

Identifying and Analyzing the Components of Educational Games Based on Social Skill Development for Preschoolers**Abstract****Article Type:****Original Research****Authors:****Shilan Aslani¹****Khalil Ghaffari²**

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In recent years, many educational experts have concluded that game is one of the key elements in learning various skills in children, especially social skills. The aim of the present study was to identify the components of games based on social skill development for preschools in order to design a desirable model. The present study was conducted using a qualitative approach, specifically the grounded theory method. Data were collected through 25 semi-structured interviews with preschool teachers and educators who had valuable experiences related to the research topic using purposive sampling (snowball), and were analyzed in three main stages: open, axial, and selective coding. Interview data analysis revealed five main categories which affect educational games based on social skill development model; namely, causal factors, contextual factors, intervening factors, strategies, and advantages. It is concluded that proper implementation of a game-based social skills curriculum and paying attention to its various elements can lead to a child's physical, mental, and sensory development.

Key Words: Educational Games, Preschoolers, Social Skill Development

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1. Introduction

Preschool refers to a two-year period that covers children aged 4 to 6 years under educational programs (Fathi, 2016). It is an early childhood education program for children before they enter formal schooling (Duan, 2025). Preschool aims to prepare children for the transition to formal schooling by developing their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills through play-based learning and structured activities (Xovoxon, 2024). This program is usually a child-centered program that follows a play and activity approach (Robinson, 2021). Education during this period has a significant impact on the child's all-round development, providing intellectual, verbal, social, emotional, and physical development (Tomé-Fernández et al., 2024). Attending preschool as an educational environment can have a significant impact on overcoming fear of unfamiliar and educational environments (Carneiro et al., 2024). The main focus in preschool is on developing and strengthening the child's important skills, and children are taught to learn basic concepts in a game-based manner. Social communication skills, motor skills, speech skills, listening skills, attention, and problem-solving skills are among the educational skills in preschool (Nurhasanah et al., 2025). Preschool education increases flexibility, cognitive skills, and discipline in the child (Ramírez et al., 2021). A child's emotional and cognitive development in preschool requires opportunities for the child to gain experience by encountering a variety of objects and places, encountering adults, other groups, and peers, and engaging in meaningful and enriching interactions with them (Jafari, 2014). The importance of the preschool years as a critical stage in learning and mental development is one of the important principles that has been repeatedly emphasized in the preschool period (Supriatna et al., 2024).

The issue of healthy mental development in the preschool period is very important (Mpella et al., 2019). Participating in preschool teaches children how to interact with their teachers and peers, and prepares them for basic concepts in elementary school. Attending preschool before entering elementary school helps children accept independence, eases the separation process from their parents, and strengthens their friendship skills (Haza et al., 2024). Social skills are taught to children during this period (Michelson et al., 2013). In the present era, a child who has proper mental development guarantees the future of any society (Maleki et al., 2019). Therefore, paying attention to the mental development of children is essential (Zheng et al., 2021).

One of the issues that has recently been raised in relation to the mental development of children is the issue of acquiring social skills, which is one of the essential elements in improving the mental development of children (Paz et al., 2021). Social skills are a large group of psychological, social, and interpersonal skills that help children make informed decisions, communicate effectively, develop coping and personal management skills, and lead healthy

lives (Heydari, 2017). Social skills develop a complex set of skills in children, including communication, problem-solving, decision-making, self-management, assertiveness, and peer interaction (De Mooij et al., 2020). It can be argued that social skills are a set of abilities that lead to the child being able to initiate positive and useful relationships and increase his or her friendship with others in order to adapt him or herself to environmental conditions (Barzegar, 2018; Sadri et al., 2016). These skills are very necessary for maintaining interpersonal relationships and satisfying these relationships (Lee et al., 2023).

Learning social skills socializes children, and through this, children learn and form norms, skills, motivations, attitudes, and behavior (Dryburgh et al, 2020). Social skills enable children to develop social relationships at different stages of life (Günindi, 2022). Social skills play an important role in developing children's ability to communicate with others and to behave in specific social situations (Zhu et al., 2021). Improving children's emotional and social communication largely depends on their social skills (Jabeen et al., 2022). Such skills lead to social adaptation in the child and have a lifelong impact on the child's life; therefore, childhood, especially preschool, is a sensitive period for developing social skills in children (Mulvey & Jenkins, 2021).

