

Original Research Article

## Research on Toy Systems to Develop the Affection and Social Relationships of Preschool Children

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**Abstract:** Emotions and social relationships are important for the comprehensive development of children. The affection and social relationships of preschool children develop best through play activities, the center of which is the role-playing game. One of the most important tasks to support the development of emotions and social relationships is the need to build a system of toys appropriate for children and suitable for the conditions in each school. Children learn to express themselves and listen to others through group activities such as building, playing with dolls, and role-playing games. These activities encourage children to exchange ideas, share, and collaboratively create stories or imaginary scenarios, thus developing their communication and language skills. Through playing together, children learn how to cooperate, share, and resolve conflicts. Group games help children understand patience, compromise, and respect for others' opinions, thereby forming the foundation of healthy social relationships.

**Keywords:** Emotional development, social relations, toys, toy system, preschool children.

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### INTRODUCTION

Emotional and social development plays a crucial role in a child's growth. Numerous studies have shown that the success of adults heavily depends on their early social cognition, integration, and adaptability. If by the age of 6 a child has not achieved the necessary level of social relationship development, they may face significant challenges in later life, particularly in adapting to new environments, such as entering first grade.

Developing emotional and social skills enables children to focus their attention, follow instructions, and persist in tasks despite difficulties or boredom. These basic skills lay the foundation for lifelong learning, physical health, mental well-being, and peaceful social interactions. Children need support to foster emotional and social relationships. Research on developing a system of toys that aid emotional and social development not only helps parents, schools, and teachers easily select and design toys that effectively promote emotional and social growth in children but also creates opportunities to harness material and spiritual resources from families, communities, and society to participate in the educational process.

- How do toys impact the emotional and social development of preschool children in early educational settings?
- How do different types of toys affect children's communication and cooperation skills?
- How does the use of toys in group activities influence the development of children's social skills?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Toys play a critical role in the comprehensive development of preschool children, especially in fostering emotional and social skills. Modern research has illuminated the role of toys not only in physical and cognitive growth but also in building emotional and social competencies. This article will present key studies on the role of toys in the emotional and social development of preschool children, analyze the underlying mechanisms, and propose future directions for development.

Jean Piaget (1962) highlighted that symbolic play helps children understand their environment and express their emotions through role-playing and pretend play. Lev Vygotsky (1978), a leading psychologist in social development, emphasized the importance of play

in children's emotional and social development. Vygotsky argued that play is crucial for developing social and emotional skills. He described how children use role-playing games to experiment with and understand social roles, developing self-regulation and emotional management. Sara Smilansky (1968) confirmed that sociodramatic play helps children develop social skills and problem-solving abilities. Smilansky found that children involved in dramatic play had better communication skills and more effective conflict resolution strategies. Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) discussed various forms of play and their impact on children's social and emotional development. Sutton-Smith argued that toys are not just tools for amusement but also mediums for children to explore emotions, develop thinking, and enhance social skills through imaginative and constructive play. Sandra Russ (2004) emphasized the role of toys and play in supporting children's emotional and cognitive skills. Russ stated that play forms such as imaginative play and constructive play help children understand and manage emotions while promoting creativity and problem-solving skills. Catherine Garvey (1990) highlighted that through play, children learn to communicate, share, and cooperate, developing essential skills for social relationships. Dorothy Singer and Jerome Singer (2005) explored the impact of toys and play in the digital age on children's emotional and social development. They pointed out that although electronic games have a role, traditional play with physical toys remains crucial for comprehensive development of social and emotional skills. Research has shown that toys affect emotional and social development through several key mechanisms:

**Encouraging Social Interaction:** Toys like dolls, building sets, and role-playing games promote participation in social activities, teaching children to share, cooperate, and communicate.

**Developing emotional regulation:** Through role-playing and imagination, children learn to understand and manage their emotions, developing self-regulation and empathy.

**Supporting creativity and problem-solving:** Creative toys like building sets and art supplies help children develop flexible thinking and problem-solving skills.

The design and selection of toys should be based on specific developmental goals, ensuring safety and encouraging social interaction. Strategies such as promoting group play, creating safe environments, and engaging family involvement can optimize the effectiveness of toys in fostering emotional and social education. Toys are not only tools for entertainment but also play a vital role in the emotional and social development of preschool children. Studies have shown that the appropriate use of toys can support children in developing essential skills for later life. This requires

collaboration among families, educators, and communities to create a comprehensive educational environment for children.

