

**The Play-Based Behaviours of Emirati Preschool Children:  
A descriptive cultural study of children's play habits and  
review of current play-based practices in Dubai**

السلوكيات القائمة على اللعب لدى الأطفال الإماراتيين دون سن المدرسة  
دراسة ثقافية وصفية لعادات لعب الأطفال واستعراض للممارسات القائمة على  
اللعب الحالية في دبي

by

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**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

at

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Play-Based Behaviors of Emirati Preschool Children: A descriptive cultural study of children's play habits and review of current play-based practices in nurseries in Dubai**

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The British University in Dubai, 2019  
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The United Arab Emirates current policy and curriculum guide for Early Childhood Education Centers advocates for the use of play-based approaches and emphasizes the importance of child-centered learning practices, similar to those advocated for in the West. However, effective pedagogical approaches for best practice reforms must reflect a sociocultural perspective and suit the context of application. The main targets of the research were to first, uncover the way in which Emirati children's and Western children's' play is scaffolded. Second, to outline the routines, habits, play partners and play themes that dominate an Emirati child's play. Third, to explore the social, cultural and maternal values which contribute to influencing the play behaviors of Emirati children, and lastly, to suggest policies that better support Emirati children based on play-based behaviors discovered.

The findings of this descriptive study aim to shed light on the cultural aspects of the play behaviors of upper middle-class children in the United Arab Emirates in contrast to European middle-class children living in the U.A.E to describe any difference from a sociocultural perspective and cultural context affecting their play-behaviors. The central aim is in primarily drawing the attention of policy makers and educators to the issue of cultural and contextual appropriateness in applying Western pedagogies in teaching preschool children of Emirati background in the U.A.E.

Through questionnaires with the mothers of 34 preschool children (29 Emirati and 5 European children) the children's daily activities, routines, family values, cultural aspects and play behaviors were investigated. The influences which play a role in shaping a child's behavior were examined in the form of investigating children's play partners, home activities and free time allocated to play. Qualitative and quantitative questionnaires were used in order to assess a wider range of answers on things such as time set aside by parents to play with their children, time spent playing with housekeepers or nannies, time spent watching tv, frequency of outings with child, amount of time spent indoors versus outdoors, amount of toys available to the children, typical themes children engaged in while playing and amount of time spent with child in general after nursery hours of both Emirati and European maternal views.

The majority of the play partners of Emirati children were nannies and relatives, while many mothers wished it was them instead. Emirati mothers were well aware of the significance of play, however were less aware of "child-led" play practices and habits, and thus were significantly less likely to facilitate child-led play times when compared to Western mothers. Despite a belief in the significance of play, Emirati mothers preferred a compromise between a play-based learning environment and a formal education environment for their preschool children.

**Key Words:** Early years foundation stage, play-based learning centres, play behaviors, Early years centres, Emirati play behaviours

سلوكيات الأطفال الإماراتيين القائمة على اللعب: دراسة وصفية ثقافية لعادات لعب الأطفال واستعراض الممارسات الحالية القائمة على اللعب في دور الحضانة في دبي

دانه الفنة

ماجستير التربية الجامعة البريطانية في دبي، 2019  
أستاذ عماد ع أبو عياش

الدليل الحالي للسياسة والمناهج الدراسية في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة لمراكز التعليم في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة يدعو إلى استخدام الممارسات القائمة على اللعب ويشدد على اهمية ممارسات التعلم التي تركز على الطفل، على غرار الممارسات المتبعة في الغرب بشأن مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة. غير ان المناهج التربوية الفعالة لإصلاح أفضل الممارسات يجب ان تعكس منظورا اجتماعيا وثقافيا وان تلائم سياق التطبيق. وكانت الأهداف الرئيسية لهذا البحث هي الكشف عن الطريقة التي يلعب بها الأطفال الإماراتيون والأطفال الغربيون في السقالات، ولتحديد الروتين، والعادات، ولعب الشركاء، ومواضيع اللعب التي تهيمن على طريقة لعب الطفل الإماراتي، ولإستكشاف قيم الأوممة والقيم الاجتماعية والثقافية التي تسهم في التأثير على سلوكيات اللعب لدى الأطفال الإماراتيين، وأخيرا، اقتراح السياسات التي تدعم بشكل أفضل الأطفال الإماراتيين اعتماداً على سلوكيات اللعب المكتشفة.

وتهدف نتائج هذه الدراسة الوصفية إلى تسليط الضوء على الجوانب الثقافية لسلوكيات اللعب لدى الأطفال من الطبقة المتوسطة العليا في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة مقارنة بالأطفال الأوروبيين من الطبقة المتوسطة الذين يعيشون في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة لوصف أي فرق من المنظور الاجتماعي والثقافي والسياق الحضاري الذي يؤثر على سلوكيات اللعب. ويتمثل الهدف الرئيسي في توجيه انتباه واضعي السياسات والمربين في المقام الأول إلى مساله الملاءمة الثقافية والسياقية في تطبيق المناهج التعليمية الغربية في تعليم الأطفال في مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة من الخلفية الإماراتية في دولة الامارات.

وتم التحقيق في الأنشطة اليومية للأطفال، والإجراءات الروتينية، والقيم الأسرية، والجوانب الثقافية، وسلوكيات اللعب، من خلال استبيانات طويلة المدة مع أمهات 34 طفل في مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة (29 طفلا إماراتيا و5 أطفال أوروبيين). وقد درست التأثيرات التي تلعب دورا في تشكيل سلوك الطفل في شكل التحقيق مع شركاء لعب الأطفال والأنشطة المنزلية والوقت المخصص للعب. واستخدمت الاستبيانات النوعية والكمية من أجل تقييم مجموعه أوسع من الأجوبة على أشياء مثل الوقت الذي يخصصه الآباء للعب مع أبنائهم، والوقت المستغرق في اللعب مع المربين أو جلسيات الأطفال، والوقت المستغرق في مشاهدته التلفزيون، وعدد النزاهات مع الطفل، ومقدار الوقت الذي يقضيه في الداخل مقابل الهواء الطلق، وكمية الألعاب المتاحة للأطفال، والمواضيع النموذجية المشمولة وقت اللعب ومقدار الوقت الذي يقضيه مع الطفل بشكل عام بعد ساعات الحضانة من قبل أولياء الأمور الإماراتيين وأولياء الأمور الأوروبيين.

وكان معظم شركاء اللعب للأطفال الإماراتيين من المربيات والأقارب، في حين تمنيت العديد من الأمهات ان يكونوا هم بدلا من ذلك. وكانت الأمهات الإماراتيات يدركن جيدا أهمية اللعب، الا أنهن اقل وعيا بممارسات وعادات اللعب "التي يفوقها الأطفال"، التالي كانت اقل احتمالا بكثير لتخصيص أوقات اللعب التي يفوقها الأطفال بالمقارنة مع الأمهات الغربيات. وعلى الرغم من الاعتقاد بأهمية اللعب، فضلت الأمهات الإماراتيات التوصل إلى حل وسط بين بيئة تعليمية قائمه على اللعب وبيئة تعليمية رسمية لأطفالهن في مرحلة ما قبل المدرسة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: مرحلة التأسيس للسنوات الاولى، مراكز التعلم القائمة على اللعب، سلوكيات اللعب، مراكز السنوات الاولى، سلوكيات اللعب الإماراتية

## **DEDICATION**

To my children for taking me down this path.

To my husband for believing I could uncover something worth sharing.

and

To all the children that I have taught who have let me into their lives.

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I consider this dissertation a huge milestone in my academic career. I have not only been fortunate enough to work alongside some of the brightest students I know, but to also learn concepts, enhance theories and study patterns that would not have been possible had I not been extensively buried in the work needed for this research. I am not only appreciative, but utterly grateful to a number of people who have not only guided me and supported me but also aided me in time of my most need throughout this research process. For without them and their assistance this venture and process would have likely been unviable.

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To the mothers who set aside precious time to take part in this study and who had the courage to answer the hard questions that will hopefully lead to a revolution in early childhood care in the U.A.E, I could not have done it without you, and your significant role in all this will never be forgotten.

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Putting thank you-s down on a paper is not an easy thing to do, especially considering that paramount love and appreciation is hard to translate through written word, but to my family, classmates, colleagues and of course children, I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me the encouragement needed and support sought to complete this dissertation.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Background**

In recent years there has been a growing surge and interest in play-based preschool settings across western schools (Gallagher 2015). This growing area of research in the field of early childhood education is a direct attribute to the relevance and significance that “play” plays in a child’s life. We have long known that the construct of play in the early years is instrumental in the development of social, cognitive, emotional and language skills in children (Celeste 2006; Rubin 1977). Aside from the developmental benefits it holds, it is a natural and holistic activity that evolves continuously throughout one’s childhood, providing children with the opportunity to take lead in exploring real experiences and in constructing their own knowledge about the world they live in (Lee et al. 2009). As such, it is widely accepted among Western and European early childhood practitioners that best practice with regards to teaching preschool children is to adopt a play-based approach to learning (Celeste 2006).

While the shift from traditional teacher-oriented pedagogy to a child-centred pedagogy is not novel to the field of early childhood education, it is not an easy task when considering the two very different teaching approaches and ethos. The main difference between the two prevalent pedagogies lies in the teacher’s contributions and vocal presence in the classroom through either instructions or knowledge-based depositions. However, no single pedagogy, from a sociocultural perspective, can merely be applied to all contexts. Western pedagogies that are widely accepted as being effective ways in supporting the play behaviours of children and their needs cannot easily be applied in the Emirates with the expectation that they would work in the same manner without considering Emirati social and cultural contexts (Li, Rao & Tse 2012).

As such, it is very important for early childhood educators to take into account and for research to uncover the current trends as displayed by children underrepresented in the literature. Current studies on the pretend play behaviours of children are restricted to European-American children, leading to a generalized account of pretend play behaviours applied to children across a

plethora of cultures and backgrounds (Shahidi 2010). One ought to doubt the one-size-fits-all universality approach to children all over the world (Bruner 1990).

There are ample factors which play a role in the way children are influenced to play and many factors in the context of cultural and societal norms which affect the lives of children and the way they spend their time. Identifying these factors contributing to these changes, can help educators understand the differing needs of the children in their classrooms.

The utmost scrutiny should be applied when making recommendations regarding “best practice” in dealing with children in early childhood settings abroad, based on pedagogy grounded in Western views. Child-centred approaches and pedagogies cannot merely be translated across continents and expected to succeed in the same manner. A child’s play behaviour, influenced by unregulated screen time, a technology-rich play environment, deprived of scaffolding would look very different than a child’s play behaviour surrounded by traditional blocks or dramatic play equipment. These changes in a child’s play contexts can account for the differences in behaviour observed by teachers in the classroom. As such, contextual studies shedding light on the context of specific children’s play habits are essential to meeting their needs.

## **1.2 Rationale**

There lies a fundamental problem with adopting and accepting universal claims and policies regarding supporting children’s play. Ignoring geographic contrasting realities, children’s support systems and cultural upbringings which play a significant role in moulding experiences and play behaviours ought to be accounted for. Generalizations about how children ought to be supported when they play or how they interact with the environment around them hamper the progress (Pellegrini & Nathan 2010).

A study carried out by Tobin, Hayashi and Zhang (2011) supported the need to use both imported and indigenous views that would help mould policies into successful, geographically correct models of dealing with the needs of the children in the appropriate context. As such, early childhood-based studies on children in the U.A.E are urgently required to begin conversations on best practice pedagogies that better support their play-based behaviours.

Within the last decade, the early childhood education sector in Dubai has received a huge surge in growth. Over the span of 13 years, the number of children enrolled in preschools across the emirate of Dubai has increased by 25% (MoSA 2009). Furthermore, in 2009, 75% more Emirati national children were enrolled in preschools compared to the number enrolled in 1996 (Karman 2011). This has drastically impacted the dynamics and need for early child care centers in Dubai. As a result, the total number of nurseries in Dubai has increased from 27 nurseries in 1996 to 84 in 2009 (Karman 2011).

As children begin to attend preschool programmes, we see a shift from major social agents from parents to educators and peers. This change in social dynamics cannot be smooth unless educators understand the needs and contextual factors affecting the play behaviours of Emirati children at home and the maternal values in which their play activities were moulded (Fabes, Hanish & Martin 2003; Shim, Herwig & Shelley 2002).

### **1.3 Significance of the Research**

Classroom-based policies and procedures in early childhood care within the United Arab Emirates ought to consider culturally appropriate means to fostering and implementing best-practice child care pedagogies. However, research with empirical evidence to support and disclose the needs of Emirati children within the context of early childhood education is limited.

Thus, this study aims to flag the attention of policymakers, educators and fellow researchers on the issue of cultural aptness and contextual appropriateness of applying educational reforms from the West by evaluating the specific ways in which Emirati children play in contrast to their Western playmates.

Although the number of Emirati children attending preschools has been increasing, very few researchers have focused on how these children can be better supported within their classrooms and how to support their needs while taking into account social and contextual values that influence their play behaviours. Thus, in this study, I discuss the play behaviours and

contributing factors with the mothers of both Emirati and Western children enrolled in a private preschool in Dubai.

## **1.4 Purpose of Research**

This descriptive study has arisen from an awareness of the burgeoning discourse in policies revised, practices implemented and research advertised on the benefits of child-led nurseries across the United Arab Emirates. In response to this global trend to shift away from familiar teacher-centred pedagogy, this study aims to explore the play-based behaviours of upper middle-class Emirati preschool children and upper middle-class Western preschool children to provide a cultural perspective on their play habits to better assess any variations in their needs and assess the implications of applying Western pedagogies.

Such research aims to contribute to the current understanding and increase our knowledge of both universal and cultural-differences in aspects of children's play. By highlighting the paramount implications of the theoretically posed question regarding children and nature vs nurture in terms of development and play, I attempt to shed light on the contrasting realities of play behaviours and the ideologies and cultural aspects behind them. The importance of play in early childhood in promoting children's emotional, psychological, cognitive and social development is paramount (Johnson, Christie & Wardle 2009; Morrison 2001).

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The primary objective of the study is to understand the way in which Emirati children and Western children are supported at home, and the way in which their play is encouraged and scaffolded in order to assess the need for re-evaluating or recreating policies that better target their specific needs.

In my research on the play behaviours of Emirati children and Western children I investigate play behaviours in relation to children's everyday routines and habits, their play partners, their play themes and their living environments. Additionally, there are countless factors within the context of cultural and social dynamics that affect children's lives and influence the ways in which children spend their time; in this paper, I also attempt to identify the factors (social



and cultural) that contribute to these changes in both the behaviour of children and the maternal values held so that educators can better meet the needs of the children under their care. Therefore, the present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Contrast/ Compare the way in which Emirati children and Western Children are supported or their play is scaffolded at home.
2. Outline the routines, habits, play partners and play themes that dominate an Emirati child's play behaviour.
3. Explore the social and cultural factors and maternal values which contribute to influencing the play behaviours of Emirate children.
4. Suggest policies that better support Emirate children based on play-based behaviours discovered.

