on her own that she couldn't slide down as well as her peer does and she blamed her friend by saying "it's you" the other child followed and replied, "it's your fault, you can't blame me for something you couldn't do well." The girl kept blaming her friend and said "it's because of you I forgot how to do it well." The other girl left the scene without saying anything else.

Analysis 30- This observation showed how play gives children the chance to deal with conflict, frustration, emotional expression, and peer interaction. The incident started when a

kindergartener found it difficult to slide down a pole and blamed her friend for her failure. Children's growing social reasoning, emotional control, and communication abilities throughout difficult and disappointing times are reflected in the interaction.

This observation emphasized irritation, emotional expression, and the development of self-regulation from the standpoint of emotional development. The child's admission that "it's because of you I forgot how to do it well" indicates that they have trouble handling disappointment and accepting personal failure. As is typical in early infancy when self-regulation abilities are still developing, the youngster projected her irritation onto her peer rather than thoughtfully considering the difficulty.

The second child's decision to quietly leave the scene may also be a sign of her growing ability to manage her emotions and keep conflict from getting worse. The two girls' conversation demonstrated an early form of conflict resolution even though the issue was not resolved verbally. "You can't blame me for something you couldn't do properly," the second girl said in defense of herself, demonstrating the development of self-advocacy and perspective-taking abilities.

4.3.3 Emotional Expression and Regulation During Play

It is observed that children express their emotions using verbal and non-verbal communication while playing, though verbal communication is abundantly used, it is seen that some children prefer to express their emotions through crying, screaming, sulking and sometimes straying away from the group. Children expressed joy, excitement, frustration, pride, empathy, and affection. Emotional regulation was demonstrated through calming down, seeking teacher support, waiting turns, and resolving disagreements.

Here is a more detailed interpretation of each emotional expression included in this section.

4.3.3.1 Self-Control:

A gradual learning and development of the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, and impulses to achieve goals.

Observation 31- It is observed that children show impulsive behaviors while they play. They either get too excited or too emotional to express themselves. Their brains are working so fast

that they don't even know where their feet are stepping on. They exhibit higher order physical stimulation and body movement; however, they show little self-control and regulation while playing. They are usually found screaming loud.

Analysis 31- This observation showed that play gives children the chance to express themselves emotionally and physically, but it also shows that early infancy is a time when self-control and emotional regulation are still developing. Play is a stimulating and emotionally charged experience through which children explore their emotions, bodies, and social environment, as seen by the children's impulsive behaviors, extreme enthusiasm, loud shouting, and uncontrollable physical movements.

The children's tendency to get "too excited or too emotional" when playing indicates that they are still learning how to control intense emotions and urges. They exhibited spontaneous emotional expression through their loud shouting and uncontrollable behaviors, which is typical in early childhood when inhibitory control is still developing.

The findings showed that children's executive functioning abilities, including self-monitoring, impulse control, and attention regulation, are still evolving. However, because these skills are still developing in young children, they may become overwhelmed with enthusiasm and be unable to control their behavior or maintain complete awareness of their surroundings. The claim that "they don't even know where their feet are treading on" highlighted the difficulty children have striking a balance between bodily awareness and control and excitement.

4.3.3.2 Emotional Communication:

The overt communication of internal emotions and needs.

Observation 32- The researcher observed that though children tend to be more impulsive and too active while playing, they also express their emotions in what they do, through the plays they're exposing themselves to and through the relationship they form with their peers and adults. They get vulnerable and have more engaged communication with adults and seem unrestrained with their peers. This of course can be put in different ways as children come from different backgrounds, but from the observations the researcher had in the three weeks, the children are free spirited and expressive.

Analysis 32- This finding showed that play is a crucial way for children to communicate with peers and adults, develop relationships, and freely express their feelings. While playing, children may seem hasty and very active, but these actions also show emotional independence, self-assurance in social situations, and genuine self-expression. According to the research, play fosters an atmosphere in which kids feel psychologically secure enough to express their emotions, personalities, and social identities.