Acquiring social skills helps children begin positive social interactions and relationships with others and maintain these skills throughout their lives. People with poor social skills experience more difficulty in seeking social support and coping with stress when they are under stress (Symeonidou, 2023). Conversely, people with strong social skills usually have strong support networks that are called upon in times of crisis (Dong et al., 2023). Children's development is influenced by numerous factors, including the environment and society. The process of socialization is one of the most fundamental axes of personality development (Caron et al., 2023). Social skills are especially useful for children to develop good relationships with others, follow social rules, be responsible, participate and cooperate, and help others enjoy their rights (Aksoy & Baran, 2020).

Given the role of social skills as a powerful catalyst for the development of positive behavior, building life skills in the early years of life helps children navigate their social and emotional challenges, such as coping with emotional pain, conflict, peer pressure, and relationship issues (Fikri & Tegeh, 2022). Therefore, it is clear that the preschool period is a crucial period in the development of social skills. During this period, one of the essential elements is game. Children in preschool have a great desire to game (Tersi & Matsouka, 2020). Game plays a fundamental role in the development and upbringing of children and many cognitive and emotional issues can be transferred to children through game (Downey & Gibbs, 2020).

According to Yuniar (2021), game to children is what speech is to adults. Game is a natural, enjoyable, surprising, and mysterious activity. Game is a means of expressing feelings, building relationships, describing experiences, revealing desires, and self-fulfillment. (Józsa et al., 2023). Because children often have less verbal and cognitive ability to express their feelings, game is a natural and objective means of communication for them to cope with the world. The importance of using game in education is so great that countries such as Malaysia and Singapore have established academic disciplines in this field (Zamata et al., 2023). The necessity of using games, considering its effects and its use in the educational process to achieve easy, attractive and stimulating learning, seems more and more necessary than ever (Habibi et al, 2022).

The use of games involves a variety of students' senses, including visual and auditory, and provides an attractive learning environment for them (Saygin & Karakas,2021). Many social characteristics, including responsibility, communication with others, decision-making, and managing emotions, can be transferred to children through game (Caron et al., 2023).Through game, the child takes the first steps towards socialization (Van Berkel & Bosman, 2023). Through game, children learn how to be accepted by the group, discover the extent of their abilities needed to succeed in the group, and also become aware of how to use the abilities of others to meet their own needs (Ke et al., 2022).

Various studies have been conducted on games and social skills, including Tomé-Fernández et al., 2024, Nurhasana et al (2025), Haza et al. (2024), Dong et al. (2023), an Józsa et al. (2023). A brief review of the above research indicates that they can be categorized into 3 areas: (1) the effectiveness of game-based education in learning social skills in a specific group of students, including children with learning disabilities, autism, and hyperactivity ; (2) the effect of game-based education in learning social skills in adolescents and high school students; and (3), theoretical study of the components of game-based education in learning social skills. As is clear from the above classification, no independent research has been conducted to examine the components and elements of game-based education in learning social skills for preschool children. Considering this, it seems necessary to design and develop an appropriate model through which social skills can be taught to children using games. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify and analyz the components of game-based social skills education for preschools.To serve that end, the following research question was formulated:

How do educational games contribute to the development of social skills among preschoolers, considering their causal and contextual factors, intervention-related elements, applied strategies, and resulting consequences?

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

In the present study, the grounded theory approach was used. The reason for using this method is that researchers usually use it to develop a specific theory about the phenomenon under study.

2.2. Participants

The participants in the present study were individuals who had valuable lived experiences related to the research topic. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation and 25 interviews were conducted. The participants consisted of professors and instructors who could provide the researcher with valuable information in the field of social skills training. In this study, purposive sampling method (snowball) was used. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1:

Table 1.