## **RESULT RESEARCH**

### **The Role of play activities in influencing emotional development and social skills of children**

Preschool children "learn through play, and play by learning". They are highly active, curious, and eager to explore and understand the world around them. Children truly learn while playing, acquiring initial concepts or pre-scientific knowledge. Play is the predominant activity in children's lives and significantly influences their emotional development and social skills. Through play, children learn to manage or cope with emotional expressions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety. Additionally, by experiencing various roles in family, preschool, and community settings, children gain an understanding of the needs and desires of others. When children discuss their play roles, they begin to adapt to different perspectives.

Play activities are independent activities not aimed at producing a product (physical result) but mainly to satisfy children's need to play, thus fostering their independence. Children's play is not real but pretend; however, this pretense has a realistic quality. The motivation for play does not lie in the outcome of the play but in the play actions themselves, and these actions stimulate and sustain children's interest in playing. Play is characterized by freedom and voluntariness; it is an independent activity (children choose their games, playmates, and seek means to fulfill their play intentions...). Children's play has distinctive features: it is highly self-regulated, inherently creative, and deeply emotional, which strongly affects how children perceive and express emotions toward those around them.

**Concept and importance:** Toys are an essential part of the daily lives of preschool children, playing a crucial role in supporting their overall development, particularly in emotional and social aspects. From simple to complex toys, each type offers different benefits in helping children build and develop social skills as well as the ability to understand and express emotions.

**Enhancing communication and social skills:** Children learn to express themselves and listen to others through group activities such as building, playing with dolls, and role-playing games. These activities encourage children to exchange ideas, share, and collaboratively create stories or imaginary scenarios, thereby developing their communication and language skills. Through playing together, children learn how to cooperate, share, and resolve conflicts. Group games help children understand patience, compromise, and respect for others' opinions, thereby forming the foundation of healthy social relationships.

Developing emotional skills. Toys and games allow children to explore and express their emotions naturally. Children can convey joy, sadness, or anger through play activities, learning to manage their emotions more effectively. When children engage in role-playing or drama, they learn to put themselves in others' positions, developing empathy and understanding. This helps children understand their own emotions and those of others, which is crucial in building social relationships.

Creating a safe environment and encouraging creativity. Toys provide a safe environment for children to experiment and learn. Children can imagine and try different roles without worrying about real-world consequences, fostering confidence and creativity. Toys such as building sets, coloring books, and art supplies stimulate children's creativity and imagination. As children create, they develop flexible thinking and problem-solving skills, which are important for later development.

Supporting cognitive development. Learning Through Play: Children learn about the world around them through toys. For example, puzzle games can help develop logical skills and spatial awareness, while

musical toys help children develop listening skills and a sense of rhythm.

**Toys in play activities**

There are two types of toys: The first type is toys made by adults for children, modeled after real objects (dolls, spoons, cars...). The second type includes objects that substitute for real ones (a pillow as a baby, a chair as a train car...). Whether toys of the first or second type, they are not actual objects corresponding to the role's actions but merely substitutes, so when children interact with substitute objects, these interactions do not correspond to real actions. This forces children to imagine a corresponding play scenario. Thus, children's play activities create imaginary play outcomes. In other words, play activities give rise to imagination rather than imagination preceding play; it is the result of play activities. Thus, it can be seen that play contributes to the comprehensive development of children's personalities. Play creates psychological characteristics typical of preschool age, notably its figurative nature and high emotional sensitivity, shaping how children exhibit social skills with those around them. To effectively organize role-playing games based on themes, it is necessary to develop a system of toys to help children perform their roles and content effectively and enhance relationships within the game.

