

The Benefit of Carefully Monitored Unstructured Play or Free Play in Developing and Scaffolding Psychosocial and Socio-Emotional Traits of Preschool Children

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ABSTRACT

One of the most crucial aspects of unstructured play is teaching children to recognize and regulate their real emotions. When preschoolers learn these skills, they are more capable of managing their emotions and gain benefits in their later lives. Psychosocial and socio-emotional are powerful emotions, often undeveloped in preschool children. This study is to identify the benefits of carefully monitored unstructured play or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children. The 12 preschool children were the study's respondents via purposeful random sampling. The research design used in the study was descriptive-inferential. The data analysis utilized the following statistical measures: mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to define the data set in terms of the pupils' pre-test and post-test observation test results from the researcher-made observation test form, and the standard deviation was used to determine the difference in the observed pupils' observation test results between the pre-test and post-test results. A paired t-test is used to establish the p-value and assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between two dependent variables or hypothesis testing from pre-test to post-test results. The finding of a P-value of 0.00 indicates a significant difference between the benefits or development of social-emotional and psychosocial traits in preschool children, comparing the pretest observation results, which lacked careful monitoring of unstructured or free play, to the post-test observation results, which included such monitoring. The findings also indicated a mean difference of -13.100 and a standard deviation of 1.912. Therefore, the results revealed a highly significant difference between the benefits or development of social-emotional and psychosocial traits of preschool children in the pre-test, which did not use the strategy of careful monitoring of unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional characteristics for preschool children, and the post-test observation results. With these findings, this study recommends that teachers or adults use this strategy to develop or enhance socio-emotional skills such as emotional awareness, social skills, empathy, self-regulation, attachment, and imitation. Additionally, psychosocial traits of preschool children include social skills, emotional regulation, imagination and play, and attachment styles.

Keywords: Scaffolding and Developing, Descriptive and Inferential, Researcher -Made Questionnaires, Unstructured Play, Preschool Children

INTRODUCTION

Carefully monitored unstructured play, or free play, is a kind of play that provides teachers and adults significant teachable moments with the children. During carefully monitored unstructured play, teachers and adults closely monitor and observe children as they play, providing positive support and guidance during teachable moments while the children navigate their environment, solve issues, engage meaningfully with others, and encounter conflict, anger, and frustration. And this concept is supported by Friedrich Froebel (1826) and Lev Vygotsky (1930), who believed that carefully monitored unstructured play, or free play, always provides significant teachable moments as preschool children experience genuine joy, excitement, frustration, anger, anxiety, fear,

and empathy during free play, and these are the perfect times for a teacher or adult to gently help a child learn how to manage challenging emotions by giving positive guidance.

Unstructured play, frequently referred to as "free play" by scientists, is any activity that children start and lead on their own without adult-imposed guidelines, objectives, or directives. The fact that the children choose what happens next is what makes it unique. Furthermore, it is crucial for normal social, emotional, and cognitive development, according to decades of research. When a child engages in unstructured play or free play, they design the activity, make up (or modify) the rules, and determine when it ends. Children must create their own worlds, stories, and rules during unstructured play or free play. Unstructured play, also known as free play, allows children to use their imaginations and develop their capacity for unconventional thinking—a talent that is essential for future innovation (The American Psychological Association, 2023).

Carefully monitored unstructured play, or free play, is a kind of play that provides teachers and adults significant teachable moments with the children. During carefully monitored unstructured play, teachers and adults closely monitor and observe children as they play, providing positive support and guidance during teachable moments while the children navigate their environment, solve issues, engage meaningfully with others, and encounter conflict, anger, and frustration. Preschool children experience genuine joy, excitement, frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, and empathy during free play, and these are the perfect times for a teacher to gently help a kid learn how to manage challenging emotions.