## **1.6 Outline of the Dissertation**

In the following pages I begin with a review of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were used when researching and investigating the play behaviours of children. This section is followed by a review of the existing literature and examines cross-cultural studies that also highlight contextual and social change amongst various children and ethnicities. Next, I outline the methods used for data collection, the ethnographic and interview questionnaire used. I then list the results obtained followed by a discussion of the results within the context and goals of the study. Lastly, I end with recommendations, implications and limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

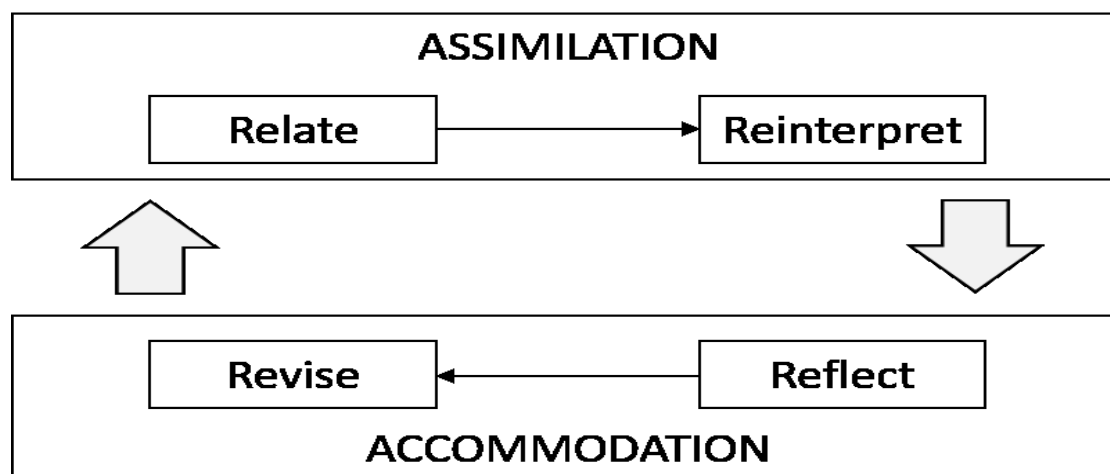
#### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A host of studies on play-based behaviours have shown the significant developmental outcomes achieved by children who partake in the social, emotional and cognitive aspect of the play. In this section I outline Piaget, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner's sociocultural theories on play in the context of this cultural study on children's play behaviours and Parten and Ramsey's theories on the children's exhibited play-based social behaviours. Next, I review the relevant literature while considering the varying dimensions of play as influenced by culture, and the role the two theorists' theories have had on forming cultural studies on play.

##### **2.1.1 Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

Piaget's influence on teaching and learning of children has been influential. Piaget perspective on play in the late 1930s, was a refreshing take on conceptualized play as a means of cognitive development rather than social or emotional (i.e. Bateson's theory or Skinner's aforementioned theories). His description of intellectual growth among children through a process referred to as adaptation was instrumental in explaining the mechanisms by which children learn through play and experiences engaged in (see figure 1). Through what Piaget referred to as 'accommodation' and 'assimilation' he argued that play is largely intellectually driven (Gopnik et al. 1999).

Through adaptation or adjustment, Piaget argued that a child makes sense of the knowledge around him or her or the knowledge learnt different from what he or she already knows. Assimilation happens when a child takes an idea and makes it fit into what they already know, whereas accommodation is when a child uses new knowledge or experiences had to modify their current schemas or play behaviours. Assimilation is of particular interest as I attempt to understand how Emirati children represent the world and gain insight into their symbolic play habits.



**Figure 1:** Piaget Theory of Cognitive Development: Concept of Adaptation (Twissell 2019).

### 2.1.2 Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory

Regardless of culture, children from all around the world engage in play to varying extents (Bruner 1990; Lancy 1996; Rogoff 1990). As such, pretend play, is considered by Vygotsky as the leading activity of childhood (Shahidi 2010).

#### A. Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory extends to include ‘zones of proximal developments’ (Vygotsky 1978). It is within these zones during play that children’s understanding of both symbolic and literal knowledge and understanding of social rules and positions are developed (Vygotsky 1978). It is where children distance the actual knowledge they have from the maturing understanding and their potential developmental levels. He argues that during play, by children assuming different contexts and roles, they create a voluntary perspective with which they use to achieve higher levels of thinking through scaffolding. He states “...in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior [and abilities]” (Vygotsky 1978). Research supporting scaffolding or structuring children’s pretend play by purposefully arranging play scenarios and situations by providing aids, props or suggestions have all been influenced by the research of Vygotsky (1978).

#### B. Symbolic Thinking and Play Themes

According to Vygotsky in addition to overcoming zones of proximal development, pretend play facilitates opportunities to develop children's symbolic thinking (Shahidi 2010). Symbolic thinking naturally develops during play and allows children to act upon their own thoughts, processes and rules and function independently, without limitations of the actual time and space in which a child is in (Vygotsky 1978). It is for this reason, that Vygotsky argued that symbolic thinking is one of the major benefactors of pretend play, and it is what allows children to build their thoughts of concepts and their perceptions on people, their environment and the world around them. Symbolic thinking is essential for building higher order understanding and allows a child to later problem-solve, and attain a higher order memory (Shahidi 2010).

### **C. Social Roles**

Pretend play also facilitates opportunities for children to assume new social roles, such as doctor, mother, policeman or father (Vygotsky 1978). Through engaging in pretend play, a child's understanding of social roles in the world around them is emerging in an active and constructive mannered process (Shahidi 2010). This is said to be the case, since during play, children do not merely rehearse social roles, but rather they create them amongst themselves in a deliberate manner. If a child chooses to be a mother, they apply their knowledge and social constructs of what a mother does, and societal views on motherhood and all its conventions in his or her play. Through these assumptions of roles, the child builds their understanding and views of the social roles and responsibilities they play in the world. During their interactions with the world and various figures, community helpers and cultural practices they become aware of the various social roles in the world around them, and later on during play, they actively play out the information gathered from their interactions as understood by them (Vygotsky 1978).

### **D. Themes and Contexts of Interest**

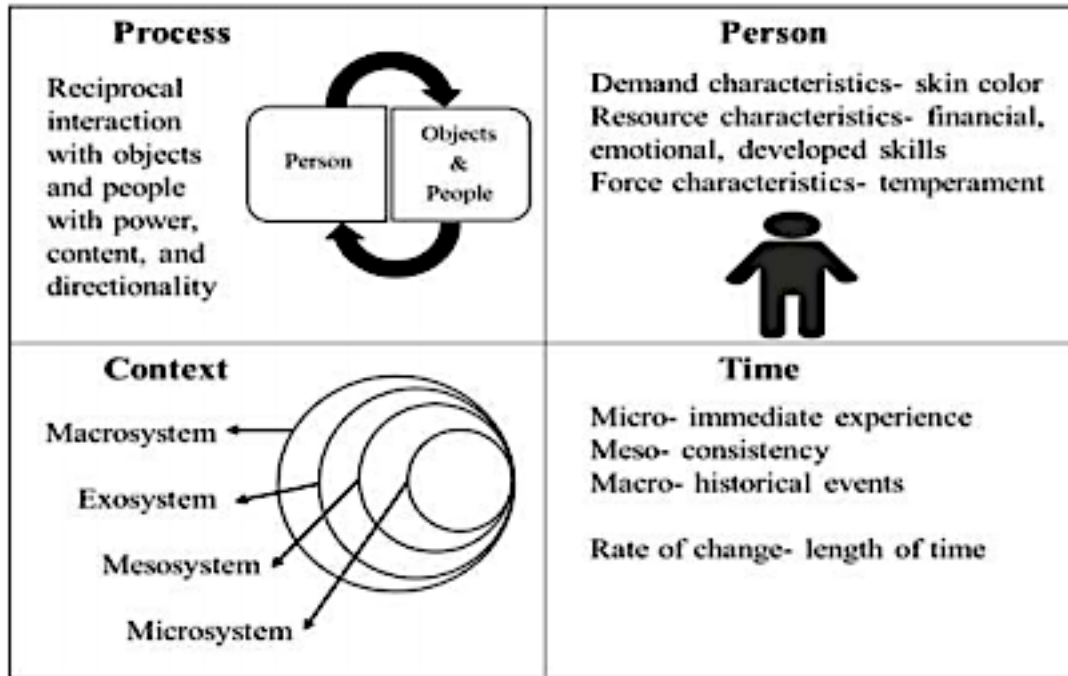
Through Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the influence of context and themes on the cognitive, social and emotional development of children, the plethora of research on the cultural influences of play was inspired. Utilizing his framework and assertions, researchers were able to directly correlate play behaviours with influences surrounding children such as play partners (mothers, fathers, siblings, teachers etc.), the amount of time spent playing, the resources and materials available to the children (open ended materials vs. pre-determined use toys) and the type

of conversations held between adults and children while they're engrossed in play (scaffolding) (Farver & Howes 1993; Goncu & Mosier 1991).

To sum up, Vygotsky's contributions and theories relating to the play behaviours of children have been substantial constructions in researchers gaining an understanding of children's play behaviours in the context of varying cultural and maternal values. While Vygotsky has laid the foundations for clarifying elements of sociocultural influences, the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) reviewed below has played a more substantial role in research targeting solely on the cultural influences of play in varying environments. While both Piaget and Vygotsky's theories were used, Bronfenbrenner's framework helped piece together the targets for this dissertation's objectives, goals and interview questions.

### **2.1.3 Bronfenbrenner's Model**

Bronfenbrenner's model regarding the ecology of human development has been regarded as a framework which describes the influences of the environment and other factors present such as cultural and community standing on the development of individuals and children (1994). The initial model of the framework presented by Bronfenbrenner (1979) mapped out how a series of direct and indirect contexts that children go through are intertwined (through the influences of four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem). Later versions of his theory expanded to also include children as active agents, changing or altering their own environments due to their diverse and unique characteristics such as their personality, their gender, their ethnicity or desires (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006). In his latest version Bronfenbrenner expanded his theory from only regarding individuals in specific contexts to accepting the reciprocal processes of interaction in his process-person-context-time model (see figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Process, Person, Context and Time Model (PPCT Model): An ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner 2005).

#### 2.1.4 Pretend Play of Children

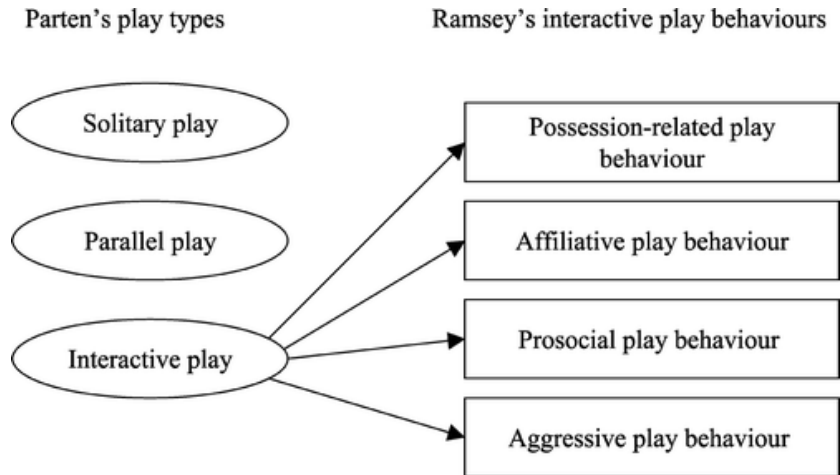
##### A. Parten (1932)

Parten's (1932) work is used to describe children's chosen social behaviours while at play. His classical model included a description of three major social behaviours exhibited by children during play, made up of six displayed behaviours. This model provides the ideal way to examine the maturing play behaviours of children as they engage in pretend play (Lee et al. 2009).

While Parten's proposed play types are not comprehensive of those demonstrated by children, for the purpose of this study it presents as a meaningful way to categorize the different play types and to study the different interactive play types based on his work and Ramsey's (1987) classification of the interactive play behaviours of children.

##### B. Ramsey (1987)

Ramsey (1987) outlines four categories he asserts fall under “interactive play” type. For the purpose of this study, we hon into the aggressive play behaviours displayed as well as the affiliative play behaviour.



**Figure 3:** Parten’s Play Types (1932) as related to Ramsey’s Interactive Play Behaviours (1987) (Lee et al., 2009).

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

### 2.2.1 Overview of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Framework used in the UAE

The Ministry of Education (MOE) in the UAE is committed to transforming early childhood development and to supporting best outcomes for future success of children in the Emirates. The current Early Years Foundation Stage guidelines offers educators, leaders and policy-makers with a framework that outlines a set of common principles and action-practice guides. At the heart of the framework is the advocacy of a child-centred learning approach in early years settings. The guideline is developed to encompass children from birth to age 5.

The guidelines ensure that children within institutions that adopt the framework are supported holistically. A holistic approach to development is done by supporting all areas of child development equally: communication and language, physical development, communication and language, literacy, mathematics, understanding of the world and expressive arts and design (Morrissey and Warner 2007). However, in the context of the UAE, to achieve a truly holistic approach would be to include aspects of both cultural and Islamic values. While the framework

ensures that educators support play-based opportunities for children to achieve milestones underpinned by the areas of child development, it ought to also factor in the significance of teaching to a nation bound by strong cultural and religious ties.

### **2.2.2 Play-Based learning curriculum in an EYFS institution**

The framework outlines 3 characteristics defined as characteristics of effective learning. These are central to the EYFS framework and the characteristics outlined here underpin the areas of development observed by teachers. The 3 characteristics are as follows:

1. Playing and exploring – engagement
2. Active learning – motivation
3. Creating and thinking critically

The EYFS framework emphasises a play-based approach to learning. It stipulates that in order to support and facilitate play activities, teachers, facilitators and assistants must be involved in play modelling play ideas and conversations to children. This insinuates the importance of guided play to the framework. Thus, the application of the following framework by institutions is their recognition and highlight of the importance that adults play in promoting and developing a child's play behaviour.

While the framework thoroughly outlines the ways in which children demonstrate their knowledge and interact with their environments, it provides very little description of the level of adult, teacher, facilitator or parent involvement in a child's play needed or the specific ways in which adults can be involved with children during play.

### **2.2.3 Play as defined by the EYFS framework and Development Matters guide**

According to the EYFS, play underpins the framework, all learning aspects and child development milestone itself (EYM 2019). It is also a generally naturalistic and spontaneous activity that is carried out by children and often times facilitated and supported by adults (EYM 2019). It is not limited or regulated by location and occurs both indoors and outdoors as children



navigate different environments through exploration and discovery. Through pretend and imaginative play, children develop their language skills as well as social and emotion skills, creativity and thinking. Play often supports children to take risks, showcase their imagination and facilitates problem solving and interact with their immediate world (EYM 2019).

The EYFS framework asserts that the role of an adult in supporting children's play is crucial through providing children with time, space and the appropriate resources that can be manipulated and used. It states that the role of the facilitator is to primarily observe and only join in when asked, instigated or invited and that they ought to listen and watch before joining so as to support the children's imagination.

A school plays a major role in establishing the concept of play itself by choosing which play-based programmes to deliver. Currently the MOE is working to remove the license, at the local level, of early childhood institutions which are not legally authorised or have clear criteria's or standards

#### **2.2.4 Contextual issues that impede the implementation or support of play-based programmes across the Emirates.**

At the heart of the EYFS framework is the desire to provide play-based practice instructions and to outline best practice for child-care programmes to implement. However, the implementation process of applying the EYFS framework is multidimensional and involves not only the planning and implementation of its contents but also a consideration of the cultural and social context of the society which results in challenges.

Within various contexts, there are varying values which impacts not only the implementation process of a curriculum but also the perception of said curriculum. The biggest factor that effects the implementation of play-based curriculums is the value that child education has (Chudakoff 2007; Gaskins, Haight & Lancy 2007). Recent research carried out on Asian countries has indicated that formal education and a direct academic approach to learning are valued much more than the modern play-based approach programmes surfacing (Mulia 2016). This trend

is driven by parental pressures placed on children in Asian countries whose parents regard areas of learning such as literacy, math and science as substantially more beneficial to a child than physical development, expressive arts and communication and language (Mulia 2016).

These maternal values within the context of certain countries such as Indonesia and Singapore hinder the implementation process of said play-based programmes. Ng (2014) reports that teachers in Singapore have yet to shift their practice from including traditional worksheets and exams to more child-centred demonstrations of learning to meet the pressures and expectations of parents in the community.

Thus, at the level of preschools and nursery's hosting the EYFS curriculum, parental values regarding the importance of play a significant role in implementing the framework successfully (Homes 2011; Roopnarine 2010; Singer et al. 2009; Vandermass-Peeler 2002;). Roopnarine et al. (2003) states that very few communities regard play as being important for achieving developmental outcomes and for child learning. The social context and demands of the public regarding best practice child learning patterns result in an array of challenges for the implementation of conflicting curriculums.

## CHAPTER 3

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **3.1 Overview of Literature Review**

Child inspired learning and teaching initiative is a relatively new model in early years' facilities and research, specifically in the Emirati context. While there is an increasing awareness and interest into children's play behaviours and best practice in terms of teaching young children, studies focusing on Emirati children's needs and behaviours itself have yet to be undertaken, although an abundance on the influence of culture on play behaviours has been shared.