Characteristics of participants in the research

Number	Field of Study	Education	Gender	Age (Year)	Experience (year)
1	Psychology	Ph.D.	Female	50	12
2	Philosophy of education	Ph.D.	Male	61	23
3	Psychology	Ph.D.	Female	46	10
4	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Male	47	9
5	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Male	39	5
6	Educational psychology	Ph.D.	Female	55	18
7	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Male	48	9
8	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Female	57	19
9	Educational psychology	Ph.D.	Male	42	7
10	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Female	46	9
11	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Male	53	18
12	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Male	49	10
13	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Female	58	19
14	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Male	41	6
15	Elementary education	Ph.D.	Male	49	8
16	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Female	54	16
17	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Male	40	5
18	Philosophy of education	Ph.D.	Male	52	14

19	Philosophy of education	Ph.D.	Female	44	9
20	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Female	58	19
21	Curriculum Development	Ph.D.	Female	49	12
22	Psychology	Ph.D.	Male	42	5
23	Psychology	Ph.D.	Female	53	14
24	Educational psychology	Ph.D.	Male	56	17
25	Educational psychology	Ph.D.	Female	43	7

2.3. Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers, face-to-face and online. Each interview lasted between 40 and 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Persian. Before the interviews, consents were obtained from the interviewees to participate in the interview and they were assured that their information would remain confidential. To assess the validity and reliability of the interview questions, the questions were checked, modified, and approved by six professors in the relevant field. As a result, five The interview prompts were developed, as follows:

- What are the causal factors influencing the use of educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?
- ≠ What are the contextual factors involved in educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?
- What are the intervention-related factors in educational games designed to enhance preschoolers' social skills?
- What strategies are used in educational games to support preschoolers' social skill development?
- What are the consequences of using educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?

The interviews were audio-recorded and carefully recorded by the researcher. The "members' check" method was used to confirm the validity of the interview transcripts. In this way, the written text was sent to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the content and to correct it if necessary.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed based on the instructions of Strauss and Corbin (2011), which includes three main stages of open, axial and selective coding. For validation, the coding and analysis of the interview data were reviewed by a colleague in curriculum studies, and agreement was observed regarding the results. Finally, the qualitative model of the

research was presented. To further ensure validity, the member-checking method was employed to validate the obtained model.

3. Findings

In order to answer the research questions, after operationalizing a total of 25 interviews with the research participants who were expert professors and directly related to the subject, the collected data were analyzed in the form of open coding. Doing the open coding process on these data led to the achievement of many concepts, which the researcher tried to reduce and categorize based on similarities and conceptual commonalities. The results of this coding are presented in the following tables:

What are the causal factors influencing the use of educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?

The causal factors that are effective in educational games based on the development of social skills can be presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Causal factors related to educational games based on social skills development

Causal Factors	1. The importance of the role of game in education	1.1. Effectiveness of game-based training 1.2. Institutionalization of game-based training among students 1.3. Objective and tangible results of game-based social skills training 1.4. Stakeholder demand for the use of games in social skills training
	2. Changing the identity of education	2.1. The disappearance of traditional education in teaching social skills to students 2.2. Attention to current realities and students' needs 2.3. Emphasis on educational innovations in social skills

Effectiveness of game-based training. In general, training that is based on entertainment is more effective and lasting. One participant stated that: *"In preschool, children have more objective thinking, so if we want to teach them social skills effectively, using games is very effective"* (Participant 4).

Institutionalization of game-based education among students. Today, society's expectations of education have changed; it is no longer limited to simply educating students as in the past. One of the participants noted that: *"The society we live in no longer seeks to send their children to school to learn addition and subtraction. Parents want their children to become good citizens and to grow up to be good human beings"* (Participant 24).

Objective and tangible results of game-based social skills training. Paying attention to skills is one of the most important tasks of education in the current era. One of the participants remarked that:

I would like to give an example: suppose we sent our child to school, and after several years of continuous education, he still lacked the skills to communicate with others. In my view, such an education should be criticized, because our goal is not merely to produce scientists and mathematicians, but to educate well-rounded individuals — something that is not possible without attention to a variety of essential skills (Participant 18).

Stakeholder demand for the use of games in teaching social skills. The needs of today's society are very different from the past, and this has doubled the attention to life skills. One of the participants highlighted that:

In today's society, interpersonal problems have increased, and many people lack even the basic ability to communicate effectively with one another. Moreover, possessing knowledge alone is no longer sufficient as it may have been in the past; therefore, we need to reconsider and reform the very foundations of education (Participant 9).