Unstructured play has a significant impact on a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. It enables kids to solve issues, explore, be creative, and engage meaningfully with others. Unstructured play helps children develop vital life skills that will aid them in school and beyond (Learn n' Play Children's Centre, 2025). Children learn to share, compromise, and empathise through play with others (Benefits of Daycare for Early Childhood Development, 2023), which helps them develop social and emotional understanding. Children gain emotional intelligence via this social connection and are better able to comprehend and control their own emotions as well as those of others. Children learn to comprehend and control their emotions through this kind of play. They learn how to cope with disappointment, enjoy successes, and manage frustration. They improve their ability to control their emotions as a result of these events, which is essential for their general mental well-being.

To have mental well-being, these essential components, strong social-emotional and psychosocial learning, must be developed in children's growth. Children with strong social-emotional and psychosocial abilities are better able to control their emotions, get along with their peers, do well in school, and face fewer disciplinary problems. Children who have developed social-emotional and psychosocial traits have improved emotional regulation, which helps them effectively manage their emotions; resilience, which helps them cope with difficulties and setbacks; social skills, which facilitate positive interactions and relationships with peers; self-esteem, which supports a positive self-image and confidence; empathy, which helps children understand and relate to others' emotions; and a sense of belonging, which creates a supportive environment for learning and growth (Brightwheel, 2024). Children with strong and developed social-emotional and psychosocial skills are typically in a positive mood; they listen and obey instructions, have strong bonds with classmates and caregivers, care about friends, and show interest in others; identify, label, and control their emotions; and comprehend and empathize with others' emotions (NAEYC, 2023).

And children need repeated practice navigating real emotional situations, not just classroom lessons about feelings (How play supports cognitive, emotional, and social development in children, 2024). Play is the primary vehicle, and it always has been, and it is actually a powerful classroom tool and strategy for cognitive, social, emotional, and psychosocial development. Additionally, the brain's design is most sensitive to experience throughout the early years of childhood. The neural circuits that underpin social cognition, stress response, and emotion control. The development and improvement of neural circuits that underpin social cognition, stress response, and emotion control are ongoing during the early years of children. These circuit environments that offer caring, consistent, and emotionally rich free play shape these circuits in long-lasting ways. However, preschoolers who do not develop their psychosocial and social-emotional traits may experience difficulty in

forming healthy relationships and social skills; emotional control disorders may lead to increased anxiety and behavioral issues; a lack of empathy development may hinder their ability to understand others' emotions; low self-esteem may result from inadequate emotional growth support; difficulty adjusting to school environments may affect academic performance; and limited problem-solving abilities may result from inadequate social interactions (NAEYC, 2023).

As part of the upcoming changing childhood research, around one in five young people aged 15 to 24 in 21 countries reported that they frequently feel depressed or have little interest in doing things. Among the most vulnerable are millions of people who are displaced from their homes, harmed by conflict and extreme adversity, and denied access to safety, aid, and education (UNICEF 2024 and Gallup worldwide poll, 2024). One in eight children suffers from anxiety disorders. Despite the availability of treatment, 80% remain undiagnosed and untreated. Undiagnosed anxiety disorders can lead to behavioral problems, including depression and suicidal thoughts, as well as a negative impact on a student's ability to learn. By recognizing the causes and types of anxiety, it may be feasible to offer tailored assistance and therapy for different age groups to break the vicious cycle of anxiety and other mental health difficulties (Depression Association of America, 2023).

Mental health disorders are thought to affect one in seven (14.3%) of children aged 10 to 19 worldwide, though they are still mostly unidentified and untreated. One in seven individuals between the ages of 10 and 19 worldwide suffer from a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the disease burden in this age group. Behavioural issues, anxiety, and depression are among the primary causes of illness and disability in youth (WFUNA, 2025). Suicide is the third most common cause of death for individuals aged 15 to 29. Adolescents' physical and mental health are negatively impacted, and their chances of having a fulfilling adult life are decreased if mental health problems are not addressed (World Health Organisation, 2021; Price, 2025).

