

Muslim Mothers' Intersubjective Perceptions of Play in the Early Years:

A UK Case Study Focusing on Berkshire

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Dedication

A special dedication of this doctoral study needs undoubtedly to be to my beloved husband, whose continuous support and encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic journey. Your patience, understanding, and belief in my abilities have been a source of strength and motivation during the challenging moments. Thank you for being my rock and my biggest cheerleader.

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أَكْبَرُ امْتِنَانِي لِلَّهِ ... مَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِكَ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ

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Abstract

Exploring play as a base for children's learning and development has for long been in the core of researcher's interest, and exploring parents' perceptions about the benefits of play, in different social, and cultural settings has also been widely explored. Nevertheless, there seem to be a limited studies that explored the perceptions of Muslim mothers who come from different background and live in the UK. This study was conducted with the aim to contribute to filling that gap. It explored the intersubjective meaning of Muslim mothers, who come from diverse backgrounds and reside in the UK, particularly in Berkshire, aiming to understand how they perceive and interpret play as a base for learning and development in early years, and how they act towards it. This study also explored the social, cultural, and religious factors that might have affected these mothers' perceptions of, and attitudes towards play, along with exploring the methods in which these mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about play. A mixed-method case study research design was used in this study utilising a questionnaire for quantitative data collection, where 103 mothers participated, and a semi-structured interview, where 16 mothers participated. The study adopted the interpretivism/social constructionism paradigm and was underpinned by a theoretical framework consisting of two main theories; 1) Developmental niche or parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006), and 2) Sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1991). Results revealed that Muslim mothers who live in the UK and come from diverse backgrounds (21 backgrounds counted in this study) are highly aware of the potential benefits of play as a base for children's learning, growth, and development, indicating significant positive perceptions and attitudes towards play. Results also revealed that the social, cultural, religious, as well as personal factors have participated in shaping these mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play. The main finding was that despite their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, Islamic religion and Islamic teachings participated in uniting Muslim mothers' views,

perceptions, understandings, interpretations, and actions towards parenting and play practices, highlighting that Islam is a way of life and not merely a religious faith. This study contributes to knowledge with an extended understanding of the Muslim mothers' level of awareness about the importance of play in early years and provides an overview of the important parenting ideas and practices related to play, which are unique to the Islamic culture. The main implication of this study to policy is developing affordable culturally and religiously sensitive family programmes tailored for Muslim families that emphasise the significance of play addressing cultural and religious challenges. This study also paves the way for future research to extend our understanding of the cultural differences in play practices by offering a meeting point between different worldviews of play, within an era of increasing globalisation and intercultural mindedness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Play, according to Jackson and Angelino (1974), is a universal human phenomenon that has been massively studied by scholars, theorists, and researchers for centuries. The definitions and the importance of play were widely considered, in addition to the status of play as a basis for young children's learning by many scholars, including Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1962), Erikson (1985), and Bongiorno (2012). A considerable number of theories has also been developed by scholars in the field of parenting and child development about the potential value of play in children's growth and development. Vygotsky (1978), for instance, explains how cognitive development relates to children's play since play is considered a valuable tool for promoting creative engagement, social interactions, and role-playing. Additionally, Erikson (1985) views play as a key component for children to express their emotions and interrelate with others.

Similarly, the impact of parents on their children's learning and development has been widely incorporated in many theories. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, for instance, is one of the theories that focuses on the influence of parents on their children's life, learning, and development. Meanwhile, many other theories draw on the impact of culture on parents' beliefs and practices, notably Sutton-Smith (1997), Vygotsky (1997) and Brown, Heath, and Pea (2003) who address the impact of adults, including parents, as well as the environment, on children's play. Sutton-Smith (1997; 1999) focuses more on the cultural aspects of play considering most of the activities children engage in, including unintended ones, as play activities, arguing that children get engaged in the type of play that is constructed because it is seen and considered significant in their society. To understand how families from diverse cultures view child development and how parents in these families support this development, Sutton-Smith (1999) addresses the importance of identifying and understanding

the sociocultural background of these families, as it typifies how people are affected by their cultures.

This study explored Muslim mothers' perceptions and interpretations of play as a basis for children's learning and development in their early years, as well as investigating how mothers' social, cultural, and religious background might have affected their views of play. The objective of this study was primarily to examine how Muslim mothers who originate from diverse backgrounds and live in the UK construct the meaning of play as a tool for young children to learn and acquire skills. In addition, this study further aimed to explore how these mothers interpret their understandings of play within their social environment.

Furthermore, this research endeavoured to provide Muslim mothers with opportunities to express themselves and discuss the intersubjective meaning they attribute to play. This study also attempted to explore the impact of their culture in forming a specific meaning about play. At the same time explore how this meaning affects their approach of raising their children in a multicultural society as the UK, and how can they support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play for their children's overall development.

The study limited participants to mothers only, as according to previous studies such as Craig (2006) and Lancy (2007) for instance, children spend more time with their mothers than they do with their fathers, which indicates that mothers are most likely to have a fuller understanding of play as part of their children's lives, than fathers (Yeung et al., 2001; Sayer et al., 2004). Additionally, other studies indicated that children's ages, developmental competence, and interactive behaviour are related to maternal interactive styles (Crawley & Spiker, 1983; Marfo, 1992; Biringen, et al., 2000), which makes the role of the mother crucial in their children's early lives, hence the focus on mothers in this study.

This study was underpinned by a conceptual framework that included two relevant theories: first, the developmental niche or parental ethno-theory (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006); and second the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These theories are discussed and explored in chapter 3 (sections 3.8.1, and 3.8.2).

1.1.1. Key terms used and defined in this study

Play: is a range of joyful and enjoyable activities that the children get spontaneously involved in, for recreation and pleasure (Murray, 2018). Further discussion of definitions around play is provided in section 3.5.

Intersubjectivity: variety of possible relations between perspectives (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). This concept is further defined and explained in section 3.9.

Perceptions: as defined by Pickens (2005) refer to the subjective judgements and interpretations that individuals develop about the world around them. Perceptions are formed through sensory information that derive from surroundings, expectations, past experiences, as well as from cultural backgrounds.

Muslim mothers: are the mothers who follow the Islamic religion and consider the Quran to be their holy book, and Mohammed to be their prophet and messenger. This includes mothers who were born Muslims and the ones who were not born Muslims but embraced Islam later in their life (Roald, 2012). Muslims represent 24.9% of the world's population, exceeding 1.9 billion, according to World Population Review (2024). Muslims come from differ regions in the world such as the Middle East-North Africa, known as (MINA region), Central Asia, South Asia, and South-east Asia. Large Muslim communities can also be found in, Europe, and Americas (Lipka & Hackett, 2017).

Culture: as defined by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2012), is a complex concept that refers to beliefs, values, customs, rituals, norms, and traditions, in addition to language, music, art, and

religion shared by a group of people within a particular society. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2012), added that culture is a shared system of meanings, and symbols that shape and guide individuals' identities within the society.

1.1.2. Statement of the problem – a researcher perspective

My decision to explore the perceptions of Muslim mothers regarding play in early childhood education stemmed from both my professional background and my interest in advancing early years education. Having worked for nearly a decade as a preschool teacher at an international school in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, implementing the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP), a curriculum which places significant emphasis on play as a key pedagogical tool. The IB programme is a globally recognised framework for children aged 3 to 19 that promotes play-based learning as an essential component of holistic child development, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth (IBO, 2009).

Throughout my teaching career, I used play to support children's learning, yet I frequently encountered resistance from parents, particularly mothers, who expressed concerns about the value of play and its potential in helping children learn skills. Phrases such as, "I sent my child to school to learn, not to play," were very common. This reaction was particularly pronounced in a culturally diverse school setting, where students and families come from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. These experiences prompted me to question how cultural and religious influences shape parental perceptions of play as a tool for learning in early years.

From a professional, as well as personal, perspective, I concluded that parental attitudes towards play were not uniform; instead, they seemed to be influenced by different cultural and religious values. The mothers' differing views on play were likely informed by their specific cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. While play is universally acknowledged as a critical element in children's development, as argued by scholars such as (Al-Ghazali, 1988) and Hines

(2017), it is also shaped by social factors, including cultural and historical contexts (Sutton-Smith, 1999). This made me more interested in investigating the intersection between cultural and social identity, religious beliefs, and parental attitudes toward play. Moreover, As a UK resident and a member of the Muslim community, I was interested in investigating how Muslim mothers, in particular, who may navigate complex intersections of faith, tradition, and contemporary social expectations, due to their residency in the UK, interpret the role of play in their children's development.

Firstly, challenging the assumption that Islam is only a faith. Shedding light on Muslim mothers' specifically allows for more understanding that Islam is not merely a religion confined to worship practices; it is a comprehensive way of life that shapes the moral, social, and educational values of its adherents (Al-Ghazali, 1995). This holistic approach to life influences all aspects of Muslim daily living, including parenting and child-rearing practices. Islam provides a unique framework for play and learning, deeply rooted in its educational philosophy, where Islamic teachings advocate for a balance between play and education, emphasising the importance of nurturing a child's holistic development, including their moral, social, and intellectual capacities (Gil'adi, 1992). However, despite Islam's extensive teachings on family and child development, there is limited academic research that explores how Muslim mothers, particularly those living in non-Muslim-majority countries like the UK, integrate their religious beliefs and practices with modern educational frameworks. Despite the growing body of research on cultural variations in play and learning, there remains a significant gap in understanding the role of the Islamic framework in the way Muslim mothers enact play, particularly within the UK context. Thus, one of this study's aims was to address this gap by focusing on Muslim mothers' perceptions of play, an area often overlooked in Western-centric research that assumes a universal approach to play-based learning. Putting this study in an Islamic context enhances our understanding about Islam as a way of life highlighting that,

contrary to some misconceptions, play is an integral part of Islamic pedagogy. Additionally, this study offers insights into how religious and cultural frameworks inform parental approaches to play, allowing for more understanding that the Islamic framework is not location-dependent, rather, it is globally applicable transcending geographical boundaries which makes it universal (Tan, 2014). Despite its universality, it is still contextually varied, and depends on how mothers interpret and apply these teachings within their local and cultural settings. Understanding this framework contributes to a broader understanding of culturally informed parenting practices which makes it essential for developing inclusive and culturally sensitive early childhood education policies and practices. This is notable because of the increasing diversity in UK classrooms and the need for educators to understand and respect various cultural approaches to early learning (Moore, 2012).

Given that parenting is a dynamic process shaped by religious, cultural, and societal factors, I was interested in exploring how Muslim mothers draw from Islamic principles to guide their children's learning through play, even when residing in multicultural contexts like the UK, and how they navigate the balance between Islamic values and the expectations of Western education systems, aiming to offer insights into how parents 'learn' to play with their children in a way that aligns with their religious beliefs. I found the focus on Muslim mothers' enactment particularly valuable due to their role as primary mediators between Islamic teachings and the demands of contemporary education systems, especially in non-Muslim-majority contexts like the UK. In many Muslim families, mothers play the role of primary caregivers and first educators (Okasha et al., 2012), and their influence on early childhood development is profound, shaping not only the daily experiences of their children but also their long-term educational trajectories. Understanding how these mothers perceive and integrate the concept of play offers valuable insights into how children's early learning is shaped within the home and community, aligning with religious and cultural values.

Additionally, Muslim mothers represent a unique intersection of multiple identities (religious, cultural, and gendered) (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2012) making their experiences and perspectives particularly complex and valuable for study. This also makes the focus on them crucial. They are not only navigating the challenges of parenting in a multicultural society but are also doing so within the framework of Islamic teachings (Sulaiman et al., 2014), which may differ from dominant Western educational paradigms. By focusing on their perspectives, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how religious identity interacts with gender roles and cultural expectations in shaping attitudes toward play and child development.

Moreover, the focus on Muslim mothers is also based on the fact that the Muslim community in the UK is not homogenous (Ali 2015). Although they are all Muslims, these mothers come from a variety of cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, each with its own unique perspectives on child-rearing and education. The focus on this group of mothers allowed the study to capture the diversity within this community, offering an understanding of how different cultural and social backgrounds influence perceptions of play. This diversity is particularly relevant in a region like Berkshire, where Muslim communities are growing and becoming increasingly diverse, both ethnically and socioeconomically (UK government, 2021). The focus on Muslim mothers allows for an exploration of how these women navigate the challenges of balancing their religious and cultural identities with the expectations of a Western educational system, and how they adapt their parenting practices to reconcile Islamic teachings with the Western context in which they are raising their children. This understanding is crucial for developing more culturally sensitive approaches to early years education in the UK.

Focusing on Muslim mothers in this study was further strengthened by considering the role of social and economic status (SES) alongside cultural and religious factors (Mooney, 2013). Muslim mothers from varying SES backgrounds experience different levels of access to

educational resources, such as quality preschools and play materials, which can influence their views on the value of play-based learning. This variability in SES creates variability in parenting practices, as mothers with lower incomes may have less time and fewer resources to engage in or understand the benefits of play-based education (Bradley et al., 2001). At the same time, economic pressures often lead lower-income families to prioritise academic learning over play, viewing it as essential for future success, while higher-income families may have more favourable attitudes toward play-based approaches (Conger et al., 2010). Additionally, educational attainment, closely linked to SES, may also shape perceptions, as more educated mothers may be more open to integrating modern educational methods, while those with less education might embrace traditional, formal learning approaches (Borjas, 2000). These differences in SES can intensify cultural differences. Therefore, understanding how SES impacts play opportunities, parental expectations, and policy implications highlights the need for fair and inclusive educational policies that address the diverse needs of families across socioeconomic backgrounds. By recognising the potential impact of SES, this research contributes to promoting equity in early childhood education, ensuring all children have access to the benefits of play-based learning, regardless of their socioeconomic standing.

At the same time, by focusing on the intersubjective perceptions of Muslim mothers who come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, this research contributes to a more inclusive understanding of how play is conceptualised and practiced across different cultural, religious and socioeconomic contexts (Kasser, 2011). The study also addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the unique challenges and strategies Muslim mothers employ in integrating play with Islamic teachings while living in a predominantly non-Muslim society like the UK.

This research challenges and enhances traditional perspectives, particularly within the context of Islamic teachings. It challenges the conventional boundaries of play-based learning by integrating Islamic teachings, adding a valuable cultural and religious dimension to the

discourse on early childhood education. While much of the existing literature on play-based learning is grounded in developmental theories such as those of Vygotsky and Piaget, this research brings attention to the intersection of these secular frameworks with Islamic teachings, which emphasise holistic child development including spiritual growth. This challenges educators to consider the integration of religious values into play-based pedagogies.

This study also contributes to enhancing the knowledge base in terms of supporting the moral and ethical dimensions of play by showing how play can be used not only for cognitive and social development but also for instilling Islamic values such as honesty, cooperation, and respect, as Islamic teachings place significant value on play as a means of moral and ethical development. Framing play as a form of ethical education allows this study to broaden the scope of play-based learning to include moral instruction, which is often overlooked in secular curricula. At the same time, the research expands the literature by addressing the perceptions and practices of Muslim parents, particularly in the UK, regarding play by revealing how cultural and religious contexts influence views on what constitutes appropriate play. Some Islamic traditions, for instance, may value structured forms of play that instil discipline, while others may emphasise creativity and autonomy. This provides a nuanced understanding of how play can be adapted to meet the cultural and religious expectations of Muslim communities, thereby making play-based learning more inclusive and culturally responsive.

Additionally, this study reinforces the role of parents and communities. Islamic teachings emphasise the role of the family and community in a child's upbringing (Ismail et al., 2010). This research highlights the critical role of parents in shaping play experience, which aligns with Islamic views that encourage active parental involvement in education (Al-Ghazali, 1988)). This enhances the current body of knowledge by showing how collaboration between educators and families can foster a more enriched, culturally grounded play-based learning environment, allowing for bridging research and practice, offering practical implications by

suggesting that early childhood educators who work with Muslim communities, can design play-based learning environments that reflect both developmental psychology and religious teachings, advocating for a dual focus on academic achievement and spiritual well-being through play. In addressing these gaps, this research aims to provide valuable insights for early childhood educators, policymakers, and researchers, contributing to the development of more culturally responsive and inclusive early years education practices in diverse societies like the UK.

1.2. Research aims and questions

1.2.1. Research aims

This research aimed to explore and identify the intersubjective perceptions of mothers who descend from a specific religious background (Muslim) and live in a multicultural country (UK), where people come from different countries, with different religions, cultures, languages and different experiences and mind-sets. These people may also hold different perceptions about many concepts, including their perception about the importance of play in their children's lives. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how Muslim mothers who live in the UK see the role of play in early years in achieving holistic learning and development for their children. Holistic development, as defined by Ogolla (2018) "entails changes that take place in children in terms of social, emotional, physical and cognitive development" (p. 47). Furthermore, this study aimed to explore the factors that might have participated in shaping Muslim mothers' perceptions about and attitudes towards play, such as culture, religion and socioeconomic status.

1.2.2. Research questions

1. How do Muslim mothers define play? (RQ1), what are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question)

2. How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? (RQ2)
3. Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? (RQ 3)
4. How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play? (RQ4)

1.3. Research Gap

Although the existing body of literature on play is substantial, addressing its benefits and the recognition of play as a fundamental right for all children, there remains ongoing debate regarding how play, as a foundation for learning and development, is defined, perceived, and conceptualised by parents (Brooker & Edwards, 2010; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Rogers, 2011). While numerous studies have examined how play is understood by teachers, early years educators, and children, as well as by both parents in some contexts, there is a notable gap in research concerning how mothers, and particularly Muslim mothers from diverse backgrounds living in the UK, perceive and interpret play. Moreover, there has been limited exploration of the factors influencing these perceptions and interpretations.

Previous studies on parental understanding of play have predominantly focused on the relationship between parents and their children's educators. These relationships are often characterised by complexity, conflict, and tension, especially regarding parents' comprehension of the role of early years educators (O'Gorman & Ailwood, 2012). Additionally, while researchers have explored the cultural aspects influencing parents' perspectives (e.g., Windisch et al., 2003; Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2008), such studies have largely been limited to examining cross-cultural differences, including African-American parents (Fogle & Mendez, 2006), Australian Indigenous parents (Windisch et al., 2003), or comparative studies between European-American and Asian-American parents (Parmar et al.,

2008). However, previous research seem to have overlooked how religious beliefs, particularly Islam, influence parents' perceptions of play. While cultural aspects have been studied in various contexts, the role of religion as a guiding force in parenting practices, especially among Muslim mothers, remains underexplored. By exploring how Islamic teachings and principles are interpreted and applied to the concept of play, an area that has received limited attention in Western-based early childhood education, this study contributes to extending knowledge about Islam as a way of life and not merely a faith.

Moreover, existing studies often treat cultural and religious communities as monolithic, without accounting for the diversity within these groups. This research explores how Muslim mothers from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds perceive and interpret play and how Islamic teachings on child-rearing and play impacted their perceptions, offering a more nuanced understanding of how this diverse group build up their perceptions and interpretations about play. Additionally, this study addresses the intersectionality of these factors. By exploring intersection of the religious identity of the Muslim mothers in the UK, and the varied cultural backgrounds, this study contributes to knowledge with a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between these factors. Furthermore, by shedding light on how socioeconomic factors intersect with religious and cultural backgrounds in shaping perceptions of play, this study extends our understanding about the socioeconomic diversity within a religious group. At the same time, by providing insights into Muslim mothers' perceptions, this study addresses a gap in knowledge that could inform more culturally responsive early childhood education policies and practices in diverse societies like the UK. It offers a valuable insights for educators, policy makers, and researchers working in increasingly diverse educational settings, to promote more inclusive and cultural sensitive approaches to early years education.

This research, while focused on the UK context, has broader relevance, beyond the UK, for both multicultural or Muslim-minority societies and Muslim majority societies across the globe, offering significant implications for educational policy, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices in diverse contexts. In Muslim-minority societies such as in parts of Europe, North America, and East Asia, this study demonstrates the importance of designing play-based curricula that are sensitive to the cultural and religious contexts of Muslim children. Educational policymakers in these societies can use the insights from this research to develop curricula that bridge secular and Islamic perspectives on child development. At the same time, this study is also contributing to promoting intercultural understanding, especially in multicultural classrooms, where play offers opportunities for children to engage with peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds, promoting empathy and respect for diversity, and reducing marginalisation. While, in countries where Islam is the dominant religion, such as in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, the integration of play-based learning into Islamic educational frameworks can be strengthened by the findings of this research. This research provides a framework for integrating modern play-based pedagogies with traditional Islamic values, offering a balanced approach to child development that can be adopted in countries such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt.

1.3.1 Intersubjectivity

Despite the term intersubjectivity being already explained in section 1.1.1, it is noteworthy to provide a more comprehensive definition at this stage, as it is one of the key terms used in this study. Intersubjectivity has been defined by Rommetveit (1985) as a process of understanding, sharing, and coordinating the overlapping beliefs and experiences between individuals within their society, while Gillespie and Cornish (2010) defined intersubjective perceptions as shared perceptions of the psychological characteristics that are widespread within a culture. Zahavi (2013) considered intersubjectivity as a central aspect of human experience and that it is deeply

rooted in our social nature, proposing that intersubjectivity is made possible by the capacity for empathy, which enables individuals to project their own experiences onto others. As such, this study aims to explore and understand the shared perceptions that Muslim mothers have in relation to play within both their indigenous and Islamic culture.

The intersubjective approach, according to Chiu et al. (2010), is concerned with the human behaviour and how it is affected by ecology and culture, and intersubjective perceptions according to this approach are distinct from personal beliefs and values. These perceptions have significant importance in balancing the ecological influence on humans' behaviour and adaptation, and they explicate the nature of cultural competencies including how multicultural identities and cultural changes and measurements are managed (Chiu et al., 2010). Drawing on this argument, Ogbu (2019), stated that, socialisation practices, including children's preparation for entry into society, are guided by parents' understanding of the society.

In summary, this study aimed to contribute to the global knowledge with at least two new discoveries about Muslim mothers who originate from different cultural backgrounds and live in the UK. First, this study deeply explored how mothers perceive and interpret the role of play in their children's learning and overall development, and the second contribution was exploring the factors that might have influenced the formation and the interpretation of these perceptions, including culture and religion. This contributed to extending the existing literature and what we already know about parent's perceptions of play, and more specifically Muslim mothers, which allowed a further understanding of the ways in which these mothers support themselves to know more about the benefits of play, and support their young children to benefit from play. Moreover, considering that Muslim mothers are under-represented group in the existing literature, this study gave them voice to express themselves, share their experiences, and state their opinions and thoughts.

1.4. Significance and Outcomes of the Study

Drawn from both personal and professional interest, conducting this study and reviewing the academic literature, this study contributes to research understandings in child development and early years education in the UK and worldwide, by highlighting some ongoing interrogations around how Muslim mothers in the UK define and perceive play, how they determine what constitutes play, how they understand its purposes and benefits and how their cultural and religious backgrounds accommodate their perceptions. The results of this study contribute to developing our understanding of what parents' beliefs about play and the learning through play approach are, which allowed to make recommendations in relation to parental engagement and home-based practices related to play.

In addition, the outcomes of this study helped understanding the level of Muslim mothers' awareness about the importance of play, and also helped understanding the important ideas and practices in relation to play, which are unique to the Muslims' culture. At the same time, this study empowered the Muslim community, especially Muslim mothers by giving them voice to state their opinion and express themselves, which is considered as a good opportunity to the minority of Muslim mothers living in the UK to participate with ideas originated from their cultural background about the considerations and the practices they associate with the importance of play.

Furthermore, the study extended what we already know about how the children benefit from play and acquire different skills and provided further insights for parents, preschool practitioners, providers, and policymakers, about the necessity of incorporating play in pre-schools, and encouraging it at home for the good of the children, as play can be practiced at home and at preschools similarly. Finally, by addressing different backgrounds points of view and understanding the different perceptions of play that Muslim mothers hold, this study contributed an interdisciplinary perspective by offering a meeting point between different

worldviews of play, within an era of increasing globalisation and intercultural mindedness (Nganga, 2016). More details about the original contributions of this study to literature are discussed in chapter 9, section 9.3.

1.5. Overview of the thesis

This thesis explores how Muslim mothers, who come from different societal and cultural backgrounds perceive and interpret the importance of play as a base for young children's learning and development. It endeavours to understand the diversity and the complexity of these perceptions by examining the different factors that might have affected mothers' play practices taking into consideration the social, cultural, and religious factors. As the study context is within the United Kingdom, it was important to examine how these mothers who come from different backgrounds and hold an Islamic religious faith and Islamic way of life manage to raise their children within the UK as a multicultural society.

This study is planned around four research questions and consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, presenting researcher's personal motivation for conducting this research, research aims, context, gap, and research questions. Chapter 2 present the study context focusing more on the Islamic context. Chapter 3 is composed of the literature review, the theories of play that and the conceptual framework that guide this study. It provides critical analysis of the existing research on the topic of play and parent's perceptions of play, as well as providing the theories that guided this research and guided the interpretation of data. Developmental niche or parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006), and Sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979)). Chapter 4 explains the appropriate methodology for this study, including research paradigm (interpretivism philosophical assumption, and a subjectivism or constructivism ontological assumption (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991)), research methods and design (mixed methods case study), and the appropriate data collection instruments (questionnaire and semi-structured

interview). In addition to data analysis methods, researcher's positionality and the ethical considerations that framed this research.

Chapter 5 presents detailed information about the quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedure of this study, the approach used in each type of data analysis (descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data, and thematic analysis for qualitative data), the computer programmes used (SPSS and Nvivo), and the steps taken from the beginning to the end to analyse both sets of data. Chapter 6 presents participants' biographies, and chapter 7 explores and discusses results about mothers' perceptions and attitudes of play answering research questions 1, and 2.

While chapter 8 explores and discusses results about mothers' societal conceptualisation of play answering research questions 3 and 4. This chapter discusses the factors that might have affected mothers' perceptions of play, along with the relationship between these factors highlighting their complex effect on mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play answering research question (3). At the same time, chapter 8 discusses the different approaches adopted by mothers to support themselves to gain more knowledge about the benefits of play, answering research question (4). Chapter 9 concludes this thesis and includes a summary of the study findings, the study's contribution to knowledge, the limitations, the implications, and recommendations for future research, concluding with the researcher's reflection and final thoughts.

1.6. Summary of chapter 1

This chapter provided the essential elements that form the foundation of this study, while stating the problem of the study, the researchers' personal motivation and perspective that guided the conduct of this study. This chapter also emphasised the significance of focusing on mothers, and more specifically Muslim mothers who live in the UK and have children aged between 3 and 6 years old as main participants. It outlined research aims, research questions

and identified research gap in the literature highlighting the significance of understanding the factors that might have shaped Muslim mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play. Moreover, this chapter clarified the significance of the study and its expected outcomes, emphasising its potential contributions to the theory, practice, and policy within the field of parenting and early childhood development. To ensure more clarity, a definition of the applicable key terms was provided, along with contextualising the study within the framework that forms an introduction to how the problem of this study was prepared for exploration.

Chapter 2: The study in the Islamic context

2.1. Introduction

For a better understanding of the relationship between Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and their cultural background, it is crucial to contextualise the study into a broader sociocultural aspect. The study was conducted in Great Britain, as it is home to many diverse cultures and communities. According to the UK government (2011), Great Britain is composed of various ethnic groups including natives and immigrants, as 20% of the population is represented by other ethnic backgrounds (UK government, 2011).

In terms of religion, 2011 census highlights that 59.5% of the population of England and Wales identify as Christian. The second largest religious group is Muslim, representing 4.8% of the population (UK government, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that results from the UK census of 2021 were released in 2022, revealing that the number of Muslims increased to 3.9 million, in 2021, up from 2.7 million, in 2011 (UK government, 2021). However, this study was framed and planned according to the 2011 census statistics. Thus, the 2021 census statistics, about the number of Muslims in the UK, are presented here as an informative update and not to be considered for this study.

In relation to the population of the study, the focus was on Muslim mothers from different Muslim backgrounds. The mothers were chosen based on three main criteria: 1) religion: mothers must be Muslims, 2) UK residency: the mothers and their children must be resident in the UK. 3) children's age: mothers must have at least one child aged between 3 and 6 years old. Focusing on children at this age particularly is due to the importance of this age. El'konin (1989) and Davies (2010), for instance, consider the first 6 years of the children's life as the most productive years, arguing that during this period the children show high readiness and high capacity for learning and developing many skills (AL-Ghazali, 1988). Also, children aged

between 3 and 6 years old, according to Van and Duijkers (2013), are more likely to be attending the preschool, or reception and interacting with other children of the same age, which makes it possible for them to get involved in a wider range of play activities. Children at this age are still dependent on their mothers Bowlby (2008), which also means that mothers have some understanding of their own children's play in a different context, as they are considered the primary caregivers and first educators, especially in the Islamic context (Okasha et al., 2012). It is for this reason mothers were chosen to participate in this study (more explanation about why focusing on these criteria (Islam and Muslim mothers) is provided in section 1.1.2).

This chapter focuses mainly on contextualising this study in an Islamic context starting by presenting a comprehensive overview of the Islamic culture and its complexities, the importance of early years, and play in early years in Islam, along with the factors that affect young children from Islamic perspective. This chapter will also address the reason why the focus is on Mothers specifically and not the fathers or guardians.

2.2. Understanding the complexity of the Islamic culture

This study focused on exploring the potential of play, by investigating the perceptions of Muslim mothers, who come from different Muslim backgrounds, about play as a basis for learning and development for young children. At the same time this study investigated the impact of the indigenous and the religious culture of the mothers and the complexity of combining both cultures on forming a particular perception about play. Thus, the terms culture, indigenous culture, Islamic religion, and Islamic culture were used differently in this study.

Culture in general has been central to many social science studies/research for a long time. This explains why there is a cascade of articles, books, and research papers about political culture, multicultural education, organisational culture, cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication, cross and intercultural management, language and culture, and other fields

(Baldwin et al., 2006). In this study, culture was used adopting the meaning provided by Spencer-Oatey (2008), who defines culture as:

a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures, and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour. (p. 3)

Investigating the impact of culture in the mother's perceptions about play is due to the significant importance the culture has in shaping people's life, forming their way of thinking that affects their perceptions and practices (Brown & Gasko, 2012). This idea is strongly supported by Denny (2015); while arguing that, culture is important to consider when aiming to make predictions about people's behaviour, as it is considered as a whole package that contains traditional ideas combined with values, beliefs, and practices, historically selected, and adopted by groups of people.

As indicated by Peterson et al. (2015) and Hines (2017), that play is informed by many factors such as social, cultural, and historical contexts, therefore, culture plays a key role in relation to play practices. Brown and Gasko (2012) asserted that implementing any play-based curriculum at schools can be influenced by teachers' understanding of, and beliefs regarding the importance of play. Similarly, Hatcher et al. (2012) added that any play activities the children get involved in at home are also likely to be influenced by their parents' beliefs and understandings of the benefits of play.

Blau (2017) indicated that throughout the last 30 years, much theoretical work was dedicated to exploring and make sense of the macro-micro link between the cultural characteristics and individual actions, highlighting that macro link refers to the written regulations, laws, and policies that form structural and cultural influences, and the micro link refers to the family

religious influences. Considering this indication, Myers et al. (2008) asserted that it is difficult to empirically untangle people from religious influences that are rooted in the family, because the intergenerational transmission of these religious beliefs are very strong. Myers et al. (2008) also adds that it is easier to change individuals at the macro level by altering the written laws and policies, than to change individuals at micro levels, because the underlying culture has a deeper and a greater effect on individuals' behaviour, especially if the religious culture is the macro force that controls the behaviours, as this force is deep and wide-reaching.

Because this study was not only concerned with Muslim mothers' perceptions of play but was also concerned with the impact of cultural factors on shaping these perceptions, it was important to explore the effect of both, the Islamic culture, and the indigenous culture, because in the Islamic context both these cultures are interconnected in a complex manner. Gulevich (2004) noted that the idea of culture for Muslims is much more complicated than it seems. Although Muslims in different countries that are called Islamic countries are thought to be practicing only Islamic culture, in fact, these countries practice an amalgam of different practices including Islamic/non-Islamic and pre-Islamic practices, which makes it a combination of different cultures at the same time (Gulevich, 2004).

These differences that the Islamic culture is facing in different parts of the Islamic world, is one of the investigations and outcomes of this study that makes it unique and new to the literature. In addition to investigating the impact of culture and religion on the Muslim mothers' perceptions about play, this study shed light on the complicated combination of the different indigenous cultures with the Islamic culture which creates a confusion for many non-Muslim people. This investigation attempted to clarify why two different Muslims may act in different ways towards the same issue, although they are both Muslims. This confusion happens because, in general, many non-Muslims believe that all Muslims have the same culture, but, in fact,

Muslim people have different combinations of their different indigenous cultures mixed with Islamic culture, as explained by Gulevich (2004).