The children's "free spirited and expressive" conduct shows how play enables them to freely express feelings of joy, excitement, vulnerability, tenderness, frustration, and attachment. Emotional security in the play setting is suggested by their readiness to become emotionally involved with adults and unrestrained with peers. Through frequent play interactions, the children's emotional openness with peers and adults indicates that they are building interpersonal trust and social confidence.

Children actively analyzed events, communicated ideas, and created meaning about themselves and their relationships through play. Their expressive actions showed that play fosters the development of self-expression and personal identity in addition to intellectual advancement.

Play strengthens verbal interaction and expressive language skills, as seen by the children's increased conversation with classmates and adults. Children who communicate freely with their peers are particularly likely to be confident in their ability to use language and express themselves socially.

4.3.3.3 Comforting Behaviors:

Refers to both self-soothing (how they calm themselves) and pro-social comforting (how they comfort others).

Observation 33- It is observed that whenever children need comforting, they immediately look for their respective teachers to go and get a hug or comforting words such as, its ok, I love you, you're going to be fine, you're brave, my child, my love, my sweetheart...Its not observed on children trying to soothe themselves.

Analysis 33- This finding showed how much children rely on adults for emotional support, assurance, and self-control when they're upset. Instead of trying to calm themselves down on their own, children who are experiencing emotional pain or irritation instantly turn to trusted

adults for physical affection and consoling words. According to the research, teachers serve as attachment figures who give children stability and confidence during play and everyday interactions, and they play a significant emotional support role in the school setting.

The note underlined that children are increasingly emotional regulators and are emotionally dependent on outside help in terms of emotional development. Self-reliance and independent emotional control skills are still developing, as evidenced by the children's urgent reliance on teachers for comfort. Their need for consoling words, embraces, and assurances highlights the need of emotional co-regulation in early life, where adults assist kids in controlling intense emotions before they eventually learn to do it on their own.

Teachers' loving words, such "my child," "my love," and "you're brave," foster a caring atmosphere where kids feel protected and appreciated on an emotional level. These exchanges help kids feel more secure in their relationships and like they belong in the classroom.

The absence of self-soothing activities suggested that children's cognitive ability to regulate intense emotions on their own is still developing. Before children could integrate calming techniques on their own, emotional regulation was a long developmental process that frequently requires repeated adult modeling and support.

Children expressed their emotional needs through asking for assistance and physical proximity, and teachers employ emotionally supportive language to reassure them. Thus, consoling conversations support the growth of both communication and feeling.

4.3.3.4 Response to Success/Failure:

Refers to how children experience and respond to success and failure.

Observation 34- It is observed that children highly rely on adults' approval for doing something. They want to show off what they can do while playing by saying "miss, look what I can do" almost every one of the children say that to the teachers so they can get acknowledgments and praises for what they do. Children need to be encouraged for their efforts to try to do something and not just for the outcomes. They also need to be consistently reminded that every failure should be seen as a steppingstone to do better next time; something that is not observed at work in the school.

Analysis 34- Children's growing self-confidence, emotional reliance on adult approval, and need for recognition are reflected in their frequent attempts to get teachers' attention by exclaiming, "Miss, look what I can accomplish." Children became unduly outcome-oriented when praise is largely focused on successful performance rather than effort, perseverance, and improvement, even if adult encouragement can positively assist development.

Children look for praise because receiving recognition from dependable adults strengthens their sense of competence, confidence, and belonging. However, children may start to identify self-worth only with success if they receive praise only for results rather than effort, which makes it harder for them to deal with failure or mistakes.

The researcher's finding that children aren't often taught to view "failure as a steppingstone" points to a lost chance to encourage the formation of a growth mindset. Children's willingness to try challenging tasks, confidence, and cognitive flexibility would all be strengthened if they were encouraged to persevere despite failing. In addition to looking for praise on an individual basis, children also watched how adults react to others, which shapes social understanding and peer comparisons. Children's social confidence and involvement in group activities can therefore be influenced by positive adult comments.

4.3.4 Cognitive and Language Use During Play

In this section of the study, the researcher observed how children's cognitive development and language use could be nourished through play. Children demonstrated imagination, symbolic thinking, creativity, problem-solving, decision-making, memory, attention, storytelling, and language use.