It is well known that rates of anxiety and depression among school-aged children and teens in the US are at an all-time high. Given that rates of anxiety and depression among school-aged children and teens in the US are at an all-time high, in 2021, child and adolescent mental health was declared a "national emergency" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2021; Children's Hospital Association, 2021; The Journal of Pediatrics, 2021). And the most prevalent mental disorders among children in the United States of America are anxiety disorders, behaviour disorders, and depression, with 11% of children aged 3 to 17 having current, diagnosed anxiety (9% of males and 12% of females); 8% of children aged 3 to 17 having current, diagnosed behaviour disorders (10% of males and 5% of females); and 4% of children aged 3 to 17 having current, diagnosed depression (3% of males and 6% of females) (Children's Mental Health, 2025).

In the Philippines, approximately 17% of teenagers suffer from anxiety problems. Around 12% of school-aged children in the Philippines show signs of depression. Anxiety and depression cases have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made mental health problems worse. Higher rates of mental health problems. Socioeconomic variables such as poverty and limited access to mental health care contribute to higher rates of mental health problems. The stigma associated with mental health frequently keeps kids and teens from getting treatment (Minot, 2022; Stevens, 2026). Schools are realizing more and more how important it is to provide students with mental health services and support networks.

To meet the requirements of mental health issues, early detection and treatment are essential. Respecting children's rights involves avoiding institutionalization and over-medicalization (World Health Organization [WHO], 2025), as well as prioritizing non-pharmacological methods and giving them priority (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2023). It needs effort, open discussion, and action as part of an all-encompassing strategy to support each child's mental health, safeguard children who are at risk, and provide care for children who are most in need (UNICEF, 2021). To guarantee that every child and teenager has a positive experience, it is our collective responsibility. We can do more to promote these experiences so that every child can realize their full potential and lead a healthy life with mental health (Children's Mental Health, 2025).

As a teacher, I discovered that carefully supervised unstructured play helps preschoolers develop and promote their psychosocial and socioemotional traits. And this study will look at the advantages of carefully supervised, unstructured play, or free play, to preschoolers' development of social and emotional and psychosocial traits. I discovered that children experience genuine joy, excitement, frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, and empathy during free play, and that these are the perfect times for a teacher to gently help a kid learn how to manage challenging emotions. Children learn how to navigate their environment, solve issues, and meaningfully engage with others through unstructured play. They are inspired to think creatively, make choices, and form friendships through this type of play. Teachers and adults can help kids develop into imaginative, self-assured, and emotionally sound adults by appreciating and encouraging unstructured play and its benefits to children's social-emotional and psychosocial traits (Learn n' Play Children's Center, 2025).

II.Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to identify the benefits of carefully monitored unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children.

III.Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study's results require careful and attentive evaluation due to certain limitations. The following points are important to note as limitations of this study.

First, several limits must be considered. The sample size was tiny, with only 12 children considered in the population, which may have reduced the ability to identify smaller impacts. Furthermore, the study primarily evaluated short-term learning.

Second, the intervention only examines and discusses the benefits of carefully monitored unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children; however, it does not consider the impact of the duration of teachers' and adults' observations during unstructured play. Lastly, this study does look at the teacher-child or adult-child ratios during the observations. Future researchers might focus on and study these variables.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The benefit of carefully monitored unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children (Mama, T., & Mama, T, 2025). Unstructured play, or free play, greatly aids a child's development. It is a unique learning experience that fosters various developmental features, including emotional development and psychosocial. And unstructured play, or free play, always motivates the child's interests and creativity (Learn n' Play Child Care, 2023). Children can learn social skills and make friends through unstructured play. Children can interact with others in a natural and spontaneous way when they play **freely** (The importance of social skills - Raising a socially intelligent child, 2019). They gain the ability to express their thoughts and feelings, share, and take turns (Learn n' Play Children Centre, 2025).

Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950) highlights that play is essential to conquering the distinct psychological challenges that each developmental stage presents. Play serves as a link between education and daily life. It's how children develop resilience, manage emotions, and adjust to change while creating lifelong memories. Play is essential to a child's development and is more than just enjoyable. Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950) claimed that play aids children in navigating psychosocial development, from the formation of trust in infancy to the creation of identity in adolescence. Children develop problem-solving, emotional control, and social skills through imaginative, physical, and social play—all while having a wonderful time! Children lose out on vital chances to investigate, try new things, and develop psychosocially. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory, human development occurs in eight stages, each of which has a fundamental conflict that affects social skills and personality. Particularly in early life, play is essential for resolving these disputes. Play that is

encouraging, imaginative, and unstructured or unrestricted fosters social skills and self-assurance, which are essential for overcoming obstacles and friendships.

And this, supported by Lev Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development (1978), emphasizes language and social interaction and learning through play (Psychology, 2025). He revealed that language use and social interactions directly influence cognitive development. Additionally, he emphasized the value of play-based learning since unstructured learning encounters help early learners build their oral language, social skills, and communication abilities. Lev Vygotsky had a distinct perspective on how children develop and learn. He did not see cognitive development as a set of distinct phases. Rather, his method promotes the development of critical executive functioning skills and language acquisition by emphasizing the ongoing process of development, which is impacted by social interactions in a play-based learning environment. Vygotsky's research emphasized the importance of language and the social environment in cognitive development. Vygotsky's research emphasized the importance of language and the social context in cognitive development through social interaction.

Unstructured play has a significant impact on a child's cognitive, social, psychosocial and emotional development (hbrAdmin, & hbrAdmin, 2024). It enables kids to solve issues, explore, be creative, and engage meaningfully with others. Teachers and adults must assist kids in developing vital life skills that will aid them in school and beyond by encouraging unstructured play (Learn n' Play Children Centre, 2025). This powerful foundation for learning and development influences every aspect of a child's growth and supports social interaction during unstructured or free play, which always provides benefits. Social interaction always happens during unstructured play or free play, and there is always a benefit. Preschoolers' psychosocial and socioemotional traits can be developed and scaffolded if teachers or other people closely supervise unstructured play or free play. Unstructured play, or free play, promotes the social and emotional development, self-regulation, and behavioral wellbeing of young children by helping them learn to understand and manage their feelings and behavior in healthy ways through developmentally appropriate, play-based methods and positive, patient guidance from adults.

And it's based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1939). Piaget's theory (1939) revealed that teaching and explanation are not the main ways that children learn. Rather, learning occurs when kids use play to experiment with materials, test concepts, see results, and think back on their experiences. According to Piaget's theory, learning and play are connected. Piaget's theory links learning and play. Children participate in negotiation during free play, which aids in the development of perspective-taking and social understanding. This is why free play is a process that facilitates learning. Additionally, it increases kids' comprehension through action and reflection. As they encounter real situations or genuine emotions, children constantly modify their ways of thinking. Children have the chance to test concepts, investigate relationships, and expand their knowledge through everyday encounters in free play that encourage investigation, discussion, and reflection. Scaffolding or assistance from adults or educators can provide a supportive environment that will enhance psychosocial and socio-emotional traits of children.

Patient guidance from adults or teachers happens through scaffolding during unstructured play or free play. Teachers or adults can provide patient guidance to support and scaffold the psychological and socio-emotional characteristics of preschool children; this period is considered the best time for development because, during unstructured play or free play, children experience real joy, excitement, frustration, anger, worry, fear, and empathy, which gives teachers the best opportunity to gently guide children in managing difficult feelings. This highlights the importance of closely supervised, unstructured play for preschoolers because unstructured play helps preschool children build psychosocial, social and emotional traits through the patient guidance of teachers and adults, who are considered trained partners in children's learning (McArdle, 2024).