Educational Activities	Toys	Pedagogical Requirements
Developing Self-Awareness	Mirror	Requires a large mirror that can reflect the child's whole body, with a clear and non-distorting image, minimum size 30cm x 1m.
	Boy doll, girl doll	Dolls should be made of soft materials like fabric or soft plastic. Naked plastic dolls for bathing; dolls with hair, clothes, accessories; boy and girl dolls; dolls representing different characters. For children under 2 years old, use simple dolls sized 20 x 25 cm (no hair, clothes attached) for easy carrying and hugging. For children aged 3-5 years, use dolls sized 25 x 40 cm.
	Stuffed animals	Made of fabric, filled with stuffing, resembling familiar animals such as dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, birds, and forest animals like tigers, elephants, rabbits, aquatic animals.
	Puppets	Puppets should be made of fabric, with distinct facial features like eyes, nose, mouth, hair, and have handles or a full-hand insert for performance.
	Lotto cards, body parts posters	Posters size A0, A2, or A3, with clear, detailed illustrations of body parts and their names. Brightly colored posters.
	Posters of children's items and toys	Posters size A0, A2, or A3, with clear, vivid illustrations of items and toys familiar to children.
Developing Recognition and Expression of Emotional States	Lotto cards	Clearly depict emotional states: happy, sad, angry, scared, on the faces of boys, girls, and adults.
	Emotion posters	Posters size A0, A2, or A3, featuring just the faces showing emotions such as happiness, sadness, surprise, anger, etc. Brightly colored posters.
	Situation exercises	Printed exercises in book form, size 20x30 cm, reflecting situations for teachers and children, including methods for resolving them.
	Portrait of Uncle Ho	Portrait size: 55x76 cm, capturing his demeanor. Brightly colored.
	Scenic photos of the country's regions	Clearly depicting the language of art through lines, colors, composition, especially with bright and clear colors.
	Posters of Vietnam's ethnic groups	Depicting men, women, and children in traditional attire, family life, community activities, festivals. Brightly colored posters.
Developing Social Relationships	Posters of some countries in the world	Posters size A0, A2, or A3, showing differences in appearance: hair color, eye color, skin color (adults, children, men, women, elderly); posters of characteristic customs, festivals, and scenic spots around the world. Brightly colored posters.
	Situation posters in communication	Posters size A0, A2, or A3. Illustrate various situations in children's activities: expressing feelings; helping each other; conflicts during play; comforting others. Brightly colored posters.

Educational Activities	Toys	Pedagogical Requirements
Play Store Game	Danger warning posters	Posters size A0, A2, or A3. Content includes warnings about: dangerous objects; hazardous actions; dangerous areas; interactions with strangers; behavior when lost; <b>handling electrical appliances, cleaning agents, medicines. Brightly colored posters.</b>
Doctor Role-Playing Game	Labor tools, plant growing kit	Materials: safe plastic or stainless steel, including simulated tools like shovels, dustpans, hoes, water spray bottles.
Cooking Role-Playing Game	Police uniform	Made of fabric, includes clothing, hard plastic hat, faux leather belt.
Family Role-Playing Game	Posters/photos of shopping activities	Posters size A0, A2, or A3 depicting shopping activities like supermarkets, stores, buyers and sellers transacting. <b>Brightly colored posters.</b>
Firefighter Role-Playing Game	Shopping basket	Made of plastic or stainless steel, can be hand-carried or designed as a cart for convenient shopping play.
Game	Toy goods	Made of plastic, diverse types representing various items used in daily life like vegetables, fruits, candies, beverages, etc.
Performance Costumes	Play money	Paper money printed on stiff paper for durability, resembling real money but scaled down for easy recognition of basic denominations by children.
Labor Worker Role-Playing Game	Scale	Made of plastic or stainless steel, with markings and numbers for quantities, can use small dial scales for play.
Educational Activities	Price tags	Made of stiff paper, with images on one side and prices on the other for easy distinction by children.
Developing Self-Awareness	Posters/photos of doctors, nurses, patients	Illustrations of activities: medical examinations, injections/medicine administration, bandaging, writing prescriptions. <b>Brightly colored posters.</b>
	Doctor tools	Materials: safe plastic and stainless steel, including simulated tools for medical examinations and treatments such as stethoscopes, syringes, IV drips, pill boxes, medicine bottles, hospital beds, and additional items like cotton, bandages.
	Doctor uniform	Made of fabric, includes a white coat and a hat, sized to fit children of different ages.
	Prescription	A notebook sized A6, with detachable pages, including date, doctor's name, patient's name, required medicines, and space for the doctor's signature.
	Kitchen and dining set toys	Materials: safe plastic or stainless steel, including simulated kitchen tools: pots, pans, bowls, chopsticks, cups - small plates, large plates, bowls, water bottles, etc., and familiar dishes for fun play and familiarization with household tasks.
	Apron, chef hat, stove items	Made of fabric, sized to fit children.
	Spices	Real items like sugar, salt, fish sauce, water, noodles, rice, wheat flour, stored in small, neat spice containers.
	Household items	Made of safe plastic or stainless steel, including simulated household items like mirrors, cabinets, TVs, fans, refrigerators, etc.
	Various toy cars	Made of plastic, includes family cars and trucks with cargo compartments.
	Parents' real items from home	Father's shirt, mother's shirt, scarf, tie, shoes for both parents, glasses, handbags, briefcases. Items should be good, beautiful, clean.
	Trash can	Made of plastic, with a lid.
	Mop	Includes a mop and water bucket, realistically modeled for practical play.
	Posters/photos simulating firefighting activities	Content: Fire station, fire truck, firefighters in station and on truck during tasks, water pumping for fire extinguishing. <b>Brightly colored posters.</b>
	Firefighter helmet	Made of plastic, sized to fit preschool children.
	Fire hose	Made of plastic, includes a nozzle for water spraying and can draw water for practical play.
	Performance costumes	Made of fabric, brightly colored, sized to fit children, includes ethnic costumes, sleeveless robes, colorful scarves, suits, shirts, ties, long dresses, short dresses, fairy costumes, princess costumes, ballet dancer costumes.
	Worker's equipment	Made of fabric, colored gray or sky blue, sized to fit preschool children. Includes rubber boots, worker's helmet, etc.
	Toys	Pedagogical Requirements
	Mirror	Requires a large mirror that can reflect the child's whole body, with a clear and non-distorting image, minimum size 30cm x 1m.
	Boy doll, girl doll	Dolls should be made of soft materials like fabric or soft plastic. Naked plastic dolls for bathing; dolls with hair, clothes, accessories; boy and girl dolls; dolls representing different characters. For children under 2 years old, use simple dolls sized 20 x 25 cm (no hair, clothes attached) for easy carrying and hugging. For children aged 3-5 years, use dolls sized 25 x 40 cm.
	Stuffed animals	Made of fabric, filled with stuffing, resembling familiar animals such as dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, birds, and forest animals like tigers, elephants, rabbits, aquatic animals.