The following are brief interpretations of each development areas included in this section.

4.3.4.1 Creativity:

Is an innate, exploratory process where children employ imagination, symbolic thinking and play to express emotions, solve problems and construct understanding of their environment. This section is more presented above in the types of play section.

Observation 35- The researcher observed that children are very curious about everything around them, use different materials to represent different ideas, and use play to express their creative

skills. The children explore their surroundings by using their senses and asking questions. As creativity is not the ability to create out of nothing, but the ability to generate new ideas by combining, changing or reapplying existing ideas, the children exhibit such behavior mostly in the classroom during indoor play time, a place where they find different objects they can manipulate.

Analysis 35- The children actively used the items in the classroom to symbolize various concepts, creatively used objects, and investigated their environment through inquiry and sensory engagement. Children can creatively reinterpret items and create new meanings from familiar objects in the classroom setting, which seemed to promote open-ended investigation.

The children's capacity to represent distinct concepts using a variety of materials showed their capacity for abstract thought and cognitive flexibility. Other than only using objects for their intended uses, the kids combine, modify, and repurpose what they already know to generate fresh concepts and creative scenarios. This lends credence to the idea that experimenting and the transformation of well-known events into novel forms foster creativity.

Children build knowledge through firsthand experience through touching, handling, observing, and questioning items. They demonstrated active cognitive engagement and a desire to comprehend the world around them through their inquisitive and curious behavior.

4.3.4.2 Imagination:

Is the internalization of children's play expressed as a force for their lives and higher order mental functioning. This section is further elucidated about in the exploratory play and pretend play.

Observation 36- It is observed that the children are very imaginative in their play. They imagine things that are not physically present, they imitate cartoon characters, superhero characters, athletes, and animals. They pretend to act as household demeanors, as schoolteachers and anything they find interesting and playful enough.

Analysis 36- The children made up scenarios based on nonexistent objects, such as fictional book characters, icons, athletes and amateurs, and even domestic duties. Their exceptional capacity to turn ordinary playing circumstances into imaginative ones demonstrates their sophisticated symbolic thinking and inventiveness.

Children learn to think beyond the immediate world and mentally represent concepts that are not physically evident by assuming the roles of various characters and imagining scenarios. This showed creative thinking and cognitive flexibility, two key dimensions of cognitive growth.

This observation also supported the discussion in the literature review of the pretend game as a tool for creative inquiry and different thinking. Children combine experiences from media, home environments, school settings, and social interactions to create new imaginative scenarios. Their imitation of superheroes, athletes, and animals shows how they creatively reorganize real-world experiences into playful representations. According to Vogt et al. (2021), play encourages creative expression and imaginative thinking by allowing children to explore possibilities beyond literal reality.

Because pretend play frequently entails cooperation, communication, role negotiation, and group engagement, the observation also reflects social development. To keep the imagined scenario going, children portraying various characters must communicate, assign roles, and react to one another. Children learn how to share imaginary experiences, take turns, and comprehend the viewpoints of others through role-playing.

Through symbolic play, children can safely express their feelings, desires, and personal interests by pretending to be strong superheroes, well-liked athletes, or compassionate teachers. Children may develop self-confidence, process events, and try out emotional roles and behaviors by acting out various identities.

Because imaginative play necessitates vocal communication of roles, actions, and ideas, the observation also emphasizes language development. Children utilize expressive language in role-playing to maintain social connection, negotiate roles, and tell stories.

4.3.4.3 Attention:

Refers to the ability to focus, sustain and shift concentration from tasks while filtering out distractions. As this study focuses on play activities in children, this topic is observed only in play matters to see children stay focused and sustain attention on different play activities.

Observation 37- It is observed that children engage in different types of play activities during their days. As they are most of the time left to play on their own (free play) the possibility of staying on one play activity in difference to the others is not more than 3-5 minutes. It is also

observed that when adults are involved in games, children tend to stay more than 5-10 minutes because adults make it easy for them to communicate, to give the game more structure while doing behavior managements and fairly distribute and assign roles. The researcher observed that children tend to stay on task for more time in indoor play compared to outdoor play whether it is for the same type of play they played outside or not.