The disappearance of traditional education in teaching social skills to students. Traditional education is no longer responsive in the current situation and fundamental changes are needed. A participant argued that:

Traditional classroom education often focuses on the teacher presenting information while students passively receive it. In today's world, this approach is increasingly ineffective, as it does not equip individuals with the skills needed to function successfully in society (Participant 11).

Education based on existing realities and students' needs. Effective education is one of the essential components in the current century. One of the participants acknowledged that:

Education can be sustainable only if it responds to the needs of its stakeholders. Many parents argue that the current system fails to adequately address their children's needs, partly due to insufficient emphasis on developing students' life skills (Participant 21).

Emphasis on educational innovations in social skills.

One characteristic of knowledge is its perishability in today's age of incomplete or fragmented information. One of the participants mentioned that:

Knowledge is becoming obsolete rapidly, so relying solely on it is a major strategic

mistake in education. Instead, we must invest in lifelong skills, such as social skills. But can a skill like empathy, one of the core social skills, ever become obsolete (Participant 19)?

What are the contextual factors involved in educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?

The contextual factors for implementing an educational game based on the development of social skills in preschool can be presented in the following table:

Table 3.

Contextual factors *related to educational games based on social skills development*

Contextual factors	4. Values, beliefs, and attitudes	4.1. Teachers' values, beliefs, and attitudes 4.2. Parents' values, beliefs, and attitudes 4.3. Staff values, beliefs, and attitudes 4.4. Children's values, beliefs, and attitudes
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Teachers' values, beliefs, and attitudes. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes play an important role in teaching game-based social skills to children. One of the participants stated that:

Teachers and coaches, as facilitators of education, play a crucial role in whether children accept or reject certain forms of training. Fortunately, most coaches now recognize that developing social skills in children is only possible through creative play (Participant 8).

Parents' values, beliefs, and attitudes. Parents, as key pillars of education, play a vital role in supporting game-based learning. One of the participants acknowledged that:

Implementing training successfully is impossible without parental support. When teaching social skills through play, it is essential to consider the values and beliefs of the parents involved (Participant 20).

Values, beliefs, and attitudes of staff. School staff and their attitudes and beliefs can play a major role in advancing game-based education. One participant stated admitted that:

The school must approve any training program to be implemented, and this is especially important when teaching social skills through play, as even minor inconsistencies in this area can render the program ineffective (Participant 14).

Children's values, beliefs, and attitudes. Children, as the primary beneficiaries of social skills, should be given special attention. One of the participants stated in this regard:

Any form of social skills training or games in this field must be grounded in children's beliefs and opinions; otherwise, it will be ineffective. If a child perceives that

a game conflicts with their beliefs, they are unlikely to engage deeply with it.
(Participant 22).

What are the intervention-related factors in educational games designed to enhance preschoolers' social skills?

The intervention-related factors in implementing educational games based on the development of social skills in preschool are presented in the following table:

Table 4.

Intervention-related factors *related to educational games based on social skills development*

Intervention-related factors	5. Environmental factors	5.1. Empathetic atmosphere in the school towards the use of games in teaching social skills 5.2. Availability of facilities and infrastructure for the use of games in teaching social skill
	6. Programs and policies	6.1. Reality-based planning in the use of games in social skills education 6.2. Dynamic and flexible policies in games and social skills 6.3. Continuity and in-depth review of programs related to the use of games in social skills education

Empathetic school environment towards the use of games in teaching social skills. The school atmosphere has a significant impact on teaching social skills through games. One participant mentioned that:

The prevailing atmosphere in a school can either facilitate or hinder social skills training based on modern educational methods such as games. When a school fails to embrace this approach and lacks coordination and synergy, success cannot be expected (Participant 3).

Availability of facilities and infrastructure for the use of games in teaching social skills. Availability of facilities plays a significant role in teaching social skills through games. One participant emphasized that: *“Teaching social skills through games requires modern facilities and equipment, including laptops, tablets, appropriate hardware and software, and access to digital games”* (Participant 15).

Reality-based planning in using games in social skills training. One of the important principles in game-based social skills training is paying attention to existing realities. One of the participants believed that: *“Many goals set for teaching social skills are overly idealistic or unrealistic, making it difficult to effectively use games in developing these skills”* (Participant 17).

