

Formulating a Model for Enhancing Children's Social Skills as a Prerequisite for Development

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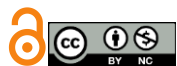
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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present research was to provide a model for enhancing children's social skills as a prerequisite for development.

Methodology: The research method was qualitative, and the target population included managers of toy manufacturing companies, experienced specialists, experts in the toy industry, policymakers, and university professors. The sample size was selected purposefully until theoretical saturation from the aforementioned statistical population. In this phase, using an exploratory semi-structured interview method among the statistical population, the factors and components of children's social skills were identified. With the help of these factors and indicators, a grounded theory-based model for enhancing children's social skills was designed.

Findings: According to the results and outputs obtained from the interviews, the factors affecting the model for enhancing children's social skills include causal conditions (the existing potential of games for development, financial and human resource issues in game design and production, deficiencies in policies and laws related to skill development in children, corporate culture and management attitudes, systematic and strategic planning for capability development), contextual conditions (management issues, infrastructure, economic conditions, corporate, legal and regulatory factors, corporate systems and processes), intervening conditions (knowledge and scientific factors, governmental and political factors, environmental factors, individual factors, corporate culture), strategies (allocating appropriate budgets, employing specialized personnel, formulating and implementing training and development programs, using modern technology in processes, providing development incentives, monitoring and evaluating improvement and development), and outcomes (increased skill development and growth, improved quality of services provided, family satisfaction and enhanced participation, increased productivity and improved performance, creating play opportunities, enhancing play skill capabilities).

Conclusion: Therefore, studying these movements and providing opportunities for their nurturing and growth strengthens and even repairs mental abilities. What children learn at home or kindergarten, they think about and derive many meanings from these phenomena when repeated in the form of games and physical activities.

Keywords: *Conceptual Model, Children's Social Skills, Development, Toys.*

1 Introduction

If culture is interpreted as a collection of the material and spiritual values of a society, and in the realm of material culture, in addition to architecture and related structures, we consider human-made structures such as tools, devices, and equipment with various applications, it can be rightly inferred that toys are the most cultural tools available in the world of children and are the most necessary tools for education and learning (Boichuk & Stadnik, 2023; Teymuri, 2013).

Children's toys play a significant role in enculturation and socialization. From the very beginning of life, children become familiar with this phenomenon and learn social roles through group play, connecting with the surrounding world. Overall, the power of play is extraordinary. Contrary to superficial beliefs, play, especially childhood play, is a serious and constructive activity that significantly impacts the growth and development of children's social skills and socialization (Rafat, 2022). The outcome of children's social growth and development through toys and modern educational games, which are sometimes imported, means that children using such toys often adopt new perspectives, paving the way for the emergence of modern individuals in the educational system, the Iranian family, and Iranian society (Barimani et al., 2018).

It is noteworthy that socialization occurs when children learn the norms, values, and beliefs of the society they live in and apply these methods in their social life and interactions with others. Naturally, in the education and training of social and cultural affairs, the growth and development of "toys and games" play a vital role in modernizing socialization and acquiring social skills in children. It is essential to note that toys, as educational tools, are modern phenomena within the cultural context of Iranian society (Sabori Khosro Shahi, 2010).

In this regard, some theorists, such as McClelland and Engels, believe that the primary condition for modernization at social levels is to create changes and transformations at social, psychological, and individual levels. They argue that modernization is a process through which individuals' values, attitudes, perceptions, personal characteristics, etc., change, which is achieved through experiences like

civilization, education (toys), information dissemination, social and group activities within organizational institutions (Clarke et al., 2004).

Engels and Smith, sociological theorists of development, have raised the question of whether the exposure of third-world people to Western modernity influences, such as imported toys, will make their attitudes more progressive than before. Consequently, they conducted comparative studies in Argentina, Israel, India, Chile, Nigeria, and Pakistan. Engels concluded that modern individuals believe in science, mobility, readiness to accept new experiences, and long-term planning. Education and training, such as group play, educational toys, mass media, and factory work, are of utmost importance in the modernization process (Clarke et al., 2004; van Gennip et al., 2009; Verver et al., 2020).

Through the socialization process, children also learn about their culture, and cultural transmission occurs during socialization. Socialization in children begins at birth. In all societies and nations, the goal of socializing children is to prepare them for their future roles as adults. Another goal is to transmit society's values and norms to them to teach social order and cohesion. Children's socialization is influenced by numerous factors and will significantly impact society in the long run (Boichuk & Stadnik, 2023).