Analysis 37- The researcher found that when children are playing freely, especially outside, they naturally switch between different play activities quickly, whereas indoor and adult-supported play activities tend to keep children interest and involvement for longer.

The literature review defines attention as the capacity to concentrate and sustain mental effort on a subject while blocking out distractions (Commodari, 2016). Children are exposed to a variety of stimuli, mobility possibilities, peers, and environmental diversions during unstructured outdoor play, which may help to explain why they frequently switch between activities in a matter of minutes. But it seems that children are better able to stay focused for longer when adults are involved and offer structure, direction, and order.

The observation also highlighted how indoor play promoted longer engagement compared to outdoor settings because there were fewer distractions and manipulable materials available. As a result, indoor environments may offer more favorable conditions for ongoing mental activity and creative exploration.

When playing under an adult's supervision, children appear to be more adept at cooperating, communicating clearly, sharing roles, and following rules. Adult presence reduces conflict and uncertainty and fosters more seamless group participation and prolonged engagement in shared activities by helping the kids arrange interactions more fairly and explicitly.

Children are observed to feel safer, more involved and more emotionally supported when there is structured interaction with adults during the play. Peer frustration, exclusion, and emotional conflict are probably lessened when roles are distributed fairly and behavior is controlled. Therefore, adult supervision help children control their emotions and maintain composure and concentration during group activities.

This observation also demonstrates language development. More opportunities for cooperative communication, role-negotiation, instruction-following, and linguistic contact are created by

adult-supported play. Children who are quieter or less self-assured may be encouraged to communicate more actively by adult assistance.

4.3.4.4 Problem Solving:

Is the ability to recognize challenges, think of possible solutions and test them out to solve a given difficulty. This area was observed thoroughly to see how children solve problems when facing challenging tasks, when they have differing opinions from friends and see reactions when there is a possible and visible choice for solving a given problem.

Observation 38- It is observed that most of the children are not exposed to solving a problem on their own, or when they're exposed to solving it for themselves, there's no follow up to the action and steps they took. They're not encouraged to acknowledge what the problem is. The children are very communicative; they speak to each other they try to do things on their own. But most of the time they look for an adult when difficulty with materials, friends or with themselves arises.

Analysis 38- Important aspect of children's cognitive, social, and emotional development are highlighted by this observation, especially in relation to problem-solving, independence, communication, and dependence on adults in trying circumstances. The observation indicated that the children are not regularly encouraged to independently recognize problems, consider solutions, or assess the actions they take when difficulties arise, even though they have great communication skills and a willingness to engage with peers.

The literature review states that problem-solving entails identifying difficulties, evaluating circumstances, and testing potential solutions to get beyond roadblocks (Mehadi Rahman, 2019). Even though the children do things on their own and interact with their classmates, they usually contact adults for help when they run into problems with supplies, friendships, or personal annoyances. This implied that the play environment may not yet completely develop or continuously promote possibilities for autonomous critical thinking and reflective problem-solving.

The finding also showed that the children might not be getting enough support to consciously identify and comprehend the steps required in problem-solving. The literature study claims that when children are encouraged to experiment, investigate solutions, and comprehend cause-and-

effect linkages, play fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Children may grow reliant on adults instead of gaining confidence in their own reasoning skills if there is no regular follow-up or reflection on how difficulties are resolved.

Before requesting adult assistance, they try to handle difficulties on their own, communicate with peers, and engage in collaborative activities. The children's propensity to approach adults during disagreements or difficulties shows that they are becoming more conscious of social norms and emotional safety, but it also suggests that their ability to resolve conflicts may still be developing and needs more assistance.

The observation highlighted children's emotional need for comfort, emotional stability, and outside assistance when problems occur. Children who seek out adults in difficult or frustrating situations may still be developing their emotional resilience and self-assurance in handling problems on their own. Therefore, adult assistance can be crucial, but with time, children's emotional independence and self-confidence may be better strengthened by balanced direction that stimulates reflection and problem-solving.

