

## CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Parent serves as the primary social unit where children embark on a journey of self-discovery and attempt to make sense of the world around them (Rathee & Kumari, 2022). The natural bond between parents and children begins at birth and holds significant importance throughout all stages of development. However, it is during early childhood age that this relationship reaches a critical juncture.

The early parent-child relationship carries immense significance as it profoundly impacts a child's physical, emotional, social, and attachment development. These factors play a pivotal role in shaping a child's future personality, behavior, relationship and life choices (Rathee & Kumari, 2022). Parents are recognized as an indispensable support system and occupy a central position in their child's development.

Parents consistently dedicate a considerable amount of time to their young children, thereby laying a solid foundation that contributes significantly to their overall growth and development (Popov et al., 2014.). Positive parent-child relationships are built upon the foundation of "quality time". This invaluable quality time entails effective communication between parents and children, where parents attentively address their child's feelings and interests within a secure environment. Such interactions are of utmost importance for the child's development and can lead to healthy and harmonious parent-child relationship (Runcan, 2012).

Despite its paramount significance, the task of nurturing robust parent-child relationships often takes a backseat amidst the demands of daily life. Therefore,

establishing a close and positive parent-child bond stands as a critical aspect of effective parenting. Hence, it is imperative for parents to promptly take proactive measures in order to prioritize the cultivation of a strong parent-child relationship.

## 1.2 Background of Study

Playtime, characterized by interactive and engaging activities, serves as a valuable platform for fostering bonding, communication and emotional connection between parents and children. For younger children, play is the fundamental in the construction of parent-child relationship (Vaterlaus et al., 2019).

Play stands as the central activity of childhood, manifesting across all contexts and moments. According Landreth (2012), children often exhibit a more profound and unfiltered expression of themselves through self-initiated, spontaneous play compared to verbal communication, as they inherently feel more at ease within the realm of play. Consequently, play serves as a crucial medium of interaction and constraining children solely to verbal expression inherently erects barriers within the therapeutic relationship. This principle serves as a cornerstone in the practice of play therapy, emphasizing the pivotal role of play in facilitating therapeutic interventions.

Parenting style also play a major role in their involvement of their children's play routine. Parenting style characterized by parent playfulness contributes to children's emotional adjustment and the quality of parent-child relationships (Shorer et al., 2019). Parents' playfulness is demonstrated through their ability to reframe various situations and interactions with their child in a light-hearted manner, transforming potentially harsh circumstances into enjoyable experiences. They exhibit flexibility, humour, and creativity, particularly during moments of stress or conflict. Consequently,

parental playfulness may facilitate better emotional regulation among parents, thereby enhancing their capacity to regulate their child's emotions.

Moreover, parent attitude and behavior towards play has a major role in child's development, leading to how parents promote, embrace or limit play (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020). As such, parents vary in the amount of time they invest in participating in child play, the specific types of play activities they engage, and the quality of their involvement in child-led play sessions. Understanding these factors is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of parent-child play practices and their significance for child outcomes.

Vygotsky (1967) emphasized several types of play, including imaginative play, rule-based play, and athletic play. He notes that imaginative play, in which children engage in make-believe scenarios and create their own narratives, is particularly important for early childhood development to promote new skills and abilities. Vygotsky also discusses rule-based play, which involves games with specific rules and structures and notes that this type of play becomes more important as children get older. He briefly mentions athletic play, which is a form of physical activity that is important for the development of gross motor skills but lacks the significance of play for the preschooler.

Vygotsky suggests that parents can improve their relationship with their children through play by engaging in play activities with them. He notes that play is a powerful tool for building social connections and strengthening emotional bonds between parents and children. When parents play with their children, they have the opportunity to enter into the child's world and engage with them on their level (Ginsburg et al., 2007; R. M. Milteer et al., 2012). This can help to build trust and rapport which can also provide parents with valuable insights into their child's thoughts, feelings, and interests in order

to improve communication and create bonding between them. In addition, parents can use play as a way to support their child's development. By engaging in play activities that are challenging but still within the child's zone of proximal development, parents can help their child to learn new skills and build confidence within their abilities.

Engaging in unstructured recreational activities, such as playtime, provides valuable opportunities for children to engage in open-ended and imaginative exploration. During these activities, parents can actively teach children essential skills such as emotion regulation and appropriate behavior, which can have long-lasting effects on their adjustment to various situations and social interactions later in life (Wong et al., 2021). Moreover, these activities facilitate positive interactions between parents and children, fostering a strong parent-child relationship.

In recent decades, there has been a notable transformation in the nature of child play, characterized by a reduction in unstructured free playtime and an increasing preference for indoor activities, including engagement with digital media or adult-led pursuits. Various factors, such as financial difficulties and career-related pressures, contribute to the lack of time and patience parents have for engaging in play with their children (Runcan, 2012). Furthermore, even children from privileged backgrounds who have ample resources and a relatively peaceful environment, may not fully benefit from play due to the increasingly hurried and pressured lifestyles they experience (Ginsburg et al., 2007). It is concerning that a significant proportion of Malaysian parents, approximately one-third, spend only 1-4 hours per week on unstructured playtime with their children (New Straits Time Online, 2019).