Since socio-emotional and psychosocial traits, or these abilities, are not natural, families, adults, guardians, and educators are crucial in helping young learners acquire them. This is why scaffolding children's social-emotional and psychological learning is so important. Scaffolding is a teaching strategy in which adults assist and mentor youngsters to acquire ideas or abilities more quickly than they would themselves. It involves providing children with the right resources and support at the appropriate time. In child development, scaffolding provides a strong

basis for the development of social-emotional and psychosocial skills, fostering healthy interpersonal interactions and mental well-being. Scaffolding refers to the process of connecting children's existing knowledge with the new information they acquire (T.E.A. Center, 2024).

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1977), an individual's growth results from interrelated environmental systems that range from social (culture) to intimate (family). According to the theory, a child's growth is a complicated web of relationships influenced by various aspects of their surroundings. This includes mesosystems, which are linkages between microsystems, like how parents and teachers discuss a child's development and provide positive guidance, and microsystems, which are the immediate surroundings and direct relationships (family, school, daycare, and classmates). This concept relates to Vygotsky's theory (1919), which states that a kid may only adopt socially shared experiences and gain practical skills and knowledge by interacting with others, especially knowledgeable individuals like adults or teachers, on various tasks. Additionally, the more knowledgeable others (MKO) might be anyone who has a deeper comprehension of the work or topic the child is attempting to acquire; these individuals are typically parents, caregivers, or teachers, but they can also be peers or mentors. In a meaningful activity, the more knowledgeable other (MKO) actively directs, models, and scaffolds the child's thinking rather than merely imparting knowledge.

Vygotsky's (1978) ideas on scaffolding. According to Vygotsky, scaffolding involves the support given by more knowledgeable others (MKOs) that enables a child to perform tasks beyond their independent capabilities but within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Psychology, 2025). This tailored support could range from direct instruction to more subtle guidance like asking open-ended questions or encouraging exploration and problem-solving. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Vygotsky's theory introduced the ZPD, which identifies the difference between what a child can achieve independently and what they can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner such as teachers or adults (McArdle, 2024; Celinska, 2026). This zone is where the most significant cognitive growth occurs, as children are challenged just beyond their current capabilities but within reach of their potential development (McArdle, 2024). Vygotsky's observations on private speech show how children, through self-dialogue during play or problem-solving, are actively building their executive functions (McArdle, 2024).

Furthermore, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1934) disclosed that human development and learning originate in social, historical, and cultural interactions. Vygotsky believed that a child's cognitive development and learning ability can be guided by social interactions. Vygotsky posited that social interactions can guide and mediate a child's cognitive development and learning ability. by their social interactions. Learning, in his view, is not a solitary journey—it is a shared, culturally situated activity. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development proposes that children do not learn in isolation. Instead, their thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities grow through engagement with other people and the cultural world around them. Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of cultural tools in shaping emotional responses during play (Celinska, 2026). Unstructured play allows children to explore and negotiate social roles and relationships, helps preschoolers learn empathy by understanding others' feelings, and promotes problem-solving and conflict resolution skills. Experiencing real emotions during unstructured play can enhance emotional regulation through shared experiences and peer feedback, while self-regulation develops from external guidance by caregivers to internalized self-control through a transformation from social interactions to individual autonomy. And this is what Vygotsky (1934) described as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky's theory (1934), the ZPD is the best time for teachers to begin by offering strong guidance—through demonstrations, facilitated activities, explicit instruction, or scaffolding—and to offer practical support provided within this zone.

Careful monitoring by teachers and adults during unstructured play benefits the development of psychosocial and social-emotional traits in preschool children, which is linked to Vygotsky's (1978) play theory that emphasizes the necessity of scaffolding, monitoring, observing, and assisting children (School, 2025). By highlighting the importance of social context in children's play, Vygotsky's perspective soon transcended reproducing Piaget's experiments and forged his route about children's play-based learning and development: Vygotsky's legacy influences perceptions of children's play-based learning and development. According to him, learning is fundamentally a socially produced activity (McArdle, 2024). Teachers should embrace the power of

play. Unstructured play is crucial for a child's development, promoting social skills, cognitive capacities, and physical health (School, 2025). Promoting this kind of playing is one of the finest methods for teachers or adults to prepare children for a fulfilling, well-rounded future and positive social, emotional, and psychological traits (T.E.A. Center, 2024).