### **Suggested use of materials and toys for developing emotional and social skills in preschool children**

To promote the emotional and social development of children, teachers should engage, attract, and praise children to encourage them to express emotions and actively communicate with those around them. When using toys, teachers should focus on developing the child's abilities towards emotional and social growth:

#### ***Helping children become self-aware:***

Discuss body parts: Teachers can talk about body parts by showing children pictures, images, or lotto cards depicting body parts and their functions. Allow children to look in the mirror and describe their body parts, encouraging them to identify the role of each part in their lives. For example: "Eyes are for seeing, legs are for walking..."

#### ***Helping children identify and express different emotional states and experience emotions:***

Use emotion pictures or lotto cards: Teachers can use images or lotto cards depicting emotional states, introducing each one (e.g., "This is a smiling face showing a very happy state. Can you make a face like the one in the picture?"). Teachers can also show clips depicting various emotions and discuss the feelings of characters in the clips; Use situational pictures to help children recognize emotional states and relate them to themselves; Use real-life situations to help children identify and express emotions.

#### ***Helping children use toys:***

Introduce familiar toys: Teachers introduce familiar toys to children and play with them; Guide children on how to play, such as how to hold a stuffed animal or use a stethoscope when playing doctor.

#### ***Helping children develop positive relationships with peers and adults:***

Familiarize children with toys: Teachers introduce toys like stuffed animals, doctor playsets, shop play, animals, fruits, and vegetables that children commonly see; Develop role-playing games where the teacher takes a role and guides children to take another role, using a toy as a prop. For example: "Hello, doll. What do you want to eat today?" The child responds: "The doll is sick today, so she just needs to rest."

#### ***Toys helping children care for pets:***

Introduce domestic animals: Teachers introduce children to some domestic animals through pictures or shape blocks; Describe animal sounds by playing them and having children imitate the sounds; Teach children how to play with animals, such as feeding them, petting them, or talking to them.