These children will build the future of every country and, over the years and decades, will become the human capital of their nations. Neglecting socialization and downplaying its importance will lead to many challenges and issues for countries. Thus, social-behavioral skills are one of the main components of socialization in all human societies and various cultures globally. Among the ways to acquire cultural capital in children is through the social role of play, toys, and educational games. Sometimes, children attribute cultural significance to their toys and any object they interact with, thereby helping their experiences shape their emerging attitudes, values, and beliefs. It is said that toys do not determine the lines of attitude, value, and belief formation but make the formation possible (Teymuri, 2013).

Therefore, possessing social skills is crucial for establishing and maintaining relationships and receiving positive feedback for social behaviors. Additionally, achieving such skills is essential for peer acceptance. Social

skills are measurable and observable behaviors that enhance independence, acceptance, and quality of life. They are vital for adaptation and normal functioning, and deficiencies in them are associated with behavioral and psychological problems (Ekin et al., 2018; Sanchez et al., 2017). Social skills play a fundamental role in the transition from childhood to adulthood and are seen as children's ability to develop positive interactions with peers and adults. Children who acquire social skills will be more successful in their careers and social relationships as adults. Even in environments with significant support, children need a repertoire of social skills to enter society, establish sustainable interactions, and become socially independent (Charlop et al., 2018; Wong & Yeung, 2019).

The relationship between social skills and behavioral problems indicates that any intervention addressing behavioral problems or social skills training must consider the connection between these two areas. Teaching social skills without considering behavioral issues and their impact will be challenging. Therefore, the present study aims to provide a model for enhancing children's skills as a prerequisite for development.

2 Methods and Materials

This research is considered fundamental in terms of its objective (which also has practical aspects). Achieving this goal requires a strategy that involves theory construction. According to Strauss's model recommendation, qualitative research methods such as interviews should be used for social issues; thus, the Grounded Theory (GT) qualitative research method was employed in this study.

According to Strauss's model recommendation, qualitative research methods such as interviews should be used for social issues. Grounded Theory is a type of qualitative research method used to study social issues. In this method, the theory must be discovered, and theory generation is based on working with data. With this method, data are identified through coding, leading to the creation of categories and themes, and eventually, hypotheses about the general issue are formed, making the theory directly related to the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To elucidate Grounded Theory, enhancing children's social skills through toys was considered a central variable, and the main storyline was defined using reminders and

diagrams. Ultimately, the resulting theory was formulated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this study, to construct a coherent theory through data collection and inductive data analysis, considering there is no reliable theory to formulate a testable hypothesis, interviews with specialists in this field lead to model design and hypothesis creation for testing the topic and validating the model.

As stated, this study constructs a model for enhancing children's social skills. The mentioned approach emphasizes data analysis through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In open coding, qualitative data are broken down into smaller parts, and categories of information related to the phenomenon are formed. At this stage, the main categories (classes) and sub-categories (features) are extracted by analyzing the collected data from interviews, observations, daily notes, and field notes. Open coding continues until category saturation is achieved through a back-and-forth (zigzag) process.

At this stage, using exploratory semi-structured interviews among the above-mentioned statistical population, the factors and components of enhancing children's social skills are identified. These factors and indicators are categorized into more limited dimensions, based on which the final questionnaire for the model of enhancing children's social skills is proposed and prepared. The sampling method at this stage is purposeful, and the sample size is sufficient or reaches theoretical saturation.

For analyzing the interview data, the text of each interview is first reviewed, and conceptual labels are selected based on key sentences and points in the interview. After initial coding, the researcher combines the codes and places similar codes into abstract categories called themes. Finally, by placing similar themes at a specific conceptual level, they are extracted, and based on them, a paradigmatic model is presented in axial and selective coding, which will be explained further.

3 Findings and Results

In this study, to develop a model for enhancing children's social skills, the interview texts and documents were analyzed through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. The initial coding sample in the first stage is presented in Table 1.