For long, Muslims have struggled to create a united Islamic culture that can be adopted by all Muslim communities worldwide. McCloud, Hibbard, and Saud (2013) argued that there has always been an ongoing dramatic history of different Muslim communities struggling to find the balance while synthesising their indigenous cultures with the Islamic ethos, which results in a wide range of religious experiences and practices that, as a combination, characterised Islam as a world religion, (McCloud et al., 2013).

Understanding Islam, Islamic culture and Islamic traditions is not only about approaching Islam merely as set of abstract spiritual beliefs, rather, it requires readers to understand Muslims' daily practices and the meaning they allocate to these practices. It is necessary, in order to understand the Islamic culture, to deeply explore the Islamic religious observances, daily life protocols, customs, calendar system, and folk beliefs (Emerick, 2004). Nevertheless, without having at least a basic understanding of the Islamic religious beliefs, and ethnic identity and the geographic distribution of Muslims in the world, Gil'adi (1992) found it difficult to make sense of the Islamic customs and observances.

2.4. Muslims in Britain

According to the UK government (2021) census, there are 3.9 million Muslims in Britain, forming 6.5% of the UK population. In accordance with the differences Muslims show in Britain, According to (2017), Muslims from different ethnic identities, including Middle Eastern, South Asian, Indian, North African, and Pakistani, carry with them rich cultural traditions of literature, architecture, dance/music, mannerism, customs, culinary arts, and languages to Britain. Their feeling of being a British minority, as elaborated by (Sealy & Modood, 2021), helped them to be widely involved in the civic and political sectors and take important political roles. They exercise considerable political power, particularly in major

cities, and they play a more active role in local political affairs than other minorities in the United Kingdom, especially through the Labour Party (Sealy & Modood, 2021). It can be said that Muslims successfully managed to create a substantial place for themselves in British politics, through planning for mosques and Halal food and ensuring the inclusion of the Islamic religion in school curricula. According to Modood and Ahmad (2007), compared with other European countries, notably, Germany and France, British immigrants, including Muslims, have made a greater contribution to civic life, because the British government facilitates making changes through local associations. Modood and Ahmad (2007) believe that although these facilities have positively impacted immigrants' chances to enter public life, they also contributed to the division Muslims are experiencing along ethnic and religious lines, especially when it comes to practices, as these practices are the results of beliefs and perceptions.

As a North African Muslim, born and brought up in Algeria, which is known to have a rich mixture of cultures, including Algerian, French, Arab, Amazigh, ottoman and Islamic cultures, and working in an international school in Saudi Arabia, which is also a multicultural environment covered by religious beliefs, I understand that it is difficult to determine whether any particular practice carried out by Algerians or Arabians reflects their indigenous or Islamic cultures. Because these cultures, according to Abd-Allah (2009) are interconnected and tangled, which makes it difficult for any non-Muslim to understand the macro and the micro relationship between these cultures and peoples' behaviours and practices within the society, without extensive searching and reading.

This explains why this study is exploring the impact of Islam, as a way of life and as a sociocultural practice and not as a religious faith, on the perceptions formed and interpreted by Muslim mothers about play.

2.5. Play in Islamic context

2.5.1. The importance of the early years in Islamic literature and Islamic culture

A large number and wide variety of sources are available for the study of the history of childhood in Islam. Children and their educational, social, emotional and psychological wellbeing have been considered by Muslim scholars within the Islamic empire for a number of years, (e.g., Al-Daqqi (12th-13th centuries); Al-Dimyati (13th-14th centuries); Al-Sakhawi (15th century); (1058-1111 AD); Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 AD)) (cited in Gil'adi, 1992). The concepts of childhood, child development and childrearing in the medieval and the contemporary Islamic society, were widely studied by many western scholars, researchers, and theorists such as Gil'adi (1992), Rosenthal (2015) and Tahir and Larmar (2020). Rosenthal (2015) has drawn the attention to the importance of the history of childhood stating that:

In order to gain an understanding of the concept of the world and of man that prevails in a given civilisation, it is quite useful to observe the attitude of the representatives of that civilisation toward the child, as that attitude reflects the general outlook on many fundamental problems of human relationships. (p. 1)

Babies, infants, toddlers, and children who are under the age of 12 years old, have received a lot of attention by Muslim scholars interested in bringing up healthy Muslim children who are physically, mentally, and psychologically balanced (Gil'adi, 1992). The Islamic literature is rich with useful materials, books, and encyclopaedias, concerned with children, childhood, and childrearing. These writings deal exclusively with children from the ethical, pedagogical, and paediatric points of view. Islam considers children, as described in the Quran: “adornment of worldly life” (Qur’an, 18:46, p 299). In Islam, children are basic units of the human race, they are considered vital elements in society and seen as future parents (Tahir & Larmar, 2020), and the Islamic upbringing approach is based on the encouragement of the practical application of Islam (Ismail et al., 2010). Al-Razi (9th-10th century) and Ibn al-Jazzar (d. 979 or 980), for

instance, devoted their work to the new-born infants care in their hygienic conditions. These written materials mentioned as Islamic scientific literature throughout the history of the Islamic empire to the current time, which clearly indicate the importance of the subject for Muslims (Gil'adi, 1992). Other scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD), devoted their work to informing parents how to bring up a balanced and well-rounded Muslim child that is productive in his society and word wide, highlighting the importance of the childhood phases (Al-Ghazali, 1988).

2.5.2. The importance of play and child development in the Islamic society

One of the fundamental objectives of Islamic education is to create a system for parents and educators that contains the principles of the positive guidance that the children should receive, to help them grow up and be balanced, strong and knowledgeable adults, who will lead lives of others and be the role models for the next generation (Sulaiman, 2008). To achieve this, children need to be looked after during the early years (Halstead, 2004). Muslim writings on the subject showed that they considered childhood as an important and exceptional period, which is different from all other phases of human's life. Muslims have long recognised the process of child development and they have been aware of all its phases (Ratnasih and Garnasih, 2020). As Muslims in general, and Muslim scholars and theorists and researchers, understood the long-term influence of childhood experiences, they attached great importance to this developmental period of children's life and they tended to take in consideration the special inclinations and needs of the children at this period as well as the individual differences (Sulaiman, Jamsari & Noh, 2014).

Many old and contemporary Muslim scholars have widely referred to the importance of play; Al-Ghazali (1988), for instance, considered play to be very important for children, and he mentioned that the significance of play will be understood later in children's life. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali (1988), argued that play helps children to be attracted to studies, starting by using

games, then gradually through using different temptations depending on the stage of development. And if the children do not use different ways of play, this will affect their learning and development later in life (Ibid. p. 69).

From references in Al-Ghazali's (1058- 111 AD) (1988) writings, it is apparent that many kinds of toys and children's games existed in the Islamic society since the 11th century, and some of which are still used until now. These toys included toy animals, games with birds, wands, balls and sticks as well as the puppet theatre, which is played in a way that a puppeteer operates the puppets from behind a screen using rag-doll puppets attached to thin cords. These puppet shows were used for entertaining children and educating them at the same time (Cheikh-Moussa, 1994).

Furthermore, there is a deep psychological understanding for the children's play in the Islamic culture that adds an extra dimension to the Muslim scholars' understanding and interest in children's play Rosenthal, (2015). Games were indeed mentioned by many other Muslim scholars such as Ibn Miskawayh who stated that: "Prevention of the child from playing games and constant insistence on learning deadens his heart, blunts his sharpness of wit and burdens his life; he looks for a ruse to escape them (his studies) altogether" (cited in Gil'adi, 1992, p. 58).

2.5.3. The factors that affect children in Islamic culture

According to Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1988) and Ibn Khaldun (2000), the child is directly affected by three factors: social environment, parents, and teachers. Sulaiman et al. (2014) asserted that for Muslims, when raising children, it is very important to create a good environment so the children can learn and develop and to assure that the child is raised to become a useful adult in the society. Rahman et al. (2020) further explained that Muslims emphasise a great importance on play environment as it drives the process of child growth, which makes it important to form an atmosphere of health and goodness, ensuring the smooth

process of child development. Moreover, the neighbourhood for Muslims is very important as the children get influenced by their surroundings, therefore a suitable environment for the children has contain positive values and a religious way of living (Ismail et al., 2010). More importantly, parents in Islam represent a life blood for their children, and they are another factor that the children get influenced by, as they spend most of their lifetime in their childhood with the family, therefore should prepare a healthy and impeccable upbringing which will produce children of noble morals, as proclaimed by Allah in the Quran in surah al-Anfal (8: 28):

Meaning: And know that your properties and your children are but a trial and that Allah has with Him a great reward. Allah explains in the above verse that properties and children most beloved to us are indeed a test for us. Our possession obtained in a halal manner and used for a halal cause will be rewarded by Allah. Also, in this verse Allah mentioned children as a test to the believers. If children are raised following the mould of Islam, the parents will be rewarded immensely for their obedience. (Sulaiman, 2008, pp. 29-30)

The Messenger of Allah, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), said in one of his hadiths: “educate your child 100 years before birth”. The phrase ‘100 years before birth’ carries a deep meaning which means that a child’s education begins to be formed long before a child is born and comes to the world, which also highlights that the attitude of parents and their behaviour influence the character and behaviour of their child (Sulaiman et al., 2014).

Muslims emphasise a significant importance on teacher-student relationship, considering teacher to be the third factor that influences the child. If the teacher, according to Abdul Nasir (2003), is not applying comprehensive methods of teaching young children and help them gain good knowledge and useful skills, and if the teacher does not have good attitude and a praiseworthy character, the children will be badly impacted by their teacher. Combining play

and academic-based curricula together, or including play in the curriculum, is of a great benefit for the child's learning and development (Hines, 2017). Fowler (2018) emphasised the importance of teacher's autonomy to create and achieve balanced curriculum composed of play and academic-based learning. Fowler (2018) noted that, traditionally, teachers who have the right to plan daily and weekly schedules that meet their students' needs and implement the curriculum in a way that responds to their students' learning needs, tend to be teaching with high performance. Therefore, Hines (2017) added that if the early years educators get a certain level of autonomy to include play in their daily classroom activities, are more likely to achieve high performance in their teaching.

2.5.4. A focus on the mother, more specifically Muslim mothers

In this study, the focus was only on mothers' perceptions about play, rather than both parents. As argued by Brown and Gasko (2012), children might miss the opportunity to benefit from play if their parents, especially mothers, misunderstand the potential role of play for their children's learning, as various sets of evidence offered in the literature such as Bowlby's (2008) Attachment Theory supports the hypothesis that mother-infant relationship is crucial and mother is the closest person to her child in their early years. Based on his theory of attachment, Bowlby (2008) emphasised the role of maternal sensitivity in facilitating the intergenerational transmission process, asserting that the human positive qualities such as cooperation, reliant responsiveness, acceptance, and pleasurable feelings are deeply impacted by the quality of mother-child interactive relationship. Furthermore, Zepeda and Espinosa (1988) argued that mothers are more aware of their children's developmental milestones within the age from birth to 6 years after surveying 139 Black, White, and Hispanic mothers of preschool children to explore their knowledge of developmental milestones of their children from birth to age 6 years old (cited in Reich, 2005). Moreover, Lin and Yawkey (2013) asserted that parents' perceptions about the importance of play guide their decisions about how, where and when their children

play, and further arguing that in homes where parents value play and provide positive play experiences, the children tend to show better social and emotional competence. Drawing on these arguments, and for better results accuracy, mothers have been chosen to be surveyed and interviewed in this study.

For the purpose of more clarification, about why focusing on Muslim mothers' play practices more specifically, this study was not aiming to deeply explore and explain the history of Islam and how this religion became a source of many important practices at the Islamic countries, however, in order to understand the relation between Islam and play and how Muslims build up their perceptions about play, it was important to explore mother-child daily interactions. Because mothers' perspectives, beliefs, and practices regarding play can significantly influence the way Islamic principles are integrated into everyday life. Therefore, the focus on the mothers offers a deeper understanding of how Islamic principles inform parenting approaches and child development within Muslim communities.

Islam, as a religion, is fluid, dynamic, and characterised by enormous diversity that includes different countries and regions all over the globe, including the Middle East, Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and United States (Said et al., 2006). Significant Muslim populations can be found in countries in each continent, and according to the World Population Review (2024), Muslims exceed 1.9 billion in the world, living in different countries across the planet as majorities and minorities. Although, originating in the Arabian Peninsula, and historically centred in the Middle East and North Africa, Islam's influence would go far beyond its initial territorial boundaries (Gulevich, 2004). This geographical diversity automatically reflects cultural and theological differentiation, which makes beliefs and practices that are predominant in Saudi Arabia differ significantly from the practices in Indonesia or North Africa, for instance (McCloud et al., 2013). Because of Islam's widespread over the globe, hitting different parts of the world with different cultures and different political aspects, Muslim scholars developed

a substantial number of rules that can be used to govern people in Muslim societies, such known as 'Islamic law'. The purpose of these laws was to establish common practices between Muslims regardless of their ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds (Gil'adi, 1992).

Although, Islam has been conveying its message for centuries in a variety of languages, and costumes, since the time of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH)¹, aiming to maintain a shared normative system, Muslims are still, today, in western countries, including Britain, not able to hold the resonance of self-identity in relation to the hybrid Western-Islamic culture so called multiculturalism, and Islam is still facing the challenge of uniting diverse national cultures (Modood & Ahmad, 2007). Considering this reality, this study aimed to explore the complexity of the perceptions formed by Muslim mothers who originate from different, not only geographical but also cultural backgrounds, about play and how this diversity might have participated in shaping their perceptions.

2.7. Summary of chapter 2

This chapter provided a systematic exploration of the Islamic cultural context that shapes Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and child development. It underscored the significance of focusing on Muslim mothers, given their central role in early childhood education within Islamic teachings. The chapter also explored the importance of play in Islamic society, the foundational role of the early years in child development, and the various factors; cultural, religious, and social that influence children's upbringing in Islamic societies. Finally, the chapter recognises the complexity and diversity within Islamic culture, suggesting that mothers'

¹ The phrase "Peace Be Upon Him" ("PBUH" or "ﷺ" in Arabic) is a translation of the Arabic phrase "ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam," which is commonly used by Muslims when referring to all prophets. Muslims also say 'Jesus Alayhi Assalam' or 'Jesus peace be upon him'. It is an expression of goodwill and supplication, asking for God's blessings, mercy, and peace to be bestowed upon all the Prophets.

perceptions of play are shaped by a nuanced interplay of cultural, religious, and social dynamics.

The next chapter will be composed of the literature review, theories of play, and conceptual frameworks. It will synthesise the existing literature providing a critical analysis of the existing research on the topic of play as a basis for learning and parent's perceptions of play. At the same time, the following chapter will provide the major concepts and theories that guided this research and guided the interpretation of data, which enabled for a development of a coherent understanding of the topic under exploration.

Chapter 3: Literature review and theoretical framework

3.1. Introduction

The role of play in early childhood development has been the subject of extensive theoretical and empirical inquiry, often addressed as a vital component of learning and growth across cultures. Theories from pioneers such as Piaget (1962) and Montessori (1936) posit that play functions as the primary "work" of children, facilitating sensorimotor, cognitive, and emotional development. This foundational belief has permeated international policy frameworks, including those of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1980) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009), which consider play as essential to children's holistic well-being.

While scholarly discourse has widely focused on the benefits of play for children's growth and development (Lin, Li, & Yang, 2019), this idealised view of play does not always align with the realities of the differences between cultures and societies. As a result, the actual integration of play at home or in educational settings can be context-dependent (Pellegrini & Smith, 2003). The role of parents and educators in shaping children's play experiences complicates the way play is implemented. Parental beliefs about play, as McInnes et al. (2013) argue, significantly influence how they engage with their children's play and the opportunities they provide. However, these beliefs are not solely informed by pedagogical principles but are deeply rooted in broader cultural, economic, and social contexts. Scholars such as Pellegrini and Smith (2003) and Singh and Gupta (2012) contend that these perceptions are shaped by the ecological realities of families and communities, which, in turn, affect how play is valued and enacted within different socioeconomic settings. Thus, while play is often perceived as a universal and natural activity, its meaning and significance are highly variable across cultures and individual contexts (Kazemeini & Pajoheshgar, 2013).

This literature review critically engages with the complex and contested narrative surrounding play in early childhood education, particularly in the UK context. This review examines empirical studies that investigate the role of play in promoting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, while simultaneously questioning the broader socio-cultural factors that influence perceptions and policies around play. It also explores the classical and contemporary theories of play, including the developmental and academic perspectives that inform current pedagogical practices. In doing so, this chapter aims to offer a critical perspective on the challenges and contradictions involved in implementing play-based pedagogies in early childhood education. Specifically, addressing how cultural, parental, and policy-driven factors mediate the practice of play in educational settings. Through this exploration, the chapter lays the groundwork for the subsequent investigation into how play is perceived and valued within diverse educational contexts, particularly among UK-based Muslim mothers, a group whose perspectives on play have been underexplored in the literature.

3.2. Early years and primary education systems in the UK context:

Education in England and Wales is compulsory for all children aged between 5 and 16 (Northern Ireland between 4 and 16). According to the UK Government, Early-Years-Foundation-Stage (2017), there are six key stages of education:

Nursery and Reception: Early Years Foundation Stage – (3- to 4/5 years old)

Key stage 1: Foundation year and year 1 and year 2 (5 to 7 years old)

Key stage 2: year 3 to year 6 (8 to 11 years old)

Key stage 3: year 7 to year 9 (12 to 14 years old)

Key stage 4: years 10 and 11 (15 and 16 years old)

Key stage 5: years 12 and 13 (17 and 18 years old)

Further exploration of early childhood education will take place in the following section, since this is the level and age group that this study focuses on.

Early Years education in the UK takes place either within or outside the state sector. Within the state sector settings, the UK government provides state nursery schools and nursery/reception classes within primary schools, in addition to privately run nurseries and childminders, and voluntary pre-schools which are outside the state sector settings. The age of the children attending early years education differs between England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Since 2010, all children aged three- and four-year-old, in England are entitled to 38 weeks of the year of free nursery education with the average of 15 hours a week. During the term following the child's third birthday until the child enters statutory education, children in Wales are entitled to a free part-time place (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002; UK Government, 2017).

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was first introduced in England in 2000 and came into force in 2008 (UK Government, 2017). This stage covered children's education from the age of 3 until the children finish their reception year and turn 5. In Wales, the Foundation Phase is considered as a holistic developmental phase, where the children aged 3 to 7 years old, are offered a developmental curriculum that is tailored to children in need to develop specific abilities during a particular stage of development (UK Government, 2017).

In Northern Ireland, the preschool age starts at 3 years and 2 months and ends when the children start their compulsory education at the age of 4 years and 2 months (UK Government, 2017).

In Scotland, the Children and Young People Scotland Act 2014, made an amendment to the amount of funded for early learning and childcare, increasing it to 600 hours per year for all children aged 3 and 4 years old (Farrugia & McGhee, 2014).

The national curriculum for 5–16-year-olds, in England, must be taught by all maintained schools (UK Government, 2017). The primary stage covers three different age ranges: children under 5 attend nurseries, infants with the age between 5 and 7 or 8 attend key stage 1 and juniors with the age of up to 11 or 12 attend key stage 2. Similarly, the statutory curriculum in Northern Ireland also covers three stages: 1) Foundation Stage: covers the first two years of the primary school and the children attending this stage should be aged between 4 and 6 years. 2) KS1 covers the age range of 6 to 8, and 3) KS2 which is for the children aged between 9 and 11years (UK Government, 2017). The types of school in Wales, are the same, although the Early Years covering the range age of 3 to 5-year-olds and key stage 1 covering the age range of 5 to 7-year-olds have been brought together to create the foundation phase of the national curriculum that covers the age range of 3 to 7-year-olds (UK Government, 2017). In Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), is a coherent, comprehensive, and intelligible curriculum designed to cover the age range of 3 to 18-year-olds, and the primary stage is part of the (CfE) education phase (Scottish Government, 2009). In England, primary schools are mainly for children aged between 4- and 11-year-olds, and some primary schools are equipped with a nursery or children's centre for the benefit of younger children (UK Government, 2017).

In the UK, although the government regulations vary across different areas: there are specific requirements and specific qualifications and trainings the nursery assistants and early years educators and teachers must have to work in the sector. Qualifications may include Early childhood studies Bachelor's (level 6) or Master's (level 7), level 6 Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner Competencies, level 3 Early years education (EYE), level 3 NNEB Diploma in childcare (UK Government, 2017).

Providers may offer after school care or holiday care for children at the age range of reception or older children who do not need to meet the expected learning and development requirements.

However, if they are dealing with younger children they should continue to be guided by the learning and development requirements (UK Government, childcare act, 2006).

3.2.1. Play, play based pedagogy and the Curriculum in the UK

UK education policy prioritises the delivery, planning, and assessment of the curriculum to meet the highest standards of quality and effectiveness. As highlighted by Wood (2004), curriculum development is an ongoing focus, aiming to cater to the needs of both children and their families. A keystone of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England is the recognition of play as a fundamental component of learning, both in formal educational settings and at home (Palaiologou, 2021). The UK EYFS framework aligns with key policy initiatives, such as the *Every Child Matters* agenda and guidance from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 2000), which underscore the importance of early childhood development and play from birth.

The distinction between *play* and *play-based learning* is a critical component of contemporary discourse on early childhood education. Two major theoretical approaches dominate the literature: the developmental learning approach (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1962; Ghafouri & Wien, 2005) and the academic learning approach (e.g., Kotsopoulos et al., 2015). The developmental approach emphasises child-initiated, self-directed play, allowing children to explore and learn independently, free from adult intervention (Wood & Attfield, 2005; Weisberg et al., 2013). Aligned with these theories, curriculum guidance documents (DfES, 2004) provide crucial frameworks that emphasise the role of spontaneous play in fostering children's learning. These documents highlight how play allows children to engage deeply with their surroundings, promoting problem-solving, imagination, and cognitive development (Wood, 2004). Conversely, the academic approach involves teacher-directed play, where activities are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes (Gmitrova et al., 2009). Despite the apparent dichotomy between these two approaches, Fowler (2018) argues that a balance

between child-initiated and teacher-guided play offers a more comprehensive framework for skill development in children. Self-directed play, being inherently meaningful to children, fosters sustained engagement and focus, while teacher-guided play introduces structured learning opportunities, known as 'play-based pedagogy'. This pedagogy, as advocated by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC, 2004), emphasises the importance of developmentally appropriate play activities. This approach, while often guided by educators, must remain child-centered to maximise its benefits (Newbury et al., 2015). Scholars such as Gallant (2009) and Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2011) stress that play-based curricula provide children with valuable opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning that supports their physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development (Horn et al., 2009). However, balancing these approaches in practice presents challenges, particularly as educators often face pressures to prioritise academic outcomes over child-led activities (Fowler, 2018). Additionally, educators may struggle to convince parents of the intrinsic educational value of play, which may further complicate play's integration into the curriculum (Peterson et al., 2015). Furthermore, the increasing societal pressures surrounding school readiness have led some parents to favour more formal, structured learning environments that emphasise academic achievement (Stegelin, 2005; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). As expectations for early academic success rise, some educators have reduced time allocated for play to focus more on direct instruction (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Powell, 2010). Nonetheless, research continues to support play as an effective medium for teaching academic skills, including reading and mathematics. Scholars such as Singer and Singer (2009), Diamond and Lee (2011), and Lillard et al. (2013) argue that play-based learning in early childhood is not only linked to immediate academic success but also predicts long-term social and cognitive outcomes.

In summary, substantial research supports the implementation of a play-based curriculum as a foundation for children's holistic development (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Such a curriculum

promotes cognitive, emotional, and social growth, equipping children with critical skills that they carry into adulthood, including improved academic performance, career success, and better overall health outcomes (Weikart, 1998; Muennig et al., 2009). Consequently, a balanced play-based pedagogy that integrates both child-initiated and teacher-guided activities is essential for optimising children's learning potential in the early years.

3.3. The importance of early years

According to Olds (2010), the age 0 to 6 years old is a key phase in children's developmental stages. This phase of children's life is categorised by several processes that help establish many competencies, such as socio-emotional, linguistic, cognitive, and physical, that the children will carry to their adulthood. Davies (2010) considered this phase as a developmental stage, and within this phase a spectacularly high proportion of learning opportunities and crucial brain developmental processes take place. The neural pruning and connections are very active, along with the formation of the synapses connections, which makes play very crucial at this age, as it empowers these biological activities, which results in helping children to build up the capacities that are necessary for adulthood (Davies, 2010). At the same time, Davies (2010) added that at this stage of life, children need a high quality of personal care, and holistic interest and attention from their caregivers, with maximum opportunities to participate in high quality experiences. Furthermore, Shonkoff et al. (2011) noted that if any of these vital processes for the brain development are disturbed at this stage, the result is going to be an unhealthy child suffering from disruptions in many domains.

From the Islamic perspective, early years are very crucial in a child's life (Ubale, Abdullah & Abdurrahman, 2015). Old Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD) (1963), Ibn khaldun (d. 1406), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (14th century) (cited in (Gil'adi, 1992)) gave special attention to this period of children's life, asserting that children during this life phase have their unique needs. The treatment of infants and children in their early years, according to Al-

Ghazali (1988), has a long-term impact on their holistic development, including their physical and psychological wellbeing, and learning opportunities provided at this stage, dominate the whole character of the child throughout life. Therefore, (Al-Jawziyya, 1999) advised parents and educators to bear a great responsibility for shaping the habits and the dispositions of the children at this age to ensure a better adulthood life. Vygotsky (1978) adopted the same point of view while arguing that children's future life is determined by the amount of care and attention, they get during this period of their lives which is between 3 and 6 years old.

3.3.1. The Importance of Play in Early Years

The role of play in early childhood development has been a subject of ongoing debate and investigation in educational and developmental research. While it has long been associated with young children, its conceptualisation as a learning tool has for long been controversy (Weisberg et al., 2013). This raises the fundamental question of the extent to which play serves as a vehicle for learning, and the way different forms of play contribute to children's development. Many scholars advocate for play. (e.g., Ghafouri & Wien, 2005; Bergen, 2009; Eberle, 2014), suggesting that play is crucial for overall developmental outcomes. However, it is important to understand how these theories align or conflict when we look at the empirical evidence surrounding play as a tool for specific competencies, such as cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Perspectives on the educational value of play remain divided. Lillard et al. (2013) questioned whether play truly contributes to learning in a structured academic context. In contrast, Riley and Jones (2010) and Riek (2014) argued that play fosters the development of academic skills. What, then, accounts for these divergent views on the value of play? Fesseha and Pyle (2016) point to the complexity of understanding play's role in educational settings, suggesting that this ambiguity complicates the implementation of play-based learning both in schools and at home. This raises the interest in investigating whether the cultural and pedagogical differences shape

these conflicting perceptions or is it the concept of play itself which is too multifaceted to fit into a single framework.

Despite these debates, the literature overwhelmingly highlights the developmental benefits of play for young children. Scholars such as Piaget (1962), Vygotsky (1978), and Bruner (1983) have emphasised the role of both child-initiated and adult-facilitated play in fostering learning, leading to the widely recognised concept of play-based learning. But it is still imperative to understand the mechanisms that make play such an effective medium for learning. Is it by simply engaging children more fully in play, as suggested by Justice and Pullen (2003) and Weisberg et al. (2013), or is it by supporting deeper cognitive functions related to creative thinking, problem-solving, and emotional regulation, as recommended by (Vygotsky, 1978). This suggests a further investigation of how does play facilitate the development of these abilities, and to what extent can it be considered more effective than traditional, instruction-based approaches for early years learning.

The benefits of play have also been explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Theories from constructivism and socio-cultural perspectives, such as those proposed by Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1977), assert that play is not merely a recreational activity but a critical mechanism for learning. Piaget (1962) highlighted how social play enables children to transcend egocentrism and engage with others' perspectives, while Vygotsky (1978) identified play as the primary avenue for cognitive and social development, viewing play as scaffolding, a tool that expands children's cognitive abilities and fosters their knowledge of the world. Yet, from a sociological standpoint (Belsky, 2012), play also has profound supporting social development.

Furthermore, the role of play in managing stress and promoting emotional well-being has been widely discussed. Shonkoff et al. (2011) argue that play acts as a stress-relief exercise, exposing children to manageable levels of stress and competition, thus helping them to regulate stress

and cope with life's challenges. If play has such profound psychological benefits, it might also serve as a therapeutic tool for children facing adversity, such as refugees suffering from PTSD, as Masten (2015) argues. Helping parents and educators understand how does play enable children to develop empathy and impulse control, as Belsky (2012) contends, especially in children with limited social interactions, and supporting to them gain more knowledge about how does play contribute to motivational development, helping children stay curious and intrinsically driven to explore their environment, as suggested by Weisberg et al. (2013) and Dweck (2016), might raise their understanding of the benefits of play.

The potential of play to support both immediate and long-term developmental outcomes is further illustrated by studies showing that play-based learning can outperform direct instruction (Han et al., 2010; Stipek et al., 1995). Marcon's (2002) research on preschool education revealed that children engaged in child-initiated, play-based learning fared better academically than those who experienced more structured, academically directed learning. However, it is necessary to question how generalisable are these findings across diverse cultural and educational contexts.

By examining these various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this section seeks to explore the nuanced and multifaceted role of play in early childhood education and development. It encourages us to consider the complex interactions between play, learning, and development, while acknowledging the diversity of viewpoints that continue to shape this critical area of inquiry.

3.3.2. Parental engagement and play

Play can appear in different forms: free play or guided play. The type of play that is initiated and directed by the child, can be defined as free play. It is voluntary, and comes in a flexible way (Fisher et al., 2013). Often it involves pretend play, and it can involve other types of play as well (Weisberg et al., 2016). While guided play, as defined by Burghardt (2011), is the form

of play that is child initiated at the same time adult guided, and it is the type of play that adults can guide when focusing on some learning outcomes. This type of play, according to Weisberg et al. (2016) is very engaging, and it has two elements: child autonomy and adult support and guidance and has the advantage of learning objectives. Although, freely chosen and child-initiated play activities are very important for children's development and learning, the adult initiated and adult guided play is also important and beneficial (Lillard et al., 2013). The rules made by educators in schools and preschools, and by parents at home are made to create some kind of social order and maintain it, regulate children's behaviour, and underline play activities, in order to achieve specific learning goals (Ólafsdóttir et. al., 2017).

Theories of parental engagement in play, such as Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Vygotsky (1978), emphasise the critical role parents play in shaping children's developmental outcomes through their involvement in play activities. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which highlights how a child's environment, including familial interactions, affects their development, parental engagement is viewed as a dynamic process influenced by cultural, social, and economic contexts. Parents' involvement in play is not just about direct participation but also encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, and values they instil in their children regarding play's purpose. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory provides a framework for understanding how play becomes a social tool for learning, where parents serve as guides or co-constructors of knowledge. Through scaffolding, parents help children navigate play in ways that promote cognitive and social development, suggesting that parental engagement is both intentional and instructive (see section 3.8.2).

Parental engagement is also influenced by Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital, which suggests that socioeconomic status (SES) affects the resources and opportunities available to parents, ultimately shaping their capacity to engage in play. Higher SES parents, often equipped with more cultural capital, may view play as a structured, educational activity, while

parents from lower SES backgrounds might prioritize unstructured or peer-based play due to limited time or resources (Bourdieu, 1997).

These theories mutually suggest that parental engagement in play is multifaceted, including direct participation, socio-cultural mediation, and SES-influenced practices. This identifies the way parents perceive and engage in their children's play.

3.3.3. Culture, socioeconomic status (SES) and parents' perceptions of play

Although play is recognised as a vital and universal activity for children across all cultures, the ways in which it is perceived and practiced vary significantly depending on cultural values and socioeconomic status (SES). These factors deeply influence parents' beliefs about the role of play in children's development, often creating a nuanced and sometimes contradictory understanding of its importance.

Cultural beliefs and social expectations shape how parents, particularly mothers, perceive the purpose and value of play. For example, studies have demonstrated that different cultures emphasise various aspects of play, such as object-oriented play, language-based play, or family-oriented pretend play (Haight & Miller, 1993; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016). These perceptions are often tied to broader cultural beliefs about childhood, developmental goals, and socialisation. Harkness and Super (2006) argue that parenting practices and attitudes toward play are rooted in long-standing social and cultural beliefs, which guide how parents raise children and prepare them for future success. Socioeconomic status, for example, can have impact not only on access to play-related resources but also on shaping the expectations and pressures parents face in terms of preparing their children for school and adulthood (Bourdieu, 1997). Parents from higher SES backgrounds may view play through the lens of academic readiness or social advantage, seeing it as a structured activity that fosters cognitive and emotional development. In contrast, lower SES parents, despite sharing an understanding of play's developmental value, may emphasise self-sufficiency, resilience or social bonding over

structured educational outcomes (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This divergence highlights how SES influences both the quantity and quality of parental involvement in children's play activities (Rogers, 2019).