Unstructured play has proved to have social-emotional and psychosocial benefits with the positive guidance of teachers and adults. Children learn important skills like negotiation, cooperation, and conflict resolution as they engage in pretend play, construct complex buildings with blocks, or negotiate a social situation during a game (How play supports cognitive, emotional, and social development in children, 2024). They can freely express their feelings, try out different social roles, and develop empathy for others through unstructured play. This encourages imagination, creativity, and self-assurance, all of which lead to positive social interactions throughout their lives (Coel, 2024).

In conclusion, according to modern play-based learning frameworks that cover the theories of Friedrich Froebel, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, play helps children actively construct knowledge and develop critical skills like problem-solving, creativity, and self-regulation, which are foundational for later academic success. Play, whether guided or led by the learner, helps learners build critical skills for future learning, and it helps children progress as their thinking matures. Though they focused on distinct methods, they both believed that play was essential to a child's growth.

Research Methods

Participants and/or other Sources of Data and Information

The 12 preschool children were the study's participants via purposeful random sampling. The following criteria were used to select participants: 1) The child must be officially enrolled in preschool for the SY 2025-2026. 2) The child must regularly attend classes, as evidenced by attendance reports from the teachers; and 3) the parents and guardians of the preschool children must provide their full consent that their child will be the respondent in the study.

Instruments

The researcher-made observation test. It is a 2-item observation test with 12 constructs that were used. The questionnaires have been validated by three experts, and they have been pilot tested in a group of respondents not included as final participants in this study. With a grand Cronbach's alpha of 0.877536666, therefore, all the questionnaires are reliable. This research-made observation test passage is designed to measure the socio-emotional development of preschool children: emotional awareness, social skills, empathy, self-regulation, attachment, and imitation. And psychosocial traits of preschool children such as social skills, emotional regulation, imagination and play, and attachment styles benefit from carefully monitored unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children. And the responses will be solicited using a five-point scale ranging from Very Frequently (100-80), Frequently (80-60), Occasionally (60-40), Rarely (40-20), and Never (20-0). Data were collected from pre-observation and post-observation test results to examine the benefits of carefully monitored unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits in preschool children.

Data Collection

The study followed the ethical norms and a code of conduct from 1992. The study was planned and carried out in compliance with ethical standards. First, everyone involved in the study gave their full approval. The principal or school administrator, parents, or legal guardians of any children participating gave their consent as respondents. The researcher was also aware of the right to privacy and the confidentiality of any information used to identify individual parents of the identified students whose records as data in this study agreed with the data's use.

Ethical Consideration

The study ensured respect by obtaining consent from the parents of the preschool respondents, protecting their privacy, maintaining adequate confidentiality of the research data, ensuring the anonymity of individuals and organizations who participated, and upholding honesty and transparency throughout the process. Additionally, avoided any misleading data or biased representation of primary data findings. The study upheld the right to privacy and the confidentiality of the information for the individuals involved. The researcher ensured that no harm occurred to the participants.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis utilized the following statistical measures: mean and standard deviation. The mean was used to define the data set in terms of the pupils' pre-test and post-test observation test results from the researcher-made observation test form, and the standard deviation was used to determine the difference in the observed pupils' observation test results between the pre-test and post-test results from the researcher-made observation test form. A paired t-test is used to establish the p-value and assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between two independent and dependent variables or hypothesis testing from pre-test to post-test results from a researcher-made observation test form.