#### **3.2 Children in the Emirate and Play Behaviours: A Policy Perspective**

In recent years, Dubai has developed much of its policy in the area of early childhood care and education through revisions and amendments to their expectations and regulations (KHDA 2019). The KHDA and MOE, the national quality framework organizations for early childhood education within the United Arab Emirates, define play as a central component to the education, well-being and development of a child (KHDA 2019). However, they also stipulate that play is a construct subjective to a child's experience, upbringing and developmental stage.

Preschool or nursery institutions which adopt a more "formal" school pedagogy and curriculum emphasize more on measurable academic outcomes concerning areas of development in literacy and numeracy rather than pedagogies embedded in play and exploration (Edwards & Usher 2008). This in turn lessens the play-based learning opportunities that a child has (Fisher 2000; Frost, Ranz-Smith 2007; Wortham & Reifel 2007;). However, one study reports that within a diverse community like Dubai, the formulation of play is eradicate and complex at best as practitioners balance the varying needs emanating from the different cultural upbringings, traditions and value systems of the children that shape and define their play (Marfo & Biersteker 2011). Thus, in order to continually strive towards the progressive educational reforms assigned by the quality frameworks we must focus bridging gaps in understanding the children under our care and the extent to which culture shapes ones play behaviour.

### **3.3 Culture and Play Behaviours**

Play is one of the childhood activities that are both valued and shared across a variety of cultures (Cote & Bornstein 2005; Karnik & Tudge 2010). Contributions from research done in the last 20 years has attempted to link culture and pretend play habits together (Corsaro, Miller & Damon 1992; Farver 1999; Gaskins 1996; Roopnarine, Johnscon & Hooper 1994). They have since argued that while play is a universal activity it is heavily regulated by cultural issues within varying context (Lancy 2007).

Cultural traditions play a significant role in the development of play amongst children. Gaskins, Haight and Lancy (2007) found that within a village in Mexico, cultural pressures had placed an emphasis on academics and formal child learning sessions rather than on play, and as such, in school's child learning had replaced play opportunities and children were in turn found to lack primitive play behaviours observed in children elsewhere. Al-Otaibi and Rashid (1997) argue that even within a contemporary Islamic society, Muslim educators in particular ought to implement more innovation approaches, in particular, in including more time to play and more play-based learning as opposed to the current domination of formal learning sessions to address the current observed gap. Mulia (2016) discusses a similar trend and gap observed in Indonesia by surveying parental values regarding early childhood education which found that parents there generally consider free play at home to be a waste of time that could rather be spent studying or reading. As such, Mulia (2016) reports that parents and community pressures have shapes an educator dominated learning environment at school, as opposed to the more progressive child-led learning facilities in the West.

Given that a general consensus exists regarding play as a means for learning within Western early childhood discourses, it comes as no surprise to see child-directed activities inspired by play ideas in areas such as Northern Italy (Reggio Emilia) and New Zealand (Te Whariki) (Broadhead 2006; Parham & Primeau 1997; Praliming-Samuelsson & Johansson 2006, Wood 2008). However, despite the wide-spread attention these play-based curriculums have received for empowering children to exercise freedom of choice, autonomy and independence (Bennett, Wood

& Rogers 1997), some researchers argue that without taking into account the complexity and diversity of the interactions at home, practitioners won't take into account the pragmatic imperatives that facilitating lessons based on play requires (Al-Ali 2002; Rogers 2011). However, it is noteworthy to note that additional research has shown that while play is an effective means and strategy for early childhood educator to promote learning, it does not necessary work for all children (Brooker 2002; Wood 2008). Thus, while countries like the UK, USA and New Zealand have found success in implementing a play-based framework, others around the world may not (Rogers 2011).

Across various cultures, play is regarded as a social function that children enter with their peers or surrounding adults such as parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents (Roopnarine et al. 1994). However, where significant differences are observed amongst different cultural communities is in the play companions available (Haight et al. 1999). Within the context of Chinese children, caregivers, parents and siblings often make themselves available to play and facilitate play opportunities with the children, as a result, children within those contexts are more articulate with regards to pretend play behaviours and base play off of real-life experiences (Fung 1994). Furthermore, they also display a partnership role when engaging in play with their peers, including them in their play scenarios and extending their play ideas (Fung 1994). Similarly, Irish children (Gallagher 2015) and Turkish children (Farver & Wimbarti 1995) are often reported playing with their peers and demonstrate healthy personal, social and emotional skills as opposed to children within low income Latino families, who are reported to spend the majority of their time playing in isolation (Gallagher 2015; Linsay et al. 2014). When mothers or parents do not consider themselves "play partners" for their children, children were less likely to engage in pretend play habits such as in East Indian (Goncu & Mosier 1991) and Mexican communities (Farver 1993).

### **3.4 Pretend Play Habits and Physical ecology**

Pretend play is a term that relates to a variety of adaptive activities that children carry out (Singer & Singer 1990). Children from birth until the age of two engage in play behaviours that are a reflection of the real world or tangible items in a functional or exploratory play formation. Here children are found to pick up objects and attempt to find out what they are used for (Farver 1993). As their play behaviours are supported and they gain more knowledge about the world

around them, we see a shift from a functional or explorative play behaviour to one that is more symbolic or a representation of pretend play (Vandermaas-Peeler et al. 2001). This phase is typically characterized by object substitution whereby children use one object to represent another (Cartwright 2004).

The shift from functional to symbolic play involves a child's ability to use imagination, forms of expression and fantasy ideas (Fein 1987). Reaching this developmental milestone entails an expansion in the child's cognitive and creative abilities to use representational substitutes in play (Bornstein, Venuti & Hahn 2002). As well as a sound development in their self-regulation abilities and coping skills (Berk, Mann & Ogan 2006; Goldstein & Russ 2000).

The significance of pretend play cannot be overlooked as many researchers vouch for the instrumental role that present play has on a child's problem-solving, social skills, emotional understanding and creativity (Dansky 1999; Fisher 1992; Russ & Grossman-McKee 1990; Seja & Russ 1999).

### **3.5 Content of play across context**

There are many aspects of play which are universal; however, understanding those along with highlighting the cultural differences observed in play behaviours amongst children requires cross-cultural studies. As such, cross-cultural studies carried out on the dimensions of play within a cultural context have been paramount in contributing to an increased understanding of children's play behaviours (Bornstein, Haynes, Fler 2008; Farver, Kim & Lee-Shin 2000; Gaskins 2000; Haight et al. 1999; Pellegrini & Nathan 2010).

The majority of cross-cultural comparisons on play behaviours of children have studied play behaviours of children through observations in naturalistic settings and documenting the observed patterns (Haight et al. 1999). Using ethnographic collection methods, Haight et al. (1999) and Haight and Miller (1993) were able to offer insight into the various themes of play undertaken by children across a variety of cultures. Within middle-class American families, mothers were often found highly engaged in the play of their children, and they spent the majority of the time at home extending their children's pretend play. These children spent less time with traditional toys,

and mothers often used everyday household routines to incorporate play such as through sorting the laundry or cooking together. Haight and Miller (1993) reported that as a result after the age of 3 these children were less likely to play by themselves and generally sought out others. Their pretend play behaviours were also noted as being superior to their counterparts. Farver (1993) adds that this is due to the hours of scaffolding invested by parents during their play which includes teaching children real-life skills and conceptual knowledge (such as “this is used to flip the eggs once this side is cooked”), suggesting dialogues and directing the play in an effective manner.

Currently cross-cultural research done with regards to children’s play behaviours have all helped in stressing the significance of applying culture-specific practices and organizing environments in a suitable manner to facilitate the play of the specific children under their care (Bradley 2002; Harkness & Super 2002; Parmar, Harkness & Super 2004; Rogoff 2003).

### **3.6 Social interactions, scaffolding and available play partners**

To Elaborate further, the benefits of children participating in pretend play with older siblings or parents is the potential for scaffolding of ideas and play behaviors. Often times, older play partners such as parents, guardians or siblings provide children with resources, props or suggestions to extend their play or interaction and build on their current knowledge (Bruner 1975; Deloache & Plaetzer 1985; Miller & Garvey 1984; Seidner 1985).

In a study examining the relationship and influence of mother-child play sessions, Miller and Garver 1984 concluded that mothers who play with their children provide their play with a structure and direction as well as support their children through demonstrating nurturing behaviours such as feeding their dolls, putting them to sleep, mimicking family roles in their play or looking after certain toys. O’Connell and Bretherton’s research conducted in 1984 revealed similar conclusion, that in fact children whose play was supported by their mothers exhibited a greater diversity of pretend material than those whose play was not. This diversity was attributed to their mother’s support, structure, guidance and scaffolding of their play behaviours.

A comparison between the contributions mothers and siblings provide children in the development of play behaviours done by Dunn and Dale 1984 emphasized the importance they

both play in supporting a child's pretend play. Having parental support and presence is an essential component in developing and encouraging a child's engagement in pretend play, imaginary play, and fantasy ideas (Parmar et al. 2004; Pazzagli 2011; Smith & Gosso 2010; Taylor & Carlson 2002). Home-neighborhood systems also play an essential role in contributing to a child's imaginative play. Haight et al. (1999) reports that Chinese, Taipei communities do not hold strong ties with neighbours, or do not regularly engage in play with their neighbours, as such, children within the Chinese community only receive parental contributions to their play behaviours while Irish Americans, who hold strong neighbour ties are engaged in play with relatives, siblings, peers, and parents, providing them with holistic support (Haight et al. 1999).

Roopnarine et al. (1994) argued that while play tends to develop in a universal manner across children, cultural variations are prominent. However, current research narrowly focuses on the cultural context of American and European cultures, which emphasize the development of play through the use of modeling, scaffolding and investing time in playing with the child, however little-to-few studies currently stand attributing the cultural variations which lead to gaps in playful interactions, sibling play opportunities or adult models to support their play (Roopnarine 2010).

### **3.7 Emirati and Western Differences**

#### **3.7.1 The Emirati Context of Current Reforms and Influences**

Children within the UAE experience a blending of Western influences with a traditional Arabic upbringing, influenced by culture, language and religion (Baker 2013). With the large influx of expatriates into the Emirate and consequently Western teachers, comes the importation of Western values, language and pedagogies in children. This has internally created a paradigm shift in the way young Emirati children are being raised and influenced (Baker 2013). Along with the importation of values, we have also seen schools and educational facilities also import curriculums, teaching strategies and pedagogies. The problem arises in the varying social and cultural contexts in which the curriculums were made for, and the contexts in which they are being applied to.

The socioeconomic status of the UAE is one of the most glaring differences between the UAE and the West. It has long been argued that socioeconomic influences contribute largely to a child's pretend play behaviour in that it is linked to the amount of time children are allowed to engage in



pretend play, and the time that parents spend playing with their children. Furthermore, children of affluent or higher earning parents are often pressured more to engage in academic studies rather than play.

### **3.7.2 Home Environment**

Traditionally families in the UAE are large and the onus of child care especially within the early years falls on mothers, who conventionally did all the child rearing (Bennett 2009). However, given the recent surge in number of Emirati woman pursuing higher education compared to in the 1990s, the number of women entering the work force within the Emirates has increased. Which in turn has increased the number of families employing housemaids to assist in caring for and rearing children in the Emirates (Bennett 2009).

Since many Emirati families within the UAE, rely on nannies or maids for child care and child rearing services (predominantly from South-east Asia) the impact that these caretakers have on the lives of their children, their behavioural development, acquisition of milestones and emotional well-being ought to be considered (Bennett 2009).

Dubai Statistics Centre reports that 94% of Emirati families employ a maid in comparison to 5% of expatriate families (Department for Education and Skills 2005). Furthermore, children are often left spending anywhere between 30-70 hours a week with the housemaids which adds up to being exceptionally more than the time that children spend in childcare centers in the US or Europe. Furthermore, researchers attribute this extended time to causing maternal attachment issues which often lead to behavioral problems (Bennett 2009). Additionally, we ought to consider that the native language of these maids is typically non-Arabic and non-English, with a low educational level or little to no training in child-rearing (Bennett 2009).

Lastly, family dynamics within the UAE are changing. Where once, divorce rates were low, we are seeing a steady increase with the addition of increasing accounts of illnesses which shake family functions are on the rise.

## **3.8 Situating the Current Study**

While all the conclusions drawn from these previous studies have been substantial in shaping the way we view play behaviours of children and across varying factors, very few studies have provided the rigorous experimental study of children across cultures and their maternal values. Both Kazdin (2005) and Mash & Hunsley (2005) have stated the importance of using an evidence-based approach in implementing tools and policies that support methodological support of children. As such, the aim of this present study is to use well-validated measures to stress the importance of considering both the influences of cultural and social ecologies in which children are raised and that effect the development of their play behaviours to inform policies and procedures which reflect situated best practice. In order to ensure that Emirati children's needs are supported and accounted for, the importance of further research into understanding their means, methods and nature of play is crucial.

More studies dedicated to bringing light to the relationships exhibited between play behaviours and cultural factors are needed to assess the role that culture and values held by mothers on play have on shaping the play processes of children. Given the paramount role that culture plays in a child's upbringing, this article aims to investigate the play behaviour in two different cultures: Emirati and Western children by evaluating cultural, social, contextual and maternal values held.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### **4.1 Overview of Methodology**

This chapter aims to explain the research methods I used for gathering data for the purpose of this dissertation. Justification regarding the use of a mixed methods approach, methods of data collection, the demographics of participants, sample size, data collection means and data analysis methods as well as ethical considerations are elaborated on.

#### **4.2 Research Approach**

This research project employs a mixed methods design, including both qualitative and quantitative measures. Researchers have long argued that mixed-methods reports lead to paradigmatic problems that single type of data collection methods avoid, however for the purpose and fit of the research question and the study itself, a mixed-methods report despite its assumed shortcomings was best fit; pragmatism (Feilzer 2010; Greene 2007; Morgan 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). Within the context of this study, a mixed-methods report places significant importance on the lives of underrepresented populations (Emirati Children) in an over saturated field (on children's play behaviours), by brining to light ethical considerations, experiences, habits and maternal values in ways that the two separate approaches could not have done if utilized disjointedly.

The mixed-methods data collected was carried out through an online survey, hosted via SurveyMonkey. The survey was aimed at mothers with children registered at a private school in Dubai with one or more children that fall within one to four years of age, who expressed a desire in participating in a research carried out on cultural influences of a child's play behaviour.

The aim of the research was to gain insight on the play behaviours of Emirati children in the United Arab Emirates. In order to gain a holistic understanding and view of the children's play behaviours, the chosen method was to utilize a survey across a large sample size (all children enrolled in the nursery) as data gathered in this manner may be later generalized across other school populations (Mukherji & Albon 2010).

This research employed a descriptive survey which is a method that sets out to uncover and find out what people belonging from a particular group think, feel and do (Mukherji & Albon 2010). The online questionnaire sought to achieve the following targets in relation to the four objectives of the study:

- 1) How are the displayed play behaviours of children related or correlated to the child's demographics? Or if a relation exists at all.
- 2) What routines and daily habits of children affect their play behaviour or pretend play habits?
- 3) Which play practices of children are affected by the children's situated environments? And Which pretend play behaviours or themes are most commonly adopted by children during play?
- 4) What are the children's maternal values on play as a construct? And how do they support their children, guide them or influence them according to their beliefs? And which policies can we implement that better support the Emirati children population based on the above.

Due to the nature of these questions and understanding required to answer them, the research questions regarding the children's play behaviours were directed to the children's parents to answer on behalf of the children's experiences, as children 1-4 years of age would simply not be able to provide answers to the questions asked.

### **4.3 Procedure**

The participants for this study were recruited through the online nursery phone application. After gaining access to the online survey database link and opening it, participants were directed to a brief description of the study, the requirements to participate and the consent form to participate. Upon meeting the criteria to participate, participants were then redirected to an introductory statement on the first of 5 pages that began with building context by asking about the participants background information. Criteria for selection in the study was the parent's willingness to participate in the study and having a child enrolled within the nursery from 1-4 years of age. After the questionnaire was completed, participants were thanked for their participation, time and opinions.