Table 1*Initial Coding Sample*

Interview	Initial Codes	Interview	Initial Codes	Interview	Initial Codes
P1	Multiple abilities	P3	Low advertising to encourage skill development	P2	Securing appropriate funding from the government
P1	Diverse games	P5	Lack of clear vision for children's skill development	P1	Development of toy production hubs
P3	Dedicated budget	P1	Government control	P1	Training specialists based on skill needs
P2	Securing investment	P2	Lack of performance indicators related to children's skill development	P1	Changing university educational frameworks based on children's skill needs
P7	Regular evaluation and monitoring of games	P7	Political challenges and existing limitations	P3	Motivating human resources to join companies to foster skill development
P1	Analyzing children's needs in various domains and identifying necessary skills	P1	Corporate policies based on government policies	P5	Appointing managers based on competence
P5	Designing and implementing programs for educational games	P5	High dynamics of current technologies	P1	Existing managerial expertise related to skill development
P4	Creating suitable conditions for retaining valuable workforce	P14	Lack of alignment of companies with technological growth	P2	Collecting data and information related to educational needs
P9	Encouraging and promoting the culture of discovering internal talents in the company	P17	Traditional frameworks in companies	P7	Providing solutions and programs for children's skill development through play
P6	Designing and implementing programs for developing children's skills	P6	Not prioritizing development and growth in child training centers	P1	Determining educational objectives and content for games

After identifying the initial indicators, the codes were categorized. In this step, words, sentences, and paragraphs from the interviews or reports were examined to extract words and phrases related to enhancing children's social skills. These words and phrases were then named and assigned initial codes.

3.1 Causal Conditions

In this model, causal conditions are the encouraging or compelling factors for utilizing the components of developing the capabilities of educational and social toys. These are factors that companies may have paid less attention to but are now prompted/compelled to consider due to current circumstances. Thus, factors considered in this section are those that have temporal precedence and compulsory conditions impacting the main phenomenon. In this research, concepts such as existing knowledge and capabilities, current cultural and social conditions, budget for training and skill development, attracting and retaining experienced and specialized workforce, utilizing domestic human resources based on children's skill needs, formulating and amending policies and laws related to children's skill education, implementing laws and policies with a focus on developing skill capabilities, developing a corporate culture based on learning and innovation, training managers in

enhancing toy production and skill capabilities, and formulating strategic plans for skill capability development, effective coordination between skill development programs and operational plans of the company were identified as causal concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the causal conditions in this model are: the existing potential of games for development, financial and human resource issues in game design and production, deficiencies in policies and laws related to children's skill development, corporate culture and managerial attitudes, systematic and strategic planning for capability development.

3.2 Contextual Conditions

Based on the coding of interview texts, contextual conditions refer to the existing infrastructural and superficial conditions for developing the capabilities of educational and social toys. These are conditions that should be considered for better success in developing these capabilities. These conditions do not have specific positive or negative effects but are factors that should be included in the features of processes and tools used. In this research, concepts such as budget and capital allocation, management and planning, required hardware and software facilities, the financial status of companies, wage and salary conditions, knowledge

weaknesses, legal and regulatory frameworks, company systems and processes based on skill development needs, monitoring and evaluation for improving development were identified as contextual concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the contextual conditions in this model are: managerial issues, infrastructure, economic conditions, corporate, legal and regulatory factors, company systems, and processes.

3.3 *Intervening Conditions*

Unlike contextual conditions, intervening conditions are those that have positive or negative impacts on the development of the capabilities of educational and social toys and can facilitate or accelerate their implementation and success or cause disruption as limitations. Therefore, concepts in this part of the model are different from the neutral contextual conditions in this regard. In this research, concepts such as inadequate understanding of development capabilities, insufficient motivation, government decisions, impacts of political decisions, growing technologies, lack of dynamism among toy producers, social factors, working conditions, societal culture, and corporate culture were identified as intervening concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the intervening conditions in this model are: knowledge and scientific factors, government and political factors, environmental factors, individual factors, corporate culture.

3.4 *Strategies*

In the strategy dimension, the main actions and activities that can lead to successful development of the capabilities of educational and social toys were considered. The difference between this dimension and the main phenomenon is that the concepts and categories in this dimension are not procedural but action-oriented and help in implementing strategies for developing these capabilities. In this research, concepts such as securing investment, revenue-enhancing strategies, focusing on proper training and utilizing university outputs, employing specialized managers, analyzing educational and skill development needs, designing and planning educational programs, implementing and evaluating educational programs, identifying and selecting suitable modern technologies, executing process optimization projects using technologies, designing and implementing educational programs for technology usage, designing and implementing reward and incentive systems for developing skill capabilities, evaluating and challenging rewards and

incentives, designing and implementing performance monitoring systems for skill development, conducting evaluations and feedback based on performance, improving based on evaluation results were identified as strategy concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the strategies in this model are: allocating appropriate budget, employing specialized personnel, formulating and implementing training and development programs, utilizing modern technology in processes, providing skill development incentives, monitoring and evaluating improvement and development.