The relationship between SES and perceptions of play can be seen in how parents from different social backgrounds approach their children's play. For example, Farver and Howes (1993) found that North American parents, particularly from higher SES groups, often involve themselves as active social partners in their children's play, whereas parents from other cultural and socioeconomic contexts, such as Mexican or Italian families, might view play as an independent activity for children to engage in with their peers or siblings (Farver & Wimbari, 1995). These findings suggest that cultural beliefs about the role of adults in children's play are also mediated by SES, with higher SES parents potentially having more time, resources, and flexibility to participate in or structure their children's play activities. Furthermore, the goals parents set for their children's development, which are heavily influenced by both culture and SES, further complicate perceptions of play. For some parents, especially those from lower SES backgrounds, play may be seen as less important compared to preparing children for more immediate practical or economic concerns. On the other hand, highly educated parents with higher SES may emphasise play as a key strategy for fostering creativity, emotional intelligence, or social leadership, particularly in societies where childhood is seen as a time for preparation rather than survival.

The complex interaction between SES and culture becomes particularly apparent when considering culturally mediated understandings of play (Marfo & Beirsteker, 2011). For instance, studies like that of Chessa et al. (2012) comparing American and Italian children's play behaviours, reflect how cultural differences in the expression of emotions and imagination in play are further shaped by social class distinctions. These findings suggest that even within a particular cultural framework, SES can result in varied approaches to the same developmental

activity. Finally, parental philosophies about education and learning, shaped by SES, affect how they interact with their children's play at home. Powell (2010) points out that parents' educational philosophies influence not only where they choose to enrol their children for early education but also how they perceive play as either a tool for learning or a leisurely activity. When SES shapes these educational expectations, it creates disparities in how parents guide and support their children's play, with lower SES parents perhaps focusing more on immediate survival skills, while higher SES parents prioritise long-term academic and social success through structured play activities (Kasser, 2011).

In summary, while play is a universal aspect of childhood, the intersection of culture and socioeconomic status profoundly affects how parents perceive and engage with it. Cultural values dictate the themes and importance of play, while SES influences the resources, involvement, and developmental goals parents associate with play (Conger et al., 2010). This interplay results in diverse and sometimes conflicting views on the role of play in children's lives, highlighting the need for a deeper exploration of how cultural and socioeconomic factors shape early childhood experiences.

3.4. Historical views of play

Scholars and early years researchers' interest in play, the benefits of play and the examination of play as a basis for learning for children is not contemporary, since it goes back to many centuries ago when Greek philosophers Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) and Plato (427-347B.C.) discussed the value of play and its importance in children's overall development (cited in Rothlein & Brett, 1987). John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Johann Pestalozzi (1746-1827) are some of the few early educators who emphasised play as an important activity for children, while research around play in early childhood development and education was highly developed and common during the twentieth century (cited in Rothlein & Brett, 1987).

Piaget (1962) was one of the first researchers who were interested in children's development and explored the importance of play and how it can contribute to early development. Piaget (1962) identified play, in his constructivist theory, as a way of integrating new information into schemas that already exist and how to organise these schemas and how to develop new ones. Vygotsky (1967) regarded play as one of the main learning avenues for children's development in the early years. Likewise, Froebel (1782–1852) (1887), who was the founder of the kindergarten, identified play, (Whitebread et al. 2017) as the key vehicle for learning in early childhood: children discover the world in play, especially when interacting with nature. Other researchers (e.g., Roskos & Christie, 2011) also explored play's direct impact on children's development and investigated the idea of using play as a supportive element for academic learning and as a fundamental pedagogical practice in the pre-primary classrooms of many countries (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016; Lynch, 2015).

As stated earlier, over hundreds of years, play has been a core part of many theories, and such theories are a combination of classical and modern. The classical theories include Practice or Pre-exercise Theory, developed mainly by Groos (1908, 1985) who argued that play emerges from instincts and exercises and helps children construct adaptive skills that are needed throughout life. Groos's practice or pre-exercise theory is considered as the most famous one among the old theories concerned with play (Jackson & Angelino, 1974). On the other hand, play according to Spencer's (1878) Surplus Energy Theory is considered as an aimless activity, arguing that children play because they need to get rid of the excess energy. Additionally, the Recapitulation Theory, developed by Hall (1920), argues that children play because they need to relax and restore their energy, and play, according to this theory, happens as a result of an evolutionary biological process. Recapitulation theory was introduced by the American psychologist Hall (1920) who was also the one who first brought the concept of 'stages of play' to the literature, and he saw play as the activity that helps an organism to transform its natural

primitive skills into new ones, by going from one stage to another (Jackson & Angelino, 1974). Recreation or Relaxation Theory, mainly developed by Lazarus (1883) and Patrick (1914), is another theory that views play as a result of a lack of energy, rather than a surplus of energy (Jackson & Angelino, 1974), similar to recapitulation theory.

More modern theories, also called dynamic theories, such as the psychoanalytic theory, (Freud, 1926, 1955; Erikson, 1985) focused on how play impacts the emotional development of young children and explained that children can manage their existing traumatic events and fulfil their wishes by playing (Stagnitti, 2004). Erikson's (1985) theory of psychosocial development, also called *Eight Ages of Man*, discusses the eight stages of human's development that cover the whole life span, from birth to the old age. Erikson's work is considered to be particularly important for every early childhood educator because it includes the child's developmental stages that form a foundation for socio-emotional development and mental health. Erikson's (1985) theory is summed up in the idea that each developmental stage has a task that needs to be accomplished before moving to the next stage, and the success in forming a good and balanced personality is related to how well these tasks are accomplished in each stage. Furthermore, Erikson (1985) considers that it is inevitable that young people experience conflicts as they grow into adults, which helps them strengthen their personality as they develop during that stage through what he calls the *identity crisis* (Mooney, 2013).

Meta-communicative theory (Bateson, 1955) considers play as learning about learning. According to this theory, play is not a factor of socialisation that helps developing skills for adulthood, because children only signal that they are playing by framing and reframing roles, and their play is dependent on the context in which it occurs (Bateson, 1955). Additionally, one of the well-known modern theories is 'Arousal modulation theory' (Berlyne, 1960; Ellis, 1973; Hutt, 1985). This theory argues that children are prepared for adaptation to adult life by

playing, and that their curiosity and exploration of objects helps them maintain play (Bateson, 2006).

Another modern/dynamic theory that widely and deeply considers play and development, is the one known as cognitive theory (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, 1997). Cognitive theories, according to Gilmore (1966), view play as part of infantile development, and they explain play behaviour in relation to personality dynamics by employing the concept of individual changes in the child's behaviour. Piaget (1962) sees children's play as direct result of the '*primacy of assimilation*' which is the process of taking new information or experiences and integrating them into the existing cognitive schemas and structures of a child's mind. He argues that children need to interact with their environment in order to learn and construct knowledge and this is how they come to understand the meaning of the world. Piaget (1962) explains this in terms of "construction is superior to instruction" (Hendrick 1992, p. 476). As Erikson's theory stressed the importance of teaching children how to develop emotionally, Piaget's theory presented an overall understanding of how children think in their early years, and it helped to design a curriculum that challenges children's mind (Mooney, 2013).

Vygotsky's (1978) approach is also a cognitive theory, which considers play as a voluntary activity that contributes to developing cognitive capacities, flexibility, adaptation, and problem-solving ability, and helps generating creative thoughts and innovation (Stagnitti, 2004). While Piaget (1962) set up a baseline as the importance of social interactions for young children's learning, Vygotsky (1978) brought a new perspective to the knowledge about children's interactions with others, claiming that personal and social interactions are interconnected and should not be separated, because social and cognitive development work together and build on each other. When children interact with other children they learn from each other: they develop language skills, for example, when speaking and listening to each other. By emphasising the impact of culture, family, community, education, socioeconomic

status, along with the adult's beliefs and values in the children's learning, Vygotsky's (1978) theory is also known as *sociocultural theory* (Mooney, 2013).

Play theories, as previously elaborated, are composed of classical and modern theories. The classical theories are the theories that existed before 1920 including Surplus Energy theory, Recreation or Relaxation theory, Practice or Pre-exercise theory, and Recapitulation Theory. The theories that have been proposed after 1920 are so-called modern theories and they are based on experimental research. These modern theories include Psychoanalytic Theory, Bateson's (1955) Meta-communicative theory, Arousal Modulation Theory, and Cognitive theories such as Piaget's (1962) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories (Mellou, 1994).

Although classical play theories are regarded as outdated and their beliefs about evolution, individuals' instincts and human's energy are discredited, they remain important because they form a valuable base for the modern theories. As stated by Mellou (1994), all theories present the concept of duality in play processes, in terms of being a personal experience on the one hand, and a social adaptation on the other.

3.5. The definition of play

Despite the agreement of early childhood educators about the importance of play and its benefits, the definition of play has been debatable for many years (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). While most scholars, theorists, researchers, and early years educators (e.g. Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1967, 1977, 1978) agree that play is beneficial, the conceptualisation of play is still not very clear. This is because the definition of play, according to some scholars and researchers, is multifaceted (Smith & Vollstedt, 1985; Jenvey & Jenvey, 2002). As McInnes and Birdsey (2014) stated, it is very important to have a common understanding of play and a common language in which scholars, researchers and educators talk about play. This helps exploring and investigating the same phenomena and come up with clear ideas about play practices, however, this cannot be achieved unless a common definition is built up and agreed

upon. Therefore, this part of the literature review will explore some of the different definitions provided in the past along with providing the definition adopted for this study.

Eberle (2014) has defined play from a psychological perspective, stating that play is an intended activity that is stimulated by emotional experiences. However, the definition of play that is widely agreed upon is the one that views play as a function of the individuals' disposition. Play has also been considered from a neurological perspective (Pellis, Pellis & Himmler, 2014) noting that it has many advantages for sensory processes and helps stimulating the neurotransmitters, as it connects to the brain activities and impacts the cognitive development in general. Although the attempts to define play differ according to different theories, Fesseha and Pyle (2016) found the definitions from an educational perspective to be the most contradictory ones, which results in challenges in understanding the role of play in educational establishments and to which extent play affects children' development, which in turn, results in affecting the inclusion and implementation of play in the curriculum and everyday educational practices and programmes.

Although it has been claimed that play as an activity is simple and obvious and that we know play when we see it, play as a concept remains complex and contested, which accounts for a considerable number of attempts by scholars and theorists to define play either by typology, criteria, category, or continuum (McInnes & Birdsey, 2014). One of the first definitions of play was provided in (1887) by the founder of the kindergarten, Froebel: "Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul" (cited in Sluss, 2005, p. 7). Van Hoorn et al., (2011) found this definition to be aligned with the constructivist's point of view, which argues that children's involvement in social interactions, while playing, facilitates their development, as this development tends to happen through social and physical explorations.

Whitebread et al. (2017) also described a collection of play definitions attempts by many theorists: Spencer (1878) said that play represents “superfluous actions taking place instinctively in the absence of real actions. Activity performed for the immediate gratification derived, without regard for ulterior benefits” (p. 3), whereas Schiller (1875) stated that play is “the aimless expenditure of exuberant energy” (p. 3). Froebel (1887) added that play is “the natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood” (p. 3), and Groos (1898) defined play as an “instinctive practice, without serious intent, of activities that will later be essential to life” (Saracho & Spodek, 1998 p. 3). Finally, Dewey (1922) defined play as “activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves” (Saracho & Spodek, 1998, p. 3).

Throughout the literature, play has proved to resist definition. Sutton-Smith (1999) argued that play has been difficult to define due to being impacted by a series of overlapping sub-problems, such as confusions related to specialised language, the effect of different approaches, theories, ethical and ideological assumptions, and academic disciplines. McInnes & Birdsey (2014), asserted that it has been difficult for different theorists to produce a common conceptualisation or definition of play due to their different points of view of what constitutes play. (Eberle, 2014) found the wealth of play definitions to be one of the reasons that makes choosing among them difficult, asserting that producing a general and accurate definition for play requires taking into consideration the different perspectives from which play can be viewed, explored, and understood. Including play being an aspect, a function, a physical, a social, an emotional or an intellectual activity. Another aspect to consider is whether it is necessary to include the different benefits, elements, and/or types of play within the definition.

Eberle (2014) proposed what he called an ongoing, onward-rolling definition and suggested that “play is an ancient, voluntary, ‘emergent’ process driven by pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables

a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more” (P. 231). The idea of an ongoing, onward rolling definitions is appropriate to adopt for this study. As a result, play will be seen as the activity that helps children interact with the world surrounding them, enjoy their time and at the same time, discover, learn, acquire and develop new skills.

3.6. Different types and different stages of play

3.6.1. Types of play

The following table illustrates different types of play as well as the characteristics and benefits of each type as defined and explained by several theorists.

Table 3.1 *Different Types of Play*

Play types	Characteristics
Exploratory play	This type of play involves children using all their senses to explore objects (looking, listening, touching, tasting, and smelling). It includes different types of messy play, such as playing with sand, water, clay (Pellegrini & Gustafson 2005).
Locomotor play	Includes exercise play notably, climbing and running, play activities that are based on the body muscles, and is usually believed to support muscular training, for endurance, strength, and skill development (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008).
Constructive play	This type of play is organised and focused towards achieving a goal, and it occurs when the children use materials, such as blocks, LEGO, or playdough to create or build something (Forman, 2006). According to Piaget (2013), the children, before they become able to construct, go through the functional play, where they explore the materials with all their senses and find out how to use them (Piaget, 2013).
Imaginary play	This type of play occurs when children are bringing to life another reality such as when they are by pretending to be teachers, chefs, doctors, or police officers, for instance, and they act their roles (Hendy, 2001). Imaginative play helps children learn symbols and sequence which regulates their actions and augments their internal capacity (Vygotsky, 1997), while acting out familiar routine pretending to feed the doll, rocking, and then putting the doll to sleep (Hendy, 2001).
Object play/ quiet play	Using objects in a playful manner, such as cars, jigsaw puzzles, building blocks, dolls, etc. Mouthing objects, with babies, and dropping them. For toddlers, it is just object manipulation (e.g., assembling blocks), and can involve pretend play such as feeding a doll or building a house. Helps trying out new actions and helps developing problem solving skills (Pellegrini & Gustafson 2005).
Language play	Includes children using their language. Solitary monologues are quite common and happen when children are babble to themselves, and toddlers (around 2 years) talk to themselves and laugh sometimes, while alone, which is playful.

Children start using language humorously at the age of 3 and 4 years. (“I am a whale. This is my tail.” “I am a flamingo. Look at my wingo.”) This play helps developing language skills including semantics, which is using vocabulary and meaning, phonology or speech sounds, pragmatics, which is using language in social interactions appropriately) and grammar (syntax), as well as helping to develop phonological skills (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008).

**Pretend play
(sociodramatic
play)**

Involves pretending using objects, language, or actions. A banana is a telephone, for instance. Children develop this type of play from the age of 15 months, pretending to sleep or pretending to put a doll or a teddy to bed, for instance, are simple actions that children start showing at this age. Then it gets developed into longer story sequences and role play where children start negotiating meanings and roles (“You be daddy, right?”) and dispute about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (“No, you don’t feed the baby like that!”) (Hendy, 2001; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008).

3.6.2. Stages of play

The following table illustrates different stages of play as well as the characteristics and benefits of each stage as defined and explained by several theorists.

Table 3.2 *Different Stages of Play*

Different stages of play	Characteristics of each stage
Unoccupied play (0-3 months)	At this stage, children are unoccupied by play itself, but they are occupying themselves with paying attention to the things that are happening around them, if nothing is happening, they occupy themselves with playing with their own clothes or body without getting involved in a particular play activity (Burghardt, 2011; Parten, 1932).
Solitary/ independent play (0-2 years)	When the child is in the same room with other children who are playing but he is playing independently, focusing on his own toys or game as a form of self-entertainment without any social interaction (Parten, 1932). In children 2 years old and under, this type of play takes the form of interactions between children and their parents or caregivers in a playful manner. But for older children from 2 to 6 years of age social play is practiced as interaction with other children. It could be between two partners for smaller age, and between groups for older ones. Parallel play, which is common among children aged 2- and 3-year-old, is played in either solitary or next to others but without much interaction. It includes, chasing, fighting, and laughing, kicks and blows. It is usually practiced with friends and language is incorporated (Parten, 1932).
Spectator /Onlooker behavior (2 years)	Children at this stage spend time watching other children playing, and they are called onlookers. They may talk to a group of children playing, asking questions, or giving suggestions without being entirely part of the play activity. While the child in unoccupied play observes everything that is happening around, the child as a spectator or onlooker observes specific group of children (Parten, 1932; Weisberg et al., 2016).

Parallel play (2+ years)	The child at this stage of play, plays with the same toys that other children in the room are playing with without trying to modify or influence the play activity of the children near him. Parten (1932), uses the expression: “the child plays <i>beside</i> rather than playing <i>with</i> the other children” (p. 250).
Associative play (3-4 years)	This play occurs when the children are playing together but there is not much cooperation between them in a specific play activity, Although they might be a loaning or a borrowing of play materials but there is no labour division (playing in the same playground but playing, but each child acts in his own way and does what he wants) (Parten, 1932).
Cooperative/ organise supplementary play (4+years)	This play occurs when there is a cooperation between the children while they get involved in a formal game that necessitates division of labour to accomplish a competitive goal, for example, or achieve a cooperative goal such as being assigned a role in preparing a meal activity (Parten, 1932).

3.7. The Lack of Play

As mentioned earlier, many studies have considered play and its significance in child development (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). It is also clear that research and theories are increasingly proving that play accelerates the development of several skills, including cognitive, social, linguistic, emotional, and intellectual (Eberle, 2011). Many researchers have drawn the readers’ attention to the lack of play in children’s Early Years educational curriculum (e.g., Oliver & Klugman, 2004; Paley, 2009; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Seng (2000) and Bergen (2009) asserted that the lack of play in children’s lives, either at home or at school, results in a gap in experiencing and promoting creative thinking and problem solving especially later in life. Meanwhile, Singer et al. (2009) noted that lack of play inhibits children from learning how to count, understand when others talk, respond to simple instructions, and recognise their names. Additionally, the United Nations Educational (1980) indicated, according to Lu and Montague (2016) that the child who does not get involved in any type of play is a sick child and the lack of play will affect these children by making them fall ill, mentally, and physically. At the same time, Ginsburg (2007) argued that without play, preschool children are more likely to display more signs of stress and anxiety. Likewise, Singer et al. (2009) indicated that children who do

not play will begin school with less ability to use proper language, they show more reliance on teachers, less self-regulation, and less interest in learning. Furthermore, Bongiorno (2012) stressed that the four domains of learning (physical, cognitive, socio-emotional and language and literacy) will be affected if the children's play is minimised.

A study by Valentino et al. (2011), which focused on children aged around 2 years old, analysed mother-child play in maltreating families. They found that children in such families with less child-initiated play, display a behaviour which lacks social competence when compared to children from non-maltreating families. In addition, Chugani et al. (2001), presented the findings of many studies of the Romanian orphanages children who were severely deprived following the events of the separation from the Soviet Union. These findings give an account of where deficient play behaviours, which is abnormal and repetitive, there occurred severe emotional and cognitive deficits, deficient growth of some brain regions and low functioning in some key brain parts.

3.8. Theories of play

Keels (2009) and Parmar et al. (2008) argued that the potential value of play is received and dealt with differently from parents in different cultures and backgrounds. This links to Keels (2009) who invited early childhood educators to consider the differences between cultures, and he also highlighted the urge to create good relationships with parents and educate them about the curriculum provided for their children and its expectations and whether it contains play or not (Keels, 2009). This explains the indication made by many researchers, such as Blake and Sekuler (2006), that it is important to understand adult's perceptions regarding play, because 'perception' is the way to view the world and it is the theory that an individual can have about reality. This reality is affected by the interpretation people give to the acquired knowledge that is used to shape their thoughts, beliefs, opinions, characters, actions, and reactions (Blake & Sekuler, 2006).

In the literature, there are many play theories that present different points of view about play, including the theories that have already been mentioned and explained in section 3.4. Although these theories are considered valuable and interesting, and they approach play from multiple perspectives, however, none of them was found to be relevant when framing the theoretical framework of this study. The reason was that this study is not approaching play from the same perspective as those theories, instead, it approaches play from the parental and social perspectives. Thus, the theories that emphasise the cultural effect on parents' beliefs and perceptions about play, such as Harkness & Super's (1983) parental ethno-theories, and the theories that emphasise the effect of parental beliefs about play on their children's play, such as sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sutton-Smith, 1999) were chosen to form the theoretical framework for this study, as they are significantly convenient.

As a result, the framework of this study was based on two main relevant theories, and they are as follows:

1. Developmental niche or parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006).
2. Sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1991).

3.8.1. Parental ethno-theories and children's play

According to Kazemeini and Pajoheshgar (2013), the idea of culture shapes parents' beliefs is implicit in cultural-ecological model of parenting. Therefore, children's play activities can be influenced by the differences in parental systems and cultural environments. Ethno-theories are among the theories that relate parents' social behaviour to cultural effects. These theories are part of the developmental niche that has been developed by Super and Harkness (1986) as a theoretical framework for investigating how the child's microenvironment is shaped by the

social culture (Harkness & Super, 1992; Super & Harkness, 1986, 2002). This approach has been proposed as a way to study psychological and behavioural theories of development and link them with social and cultural theories (Super & Harkness, 1986; 1994).

The developmental niche consists of three dimensions: 1) physical and social settings related to the children's daily life, including the customs that are culturally regulated for children's care. 2) Behaviour management, including the parental behaviour that is related to the parents' cultural system. 3) Psychological dimension, including the psychology, the beliefs, and the parental ethno-theories of the children's caregivers (Penderi & Petrogiannis, 2011). These components are interconnected and form a system that is tied to broader cultural features, such as economical production, political organisations, ecological systems, and ethics. These connections may allow for the child to become familiar with the surrounding socialisation practices and get used to the cultural traditions (Super et al., 1986). As a result, considering ethno-theories as a framework for this study is important as this study is concerned with investigating the impact of the culture on parents,' more specifically mothers' perceptions about play.

The cultural beliefs that parents construct about children's play and learning vary widely, both in terms of what children need in their early childhood stages, and what they need to learn at these stages and later on, and what is the role of parents in this process (Harkness & Super, 2006). Parental ethno-theories are concerned with providing a framework for explaining the ways parents think about themselves, their children, and their families and shedding light on the implicit choices they make regarding the way to raise the next generation (Kazemeini & Pajoheshgar, 2013).

Parental ethno-theories are generally implicit, and they are related to children and family. These theories, according to (Harkness et al., 2009), have strong motivational properties for parents and their understanding of parenting, child development and family life. Through these ideas,

parents evaluate themselves and their relationships with their children, they get informed of their perceptions about the concept of parenting, and the way of bringing up children, and these ideas also allow parents to compare themselves to other parents considering many differences, notably cultural differences (Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015).

3.8.2. Sociocultural theories related to children's play

Sociocultural theories are based on the social constructivist paradigm. This paradigm considers that people construct meaning through their social interactions. Likewise, sociocultural theories consider knowledge to be constructed through the interactions individuals socially create and share with each other, and development and learning are embedded within the social events Piaget (1968). According to Vygotsky (1978), development occurs when the learner starts interacting with other people, objects, and events within his collaborative environment.

Sociocultural theories were first formed and applied by Vygotsky and his associates during the 1920s and 1930s of the 20th century (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky started his career by teaching literature in secondary school, where he started getting interested in how people learn, and how learning is related to cognitive and language development (Mooney, 2013), which gave him a significant motivation to develop his learning theories including sociocultural theories. Later on, sociocultural theories were further developed by other theoreticians who adopted Vygotsky's point of view about learning and development, notably, Lave (1988; 1991), Wertsch (1991), Lemke (1990) and Rogoff (1990; 2003).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is concerned with the human cognitive development within social context. Through his theory, Vygotsky discussed four aspects of human cognitive development, and these aspects include what is so-called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in addition to mind, tools, and community of practice (Mantero, 2002).

The ZPD is one of the four aspects of the cognitive development, which is defined by Vygotsky as:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85)

Vygotsky (1978) argued that understanding the difference between these two levels of development (the actual level and the potential levels) helps to understand the relationship between cognitive development and learning.

Within the ZPD, children start learning and using their abilities at the level where they play and act alone, and then they develop these abilities to a higher level depending on the scaffolding that is provided and the guidance of a more experienced individual (Rogoff et al., 1993). Accordingly, children can reach sophisticated levels of play when they play with more experienced partners, such as teachers or parents, or more experienced children (Noll & Harding, 2003). Vygotsky (1978) asserted that when children play, they are naturally operating in the ZPD zone.

Parents can be the more knowledgeable other when playing with their children and encourage their children to operate at a higher-level by initiating or guiding the play behaviour and getting engaged in play activities (Fiese, 1990). Moreover, Parents may use an advanced level of play behaviour while responding to their children's play (Damast et al., 1996). According to the Vygotskian approach, as viewed by Bodrova and Leong (2015), play is influenced by adults in both direct and in indirect ways. Parents use their cultural beliefs and perceptions about play while setting up the play environment for their children, and this can be noticed in the kind of toys they encourage their children to use, and with whom to play. Adults, in some cases, get

involved in play by modelling to the children how to play with certain toys, for example, how to take turns while playing with partners and how to get along with them (Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015). However, in some societies, the children, from an early age, are expected to be part of the labour force, and need to work to help their families, therefore, the play activities that they get involved in are likely to be very limited, and parents' interaction in these play activities hardly ever exist (Sutton-Smith & Sutton-Smith, 1974).

Sutton-Smith and Sutton-Smith (1974) concluded that despite the influence of the culture and society on play, play tends to occur naturally. Infants play all the time, despite nobody teaching them how to play, they make mouth sounds, play with their fingers and lips, and as they grow their awareness of their surroundings gets stronger. However, the time devoted to children's play is dependent on the surrounding adults such as parents, guardians, or caregivers.

The Vygotskian point of view about the social effect on children's learning and development was adopted by many other theorists. Sutton-Smith's (1999) theory is also concerned with the effect of social interactions and culture on children's learning and development, and helps understanding the cultural effects on children's play, as this theory focuses on the cultural aspects of play, which makes it a useful part of the theoretical framework of this study. Sutton-Smith (1997; 1999) argued that any intended or not intended activity the children get involved in can be considered as play, and the type of play that children usually get involved in, depends on the significance of play within the social context of the child (Sutton-Smith, 1999).

Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, is one of the theories that emphasise the influence of the environment and members of the family and society in the children's life. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that children get exposed to different social systems that interact in several ways. These systems are composed of 1) microsystem, 2) mesosystem, 3) ecosystem, and 4) macro-system. The microsystem is concerned with children's small environment that includes their interactions with the groups that are within their immediate

cultural context, such as family members, caregivers, and peers. Whether or not, people who form this environment provide any play opportunities, encourage children's play, and support it, these interactions have a direct effect on children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Mesosystem is the next level in the ecological theory, where various microsystems interact together. At this level, Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises the importance of the link between home and school, so for example at this level parents and teachers can agree on the importance of play for children's development, in order to create balanced goals for children cross the mesosystem that connects home with school.

In the next level of the ecological theory Bronfenbrenner (1979) talks about the ecosystem, which is concerned with the settings that affect the child indirectly, such as municipal plans, for instance, or the policies that apply in the parents' workplace. If the government, for example, decides to build or remove a park, this will affect the children by expanding or limiting their play opportunities, although, the children have no direct contact with this system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, the last level is the macro-system, which influences children at a broader level. This system is concerned much more with the social ideologies and values.

According to Tisdall and Davis (2004), it is important for the stakeholders and policy makers in any society to take into consideration the children's right to play when they develop policies. The decision whether to protect the children from adults' work or not or whether to set a time and space for children to play, depends on how society views play and its importance for children. In the societies where parents work and children are protected from the adults' labour and are not part of the labour force, children, according to Rogoff et al. (1993), are more likely to get more time and support from their parents to play. In the contrary, in the cultures where the children are part of the labour force, play means something different to the parent and it can be seen as waste of time. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecology helps to provide an additional element in the theoretical framework for this study, in relation to considering play

as part of a child's development within different social systems, where the family plays a crucial role.

Choosing these theories as part of this study's conceptual framework was also driven by their significance and also relevance to this study, as this study aimed to explore Muslim mother's intersubjective meanings of play as a basis for learning and at the same time explored the impact of mothers' cultures on forming these meanings. These theories helped to understand the social influence the children are exposed to considering parents as the most influential people in their children's life. Therefore, the parents' beliefs and conceptions about play naturally influence the children's engagement and involvement in play activities in a direct and/or indirect manner (Sutton-Smith, 1999). This gave the researcher an overview of the scholars and theorists views about the effect of the society on the children's behaviour which helped to systematically build up propositions and explanations, and to produce strong and meaningful conclusions throughout the process of the study.

3.9. Conceptual framework

This study is framed by several key concepts: play, perceptions, intersubjectivity, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES), along with two main theories of play, sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006). Together, these concepts and theories provide a conceptual framework for understanding how Muslim mothers in the UK perceive and interpret the value of play in early childhood and the factors that influence these perceptions.

The first guiding concept is *play*, widely regarded as a fundamental aspect of early childhood development, promoting physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Play, as discussed in academic literature (see sections 3.4 and 3.5), has been conceptualised in multiple ways, reflecting its multifaceted nature within early education, psychology, and sociology. This study explores how Muslim mothers perceive the benefits of play in their

children's learning and development, viewing play not merely as a leisure activity but as an integral component of learning and development. Sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979) (see section 3.8.2) add another dimension by framing play as a social process influenced by various systems in a child's environment, such as family, community, and society at large. These theories position mothers within an ecosystem of cultural and social influences that impact how they interpret and prioritise play, highlighting the relationship between mothers' beliefs (influenced by culture and religion) and their socio-environmental context, laying the groundwork for how the concept of play is understood and valued.

Perceptions and *intersubjectivity* are the second and third key concepts. Perceptions are used in the literature as the subjective beliefs and attitudes parents hold regarding the value of play (Pickens, 2005), which are shaped by personal experiences, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic conditions (see section 1.1.1). Intersubjectivity, as defined by Gillespie & Cornish (2010), is used in the literature as the shared meanings formed through social interactions (see section 1.3.1). In this study, intersubjectivity helps explore how Muslim mothers' perceptions of play are co-constructed through their interactions with family, community networks, and broader societal influences. While sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explain that perceptions of play are co-constructed through experiences and interactions within broader social structures, parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006) provide insight into why these perceptions differ across cultures, as cultural beliefs offer parents a lens through which play is valued (see section 3.8.1). This may result in diverse perceptions of play among Muslim mothers, influenced by both cultural and religious expectations. While sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979) interact with the concept of intersubjectivity by explaining how these shared understandings emerge, parental ethno-

theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006) interact with this concept by showing how they are shaped by deep-seated cultural beliefs helping in bridging individual beliefs with community norms, showing that Muslim mothers' views on play are not formed in isolation but are influenced through engagement with family, friends, and community (see sections 3.8.1 and 3.8.2). Through intersubjectivity, their perceptions of play are enriched by collective beliefs and values, supporting a more communal view of child development.

Islam as a religious and cultural system is also a key underpinning concept. Islam as a culture is interpreted in the literature through the Islamic teachings (see section 2.2). These teachings emphasise nurturing a child's moral, intellectual, and physical well-being (Al-Ghazali, 1988). The religion's principles of balance and holistic development influence how Muslim mothers perceive play's role in their children's lives. *Broader cultural influences* are another significant concept, defined as the shared values, beliefs, and practices of a group (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2012). These cultural influences work together to shape how parents perceive play, and help creating a set of norms and expectations that parents apply when making choices about their children's play activities. For Muslim mothers, cultural norms informed by Islamic traditions, as well as the broader UK context, likely shape their views on play in childhood development (Eisenberg, et al., 1999). Religious and cultural expectations, as part of sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979), influence both the types of play deemed acceptable and the broader expectations of parenting. In the UK context, this study seeks to understand how religious beliefs and Islamic cultural norms shape ideas about appropriate play, and its developmental outcomes valued by Muslim mothers.