## 4.4 Participants

A cohort of 208 mothers (80% Emirati, 8% Egyptian, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese 4% American 4% British and German 2% Canadian and 2% Indian and Pakistani and ranged from 19-52 years ( $M= 31.8$ ,  $SD= 0.89$ ) were selected as the target group for the purpose of this study and provided with a large-scale online survey, soliciting information on their children’s play behaviours and their perceptions of their children’s play behaviours. The gatekeepers were the nursery administrators and managing director, who consented to their participation in the study by posting a description of the study along with the consent forms and survey link for parents to participate. The participation in the research was self-selected, meaning any parent at the nursery who had access to the link or became aware of the study could choose to participate or not. Although, it is worthwhile to note that in order to do so, parents had to have had their child registered on the school online application and have a device with internet access, capable of accessing the research link. While this research sought a relatively large sample size, 208 to increase the likely of generalizations, the sample of respondents was 35 (Mukherji & Albon 2010).

**Table 1** *Participant Demographic Data*

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Frequency (N=35)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	18	51.43%
Male	17	48.57%
<b>AGE</b>		
Range	1.2 years – 3.11 years	
Mean	3.22 years	
<b>ETHNICITY</b>		
Emirati	29	82.86%
Western	5	14.28%
Egyptian, Syrian, Palestinian or Lebanese	0	0.00%
Pakistani or Indian	1	2.86%
Other	0	0.00%
<b>EDUCATION LEVEL</b>	<b>MOTHER</b>	<b>FATHER</b>
Highschool Diploma	1      2.86%	6      17.14%
Higher Certifications	1      2.86%	0

College or University Degree	25	71.43%	20	57.14%
Masters	6	17.14%	7	20.00%
Post Graduate or PHD Level	2	5.71%	2	5.71%
None	0		0	

#### 4.4.1 Parent demographics

The level of involvement and attention that an early childhood education system pays to the parents is one of the biggest indicators of success with regards to quality and provision at the early stages (Crosnoe, Augustine & Huston 2012). As such, it is imperative that any study seeking to achieve improvements within the early childhood sector ought to seek out the perspectives and opinions of the parents. Noting that child-rearing and education, specifically during the preschool age, within the Arab world has solely been the responsibility of the woman in the children's lives, to gather insight into the play behaviours of Emirati children and of current play-based learning curricula in place children's maternal opinions were surveyed (Bennett Report 2009).

A total of 35 mothers (83% Emirati, 14% Western, 3% Pakistani, Indian) partook in the study. The mother's educational levels were on average having attained at least a Bachelor's degree. Mothers were stay-at-home housewives (8%) or employed (92%). While the number of single child families was (7%) in comparison to multi-children households (93%). The mothers were asked to answer the questionnaire questions in reference to one of their children enrolled at nursery, restricted to the 1-4 age range specified.

#### Mothers Demographics

**Table 2** *Mothers age range*

<b>Mothers Age Range</b>	<b>Frequency (n=35)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<i>19-29 Years</i>	3	8.57%
<i>30-40 Years</i>	19	54.29%
<i>41-51 Years</i>	11	31.43%
<i>52-62 Years</i>	2	5.71%

**Table 3** *Mothers profession*

<b>Mothers Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency (n=35)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Homemaker	3	8.57%
Educator (Teacher, Professor etc.)	19	54.29%
Accountant/ Finance	2	5.71%
Law	2	5.71%
Dentist	1	2.86%

CEO/ Owner	2	5.71%
Entrepreneur	1	2.86%
Analyst	3	8.56%
Part Time Employee	1	2.86%
Other/ Unspecified	1	2.86%

**Important Note:** The majority of mothers of Western backgrounds (60%), indicated taking time off work after child rearing to spend it with their children. While 10% of Emirati mothers noted the same.

### **Fathers Demographics**

**Table 4** Fathers age range

<b>Fathers Age Range</b>	<b>Frequency (n=35)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
19-29 Years	3	8.57%
30-40 Years	19	54.29%
41-51 Years	11	31.43%
52-62 Years	2	5.71%

**Table 5** Fathers profession

<b>Fathers Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency (n=35)</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Police/ Army	5	14.28%
Educator (Teacher, Professor etc.)	2	5.71%
Accountant/ Finance	4	11.43%
Law/ Legal Advisor	4	11.43%
Engineering	5	14.28%
Government Sector	5	14.28%
Director	1	2.86%
Project Manager/ Manager	3	8.56%
Nuclear Operator	1	2.86%
Other/ Unspecified	5	14.28%

**Important Note:** Upon relating a father's education level to their profession, it was noted that there wasn't a strong correlation between the two; while 60% of fathers only obtained a high school degree, the majority were able to attain positions as managers or senior level in both the public and government sector due to opportunities presented.

#### **4.4.2 Site**

Parents of children enrolled at a private nursery in Dubai were asked to participate in the research. The setting selected for the study had opened its doors to children of ages 45 days – 4 years in September of 2016. Initially the nursery adopted the International Preschool Curriculum

(IPC) and later moved to the EYFS and Reggio inspired learning in 2017. Situated in the heart of Al Mizhar in Dubai, the nurseries children are predominately Emirati, although the nursery is all inclusive.

## **4.5 Data Collection**

The main data collection tool used in gathering data for the purpose of this research was a survey. The survey contained an equal number of close ended questions and open ended questions. The survey was divided into five sections that correlated to one of the aims of the research project. The first section was demographics, which provided me with general information to contextualize the respondent's future responses. Participants were asked questions regarding their children's ages, siblings, living arrangements and nationality. The second section was about the children's home environment and home life. Within this section I asked questions regarding the child's day-to-day routine, habits, and play partners at home. The third section related to the child's environment, child's access to various environments at home, their play habits and how their behaviour varied in the various places and within varying company. The fourth section consisted of ample Likert scale questions which were designed to evaluate the degree to which parents agreed or disagreed with play as a construct of learning. This section focused more on the material's values and views rather than the child's behaviour or habits. The last and final section was related to understanding the displayed pretend play behaviour of children. Again, through the use of a Likert-type scale questions, I was able to ascertain or uncover various perceptions, perceived barriers and opinions regarding children's play behaviours (Uebersax, 2007).

## **4.6 Data Analysis**

Data collected from the respondents were exported from the survey host SurveyMonkey onto spreadsheets within the software Microsoft Excel. This allowed me to view each participants' individual responses and correlate or ascertain frequent or common trends and responses across my larger sample group. I was also able to identify any outliers by viewing the data collected as a whole on one document. I also exported graphs, and charts directly from my host SurveyMonkey, as well as create my own directly using the Microsoft Word and Excel software.

## **4.7 Ethical Considerations**



The predominant ethical considerations arisen during the construct of this research project was the inclusion of children and ensuring that all reasonable precautions were in place to avoid children being adversely affected or harmed in the participation of the research, as well as to ensuring that children's privacy is fully respected. Having found hardship in obtaining enough parental consent to conduct informal observations of children during play sessions, I elected to use a less stressful research procedure to evaluate the play behaviours of children by surveying their mothers. Once the decision was made to consider parents as the prime participants and aim, within the context of my research, both informed consent from the parents and protection of data collected were the main ethical issues I needed to consider.

In order to obtain consent and ensure that all participants were aware of the purpose, methods and means of data collection of this research, informed consent from each participant was sought prior to commencement of the survey. Participants were provided with information regarding the survey and my contact details before they participated. I ensured confidentiality by not collecting any identifiable information from participants and by sharing the survey link via an online nursery application which prevented me from seeing which parents accessed the link. Lastly, the protection of the data collected was ensured by securing all the exported data sheets void of any identifiable information on one computer only accessible to the researchers and the research supervisor.

#### **4.8 Adversities Encountered**

The largest challenge faced with regards to carrying out this study was relevant to the data collection tools and methods. Having begun the data collection a mere week before Ramadan began proved to have its own difficulties in getting parents involved. To overcome this issue, I decided to transfer all the predetermined interview questions into an online survey. However, the piloted survey was fairly lengthy, and averaged parents approximately 42 minutes to complete which negatively impacted the response rate (assumed by the number of incomplete surveys filled out). Additionally, considering this study targeted mothers who are parents to young children and many of whom have jobs, the time required from them to fill out the survey proved to be deciding factor in participating. To overcome this, I rewrote many of the open-ended response questions to multiple choice format before relaunching the survey to parents again for participation.

The survey process took place over a duration of 35 days, from April 25<sup>th</sup> to May 29<sup>th</sup>. The survey received a total of 46 respondents, of which 46 provided consent to part take in the research. However, of the 46 respondents' surveys responses 11 were omitted due to lack of clarity or incoherent answers provided, inconsistent or conflicting information provided or for not answering the survey with respect to a child of age 1-4. Additionally, 6 participants filled out the survey skipping several parts or questions in a sporadic manner, leading to the exclusion of their responses.

The respondent's answers excluded were done so as to not skew the research results or incorrectly influence the outcomes of the research. The process of identifying which respondents to exclude proved to be time consuming as each answer given had to be read through and related to the next in order to identify if any conflicting answers were given, or respondents who omitted parts of questions had to be identified so their incomplete responses could be moved as appropriate.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results obtained in relation to the four objectives of the research study. It presents a description of the analytical processes used and statistical analysis performed. This section is followed by a discussion of the potential meaning and denotation of the results obtained tending to a discourse of developmentally relevant and culturally appropriate play practices.

The goals of this study were to (a) compare the way in which Emirati children and Western children play and the level of parental support and interaction received at home, done via analytical comparison tables and charts. As well as to (b) outline the routines, habits and play themes that dominate Emirati children's play behaviours, which was done by using the mean values and charting the frequency of each participants recorded answer. Additionally, to (c) explore the social and cultural factors and maternal values which contribute to influencing the play behaviours of Emirati children; common themes and answers were recorded. Lastly, (d) to illicit suggestions and best practice policies that better support Emirati children through the analysis of parental views as well as data collected as a whole by using graphing comparisons as well as non-parametric (or distribution free) analyses.

#### **5.2 Results**

##### **5.2.1 Comparison Between the Play Behaviours, Environments and Play Partners of Emirati and Western Children**

Previous research conducted in a cross-cultural manner on play behaviours between children indicated that small to medium effects might be expected (Bronfenbrenner 1990; Sam et al. 2006). As such, to achieve data and statistics for our first objective, a comparison between play behaviours observed in Western and Emirati children, I assembled graphs for descriptive analysis purposes and side-by-side tables directly comparing play habits with data collected for survey questions filled out.

One of the very first aspects affecting play behaviours of children related to differences in living arrangements and consequently, play partners available at home among children of different ethnicities.

**Table 6** *Living arrangements of Emirati children compared to the living arrangements of Western children*

	<b>Emirati (n=29)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Western (n=5)</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Alone</i>	14	48.28	5	100.00
<i>Extended Family</i>	6	20.69	0	0
<i>Maternal Grandparents</i>	6	20.69	0	0
<i>Paternal Grandparents</i>	6	20.69	0	0
<i>Nannies</i>	16	55.17	0	0

While all mothers of Western children indicated that they live alone with immediate family members, mothers of 60% of Emirati children indicated that they lived in an extended family household. This is significant due to the presence of cousins, aunts, uncles or grandparents who for the purpose of this study could be regarded as potential play partners for the children. Many of the Emirati mothers indicated that grandparents often engaged in pretended play with the children while aunts and uncles were often regarded as a source of “fun” by taking the children out for active play in soft play areas or on excursions to the mall, especially during weekends. Additionally, in extended family living arrangements cousins of similar ages often played together and engaged in pretend play when appropriate.

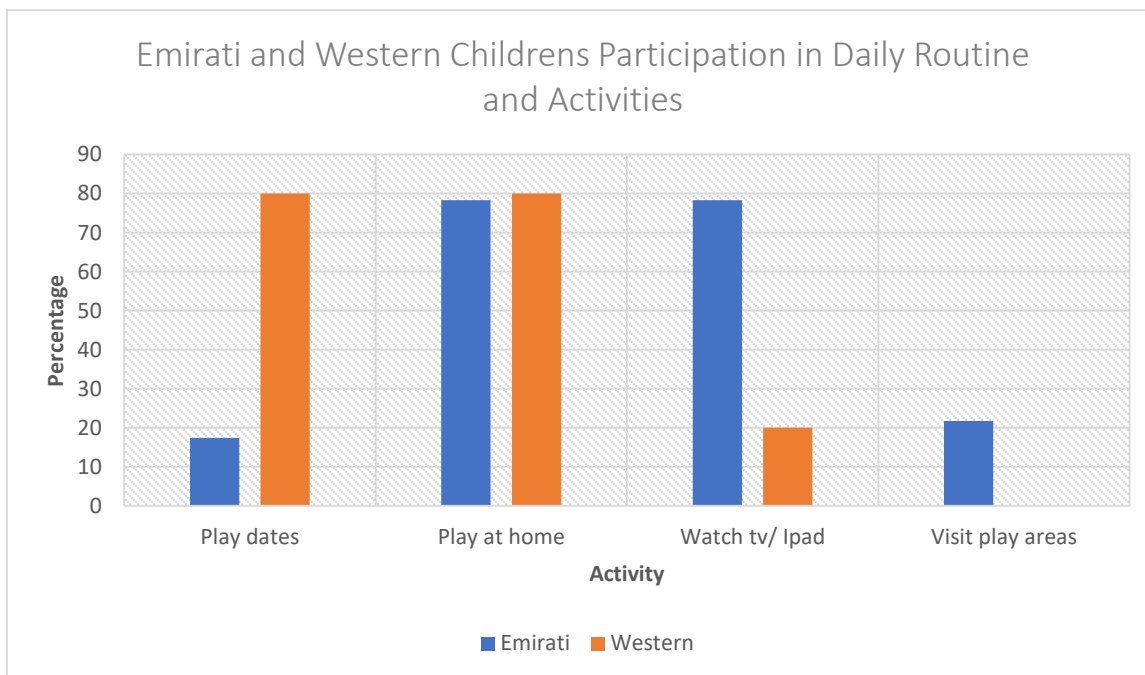
Over 50% of Emirati families also indicated living with nannies, while 100% of Emirati respondents indicated having a nanny at some point in the survey. 90% of the mothers who participated in this study maintained a professional career, as such, a nanny is not only the source of help for families, but support as well while the mothers are away (See Table 3).

My personal experience, in Dubai, living in an extended family household posed challenges in maintaining rigid rules and bedtime routines for children. However, of the surveyed Emirati mothers, 78% indicated that they still maintained a bedtime routine for the children compared to 100% of Western mothers living alone.

To collect information regarding play habits and opportunities at home, mothers were asked what children typically did after preschool hours. While the majority of Emirati parents indicated that the children had a snack or lunch, many said they spent the remaining time on the tablet or watching T.V. As opposed to 80% of Western moms who indicated that the children spent the majority of their time after nursery at playdates or playing at home.