Therefore, it is crucial for parents to have a deep understanding of the effects of parent-child playtime and the parent-child relationship. This understanding empowers parents to make informed decisions that promote healthy relationships,

support optimal development, mitigate negative impacts, and provide effective guidance and positive role modelling for their children. By prioritizing these factors, parents can create a nurturing environment that contributes to their child's overall growth and well-being.

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### **1.3 Problem Statement**

This research seeks to examine the association of parent-child playtime and parent-child relationship. Playtime is a crucial in fostering social and emotional bonds within the family, contributing significantly to children's healthy development through nurturing relationships with consistent caregivers. The interactive nature of play creates a unique opportunity for parents to engage with their children in a meaningful way, enabling them to actively listen and connect with their little ones (R. M. Milteer et al., 2012). The intense involvement and relaxed interactions during playtime send a clear message to children that their parents are fully present and attentive, reinforcing the bond between them.

We can see slight changes in play pattern between parent and children in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when technology have a significant influence/role in day-to-day activities. Various factors, such as financial difficulties and career-related pressures, contribute to the lack of time and patience parents have for engaging in play with their children (Runcan, 2012). Furthermore, even children from privileged backgrounds who have

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In the contemporary digital era, screens have become an integral part of children's lives from an early age (Kaya, I., 2020). Screen time refers to the duration spent on visual screen-based technologies, including televisions, computers or laptops, videogames, smartphones, tablets/iPads and handheld electronic or gaming devices. Activities such as internet usage, social media engagement, and text messaging are all encompassed within the definition of screen time (Oswald et al., 2020). The use of interactive screens, such as smartphones and tablets among young children is rapidly increasing.

Early exposure to screens has been found to have significant and adverse effects on future behavioral outcomes, particularly in children. Guidelines recommend that children under the age of two should not have any screen time, while children aged two to twelve should be limited to one hour of screen usage per day (Astro Awani, 2020).

According to studies conducted in Malaysia, children devote a substantial amount of time, approximately 19 hours per week, to screen activities (Nahar et al., 2018). This

significantly surpasses the recommended recreational co-limit of 14 hours or fewer per week (Astro Awani, 2020).

Major experts show their concerns to this routine change because it not only caused to lack of physical activities (Lindsay et al., 2017) but also affect parent-child interaction (Driscoll et al., 2011). It is imperative to recognize that the behavioral repercussions associated with early screen use are inherently difficult to reverse and cannot be adequately addressed through regular parent-child interactions and participation in play-based activities alone (Wong et al., 2021).

Undeniably, an external factor such as technology and poor parent-child relationship can lead to heightened parenting stress (Jackson et al., 2018; Mak et al., 2020). Parenting stress refers to the strain and pressure experienced by parents throughout the process of raising children. Numerous studies have underscored the association between parenting stress and children's behavioral problems from a young age. These behavioral problems encompass externalizing behaviors such as aggression, as well as internalizing issues including serious mental health disorders like depression and anxiety disorders (Jackson et al., 2018; Mak et al., 2020). According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2019, approximately 424,000 children in Malaysia were identified as having mental health problems.

Parental factors play a crucial role in establishing adolescent mental health and overall well-being. According to the Adolescent Health Survey conducted in 2022, 26.9% of adolescents in Malaysia reported experiencing symptoms of depression. Additionally, the survey revealed a decreasing trend in the prevalence of parental or guardian bonding among adolescents, with a rate of 33.4% in 2022, compared to 43.1% in 2012 and 42.6% in 2017.

The data suggests a correlation between lack of parent-child relationship and the emergence of serious psychological disorders later in life. However, existing research lacks information on the prevalence of parental bonding and its association with developmental outcomes among younger children. Therefore, this study was undertaken to address this gap in the literature and provide insights into the importance of parent-child bonding for early childhood development and well-being.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The aims of the study are:

1. To examine the level of parent-child playtime.
2. To measure the level of parent-child relationship.
3. To identify the correlation between parent-child playtime and parent-child relationship.
4. To identify the influential contribution of parent play attitude on parent-child relationship.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

There are four research questions to achieve the objective of this study:

1. What is the level of parent-child playtime?
2. What is the level of parent-child relationship?
3. Is there a correlation between parent-child playtime with parent-child relationship?
4. Is there any influential contribution of parent play attitude on parent-child relationship?

## **1.6 Research Hypothesis**

1. There is a correlation between parent-child playtime and parent-child relationship.
2. There is an influential contribution of parent play attitude on parent-child relationship.