Finally, *socioeconomic status* (SES), including factors like income, educational attainments, and occupation, plays a crucial role in shaping parenting practices and perceptions of child development (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979) recognise that SES impacts families' ability to provide

enriching play experiences, potentially affecting how mothers perceive play's developmental value. SES can also influence perceptions of play by dictating the types and quality of play experiences available (Huang, et al., 2017). It intersects with cultural and religious expectations to create a complex layer of meaning around play, shaping the way mothers adapt their beliefs to align with what is feasible within their socioeconomic context (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2010). This research recognises that SES affects Muslim mothers' perceptions and attitudes toward play and their ability to provide opportunities for it. Higher SES may correlate with better access to play resources and a greater understanding of play's developmental benefits (Kasser, 2011), while lower SES can present challenges such as limited time and access to safe play spaces, potentially influencing perceptions of play's importance (Conger et al., 2010).

In summary, in this framework, the concepts and theories are not static; they dynamically interact to create a nuanced understanding of Muslim mothers' perceptions of play. Religion, culture, and parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006) provide a primary lens through which Muslim mothers view play, helping them interpret its role in child development in a way that aligns with their religious values. **Intersubjectivity as a social process**, according to sociocultural theories (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978, and Bronfenbrenner, 1979), position mothers' beliefs within a community, showing that perceptions of play are shaped not only by personal beliefs but also by shared cultural meanings (Fleer, 2018). SES as a contextual constraint and enabler interacts with cultural and religious beliefs to determine the practical application of play perceptions, moderating access to play opportunities, which influences mothers' ability to implement their beliefs about play in daily practices (Borjas, 2000). This integrated approach highlights how each concept and theory, while distinct, converges to shape Muslim mothers' beliefs and practices surrounding play. It acknowledges that mothers' perceptions are not formed in isolation (Pellegrini & Smith, 2003) but are the result of a rich interplay of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors. This

framework thus allows for a comprehensive examination of how mothers' perceptions and attitudes toward play in early childhood development are formed and expressed. Figure 3.1 below represents the conceptual framework of this study.

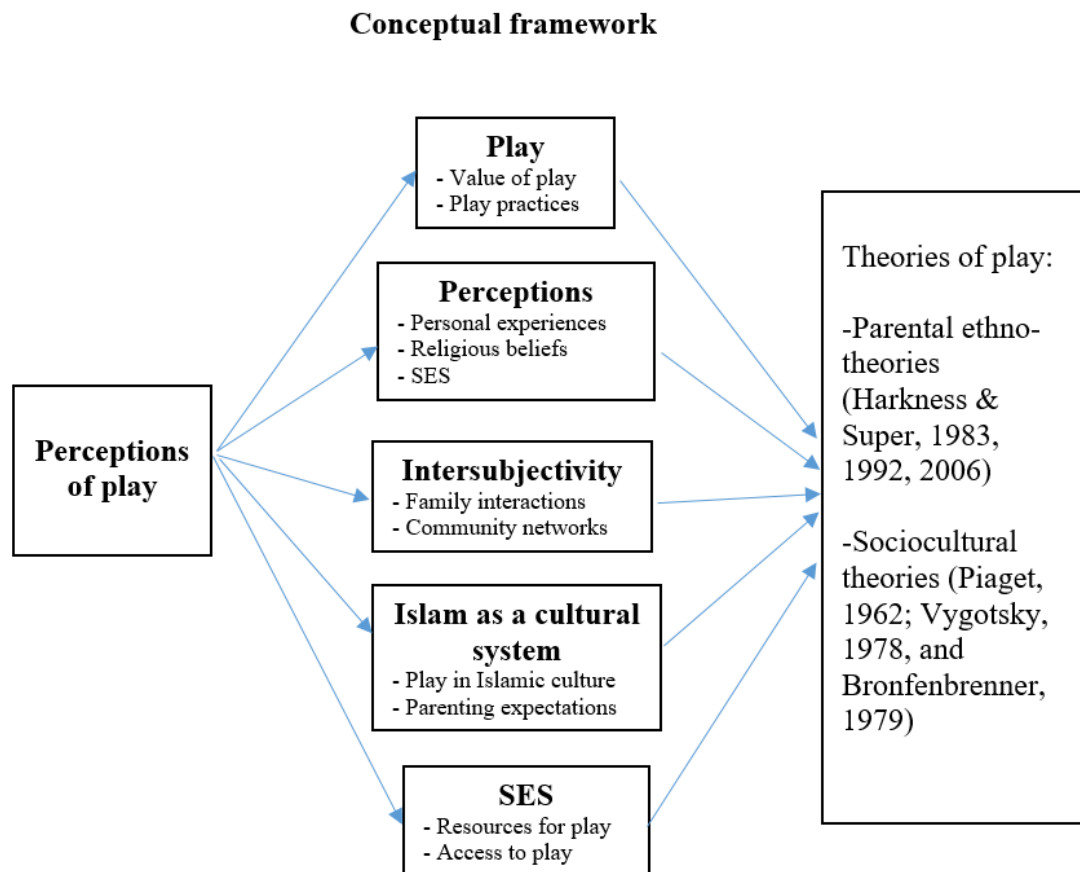


Figure 3.1. The conceptual framework

3.10. Summary of chapter 3

This chapter contained the main sections of the literature review, theories of play and the conceptual framework of this study. It synthesised the existing literature and provided a critical analysis of the existing research on the topic of play as a basis for learning, parent's perceptions about play and the cultural influences that parents may face while constructing their intersubjective meanings about play as a learning tool in early years. At the same time this chapter provided the theories, and the concepts that guided this research and guided the

interpretation of data, forming the theoretical framework of this study that enabled the research to develop a coherent understanding of the topic under exploration.

The following chapter will explain the appropriate methodology for this study, including the research paradigm that guided the study, the research methods, research design along with the appropriate data collection instruments. Additionally, the following chapter will present data analysis methods and appropriate computer programmes that facilitated the data analysis and ensured accuracy. Moreover, the limitations and the challenges that faced the data collection will be well discussed, along with explanations about how these challenges were mitigated. Finally, the following chapter will present the researcher's positionality and the ethical considerations that framed this research.

Chapter 4: Methodology and methods of research

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will highlight the main steps of the methodology. First, it outlines the research questions along with the aims of the study. Then, it discusses the appropriate paradigm including ontological and epistemological assumptions that guide the research. After that, the methodology is identified, including research design, research method and data collection methods along with the instruments used to collect each type of data (quantitative and qualitative). Next, the ethical considerations and the ethical assurances for the participants are stated. Then, this chapter presents the appropriate data analysis plan for each type of the collected data, taking into consideration the feasibility, the validity, and the reliability of both the research materials and the data. Finally, a summary is provided at the end of the chapter.

4.2. Restatement of the study's aim and research questions

This research aimed to explore how UK resident Muslim mothers who have children aged 3 to 6 years old, perceive the importance of play as a basis for their children's learning and development. More specifically, this study explored the intersubjective perceptions of mothers who are UK resident Muslims descending from different backgrounds with different cultures, languages and mind-sets, therefore different perceptions about many aspects such as their perception about the importance of play as a basis for learning and development for their young children. Along with exploring the factors that might have affected these mothers' perceptions about the importance of play notably, social, cultural, and religious.

Before stating the methodological framework, it is important to outline the main questions, (Nelson et al., 1992), of this research, which are as follows:

1. How do Muslim mothers define play? (RQ1), what are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question)

2. How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play and its relation to learning?
(RQ2)
3. Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? (RQ3)
4. How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play? (RQ4)

4.3. Research paradigm

In selecting an appropriate research methodology, it is crucial to align with a philosophical framework, commonly referred to as a paradigm, as it profoundly influences the definition of research and the way knowledge is studied and understood (Mertens, 2014). The term *paradigm*, derived from the Greek etymology meaning "pattern" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), was first introduced by Thomas Kuhn (1962) to describe a philosophical way of thinking. In contemporary research, the term is used to indicate the philosophical perspective that guides the conduct of inquiry (Cohen et al., 2007). A research paradigm consists of three core elements: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Popkewitz et al., 1979). These components are interconnected and reflect the researcher's worldview concerning the nature of reality and how it can be studied (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Therefore, to design an appropriate research methodology, it is essential to select a paradigm that aligns with the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance (Scott & Usher, 2004). In the literature, four primary research paradigms are outlined: Positivism/Post-positivism, Interpretivism/Constructivism, Transformative, and Pragmatic (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). These paradigms employ differing approaches to research due to their divergent views on knowledge and its acquisition (Noor, 2008).

This study is grounded in interpretive epistemology, which is rooted within the constructivist paradigm (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Interpretive epistemology seeks to examine the

subjective meanings individuals or groups attribute to their social realities, recognising the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Burr, 2003). In contrast to positivist epistemologies that aim to uncover objective truths, highlighting instead the fluid, context-dependent nature of knowledge (Crotty, 1998). The constructivist paradigm, which underpins interpretive approaches, according to Robson (2011), suggests that knowledge is not a fixed, external reality but is constructed through social interactions and shaped by cultural, historical, and environmental factors. Research within this paradigm, focuses on how individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds construct their understanding of reality and how they interpret and make sense of their experiences within their specific socio-cultural contexts (Schwandt, 2007).

The current study, through an interpretive framework aimed to explore how Muslim mothers living in the UK perceive and conceptualise the role of play in their children's early years, recognising that these perceptions are co-constructed through their cultural, religious, and social interactions (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). The emphasis on intersubjective perceptions in this study is a key element that reinforces its alignment with interpretive epistemology. Intersubjectivity refers to the shared meanings that emerge from social interactions, making interpretive inquiry particularly suitable for this research (Grix, 2018). The subjective and culturally specific nature of these perceptions of play, which are shaped by the mothers' Islamic way of life, cultural practices, and social contexts in the UK, requires a methodological approach that prioritises context and meaning-making (Van Hoorn et al., 2011). The mothers' perceptions of play, therefore, are understood as dynamic, shaped by their interactions with their children, communities, and broader social contexts in the UK (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By adopting a constructivist approach, the research acknowledges the fluidity of these perceptions, resisting the tendency to treat them as fixed or universally applicable (Creswell, 2007). These frameworks inherently reject universalising approaches to understanding human

behaviour, instead emphasising that perceptions are shaped by individuals' unique socio-cultural contexts (Super & Harkness, 2002). In this case, the research acknowledges that the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play are likely informed by religious teachings, cultural traditions, or broader societal expectations within the UK (Vickerius & Sandberg, 2006). Through an interpretive lens, the study sought to uncover these culturally specific understandings, offering insights into how religious and cultural contexts shaped mothers' views on play.

This study's use of a case study approach further situates it within the constructivist paradigm (Zainal 2007). The case study method, often employed in constructivist research, allows for an in-depth examination of how individuals or groups construct meaning in specific socio-cultural contexts (Creswell, 2007). In this instance, the focus on Muslim mothers in Berkshire offers a localised understanding of how broader cultural, religious, and social forces intersect to shape these mothers' perceptions of play. Such a focus enhances the depth of analysis and understanding the ways these women navigate and negotiate their experiences and practices as Muslim mothers in the UK (Yin, 2003).

Furthermore, the study, in addition to the quantitative method, employed qualitative method (interviews), to gather rich, descriptive data on the mothers' experiences and perceptions of play (Yin, 2018). Qualitative research, especially within an interpretive framework, is designed to capture the complexity of human experience and the subjective meanings people assign to their lives. By engaging with the narratives and lived play experiences of Muslim mothers, the study not only aligns with the constructivist emphasis on knowledge as socially constructed but also positions itself to uncover how these women make sense of their social world through interaction and reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the reliance on qualitative methods, while providing depth, may also introduce potential biases due to the researcher's

positionality, necessitating critical reflection on the interpretive process (Lune & Berg, 2017). This was taken into consideration in this study and discussed in section 4.10.

In summary, the alignment of this study with the constructivists' interpretive epistemology enabled the study to provide a rich, contextually grounded understanding of how Muslim mothers in the UK conceptualise and navigate the role of play in the early years of their children's development, contributing valuable insights into the intersection of culture, religion, and parenting. The methodological framework adopted for this study is visually represented by the research onion, adapted from Saunders et al. (2009), demonstrating the theoretical and methodological foundations planned for the research.

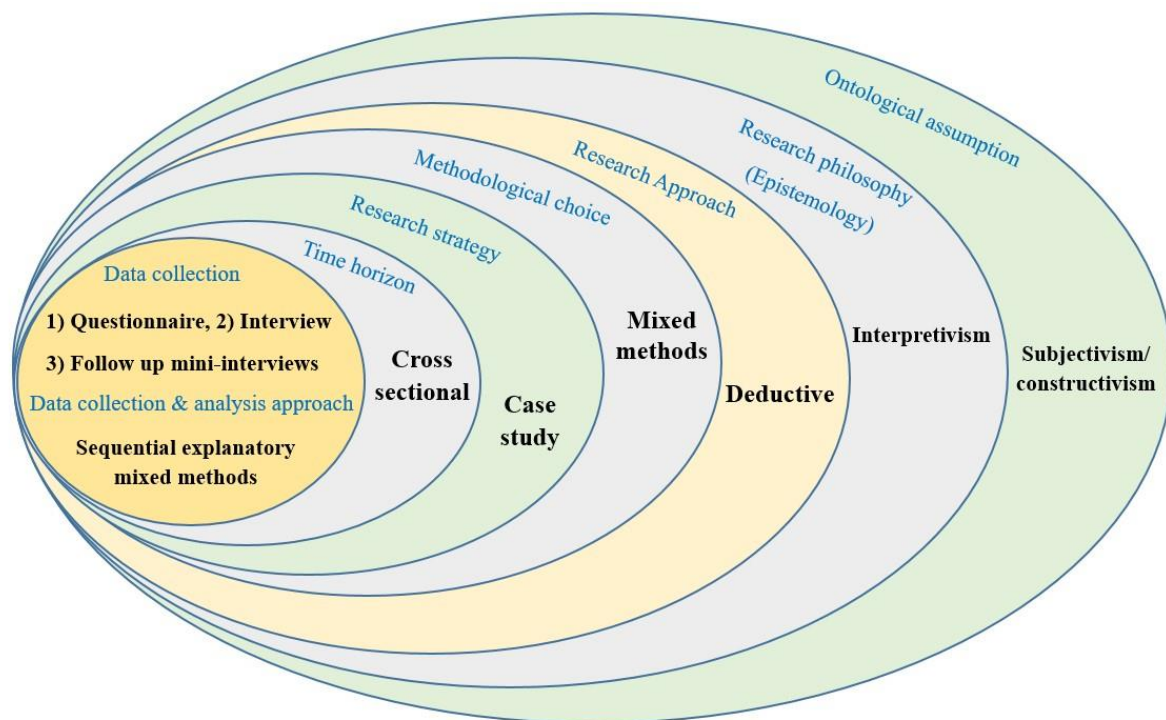


Figure 4.1. Theoretical and methodological framework adopted for this study presented in a form of research onion

4.4. Research design: mixed methods-case study

This study, positioned within the constructivist paradigm, it employed an interpretive epistemology (Crotty, 1998) which is typically aligned with qualitative approaches. While

interpretive research is traditionally qualitative, Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) challenge the conventional boundaries between paradigms, suggesting that mixed methods can be applied to enhance research across diverse epistemological frameworks. Creswell (2009) reinforced this position by criticising the limitations of relying solely on qualitative methods, arguing that complex social phenomena often require mixed methods for a more comprehensive analysis.

The choice to adopt a mixed methods-case study design in this study is justified by the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive exploration of individuals' perceptions and experiences, which cannot be adequately achieved through a single methodological approach. Creswell (2009) and Yin (2018) underlined the advantages of combining mixed methods with case study research, particularly in generating a more layered understanding of phenomena situated within complex social contexts. In this study, quantitative data collected through questionnaires providing an initial exploration of Muslim mothers' perceptions of play in the UK. However, it was the subsequent qualitative data from semi-structured and mini-interviews that enabled a more critical interrogation of the socio-cultural and religious factors shaping these perceptions. This mixed-methods approach not only provided a deeper understanding of the mothers' perspectives but also illuminated the interconnections between broader social, cultural, and religious influences, challenging the adequacy of purely qualitative or quantitative approaches alone.

4.5. Research method: Case study

According to Morgan and Smircich (1980), the selection of a research method should be driven by the nature of the phenomena being investigated. In light of this assertion, a case study approach was deemed most suitable for this research, which seeks to explore the intersubjective meanings, perceptions, and understandings of a distinct group of Muslim mothers in Berkshire, UK, regarding the role of play in early childhood learning and development. Yin (2018) argues that case study research is particularly effective for studies requiring in-depth exploration, as it

facilitates the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing the researcher to obtain a comprehensive, holistic view of the subject under investigation within its real-world context.

One of the key justifications for adopting a mixed-methods case study, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, for this study, lies mainly in the necessity for a detailed, multifaceted understanding of the research problem, as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). This study aimed to provide a deep exploration of the perspectives and experiences of Muslim mothers, a goal that could only be achieved through direct engagement with participants, enabling them to voice their opinions and share their narratives without being constrained by pre-existing literature or researcher expectations. The case study approach, in this context, was appropriate as it empowered the participants, fostering a genuine exploration of their viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Yin (2018) identifies several key reasons for employing case study research: the need to answer “how” and “why” questions, the avoidance of participant manipulation, and the focus on a bounded system to investigate a contemporary phenomenon. This research is well-aligned with these criteria, as it seeks to understand *how* Muslim mothers perceive play and *why* their interpretations of its value may differ. The study also aims to identify the factors, whether cultural, religious, or social, that contribute to the Muslim mothers’ beliefs regarding the significance of play in children’s development. These complex, context-dependent questions make the case study approach particularly appropriate for this research.

Zainal (2007) further supports the case study methodology by highlighting its effectiveness in providing a detailed examination of data within a defined context. This study focuses on a clearly bounded system: a specific group (Muslim mothers) within a specific geographical area (Berkshire), creating a natural boundary for the case. The bounded nature of the research, a key

feature of case study methodology, justifies its appropriateness for this inquiry. Additionally, the in-depth exploration that case studies facilitate is crucial in this research, given the complexity of intersubjective perceptions surrounding play, which require a detailed understanding of the cultural, social, and personal factors that inform these perceptions. Moreover, case studies are particularly well-suited to examining multiple perspectives within a defined group. This study explores the intersubjective perceptions of play, involving multiple viewpoints. The ability of case study research to capture diverse perspectives and experiences within a bounded context aligns seamlessly with the objectives of this research, as it seeks to investigate the ways in which cultural and religious factors intersect with local influences to shape mothers' views on play.

Another factor reinforcing the appropriateness of the case study approach is its focus on contemporary phenomena. Yin (2003) emphasises that case studies are suited to examining “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context” (p. 25). This study investigates current perceptions of play among Muslim mothers in their lived environment, an aspect that cannot be experimentally manipulated (Yin 2018), making it a timely and relevant inquiry. Unlike experimental designs, case studies allow for the examination of phenomena as they naturally occur, providing a holistic and contextually grounded understanding of the factors influencing participants' perspectives (Yin 2018). This research is thus deeply embedded in its contemporary, real-world setting, examining how local factors shape the participants' beliefs and practices. This real-world context strengthens the rationale for using a case study, as it allows for a nuanced exploration of the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play within the specific geographical and cultural context of Berkshire, UK.

Moreover, the case study approach in this research proved particularly valuable in capturing the nuances of Muslim mothers' experiences, especially those that might have been

overlooked by more quantitative or broad-based methods (Yin, 2018). Some examples are listed below:

1. By focusing on individual, in-depth cases within the specific cultural context of Muslim communities in the UK, this approach allowed for a richer, more detailed exploration of how Islamic values, cultural expectations, and personal beliefs shape these mothers' perceptions of the potential benefits of play.
2. Through extended interactions and detailed narratives, the researcher was able to uncover intricacies, such as how Islamic teachings on family and child-rearing intersect with the mothers' educational preferences. These insights might have been diluted or missed altogether in a large-scale survey or more generalised study (Fisher & Ziviani, 2004).
3. Case studies provided the flexibility to explore how the experiences of these mothers evolved over time, particularly as they navigated a multicultural society like the UK. Linking play-based learning, for instance, to their growing understanding of Western educational models might have participated in changes in their perceptions. This temporal depth achieved using case study, focusing on both current educational challenges and historical influences from their cultural backgrounds, enabled for capturing shifts in attitudes and practices that a survey cannot provide (Stake, 2005).
4. The qualitative nature of a case study allowed for diving deeply into individual stories, capturing the emotional, social, and cognitive factors that influence educational choices (Creswell, 2007). This level of personal detail could have been obscured in methods that focus purely on measurable outcomes.
5. Case studies are also useful at capturing the tensions and contradictions that arise in complex, culturally embedded issues. It was possible to explore the internal conflicts

that Muslim mothers faced between embracing Western educational practices like play-based learning and maintaining traditional Islamic educational values (Lune & Berg, 2017). These complexities may go unnoticed in more structured methodologies.

It is worth mentioning that the type of the case study adopted in this research is 'explanatory case study design', which is specifically recommended for investigating complex phenomena where causal relationships need to be explored and explained (Yin, 2003). Explanatory case study is one of the three primary types categorised by Yin (2003): descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory.

The decision to adopt an explanatory case study for this research is grounded in both the nature of the research questions and the complexity of the phenomena under investigation. Yin's (2018) assertion that "how" and "why" questions are particularly suited to case study methods was a key influence in selecting this approach. These types of questions are inherently explanatory, requiring an in-depth tracing of processes and relationships over time. Moreover, explanatory case studies are particularly effective when investigating complex social phenomena, such as family dynamics and cultural practices, which are central to this research.

This focus of this study on uncovering causal relationships and building explanations around perceptions and practices of play, especially in relation to broader social, cultural, and educational factors, aligns with the characteristics of an explanatory case study. As Pegram (1999) suggests, explanatory case studies are useful for developing causal arguments and explanations, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how various factors, such as religious beliefs, education, and socioeconomic background, influence maternal perceptions of play.

An explanatory case study allows for deep exploration and explanation of complex phenomena while retaining flexibility, which is crucial given the multifaceted nature of the research subject. This flexibility enables the researcher to remain open to emergent themes and

discoveries during the research process, thus enhancing the richness and depth of the study (Blatter & Haverland, 2012; Stake, 2005). However, a key challenge with explanatory case studies is ensuring that the researcher's interpretation does not overshadow the evidence collected, a common criticism of the method (Lune & Berg, 2017). In this research, I was highly aware of this issue and took steps to mitigate it. Strategies such as member checking, where participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, and maintaining reflexivity throughout the research process, as elaborated in section 4.10, were employed to ensure that participants' voices were authentically represented (Fisher & Ziviani, 2004; see section 4.10).

Furthermore, this study is structured as a single explanatory case study, focusing specifically on one group (Muslim mothers in Berkshire) due to the localised and context-specific nature of the inquiry. Single case studies are appropriate when the objective is to gain a deep understanding of a particular group or phenomenon within a bounded context (Yin, 2018). In this case, the bounded context is defined by the geographical location (Berkshire), the specific participant group (Muslim mothers), and the cultural and religious context of the study. By concentrating on a single case, the study aimed to provide detailed, contextually rich explanations of how intersubjective meanings about play are constructed within this specific group.

In summary, this study's focus on a bounded system, the complexity of the intersubjective perceptions being investigated, the real-world context in which the research is situated, and the contemporary nature of the phenomena under study collectively justify the use of case study methodology. The ability of case study research to offer an in-depth, holistic examination of complex social phenomena, while capturing the nuanced and context-specific factors shaping participants' perspectives, makes it the most appropriate methodological approach for this inquiry. At the same time, the adoption of the explanatory case study approach is justified by

the nature of the research questions, the complexity of the phenomena under investigation, and the need for a contextually specific exploration of Muslim mothers' perceptions of play. This method, through careful design, reflexive engagement, and the use of strategies to minimise bias, provided the best framework for answering the research questions in a rigorous and nuanced manner.

4.6. Pilot study

The pilot study, according to Given (2008), refers to conducting part of the research in small-scale to test the studies instruments, usually, conducted with a smaller number of participants and in a shorter time. Pilot studies can be used to explore potential roadblocks of any study before fully implementing the study, they can be used while collecting data in new location or in new format. Moreover, pilot studies, according to Given (2008), can be used in all methodologies, and in all methodological settings.

Lowe (2019) considered pilot studies as feasibility studies, conducted to determine whether the whole study can be easily accomplished, and he finds them very practical when there are concerns about how well the full-scale study can be conducted and successfully accomplished.

In this research, the pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire's questions and both the interview's and follow up interviews' questions, to find out how well they are designed and used. The questionnaire was sent to a small number of volunteer participants (7) to test the return rates, the time it takes to be completed and whether the questions were easy to understand and easy to answer, and whether the Microsoft form was working properly without any issues. Similarly, a small number of volunteer participants (2), were interviewed in a pilot study to determine to which extent the interview is well designed and whether the questions are clearly worded and easily understood, also testing the duration of the interview. The follow up interview was only piloted with 1 volunteer participant to test the questions and the best way to receive the responses. The results of the pilot study were significantly helpful to revise,

refine and finalise the data collection instruments. However, testing the effectiveness of the time for the follow up interview (6 weeks), as it was planned, and testing the level of the participants' commitment and the possibility of receiving responses from the mothers during the period of 6 weeks, was not possible due to the long time it takes, and to the limited time of this study.

4.7. Population, Sample and Sampling

4.7.1. Population

The population for this study was Muslim mothers living in the UK. Figures from the Annual Population Survey (2011) showed that 59.5% of the population of England and Wales identify as Christian. The second largest religious group, according to 2011 census, is Muslims, with a total of 2.7 million people representing 4.8% of the population (UK government, 2011).

Compared with the whole population in the UK, Muslims are less likely to cohabit or get children outside marriage status. They are more likely to be married, reflecting the values of the Islamic culture and religion. However, in some cases the couples are religiously married (marriage recognised by Imam of the Mosque) without an official act of marriage which can be considered as cohabiting couples. According to the MCB (Muslim Council of Britain) Census report 2015 (Ali, 2015), drawing on 2011 census, there are 745,261 Muslim households (representing 34.7% of the Muslim population) from which 434,541 are with dependent children (Ali, 2015). Moreover, and according to the same source, there are 317,952 Muslim children within the age group of (0 to 4), but so far, there are no statistics found to show the number of the Muslim mothers with dependent children aged 3 to 6 years old (Ali, 2015). More specifically, in the county of Berkshire, which is the focus area of this study, according to City Population official website (2020), Muslims represent 8% of the county's population (71,000) in 2018 (Citypopulation.de.uk, 2020). However, there are no statistics found about the exact

number of the Muslim households with dependent children in Berkshire between the age of 3 and 6 years old.

It is worth mentioning that results from the UK census of 2021 were released in 2022, showing the most recent calculated percentages of the overall population in the UK including religious groups. Results revealed that the number of Muslims, increased to 3.9 million, 6.5% in 2021, up from 2.7 million, 4.8% of the UK population in 2011 (UK government, 2021). However, this study was framed and planned according to the 2011 census statistics. The study population and the study sample were identified before the 2021 results were released. Thus, the 2021 census statistics, about the number of Muslims in the UK, are presented here as an informative update and not to be considered for this study.

Drawing on the 2011 census statistics, 100 mothers, as population representatives, were found to be reasonable to complete the questionnaire, and the number of 15 mothers was also found reasonable to participate in the interviews along with 5 mothers were aimed to participate in the follow up mini-interviews. Participants, in both types of data collection, were recruited based on meeting a set of criteria (see section 4.7.2).

4.7.2. Sample

A sample is a subset of data sources selected from the broader population under study (Yin, 2018). In the sampling process, it is essential for researchers to first define the population and then carefully draw a sample that adequately represents the entire population (Given, 2008). The identification of the population for this study has been outlined in detail in the previous section (see Section 4.7.1: Population).

There are two primary approaches of sampling, probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Schwandt, 2007). In probability sampling, sample units are selected based on empirical or statistical principles, ensuring that they are representative of the population

(Barreiro & Albandoz, 2001). This type of sampling includes cluster, stratified, systematic, and random sampling. In contrast, non-probability or purposive sampling, does not prioritise statistical representativeness but instead, it selects participants based on their ability to contribute to the development of explanations within the research (Schwandt, 2007).

Given the specific context of this study, non-probability sampling was employed, but this raised potential concerns about self-selection bias, particularly because many of the participants are women who have either attended my play courses or follow me online. Self-selection bias occurs when participants voluntarily engage in the study due to a pre-existing interest in the research topic, which can result in an overrepresentation of particular perspectives (Braver & Bay, 1992). In this study, the participants' pre-existing interest in play, fostered through their interaction with me, could lead to an overrepresentation of positive attitudes towards the importance of play. This might limit the diversity of viewpoints, as mothers who do not prioritise play or hold different beliefs about its role in children's development may be underrepresented. Consequently, the findings might reflect a skewed perception of how play is viewed within the broader population of Muslim mothers, thus limiting the generalisability of the study's conclusions.

To address and mitigate this self-selection bias, several steps were taken in the research design. First, reflexivity (Corlett & Mavin, 2018) was rigorously applied throughout the research process. The reflexive practice involved continuous self-monitoring by the researcher (Myself) to ensure that personal biases and the researcher's positionality did not overly influence participant selection, data collection, or interpretation. At the same time, reflexive journaling and continuous self-awareness were employed to monitor and critically evaluate the researcher's own biases and their potential impact on the study. Additionally, steps were taken to diversify the participant sample. While the sample inevitably included participants with an interest in play due to their prior interaction with the researcher, efforts were made to reach out

to mothers with varying levels of engagement and interest in play. This was achieved by broadening recruitment efforts beyond those who had directly interacted with the researcher's play courses or online content, thereby incorporating a more diverse range of perspectives.

Moreover, purposive sampling was complemented by strategies to enhance the inclusivity of different views. By creating an open environment for the expression of diverse opinions, the study sought to capture a broader spectrum of perspectives, mitigating the potential skew that could arise from overrepresentation of mothers with a strong pre-existing commitment to the value of play.

Finally, throughout the research, transparency regarding the limitations of the sample was emphasised. I acknowledged the potential for self-selection bias in both the methodology and discussion of results, which allowed for framing the findings within their appropriate context. This transparency ensured that readers are equipped to critically assess the degree to which the findings can be generalised and underscores the reflective and intentional steps taken to counteract bias in the research design. This is further discussed in section 4.10.

4.7.3. Sampling methods

The rationale behind using sampling techniques to identify the sample that represents the population, is that in most cases, it is impossible to use the whole population, due to the size of the population or when there are financial or geographical limitations (Etikan, et al., 2016).

According to the nature of this study, which is qualitative and quantitative research, two main sampling methods were utilised to select a sample for each kind of data collection (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019): snowball sampling for the questionnaire and convenience sampling for the interviews. More details about the different sampling methods used in this study are presented below.

Participants, in both types of data collection, were recruited based on meeting a set of criteria. The four criteria are the same for participants who are either completing the questionnaire or participating in any of the interviews (the semi-structured interview or the follow up mini interview), and they are as follows: 1) the person who completes the questionnaire or gets interviewed must be the mother (not the father or any other members of the family). 2) the mother must be Muslim from any Islamic background. 3) the mother must be resident in the UK, and 4) the mother must have at least one child aged between 3 and 6 years old.

4.7.3.1. Snowball sampling

Snowballing, also called word-of-mouth technique, uses referral sources to select eligible participants that are recommended by other participants (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). The name is obtained from the idea of a snowball that is rolling downhill and increases in size (Given, 2008). Emerson (2015) stated that the basic idea for applying snowball sampling is when the population members know each other and members of the special population are willing to recommend other members who meet the criteria and possess the same characteristics. This form of nonprobability sampling (snowball sampling) is employed when the qualitative researchers find that the population is hidden or hard to reach (Heckathorn, 2011). Sampling and framing the hidden population (where there is no way to figure out the total size of the population) to draw a sample from it can be difficult, especially, when the population is not a big relative to the overall population, or when there is a problem of stigma, or when the researcher cannot penetrate certain networks (Sudman & Kalton, 1986). In this case, chain-referral-sampling (snowball sampling) is useful. This procedure starts with a convenience sample of initial subjects, because if it is possible to draw a random sample, it is not possible to consider the population as hidden (Heckathorn, 2011).

In this study, the snowball sampling was used to recruit the participants for the questionnaire. This step was taken initially before selecting the sample that will be recruited for the interviews

using convenience sampling (see section 4.7.3.2). The participants who are found to be appropriate and met the criteria were asked to help the researcher by nominating other subjects that have the characteristics required for the research through a referral method, and they were, affectively, very helpful. In snowball sampling the respondents' help is significant, as when study respondents show a willing to help find other potential respondents, Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) considers them as research's assistants, and without their assistance the snowball sampling process is hard to be completed.