**Table 7** Emirati children’s participation in daily routines and activities in comparison to Western children’s daily routines and activities after nursery

	<b>Emirati (n=23)</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Western (n=5)</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Lunch</i>	14	60.87	1	20.00
<i>Play dates (friends or relatives)</i>	4	17.39	4	80.00
<i>Play at home</i>	18	78.26	4	80.00
<i>Mall</i>	2	8.70	1	20.00
<i>Visit play areas</i>	5	21.74	0	
<i>Watch Tv/ spend time on the Ipad</i>	18	78.26	1	20.00
<i>Sleep/ take a nap</i>	8	34.78	2	40.00

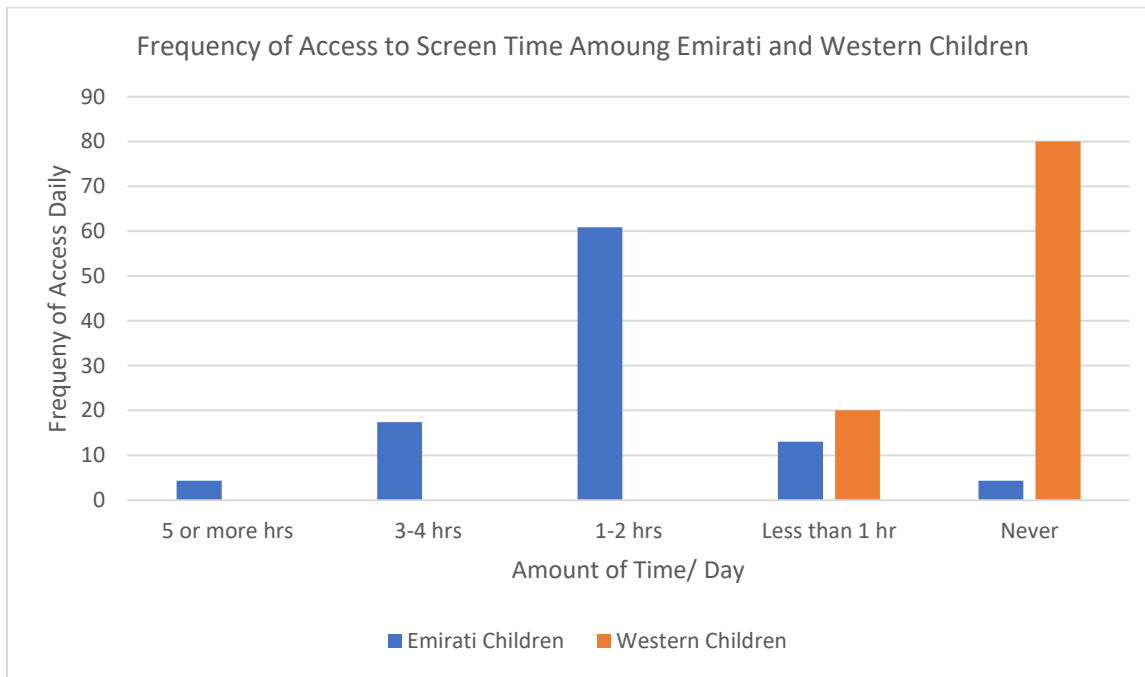


**Figure 4:** Daily Routines: Emirati and Western children’s participation in various activities after preschool hours.

The amount of time spent on the Ipad and T.V as disclosed by Emirati mothers is almost 4 times the amount of time spent on the Ipad or T.V as disclosed by mothers of Western children (see Figure 4).

**Table 8** Amount of time Emirati and Western children spend “playing” with a tablet, Ipad, T.V, or computer daily

	Emirati	%	Western	%
5 or more hrs	1	4.35	0	0
3-4 hrs	4	17.39	0	0
1-2 hrs	14	60.87	0	0
Less than 1 hrs	3	13.04	1	20
Rarely/ never	1	4.35	4	80



**Figure 5:** Screen Time: The frequency of access to screen time among Emirati and Western children.

**Table 9** Frequency of interaction between Emirati and Western children's and various play partners on a daily basis

	<b>Emirati</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total Emirati</b>	<b>Total Western</b>
<b>Nursery teachers or friends</b>						
Every day	19	82.61	5	100	23	5
3 days a week	3	43.48	0	0		
1 day a week	1	4.35	0	0		
Never	0	0	0	0		
<b>Relatives</b>						
Everyday	6	26.09	0	0		
3 days a week	3	13.04	1	20		
1 day a week	12	52.17	2	40		
Never	2	8.70	2	40		
<b>With Parents</b>						
Everyday	9	39.13	3	60		
3 days a week	6	26.09	2	40		
1 day a week	4	17.39	0	0		
Never	4	17.39	0	0		
<b>Nanny</b>						
Everyday	17	73.91	0	0		
3 days a week	1	4.35	0	0		
1 day a week	0	0	0	0		
Never	5	21.74	5	100		

The play partners available to children influences the type of play that children engage in. The most frequent play partners available to Emirati children are nursery friends and nannies, while the most frequent play partners available to Western children are their nursery friends and parents.

**Table 10** Emirati and Western children's most frequent play partners

	<b>Emirati</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total Emirati</b>	<b>Total Western</b>
Parents	9	40.91	3	60		
Siblings	7	31.82	1	20		

<i>Relatives</i>	1	4.55	0	0	23	5
<i>Friends</i>	0	0	1	20		
<i>Nanny</i>	5	22.73	0	0		

Furthermore, Emirati children typically came from families larger than three with siblings, while the Western children surveyed typically came from families of three (father, mother and single child). The availability of siblings as a play partner to children is an advantage the Emirati children in the survey enjoyed, as 31.82% of Emirati children engaged in pretend play or play with their siblings in contrast to 20% of Western children (See Figure 6).

The presence of nannies in Emirati households, especially in households where both the mother and father hold full time careers makes them an essential part of a child’s life, including their time spent in play. As such we see 60% of Emirati children spending 4 hours of more with nannies in contrast to 0% of Western children surveyed. While many Emirati household’s employee nannies, their Western counterparts frequently do not. This could be due to cultural norms, additionally having nannies is not something Western families typically grow up with in their home countries, leaving them less likely to hiring them once living as expatriates in the U.A.E. Furthermore, living as expatriates away from their home country, family and friends leaves Western children deprived of lengthy interactions with relatives and friends enjoyed by their Emirati counterparts.

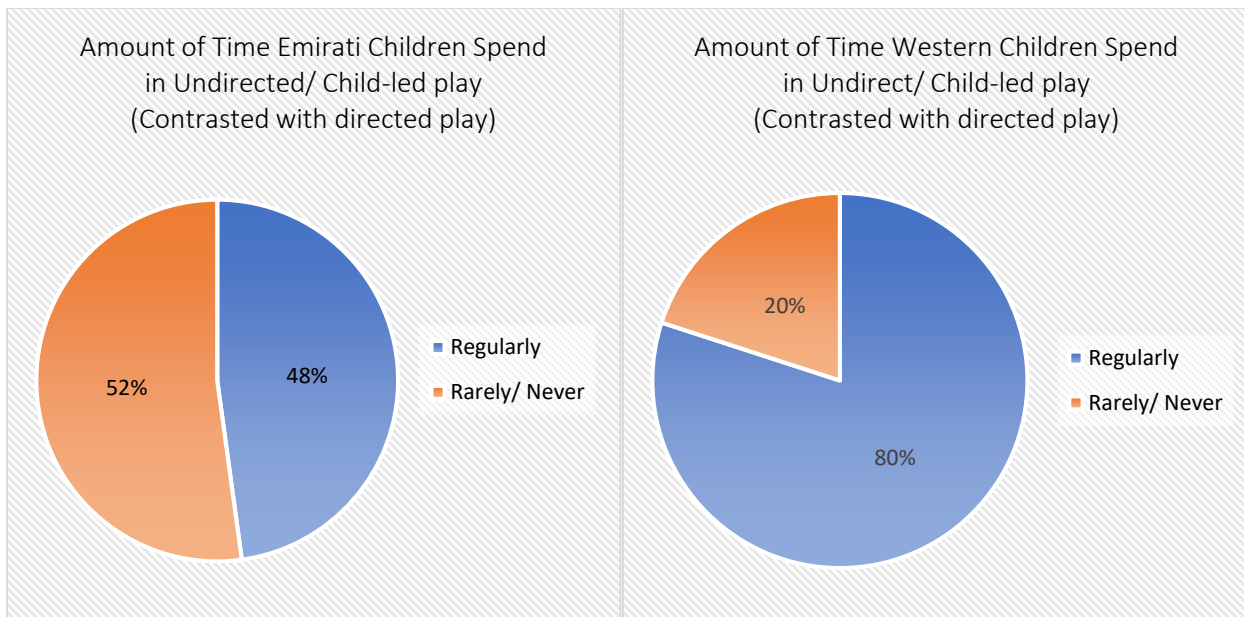
**Table 11** Amount of time per day the reported frequent play partners spend playing with Emirati and Western children respectively

	Emirati	%	Western	%	Total Emirati	Total Western
<b>Parents</b>						
<b>Mother</b>						
<i>5 or more hrs</i>	8	34.78	5	100	23	5
<i>3-4 hrs</i>	4	17.39	0	0		
<i>1-2 hrs</i>	9	39.13	0	0		
<i>Less than 1 hr</i>	2	8.70	0	0		
<i>Never</i>	0	0	0	0		
<b>Father</b>						
<i>5 or more hrs</i>	1	4.35	3	60	23	5
<i>3-4 hrs</i>	2	8.70	0	0		
<i>1-2 hrs</i>	5	21.74	2	40		
<i>Less than 1 hr</i>	10	43.48	0	0		
<i>Never</i>	5	21.74	0	0		



<b>Siblings</b>						
<b>Older Siblings</b>						
5 or more hrs	2	10	1	25		
3-4 hrs	3	15	0	0		
1-2 hrs	4	20	0	0	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>
Less than 1 hr	1	5	0	0		
Never	10	50	3	75		
<b>Younger Siblings</b>						
5 or more hrs	3	16.67	2	50		
3-4 hrs	2	11.11	0	0	<b>18</b>	<b>4</b>
1-2 hrs	1	5.56	1	25		
Less than 1 hr	1	5.56	0	0		
Never	11	61.11	1	25		
<b>Relatives</b>						
<b>Grandparents</b>						
5 or more hrs	0	0	0	0		
3-4 hrs	3	13.04	0	0	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>
1-2 hrs	6	26.09	1	25		
Less than 1 hr	9	39.13	2	50		
Never	5	21.71	1	25		
<b>Aunts/ Uncles</b>						
5 or more hrs	2	8.70	0	0		
3-4 hrs	4	17.39	0	0	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>
1-2 hrs	10	43.48	2	50		
Less than 1 hr	6	26.09	2	50		
Never						
<b>Friends</b>						
5 or more hrs	3	13.04	1	25		
3-4 hrs	3	13.04	1	25		
1-2 hrs	3	13.04	0	0	<b>23</b>	<b>4</b>
Less than 1 hr	4	17.39	1	25		
Never	10	43.48	1	25		
<b>Nanny</b>						
5 or more hrs	5	22.73	0	0		
3-4 hrs	9	40.91	0	0		
1-2 hrs	2	9.09	0	0	<b>23</b>	<b>5</b>
Less than 1 hr	1	4.55	0	0		
Never	5	22.73	5	100		

Undirected play is the result of following the child’s interest and lead in dictating their own play and narratives. Western children are twice as likely to engage in undirected play than Emirati children. Some Emirati mothers explained that their children typically enjoyed having access to an adult around (relative, parent or nanny) leading/ guiding their play that they did not find joy in playing in solitude, whereas the number of adults present in a Western household could facilitate more opportunities for the child to guide their own play. Furthermore, the lack of a nanny providing children assistance in a Western household could potentially also contribute to Western children having more independence or confidence in doing things on their own when compared to Emirati children with access to help and nannies more frequently.



**Figure 6:** Directed and Undirected Play: The amount of time Emirati and Western children spend in undirected/ child-led play practices.

### 5.2.2 Routines, Habits and Play Themes Surrounding the Play Behaviours of Emirati Children

In order to gain better understanding and insight into the play behaviours of Emirati children, questions targeting their routines, habits and play themes were posed to parents. The mean values and frequency of various answers were gathered and recorded in order to uncover patterns that dominate Emirati children’s play and play behaviours.

Living arrangements and space available to children also greatly contributes to the child’s play habits. While both Emirati and Western mothers disclosed that they lived in villas as opposed to apartments, the amount of room available to children in Emirati households was almost double than what the Western children had. Aside from children in Emirati households having their own rooms, they also had access to a dedicated play room within their house and a private play space outside their villas with bikes, slides or pools.

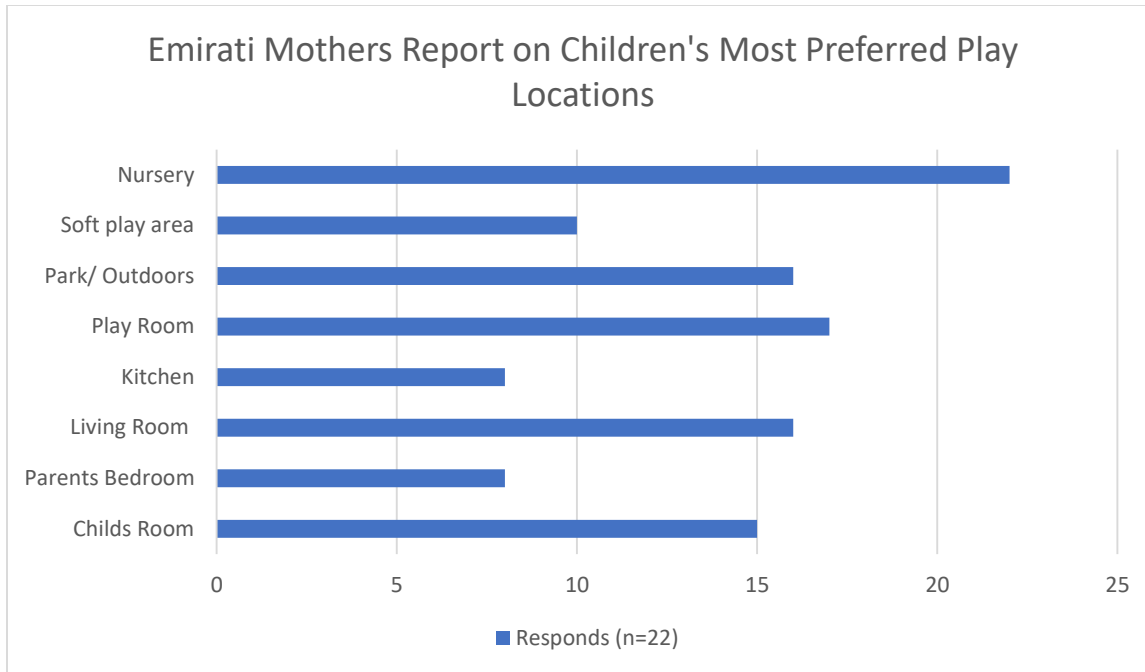
**Table 12** *Most frequent play locations/ environments as indicated by Emirati mothers*

<i>Play Locations</i>	<b>Responds (n=22)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Childs Room</i>	15	68.18
<i>Parents Bedroom</i>	8	36.36
<i>Living Room</i>	16	72.72
<i>Kitchen</i>	8	36.36
<i>Play Room</i>	17	77.27
<i>Park/ Outdoors</i>	16	72.73
<i>Soft play area</i>	10	45.45
<i>Nursery</i>	22	100

**Note:**

*A few other parents wrote that their children also frequent relatives house on a daily basis.*

*It is also noteworthy to mention that zero respondents said that their children frequent others friends’ houses for play.*



**Figure 7:** Play Locations: Emirati mothers report on most frequent/ preferred play locations of children

A look at the responses in accordance to child’s gender also revealed to play a significant role in children’s play location. Mothers of boys typically checked off “park/outdoors” more often than mothers of girls. Additionally, all mothers of girls indicated that their child frequently played in their room, as opposed to only 66% of mothers of boys.

Some mothers added that the summer heat in Dubai played a huge role in them not sending their children out to play even though their children frequently ask. A few mothers added that they send their children outside despite the heat due to the added value in children playing outdoors.

75% of mothers of children below the age of two, across both genders revealed that children played in their rooms so that the mother was able to keep closer watch on the child as she read, got ready or sat there, as opposed to only 25% of mothers of children above the age of two, who selected “parents’ rooms” as a preferred area.

When asked what does your child typically pretend to be the most common themes mentioned surrounded community helpers or fantasy characters mostly inspired from something the children had seen on T.V or on their iPad.