4.3.4.5 Decision Making:

Is a process of cognitive development where children selectively choose a course of action from two or more available options.

Observation 39- The researcher observed that the children's decision-making skill blooms during free play time where children tend to make choices of their own through evaluating situations. This is observed through how they show a behavior of how they would want to play a given game in collaboration with others, by themselves or in a group, as well as how they show their preference in playing a given play activity from all the other choices. Even though the children showed high understanding and maturity when it comes to selecting to play a preferable game or activity of their own, it is also observed that they tend to follow and imitate each other a lot that individual preferences could be overlooked in the crowd.

Analysis 39- This finding highlighted how crucial unstructured play is for fostering children's independence, decision-making, social awareness, and cognitive growth. Children have the chance to autonomously assess circumstances, choose favorite activities, and determine whether they want to play alone, with others, or in a bigger group during free play. Children actively

consider their options and involvement, demonstrating growing maturity and independence in their play behavior, according to the observation.

The literature review defines decision-making as the process by which children select a plan of action from a variety of possibilities. Children evaluated various games, social settings, and activity options during free play before determining how they wish to engage. Growing cognitive maturity and self-directed thinking are demonstrated by the children's capacity to choose preferred activities and gauge their level of participation.

The children's choices regarding whether to play alone or with others show their developing social awareness and relationship awareness. Nonetheless, the finding that individual preferences are occasionally disregarded in group environments implies that kids are still learning how to strike a balance between their own interests and peer pressure and group expectations.

4.3.4.6 Communication Skills:

Refers to the ability to use spoken language to communicate and express thoughts, needs and emotions while also understanding and responding to others. This section is presented in the social interaction in play section thoroughly.

Observation 40- It is observed that the children are exposed and encouraged to use spoken language to express their needs, thoughts and feelings while understanding and responding to others. Though the researcher is focused mainly on the general population as a sample, there was this girl in Preschool classroom who is verbal but chooses to use nonverbal communication such as making noises when she wants attention, when she wants to be part of a play activity with her peers, and when she wants something to be resolved. This behavior of hers makes her peers uncomfortable and they usually overlook her in a game which makes her more anxious and complain more.

Analysis 40- This finding highlighted the significance of spoken language for children social engagement as well as the difficulties that might occur when communication problems interfere with playtime peer interaction and emotional control. The observation of a preschool girl who mainly uses nonverbal communication shows how communication styles can affect children's social inclusion, emotional experiences, and participation in play activities, even though the

majority of students in the classroom are encouraged to verbally express their thoughts, feelings, and needs.

From the standpoint of language development, the discovery highlighted how important spoken language is to children's ability to interact with others and communicate successfully. However, the child observed may have difficulty expressing herself properly and in a way that her classmates can understand, as she may prefer to communicate nonverbally by sounds rather than words.

The observation also reflects important aspects of social development, such as peer relationships, inclusion, cooperation, and social communication. In this case, the child's nonverbal communication style appears to impede easy peer connection, which causes discomfort for peers and reduces participation in group play. This could affect her ability to form strong peer relationships and feel socially accepted in the classroom.

The girl may have difficulty expressing her feelings verbally, as she appears to use sounds and non-verbal behaviors to gain attention, to express her needs, and to overcome barriers. She may become more anxious and frustrated as a result of being repeatedly ignored by her peers, which may lead to more aggressive attempts to attract attention or to express discomfort. This cycle shows how emotional health and social trust can be directly affected by communication problems.

4.4 Frequency and Duration of Play Activities

An important finding of the study relates to the frequency and duration of children's exposure to play activities throughout the school day. During the three-week observation period, play was observed as a regular and recurring component of the daily routine across all classrooms at Gifted Hands Kindergarten. Children were exposed to both structured and unstructured play opportunities during classroom activities, learning center sessions, outdoor recess periods, and teacher-guided experiences.

Based on the daily schedule and classroom observations, children engaged in play activities for several hours each day, although the exact duration varied according to age level and classroom routine. The Early Preschool children experienced the greatest amount of play exposure, as much

of their learning was organized through play-based activities. These children participated in free exploration of classroom materials, dramatic play, physical play, creative play, and outdoor play opportunities throughout the day. On average, they were observed engaging in play-related activities for approximately four to five hours daily, either directly or as part of play-integrated learning experiences.