4.7.3.2. Convenience sampling

Convenience or opportunistic sampling, also known as accidental or haphazard sampling, is a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling, where a group of members from the target population are recruited to participate in a study (Emerson, 2015). This population is required to meet certain practical criteria, such as being proximately accessible, being available at the time of conducting the research and willing to participate in the research (Etikan et al., 2016). Convenience samples -also called accidental samples- are selected by the researcher spatially or administratively near to where the data collection is conducted (Palinkas, et al., 2015).

Convenience sampling was found to be an appropriate technique for selecting the participants for interviews in this study. According to Etikan et al. (2016), the researcher might use the convenience sampling when subjects are of a possible accessibility, or, as claimed by Palinkas, et al. (2015), researchers use convenience sampling when information need to be collected from participants who are of a possibility to be approached easily, such as recruiting participants attending staff meetings, courses, or trainings, for example, for study participation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Drawing on these explanations, the convenience sampling technique was used in this study to recruit participants for the semi-structured interview and the follow up mini-interviews. The participants were Muslim mothers who have children at the age of 3 to 6 years old, and living

in Berkshire, South-East England. These mothers are selected from both groups, the group participating in filling the questionnaire and from the group of mothers who attended a 'parenting' course that I (the researcher) delivered in October/Nov/ Dec 2019. The course was organised by a mosque in Reading, and it was delivered over 8 weeks. During that time, I had a chance to talk to the mothers about many issues that concern their children and built-up good relationship with them, and they kindly showed their willingness to participate in this research. The mothers were all Muslims, but they come from different countries with different cultures, traditions, and languages at the same time they are able to communicate in English. These countries include India, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Pakistan, Czech Republic, Morocco, France, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen, and United Kingdom. All the participants were selected according to specific criteria, as aforementioned in (section 4.7.3) of this chapter, with the importance of making sure that the selected mothers meet the criteria.

Despite the popularity and the common use of the nonprobability sampling techniques, and despite the homogeneity and the analogy of the population subjects in convenience sampling this sampling technique tends to have some limitations (Brewis, 2014). It is argued by Emerson (2015) that nonprobability samplings have subjective nature when choosing the samples and their capacity to represent the population is poor, but in fact they are useful especially when it is impossible to randomise; when the population is very large, for example. Convenience sampling can also be useful when the researcher has limited time, resources, and workforce, and when the research is not aiming for generalisation (Etikan et al., 2016). In order to mitigate these limitations and obtain accurate data while using convenience sampling it is important to avoid bias at the highest possible level by ensuring that the participants meet the criteria and they are given equal opportunity to be selected (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). This was highly applied in this study for the purpose of reaching the effectiveness of applying the convenience sampling.

4.8. Data collection

As aforementioned in section 4.4, this study was undertaken using mixed methods-case study design, which allows for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, for more rich information and deeper understanding of the investigated topic. Therefore, two instruments were used in data collection: a questionnaire for quantitative data collection and a semi-structured interview along with semi-structured follow-up mini-interviews for qualitative data collection.

The literature showed that authors emphasised sequential approaches while attempting to give a name to mixed methods design. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), for instance, used the name ‘sequential model’, Morse (1991) used ‘sequential triangulation’, Morgan (1998) used ‘qualitative follow-up approach’, and ‘the iteration design’ was used by Greene (2007). However, Creswell et al. (2003) used different names to distinguish between the sequential design that begins qualitatively and the one that begins quantitatively. The exploratory sequential design begins qualitatively, while the one that begins quantitatively, and which was adopted for this study, is so called ‘explanatory sequential design’ (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). More details about data collection using explanatory sequential design are provided in the following sections (4.8.1 and 4.8.2).

4.8.1. Quantitative data collection

As this study adopted the explanatory sequential design of mixed methods, data collection, as a result, was processed in a sequential manner. The explanatory sequential design, according to Creswell and Clark (2018), can be applied in two successive phases.

In the current study, the first phase was concerned with collecting quantitative data using a questionnaire, where the targeted sample was 100 participants that have been recruited using snowball method of sampling (see section 4.7.3.1). The second phase was concerned with collecting qualitative data using both the main and the follow up interviews, where 15

participants were targeted for the main interview and 5 participants for the follow mini-interview, and their recruitment was achieved using convenience sampling method (see section 4.7.3.2).

In addition to using explanatory sequential design, this study also used integration of data. The integration in this study was made by connecting the quantitative data analysis and the results of the first phase with the qualitative data collection of the second phase (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This means that the results from the quantitative data, after being analysed, confirmed the interview questions that were already developed and helped refining them for the aim of getting more in-depth investigation and exploration of the research problem. This was during the second phase which was the qualitative strand by conducting interviews with a smaller sample of participants (15 were aimed, but 16 participated).

4.8.1.1. Quantitative data collection instrument: questionnaire

Quantitative data collection was conducted during the first phase of this sequential mixed methods study. This type of data was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire, according to Cooper and Schindler (2006) and Ong (2012), is an efficient tool for data collection from large samples, because it allows each respondent to answer the same set of questions that are pre-set in a specific order forming a particular layout. On one hand, questionnaires are known for the advantage of being useful for large-scale data collection, as they can be sent to a significant number of participants (Nunan, 1999; Gillham, 2000). Additionally, they are cost efficient, time saving, easy to administer and collect by researchers, and they are anonymous which puts participants in ease to share their information (Brown, 2001). On the other hand, when using questionnaires, researchers cannot guarantee a high return rate, the answers may not be always accurate and they can be questionable, the unclearness and ambiguity of some questions can be present, which may affect the answers, and also misunderstanding or unclear wording of some questions may affect the answers

(Gillham, 2000; Brown, 2001). Therefore, it is very important to take all these factors into consideration while constructing and designing any type of questionnaire.

In any research attempt, questionnaires with all their different types (open ended questionnaires, closed ended or a mixture of both), are one type of the primary sources of collecting data (Zohrabi, 2013). However, constructing and designing a questionnaire is not easy, and certainly, not straightforward. Before designing any questionnaire, it is crucial that researchers ensure its validity, reliability, and unambiguity (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Some authors, such as Seliger and Shohamy (1989) and Rowley (2014), find closed-ended questionnaires more efficient and accurate due to them being easy to analyse in comparison to the open-ended questionnaires, which provide more information, but they are more difficult to analyse. However, each type of questionnaire has its strengths and its weaknesses, but they can both be used efficiently (Rowley, 2014).

In this study, a closed-ended questionnaire was used to obtain quantitative data. The questionnaire was developed and designed in a way that allowed to collect maximum information from participants. While designing the questionnaire many factors were taken into consideration, to ensure its validity, reliability, and unambiguity, such as being careful while forming the questions, making them specific, properly worded and asked in an easy and understandable manner, which allows for more reliable answers. At the same time, piloting the questionnaire, allowed for getting an idea about the questions as well as detecting any formatting issues.

More details about how the questionnaire was constructed, designed, and administered in this study, along with ensuring the validity, reliability, and the unambiguity of this questionnaire, are presented in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.8.1.2. Constructing and designing the questionnaire

The questionnaire, for this study, was designed using Microsoft form to be administered online through social media platforms, such as Facebook, Tweeter, and WhatsApp. A sample of the questionnaire is presented in appendix (B).

The questionnaire consisted of four sections comprised of two types of questions: classification questions and target questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). The administrative questions (Lauri, 2011) are not used in this questionnaire as the participants were anonymous. Therefore, Section 1 consisted of classification questions which are all about the demographics such as race, religion, number of children, relationship status, employment status, background, and personal information (anonymously). This type of questions, as recommended by Ong (2012), were answered in the beginning of the questionnaire so the respondent could be screened. The remaining sections were composed of target questions, which are related to the subject under study. Section 2 was about parents' attitude towards play. Section 3 was concerned with mothers' involvement, enjoyment, and engagement (Vickerius & Sandberg, 2006) in their children's play along with the play environment they provide for their children at home (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). Finally, section 4 was about cultural and religious effect on parent's attitude towards play (Singh & Gupta, 2012) and how best the mothers can support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play (Mikelson, 2008).

The questionnaire contained mainly closed ended questions, in addition to few open-ended questions that gave the participants the opportunity to express themselves and state their opinion, such as giving their own definition of play and list the activities their children like to play most at home. Dichotomous questions that only give the "Yes" or "No" answers, were not used in the target questions because answers in this case will not capture the variability in the response (Zikmund, 2003). Therefore, other form of multiple responses were used such as Likert scale. Likert scale is widely used to measure the participants' attitudes and perceptions,

and it is easy and straight forward while used or analysed (Ong, 2012). Through Likert scale, the respondents in this study indicated how strongly they agree or disagree with the target statements (items), and this allowed for the variability of answers which makes the questionnaire more sensitive to responses, thus, more accurate (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Additionally, the questionnaire was formatted into pages that appear one page at a time to keep the questionnaire simple and facilitates its completion, which enhances the response rate.

4.8.1.3. Administering the questionnaire

There are different ways to administer questionnaires, such as sending them by post, through the phone, or face to face (Gillham, 2000). Brown's (2001) method of administering the questionnaire involves sending the questionnaire to a group of individuals who are situated in the same place, and who will fill it out at the same time. As according to Brown (2001), this method is more preferable because it results in higher return rate and it is believed that the presence of the researcher in the same place will make the conditions under which the questionnaire was filled out clear, and at the same time the researcher will help explaining the questions if needed for more accurate answers. Unfortunately, according to the conditions under which this study was conducted, this was not feasible as the participants were not all in the same place, and the lockdown and the restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic, made meeting participants face to face not possible. Therefore, the questionnaire used in this study was administered using the internet. It was sent online through different social media platforms, notably, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, Tweeter, and emails. This process proved very successful and as early as the first day some responses were received.

4.8.2 Qualitative data collection instrument: interviews

The qualitative data collection took place during the second phase, after collecting and while analysing the quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected in two steps, applying two different kinds of interviews conducted in different times. In the first step, the semi-structured

interview was conducted with 16 mothers, 15 mothers were planned, and however, one extra mother kept insisting that she really wants to participate, so it was found to be useful to conduct an extra interview, for extra information for the study. That was after the quantitative data was collected, and it was in the process of analysis. These steps were taken according to the integration method adopted for this sequential explanatory study. During the second step, the follow up mini-interviews were conducted with 3 mothers within the time frame of 6 weeks, after completing the conduction and the analysis of the first interviews. Again, for the follow up mini-interviews, 5 mothers were planned to participate, and however, only 3 of them sent back their answers on time.

4.8.2.1. Construction of the semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview is defined by Given (2008) as “a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions” (pp. 810-811). Rather than the structured type of interviews, the semi-structured interview was utilised in this study, because in this type the researcher can be more in control of the topic and can add some sub-questions if necessary, in order to clarify the main questions to the participant, which allows for collecting more relevant answers that are rich with information and meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

As aforementioned earlier, the qualitative data was collected using a semi-structured interview and follow up mini-interviews for deeper investigation of the research problem. According to the interpretivism approach adopted in this study, it would have been ideal to interview the full population that meet the criteria (all the Muslim mothers who live in Berkshire, in this study). However, that is not realistically feasible. As a result, the number of interviewees chosen that was reasonable and that was possible to complete within the time frame of a PhD was 15 for the semi-structured interview, followed by 5 mothers for the follow up mini-interviews. The targeted participants were carefully selected from the population, according to a set of criteria

(see section 4.7.3) for both types of interviews to achieve an appropriate in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation.

The participants were interviewed based on one-on-one interviewing, remotely due to the requirements of social distancing, using WhatsApp calls. The interviews duration time was between 40 and 80 minutes and they were all audio recorded for time saving and for making sure that all the information provided by the informant are included. A written interview guide with a list of topics and a list of carefully worded questions was developed prior to the interviews taking place (see appendix C), to help organise the interview process and assure that all the topics are covered.

All the questions were clear and understandable, therefore properly answered. The questions were mainly open-ended questions that differ in their target. Some questions were directed to get answers for relatively concrete information (such as the number of children, their ages, the country of origin, level of education, whether the mothers play with their children, how many times a day and for how long in case of yes), some other questions were seeking answers for more narrative information, such as: what is your knowledge about play?, how would you define play?, what is the meaning of play in your culture and religion?, what is the impact of your childhood play experiences on your children now?, how would you evaluate play?, how would you define the relation between play and learning?. All the questions were related to the concepts under inquiry. The full interview guide can be found in appendix (C).

4.8.2.2. Conducting the semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study to collect data due to their flexibility. The interview schedule was centred on nine well- chosen and well phrased questions planned to be asked in set order (see appendix C), however, with the flexibility of the interviews' type (semi-structured) some of the questions were asked according to the engagement of the interviewees, and the extent of probing. Some of the questions had sub-questions, and the number of sub-

questions was kept flexible as some extra sub-questions were added during the interview process, especially when attempting to ensure that the participant explores the main question in a sufficient manner, which results in obtaining more accurate answers (Rowley, 2014).

The main interviews were conducted with 16 Muslim mothers, resident in Berkshire, and they took place within the period of seven weeks (from the beginning of February 2022 to the last week of March 2022) with the average of 2 to 3 interviews per week. The full number of the interviews was conducted remotely through WhatsApp video calls and none of the participants had any objection against audio recording their interview (a separate device used for audio recording) which made it possible to obtain the full information provided by the participants.

Two of the participants, were mothers who have already attended my parenting courses and workshops. While the other 14 interviewees, were mainly mothers who are followers on social media platforms. All mothers showed enthusiasm towards the topic under investigation, and they were overexcited to participate and state their opinions about the benefits of play and share their children's play experiences at home. They, also, showed the same excitement level when they were given the opportunity to share their own play experiences as children. This made the communication process between the interviewees and the interviewer very affective, which generated a smooth expression of opinions, practices, and ideas (Cohen et al., 2007).

In the beginning of each interview the participants were invited to answer three questions to give their consent to participate in the interview, to have their interview audio recorded and to allow for the use of the information they participate with to be anonymously used for this study. The interview questions were carefully examined for 'jargon' that the interviewees might find difficult to understand, therefore the questions were designed to cover the concepts required for the study without using any academic terms.

All the interviews went smooth and within the time frame. All the participants were ready and prepared for the interviews once they were called, in terms of sitting in a quiet and convenient place and keeping their children busy or put them to sleep during the interview. This enabled to conduct each interview in one go, without any interruptions, delays, or distractions, which enabled collecting authentic data.

It is noteworthy that all interviews were conducted in English, however, during some interviews the participants found it easier to use the Arabic or French language to provide a clearer idea, as they all know that the interviewer/researcher (myself) is trilingual and masters English, French and Arabic. This necessitated translation to these parts of the interviews by the researcher. More details about the translation process and the mitigation measures for this challenge can be found in section 9.4.2.

4.8.2.3. The construction and conduction of the follow up mini interviews

After completing the interviews, in order to go deeper in exploring the mothers' perceptions about play, 5 of the mothers who have already been interviewed showed their willingness to participate in a fortnightly short follow up to understand a bit more of their daily life and practice with their children in relation to play at home, after they participated in this study. The follow up interview consisted of 8 open-ended question that were carefully worded targeting further information that were not obtained, neither from the questionnaire, nor from the semi-structured interview. The follow up approach was planned and applied as follows:

For 6 weeks the mothers were receiving 2 or 3 questions every other week as a WhatsApp message, and they were given a sufficient time to send back their responses at their convenience. Noting that the 5 mothers, in the beginning, showed their willingness for participation, however, only 3 mothers sent back all their responses (see appendix D). The mothers were, also, invited to keep some notes (e.g. a diary) if they want to, of ideas, thoughts, and activities they have been doing with their children and share by getting them sent in a

message. Only one of the mothers, mainly, managed to keep a diary about her children's activities, especially that summer holidays were in the middle of the 6 weeks dedicated to completing this follow up plan. This mother kept me updated by continuously mentioning me when posting her children's activities, during the holidays, on social media. The other two mothers managed only to answer the questions and send them back.

It is worth mentioning here that the data gathered from the follow up interviews was not treated as distinct follow-up information, instead it was integrated with the primary interview data, due to the limited participation, in addition to the repetitive nature of these information compared to the primary questionnaire and main interviews, which sufficiently answered research questions resulted in reaching data saturation (Francis et al., 2010). More details can be found in section 9.4.7.

4.9. Ethical considerations

The moral issues and ethical considerations while conducting social research are related to the axiology (Hart, 1971). Axiology involves that researchers should be able to define, evaluate and understand the good and the bad (right or wrong) behaviour in relation to their research and they must be able to consider what is good for humans and society (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). It is very important for the researchers to make sure that any research they are involved in is conducted in a moral, ethical, and respectful manner, respecting all the human values and morals. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) affirms that:

Educational researchers should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons – including themselves – involved in or touched by the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice, in recognition of both their rights and of differences arising from age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant characteristic. (p. 6)

In this research all the ethical considerations were carefully considered. Ethical approval was obtained before starting any data collection. The participants were informed of the aims and objectives of the study, and they received an information sheet (see appendix E) with clear explanation about their role in the study, what they will be required to do and what kind of information they would share as part of participating. They were invited to review and sign a consent form that outlines all the advantages and any risks of getting involved in this study. The consent form (see appendix F) provided participants with all the information about the research and the institution involved. The consent clearly explained that this research has received ethical approval, and it follows the laws of ethics and morals required in social research in the UK, according to the BERA (2018) principles. The approved ethics form can be found in appendix (G).

During the research process, no participant was mistreated or humiliated, they were respected and not forced to do anything unethical and, they were kept physically, psychologically, economically, and legally safe, as required by BERA (2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained all the time while pseudonyms were used instead of real names. The data collected during this research was kept safe with the researcher and only the supervisors can have access to the data, following the Data Protection Act (2018). When presenting or publishing any work related to the findings of this research, this will be done after anonymising all the data and findings according to specific terms and conditions. Finally, participants were informed and reminded of their right to withdraw at any time, without any consequences, applying the principles of BERA (2018). The participants were also informed that any data collected prior to their withdrawal will be disregarded (see appendix H).

4.10. Researcher's positionality and power dynamics

It is known in the any research that the paradigm represents the lens through which a researchers view their study and shape the way they position themselves within the research

(Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Within an interpretive paradigm, the researcher's positionality includes their subjective role and influence throughout the research process, acknowledging that their values, beliefs, and background fundamentally shape the study (Mertens, 2014). In this context, as an interpretive researcher, I understood that my theoretical positionality was central and embedded at every phase of the research, influencing both the interactions with participants and the interpretation of data. Therefore, I was, fully conscious of my role as an active participant in the co-construction of meaning, rather than a detached observer, and recognised the impact of my biases and experiences on the research.

Some of the interviewed participants, in this study, could potentially have attended my parenting workshops and courses. In this case, the interaction would have been a teacher-student one, characterised by dichotomous power dynamics, which might cause for the problem of empowerment to appear. This makes my positionality as a researcher crucial, requiring an explicit and nuanced discussion of how my beliefs about parenting and the value of play shape the research process. As both a researcher and a preschool teacher, I hold a firm belief that play is crucial for children's overall development (Vygotsky, 1978). However, this stance raises several concerns regarding potential bias. My professional background means that I might privilege play as a pedagogical tool, which could lead to a skewed interpretation of the data, especially when participants do not share my enthusiasm for play. At the same time, my perspective of play, which is shaped by Western educational philosophies and the IB framework, may not align with the cultural or religious values of the Muslim mothers I am studying. This could lead to an unintended imposition of my own beliefs about what constitutes "good" parenting, potentially marginalising alternative viewpoints or ways of raising children that do not centre on play. To address these concerns and engage reflexively with the research process, I have taken several steps:

- 1. Careful selection of participants for interviews:** As a researcher being aware of the

power dynamics, and of the bias that can go out of control when I am interviewing people I know, the interview participants were carefully recruited. From a large group of mothers who completed the questionnaire, I decided to select and recruit mothers who, have never attended the workshops, and had no conversation with them before.

2. **Professional conduct of interviews:** Aware of a possible “empowerment” over some participants, it was agreed that the interview would be conducted in a professional way focusing solely on the study, with time given afterwards to have a conversation and answer any potential questions about parenting issues. This was overall highly achieved.
3. **Critical Self-Reflection:** I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process, noting how my own beliefs and assumptions surfaced during data collection and analysis. This practice helped me identify moments where my professional background and views on play might influence my interpretation of the data.
4. **Dialogues with Peer Researchers:** Engaging with peer researchers and supervisors allowed for external perspectives to challenge my assumptions. This peer debriefing was crucial for ensuring that my analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives, rather than being overly shaped by my own.
5. **Reflexive Interviewing:** During the interviews, I was mindful of the need to create space for participants to express their own views on parenting and play, even when these were different from my own. This required an awareness of how I framed questions and a conscious effort not to steer conversations in a direction that aligned with my beliefs.
6. **Member Checking:** I engaged in member checking by sharing initial interpretations and findings with participants, allowing them to confirm, challenge, or expand upon my interpretations. This helped mitigate the risk of misrepresentation or bias in the

analysis.

7. **Transparency in Reporting:** I have made an effort to be transparent in how my own positionality may have influenced the research process, explicitly stating where my interpretations might be shaped by my views on play and parenting. This transparency served to highlight the co-constructed nature of the research findings.

My professional experience in implementing play-based learning within the IB framework may have predisposed me to view play as an inherently effective pedagogical tool. This could also have led to a potential bias in interpreting the role of play in early childhood development. To counterbalance this, I have critically engaged with literature that questions or contrasts with the play-based approach such as reviewing studies that highlight parental preferences for more formal academic learning (e.g., Almon, 2003; Stegelin, 2005) which allowed me to remain open to perspectives that may diverge from my own educational philosophy. By presenting a balanced view, I acknowledged the legitimacy of different educational priorities, ensuring my data interpretation was not overly influenced by personal bias. At the same time, engaging with parents from Muslim-minority communities in the UK provided a contrasting context, helping me to examine how Islamic teachings intersect with educational practices in different socio-cultural environments, thereby broadening the applicability of my findings. Moreover, to avoid overemphasising parental involvement based on my professional experiences, I conducted interviews and collected data that explicitly addressed the varying degrees of parental engagement. I also included perspectives from parents with different levels of involvement in their children's education, which helped prevent the data from being skewed towards an idealised view of active parental participation. This approach ensured a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of how Muslim parents navigate the balance between cultural values and play-based learning in different contexts.

In summary, while my background as a teacher and my beliefs about the value of play offer valuable insights, they also necessitate ongoing reflection to ensure that the research remains participant-centred. By engaging in continuous reflexivity and taking concrete steps to check my biases, I aimed to ensure that the voices of the Muslim mothers in this study are authentically represented, and that their diverse perspectives on parenting and play are given the weight they deserve.

4.11. Summary of chapter 4

In this chapter, the philosophical assumptions have been clearly presented along with the research design, methods and the instruments used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. In addition, a detailed plan for data collection and data analysis of both qualitative and quantitative types of data has been presented, which made the process of collecting and analysing data clear and straight forward. Moreover, this chapter has also presented the limitations and the challenges that the researcher faced while collecting data, along with explaining the way it was dealt with these challenges to apply the plan designed for the methodology in a smooth and effective way.

The next chapter will present detailed information about the quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedure of this study. The approach used in each type of data analysis, the computer programmes used, and the steps taken from the beginning to the end of the analysis. Along with presenting how best the research questions were answered using the gathered data.

Chapter 5: Data analysis procedure

5.1. Introduction

Preliminary quantitative data for this study was collected using a questionnaire. The quantitative data was collected and analysed before the qualitative data that was obtained through conducting two types of interviews (semi-structured interview and follow-up mini-interview). Interviews were used to achieve an in-depth investigation of the mothers' perceptions of play and the factors that might have impacted these perceptions such as indigenous and Islamic culture. The goal of the data analysis process in this study was to answer descriptive as well as inferential research questions, firstly by identifying frequencies and emergent themes and making meaning of the data, and secondly by finding correlations among variables.

In this chapter a detailed explanation of how data was treated and analysed is provided. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures are presented separately. The first part of this chapter discusses the quantitative data analysis. The second part focuses on qualitative data analysis. Taking into consideration the assurance of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness in both strands.

5.2. Overview of the quantitative data analysis

According to Thompson (2009), good quantitative data analysis depends on constructing a good statistical plan at the beginning of the study to support the analysis procedure. This requires raw data to be systematically reorganised into a format that is compatible with the software used for the analysis. For data analysis, various computer programmes are helpful. These include STATISTICA (by StatSoft) (Weiß, 2007), Microcase (Silver, 1991), SAS (Statistical Analysis System) (Rodriguez, 2011), BMPD (Dixon et al., 1990), Minitab (Alin, 2010) and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (Asthana & Bhushan, 2016), which is the most popular and most widely used in social sciences, and it is the one that was

used in this study. This software contains many statistical measures that make it powerful in analysing data efficiently (Rahman & Muktadir, 2021). Its only disadvantage is that it needs a long time and lots of effort to learn due to its complexity and the wide number of options that it contains (Field, 2018). This study also utilised a descriptive analysis to describe the variables and identify the demographic characteristics of the sample, as well as how data was collected, analysed, and interpreted (Kemp et al., 2018).

5.2.1. Data screening

A total of 120 questionnaire responses were received which was above the target, as the targeted number of participants was 100. First, all 120 questionnaire responses were checked one by one for completion and errors, taking into consideration the 4 main criteria to be met (see section 4.7.3). Of the 120 responses, 103 were found to meet all criteria, therefore, the 17 responses which did not meet all 4 criteria were excluded from the data analysis.

The data from the questionnaire included both numerical and non-numerical data. To prepare data for analysis, each participant was allocated a number, likewise, each question was identified by a number. Some questions were answered using the Likert scale; therefore, each scale point was allocated a number. Some other questions were answered by choosing from a list of options. Similarly, each option was identified by a number. Some other questions were answered in the form of text (sentences). After that, the raw data was carefully entered into the SPSS programme for different types of analysis.

5.2.2. Preparing data for analysis

To make the coding process simple and easy, Neuman (2014) suggested using a coding procedure to code each category of all the variables. Regarding the quantitative strand in this study, data was collected by sending a questionnaire survey to the mothers through different social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Tweeter).

The first part of the questionnaire contained the participants' demographic information including the age, gender, relationship status of the participants, the number of children under 18, the number of children between 3 and 6, the mothers' employment status, spouse or partner's employment status, level of education, ethnic group or background, the country of birth, the country of origin and the level of English fluency.

The second section of the questionnaire contained questions about play; 1) the first question was related to mothers' definition of play, and as a sub-question, the play activities the children prefer to play at home. The mothers were invited to write down their own definitions of play in few sentences, and list the play activities their children prefer to play most at home, 2) to answer the questions about mothers' perception of play; 68 statements were used in a 5 points Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree, for some statements, and 1=always, 5=never, for some other statements). These statements were carefully formed to collect information related to: a) the mothers' perceptions about the importance of play and its relation to learning (18 statements), b) the level of the mothers' involvement and engagement in their children's play (13 statements), c) the level of their enjoyment while playing with their children (6 statements), d) the kind of environment the mothers provide at home for their children to play (14 statements), and, e) the type of play their children prefer to play most at home (9 listed statements -not in Likert scale- to choose from them, with additional spaces to allow adding something else). The Likert scale items were a combination of positively and negatively worded statements, which was important for ensuring the mothers' focus and consistency in their answers.

The third section of the questionnaire was designed to understand how culture and Islamic religion might have impacted the mothers' perceptions about play (17 statements), including how their culture perceives play (their play experiences as children and their parent's attitude towards play), and what does their Islamic religion say about play. This section of the

questionnaire was completed using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). Similarly, the Likert scale items, in this section, were also a combination of positively and negatively worded statements, for the same former reason.

The last section of the questionnaire investigated how best the mothers can gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play, by choosing one or more options from 6 listed options. See the full questionnaire in appendix (A) and a matrix presenting the research questions, the items used to answer each research question, and the type of analysis used for different groups of items can be found in appendix H (table H.1).

5.2.3. Descriptive and correlational analysis

According to Kaur and Phutela (2018), calculating descriptive statistics in order to summarise and understand the aspects of a specific set of raw data, is a vital step in the beginning of quantitative data analysis. The objective of descriptive statistics, as put forward by Kemp et al. (2018), is to measure the central tendency, which means describing the midpoint of a spread of scores, known as the dispersion or variance. While, summarising, typically involves organised quantitative data along with visual presentations such as charts and graphs (O'Connor et al., 2018). Moreover, Kaur and Phutela (2018) added that calculating inferential statistics in quantitative analysis is important and required in most studies, to draw correlational, causative, and/or associative relations between certain variables, or other conclusions from the data.

Both, descriptive as well as inferential analyses, were conducted in this study. Descriptive statistics were necessary to describe the midpoint of the spread of the scores and condense data into simpler summaries which allowed for the presentation of data in an understandable way (Kemp et al., 2018). Descriptive statistics were calculated first, as a prerequisite and a foundation for inferential statistics, identifying the characteristics of the participants, and the frequencies of their answers. At the same time, the inferential statistics were calculated mainly to test the correlational relations between certain variables. Notably, the relation between the

benefits of play and mothers' involvement, the benefits of play and mothers' enjoyment, and the benefits of play and play environment. Moreover, the correlation also was tested between the benefits of play and the cultural and religious beliefs, as well as the relation between the benefits of play and mothers' ethnic background. Along with other correlations such as: mothers' level of education and cultural beliefs, mothers' level of education and ethnic background, ethnic background and cultural beliefs, ethnic background and mothers' involvement/engagement in play, mothers' play enjoyment and play environment, play environment and cultural beliefs, and mothers' play enjoyment and cultural beliefs. The full results of both descriptive and correlational statistics are presented and discussed in the upcoming chapters (6, 7 and 8).

5.2.4. Validity and reliability

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), every research should aim to contribute valid and reliable knowledge to its field of study. In social research, '*validity*' means the extent to which the data, the tools used, and the processes are appropriate. Validity, as elaborated by Noble and Smith (2015), tests how valid are the research questions, how appropriate the methodology, the context of the study, the design, and the sampling methods are, along with testing the significance of the results and the conclusion. In order to ensure that the data collected and analysed are accurate and they appropriately measure the phenomenon under study, Noble Smith (2015) suggested that it is important to assess both the validity of the instruments used for data collection such called *internal validity*, and the validity of the findings, such called *external validity*. Assessing internal validity requires establishing control or comparison groups, for example, ensuring the population representativeness by using randomisation, and collect data from multiple sources and measures, which enhances reliability and reduces measurement errors. And assessing external validity requires considering the study design, selection of participants, and data collection methods.

While '*reliability*', according to Marczyk et al. (2005), means testing how consistent the measures of the study are, how accurate the results are, how consistent the results are over time, how representative the population under investigation is, and whether it is possible to obtain the same results if conducting the research in the same conditions. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) asserted that reliability can be assessed using a diverse number of methods: such as test-retest reliability (repeating the same test at least one more time in different occasion), split-half reliability (administering the same test that is divided into two equal halves), alternate-form reliability (presented as the correlation between different forms of the same measure) and testing construct and consistency (Cronbach's alpha). Moreover, conducting the investigation in an ethical manner is an auxiliary aspect to ensure validity and reliability in any research (Marczyk et al., 2005).

5.2.4.1. Reliability tests used in this study

Construct reliability, according to Field (2018), is the degree to which different measures used to assess the same construct yield similar results, indicating the extent to which a measure consistently measures what it is intended to measure. In this study, construct reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha test in order to determine the extent to which Likert scales were consistent and reliable (Field, 2018). Five different Likert scales with different number of items were used to collect data and answer research questions. The scales that contain large number of items were tested separately. These are: 1) mothers' perception of the benefits of play, 2) play environment provided by the mothers at home, and 3) Mothers' cultural and religious beliefs about play. While involvement, engagement and enjoyment were tested both combined and separately.

According to Hair et al. (2013), the construct can be regarded as reliable if alpha is greater than .70. Results revealed that the mothers' perceptions of the benefits of play with 18 items ($\alpha = .801$). Mothers' involvement scale combined with mothers' engagement, and mothers'

enjoyment while playing with their children with a total of 19 items ($\alpha = .717$). These results indicated that the construct of the above scales is reliable. Play environment provided by the mothers for their children at home with 14 items ($\alpha = .702$), others' cultural and religious beliefs about the potential of play with 17 items ($\alpha = .746$). Considering the results obtained above, the scores of Cronbach's alpha tests of the Likert scales used in this study indicated reliability for all scales. Reliability results are summarised in table 5.1.