Research Design

The research design used in the study was descriptive-inferential. The designs illustrate the benefits of carefully monitored unstructured or free play in explaining and supporting psychosocial and socio-emotional characteristics of preschool children, which are relevant for analyzing the collected data of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Tally for Discrete Variables: Respondents, Pre Test Observation Test , Post Test Observation Test

Pre-Test Observation Score	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Post-Test Observation Score	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
72	2	20.00	85	2	20.00
73	4	40.00	86	3	30.00
74	2	20.00	87	2	20.00
75	4	40.00	88	5	50.00
Total	12	100.00	Total	12	100.00

Note: Percentages are based on N = 12 respondents.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Observation Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SE	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test Observation	12	73.40	1.08	0.34	72	75
Post-Test Observation	12	86.50	1.08	0.34	85	88

Table 3. Paired Samples t-Test for Pre-Test and Post-Test Observation Scores

Comparison	Mean Difference	SD	SE	95% CI	t	df	p-value
Pre-Test vs. Post-Test	-13.10	1.91	0.61	-14.468 to -11.732	-21.67	11	< .001

Table. Paired Samples t-Test Comparing Pre-Test and Post-Test Observation Test Results (N = 12)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	SE
Pre-Test Observation Test Results (Without Intervention)	12	73.400	1.075	0.340
Post-Test Observation Test Results (With Intervention)	12	86.500	1.080	0.342
Difference	12	-13.100	1.912	0.605
Test Statistics	Value			
95% Confidence Interval for Mean Difference	(-14.468, -11.732)			
t-value	-21.67			
Degrees of Freedom (df)	11			
p-value	< 0.001 (Highly Significant)			

Test of significant difference between Pre Test Observation Test of Social and Emotional ; psychosocial traits of preschool children and Post Test Observation Test of Social and Emotional ; psychosocial traits of preschool children

The study's results show a P-value of 0.00, which means that there is a big difference between the benefits and development of social-emotional and psychosocial traits in preschool children. This difference was seen in the pretest results, which did not involve careful monitoring of unstructured or free play, and the post-test results, which did involve such monitoring. Furthermore, the study's results indicate a mean difference of -13.100 and a standard deviation of 1.912. Therefore, the results revealed a highly significant difference between the benefits or development of social-emotional and psychosocial traits of preschool children in the pre-test, which did not involve careful monitoring of unstructured or free play, and the post-test observation results, which did use this strategy.

It implies that teachers need to utilize the strategy of careful monitoring of unstructured or free play in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional characteristics for preschool children because it helps develop or improve emotional awareness, social skills, empathy, self-regulation, attachment, and imitation. The psychosocial traits of preschool children include social skills, emotional regulation, imagination, play, and attachment styles. The pre-test and post-test results indicate a significant difference between the pre-test results, which did not involve the intervention, and the post-test results, which included this strategy. Therefore, careful monitoring by teachers or adults during unstructured or free play is beneficial for developing and scaffolding the psychosocial and socio-emotional traits of preschool children, as this period allows them to experience genuine feelings and emotions, making it an ideal time for teachers or adults to provide appropriate and positive guidance on regulating these emotions during unstructured play

The benefit of carefully supervised free play or unstructured play in the development and scaffolding of psychosocial and socio-emotional traits in preschoolers is that it allows teachers or other adults to address children's emotions, such as anger, during play by immediately validating their feelings. Additionally, such unstructured play is the ideal opportunity for adults or educators to teach kids how to control their emotions in real time, as preschool children experience genuine emotions. Additionally, since children experience genuine emotions during free play, teachers and adults have the best chance to encourage them to communicate their sentiments using words or artistic outlets. Free play is an evidence-based, child-centered approach that can significantly aid in this process. It provides a safe, supportive environment for children to express their anger, identify its root causes, and help them develop effective coping strategies while engaged in playful activities (Admin, B. (2023)).

Careful monitoring of teachers and adults during free play provides children with a therapeutic modality that supports emotional development, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills, all of which are crucial for effectively managing anger. Free play is grounded in the understanding that children process emotions differently, and teachers and adults can support, scaffold, or create a safe environment where children can explore complex emotions, such as anger, in a non-threatening way. This approach is particularly effective for children who may not yet have the verbal skills to express their feelings or manage their anger. Because during free play

it allows children to externalize their anger and explore its causes in a controlled environment (Core wellness. ,2025).