3.5 *Outcomes*

Finally, in the outcomes dimension, expected tangible and intangible results and the conditions of the toy production industry were considered. Expected outcomes that can result from implementing processes, actions, and strategies for developing educational and social toy capabilities. In this research, concepts such as economic and scientific improvement, increased societal welfare, identifying children's needs, improving processes and systems for higher quality services, implementing activities to increase family satisfaction, developing mechanisms to hear parents' voices, improving operational processes of toy production, using productivity management methods and tools, managing and tracking company performance for improvement, identifying and creating job opportunities within the company, developing professional advancement and employee promotion programs, identifying corporate capability needs, developing programs and activities for enhancing play skill capabilities, facilitating and promoting interactions between companies were identified as outcome concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the outcomes in this model are: increased development and skill growth, improved quality of services provided, family satisfaction and enhanced participation, increased productivity and performance improvement, creating play opportunities, enhancing play skill capabilities.

After extracting secondary codes, selective codes were defined. Each of these codes is discussed below, and the final model is depicted at the end. As mentioned above, after the initial coding stage, by analyzing the data and repeatedly combining seemingly different open codes in similar and meaningful processes, open codes were merged into more abstract concepts, and the components were categorized, ultimately identifying causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes.

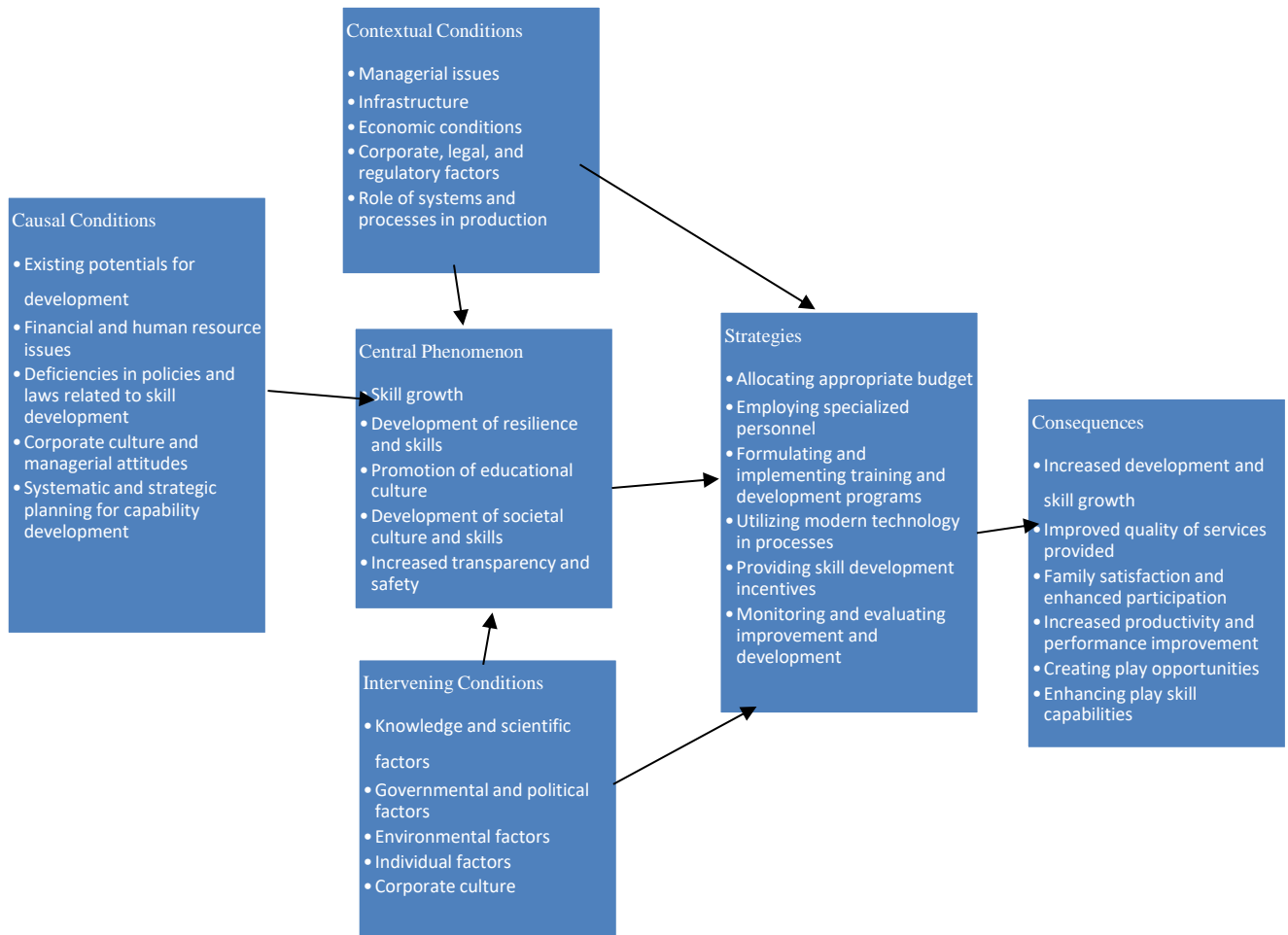
Based on these components, a process model for enhancing children's social skills was designed.