**Table 13** Mothers description of most common pretend play scenarios carried out by Emirati children

<b>Common Themes</b>	<b>Responses</b>
<i>People we know/ she/he knows (e.g. Mother, Father, Teacher etc.)</i>	<p>“A baby”</p> <p>“His friends, or sometimes his teachers too”</p> <p>“[Typically] his father”</p> <p>“Sometimes her teachers”</p>
<i>A Community Helper (Police Officer, Doctor, Chef etc.)</i>	<p>“A nurse taking care of all her babies or her Teacher at nursery teaching her babies”</p> <p>“A doctor, someone she wants to be when she grows up”</p> <p>“Cooking food for us, macaroni or salad”</p>
<i>Fantasy Character (Cartoon Character, Disney, Superhero)</i>	<p>“Someone he’s seen on T.V”</p> <p>“Superman, Spiderman, Iron man...”</p> <p>“Sometimes a Dragon, sometimes a Princess... it changes with her changing interests”</p> <p>“Usually, anything she watches on T.V.”</p>
<i>Re-enactment of an experience</i>	<p>“He pretends he is riding on a plane”</p> <p>“A driver, driving a car to an appointment”</p> <p>“Driving to nursery, or making his lunch box”</p>

It is also noteworthy to mention that the number of toys available to Emirati children was more than what was made available to Western children (many Emirati mothers mentioned children enjoyed playing with play kitchen setups, doll houses, ride in cars and bikes, not mentioned by Western mothers).

Next, I explored the themes that children typically undertake while engaged in play. While a presentation of the results as a function of the theme itself did not reveal anything significant, further assessment of the data as a function of gender revealed suggestive trends.

**Table 14** Mothers reports on most common play themes undertaken by Emirati children during play

<i>Themes</i>	<b>Responses (n=18)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Caretaker role (mother, father, nanny, etc.)</i>	11 <sup>^</sup>	61.11
<i>Chef (cooking based role)</i>	13	72.22
<i>Infant (role play as a baby)</i>	10 <sup>^</sup>	55.56
<i>Doctor</i>	11 <sup>^</sup>	61.11
<i>Fighting or Rough play</i>	6 <sup>*</sup>	33.33
<i>Police/ Firefighter/ Ambulance</i>	7	38.89
<i>Building or Using Weapons</i>	4 <sup>*</sup>	22.22
<i>Fantasy Play (Spiderman, Superman, princess etc.)</i>	9	50.00
<i>Risk play (car crash, house on fire)</i>	3 <sup>*</sup>	16.67

\* male dominated  
<sup>^</sup> female dominated

\* A look at the distribution of responses in relation to gender revealed that all 4 responses regarding building weapons came from mothers of boys, 2 of the 3 responses with regards to risk play came from mothers of boys and 4 of the 6 responses with regards to fighting or rough play came from mothers of boys.

<sup>^</sup> 7 out of the 11 responses with regards to participating in a caretaker role came from mothers of girls, 8 of the responses with regards to taking on a doctor roll came from mothers of girls and 8 of the responses with regards to taking on an infant roll came from mothers of girls.

While it was made clear that an abundance of toys was regularly made available to Emirati children, I explored the concept of play with non-toys, such as assuming available resources as

items to further pretend play habits. While the majority of Emirati children were able to assume non-toys as other objects to further their play, only 9% did so on a regular basis.

**Table 15** Emirati children’s use of non-toys during play to further pretend play scenarios

	Responses (n=23)	Percentage (%)
<i>Always</i>	2	8.69
<i>Sometimes</i>	13	56.52
<i>Never</i>	8	34.78

A look at the use of non-toys as objects to further children’s play as a function of gender revealed that in general Emirati girls were more abstract in their imagination of non-toys as various objects such as using their fingers as a camera or a spoon as a makeup brush, where-as Emirati boys were more practical in their imagination of non-toys using pencils as needles or paper as money.

**Table 16** Emirati mothers accounts of various non-toy objects and their uses as toys to further pretend play scenarios as observed in their children

	Themes	Responses
<i>Female</i>	Self-care	“Paint brushes or spoons as makeup”
	Everyday Items	“Her finger can be used as a camera”
		“Making a house out of blankets or pillows”
Caretaker	“Towel for the baby blanket”	
	“Dolls as patient”	
<i>Male</i>	Caretaker	“She pretends to be the teacher and asks [me] to be the student”
		“Sticks as weapons”
	Weapons	“Pencil like a needle for doctor”
	Fantasy / Risk Play	“String from the cupboard for Spider-man Web”
“The floor is lava and the table or chairs are buildings”		

Everyday Items	“A paper for using to cut the fruit play fruit on” “Pieces of paper as money” “Air as “ice cream”” “Lego pieces as food”
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### 5.2.3 Social and Cultural Factors and Maternal Values which Contribute to Influencing the Play Behaviours of Emirati Children

The social and cultural function of play plays a substantial role in underlying play routines and habits of children. To uncover these, I examined how Emirati mothers and their cultural and social values dictated the way they viewed pretend play, the reasons for play deprivation, if any. And finally, their level of involvement and degree of support of their child’s play behaviours.

Most mothers indicated that they preferred that their children played with other children their age rather than familiar adults. Most indicated that they valued having the play partner express the same interests as their children. While the responses did not seem to change based on gender, a look at the responses given as a factor of age revealed that mothers of children below 2 in general valued their child’s play partners’ ability to keep their children safe the most, while mothers of children above 2 looked for their children’s play partners to have the same interests and provide their children with a fun time.

**Table 17** Emirati’s mothers account for the traits valued the most in their children’s play partners

<b>Mothers of Emirati Child Reports:</b>	
<i>Girls (2yrs and below)</i>	“Entertain her and watch her” “Keep my baby safe”
<i>Boys (2yrs and below)</i>	“Love and care for him” “Show an interest in him”
<i>Girls (above 2yrs)</i>	“Value their time [spent] to make her happy and loved” “Same interests” “Bring my child laughter” “Make her have fun”
<i>Boys (above 2yrs)</i>	“Allow him to have fun and make him happy” “Good manners”

**Common themes:**

*“Well mannered” came up a total of 7 times across both genders and age groups*

*“Show an interest [in child]” was mentioned a total of 4 times, again across both genders and age groups*

*Leading to child “having fun” was mentioned a total of 5 times, specific to the above 2’s and across both genders.*

**Table 18** *Western’s mothers account for the traits valued the most in their children’s play partners*

<b>Mothers of Western Child Reports:</b>	
<i>Girls (2yrs and below)</i>	N/A
<i>Boys (2yrs and below)</i>	“Do activities to help develop my child more”
<i>Girls (above 2yrs)</i>	“Help my child stay out of harm’s way... keep him happy” “Facilitate opportunities for her play, imagine with her, support her needs to explore, investigate and lead her own play”
<i>Boys (above 2yrs)</i>	“Keep her engaged and entertained by being a good role model and friend to my daughter” “Allow him to be him! Play with him and keep him happy”

**Important to Note:**

*The answers provided by Western mothers were longer in length and in word count than the answers provided by Emirati mothers, additionally, they were unanimously worded in full sentences rather than point forms, and often times were accompanied by specific and detailed examples (omitted for anonymity purposes)*

The majority of mothers surveyed revealed that they believed play was a social function rather than a cognitive function. Their understanding of why children enter in pretend play was for connecting with other children and socializing with them, rather than learning about the world they live in. Additionally, 100% of surveyed mothers agreed that children deprived of play opportunities had negative effects on the child’s growth and progress in life. 100% of mothers indicated that pretend play was very important or somewhat important for the development of their children. I also asked about their thoughts on the importance of them joining in on their children’s play, and how important they felt their presence was. 90% of mothers indicated that they believed it was very important for them to join in or play with their children.

**Table 19** Emirati maternal value of the significance of playing with their children

	<b>Responses (n=22)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Very Important</i>	20	90.91
<i>Not Important</i>	2	9.09

However, some mothers did disclose that they were not able to play with their children as often as they would like. Some reasons provided by mothers for not participating in play with their children included time restrictions with clashing nursery and working hours, their work commitments and schedules and lastly, some did disclose that they were not sure how to play with their children or preferred to let someone else fill that role such as a sibling, friend or nanny.

**Table 20** Factors that impede Emirati mother's ability to play with their children

<b>Responses</b>
"Time restrictions after nursery and working days"
"They don't know how"
"Full time jobs"
"There are others who fill that role"

Pretend play as opposed to play in general includes an element of imagination and creativity. While 100% of Emirati mothers reported that their children play, only 40% of those children engage in pretend play regularly.

**Table 21** Emirati mothers report on how often their children engage in pretend play

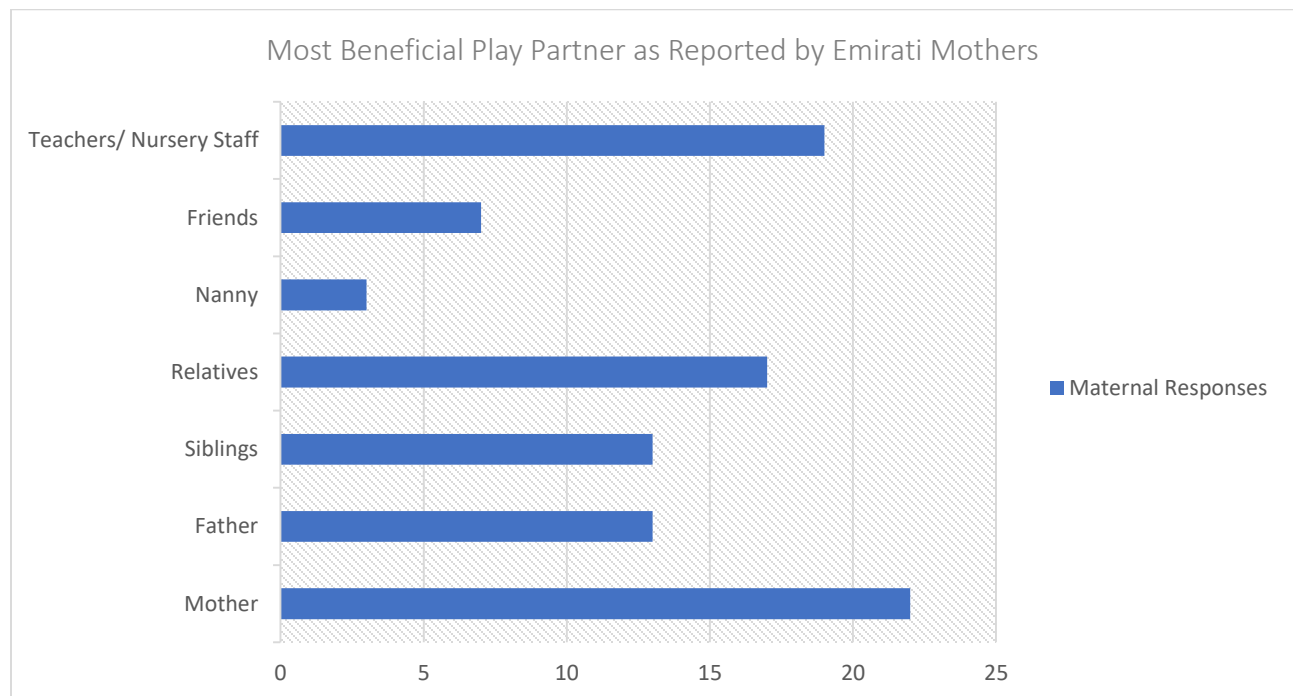
	<b>Responses (n=20)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Always</i>	8	40
<i>Sometimes</i>	10	50
<i>Rarely/ Never</i>	2	10

When asked about the reasons that their children do not engage in pretend play more often, most mothers said it was due to lack of opportunity since the child spent the majority of his or her time on the Ipad, or watching T.V, or that they didn't have a suitable play partner to pretend with.

### 5.2.4 Account of Maternal Views and Children Play Behaviours to illicit Best Practice Policies that Better Support Emirati Children in Early Childcare Settings

After examining Emirati children’s play habits, and behaviours and exploring the social and cultural functions which affect their play behaviours, I began exploring the mother’s expectations of their children’s preschool setting. This allowed me to understand their developmental expectations of a childcare setting for their children and their concepts about how their children learn and grow. Addressing the maternal values that the children we teach daily facilitates opportunities to bridge the gap that exists between educators and parents. It also helps draw us closer by identifying the expectations of parents and learning more about their parenting practices so that we may develop an inclusive and extensive policy that is catered to the specific children and the unique needs of those children under our care.

In order to gain insight into the influences and interactions that are rated with most significance and valued by Emirati mothers I asked which interaction they felt was the most beneficial to the development of their children’s play behaviours. Over 95% of parents believed that the mother’s interaction was most beneficial followed closely by their child’s teacher.



**Figure 8:** Play Partners: Emirati mothers report on the most beneficial play partner as regarded by them for their children

While most mothers indicated that they expected their children to learn their numbers, letters and phonics at some point in their tenure at preschool, 80% of mothers valued their children learning moral values, making friends, interacting with other children and following/ listening to instructions. As opposed to 40% of mothers who valued their children learning their ABC's, the Arabic language, and about the world they live in.

**Table 22** Emirati mothers' expectations of developmental outcomes from preschool settings they send their children to

	<b>Respondents (n=22)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Learning their ABC's</i>	10	45.45
<i>Learning phonics</i>	11	50
<i>Writing letters</i>	5	22.73
<i>Learning Arabic language</i>	9	40.91
<i>Learning Quran</i>	12	54.55
<i>Learning moral values</i>	18	81.82
<i>Making friends</i>	18	81.82
<i>Proper eating habits</i>	12	54.55
<i>Interacting with other children</i>	18	81.82
<i>Listening and following instructions</i>	18	81.82
<i>Learning theme related knowledge</i>	6	27.27
<i>Learning about the world they live in</i>	9	40.91
<i>Engaging in/ learning how to pretend play</i>	11	50

**Note:**

*80% of Emirati mothers indicated that their most preferred developmental outcomes from the preschool settings are: moral values, friendships, interacting with others and following instructions.*

*In contrast to 100% of Western moms who indicated that learning to pretend/ engaging in pretend play, interacting with other children and making friends were the most important.*

When asked what the single most important developmental outcomes that mothers had with regards to their child's current preschool setting, 77% of mothers indicated that learning "good

behaviours and being well mannered” topped their list. Some added “learning proper values and habits” and “being patient.”

**Table 23** *Single most important developmental expectations of Emirati mothers from preschool*

<b>Common Themes</b>	<b>Maternal Definitions/ Understanding of Play</b>
<i>Enjoyment</i>	<p>“Having fun”</p> <p>“Doing something that is enjoyable”</p> <p>“Playing [happily] without [interference]..... good imagination”</p> <p>“..child having fun with whatever they are doing”</p> <p>“Having fun...” x 4</p> <p>“Activities for fun”</p>
<i>Use of Toys</i>	<p>“...with toys”</p> <p>“...do with the toys what she [wants] happily”</p> <p>“something a child does with toys”</p> <p>“...do what he wants with toys”</p>
<i>Cognitive Element</i>	<p>“Engaging my child by using all [his/her] sense to learn”</p> <p>“Activity that stimulates brain action in an enjoyable way”</p> <p>“Smart way to learn”</p>
<i>Bonds</i>	<p>“How to take turns”</p>
<i>Discovering/ Experimenting</i>	<p>“...exploring themselves”</p> <p>“...enable child to spend all his energy”</p> <p>“Experimenting, discovering and moving to burn energy”</p> <p>“...using her energy in a fun way”</p>
<i>Acquire Different Skill Set</i>	<p>“...children [way of learning] different skills (social skills, motor skills, imagination and role playing). It also creates a bond between the child and his/her playmates”</p>

Within the U.A.E an array of schools adopting various approaches exists. When asked which approach parents felt would better support their children’s development and growth, close to 80% of parents indicated that a compromise between a play-based learning and a formal learning environment is most optimal, contrary to recent literature that indicates a play-based learning environment is best practice.

**Table 24** *Mothers report on the type of preschool they believe would better support their children’s development and growth holistically*

	<b>Responses (n=23)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Formal Learning Based School System</i>	2	8.69
<i>Play Based School Environment</i>	3	13.04
<i>A compromise between both: Learning through Play</i>	18	78.26



## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

This study was conducted as a cross-cultural comparison of the play behaviours of Emirati and Western children and their maternal values on play-based educational preschool systems and curriculums. The two dimensions I explored for the purpose of this study were play behaviours and maternal values while incorporating an exploration into cultural practices which affects parenting styles. Researchers have long asserted that that varying cultural practices greatly influences the quality and outcome of a child's play (Fleer & Samuelsson 2008; Pazzagli 2011). Within the context of a literature review that was conducted on the specific play behaviours of Emirati children and their maternal values, no research was located. As such, this research was able to gather preliminary data on a group of individuals unheeded in literature to date.