Table 5.1 *Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Statistics*

Constructs	No of items	Alpha (α)
Mothers' Perceptions of play	18	.801
Mothers' involvement, engagement & enjoyment of play	19	.717
Play environment	14	.702
Mothers' cultural & religious beliefs	17	.746

5.3. Overview of the qualitative data analysis

Creswell (2007) defines data collection, data analysis, and writing the report of the findings as an interrelated process. He explains the general qualitative data analysis procedure as follows:

In qualitative research, data analysis consists of preparing and organising the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. Across many books on qualitative research, this is the general process that researchers use. (p. 148)

In the qualitative data management and analysis, there are many Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software programmes (CAQDAS) that can be employed (Olapane, 2021), such as: ATLAS (Hwang, 2008), NU*DIST (Non numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising) software (Richards & Richards, 1982), XSIGHT, Weft and QDA (Bazeley, 2007). In this study, NVivo was used for organising and analysing qualitative data because of its useful features, such as folders that can organise documents according to type, which

enables for arranging information and integrating the literature used for better discussion (Bazeley, 2007). Also, this software enables the use of audio or video data directly as data sources, and it can be used for determining reliability that assures stability of the coding process using the coder comparison with the Kappa calculation. Moreover, NVivo allows for using matrix coding for data queries (Ishak & Bakar, 2012).

5.4. Detailed qualitative data analysis process

In this study, the qualitative data analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was in the form of audio recordings, it was collected, transcribed into sentences as appropriate text units, and organised into files and folders (Creswell, 2007). Some interviews encompassed substantial segments of French and Arabic expressions, as detailed in section 4.8.2.2, which necessitated translation by the researcher during the transcription process.

Following the organisation of the data, it was required to continue analysis by getting a sense of the whole database. As suggested by, Agar (1980), it was very important to read the transcripts several times before breaking them into parts, this provided a good general understanding of the data and helped constructing the meaning. After that, the data was coded by being described in detail and systematically classified using Nvivo, into themes and categories that were used later to write the narrative (Byrne, 2022). Code segments were used to develop themes and to describe information, representing both, interesting information wanted before the study, and the unusual, unexpected, or surprising information occurred from the data (Creswell, 2007). Then, the analysis process moved to the engagement in the interpretation phase.

Coding and collating the data resulted in a long list of different codes that needed to be sorted and connected together in order to form themes. Forming themes is a phase where the different codes are sorted and collated into potential themes which allowed for the analysis to be refocused at the broader level of themes rather than codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this

phase, all the relevant coded data extracts were collated within identified themes, identifying how different codes can be combined in order to form different overarching themes. A visual mind-map representation has been created for this early stage of theme formation to help sorting and organising codes into themes, first using a paper and a pencil approach, to draw the presentation and adjusting as needed. Then, the final representation was transferred to the computer.

This process helped to visualise the different codes and made their organisation clear and easy which helped generating themes by grouping a number of relevant codes together after identifying the kind of relationship between them. It also helped to gain an overview of the possible relationships between the themes and between different levels of themes and sub-themes. This phase resulted in forming seven main initial themes and six subthemes, along with twelve sub-subthemes that are all connected. The initial themes were formed by combining some initial codes, and other codes formed sub-themes. Initial themes mind-map is presented in figure 5.1.

5.4.1. Forming themes:

Four different steps were involved in the themes' formation process. In the first step the initial themes and sub-themes were formed, resulting in six initial themes and eight related subthemes. Further analysis of the subthemes resulted in nine sub-subthemes. The themes emerged during the first step are listed below. Followed by a detailed explanation of the second, third and fourth steps of the themes' formation and analysis. To clarify how these themes relate to one another, figures and tables are included (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 1: Generating initial themes and sub-themes:

1. Mothers' attitude towards their children's play (positive/negative attitude)

1.1. Play definitions

1.2. Play activities

1.2.1. Daily play time duration

1.2.2. Investing on toy

1.3. Family engagement in play

1.3.1. Children play together at home

1.3.2. Father and other family members engaged in children's play

1.4. Mothers' engagement in play

1.4.1. Mothers' involvement frequency per week

1.4.2. Mothers' active engagement in play

1.4.3. Mothers' passive engagement in play

1.4.4. Mothers accept messy house

1.4.5. Mothers do not accept messy house

2. Play and learning relationship

2.1. How do mothers perceive the relationship between play and learning

2.2. Gifts for learning motivation

3. Play and culture

3.1. Mothers' play experiences during childhood

3.2. Mothers' parents' attitude towards play

4. Play in Islam (what does Islam say about play)

5. Gaining knowledge about the potential of play

6. Stories

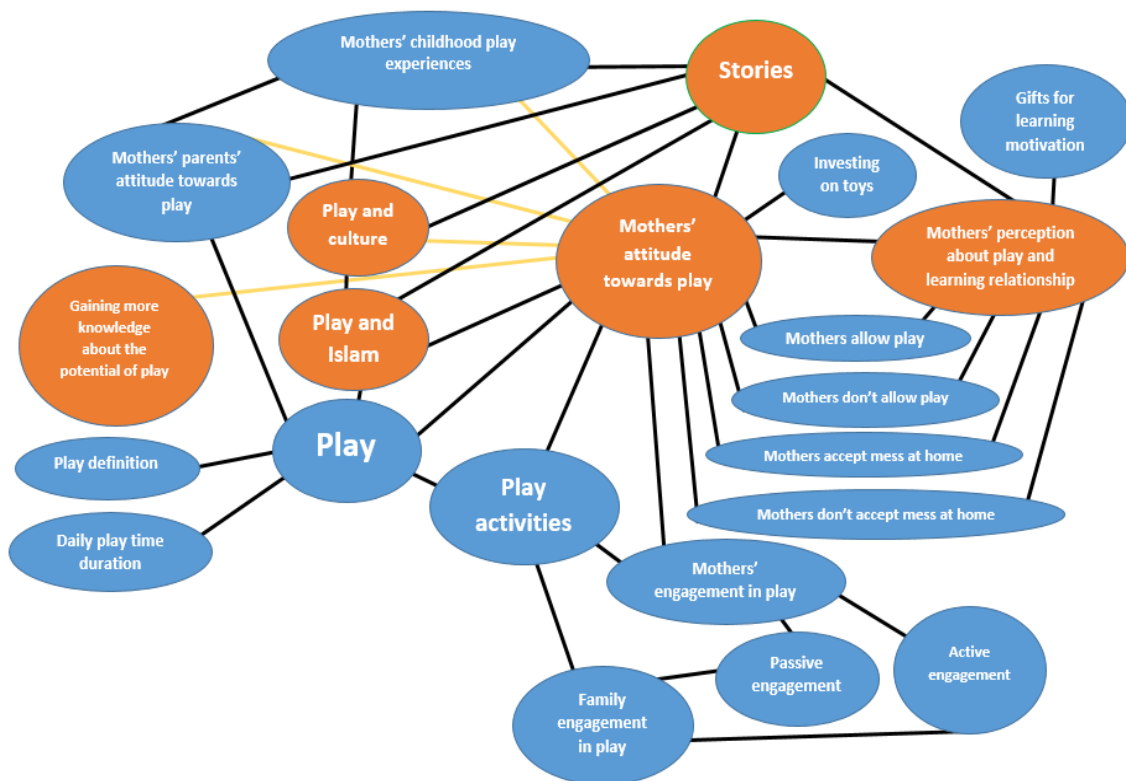


Figure 5.1. Initial thematic map, showing six overarching themes and their sub-themes

Step 2: Relate initial themes to research questions

One of the important aspects that make a good thematic analysis, is that the themes formed from the data collected allow to build up a good platform that participates in answering research questions in a powerful manner (Braun & Clark, 2006). The initial themes formed during step 1, in this study, have been checked, revised, and carefully constructed in order to determine to which extent they are strong, convincing, interconnected and internally coherent, at the same time they answer the research questions. The connections between themes and each research question, is presented in table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 *The Emerged Themes Connected to Relevant Research Questions*

Themes emerged	Research questions related to each theme
Theme 1: Mothers' attitude towards play (mothers allow/do not allow play).	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

Theme 2: Play activities (mothers' engagement in play).	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Theme 3: play definition.	RQ1: How do Muslim mothers define play? What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question).
Theme 4: Mothers' perception about play and learning relationship.	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Theme 5: Play and culture (Mothers' childhood play experiences and Mothers' parents' attitude towards play).	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Theme 6: Play and Islam,	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Theme 7: stories.	RQ1: How do Muslim mothers define play? What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question) RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? RQ3: Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? RQ4: How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play?
Theme 8: Gaining more knowledge about the potential of play.	RQ4: How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play?

Step 3: Forming candidate themes and sub-themes:

This phase is concerned with forming candidate themes along with some sub-themes. The themes formed during the previous phase (step 1) have been reviewed, refined, and combined with some relevant sub-themes, taking into consideration the dual criteria judging categories (Patton, 2015), internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity and ensuring meaningful coherence between the combined themes and sub-themes. At the same time ensuring that the distinctions between them are clear and easy to identify. Ensuring the coherence was through reading and rereading all the collated extracts, in order to form an overview to see whether they seem to form a coherent pattern. At the end of this phase, two main candidate themes were

formed along with four sub-themes that appear to be adequately capturing the contour of the coded data. In addition, a candidate thematic map was created in order to visualise the whole process of creating these themes and their relevant sub-themes. The outcome of this process can be seen in the candidate themes listed below and in the thematic map presented in figure 5.2.

- **Candidate themes**

1. Mothers' attitude towards play (positive/negative attitude):

This attitude is impacted by two factors: indigenous culture and Islamic culture.

1.1 Play and culture

a. Mothers' play experiences during childhood

b. Mothers' parents' attitude towards play

1.2 Play in Islam (what does Islam say about play)

2. Play and learning relationship (How do mothers perceive the relationship between play and learning).

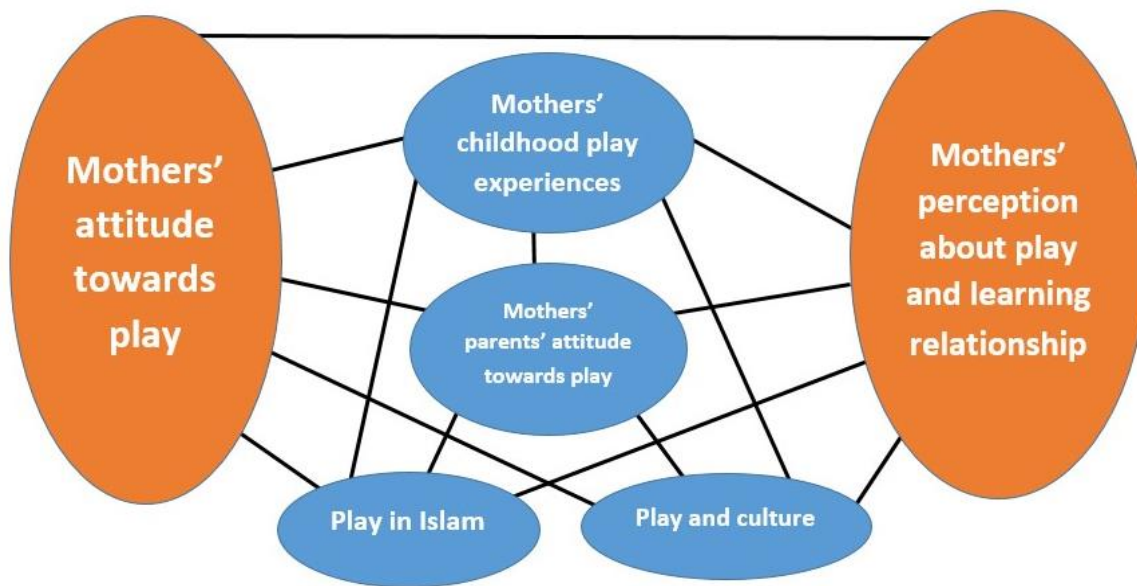


Figure 5.2. The candidate themes and their sub-themes

Step 4: Final main theme and related sub-themes

At the end of step 3, with further refinement of the themes formed in the previous steps, one main theme was found to be capturing the contour of the coded data. This main theme resulted from applying similar process to the previous steps at advanced level. At this level, it was important to consider the validity of each theme in relation to the whole data set, ensuring that all the aspects of this theme cohere around the central idea of this research, which is, the perceptions of Muslim mothers about play and the factors that might have influenced these perceptions. Mothers' attitude towards play, according to their understanding of play and learning relationship, can tell so much about how they perceive play as a base for learning and development. Three subthemes were found to be representing the factors that might influence the mothers' perception about play. Therefore, the type of the influence shapes their attitude towards play either as a positive or a negative attitude. The thematic mind-map developed as a result of the fourth step is presented in figure 5.3.

- **Final main theme and its sub-themes**

Mothers' attitude towards play (positive/negative attitude): this attitude is impacted by 3 factors:

- i) **Play and culture** (mothers' play experiences during childhood and mothers' parents' attitude towards play).
- ii) **Play in Islam** (what does Islam say about play according to the mothers understanding).
- iii) **Play and learning relationship** (How do mothers perceive the relationship between play and learning).

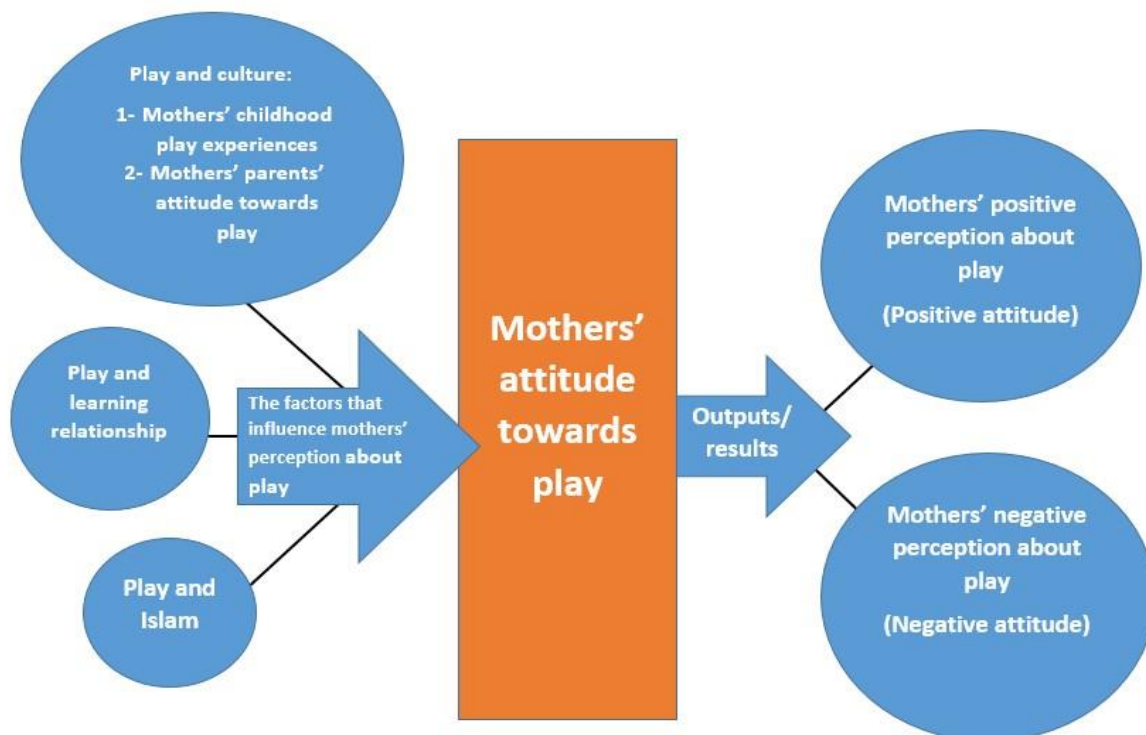


Figure 5.3. The main theme and its relevant subthemes

5.4.2. Codes meaning and explanation

The following matrix (table 5.3) presents the meaning and explanation of the codes and how each code relates to answering research questions.

Table 5.3 *Explanation of the Codes' Meaning, and How Each Code Relates to Answering Research Questions*

Codes	Explanation	Research questions
Biography	Names of the participants (pseudonyms), country of birth, country of origin, country of residency, level of education, number of children, children's gender, and children's age. A table of the participants' biography is presented in section 6.2.2.	Meeting the main criteria
Mothers' Involvement frequency per week in their children's play	Any extracts where mothers talk about how many times a week they get involved in their children's play. E.g. Lama: <i>"maybe twice a week, the average, yes twice, let us say twice a week. Sometimes I play more, some weeks less, yes."</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Mothers' attitude towards their children's play	Any extract where the mothers talk about how they act towards their children's play, whether they allow them or support them to play or not. E.g. Selma allowing, encouraging, and getting engaged in her child's play: <i>"we would make pastries together, I can make her an egg and I get her to whisk the egg, crack the egg, so she gets involved whenever."</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Play definition and play activities children like to play at home	The mothers' own definition of play (how do mothers define play according to their understanding). E.g. Iman: <i>"it is having fun for children in general, by using toys, games, playing indoor, and outdoor, like in the park, and play grounds. Indoor my children [...] play with toys [...] my boy likes cars, vehicles, buses, fire-trucks, airplane, and my daughter likes dressing up."</i>	RQ1: How do Muslim mothers define play? What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question)
Gifts for learning motivation	Excerpts showing that mothers use gifts as reinforcement to encourage their children to learn, either through play or through academic way. E.g. Rowena: <i>"my child already refuses to do the spelling at school. What I started to do is let her write the spelling as a game, and I told her if you do well at school you will get a reward."</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Play in Islam	The mothers' opinion about play according to their Islamic religion; their beliefs of what Islam says about children's play. E.g. Intisar: <i>"the prophet Mohammed advised us to teach our children swimming, horse riding and archery, because this helps them to learn many skills [...] this is play for young children, they enjoy these activities, and they learn from them at the same time."</i>	RQ3: Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background?
Mother's parents' attitude towards play	Extracts where mothers talk about how their parents acted towards play (positively by allowing/supporting or negatively by restricting their play time or activities). E.g. Lama answered the question: did your parents encourage play? Saying: <i>"yes, especially my mum, she got knowledge, she did the research, but in the big family, I remember my grandmother used to tell my mum do not buy toys, it is a waste of money. It is ok to play free play that does not need toys, but buying lots of toys for her it is a waste of money."</i>	RQ3: Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background?
Mothers' play experiences	Extracts where the mothers talk about their play experiences when they were young and even some short stories and funny situations that the	RQ3: Is there a link between the Muslim

during childhood	mothers went through while playing. E.g. Selma: <i>“yes, we have always had toys, like scooters and bicycles, balls, a rocking horse, and my mum used to send us to summer play schemes in summer, so we don’t get bored at home, so we do activities to keep us occupied.”</i>	mothers’ perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background?
Children’s daily play time duration	The time the children spend playing during the day. E.g. Khadija: <i>“I would say she probably spends 4 to 5 hours playing at home, and 1 to 3 hours playing outside, but outside it’s not always outdoor, it is usually in the play groups, because we go to the play group every day.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Investing on toys	When mothers talk about what they think about buying toys to their children, and the reason why they do so. E.g. Rowena: <i>“Toys are important, I feel like, gifting my children a toy is a good thing, it’s not a waste of money, and I can choose the range, the price range, so I can choose like not expensive toys.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Play activities	All the activities the children do at home that mothers consider as play. E.g. Khadija: <i>“toys, play dough, crayons, using the pots and pans in the house, I have not actually started dress up with my daughter. We do go to play groups and the do dress up in play groups. She is still learning about sharing.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? RQ1: (the Sub-question): What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home?
Father and other family members’ engagement in play	Other family members that get involved in play with the child other than the mother (e.g., father, siblings, grandparents). E.g. Selma: <i>“what I see that my husband plays hide and seek with my daughter, I catch you, I catch you I catch you, or he would play racing with her.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Children play together at home	Any excerpts where the participants talk about children (siblings) playing together at home. E.g. Sofia: <i>“doing shapes, I couldn’t imagine they can do something similar, but they still do it together, counting, sometimes.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Gaining knowledge about the potential of play	All about the actions the mothers take when they want to gain more knowledge about the potential of play. E.g. Khadija: <i>“I would try books in the library, looking online, also talking to the health visitor. That is what probably I would do.”</i>	RQ4: How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play?
Mothers' active engagement in play	When the mothers mentioned that they get actively engagement in their children’s play (play with them football, board games, cooking activity). E.g. Sabrina: <i>“when we go outside sometimes, I play with them with the ball or when there are some games outside or going to the museum, or something like that, we do it together.”</i>	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?
Mothers' passive engagement in play	When the mothers show a passive engagement in their children’s play. They are in the same place where the children are playing but they are not part of the play activity (supervising the children playing indoor or outdoor to ensure their safety, or they sit beside them and watch them	RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early

to make sure they are using their toys properly). E.g. Nadia: *“I am there, 50 per cent, to protect them but 50 per cent, I was watching them how they think, how they react to toys, and the relationship between them.”*

Mothers accept messy house

Extract where mothers mention that they put their children’s play first and accept mess at home as long as the children are playing and learning, by allowing the children to use furniture or kitchenware in their play or use home space to play with their toys. E.g. Malika: *“we make a list of their choices and we follow it for a week, if they want, they can repeat it next week, even if they choose something that makes the house messy, I don’t mind, when it’s messy, [...] I can put them in the kitchen, or wherever they want and when they go to bed I clean the place, and I don’t mind doing that, I just want them to be happy.”*

years and its relation to learning?

RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

Mothers do not accept mess at home

Extracts where mothers mention that they allow their children to play as long as they do not make any mess, and they stop them from playing when the house starts getting messy. E.g. Nadia: *“if you come to my flat, everything is tidy and in place, I don’t like mess, and noise, because I get tired during the day, so at this time I need some rest.”*

RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

Play and learning relationship

Excerpts where mothers either mentioned, explained, or gave an example or told a short story about the relationship between play and learning. E.g. Sara answered the question does play relates to learning? saying: *“oh, absolutely, a hundred per cent, play is fundamental to learning [...] my daughter was trying to learn about money [...] doing it on paper it’s very abstract for the children, very, very abstract, so we set up a shop, and we priced everything up, [...] She has to use her play money to figures out how much change she gives me. I did that in the evening few times, and now because she moved from the abstract and has a set of money, she understood it, I did it through play.”*

RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

Stories

The different stories told by mothers, which are relevant and important for the purpose of the study. E.g. Malika: *“my daughter had a doll and a teddy, that she would carry all the time for many years, and last week there was a charity organisation collecting things. She said I want to send them my doll, may somebody play with it. So, you see that means Islam is teaching us how to raise our children, how to act with our children, because every year is a different step for them, and we can realise it through looking after hem, and as teenagers we have to be friends with them not parents only.”*

RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

RQ3: Is there a link between the Muslim mothers’ perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background?

5.4.3. Feasibility

The current study investigated the intersubjective meaning of play for the Muslim mothers living in Berkshire, Southeast of England (UK). Some of the Muslim mothers, by being enthusiastic, and explicitly showed willingness to take part in this study, made the study

feasible and made the data collection easy and rich with information. I (the researcher) have met some of the mothers while delivering a parenting course in Reading (South-East England) and we built good relationship with each other.

Some phone numbers were collected, and a WhatsApp group was created, which was continuously increasing by adding new participants. During the conditions of the lockdown and social distancing restrictions, the contact between the group members was still achieved by phone and internet facilities, which did not affect the trajectory of the study. However, some expected and unexpected challenges occurred before and during the data collection which slightly delayed the process of obtaining data as planned. Nevertheless, this did not affect the timeline of the whole study to submission. For instance, losing contact details of some participants, and some participants were scheduled for the interviews but had circumstances that inhibited the interviews to be conducted on time, such as: sickness of their children, travelling and moving homes. However, none of the mothers was no longer interested in participating, they only asked for more time.

Another, obstacle, that affected the trajectory of the study, in terms of timeline, was the very low-rate return of the questionnaire responses in the beginning, which required resending the questionnaire several times. This demanded extra time and effort; however, it resulted, in the end, in augmenting the responses rate by receiving back 120 responses while the targeted number was 100. Moreover, while conducting the follow-up mini-interviews, 5 mothers showed their willingness to participate in the beginning. In the end, I managed to get back full responses from only 3 mothers. Mothers were given extra time to send their responses, after the time of six weeks dedicated to conduct these mini-interviews was finished, but unfortunately, they did not respond. After that, in order to save time, a decision of considering only the 3 full responses was taken. The participation of 3 mothers with full responses for 8

questions, was found to be reasonable for a follow-up. Apart from that, the data collection procedure was smooth and straightforward.

5.4.4. Credibility and trustworthiness

Credibility, as stated by Gerring (2006), is all about how researchers can defend the choices they made to answer the research questions and explain why they made such choices. At the same time, Lichtman (2013) presented the criteria that a good piece of research should meet, by listing: “1) being explicit about the researcher’s role and his or her relationship to those studied, 2) making a case that the topic of the study is important, 3) being clear about how the study was done, and 4) making a convincing presentation of the findings of the study” (p. 294).

Internal validity, as elaborated in section 5.2.3 is another concept used in research; it is concerned with the meaning of the reality. It is all about questioning whether research findings are congruent and in a good match with the reality, whether they really capture the existing reality and whether the investigators are taking the right track in measuring what they are intending to measure (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). Firestone (1987) argued that while quantitative researchers must clarify that they faithfully followed appropriate procedures to convince their readers of their trustworthiness, qualitative researchers need to provide enough details on their descriptions to persuade their readers that their conclusion makes sense. Because, as put forward by Maxwell (2013), in qualitative research, validity is strongly related to which extent the conclusion of the study is related to reality. In this sense, reality, in this study is how mothers actually perceive play and its importance in children’s learning and development and what their attitude towards play is.

To ensure internal validity and credibility of results in this study, *respondent validation*, also known as, *member checks* (Maxwell, 2013), was applied as one of the strategies. This strategy was used in order to avoid misinterpreting what the respondents said, as some interviews were conducted in more than one language (English, Arabic and French) and they needed translation.

The translation was made by me (the researcher) as I am trilingual who can fluently read, write, and speak these three languages. To ensure the reliability and the validity more, all the translated and interpreted preliminary transcripts along with some other transcripts that were conducted only in English, but they needed confirmation, were all sent back to the participants to check and confirm the responses and interpretation.

Furthermore, the strategy of *adequate engagement in data collection* was also applied, in order to allow for discovering data that permit for alternative explanations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a researcher and as a parenting workshops provider for the majority of the participants, I spent sufficient time in touch with these mothers, receiving and answering their parenting questions, following some of the play activities they post on social media, especially during summer holidays, they maintained sharing pictures of their involvement in their children's play activities. This helped me to build kind of trust and rapport with the mothers which facilitated the co-construction of meaning between me as researcher and the members of the study. This prolonged engagement, enabled detecting and accounting for distortions that might be in the data, which in turn, allowed me to rise above my own preconceptions as a researcher.

5.4.5. Triangulation

According to Merriam & Tisdell (2015), the best strategy to support and increase the credibility or the internal validity of any research, it is to consider the triangulation (regardless of the type used), as it is a powerful strategy. Patton (2015) argued that “triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern (or accusation) that a study's findings are simply a result of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's blinders” (p. 674).

The term triangulation, in social research, means using a number of methods and measures to test an empirical phenomenon to ensure the minimum bias and improve *convergent validity*

that substantiates an empirical phenomenon using more than one source of evidence (Mills et al., 2009). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) consider triangulation a key strategy in the interpretivism constructivism paradigm for ensuring validity and reliability. According to Wolcott (2005) qualitative researchers need to make good links between the research and the real world and they must aim to increase the correspondence between them.

Triangulation of multiple sources was an established practice in this research to emerge findings, as well as triangulation of multiple data (Denzin, 1978). This study, being a mixed methods-case study research, it used multiple sources for data collection. Closed-ended questionnaire for collecting quantitative data, and semi-structured interview with open ended questions along with follow-up mini-interviews also with open ended questions for collecting qualitative data. All research questions were explored and answered by the questionnaire and both interviews, which allowed for triangulation of data in order to obtain high dependability and trustworthiness of data with more valid and accurate interpretation (Zohrabi, 2013).

To ensure credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the findings of this case study research, a cross-reference check of data was applied using the strategy of triangulation. Follow-up mini-interviews were used in addition to interviews and a questionnaire to ensure that the information mothers provided cross the three forms of data were consistent. This cross-reference check provided first-hand and second-hand accounts of the mothers' perceptions and practices about play, which allowed for constant comparative analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

5.5. Summary of chapter 4

Chapter 4 presented a detailed overview of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Along with the assurance of the validity reliability and trustworthiness. After the analysis of both types of data, the qualitative data was connected to the quantitative data to form an overall data ready for interpretation and discussion. The quantitative and qualitative results were presented,

interpreted, and discussed in integration. The interpretation and the discussion provided insights about the extent to which the combination of both data helped in effectively exploring and explaining the problem under study. Additionally, the integration of both data provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how research questions were addressed and answered, by developing final reports that were added to this thesis as chapters.

The following chapters will focus on the findings of the study. The results of both phases of this research will be presented, interpreted, and discussed in four distinct chapters in an integrated manner. These chapters will be structured around the 4 research questions/sub-questions as follows:

Chapter 6 will present participants' biographies, and it will be mainly descriptive as it provides the context for the study's participants. Chapter 7 will report, interpret, and discuss results about how mothers perceive and conceptualise and act towards play by answering research questions 1, and 2. These questions are interconnected, therefore, their answers will be reported, interpreted, and discussed in integration, while Chapter 8 will report, interpret, and discuss results about mothers' societal conceptualisation of play, answering research questions 3 and 4. Chapter 8 will be presented in 2 distinct sections. Section 1 will explore and discuss the factors that might have affected mothers' perceptions of play such as society, culture and religion answering research question 3, in addition to discussing the relationship between these factors highlighting their complex effect on mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play. Section 2 will focus on the different approaches adopted by mothers to support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play, answering research question 4.

At the end of this thesis, a conclusion Chapter will be presented as Chapter 9. This chapter will include a summary of the study findings, its contribution to knowledge, the limitations, the implications, and recommendations for future research, concluding with the researcher's reflections and final thoughts.

Chapter 6: Participants biographies

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the individual characteristics of the participants in this study. Notably the main characteristics including meeting the criteria, the participants' background, ethnic group, and the children's age as well as the participants' relationship status, employment status, level of education and how confident they are in using the English language to complete the questionnaires and the interviews. This chapter is primarily descriptive due to the nature of the characteristics.

6.2. Participants biographies

6.2.1. Quantitative participants' characteristics

6.2.1.1. Meeting the criteria

Descriptive statistics of the quantitative data showed that 100% of the participants who completed the questionnaire (103) met the full criteria (see section 4.7.3). All the mothers were Muslims, had at least one child between 3 and 6 years old, and were all residents of the UK (see appendix H: table H.2).

6.2.1.2. Participants' background and ethnic group

Descriptive statistics were conducted to identify the mothers' ethnic groups and backgrounds (countries of origin and countries of birth). Results revealed that most of the mothers (63.1%) were from an Arab ethnic background, 2.9% were White British and 10.7% of the participants were from other white backgrounds. In addition, 4.9% were Asian-British including Indians (1%), Pakistani (4.9%), Bangladeshi (3.9%), and other Asian Background (1%). The remaining number of participants were from other backgrounds (mixed white and Black Africans and Chinese). Results also revealed that mothers originate from 21 different countries situated in the three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Arab Muslim countries that are situated in Asia and Africa, form the percentage of 76.7%. The remaining 23.3% were from other European

countries. Some of the mothers were born in their country of origin and live in the UK, while some others were born in different countries than their country of origin including 10.7% of them were born, raised, and still resident in the UK. (89.3%) were born outside the UK, African countries (63.1%), Asian countries (22.3%), and 3.9% of them were born in European countries, including UK, France, Lithuania, and Belarus. For more details (see appendix H: table H.3).

6.2.1.3. Children's age

One of the main criteria that the participants should meet, was to have a child between 3 and 6 years old (at the time of the study). However, the participants were also asked how many children they have under 18, and the purpose is to have an overview of the play environment and play opportunities for the children at home, as siblings under 18 are more likely to get involved in their younger brothers and sisters' play activities which encourages them to play and creates a play environment that is different than the environment of a unique child or the child whose siblings are over 18. Additionally, the number of siblings might have an impact on the children's motivation to play at home.

All mothers (100%) mentioned that they had children under 18, the number of children was between 1 and 5 or more than 5. Nine participants (8.7%) had 1, and two participants (1.9%) had more than 5 children under 18, while most of the participants (46.6%) had 2, 3, or 4 children under 18. Results revealed that 100% of the participants had children aged between 3 and 6 years old. 63.1% of the mothers had 1 child between 3 and 6 years old, 3.9% had 3 children aged between 3 and 6 years old, and 33% had 2 children in this age range (see appendix H: table H.4).