Dynamic and flexible policies on game and social skills. Policies that are defined in the

context of using play in teaching social skills should be flexible. One participant highlighted that:

By nature, games are flexible; therefore, any program designed in this field must incorporate that flexibility. A rigid, linear, top-down approach is unsuitable in this context (Participant 9).

Continuity and in-depth consideration of programs related to the use of games in social skills training. The continuity of game-based social skills training programs is another crucial component. One of the participants stressed that:

Any program that is implemented sporadically and without continuity cannot achieve the desired effectiveness. When teaching social skills through games, the program must be sustained over a long period to be truly effective (Participant 2).

What strategies are used in educational games to support preschoolers' social skill development?

The strategies for implementing educational games based on the development of social skills in preschool can be presented in the following table.

Table 5.

Strategies for implementing educational games based on the development of social skills

Strategies	7. Attention to the importance of game and new methods	7.1. Using group and collaborative games in teaching social skills 7.2. Using games based on role-playing, modeling, and empathy in teaching social skills
	8. Negligence and inattention	8.1. Using stereotyped games 8.2. Using one-dimensional games 8.3. Using games devoid of creativity and originality

Using group and collaborative games in social skills training. Incorporating group games is one of the strategies commonly used in social skills training. One of the participants confirmed that: *"I believe group games are highly important, as playing games that require cooperation and participation can strengthen social skills such as teamwork and turn-taking"* (Participant 3).

Using games based on role-playing, modeling, and empathy in teaching social skills. Another effective strategy in teaching social skills is the use of empathy-based and role-playing games. One of the participants mentioned that: *"To effectively teach students social skills, they must be exposed to real-life situations. For example, through role-playing, each student can learn about social responsibilities (Participant 19).*

Using stereotyped games. One ineffective strategy in teaching social skills is the use of stereotyped or rigid games. One of the participants noted that:

Repetitive and uncreative games can lead to student boredom. Games should actively engage students, stimulating their emotions and feelings, which are essential components of social skills (Participant 7).

Using one-dimensional games. Another negative strategy in the field of teaching social skills is the use of one-dimensional games. One of the participants admitted that:

Games that lack clear principles and steps, or that focus solely on a single skill, are not well-suited for teaching social skills. Effective games should engage the student's understanding, emotions, and cognition (Participant 16).

Using games devoid of creativity and originality. Another ineffective strategy in teaching social skills is the use of games that lack originality. One of the participants acknowledged that:

A game that does not allow students freedom of action and flexibility cannot effectively teach social skills. The game should provide opportunities for both individual and collective student initiative (Participant 17).

What are the consequences of using educational games for preschoolers' social skill development?

The consequences of implementing an educational game based on the development of social skills in preschool can be presented in the following table:

Table 6.

Consequences of implementing an educational game based on the development of social skills

Consequences	9. Individual	9.1. Emotional and Emotional Development of Children
	10. Social	9.2. Development of Communication Skills of Children
	11. Behavioral	10.1. Development of Responsibility and Accountability in Children
	12. Cultural	11.1. Attention and Respect for Differences in Society
		12.1. Avoidance of Abnormal Behaviors and Lawfulness
		12.2. Development of Empathy and Solidarity Skills with Others
		12.3. Cultivation of Positive Thinking and Critical Thinking

Children's emotional and sentimental development. One of the positive outcomes of teaching social skills based on game is children's emotional development. One of the

participants stressed that:

When children are immersed in a game, they are compelled to respond to the opinions, beliefs, and values of their peers in various situations. These responses help them recognize their own feelings and emotions, promoting self-awareness, adjustment, and personal growth (Participant 22).

Development of children's communication skills. One of the direct effects of game-based social skills training is the development of communication skills. One of the participants highlighted that:

During play, children learn to establish various forms of eye contact, verbal, and nonverbal communication with their peers, as well as how to coordinate within a communication network and interpret messages. In essence, play conveys the complexities of communication to children (Participant 6).

Development of responsibility and accountability in children. Development of responsibility is another outcome of teaching social skills through playing. One participant stated that:

Group and role-playing games primarily teach children how to be responsible toward their peers and accountable for the tasks assigned to them during the game. In doing so, they learn accountability to others and the importance of adhering to established rules (Participant 20).

Attention to and respect for differences in society. Another positive outcome of teaching social skills through game is understanding and respecting the differences of others. One of the participants emphasized that:

When children participate in social skills training through games, they gradually recognize that their peers differ in language, race, intelligence, talent, and emotions. Through this process, they learn that such differences should be respected (Participant 4).