Carefully supervised free play or unstructured play will always create significant teachable moments with the children. Friedrich Froebel (1826) and Lev Vygotsky (1930) noted that in the development and scaffolding of psychosocial and socio-emotional traits in preschoolers, it allows teachers or other adults to address children's emotions, such as anger, during unstructured play or free play by immediately validating their feelings. Teachable moments are spontaneous, often sparked by a child's interests or curiosity during unstructured play or free play. A teacher or adult can spot teachable moments by closely monitoring unstructured play or free play, as children navigate their interests and experience real emotions during free play activities (Wright, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The social-emotional and psychosocial benefits for preschool children of close monitoring of unstructured play or free play are proven by giving positive guidance and support during significant teachable moments. During unstructured play or free play, preschool children experience genuine joy, excitement, frustration, anger, anxiety, fear, empathy, and other challenging real emotions as they navigate social scenarios. Teachers and adults can do careful monitoring and scaffolding by giving positive guidance and support. This approach helps preschool children develop socio-emotional skills, including emotional awareness, social skills, empathy, self-regulation, attachment, and imitation. This approach also fosters psychosocial traits in preschool children, including social skills, emotional regulation, imagination, play, and attachment styles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study points out the possible benefit of carefully monitored unstructured or free play during significant teachable moments in developing and scaffolding psychosocial and socio-emotional traits for preschool children. And the study recommends the following:

1. Adults should monitor unstructured play to effectively respond to and reinforce preschool children's emotional management during significant teachable moments by giving positive guidance and support, and this will help develop preschool children's psychosocial and socio-emotional traits.
2. Teachers or adults should carefully monitor unstructured or free play to develop and scaffold by giving positive support and guidance during significant teachable moments, which is the most effective way to reinforce positive behavior when children manage their emotions well. During free play, children experience genuine emotions, and by scaffolding these feelings during significant teachable moments, adults can help foster the development of socio-emotional and psychosocial traits in preschool children.
3. Teachers or adults should monitor unstructured play during teachable moments to help preschool children express their emotions and develop psychosocial and socio-emotional traits.
4. Teachers or adults should carefully monitor unstructured free play during significant teachable moments, as this encourages preschool children to externalize their true feelings and helps develop their psychosocial and socio-emotional traits.
5. Teachers or adults should carefully monitor unstructured or free play during significant teachable moments to develop and scaffold psychosocial and socio-emotional traits in preschool children, as this is the most effective way to teach problem-solving skills, help children reframe their responses to real feelings of anger, happiness, and frustration, and equip them with more constructive ways to handle different emotions.

Practical Recommendations

1. In this strategy, teachers or adults closely monitor unstructured play or free play and pay attention to what children are naturally drawn to—taking notice of their behaviour and engagement with children who spend extra time exploring or experimenting with something. With this strategy, teachers and adults can identify teachable moments by closely observing and listening to children during unstructured play or free play. By paying attention to children's behaviours, interests, interactions, and genuine feelings, teachers and adults can provide positive guidance and support, which helps develop children's social-emotional and psychosocial traits through effective scaffolding.

2. During teaching moments, teachers and adults must ask open-ended questions: encourage conversation by asking questions like, “What are you noticing?” or “How do you think that works?” This helps enhance their engagement and allows them to express their thoughts. Encourage discussion: if they stay engaged in the activity or conversation, prompt them to share more about what they're doing or thinking. This will reinforce their learning in a fun, interactive way. Teachers can naturally recognise teachable moments by doing close monitoring, such as watching, listening and observing while children engage with unstructured or free play. Teachers and adults can maximise these opportunities to nurture preschool children's social-emotional and psychosocial traits by closely monitoring unstructured or free play.



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