6.2.1.4. Participants' age

Results showed that the mothers' age, was between 18 and 50 years old, 83.5% were aged between 31 and 50 years old, while 15.5% were between 18 and 30 years old, and only 1 of the 103 participants (1%) was 50 years old (see appendix H: table H.4)

6.2.1.5. Participants' relationship status

Regarding the mothers' relationship status, results showed that 99 mothers (96.1%) were married, three of them were separated (2.9%) and one was divorced. At the same time, none of the mothers mentioned that they were single cohabiting, or single never married ((see appendix H: table H.4) It is worth mentioning that Muslims, according to their religion, cannot have children outside marriage, and it is prohibited to cohabit without official marriage. This excludes cases of people that do not fully practice the Islamic religion and do not fully obey the Islamic regulations.

6.2.1.6. Caring responsibility

Each mother was asked to comment on whether she takes care of her children on her own, with help from spouse (husband) or she gets help from others, such as parents, guardians, in-laws, or other family members. Although 99 mothers (96%) reported that they were married, (with the rest being separated or divorced) only 84.5% of them said that they take care of their children with the help of spouse and one of the participants responded that she gets help from others (without mentioning whether the husband is included, or others excluding the husband), while 14.6% of the mothers indicated that they take care of their children on their own. Any other way of taking care of the children was not applicable (see appendix H: table H.4).

6.2.1.7. Mothers' employment status

It was important to know the mothers' employment status, as this can be linked to the time they spend playing with their children and the way they get involved and engaged in their children's

play. Results revealed that less than a third of the mothers (27.2%) were not employed but they were looking for a job. Another 25.2% of the mothers were not employed and not looking for jobs, including some who were students (six). In addition, one was disabled and not able to work, 16.5% were full-time employed (including one mother who was working full-time from home) and 17.5% were part-time employed (see appendix H: table H.4).

6.2.1.8. Mother's level of education

Descriptive statistics showed that most of the mothers were highly educated, with 82.5% of them holding a higher education degree (Bachelor's, master's degree, and PhD), while only 1.9% of them stopped their studies at secondary level. At the same time, 15.6% of the mothers had either an A level or GCSE level of education. More details about the mothers' level of education are presented in table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1 *Mothers' Level of Education*

Level of education	N/n	N%
Secondary school	2	1.9%
A level/ level 3 qualification	11	10.7%
GCSE	5	4.9%
Higher education/ degree	85	82.5%

6.2.1.9. Mothers' English level of fluency

To ensure the questionnaire's reliability, it was important to know the extent to which mothers were confident about their English level, so they could understand the questions and give reliable answers. Results showed that only 11.7% of the mothers, English is their first language, while 88.3% of them the English is not their first language. However, 41.7% indicated that they were extremely confident with their English, and 36.9% mentioned that they were confident, and of the 103 participants, only 2 participants reported that they were extremely not confident about their English level, while 11.7% remained neutral about this question. Details are presented in table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 *Descriptive Statistics of Mothers' Level of English Fluency*

Mothers' confidence in using English	N/n	n%
English is my first language	91	88.3%
English is not my first language	12	11.7%
Extremely confident	43	41.7%
Somewhat, confident	38	36.9%
Neutral	12	11.7%
Somewhat, not confident	8	7.8%
Extremely not confident	2	1.9%

Note. The 2 mothers who answered “extremely not confident” about their English, both contacted me asking whether there is a version of the questionnaire in French or Arabic. Since the only version was in English, they completed their questionnaires with assistance from their husbands, who translated the questions for them.

6.2.2. Qualitative participants' characteristics

Qualitative results showed that all the 16 participants who were interviewed, including the 3 mothers who participated in the follow-up interview, met the full criteria (see section 4.7.3). Results also showed that the 16 mothers were from seven diverse backgrounds. Algeria (eight), Lebanon (one), India (one), France (one), UK (one), Saudi Arabia (two) and Pakistan (two). At the same time, most of the mothers were found to have higher education levels. Bachelor's (13 mothers), PhD (two), A level (one). Moreover, all 16 mothers mentioned that they had a child between 3 and 6 years old, and most of them (except for one mother) had more than one child of different ages. The number of children was between the minimum of one, and the maximum of four children. More detailed information about the interviewees' biographies is presented in table 6.3 below. Noting that, mothers who are presented in bold on table 6.3 participated in the questionnaire and in both, semi-structured and follow-up interviews.

Table 6.3 *Qualitative Participants' Biography (Using Pseudonyms)*

Participants' Names	Country of origin	Country of birth	Country of residence	Level of education	Number of children	Children's gender		Children's ages
						Boys	Girls	
1. Rowena	Lebanon	Lebanon	UK	Bachelor's	2	1	1	5, 8
2. Lama	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	4	4	0	9, 7, 5, 5
3. Farida	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	3	1	2	3, 8, 9
4. Nadia	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	2	1	1	6, 9

5. Noor	Pakistan	Pakistan	UK	Bachelor's	3	2	1	1, 6, 7
6. Sara	UK	UK	UK	Bachelor's	2	1	1	5, 14
7. Sabrina*	France	France	UK	Bachelor's	4	2	2	10, 9, 7, 4
8. Fatima	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain	UK	PhD	3	2	1	5, 9, 13
9. Yasmine*	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	2	1	1	4, 10
10. Sofia	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	2	0	2	3, 6
11. Selma	India	UK	UK	Bachelor's	4	3	1	15, 8, 7, 4
12. Malika*	Algeria	Algeria	UK	A level	2	1	1	5, 13
13. Intisar	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	4	4	0	3, 5, 7, 9
14. Khadija	Pakistan	UK	UK	Bachelor's	1	0	1	3
15. Iman	Algeria	Algeria	UK	Bachelor's	2	1	1	3, 5
16. Hasina	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	UK	PhD	2	1	1	5, 7

* Completed the questionnaire and both semi-structured and follow up interviews.

6.3. Summary of chapter 6

The description of the characteristics of the study participants presented in this chapter was important to provide insight into the generalisability of the findings as well as any limitations of the study. It was evident, from the biographical characteristics, that the participants fulfilled the criteria for selection and were therefore the appropriate sample to assist with answering the research questions and enhancing our understanding of the phenomenon. This chapter also assisted in the interpretation of the results, by linking back to the participants' biographies. The next chapter (chapter 7) will present the mothers' personal conceptualisations of play. Chapter 7 will discuss the mothers' definitions and perceptions of play and its importance for learning and development for young children, answering research questions 1 and 2.

Chapter 7: Mothers' perception of play

7.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the mothers' personal conceptualisations of play, following the answers to research questions 1 and 2. Both qualitative and quantitative results, will be presented in a unified manner to provide a more comprehensive answer to these questions. This chapter will firstly present mothers' own play definitions and the activities their children prefer to play most at home (RQ1), secondly, the mothers' perception of the importance of play and how play relates to learning, along with presenting mothers' attitudes towards play, including their engagement and the play environment they provide for their children (RQ2).

7.2. Play definition and children's preferred play activities

This section will deal with answering the first research question, by presenting, interpreting and discussing results from (RQ 1). The first research question was composed of the main question and one sub-question:

- How do Muslim mothers define play? (RQ1)
- What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question)

As part of answering this question, mothers first provided their own definition of play via both qualitative and quantitative data, and they listed the play activities their children prefer to play most at home in both data sets.

7.2.1. Mothers' Play definitions

Results showed that play was defined by respondents, in both data sets, according to its values and characteristics. Both data sets displayed almost identical definitions of play from mothers using different synonyms. Three main meanings dominated most of the definitions, noting that most of the mothers used more than one meaning in their definitions. These meanings are: 1) play helps for learning, 2) play is fun and enjoyment, and 3) play is engagement and interaction.

To illustrate this, a table was created (table 7.1 below) demonstrating the number of mothers who share the same meaning in their definition of play, in both data settings, along with all the synonyms used for each meaning. Some participants were counted more than once because they provided more than one meaning in their definitions. However, the mothers who provided the same meaning in both data sets were, as mentioned in table 7.1, counted only once.

Table 7.1 *Number of Mothers Who Share the Same Meaning in Their Play Definitions, and the Synonyms They Used for Each Meaning*

75 mothers defined play by describing its learning and developmental values: (67 quantitative and 8 qualitative participants)		
Meaning 1	Synonyms used by the 67 quantitative participants	Synonyms used by the 8 qualitative participants
Learning and development	Communicate	Rowena: Play is a good source for children to learn.
	Be self-aware	Lama: Play is creativity.
	Imaginative activity	Farida: Play is something beneficial.
	Develop/development	Nadia: Play is important thing for the development of children.
	Discover	Sara: Play is sort of imaginative activity.
	Explore the world	Fatima: Play is time for learning new skills.
	Be active	Sofia: Play helps children discover, know what is around them.
	Pedagogical way of learning	Khadija: Play stimulates children's learning and help them develop.
	Stimulates the mind	
	Acquire new skills	
	Building personality	
	Helps for growth	
	Spending quality time	
	Experiment	
	Understand	
Behavioural rewards		
Emotional rewards		
Social and psychomotor rewards		
Gaining new experiences.		
47 mothers defined play as a fun and joyful activity: (38 quantitative and 9 qualitative participants)		
Meaning 2	Synonyms used by the 38 quantitative participants	Synonyms used by the 9 qualitative participants
Fun and enjoyment	Enjoyment	Lama: Play is joy, it is happiness.
	Happiness	Sabrina*: Play is an enjoyable moment.
	Excitement	Fatima: Play occupies the children, with something enjoyable.
	Recreation	Yasmine*: Playing is fun, it is enjoyment.
	Entertainment	Sofia: Play is to have fun.
	Amusement	Selma: Play is just enjoying yourself and have a good time.
	Spending enjoyable time especially with others	Intisar: Play is enjoyment.

Iman: Play is having fun for children.
Hasina: Play is a fun activity; it is something that we entertain ourselves with when we do it.

42 mothers defined play as a way of engagement and interaction: (36 quantitative and 6 qualitative participants)

Meaning 3	Synonyms used by the 36 quantitative participants	Synonyms used by the 6 qualitative participants
Engagement and interaction	Engage Act Relax Exercise Connection Relationship Interacting Increasing imagination Expulsion of negative energy Distress Freedom Express feelings and emotions Wounding stress Sharing ideas Involvement.	Noor: Play for me is interacting at home with your kids. Sabrina*: Play is a moment where we can laugh with friends, have activity together. Yasmine*: Play is freedom, play is relaxing, play is peace with yourself and people with whom you are playing. Selma: Play can just give you good vibes in yourself. Malika*: Play is a type of language the children can express themselves. Intisar: Play is people sharing nice time together, sharing a game that are interested in.

** Also participated in the questionnaire providing the same definition that is counted only once.*

Based on the results presented in the table 7.1, play is regarded by most mothers as a vital means of providing children with opportunities to learn, develop, explore, enjoy their time, and practice their independence. According to some definitions, children play to foster imagination, create social connections, strengthen family bonds, and gain and develop many skills notably, motor, cognitive and social-emotional skills. According to some other definitions, play seems to be viewed by some mothers as a fun and entertaining activity that provides happiness and enjoyment for the children.

The participants used different synonyms for each of the 3 meanings (meaning 1: play helps for learning, meaning 2: play is fun, meaning 3: play is engagement and interaction). Noted that some participants used more than one meaning in their definitions. This resulted in them being counted more than once, except for the ones who participated in both data sets and provided the same meaning (see table 7.1). These synonyms are detailed below.

7.2.1.1 Learning and development

A total of 75 mothers (67 from the questionnaires and 8 from the interviews) defined play by describing its learning and developmental value, using a significant number of synonyms to “learning” such as: communicate, be self-aware, imaginative activity, develop/development, discover, explore the world, be active, pedagogical way of learning, stimulates the mind, acquire new skills, building personality, helps for growth, spending quality time, experiment, understand, behavioural rewards, emotional rewards, social and psychomotor rewards and gaining new experiences. For example, play, as defined by participant 48 (questionnaire) is:

A way to stimulate and develop the mind properly, whereby, children can acquire new skills and abilities to learn about their own feelings and emotions and ways to express them healthily. It stimulates the child's awareness and ability to communicate, therefore develops social skills. I believe, play is crucial for building a child's personality.

This was further confirmed by eight different interviewees. Sofia, for instance, emphasised that play is not merely for fun, it is a learning and discovery process, by saying:

Play? Okay, I would say it is to have fun and learn at the same time, it is like discovering what is around us for the child, like they do not know what happens around them, what are the different textures, and materials, yes. I would say discovering for them.

Fatima (interview) also defined play as a learning facilitator, stating: “*for me playing time is time to learn, new skills especially, [...] for me playing time is for learning skills, and enjoyment between me and my kids [...] as well.*”

It seems that this group of mothers strongly relate play to learning and development values. They seem to see play as a tool that accelerates children’s learning and helps them gain skills faster. Play for these mothers refers to any activity that fosters a child's learning and development. Their use of synonyms such as ‘pedagogical way of learning’, ‘understanding’,

'communicating', 'be self-aware', 'acquire new skills', 'imaginative activity', 'stimulates the mind', 'explore the world', 'experiment', and 'gain new experiences', may indicate their belief that play relates to allowing children to explore their creativity and their surroundings. It also allows them to make discoveries, expand their cognitive abilities, and learn from direct experiences. In addition, the development of play definitions, based on these meanings, may provide further evidence that these mothers deeply appreciate the benefits of play for their children on a multidimensional level. The mothers' definition of play using the listed synonyms is very much aligned with neurological and cognitive definitions of play in the literature. Pellis et al. (2014), for instance, defined play as an activity that enhances sensory processes and helps stimulating the neurotransmitters, as it connects to the brain activities and impacts the cognitive development in general. According to Pellis et al. (2014), play can be used to enhance the sensory experiences, as it triggers the release of neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin in the brain. These neurotransmitters play a significant role in regulating cognitive processes, attention, and motivation. Play exposes children to a wide range of stimuli, including sights, sounds, textures, and movements. This engagement of the senses stimulates neural connections and helps children develop sensory processing skills. Thus, children's engagement in play activities allows them to learn how to interpret and integrate sensory information, which enhances their overall cognitive development.

Mothers also used phrases like "be active" and "psychomotor rewards" which may highlight their awareness of the physical aspect of play, such as movement and engagement with the environment to promote physical development. This aligns with Spencer's (1878) definition of play as "superfluous actions taking place instinctively in the absence of real actions. Activity performed for the immediate gratification derived, without regard for ulterior benefits" (p. 3). Other phrases, used by mothers to define play, like "emotional rewards" and "social rewards" underscore mother's recognition of the social and emotional rewards of play, including

improved communication skills, self-awareness, and the development of positive behaviours. Mothers also seem to understand that play provides a platform for children to learn about emotions, relationships, and social interactions. This play definition used by mothers is aligned with Mandryk and colleagues' (2006) philosophy of play, indicating that they were able to identify different emotional states, in their study, including enjoyment, frustration, and boredom, through the combination of self-report measures and physiological responses. Moreover, Eberle's (2014) psychological philosophy of play views play as an intended activity that is stimulated by emotional experiences.

The phrases "behavioural rewards" and "building personality" used by mothers suggest their beliefs that play can influence behaviour by helping children understand cause-and-effect relationships and develop self-regulation. It may also suggest that mothers recognise the importance of play in skill development and personality building. They seem to recognise play as a formative activity that contributes to a child's sense of self and identity. This definition links to Evans's (2012) point of what constitutes play, arguing that play includes free imaginative activities that foster their creativity and help them develop a sense of self-identity. In addition, the phrase "spending quality time" indicates that mothers view play as an opportunity for bonding and building a strong parent-child relationship. This notion is also strongly supported in the literature, such as research by Ginsburg (2007), which highlights the crucial role of play and suggests that play includes many activities that help promote healthy child development and maintain strong parent-child bonds.

The mothers' use of all these aforementioned synonyms to define play indicates that they perceive play as a complex and comprehensive activity that encompasses various aspects of a child's holistic growth, recognising that play is not just a leisure activity but a pedagogical process through which children acquire knowledge and skills. It also highlights their belief that

learning is perceived as an ongoing and dynamic process facilitated by play, something that is also suggested by Pellegrini (2011).

Additionally, the mothers' diverse definitions of play emphasising its learning and developmental value through various synonyms, align with contemporary research on the importance of play in child development. These findings of how mothers define play echo the idea that play includes learning and promotes holistic child development (Pellegrini, 2011). Piaget (2013) and Vygotsky (1978, 1987) also highlighted the importance of play in expanding children's cognitive abilities and developing their knowledge about the world. The mothers' notion of play as a learning tool that involves various aspects of children's development is also well aligned with Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) theory of cognitive development, as elaborated in the literature review of this study (section 3.4). Vygotsky's theory emphasises play as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), arguing that allowing children to engage in activities just beyond their current abilities helps them develop physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. The ZPD, as a fundamental concept in Vygotsky's (1978) theory, represents the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person, often an adult or peer (see section 7.4.1.1). Similarly, Durlak et al. (2011) suggested that play fosters language and communication skills, while Weisberg et al. (2013) stressed that play empowers children's motivation system, which is important for them to stay curious and motivated. Moreover, from a sociological point of view, Belsky (2012) elaborated that play develops empathy in young children, especially children who have limited social interactions. It helps them become more disciplined and have more impulse control by helping them monitoring their motor reactions.

Based on this group of mothers' definitions that emphasise learning and development, the mothers seem to understand and appreciate the above connotations between play and learning, showing that they value play more and consider it a vital aspect for learning and development.

7.2.1.2 Play is fun and enjoyment

A total of 47 mothers (38 quantitative, and nine qualitative, from which two participated with the same definitions in both data sets, but counted once, only as qualitative participants) (see table 7.1) defined play as a “fun/joyful activity”, using different synonyms, such as: enjoyment, happiness, excitement, recreation, entertainment, amusement and spending enjoyable time especially with others. Participant 40 (questionnaire), for instance, defined play as *“a moment of joy and enjoyment for kids as well as parents.”* Participant 93 (questionnaire) and Intisar (interview), both equated play to enjoyment entertainment and amusement with others, by stating: *“Play is the time where children enjoy themselves and learn how to become creative, and also spend time with their siblings, friends and parents while playing with them”* (Participant 93). *“Play is enjoyment, people sharing nice time together, sharing a game that are interested in, and happy with, and they entertain themselves, while playing that game.”* (Intisar, interview). Lama (interview) strongly emphasised joy and happiness in her definition of play, by saying: *“Play is joy, is happiness, yes, it is joy and happiness.”*

The second set of definitions, from these 47 mothers, strongly associates play with fun, enjoyment, and happiness, considering play as a healthy socialisation for children. The mothers’ definitions of play using synonyms like "enjoyment," "happiness," "excitement," etc., reflect a deep appreciation for the positive and recreational aspects of play. This links to many scholars’ points of views in the literature, notably, Sutton-Smith (1997) and Huizinga (1949) who argue that play is a source of joy and pleasure, emphasising its inherent positivity and its role in contributing to children’s overall well-being.

Mothers' focus on play as a source of enjoyment and happiness aligns with research emphasising the emotional well-being that play brings to children. For example, Burdette and Whitaker (2005) suggested that play reduces stress, promotes positive emotions, and contributes to overall mental health. Phrases like "recreation," "entertainment," and

"amusement" used by mothers, suggest their belief that play is intrinsically motivating for children. This aligns with the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2008), and with supports the notion that activities driven by intrinsic motivation, such as play, lead to greater satisfaction and engagement which has a positive effect on children's psychological state, mental health, and overall well-being. This notion is also supported by many scholars such as Durlak et al. (2011) and Belsky (2012), who see play as a form of relaxation and leisure for children, as well as Sutton-Smith (1997) and Pellegrini and Smith (2003) who view play as an activity that provides children with a space for enjoyment and rejuvenation. The use of the term "excitement" in some definitions, indicates that mothers recognise play as a naturally stimulating and engaging activity, a view which aligns with Bodrova and Leong (2015) who said that play captivates children's interest and offers opportunities for exploration and discovery.

Mothers' descriptions of play as "fun" and "joyful" indicate that play is often intrinsically motivated, and it brings happiness and satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) argued that this intrinsic motivation can be a powerful driver for joy and happiness as well as learning and exploration. The mothers' definitions that play is fun and joyful seems to be assorted with definitions provided by many old and contemporary scholars. Schiller (1875) for instance, stated that play is "the aimless expenditure of exuberant energy" (p. 3); Froebel (1887) added that play is "the natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood" (p. 3), and later Groos (1898) defined play as an "instinctive practice, without serious intent, of activities that will later be essential to life" (p3). In addition, Dewey (1922) defined play as "activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond themselves" (cited in Saracho & Spodek, 1998, p. 3). Similarly to how this group of mothers' view play, play according to the theorists mentioned above, is a fundamental aspect of human experience that is not driven by

external goals or outcomes. Instead, play is viewed an end in itself, pursued for the sheer joy and pleasure it brings, as advocated by Dewey (1938).

The concept of "spending enjoyable time especially with others" that the mothers used to define play underscores the social aspect of play. Playing, according to this group of mothers, helps to reduce stress levels while spending enjoyable time with others, increases self-esteem, and improves communication skills, which helps children develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively. At the same time, as argued by Pellegrini (2011), spending enjoyable time with others while playing allows children to discover life and develop their interpersonal skills, promotes social skills, and fosters healthy social relationships.

Generally, the mothers seem to understand and appreciate the above connotations between play and enjoyment and seem to encourage play activities that allow their children to experience a joyful time.

7.2.1.3 Play is engagement and interaction

A group of 42 mothers (36 from questionnaire and six from interviews, from which three also participated in the questionnaire but counted once, only as qualitative participants) (see table 7.1) defined play as "a way of interaction" using the following synonyms: engage, act, relax, exercise, connection, relationship, interacting, increasing imagination, expulsion of negative energy, distress, freedom, express feelings, and emotions, wounding stress, sharing ideas and involvement.

Participant 24 (questionnaire), for instance, stated that: "*Play is engaging in activity for enjoyment and recreation especially when children play together.*" Similarly, Noor (interview) explained what play means to her by saying: "*Play for me is interacting at home with your kids, helping you with different things as well, you are having fun at the same time, they are learning as well, and you are having that bond with your child as well.*"

In addition, participant 33 (questionnaire) added: *“Play is a way of making connection and relationship. It is a way of communicating, interacting, and increasing imagination.”* While Yasmine (interview) defined play saying:

Play is freedom, play is relaxing, play is peace with yourself and people with whom you are playing. Playing is fun. It is enjoyment. It is a disconnection from devices, from the world. Play is paradise for those who know how to play.

This group of mothers mostly linked play to interaction and engagement. They associate play with social growth and development considering any activity that allows children to interact, get engaged, connect, create new bonds and relationships, share ideas, and get involved as play. The concepts used by mothers such as “engage,” “act,” “connection,” “relationship,” “interacting,” “sharing ideas and involvement” and “spending enjoyable time especially with others” underscore the social dimensions of play. Play, according to these mothers, involves interacting with peers or caregivers, contributing to the development of social skills, cooperation, and relationship-building (Pellegrini & Smith, 2003). This notion about what constitutes play expressed by these mothers may indicate a belief that if children can connect, explore, and create relationships, they will be able to develop important skills that will last a lifetime. According to Sutton-Smith (1999), play not only provides physical and mental benefits to children, but it also helps to build the sense of belonging and community. This notion also highlights the mothers’ belief that when children have the chance to share their play and experiences with others, it can help build relationships, foster empathy, and cooperation, and build trust and communication, which are essential skills for future life (Zippert et al., 2020). A similar notion, as elaborated in (section 3.8), was strongly supported by sociocultural theorists, such as Vygotsky (1978) who asserted that development and learning are embedded within the social events, considering knowledge to be constructed through the interactions children socially create and share with each other. Van Hoorn et al. (2011) find the definition

that views play as a social activity to be also aligned with the constructivist's point of view, which argues that children's involvement in social interactions, while playing, facilitates their development, as this development tends to happen through social and physical explorations. Based on the above, the mothers seem to believe that there is a link between play and engagement which makes them appreciate and encourage interactive play activities.

Moreover, the mothers' view of play as "a recreational activity" by using synonyms like "relax," "exercise," "expulsion of negative energy," "distress," "freedom," "express feelings and emotions" and "wounding stress" echoes the idea that play serves as a stress reliever for children. Sutton-Smith (1997) argued that play provides a space for children to escape daily pressures and engage in activities that bring joy and relaxation. Similarly, Shonkoff et al. (2011) considered play to be known as a very good stress release exercise which helps children foster their emotional security and prevents them from developing toxic stress. While playing, children, according to Shonkoff et al. (2011), experience healthy stress and get exposed to some kind of competition, which helps them gain the ability of regulating stress and coping with stressful life events, which in turn allows for developing healthy attitudes in the future. This finding may also suggest that mothers' emphasis on play as a joyful and recreational activity can influence their own engagement in play with their children as further elaborated in section 7.4.3. Hurrell et al. (2015) suggested that parents who perceive play as enjoyable are more likely to actively participate in their children's play, fostering positive parent-child interactions. The perception of play as joyful also aligns with cross-cultural research, indicating that the joy and amusement associated with play are recognised universally across different cultures (Göncü & Gaskins, 2007).

Finally, the differing views, presented by the mothers of what constitutes play while attempting to define it, aligns with what is argued throughout the literature that play has proved to resist definition, as elaborated in the literature review (section 3.5). McInnes and Birdsey (2014),

asserted that it has been difficult for different theorists to come up with a common conceptualisation or definition of play due to their different points of view of what constitutes play. This was the case for the mothers in this study. Their different points of view of what constitutes made them come up with diverse definitions rather than a common definition. The wealth of play definitions in the literature, and as we have also noticed, in this study by the mothers, is one of the reasons that make choosing only one definition difficult. Producing a general and accurate definition for play requires taking into consideration the different perspectives from which play can be viewed, explored, and understood, including play being an aspect, a function, a physical, a social, an emotional or an intellectual activity. However, the mothers' diverse and multidimensional definitions showed rich point of views and deep conceptualisations of what constitutes play from their perspectives. This echoes Eberle's (2014) proposition of what he called an ongoing, onward-rolling definition suggesting that "play is an ancient, voluntary, 'emergent' process driven by pleasure that yet strengthens our muscles, instructs our social skills, tempers and deepens our positive emotions, and enables a state of balance that leaves us poised to play some more" (P. 231).

7.2.2. Children's preferences of play activities

This sub-question was both quantitatively and qualitatively explored. In the questionnaire, free and guided play were listed for the mothers to select which one their children prefer more. Results revealed that, according to the mothers, 71.8% of their children prefer free play, 15.5% prefer guided play while the remaining 12.6% prefer both free and guided play (see appendix H: table H.5). At the same time, a list of seven different types of play was also provided for mothers in the questionnaire to select which type of play their children prefer. Results revealed three top types of play that are preferred by children, according to the mothers: outdoor/exercise play (71.8%), object/quiet play (64.1%), and constructive play (59.2%), without mentioning

any differences between boys and girls. It is worth noting that the type of play that the children seem to prefer the least is exploratory play (27.2%) (See appendix H: table H.6).

Out of the 103 quantitative participants, 10 mothers, in addition to selecting the preferred types of play from the list, they also selected the “something else” option to report that their children prefer to play other types of play. However, the results indicated that all the activities added by the mothers as something else fall into one or more of the categories already listed. These play activities are: drawing, painting, crafts, puzzles, cars, play dough, magic sand, cards, video games, (quiet play), skipping rope (outdoor/exercise play), cooking, playing with siblings/family members, and board games with an adult (social/interactive play), Legos (constructive play) (see appendix H: table H.7).

Qualitatively, play activities were questioned more in-depth. The question was more open ended, asking the mothers to describe the play activities their children like to get involved in most at home. By answering this open-ended question, the mothers were able to provide an overview of their children's play preferences. Qualitative results showed that all the activities listed by the mothers also fall into one or more of the categories already listed in the questionnaire. The activities the children like to play most indoors and outdoors, as listed by the interviewees are Legos (constructive play) Rowena said: *“My son likes to play with Legos. He likes building stuff and doing some shapes.”* Board games, card games, chess, playdough, drawing and using toys including cars, dolls, and soft toys (quiet play). Sara for instance stated: *“My children play board games, card games, my daughter plays with dolls, her teddies [...] she has like a kitchen, she plays in, she does dress ups [...] that is play as well [...] My older one, for him, is more [...] card, board games and electronic stuff.”* Football, riding bikes and hide-and-seek in the park (outdoors/exercise play) were also mentioned by many mothers, such as Malika for instance who said: *“I also play with them in the park, some fun games, we play football, hide and seek and stuff like that.”* Dress up (pretend play) was also noted by mothers,

Iman said: *“now my daughter she is 5 and she likes dressing up, she uses my cloths, she uses my makeup. I think because she watches the little mermaid princess, this is why she likes dressing up.”*

Furthermore, several mothers indicated that their children enjoy playing with kitchenware and participating in kitchen activities like baking, cooking, making dough, chopping vegetables, or simply making sounds with stainless steel pans and spoons. They expressed a positive attitude towards giving their children some space in the kitchen to allow them to play and learn many skills such as developing fine motor skills while using the dough and doing the washing up. Iman said: *“When my son was 1 year old, he used to like playing with kitchen ware, saucepans, spoons [...] I give him saucepan, and sometimes he gets them by himself from the lower cupboard in the kitchen.”* Mothers noticed their children learning measurement and using their senses to see, touch smell and taste different textures, as well as learning some vocabulary by repeating the names and the colours of the vegetables and kitchen utensils, e.g., Sara when saying: *“we wood cook together and learn measurements”*. Most of the mothers reported that they encourage their children to play in the kitchen and they create convenient and safe environment for them and get involved in this type of play activities most of the time (see chapter 6 for more details).

According to both quantitative and qualitative data, mothers seem to have reported similar play activities preferred by their children at home. Indicating that indoor and outdoor play activities are both liked by their children, mentioning that they encourage both free and guided play, as they find them equally important for their children’s cognitive and physical growth and development.

The findings in relation to this question indicated that children had diverse play preferences that included a range of play types. This suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to play, and children's interests and inclinations can vary widely. This is strongly supported by

Ginsburg (2007) who discussed the importance of recognising play differences among children and respecting individual play styles to promote optimal child development. The high preference for outdoor/exercise play (71.8% of the quantitative participants and seven interviewed mothers) may indicate that children by nature need the physical activity and seek for it, and mothers seem to be encouraging them by providing the right environment (e.g. Fatima who provides her children with outdoor physical play equipment, as she explained in sections 7.4.1.1, and 7.5).

In addition, this may indicate that these children possess natural energies, and outdoor play provides them with the opportunity to participate in physical activities such as running, jumping, climbing, and cycling. A countless number of studies have been conducted and referenced in the literature exploring the benefits of outdoor activities for children's development. Mothers in this study seem to be aware of these benefits, echoing the suggestions of many studies in child development, e.g., Chawla (2015) and Olivos-Jara et al. (2020) that playing outdoors often allows children more freedom and independence. They can explore their surroundings, make choices, and test their own limits. Chawla (2015) added that this autonomy supports the development of decision-making and problem-solving skills. The outdoor environment, according to Louv (2008), encourages imaginative play, stimulates creativity, and fosters cognitive development. Children can transform sticks into swords, rocks into treasure, and open fields into uncharted territories. This finding about the importance of physical play is also consistent with Chaput et al.'s (2018) argument that regular physical activity is essential for children's physical health, including the development of strong muscles and bones, cardiovascular fitness, and obesity prevention. The same argument was made by Chawla (2015) indicating that outdoor play provides children with sensory experiences they cannot get indoors. Moreover, nature exposure, as elaborated by Kahn (1997), from feeling grass underfoot to hearing the sounds of birds, contributes to a child's cognitive development,

creativity, and overall mental and psychological well-being. In this regard, Kuo and Faber (2004) highlighted the restorative and stress-reducing effects of nature on children. This is strongly supported by the biophilia hypothesis (Kahn, 1997; Olivos-Jara et al., 2020; Chang, et al., 2020) that suggests that humans have an innate affinity for nature indicating that outdoor play allows children to form a connection with the natural world, which is associated with a range of positive psychological and cognitive outcomes. Mothers in this study seem to be aware of the above benefits of the outdoor play, and this may explain why they encourage it.

Results in this study also showed a substantial preference for object/quiet play (64.1% from questionnaire and nine indications from interviewed mothers) and constructive play (59.2% from questionnaire and seven indications from interviewed mothers). This could be an indicator of parents encouraging structured, skill-building activities as a result of their understanding of the significance of cognitive and creative play. This assumption is also supported by the mothers' testified willingness to encourage their children to engage in this type of play by providing the right environment such as providing convenient toys and getting engaged in order to motivate their children (e.g., Sara who gives her child space at home to make discoveries through play, and she also gets engaged, as elaborated in sections 7.3.1.1. and 7.5). Children engaging in these activities, according to this group of mothers, may develop problem-solving skills, nurture creativity, and develop fine motor skills. This is consistent with Maitland et al.'s (2013) argument that when children prefer object/quiet and constructive play, it suggests that they are interested in activities that engage their cognitive skills which fosters their problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making skills as well as encouraging imagination and creativity. Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (2013) both argued that children who gravitate towards object/quiet and constructive play are likely seeking mental challenges and opportunities to learn. They can use objects to create stories, scenarios, and unique worlds. This type of play is a canvas for their imagination and storytelling skills.