Avoiding abnormal behaviors and respecting the rules. Reducing and avoiding abnormal behaviors is another result of game-based social skills training. One of the participants stressed that:

Many individuals who commit crimes often lack social skills and have not learned how to interact effectively with others. Teaching social skills through games helps convey these essential interaction skills to individuals (Participant 1).

Developing empathy and solidarity skills with others. Developing a sense of

interdependence with others and society is one of the outcomes of teaching social skills through games. One of the participants mentioned that:

When children are taught to play in groups and with diverse peers, they are essentially learning that a fulfilling life involves sharing their experiences with others, listening to others' stories, and engaging empathetically with those experiences (Participant 17).

Cultivating positive thinking and critical thinking. Cultivating positivity and constructive criticism of others is another result of game-based social skills training. One of the participants stated that:

During play, children learn to identify the flaws and shortcomings of others while simultaneously preparing to cooperate constructively with them. In this process, they develop the ability to critically evaluate others while maintaining a positive attitude toward collaboration (Participant 22).

Based on the research findings, the conceptual model presented in Figure 1 shows the relationships between the main categories resulting from the qualitative analysis process.

4. Discussion

The results of the research indicated that the elements of educational games based on the development of social skills in preschool can be explained in the form of five factors: causal, contextual, intervention-related, strategies, and consequences.

As indicated, issues such as the effectiveness of game-based education, the institutionalization of game-based learning among students, and the objective, tangible results of game-based social skills training are critical areas for consideration. In recent years, societies have increasingly recognized the importance of social skills and have mobilized resources to enhance various individual competencies. In this regard, Barzegar (2018) reported that education related to social skills has grown more than fourfold in the past decade. This type of education is no longer limited to universities but has expanded to other institutions, including schools, many of which have developed and implemented specialized programs to equip students with social skills.