Preschool and Lower Kindergarten children were also exposed to play on a regular basis. While they participated in more structured learning activities than the Early Preschool group, play remained an important part of their daily experiences. These children were observed engaging in free play, cooperative play, physical play, and teacher-guided activities for an estimated three to four hours per day.

Upper Kindergarten children participated in comparatively more academic and teacher-directed activities. However, play continued to be incorporated through learning centers, educational games, collaborative activities, construction play, and outdoor recess sessions. Observations indicated that these children were exposed to approximately two to three hours of play-related experiences daily.

The observations further revealed that play was not restricted to designated recess periods. Children frequently incorporated playful behaviors into classroom learning activities, transitions between lessons, group tasks, and interactions with peers. As a result, play functioned as a continuous feature of the learning environment rather than a separate activity occurring only at specific times of the day.

Across the three-week observation period, free play, physical play, and pretend play were the most frequently observed forms of play. These activities occurred daily and often involved active participation from a large number of children. In contrast, solitary play was observed less frequently, as most children preferred engaging with peers in group-based activities and shared play experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that children at Gifted Hands Kindergarten were exposed to play opportunities for a substantial portion of the school day. The consistent occurrence of play across classroom and outdoor settings suggests that play constituted an integral aspect of children's

daily experiences within the kindergarten environment. Across all age groups, play was observed daily and occupied a substantial portion of the school routine.

Play Types	Frequency
Free Play	Very frequent
Physical Play	Very frequent
Pretend Play	Frequent
Cooperative Play	Moderate
Solitary Play	Rare
Guided Play	Moderate

4.5 Discussion in Relation to Existing Literatures

The findings of this study revealed that children frequently demonstrated a variety of social, emotional, cognitive, and language-related behaviors while participating in different forms of play. The observations showed that play served as a context in which these behaviors were expressed and observed. The findings are discussed in relation to existing literature that has documented similar patterns among children engaged in play activities. Due to the observational nature of the study, the findings do not establish that play caused these behaviors or developmental outcomes; rather, they describe behaviors that were observed during play and compare them with those reported in previous research.

Play and Social Development

The findings revealed that children frequently demonstrated social behaviors such as cooperation, sharing, negotiation, leadership, communication, and conflict resolution during play activities. Children continuously interacted with peers during both indoor and outdoor play experiences by exchanging ideas, assigning roles, sharing materials, and maintaining shared play scenarios. These findings are consistent with existing literature which reports that such social behaviors are commonly observed in children's play experiences (Jaggy et al., 2022).

The findings also align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in children's learning experiences. Throughout the observations, children actively participated in cooperative and imaginative activities that required communication,

collaboration, and role negotiation. For example, children worked together while constructing a Lego "dream house" and coordinated their actions during group games such as "run, dance, and freeze." These observations illustrate how children engaged in collaborative interactions during play.

Similarly, previous studies have documented that play settings often provide opportunities for peer interaction, communication, and group participation. The friendships, negotiations, leadership behaviors, and cooperative interactions observed in this study are therefore consistent with patterns reported in the literature.

Play and Emotional Development

The findings revealed that children expressed a wide range of emotions during play activities, including excitement, happiness, frustration, pride, empathy, affection, and disappointment. Children were also observed responding to emotional situations by seeking support, calming themselves, comforting peers, waiting their turn, or expressing their feelings verbally.

These findings are consistent with previous literature describing play as a setting in which children commonly express and experience different emotions. Existing studies suggest that play environments often provide opportunities for children to display emotional reactions, empathy, self-control, and emotional communication. Similar emotional behaviors were observed throughout the present study.

The observations also reflected the psychoanalytic perspective of play, which views play as a medium through which children express thoughts, feelings, wishes, and experiences symbolically. The imaginative scenarios, role-playing activities, and pretend situations observed during the study provided examples of children expressing emotions and personal interests within socially accepted play contexts.