Based on this, Figure 1 shows the model for enhancing children's social skills. The factors affecting the

enhancement of children's social skills include causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes. Each of these components also has sub-components, which can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Model for Enhancing Children's Social Skills



4 Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results obtained from expert interviews, the interviewees generally provided their opinions on the components of the model. According to these opinions and the six dimensions of the model, the measures related to each dimension were differentiated. However, with the analyses and iterations that were conducted, some adjustments were made to the initial responses of these individuals. Therefore, the storyline and criteria for selecting concepts in each dimension of the model are in line with the explanations below. The propositions obtained in the research model are also presented below.

In this model, causal conditions are the encouraging or compelling factors for utilizing the components of developing the capabilities of educational and social toys. These factors may have been less considered by companies but currently compel companies to pay more attention to this phenomenon. Thus, factors that have temporal precedence and compulsory conditions affecting the main phenomenon are considered in this section. In this research, concepts such as existing knowledge and capabilities, current cultural and social conditions, budget for training and skill development, attracting and retaining experienced and specialized workforce, utilizing domestic human resources based on children's skill needs, formulating and amending policies and laws related to children's skill education, implementing

laws and policies with a focus on developing skill capabilities, developing a corporate culture based on learning and innovation, training managers in enhancing toy production and skill capabilities, formulating strategic plans for skill capability development, effective coordination between skill development programs and operational plans of the company were identified as causal concepts. Ultimately, based on the obtained propositions, the causal conditions in this model are: the existing potential of games for development, financial and human resource issues in game design and production, deficiencies in policies and laws related to children's skill development, corporate culture and managerial attitudes, systematic and strategic planning for capability development.

The results of the present research align with the findings of studies conducted on preschool games and mental skills (Akyol & Yaşar, 2022; Barimani et al., 2018; Boichuk & Stadnik, 2023; Charlop et al., 2018; dos Santos Nunes et al., 2017; Ekin et al., 2018; Rafat, 2022; Sanchez et al., 2017; Verver et al., 2020; Wong & Yeung, 2019).

These findings can be explained by stating that through educational games in preschool, not only are motor skills in children strengthened, but mental skills are also nurtured and developed. Mental abilities are not separate from basic motor abilities. Therefore, studying these movements and providing opportunities for their nurturing and growth strengthens and even repairs mental abilities. What children learn at home or kindergarten, they think about and derive many meanings from these phenomena when repeated in the form of games and physical activities. Additionally, during play, characteristics such as accuracy, memory, imagination, order, agility, skill, and more grow and develop in children. Furthermore, from an early age, children acquire and reinforce concepts such as quantity, distance, size, number, and space from their direct experiences. They better understand the connections between phenomena and comprehend mental issues (related to understanding basic concepts) more easily and accurately. Therefore, providing activities and movements in the form of games and stimulating children's interest and motivation significantly enhance their learning ability, especially if the games align with their desires and interests (Barimani et al., 2018; Sanchez et al., 2017).

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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