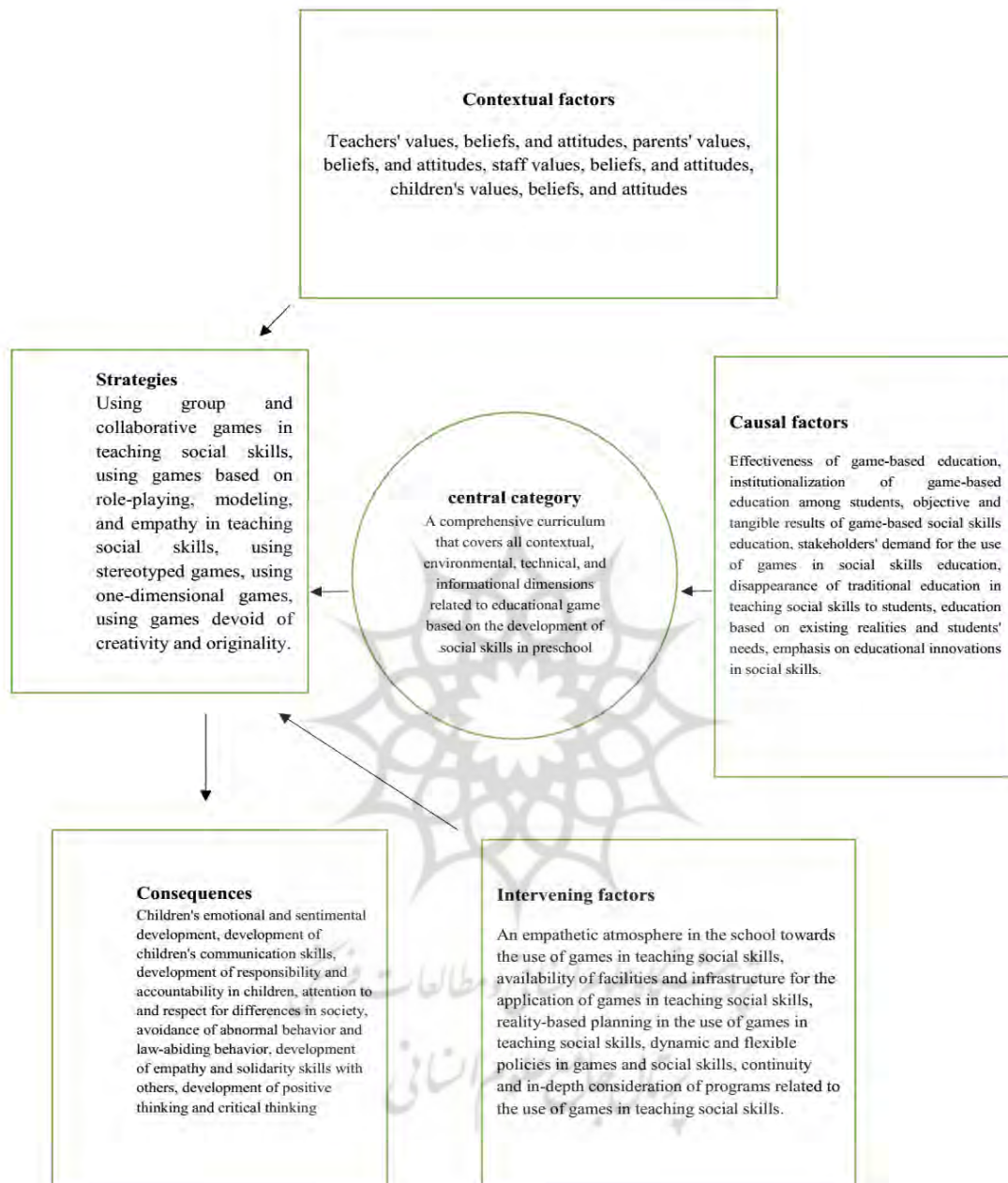


Figure 1.

Model of game-based social skills education for preschools

Another key factor in game-based social skills training is its effectiveness and measurable outcomes. Education in recent decades has shifted toward gamification. For example, Scott et al. (2022) found that training delivered to children through games is twice as effective as traditional methods. Indirect training through games is particularly beneficial for children with an object-oriented mindset. One important issue raised in the present study is the decline of traditional training. The reality is that modern society is not receptive to superficial instruction or the mere transfer of information, especially in crucial areas such as social skills. Given the nature of social skills, the ultimate goal is skill acquisition, which can be best achieved through practical approaches such as games.

The second influential category in educational games aimed at developing social skills in preschool is contextual factors, which include the values, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers, parents, school staff, and children. Among these, teachers play a particularly important role. Teachers' beliefs and attitudes can either facilitate or hinder the use of educational games for social skills development. As facilitators, teachers with a positive attitude toward educational games can significantly influence their successful implementation. In this regard, Heydari et al. (2017) conducted a study examining teachers' willingness to teach social skills through games and found that more than two-thirds supported this approach.

The next important factor is the attitudes and beliefs of parents, who complement and reinforce in-school education. Ohara et al. (2019) argued that implementing social skills training through play is not possible without parental support, as some school-based games are extensions of activities at home and remain ineffective without parental cooperation. Another key element is the school's educational staff. As the implementers of educational programs, they play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness—or ineffectiveness—of game-based social skills training. Smolkowski et al. (2022) emphasized that complete coordination among all school stakeholders is essential for teaching social skills through games, ensuring that they share a unified vision on the matter.

Issues such as fostering an empathetic school atmosphere toward the use of games in teaching social skills, ensuring the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and adopting reality-based planning are critical to the success of game-based social skills training. An empathetic school atmosphere is particularly influential. The prevailing environment in the school and the quality of relationships among its members play a vital role in teaching social skills, especially through games. In this regard, Jafari (2014) found that the synergy created by an empathetic atmosphere in schools increases the participation of various educational stakeholders in games related to social skills, thereby enhancing the program's success.

Another factor influencing game-based social skills training is the availability of

facilities and equipment. Since the implementation of various games requires both hardware and software resources, any shortage of equipment can hinder such training. Polat et al. (2022) identified the lack of necessary facilities and infrastructure as one of the primary causes of failure and ineffectiveness in educational programs. Finally, idealism and disregard for practical realities represent another major challenge in social skills training. Efforts in this field must be grounded in real-world conditions to ensure feasibility and effectiveness.