Rather than demonstrating that play caused emotional development, the findings indicate that emotional behaviors and emotional interactions were frequently observed while children were engaged in play activities.

Play and Cognitive Development

The findings revealed that children frequently demonstrated cognitive and language-related behaviors during play activities. These included imagination, symbolic thinking, creativity, problem-solving, decision-making, storytelling, questioning, concentration, and vocabulary use. Children were observed creating imaginative scenarios, assigning roles, solving practical challenges, asking questions, and communicating ideas with peers and adults.

These observations are consistent with existing literature which describes imaginative thinking, symbolic representation, creativity, language use, and problem-solving as behaviors commonly observed during children's play experiences. Similar patterns have been reported by researchers examining children's engagement in pretend play, exploratory play, and cooperative play activities.

The findings also align with Piaget's cognitive perspective, which emphasizes active engagement with the environment. Throughout the observations, children manipulated objects, explored materials, experimented with ideas, and created imaginative representations of familiar experiences. These behaviors reflected active engagement with their surroundings.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that play directly caused cognitive development. Instead, the study demonstrates that cognitive and language-related behaviors were frequently observed while children were participating in play activities. The findings are therefore consistent with previous studies that have documented similar behaviors in play settings.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored children's play experiences and the social, emotional, and cognitive behaviors demonstrated during play activities at Gifted Hands Kindergarten. Through three weeks of classroom and playground observations, the study documented the types of play in which children engaged, the frequency of play activities, and the behaviors children demonstrated while participating in play.

The findings revealed that play was a regular part of children's daily experiences and occurred in both indoor and outdoor settings. Children participated in a variety of play activities, including free play, physical play, pretend play, cooperative play, constructive play, and teacher-guided play. Free play, physical play, pretend play, and social play were observed most frequently across the different age groups.

The observations showed that children frequently demonstrated social behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, communication, negotiation, leadership, friendship formation, and conflict resolution during play activities. Children also expressed a range of emotions, including excitement, happiness, pride, empathy, frustration, and disappointment. In addition, cognitive and language-related behaviors such as imagination, creativity, symbolic thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, storytelling, questioning, and vocabulary use were commonly observed during play.

The findings are generally consistent with existing literature describing play as a context in which children commonly demonstrate social, emotional, cognitive, and language-related behaviors. However, because the study employed an observational design and was conducted over a three-week period, the findings do not establish a causal relationship between play and developmental outcomes. Rather, the study documents behaviors that were observed while children were engaged in play activities.

Overall, the study highlights the significant role of play within the kindergarten environment as a common context for children's interaction, communication, emotional expression, imagination, and exploration. The findings contribute to a better understanding of children's play experiences and the behaviors that occur during play in an early childhood education setting.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

For Schools and Early Childhood Education Centers

Schools should continue to provide children with regular opportunities to engage in a variety of play activities throughout the school day. The observations indicated that children frequently participated in free play, physical play, pretend play, and cooperative play activities. Therefore, early childhood education centers should ensure that sufficient time, space, and materials are available to support diverse play experiences in both indoor and outdoor settings.

Schools should also maintain learning environments that encourage interaction, communication, creativity, exploration, and active participation among children. Providing a balance between structured learning experiences and play opportunities may help create engaging and developmentally appropriate learning environments for young children.

For Teachers

Teachers should continue to observe children's interactions and behaviors during play activities, as play provides valuable opportunities to understand children's interests, communication patterns, emotional expressions, and problem-solving approaches. Teachers can use these

observations to plan activities that respond to children's needs and encourage meaningful engagement.

Teachers should also facilitate inclusive play opportunities that encourage participation from all children and support positive peer interactions. Particular attention should be given to children who participate less frequently in group play activities to ensure that they have opportunities to engage with their peers.

For Future Researchers

Future studies should employ longer observation periods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of children's play experiences over time. Since the present study was conducted over a three-week period, extended observations may capture a broader range of behaviors and play patterns.

Future researchers may also consider using multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews with teachers and parents, focus group discussions, and developmental assessment tools, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of children's experiences during play. Comparative and longitudinal studies may further contribute to understanding how children's play experiences vary across different contexts and age groups.

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