Through this present study, I compared the data collected from Western mothers with regards to their children and the data collected from Emirati mothers. The results indicated that there were significant differences in the described play behaviours and environmental influences of both. The significance of the results I present lies in cultural perspectives I have highlighted above, which underlines the play behaviours explored within the study. Analyzing play behaviours of children using a cultural perspective, sheds light on the habits, attitudes and needs of those children.

In schools in America, play is often seen and used as a means to improve a child's social and cognitive abilities and as such, play is huge part of preschool systems as well as a child's home presence (Bornstein et al. 2001). Correspondingly, research carried out on American children and their maternal values, shows that parents, particularly American mothers, invest an ample amount of time in promoting their children's self-skills and imaginative play by being present during play sessions, extending their children's play through inquiry-based questions and provocations (Bornstein et al. 2001). Additionally, American children were seen to exert more independence with regards to directing their own play and strong imaginative play behaviours. Parmar et al. (2004) explains that American families often use every opportunity possible to

extend their child's cognitive growth, through incorporating learning in basic everyday tasks. As such, we see a unity established between the maternal values, the children's play behaviours and schools teaching ethos. When comparing this found knowledge to the data collected, we see the contrary.

Due to the large number of Emirati families living in extended family households, as well as with nannies, the amount of time and interaction between mothers and Emirati children decreases. This is notably seen in contrast to Western families who indicated they live alone with their immediate family without nannies at home, leading mothers to include their children in daily household activities and tasks in order to manage the load. Emirati children, on the contrary, were often left under the supervision of nannies or extended family while mothers tended to other activities. Klein, Graesch & Izquierdo (2009) reports that children in families who hire domestic help or nannies tend to be less independent and exert consistency than children without. I suggest that this is due to the children not having to partake in the basic everyday tasks that families without help include their children in. As such we see a drop in Emirati children use of play to promote their self-skills, additionally the lack of inquiry rich interactions that a mother or similar would have offered if present during play sessions is noted. Early childhood facilities in Dubai who attempt to use play as both a social and cognitive driving agent then face issues in conflicting home and school philosophies. Emirati mothers' general expectations of their children's nursery or preschool setting were related to social values or moral, (such as displaying good manners, truthfulness, following instructions and being respectful) as opposed to cognitive agents as seen by American mothers in literature (Bornstein et al. 2001) and in this research (using imaginative skills, being innovative etc.).

The cultural values and norms maintained by parents shapes the parent's level of participation and interaction in their child's play (Gaskins 2006; Parmar et al. 2004; Roopnarine 2010). Chao (2000) states that the goals parents have for their children are called "socialization goals-shared beliefs" which they try to reach within their cultural community as part of a shared belief system they acquire through socialization. Socialization goals shared through cultural communities can affect things such as the level of participation by parents during children's play activities and how invested or how much time they spend on scaffolding their children's play (Roopnarine 2012). While all Emirati mothers reported that their presence during their children's

play sessions is instrumental, less than half of mothers made themselves available for 1 hour or more during play. This is in contrast to the Western mothers surveyed who were available for at least 2 hours or more all the time as reported. Farver (1993) reports that American mothers readily joined in their children's play and extended on their play behaviours. This is in contrast to Haight et al. (1999) report that while Chinese mothers were available, they used play to support other values such as social lessons or extending on morals, rather than play behaviours itself.

A study carried out on German and American communities revealed that mothers generally participate in their children's play activities more due to their belief that it strengthens their children's growth and development, studies carried out on parents of Asian descent reveal that they generally focus on group activities with their children rather than devoting time to them individually (Roopnarine 2012; Rothbaum & Trommsdorff 2008). Emirati mothers surveyed revealed that nursery friends and nannies as well as extended family members were their children's most frequent play partners, while western mothers indicated it was themselves or their nursery friends, as they did not have nannies or extended family members around. Haight et al. (1999) stated that the specific ways in which communities are made up, yields different interactions between the people in that community. This is seen through the regular interactions reported by Emirati mothers and their children's extended family members and domestic help, which are void among Western children living as expatriates away from extended family and without help at home. Thus, we would expect that the type of scaffolding that children receive from the two different social circles are different. Furthermore, children who spend an abundance of time with maids who often speak a different language, or who are not native Arabic or English speakers, often do not receive any type of scaffolding during their play (Karaman 2011).

Siegler, DeLoache and Eisenberg (2002) reported that a parent's choice in play partners for their children is influenced by many cultural values. They go on to reveal that cultures which value independence and autonomy more such as American-European, provide more peer experiences through play groups, enrollment in nursery or preschool settings or after school programs, while cultures where inter-dependence is more valued such as among Japanese-

Australians where more extended family interactions are encouraged. When comparing this to the data collected from mothers in this study, we see Emirati mothers resembling mothers within inter-dependent cultures, who seek more relative interactions for their children as opposed to peers, and as opposed to Western mothers who resembled the independent cultures by seeking play groups or similar meet ups. One possible reason for this is the sense of comfort of having your child play with children with the same shared social or moral value system that Emirati parents get when their children play with their own kin versus when meeting a group of mothers and children at a play group. Further studies would do well to investigate whether growing up and playing in a relative dominated environment affects choices in school friends and play partners later.

The social function of play plays a huge role in dictating what children play with and the themes they carry out. Through an analysis of Emirati mothers' responses on questions pertaining to the social function of play, the following main values were noted: play is very important for the development and cognitive growth of children, it is a pleasurable activity that the child undergoes, it allows them to interact with others, make friends and learn social values and morals. These findings were in align with sentiments shared by Korean mothers who reported that play is a pleasurable activity for children (Farver & Wimbarti 1995). However, unlike Emirati mothers who revealed that combination of learning and play preschool systems were the most effective, Korean mothers saw little value in play preschool systems and favored the more traditional learning-based systems. While European American mothers, in contrast to the above two, are reported to value true play systems as the most effective contributor to their children's social and cognitive growth (Farver & Wimbarti 1995).

Within the last decade alone, Dubai has seen many preschools shifting to adopt a play-based system (dominate in Western countries) as educators, leaders and parents have begun to take an interest into best practice methodologies (Karaman 2011). However, in order to ensure the success of a play-based system in Dubai, the existing gaps between cultural upbringing, environmental factors and social norms that exists between children in Dubai and in the West ought to be brought to light and addressed to maximize the child development outcomes and well-being. The findings outlined of Emirati mother's expectations of their children's preschool

systems could prove to be very useful to newly adopted play-based schools' curriculums. One example of using their outlined expectations would be in planning to incorporate teachings of accepted social norms in early childhood schools. Emirati mothers report that they value teachings of accepted social norms more than academic values. This however is not novel, as Fung (1994) reports in his study that Chinese mothers often use play to incorporate teachings on acceptable and unacceptable social norms and outlines respectful behaviours and habits. However, through the implementation of moral studies lessons and in maintaining children's national identity through cultural awareness, this can be addressed.

Noting the cultural differences experienced by children's in Emirati households, unearthed in this report and Western households could help policy makers and curriculum heads in drafting more tailored curriculums which address the children's needs and supports their play behaviours directly. However, on a larger scale, I would ponder what the implications would be if these results were replicated to other samples and underrepresented children in literature. What significance would the results hold to early childcare specialists and educators? What would they mean for understanding play behaviour, especially child development on a wider scale? Children in two various cultures may use play in two different ways, attaining developmental milestones at differing rates and times, could this then potentially lead to having tailored "Child Development Matters" maps and guides as opposed to adopting the national framework from the U.K?

In conclusions, I believe that the results presented highlight how children from varying cultures can use play in two different ways. Utilizing this knowledge when transitioning children into preschool systems is paramount in ensuring a smooth process for children, additionally, utilizing this knowledge aids in identifying which areas Emirati children ought to be supported more in, in preschools in Dubai in attempt to tailor educational systems to their specific needs, and identifies the gaps that must be addressed in order to ensuring maximum child development and growth outcomes in preschools in the U.A.E.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### **7.1 Concluding Statement**

This study aims to contribute and increase both the current understanding of the universal aspects of play and the cultural differences and variations which shape children's play behaviours. The problem with using universal claims to describe play behaviours lies in that they ignore contrasting actualities about children, their experiences and cultural upbringings which play enormous roles in shaping their play behaviours. While play undoubtedly is developed through universal properties, the cultural components contributing to play must not be overlooked (Roopnarine et al. 1994). In current research children's play behaviours is narrowly described by frameworks of European and American cultures which support play-based pedagogic views and goals in school settings. In order to offer a line of new insight to the literature surrounding children's play, a unique and rigorous look into the play behaviours of Emirati children was taken.

In light of this research we can conclude that children's play behaviours vary between cultures. This cross-cultural study helps in emphasizing the variation in views concerning the value that play has on children's lives. In turn, these views affect factors such as the quality, the nature or the frequency of parent and child play interactions. Additionally, it offers information on the role that parents play in their children's development and later on, school success. It also reveals information regarding maternal views on educational approaches and teaching styles. Western heritage children engage in more free self-initiated play compared to Emirati heritage children, due to the value placed on unregulated and uninterrupted play time for children of Western parents. Furthermore, we can conclude that due to the lack of one-on-one time received by Emirati children by their primary caregivers and inclusion in everyday household activities, Emirati children require more modeling and support of play behaviours in classroom settings.

Preschools in the emirates are continuing to support and implement play-based learning programmes, however challenges arise in appeasing the social context and parental views on said curriculums. Not all communities' value play-based learning or regard them as best practice

policies, thus an awareness and insight into this is significantly important as we assess how to improve the awareness of the significance of play and hold parental programmes which reiterate this. While Emirati mothers have all agreed that play is essential to learning, they would be weary of placing their children in a play-based facility without promise that their children would also carry out formal or focused learning sessions.

Despite the fact that “child-initiated, child-directed and teacher-supported play” has long been considered a vital component of best practice within early years settings (Bredekamp & Coople 1997), it is not necessarily accepted by all parents, policy makers or educators. Within a range of varying social and cultural contexts, this can be challenged (Ailwood 2003; MacNaughton & Corr 2004; Rogers 2011). While play is a key component to teaching and learning, it is certainly not the only preferred or effective strategy for teaching children (Brooker 2002; Wood 2008). However, as disclosed within this study, Emirati mothers preferred a compromise between a play-based learning environment and a formal education environment for their children. As such, the findings of this study provide early childhood educators, policy makers and leaders in Dubai and the Emirates a better understanding of the maternal values, developmental goals, outcomes, expectations and behaviours of Emirati children under their care. As an early childhood educator my goal would be to educate Emirati parents about the benefits of unstructured and unregulated child-play times, devise a curriculum that incorporates all the traits of a play-based facility yet supports their needs and lastly, tailor centres that train their staff to observe their children’s play behaviours in a manner which allows them to identify what their children’s needs are.

In undertaking this analysis of the play behaviours of Emirati children, who are gravely underrepresented in literature my aim has been to uncover the dominant practises of play surrounding Emirati children and their maternal views on early childhood education. Aside from doing so, the results of this study also validate Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory on “reciprocal interactions” and how children’s behaviours are affected by the interactions they have with other people, as well as their interaction with their environment.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

The following are recommendations made with respect to the findings of this research and in bridging the current gaps:

1. This study found that 80% of Emirati mothers believe that a compromise between knowledge-based learning and play-based learning is the most optimal curriculum for their children. As a result, I recommend that all play-based early childhood institutes discuss and spread awareness of the benefits of child-led play and play-based early learning centres by opening dialogues with parents first and foremost and then policy makers and the public.
2. This study revealed that 60% of Emirati children never or rarely engage in pretend play due to contextual constraints (readily available screens at home as distractions, inappropriate play partners etc.), as a result I recommend that Emirati dominated early-childhood centres tailor current Western educational curriculums to their Emirati children by taking into account their revealed needs, scarce play opportunities and described cultural factors, by providing them with ample support and modeling.
3. Emirati mothers surveyed indicated that they expected their children enrolled in preschool to learn how to make friends, moral values and interact with an array of children. As such, I recommend that stakeholder tailor their alignments to better suit Emirati Children by address their revealed needs. Currently there are many organizations in Dubai that are involved in early childhood education. Thus, I propose for them to align their targets with what is suitable for children in the U.A.E.
4. This study revealed that 48% of Emirati children vs. 80% of Western children regularly engage in undirected play. Thus, I propose that early childhood educators are aware of the differences and similarities in play behaviours of Emirati and Western children and plan activities which better support Emirati children within a Westernized curriculum.

### **7.3 Implications**

I believe that the following are most likely to benefit greatly from the data collected above in this paper: (a) Emirati children, (b) policy makers, (c) and early childhood educators.



The implications of this paper sets the tone and begins to make the first steps in tailoring Western pedagogy's and adapted curriculums to the specific needs of Emirati children. This paper outlines the benefits of unstructured play and begins to open up a discussion between Emirati mothers and educators about the value in following children's interest in their play and allowing them ample time to engage in their play. It also begins in explaining the Western Pedagogy's implemented in their children's education institutes. It highlights the needs of Emirati children and mothers to policy makers and describes cultural factors, social norms and maternal values all crucial to understanding the children receiving the curriculums they implement. And lastly, it sets us on the beginning of a trajectory of learnt knowledge on an unheeded group in literature, with promise of exploring more:

How can we help assimilate Emirati children in settings employing mainstream Western philosophies? What can we do to empower biculturalism within the context of preschools and nurseries? What are both developmentally and culturally appropriate practices that early childhood teachers can implement in their classrooms? A teacher is quintessential in the learning and development of the children under her care (Hyun 1998). As such, lets equip them with all the information they may need to make the biggest impact on the children they teach.

I suggest that all early childhood educators and policy makers to consider the following with respect to culturally relevant teaching practices:

- Their level of understanding and awareness of the developmental needs and background of Emirati children
- Their level of commitment, and awareness in meeting the needs of Emirati children and their family (this can perhaps be met by facilitating mandatory parent teacher meetings)
- Classroom resources, materials and provocations that speak out to Emirati children (inclusion of Arabic books in the reading corner, culturally significant landmarks in the blocks section: Burj Khalifa and Dubai mall etc.)
- Professional development training courses or workshops the teacher has participated in that address developmentally appropriate practice within culturally relevant realms.

## **7.4 Delimitations**

Aside from carrying out the respective study during Ramadan, and consequently shifting from an interview-based data gathering method to online survey there were no additional barriers or foreseen accessibility issues in conducting the research as planned. Access to an Emirati demographically dominated early education center was facilitated through my workplace. I currently work as a Head of Curriculum and teacher for a private preschool in Dubai, U.A.E and have access to the students and student/parent pool. I have also been with the preschool centre since its inception in 2016 and have since then built a good rapport with parents, staff and students that helped in facilitate the data collection process and interaction between researcher and research subjects.

## **7.5 Limitations**

Qualitative studies by their nature, pose limits to the extent of which the information derived from them can be applied or generalized to a greater population or cohort (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil 2002). As such, given that this current study has taken on the single-case design format, generalizations of the data and results gathered are limited to other single-case studies.

A limitation beyond my control as a researcher was the number of parents who denied observations of their child's play behaviour to be monitored, studied or recorded, leaving this study void of any first-hand data regarding the play behaviors of Emirati children. Additionally, I carried out all the necessary data collection, coding and analysis required for the purpose of this dissertation subjecting the study to bias which could have been avoided had a second researcher been available (Mackey & Gass 2005).

Lastly, due to the time constraints of both a working and studying researcher might face, the scope of the research was limited to what was possible for me to achieve. While I acknowledge that using interviews and one-on-one sessions with mothers would have drastically contributed to the research outcomes, the time limitations to conducting a study of that scope did not permit. Lastly, the involvement of children directly in the study would have been paramount in yielding

significant information that could have additionally been used to shape policies and procedures that supported best practice when supporting and teaching Emirati children.