Issues such as the use of group and collaborative games, as well as games based on role-playing, modeling, and empathy, are central to teaching social skills. The findings of the present study indicate that educational games aimed at developing social skills in preschool can be approached in two ways: acceptance or rejection. The adoption of innovative methods—such as group and cooperative games, role-playing, modeling, and empathy-based activities—falls within the accepting approach to educational games for social skills development.

Given that social skills are a relatively new and emerging area in education, traditional teaching methods are unlikely to be highly effective. Teaching social skills cannot be achieved merely by delivering information or lectures, as these skills must be applied across all areas of students' lives. Therefore, instruction in this area requires a multifaceted approach. Simply labeling a lesson as “social skills” will not produce meaningful results; rather, such training should be delivered through engaging methods, including digital games. Teaching social skills through games is both attractive and practical, fostering higher levels of student engagement and increasing interest in the subject.

The consequences of social skills training include children's emotional and sentimental development, enhanced communication skills, increased responsibility and accountability, greater attention to and respect for societal differences, avoidance of abnormal behaviors, and the promotion of law-abiding conduct. Numerous studies have emphasized these positive outcomes. For example, Maleki et al. (2019) found a direct and significant relationship between social skills training and the development of creativity, critical thinking, and positivity in students. Social skills provide students with various tools for thinking and reflection, contributing to their intellectual growth. Similarly, Bakola et al. (2019) reported that social skills training increases desirable behaviors, reduces delinquent tendencies, and fosters greater responsibility among students. Salavera et al. (2022) argued that social skills training is a key element in promoting empathetic living and fostering solidarity. Such training is also believed to enhance interactions between children, thereby improving their verbal and interactive skills.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the primary goals of game-based social skills education should include fostering responsibility, promoting children's socialization, and developing empathy and solidarity. Such training can influence an individual's sense of self-sufficiency, self-confidence, and self-esteem, thereby playing a significant role in encouraging normative behavior. By engaging in game-based social skills activities, children experience a greater sense of acceptance within their social environment, which in turn facilitates their integration into society.

The study also highlights that game-based social skills education is influenced by numerous interrelated micro- and macro-level components. Neglecting any of these components can undermine the effectiveness of the program. For instance, without a supportive and welcoming attitude toward such initiatives, even the most well-designed programs may fail. Similarly, overlooking the interactive and creative aspects of social skills can render a program ineffective. Game-based social skills training can be likened to a complex structure in which the proper arrangement of each component determines its functionality and impact.

Based on the results of this study and existing literature, the following implications are offered for policy and practice:

1. Shift from purely cognitive instruction to applied learning. Given the evolving nature of social skills education, programs should move beyond the delivery of abstract information and focus on creating practical, experience-based learning opportunities.
2. Consider stakeholder values and attitudes. The values and beliefs of teachers, parents, and other stakeholders play a critical role in the success of game-based social skills education. Program design should account for these contextual realities.
3. Avoid generalization and idealism. Due to the diversity of contexts in which social skills programs are implemented, educators and policymakers should focus on developing objective, context-specific, and operational strategies rather than overly broad or idealistic ones.
4. Strengthen teacher preparation. Since teachers have a central role in promoting game-based social skills education, training programs should ensure that educators are well-prepared and skilled in using games as a teaching tool.
5. Invest in digital infrastructure. Given the demonstrated value of digital games in teaching social skills, preschool institutions should be equipped with the necessary hardware, software, and technological support.

6. Incorporate diverse and multidimensional games. Social skills are multifaceted, and their instruction should draw on a variety of game types to address different skill dimensions effectively.
7. Enhance parental involvement. Parents play a vital role in reinforcing social skills outside of school. Strategies should be developed to actively engage parents in game-based social skills education initiatives.

This study faced several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting its findings. Access to some research participants proved challenging, which restricted the ability to conduct interviews with certain individuals relevant to the topic. Similarly, reaching parents of children and other stakeholders involved in social skills education was limited, narrowing the scope of perspectives included in the analysis. Another challenge arose from the cautiousness of some participants, who, due to personal or contextual reasons, refrained from disclosing certain realities and experiences related to social skills.

From a methodological standpoint, the study relied solely on the grounded theory approach without incorporating other complementary research methods that might have provided additional depth or triangulation. Furthermore, interviews were used as the primary data collection tool, with limited use of other methods for gathering information. These constraints may have influenced the breadth and richness of the data obtained.

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