## **1.7 Scope of Study**

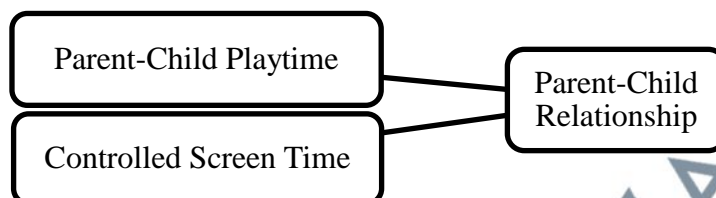
The study involves Malaysian parents who lived in Klang Valley with children aged between 2 and 8 years old. All sectors of employment are involved in this study including government, private and self-employed parents. This study focuses on the relationship between parent-child playtime and parent-child relationship.

## **1.8 Significance of Study**

This study holds significant importance as it raises awareness among parents regarding the impact of parent-child playtime and screentime on their relationship. In the contemporary world, it is crucial to adapt the concept of family bonding that suit the demands of modern lifestyles. Incorporating both playtime and screentime can effectively contribute to nurturing this bond. Hence, parents bear a pivotal responsibility in dedicating their time to engage in meaningful play and responsible screen usage.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to benefit the broader community by expanding knowledge in the field. With a specific focus on the family institution, the study aims to promote and encourage healthy relationships among Malaysian families. Moreover, educators and professionals in child development sectors should play an active role in disseminating information on time allocation,

available resources, and strategies to foster positive and healthy parent-child interactions.



**Figure 1.1:** Research Framework

## 1.9 Conceptual Definition

### 1.9.1 Parent-Child Playtime

Play is an inherent, self-driven and enjoyable endeavor that occurs naturally and spontaneously within human interactions (Whitebread et al., 2012). It brings about feelings of pleasure and joy, prompting positive emotional responses (Drewes & Schaefer, 2015). Described as voluntary, non-directive, and pleasurable, play encompasses activities that are spontaneous and undertaken for their own sake (Landreth, 2012).

Parent-child playtime refers to the interactive and recreational activities shared between parents or caregivers and their children in a playful and engaging manner. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including but not limited to games, storytelling, creative arts and crafts, physical play, and imaginative role-playing (Vygotsky, 1967).

Parent-child play is referred to the main source of influence on play attitude that children refer as mean to learn about their environment (Garner et al., 2006.). The essence of parent-child playtime lies not only in the activities themselves but also in the

quality of interaction and bonding that occurs during these shared experiences (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020; Ginsburg et al., 2007; R. Milteer et al., 2012.).

One of the core concepts in parent-child playtime is parental playfulness which characterized by its spontaneity, flexibility, and joyous nature, providing children with opportunities for exploration, learning, and socialization in a supportive and nurturing environment (Shorer et al., 2019). This concept underscores the importance of parent play attitude where it refers to actively involved and engaged during playtime as significant element in parent-child play (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020).

### **1.9.2 Parent-Child Relationship**

Parent-child relationship can be conceptually defined as the emotional bond and interactional dynamic established between a parent and their child. The parent-child relationship referred to as forms a foundation for all other interpersonal relationships (Driscoll et al., 2011.). According to Bowlby (1969), the parent-child relationship is guided by an underlying system, referred to as the caregiving system and solely depends on parents' behavior.

This relationship encompasses various dimensions, including but not limited to emotional closeness, communication patterns, and the quality of interaction between the parent and child (Drewes & Schaefer, 2015). One factor believed to impact the quality of parent-child relationships is the quality of attachment quality (Walsh & Zadurian, 2022).

Attachment theory, pioneered by Ainsworth (1979) and Bowlby (1969), underscores the significance of parental emotions, cognitions, and behaviors in shaping the relationship's quality. According to this theory, early interactions between parents

and children, influenced by various behavioral systems, shape an individual's ability to form high-quality interpersonal relationships across their lifespan.

## **1.10 Operational Definition**

### **1.10.1 Parent-Child Playtime**

Parent-child playtime divided into three dimensions which are frequency of parent-child play, the frequency of digital media use and the parent attitudes towards play that had been measured in the Parent Play Questionnaires by Ahmadzadeh, Lester, Oliver and McAdams (2020).

### **1.10.2 Parent-Child Relationship**

Parent-child relationship refers to Child-Parent Relationship Scale- Short Form by Driscoll and Pianta (2011). The type of relationship was categorized into two which are conflicts and closeness. Conflicts measure the extent to which a parent observes negativity in their relationship with a specific child. Conversely, closeness evaluates the degree to which a parent characterized warmth, affection, and open communication in the relationship.

## **1.11 Limitations of Study**

Some limitations of this study need to be addressed. First, sampling technique that will be employed in this study may not reach targeted respondents. Second, this study sample limited to working parents, which may produce different for other socioeconomic background. Thus, it is unclear whether the results in this study can apply to all Malaysian parents.

### 1.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter presented an introduction, background of study, problem statement, research objective, research questions, research hypothesis, scope of study, significance of study and limitation of study.