## **7.6 Disclosure Statement and Ethical Considerations**

No conflicts of interests are reported for the purpose of this study. Ethical issues arisen within the context of this research were primarily regarding informed consent and data protection methods.

Confidentiality was ensured by designing the data collection tool to not collect any identifiers or identifying information on the parent filling out the survey or the children in reference to. I did not permit SurveyMonkey to collect any information regarding computer IP addresses of participants or respondents' details. Consent was obtained by providing participants with a page long description of the study which included information about me, my role and my objectives. The purpose of my proposed research was also shared prior to proceeding with the survey. Participants had the chance to select "I agree to participate in the study" before beginning to answer the survey questions. Moreover, information regarding how participants could contact me for further clarifications, questions or inquiries was provided on the same page. Participants were also reminded that they could contact me at any time if they had further information they wished to share, or if they no longer wanted to be included in the study.

The data that I collected was stored on a laptop only accessible to me, via password protection. Moreover, the data collected in raw format was only viewed by me the researcher and my research supervisor. The protection and proper storage of the collected data was ensured by only having the raw data available to the me only for the duration of the dissertation.

## **7.7 Funding**

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## Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Research



### CONSENT FORM

*The Play Based Behaviours of Emirati Preschool Children: A descriptive cultural study of Emirati children's play behaviours and mothers' values to illicit policies and care routines that meet their needs and support their privations.*

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**Dana Al-Qinneh**  
Masters of Education  
in Leadership and Management  
The British University in Dubai,  
United Arab Emirates  
056 494 9615

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Hello, my name is Dana Al-Qinneh and I am both a Teacher and Department Lead at Creative Nest Nursery as well as a student at The British University in Dubai, Masters of Education programme. I am interested in studying the play-based behaviors of Emirati children in Dubai and their Emirati mothers' thoughts and values on their child's play behaviors.

I am very interested to learn about the play behaviors of Emirati children and to hear about their play habits so that Emirati children can be better supported through the adaptation and creation of policies that ensures their needs are met and privations are supported. I would like to find out things such as: how often your child engages in pretend play, where he/she plays and with whom he/she spends most of their time playing with. I would also like to know your thoughts and values on your child's play behaviors or if there is anything that you dislike about your child's play behaviours. I am also interested to find out how often your child has access to screens, toys or books at home and your thoughts on them as play products.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have an Emirati child between 1 - 4 years of age enrolled in nursery. Your role in this study will be to answer a series of questions I would ask you in an interview format. The interview may take up to an hour to complete and would consist of series of interrelated questions surrounding the play behaviors of your child and

your thoughts regarding them. The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and reference purposes and will not be shared with anyone but myself.

There are no foreseeable risks or haram associated with your participation in this study or your child's participation. Also, you do not stand to gain anything from your participation apart from the opportunity to re-evaluate your child's play behaviors and discuss your thoughts on the matter with an Early Childhood Educator. However, if at any point, for any reason you do not feel like continuing our conversation or would like to withdraw from the study, please let me know and we will immediately cease the interview and your inclusion in the study.

Furthermore, to gain a holistic understanding and appreciation of your child's play behavior I will be conducting informal observations. The observations will take place of your child in their original class during their regular scheduled activities. I will not intervene or interact with your child in any way, other than to just observe from a distance and record my observations. If at any point your child is distressed by presence, I will cease the observation.

Lastly, please be assured that what we discuss in the interview and the data I collect from the observations will remain confidential and be used solely for the purpose of this research. While I may share the findings, I gathered from my interaction with you and observations of your child, I will never use any identifiable features such as your name, your child names, your child's age or your demographics. I will transcribe what we discuss for the purpose of book keeping and reference, but your anonymity will always be held.

If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to discuss with me you may do so either in person or by contacting me at the number listed above.

I agree to take part in this interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **Appendix B: Targets of Research**

### **Interview Outline**

*The Play Based Behaviours of Emirati Preschool Children: A descriptive cultural study of Emirati children's play behaviours and mothers' values to illicit policies and care routines that meet their needs and support their privations.*

Dana Al-Qinneh  
Masters of Education  
British University in Dubai  
Local Number 056 4949 615

### **Introduction**

This descriptive study has arisen from an awareness of the burgeoning discourse in policies revised, practices implemented and research advertised on the benefits of child-led nurseries across the United Arab Emirates. In response to this global trend to shift away from familiar teacher-centred pedagogy this study aims to explore the play-based behaviours of upper middle-class Emirati preschool children and upper middle-class Western preschool children to provide a cultural perspective on their play habits to better assess any variations in their needs and asses the implications of applying Western pedagogies.

### **Purpose**

The primary objective of the study is to understand the ways in which emirate children and western children are supported at home, and the way in which their play is encouraged and scaffolded in order to assess the need for re-evaluating or recreating policies that better target their specific needs.

Classroom-based policies and procedures in early childhood care within the United Arab Emirates ought to consider culturally appropriate means to fostering and implementing best-practice child care pedagogies. However, research with empirical evidence to support and disclose the needs of Emirati children within the context of early childhood education are limited.

Thus, this study aims to fill in the gap in current research by addressing the issue of cultural aptness and contextual appropriateness by conducting a cross-cultural study in order to provide theoretical support for the assertion that current education reforms ought to be revised with the specific needs of the children they are supporting in mind.

**Section 1: Demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Girl</b>
<b>Date of Birth (MONTH/DAY/YEAR)</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
<u>Siblings</u>		
<b>1. Brother</b>	<b>Sister</b>	Age
<b>2. Brother</b>	<b>Sister</b>	Age
<b>3. Brother</b>	<b>Sister</b>	Age
<u>Parents</u>		
<b>Mothers Education:</b>		
<b>Mothers Occupation:</b>		
<b>Mothers Age:</b>		
<b>Fathers Education:</b>		
<b>Fathers Occupation:</b>		
<b>Fathers Age:</b>		
<b>Living Arrangements</b>	Alone	Extended Family

The following are questions asked with the intention of seeking more knowledge on the play behaviors of your children....

Lets Begin!

**Section 2: Home Life**

**I. Can you describe your child’s daily routine?**

- What does your child do after he/she wakes up in sequence until their bedtime?
- How many hours are spent playing?
- Which part of the day do you most look forward to with your child?
- Which part of your child’s day do you look forward to the most/ value the most?)

1. What time does your child typically wake up:
2. What does your child do during the afternoons?
3. What does your child do in the evening?
4. What is your child’s bedtime routine?

Please tick off the following as applicable in relation to your child’s “regular” week

<b><u>Setting</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency</u></b>				
	Everyday	5-6 Days a week	3-4 Days a week	1-2 Days a week	Never
Nursery					
Outdoor Park					
Indoor Soft Play Area					
Mall					
Visiting Relatives					
Relatives visiting					
Playing alone					
Playing with friends					
Reading					
TV					
IPAD					
Painting					
Errands with parents					
Extracurricular classes					
Helping mom at home					
With nanny					
Other (please specify)					

**II. Who does your child spend the most time playing with on an average day?**

- Who plays with your child the most at home?
- How many hours does he/she spend playing your child?
- What do you like most about this person and how they play with your child?
- What do you like the least?)

**Figures Most Present for Play in Childs Life:**

**Q.1:** Which people, and their frequencies are most present during play time for your child:

	At least 4 hours a day	1-3 hours a day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Never
Mother					
Father					
Older Sibling					
Younger Sibling					
Nanny					
Grandma					
Grandpa					
Cousins					
Uncle					
Aunt					
Friends					
Neighbors					

**Q.2:** In general who do you feel is the most suitable playmate/ model for your child?

**Q.3:** What do you think makes a good playmate for your child?

**Q.4:** Do you wish your child had more time with a certain playmate? Less time with a certain playmate?

**Q.5:** Which playmate do you feel is the most beneficial for the development of your child’s play behaviors? (Choose maximum 5)

Mother	
Father	
Older Sibling	
Younger Sibling	
Nanny	
Grandma	
Grandpa	
Cousins	
Uncle	
Aunt	
Friends	
Neighbors	

**Q.6:** Which playmate do you feel most comfortable with playing with your child? (Choose maximum 5)

Mother	



Father	
Older Sibling	
Younger Sibling	
Nanny	
Grandma	
Grandpa	
Cousins	
Uncle	
Aunt	
Friends	
Neighbors	

**Q.7:** Which playmate do you feel least comfortable with playing with your child? (Choose maximum 5)

Mother	
Father	
Older Sibling	
Younger Sibling	
Nanny	
Grandma	
Grandpa	
Cousins	
Uncle	
Aunt	
Friends	
Neighbors	

**Comments:** Please add in anything you feel is relevant for me to know about answered questions above.

### **Section 3: Child’s Environment**

#### **III. Where does your child spend the most time playing?**

- Which location either at home or outside does your child spend the most time playing?
- Do you like this destination as your child’s ‘play environment’?
- What makes this place most suitable for your child?)

	At least 4 hours a day	1-3 hours a day	A few times a week	A few times a month	Never
His/ Her Room					
Living Room					
Kitchen					
Parents’ Bedroom					
Play Room					
Park					
Soft Play Area					
Nursery					
Family Members House					
Friend’s House					
Outside Villa					
Neighbors House					

**Q.1:** What do you think makes the most suitable play area or space for your child?

**Q.2:** Is there anything you don’t like about your child’s current play area?

**Q.3:** What would the most ideal play area for your child consist of?

#### **Nursery Life**

**Q.1:** In relation to your expectations of developmental outcomes from your child’s current preschool setting:

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	NOT Important
Learning their ABC’s (identifying the letters by NAME/ singing ABC song)				
Learning the sounds of the ABCs (English alphabet)				
Writing letters				
Learning to speak in proper sentence structure				
Learning the Arabic alphabet				

Learning to write the Arabic alphabet				
Learning verses of Quran				
Learning Moral Values				
Making friends/ learning to socialize				
Learning proper eating habits/ eating with manners				
Learning to accept/ try a variety of foods				
Interacting with other children				
Interacting with other adults				
Learning to listen, understand and follow instructions				
Learning theme related knowledge (space, sea, farm etc.)				
Learning about the world they live in				
Learning to pretend/ imagine				
Learning to paint				

**Q.2:** Of the above, if you had to choose the SINGLE most important developmental outcome what would it be:\_\_\_\_\_.

**Activities Most Valued in Nursery:**

**Q.3:** If you had to choose between the following activities for your child to engage in which would you choose:

- |                       |    |                                 |
|-----------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 1. Musical Activities | or | Sand and Water                  |
| 2. FINGER painting    | or | Reading                         |
| 3. Gymnastics         | or | Messy play                      |
| 4. Outdoor playground | or | Practicing Writing/ mark making |
| 5. ROLE playing       | or | Motor skills practice           |

**Q.4:** There are three various types of preschools:

1. Learning based
2. Play Based
3. Learning through play

Please explain your understanding of each and state which one you would prefer for your child and why?

**IV. What does your child choose to play with the most?**

- Which items/ toys at home does your child play with the most?
- Why do you think your child is drawn to that item more than the rest?

**Q.1:** What are you child's most favorite objects/ things to play with at home?

**Q.2:** Who typically buys things for your child to play with?

**Q.3:** What things do you consider when shopping for toys or products for your child?

**Q.4:** What toys would you be uncomfortable with your child playing with?

**Q.5:** Are there certain toys or objects your child always insists on playing with?

**Q.6:** Which play materials/ toys of your child's would you consider the more beneficial for your child to play with?

**Q.7:** Which play materials/ toys of your child's would you consider the least beneficial for your child to play with?

**Comments:**

**Section 4: Understanding Play as a Construct**

**V. What is your definition/ understanding of play?**

- What is the purpose of playing?
- How important is it for adults/ mothers to play with their children?
- Why or why not?

**Scenario A:** Your child is playing with playdough along with a few other children. He/she gathers a few “tools” to use along with their playdough. They select a cupcake tin, a few sticks, a couple of pebbles and glitter. They see another child using a plastic knife to cut their playdough into smaller pieces. They attempt to take the knife, but the other child refuses to let go. They ask you for a knife.

In your opinion what is your child learning through this play? Check all that applies:

<b>Experience</b>	
<b>Learning to cooperate within boundaries</b>	
<b>Learning social rules of play</b>	
<b>Experiencing another’s perspective</b>	
<b>Learning to negotiate</b>	
<b>Working on their communication and language skills</b>	
<b>Utilizing their mathematics</b>	
<b>Working on their imaginative play</b>	
<b>Learning to select their own resources and tools to initiate play</b>	
<b>Create a scenario using available resources and props</b>	

**Scenario B:** Your child is playing alongside a few other children by the dramatic play kitchen. Your child notices a cash register and begins to engage other children in dialogue about how much the apples or pears cost. Your child and other children begin to exchange products and “money” as well as proceed to cook the fruits and vegetables.

<b>Experience</b>	
<b>Learning to cooperate within boundaries</b>	
<b>Learning social rules of play</b>	
<b>Experiencing another’s perspective</b>	
<b>Learning to negotiate</b>	
<b>Working on their communication and language skills</b>	
<b>Utilizing their mathematics</b>	
<b>Working on their imaginative play</b>	
<b>Learning to select their own resources and tools to initiate play</b>	
<b>Create a scenario using available resources and props</b>	

**Comments:**

## Section 5: Pretend Play Behaviours

### **VI. What does your child spend the most time pretending to be/ which scenario does your child spend the most re-enacting?**

- What “theme” does your child engage in the most?
- Why do you think this particular theme appeals to your child the most?
- Do you agree with these play patterns/ themes/ scenarios that your child imagines?

Pretend play is a social construct that the child enters. They choose someone, something or a profession to be. Often times it is something that they’ve seen or an experience of significance to them that they re-enact such as a visit to the doctor’s office, or cooking in the play kitchen like they’ve seen you cook. Children can also pretend to be placed they are not such as on a bus, or in an ocean. Keeping this in mind:

**Q.1:** Does your child engage in pretend play? Can you provide me with an example of a time that they pretended to be something, someone or somewhere?

**Q.2:** Does your child often use available resources to support their play by pretending that those resources are something they’re not? Example: using a wooden stick as a spoon in its absence, or a few pebbles as macaroni etc. Can you given an example?

**Q.3:** Does your child ever imagine themselves to be somewhere they’re not? Example: Imagine that they are at the beach swimming, or in the park on a swing?

**Q.4:** Regarding the themes that your child engages in while engaged in pretend play:

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
Care/ Love				
<b>Caretaker</b>				
<b>Chef</b>				
<b>Going to work</b>				
<b>Baby or child</b>				
<b>Doctor</b>				
Violence				
<b>Fighting</b>				
<b>Car crash</b>				
<b>Police</b>				
<b>Building or using weapons</b>				
Animals				
<b>Specify which animal:</b>				

Fantasy				
<b>Cinderella</b>				
<b>Spiderman</b>				
<b>Batman</b>				
<b>Superman</b>				
<b>Disney characters</b>				
Adventure/ Risky				
<b>Fire-fighters</b>				
<b>Ambulance</b>				
<b>Motorbike</b>				
Open Ended Material				
<b>Lego</b>				
<b>Playdough</b>				
<b>Blocks</b>				
<b>Building Structures</b>				
<b>Other:</b>				

**Q.5:** Why do you think your child chooses those specific themes to re-enact during their play?  
Where do you think your child gets the narrative for their play?

**Aggressive Behavior/ Negative Behavior during play:**

**Q.1:** How often would you say your child displays aggressive or negative behavior during play?

**Q.2:** Which of these behaviors is your child prone to demonstrating during play at any given time?

	Always	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
<b>Snatching</b>				
<b>Pushing</b>				
<b>Biting</b>				
<b>Hitting</b>				
<b>Kicking</b>				
<b>Screaming/ Yelling</b>				
<b>Name Calling</b>				
<b>Verbal Bullying</b>				
<b>Throwing Objects</b>				
<b>Tantrums</b>				
<b>Spitting</b>				
<b>Other:</b>				

**Q.3:** Of the above, which do you feel if the most problematic behaviour that your child exhibits?



**Q.4:** Which of the above would you consider most problematic for your child's playmate to exhibit?

**Comments:**