#### ***Toys for learning and performing cultural and social behaviors and following simple rules:***

Use puppets or dolls: Teachers can use fabric puppets or dolls to teach children how to communicate,

such as greeting elders ("Hello, grandpa/grandma") and saying thank you; Use situational pictures to teach children how to interact with others, showing situations like a child meeting an elderly person and saying "Hello, grandma"; Show pictures of classroom rules and guide children to follow these rules, such as putting away toys after playing and placing shoes in the designated area; Teachers can see that a variety of materials and toys can be used to help children develop emotional and social skills, so each toy can have multiple uses for fostering these skills. For example, a doll can help children recognize body parts, express emotions, and teach respectful communication with others. Therefore, teachers need to be flexible in their use and continuously encourage and motivate children to play positively, demonstrating their emotions and social skills.

### ***Suggested use of materials and toys for developing emotional and social skills in preschool and kindergarten children***

For kindergarten children, their understanding of materials, toys, and the world around them becomes increasingly expansive, and their relationships with peers and others become more complex. It is important to use versatile materials and toys to help them explore and understand the world more deeply. Children's ways of recognizing and expressing emotions also become more diverse, and they can show a wider range of emotions to those around them. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage children to actively express emotions with appropriate gestures and expressions.

#### ***Helping children become self-aware:***

Discuss body parts: Teachers show children pictures, images, or lotto cards of body parts and ask them to name and explain the role of each part; Allow children to look in the mirror and describe their body parts, encouraging them to identify the role of each part in their lives. For example: "Eyes are for seeing, legs are for walking..."; Encourage children to describe their body parts in various ways.

#### ***Helping children recognize, express, and share different emotional states:***

Use emotion pictures or lotto cards: Teachers use images or lotto cards depicting emotional states like happiness, sadness, surprise, or shame. Introduce each state (e.g., "This is a crying face; it shows someone is very sad. When you feel sad, how do you look? Show me your sad face."); Show each face and ask children to identify the emotion or ask them to show the face depicting anger; Show clips depicting various emotions and discuss the feelings of characters in the clips; Use situational pictures to help children recognize emotional states and relate them to themselves; Use real-life situations to help children identify and express emotions.

#### ***Helping children use toys:***

Introduce familiar toys: Teachers introduce familiar toys to children and play with them; Guide

children on how to play, such as how to hold a stuffed animal or use a stethoscope when playing doctor.

#### ***Helping children develop positive relationships with peers and adults:***

Familiarize children with toys: Teachers introduce toys like stuffed animals, doctor playsets, shop play, animals, fruits, and vegetables that children commonly see; Develop role-playing games, guiding children to interact with different roles. Encourage them to use the toy to play their part and demonstrate social skills in their interactions; helping children build cooperation in activities and play, make friends, and interact with others:

Encourage play in various corners: Encourage children to play in areas like art, construction, and creation. Develop play content to enable groups to communicate and cooperate during play, such as playing doctor and pharmacy roles: "I'm sick, take me to the doctor," and then the doctor writes a prescription, so they need to go to the pharmacy to buy medicine; Encourage children to help each other during play, like helping a friend with wooden blocks or putting away toys in the designated place.

#### ***Toys for learning and performing social rules and simple daily regulations:***

Use situational pictures: Use situational pictures to teach children how to interact with others. Show pictures of a child meeting an elderly person and saying, "Hello, grandpa"; Describe dangerous or unsafe places through pictures and remind children not to go to those places; Show pictures of classroom rules and guide children to follow these rules, such as putting away toys after playing and placing shoes in the designated area.

#### ***Toys helping children learn to recognize and respect others:***

Use dolls: Use dolls to help children distinguish between boys and girls and teach them to respect differences in preferences and gender of their peers. Use pictures of Vietnam's ethnic groups and some countries worldwide to show the diversity of regions and nations, educating children to respect and cooperate with everyone regardless of skin color, country, or region.

## **CONCLUSION**

Emotional and social development is a crucial area of growth for preschool children. Social-emotional skills play a significant role in how children live their lives, affecting everything from their interactions with others in daily activities to the decisions they make.

Developing emotional and social skills enables children to focus their attention, follow directions, and persist with tasks despite difficulties or boredom. These fundamental abilities lay the foundation for lifelong learning, physical health, mental well-being, and peaceful social interactions. Children need support to foster their emotional and social relationships. Research and development of a toy system aimed at enhancing emotional and social development not only assist parents, schools, and teachers in effectively selecting and designing toys to foster these skills, but also ensure the achievement of educational goals related to emotional and social development. Additionally, such a toy system creates opportunities to leverage material and spiritual resources from families, communities, and society to participate in the educational process for children.

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