Moreover, engaging in object and constructive play often involves building, organising, and structuring materials which requires using focus, order, organisation skills and spatial awareness (Lillard et al., 2013). A preference for this type of play can indicate that a child is drawn to activities with a sense of order and structure which develop skills that are strongly linked to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Hirsh-Pasek (2009) predicted that building with blocks or engaging in construction projects can lay the foundation for understanding principles in the STEM domains. Children who enjoy this type of play may develop an early interest in the STEM subjects and the skills associated with them. Although not all mothers in this study mentioned the reasons why their children prefer a particular type of play (especially in the questionnaire as there was no specific question to capture the reasons), their attitude of allowing and encouraging these play types may indicate that they understand the benefits of play in developing the above skills.

In addition, results also showed that exploratory play, according to the mothers' indications, was the least preferred among their children. Eisenberg et al. (2015) highlighted that exploratory play typically involves manipulating objects to understand their properties and children who are frequently exposed to structured and adult-led activities may develop a lower preference for exploratory play. If, according to Eisenberg et al. (2015), children are accustomed to activities with specific goals and instructions, they might find free exploration less appealing especially in relation to outdoor activities. Valentine and McKendrick (1997) added that parents may have concerns about the safety of unstructured outdoor or exploratory play which can limit children's opportunities for unsupervised exploration, leading to a lower preference for this type of play. This might explain why in this study the percentage indicating the children's interest in this type of play was lower when compared to other ones. Some mothers mentioned that during their childhood, they used to spend a long time outdoors without being supervised because the sense of community and safe neighbourhood was stronger, but

know they supervise their children because it is not safe. e.g., Sara when she said: *“I remember leaving the house after school or after lunch in summer and play the full day outside until 7 or 9 o’clock in summer, only went home to use the bathroom, or to eat [...] and it was very unsupervised play. We lived in a safe neighbourhood. But our children live in a different time.”*

This is also related to Rogoff’s (2003) argument that cultural and environmental factors can also influence children's play preferences. In some cultures, or urban environments, there may be limited access to outdoor spaces for safe exploration, which can impact a child's preference for this type of play. In this respect, it is relevant to mention that in the current study the reason was not only cultural but related to some life circumstances. Part of the current study was conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic, with outdoor space restrictions. This might be another reason of why mothers reported that their children were less interested in exploratory play.

However, a low preference for exploratory play does not necessarily indicate a lack of curiosity and it is not necessarily negative. It may simply indicate, according to Piaget (20013), children’s diverse interests that are more aligned with their unique personalities and temperaments. Some children may simply be more drawn to other types of play, such as constructive play, imaginative play, or social play. Maitland et al. (2013) noted that some children may be naturally more cautious or less inclined to take risks or find this type of play as less engaging compared to other activities, which can influence their preference for exploratory play. In addition, digital devices and screen-based activities have become more prevalent in children's lives, leading to a reduced exposure to exploration, as pointed out by Christie & Roskos (2009).

Free and guided types of play preferred by the children were also explored. Results indicated a high preference for free play (71.8% from the questionnaire and five interviewed mothers) over guided play (15.5% from the questionnaire and four interviewed mothers) in addition to

the remaining (12.6%) of the mothers who completed the questionnaire and seven interviewed mothers whose children prefer both free and guided play. The high preference for free play may underline that the mothers recognise the importance of unstructured and child-initiated activities, and they encourage it. This is consistent with research highlighting that free play fosters imagination, creativity (Piaget, 1962), and self-regulation skills (Lillard et al., 2013), while Vygotsky (1978) found it essential for children's overall development. This notion of the importance of free play is also consistent with research by Lillard et al. (2013), advocating for less structured playtime to promote children's autonomy and imagination. However, the preferences for guided play and the combination of free and guided play may suggest that some children benefit from structured and adult-led activities. As elaborated by Hirsh-Pasek (2009), this highlights the need for a balanced approach to play, where guided play can provide support for skill development and scaffold learning, while free play allows for creative exploration.

Generally, children's preferences for play types vary widely. Whitebread et al. (2017) asserted that children's play preferences are influenced by a complex interplay of individual, contextual, developmental, and cultural factors, which makes it essential to recognise and honour these individual differences in play preferences. Piaget (2013) argued that children's play preferences can also vary based on their developmental stage. As children grow, their play preferences may shift towards more or less structured and goal-oriented activities, and to support their holistic development, it is essential to provide opportunities for them to engage in a variety of play experiences. Although mothers in this study did not mention the reasons behind their children's choices and preferences of play activities, it is reasonable to assume that the children's choices and preferences can be due to one or more of the factors listed above.

The overall conclusion of this section (section 7.2) indicates that mothers' play definitions were remarkably aligned with the types of activities they said their children prefer to play most at home. This might be explained that the mothers observe their children when they play and

according to the activities their children get involved in, they built up their definitions of play. Additionally, mothers' encouragement of the types of play their children prefer to play is strongly related to how they see play and which kind of activities they consider as play. The children's play preferred activities cited by the mothers were either educative, fun, or interactive. These types of activities formed the mothers' definitions of play.

7.3. Mothers' perceptions of play's importance and its relation to learning

- How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play and its relation to learning?

(RQ2)

Research questions 2 explores the mothers' perceptions of the potential benefits of play in early years from different perspectives along with their attitudes towards it. In the quantitative strand, mothers were asked to state to what extent they agree or disagree with several statements presented in a Likert scale about the importance of play (see appendix H: table H.8). Some of the Likert scale items were positively worded and others were negatively worded. However, both types were designed to assess how mothers perceive the importance of play in early years, and how they think play relates to learning. As for the qualitative strand, mothers directly answered these questions, as open-ended questions, during the interviews.

Quantitative results showed that 99% of the mothers agreed or strongly agreed to 5 out of the 11 statements presented in table H.8 appendix H, about the benefits of play, 98.1% agreed or strongly agreed to two of them, 97.1% agreed or strongly agreed to two of them, 96.1% agreed or strongly agreed to two other statements, and 100% agreed or strongly agreed to the remaining one of these statement, while none of the mothers (0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements and less than 3.9% of the participants remained neutral.

Overall, results indicated a significantly positive perception among mothers regarding the importance of play. All mothers converged in their perception of the value of play. There was

a widespread acknowledgement among mothers that play offers children opportunities to explore new experiences and helps develop different skills and abilities. Results showed that over 95% of the mothers agreed or strongly agreed that play is valuable for their children, and over 95% of them agreed or strongly agreed that if they take time to play with their children, they will be better at playing with others. Furthermore, over 98 % of the mothers agreed or strongly agreed that their child learns social skills through play (see appendix H: table H.8). Mothers were also highly aware that playing at home helps their children in school as it helps improving language, communication, and social skills (98.1%). Through play, children learn to express positive as well as negative emotions (e.g., happy, or sad) (98%). Additionally, all mothers recognised that play is an integral part of their children's daily activities.

As for the qualitative strand, the 16 interviewees reported that play is important and fundamental for children in early years. Each of the interviewed mothers specified why they believe play is important. Five initial themes were generated from their responses; Theme 1) Play is vital for learning. Within this theme there are three subthemes: a) play can become a learning experiment, b) play helps understand children and teach them the right skills, and c) Play helps for growth and change and strengthens family bonds. Theme 2) Play helps discover children's talents. Theme 3) the lack of play hinders children's learning and development. Theme 4) the importance of attending nursery at early age and learning through play until age of seven. All these themes are discussed below.

7.3.1. Play is vital for learning

Both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that all the mothers agreed that play is important for learning. Over 91.3% of the quantitative participants agreed or strongly agreed with all the statements that emphasise the importance of play (see appendix H: tables H.8 and all mothers in the interviews asserted that "*wherever there is play there is learning*" (Fatima). A wide range of explanations was given by most interviewed mothers regarding how important

play is and how it assisted their children's learning in various areas. Echoing Vygotsky's (1978) perspective about the benefits of play, mothers found play essential for children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development, showing a high awareness of the importance of play, which motivated them to encourage it from early age.

Several mothers clearly affirmed that play is important for children's learning. Malika, for instance, is a mother of a 5-year-old boy and a 13-year-old girl. She said, talking about her children: *"They play, and they learn at the same time, they cannot get involved in any play activity without learning."* Likewise, Sara, as a mother of a girl aged 5 and a boy aged 14, also, explained how play helped her daughter learn different math concepts in an easy and joyful manner. She stated, when she was asked if she thinks play has any relation to learning and development:

Oh, absolutely, a hundred per cent, play is fundamental to learning, [...] my daughter was trying to learn about money. Doing it on paper it is very, very abstract. So, we set up a shop, and we priced everything up, and we used play money to figure out the change [...] and now because she moved from the abstract, she understood it. I did it through play, there was no point to sit there and try to teach her that kind of stuff [...] we would play shopping at home, with maths involved in shopping, [...] we cook together and learn about measurements [...] her life was full of this kind of play going on, and I found that she started to excel in her academic. I saw that relation between playing and me teaching her through play, and her achievements in school. I think that has accelerated her by a year full, and that has a lot to do with her learning through play at home with me.

Sara, like many other mothers, tried to give evidence of play being not only important but vital for young children's learning. This agrees to the literature such as Vygotsky (1978, 1987) who states that children's learning can be supported by adults' involvement in play that contains

learning goals. She extensively explained how she successfully used play to teach her child mathematics in an enjoyable way. She also demonstrated through sharing this experience how she believes we can teach children many concepts through play.

According to both types of data, a large group of mothers showed high awareness towards the importance of play and its potential for learning, indicating that when children are given the opportunity to play, they improve their fine and gross motor skills, self-expression, imagination, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This is consistent with many scholars such as Piaget (1968), Vygotsky (1978), Belsky (2012) and Weisberg et al. (2013), who all emphasised the importance of play in promoting social, emotional, and cognitive development, in addition to reducing stress levels, improving mood, developing various skills, and enhancing overall well-being. Mothers also indicated that their engagement and involvement in their children's play helps them learn. This finding is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of ZPD, as elaborated in the literature review and the theoretical framework of this study. ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner can perform with the help of a more knowledgeable person, such as teachers or parents/caregivers (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD represents the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with assistance. Vygotsky's reference to this assistance as 'scaffolding,' means supporting the child's learning by providing guidance. This support can take various forms such as questions, hints, or explanations. The scaffolding can be gradually removed when the learner starts becoming more competent and able to take responsibility. Vygotsky (1978) saw play as a critical context where the ZPD is in action, stating that when a child engages in play, they often operate at the upper boundary of their current abilities, and playful activities encourage children to stretch their skills and problem-solving capabilities (Doolittle, 1995). Highlighting that play represents a zone where children can move beyond what they can do alone and receive support from a more capable peer, caregiver, or teacher (Vygotsky, 1978). This concept of scaffolding

can be used to explain mothers using play to support their children's learning especially by getting involved in their play and by creating a play environment that supports learning.

Additionally, mothers mentioned that children learn how to interact, cooperate, and communicate by playing with others, which enhances social skills. They learn how to deal with emotions and conflicts, as well as how to express themselves. This is also consistent with the findings of various studies in the literature. Based on the literature review of this study (section 3.3.1), from a sociological point of view, Belsky (2012) asserted that play develops empathy in young children, especially children with limited social interactions, and it monitors children's motor reactions, which helps them become more disciplined and have more self-control.

Mothers also indicated that play has neurological benefits and allows neurons to establish new connections. For example, Lama after mentioning that she was attending some child development related courses (see section 8.4.1), she said: *'I am now more convinced that play is the most important thing that our children can do, because it affects their brain development, in the sense of their senses, using their senses. So, there are more neurones, more neuron connections.'* This finding is consistent with Pellis et al.'s (2014) study that explored the benefits of play from a neurological perspective, noting that play has many advantages for sensory processes and helps stimulating the neurotransmitters, as it connects to the brain activities and impacts the cognitive development in general. As a result of their awareness of this neurological perspective, mothers in this study may have placed importance on, and encouraged the children to engage in social interactions on a daily basis.

7.3.1.1. Play as a learning experiment

As for mothers' awareness of the importance of play for learning, many of them expressed their belief that the play environment can serve as a laboratory for experimentation, where learning

can take place. Fatima (mother of a girl and 2 boys aged 5, 9 and 13 years old), provided interesting examples about how she turns playtime into learning experiments:

Play helps children discover and try new things because most of play includes experiments. When the child, for example, takes a paper and cut it and put it inside the tub that is filled with water and see that it floats and it does not sink while other things such as heavy toys, sink, this is an experiment. Children experience their knowledge. [...] I feel like the child that does not play does not have communication skills, creativity, or invention, I feel like invention is strongly related to play, and, also, play is based on trial, hands-on, when the children try, they learn.

Moreover, Sara also described how she established a play environment at home that was conducive to teaching her 5-year-old daughter addition, subtraction, and measurements through play, stating:

I remember I tried to teach my daughter addition and subtraction [...] we went to the shop, we bought 10 sweets, and now we go home and share this with her teddies. She has two teddies, so how many sweets each teddy gets? [...] then she understood. So, I taught lots of stuff like that, through play. She got it, and still more challenging work if you try to do that on paper, yes, they are learning through play [...] through cooking she learned measurements as well. We taught her about grams and litres.

According to this group of mothers, the play environment can become an ideal place to carry out many experiments, where children are able to play a key role in creating these experiments and gain valuable knowledge and skills. The active role of mothers in creating learning experiments within play at home highlights the importance of parental involvement in a child's education. Mapp (2013) indicated that parental involvement positively influences children's academic and cognitive development. The mothers' notion that play environment can serve for

learning experiments is in line with the concept of experimental play developed by Dewey (1938) and the concept of scientific inquiry in play developed by Berk and Winsler (1995). Through experimental play and by participating in activities that have tangible outcomes, these mothers believe that children are better able to understand concepts and ideas.

The idea that play can serve as a laboratory for experimentation and learning (e.g., Fatima & Sara) is well-supported by Dewey's (1938) educational theory and research. It underscores the value of experiential learning, parental involvement, and the practical application of knowledge within the context of play. Dewey's (1938) approach emphasises experiential learning as a fundamental approach to education, arguing that learning should be grounded in real-life experiences and that active engagement with the environment is central to meaningful learning. Hands-on activities can enrich a child's educational experience and promote both cognitive and socioemotional development.

Mothers also mentioned that by engaging in experimental play, children can learn how to think critically and develop problem-solving skills. Additionally, engaging in experimental play can also lead to better communication (Fatima) and collaboration (Sara), as well as improved creativity and innovation (Farida in section 7.3.1.4). This is consistent with Berk & Winsler's (1995) who have explored the role of scientific inquiry in play. Their work underscored how children can engage in inquiry, exploration, and experimentation during play, leading to cognitive and problem-solving development. From the above, mothers seem to be aware of the benefits of involving children in hands-on play activities. Maybe their awareness does not derive from knowing what theorists say, but it is rather derived from their experiences and the way they engage in their children's play.

7.3.1.2. Play helps understand children's abilities and teach them the right skills

An interesting result obtained from the interviews, was that some mothers do not only believe that play is important for their children, but they also use play carefully and intentionally to

teach their children specific skills. There is also a widespread belief among mothers that play helps them to better understand their children. It gives them an overview of their children's capacities, abilities, interests, and inclinations. As a result, children are taught the right skills at the right time. Hasina, who is a mother of 2 children aged 5 and 7, illustrated this point by saying, when asked whether she thinks play relates to learning:

Yes, I think so, play affects the learning and development, even if the game or the activity is not directed for learning. For example, we have a book that contains lots of drawings which are not coloured, and my daughter is colouring them all the time. So, I think when she colours them, she learns boundaries, how to not get out of the line, so she colours just inside the shapes, so this helps her to be focused and to determine what to colour what not to colour.

Nadia, a mother of a boy and a girl aged 6 and 9, also shared an example of how she teaches different skills to her children through play, stating:

For me playing time is time to learn new skills especially [...]. When my son plays with the ball, it is not only how to play with the ball, but also if he can score, [...] and how he manages himself to score. It is not just enjoyment; it is how to practice as well.

Additionally, Sabrina, who is a mother of 2 boys and 2 girls aged 4, 7, 9, and 10, explained in different stories how she managed to teach lots of skills to her children through play, notably, social skills, communication skills, and interpersonal skills. She extensively explained:

Yes, it is particularly important for them to play because that establishes their personality as well. To compromise, for example, one wants to play football and the other one wants to play something else [...] Sometimes I hear them saying ok we play half an hour football to please Hamza and then we play my game, so it helps them to do negotiation [...]. Also, the kids when doing gardening or playing outside they will

learn much more than just sitting on the desk. We make activities like problem solving, to have a solution [...] when cooking something together they can do much more calculation on maths than when just doing their maths homework. This is what we call playing for learning.

Play, as a key component of learning, emerged as one of the most interesting and significant outcomes of this study. It is evident that this group of mothers' view play as a learning opportunity for their children. They expressed their opinion by stating that play can be extremely beneficial for children if directed in a learning direction by their parents. This notion was linked to the mothers' belief that play helps them to better understand their children, by giving them an overview of their children's capacities, abilities, interests, and inclinations. As a result, children are taught the right skills at the right time. A total of 12 out of 16 interviewed mothers in this study explained extensively how play helped them understand their children's interests and capacities, therefore it was used to nourish these interests and improve these capacities. For all mothers, without exception, play time is learning time, even if the game or the activity are just for fun and do not contain any learning objectives. They demonstrated their view that children can profoundly benefit from play, since it allows them to have fun while simultaneously learning a wide range of skills, and so many of them used play to teach skills.

The recognition among mothers that play can be a deliberate tool for teaching specific skills aligns with the concept of guided play used by Hirsh-Pasek (2009) that emphasises the intentional use of play as a deliberate tool to teach specific skills. This recognition among mothers highlights their understanding of the importance of incorporating play into the educational process, as it offers a natural and effective way for children to learn and develop a wide range of abilities. As elaborated in the literature review (section 3.3.2) Guided play, according to Hirsh-Pasek (2009) involves providing some structure and adult involvement while still allowing for child-led exploration. The adult's role is to actively engage with the

child, providing direction and guidance while still allowing the child to have autonomy and choice. By incorporating play into the learning process, adults can tap into children's natural curiosity and desire to explore, making learning more enjoyable and effective. This approach, according to Gallant (2009), recognises the importance of adult guidance in play to support skill development.

The mothers' belief that play offers insights into their children's capacities, abilities, interests, and inclinations is also strongly supported by research in child development. Erikson (1985) considered play as a natural and a powerful medium through which children express themselves and demonstrate their emerging skills and preferences. He also suggested that play allows parents to observe their child's developmental progress in a natural context. Furthermore, the mothers' idea that play allows children to learn the right skills at the right time is consistent with the developmental perspective in education. As asserted by Cople and Bredekamp (2009), developmentally appropriate practices emphasise tailoring teaching methods to align with a child's stage of development, ensuring that learning experiences are meaningful and effective. The mothers' involvement in using play as a teaching tool reflects their awareness of the importance of parental engagement in children's learning. This is consistent with Bornstein, Tal and Tamis-LeMonda's (2013) research that emphasises the positive impact of parent-child interactions, including play, on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Bornstein, Tal and Tamis-LeMonda (2013) found play to be a shared activity, allowing for joint interaction and learning between parents and children, indicating that these shared play activities promote bonding, trust, and a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives. The mothers' notion about the importance of play in teaching skills if directed properly by parents, aligns with the idea of parent-as-teacher, where parents play a crucial role in their child's early learning experiences as advocated by Christie and Roskos (2009), who recognised that this

notion empowers parents to take an active role in their child's education, which results in being more effective in fostering early years education.

However, the idea of using play intentionally requires parents to find the balance between structured goal-oriented play and child-initiated free play. Meadows (2012) asserted that both approaches have their merits and contribute to different aspects of a child's development. According to Hirsh-Pasek (2009) structured play targets specific skills or knowledge areas using educational games and activities that are designed to teach concepts, such as early math or literacy skills. This can contribute to introducing children to the routines and expectations of formal schooling, which, as stated by Meadows (2012), helps children's transition to structured learning environments. And because guided play is frequently associated with clear learning objectives and outcomes, it is easy to assess the child's progress. Although this type of play can be effective for children to learn specific targeted skills, as argued by Christie and Roskos (2009), according to Berk and Winsler (1995) highly structured play may limit a child's creativity and imagination because it leaves less room for open-ended exploration and self-expression and may lead to performance pressure and stress in children, as highlighted by Deci and Ryan (2008), which can be detrimental to their enjoyment of learning. For the sake of balance, Dewey (1938) believes that it essential to allow some space for free play, considering this type of play inherently motivating, as it encourages creativity, imagination, and exploration, and the children have the freedom to create their own scenarios and stories. Dewey (1938) added that child-initiated play brings joy and pleasure to the child, which fosters the love of learning.

In conclusion, it is evident from the findings and the above discussion that mothers recognise a child's learning and development as complex process, therefore, a balanced approach to play is advantageous. The approach that incorporates both structured and free play recognises that both forms of play are valuable and can be integrated to provide a well-rounded educational

experience as elaborated by Hirsh-Pasek (2009) who emphasise the importance of playful learning, and the value of both structured and unstructured play, highlighting that integrating the two approaches, helps children benefit from the advantages of skill-focused learning while also having the freedom to explore, imagine in a joyful manner.

7.3.1.3. Play helps for Growth and change and strengthens family bonds

Some mothers noticed growth and change on their children because they play every day. When asked what their children's growth and change is due to, they answered 'to play.' Khadija, for instance, who has a girl at the age of 3, explained her point of view saying:

My daughter recently started playing make-believe, so she would pretend being a doctor, or a pilot or something, yes, that is a new thing. Today she was pretending that she was mama, and I was her, and I was just saying to my husband today, I cannot believe how much she was grown and changed.

Khadija added after being asked what she thinks this is due to, saying:

To play. Yes, definitely. I think most of the learning comes from play. If you can do play right and if you can put Islam into play, then you have got win. Especially learning not just Islam, any learning, if you can put it into play, then it shapes your child all over.

In addition, some mothers presented interesting perspectives to the concept of 'play in relation to learning,' explaining that children get ready to learn after they play. They also think that when parents play with their children, they are showing them love, which makes them feel secure and relaxed. This helps children's minds become clear and ready to learn. Yasmine, for instance, is a mother of a boy and a girl aged 4 and 10, shared her perspective of how play relates to learning saying:

For me, play is the best way to learn. When the kids play their minds are ready to assimilate many things, to learn more, because they are already relaxed [...]. When

you play, you are taking the toxins away from your body, which means your mind is like pure, clear, and ready to learn. But when the children do not play, they do not get rid of the negative energy. So, it is difficult to assimilate what they want to learn, [...] and what stays in their minds and souls [...] my parents do not play with me means they do not love me. They are always worried [...] because if the children do not feel safe and secure, they are not ready to learn, their minds are half blocked. But if at home the children feel loved, they learn better. So, the best way to show your kids that you love them, just play with them.

Lama as a mother of four children aged 9, 7, and twins aged 5, emphasised both her own relationship with her parents as a child and her relationship with her children as a mother, explaining that she was more attached to her mother than to her father because her mother played with her more. Lama mentioned that she is applying this with her own children by playing with them which is creating strong family bonds, and helping for growth and development:

Play can also affect the parent's relationship with their children. Now I see it. Back to my childhood and my relationship with my mother, I am seeing my children now. So, I try to do this connection. Play affected my relationship with my parents, I feel more connected to my mother than my father, because my mother was playing with me [...], and my father was not that much in playing. So, this affects children's relationship with their parents and also it affects their brain, it helps them grow and develop their skills, [...] their fine motor skills, and their muscles. Play helps everything to be better.

According to this group of mothers, play, certainly, helps children develop and grow. Mothers stated that children's involvement in specific types of play indicates active growth and change. They believe that most of the learning comes from play, and putting Islam into play, for example, is a win-win for Muslim parents and their children. According to these mothers,

children can foster their learning and understanding of Islamic principles and develop the skills required for Islamic daily practices through play. This statement may reflect a well-informed mothers' perspective on the positive effects of play on children's growth, development, and readiness to learn. It may highlight the interconnectedness of emotional well-being and cognitive development, emphasising the crucial role of play in promoting spiritual and religious beliefs for Muslim children.

These mothers observed noticeable growth and positive changes in their children, and they attribute this development to the regular act of play (e.g., Khadija). This observation aligns with Ginsburg's (2007) research in child psychology which highlights the many benefits of play in early childhood, such as improved cognitive, physical, and social development. The mothers also discovered that after playing their children were better prepared to engage in learning (Yasmine). This idea is consistent with the concept of "readiness" in education. Play, according to Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992), provides a foundation for cognitive development and often precedes formal learning, equipping children with skills and knowledge that facilitate their preparedness for more structured educational experiences. This observation is also supported by Hirsh-Pasek's (2009) argument that play fosters cognitive readiness, as it encourages curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

Additionally, the mothers noted that playing with their children is an expression of love, indicating that this emotional connection strengthens parent-child bonds and creates a sense of security and relaxation for their children. This finding aligns with Bowlby's (2008) attachment theory, which underscores the importance of secure attachment relationships in a child's emotional well-being. Secure attachment established through responsive caregiving and play, according to Bowlby (2008), is associated with emotional well-being and provides a foundation for children to explore and learn. Furthermore, mothers suggested that the emotional connection established through play participates in helping clear children's minds and prepares

them for learning (Yasmine). This idea is in line with the concept of socio-emotional development and its impact on cognitive readiness. A secure emotional foundation, according to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC, 2004) can contribute to a child's ability to engage in learning. Through providing a child with love, support, and a sense of security, parents can create an environment that encourages cognitive development, enhances motivation, and fosters positive relationships which makes it, according to the NSCDC (2004), imperative to prioritise the emotional well-being of children in order to create a nurturing and educational environment that empowers them to thrive academically.

Based on the mothers' quotes and explanations, these mothers seem to have a high awareness of the benefit of play in relation to children's growth and the importance of creating strong and secured family bonds and relationships.

7.3.1.4. Play helps discover children's talent

One of the most remarkable findings that emerged from the interviews is that some mothers use play and play time to discover their children's talents, and abilities by observing them while playing. In this respect, Farida elaborated:

I observe them when they are playing, for example when they are drawing. I like to see what they are thinking about [...] I always think, it could be something that I do not know about them. So, their drawings can show me something that they might be hiding, without putting pressure on them to know what is in their mind. I also allow them free drawing; they might be talented. I mean to find out whether they are talented. They love drawing and I support them in using their time effectively.

Farida, also, explained how play helped her discover many talents in her children by announcing:

On Friday, for example, my two daughters got a certificate. They had a project about numbers, and they had to create a board for numbers, and they won for being the most creative girls and they created a useful board and made it all by themselves.

Fatima also said that she encourages her children to be more creative and she prepares the environment for them to discover their talents. The following is her quote:

I like them to play things that allow for them to be creative to see what they can do. I help them and I push them to create something, robots, for example, anything that they can do. I basically want them to be creative and use their imagination to see what they like to create.

These mothers believe that play is a powerful tool in helping to discover and nurture a child's talents. Through play, according to these mothers, children can gain an understanding of their own capabilities, practice and refine their skills in a low-stakes environment. Mothers who are encouraging play with a precedent attention to watch the children's actions and reaction during their play to assess their way of thinking and discover their talents, seem to be aware of the unlimited benefits of play for children's development. They also seem to be aware that allowing children to explore and experiment through play can be an essential part of helping them to identify and develop their talents. The concept of children's talent development is widely used by Winner (2000), who highlighted that play offers a low-stress, exploratory environment where children can identify their interests and strengths. The same concept is also aligned with Gardner's (2011) theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), which acknowledges diverse talents and ways of learning for individuals. This theory, although it has been criticised for the lack of the empirical evidence that supports the existence of multiple intelligences, lack of practical application especially in education as it does not offer clear guidelines to teachers and educators to apply it in educational settings, lack of cultural relevance as it is seen reflecting mainly Western Eurocentric perspective (Calik & Birgili, 2013), it has, however, influenced education

by promoting diverse teaching methods. MI theory suggests that educators should be encouraged to recognise and cultivate students' strengths in different intelligences, and the assessment should not be limited to traditional tests but should include a variety of methods that allow students to showcase their strengths (Gardner, 2011).

Mothers also mentioned that they allow their children to explore their abilities and interests through play. They encourage them to get involved in certain play activities such as free drawing (e.g., Farida) which stimulates their intelligence, and they provide them with the right environment that fosters creativity (e.g., Fatima). Consequently, these mothers appear to have a good understanding of the developmental stage of a child between the ages of 3 and 6. They also appear to know that the development of certain skills for children during this stage is dependent on parents' attention and intelligent decision-making. At the same time, it seems like these mothers are aware of the age-appropriate play activities such as free drawing and participating in school project competitions (e.g., Farida). The mothers' notion of allowing children to explore their interests aligns with Hidi and Renninger's (2006) approach of interest-driven learning. This approach acknowledges that nurturing talents is most effective when driven by a child's intrinsic motivation and passion. At the same time, the perspective that play allows children to explore and develop their talents emphasises the importance of fostering a growth mind-set as put forward by Dweck (2016). When children play, they have the freedom to try new things, make mistakes, and learn from them. This learning process, according to Dweck (2016), allows children to develop resilience, adaptability, and a sense of self-efficacy. They understand that intelligence is not fixed, and that hard work and perseverance can lead to improvement. It is worth noting that growth mind-set is a psychological concept developed by psychologist Dweck (2016). Contrary to a fixed mind-set, which believes that abilities are fixed and cannot be changed, a growth mind-set emphasises the belief that abilities can be improved through effort and perseverance. Dweck (2016) suggested that growth mind-set encourages

children to see challenges and failures as opportunities for learning and improvement which motivates them toward further achievements.

Mothers also mentioned that they are teaching and assessing their children's creativity through play. This may indicate their understanding that play is a platform for children to understand their capabilities and enhance their skills, and that play provides opportunities for practicing and refining abilities in areas such as problem-solving, creativity, and interpersonal skills. Multiple studies in child development support mothers' notion about the role of play in fostering, creativity, and interpersonal skills. Resnick (2017), for instance, in his argument that play fosters creativity, stressed the importance of not confining play to childhood. Instead, play should be integrated into learning throughout life. Education, according to Resnick (2017), should prioritise fostering creativity and imagination in learners. Encouraging learners to embrace their creative potential helps in equipping them with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world as elaborated by Zhao (2012). However, while parental involvement is crucial, there is a need for balance. Elkind (2007) highlighted the dangers of over-scheduling children's lives, concluding that excessive emphasis on structured activities and pressure for cognitive development during play might unintentionally lead to stress, anxiety, and a lack of opportunities for autonomy, as cited by (Yogman et al., 2018) who advocated for a balanced approach between adult directed and child-directed play, allowing for free exploration and imagination.

In addition, the belief that mothers can discover whether their children are gifted and talented through observation during play aligns with Robinson's (2008) notion that early signs of giftedness can be evident in children's behaviour and interests. However, identifying giftedness typically requires a comprehensive assessment. Robinson (2008) suggested that early signs of giftedness, such as advanced cognitive abilities or intense interests, may be observable in children's behaviour, and parents can discern giftedness through play because gifted children

often have unique passions and curiosity that drive them to explore and learn beyond their age group. However, it is crucial to recognise that these signs alone may not be enough to make a definitive determination of giftedness. A more comprehensive assessment is necessary to fully understand a child's giftedness, such as the Cognitive Assessment System (CAS), the Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (CTONV), Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scale (SBIS), and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV) that were used by Newton et al. (2008) to identify gifted children aged between 6 and 12 years old. These assessments provide a more accurate and reliable measure of a child's abilities and potential than observation alone.

In conclusion, it is important to mention that mothers' conceptions of play and the use of play to identify their children's talents and interests may indicate that these mothers understand that play serves more than just entertainment for their children. They also seem to find it as an effective tool for identifying and enhancing children's intelligence.

7.3.1.5. The lack of play may hinder children's learning and development

Three of the 16 interviewed mothers (Noor, Malika, and Sabrina) admitted that they have been unaware of the extent to which play is essential for learning and development when they had their first child. Thus, their first children were not encouraged to play as much as their subsequent children. With time, they noticed a distinct difference between their children who played enough and those who did not. These three mothers offered some interesting mini stories about their children's experience with lack of play. They illustrated the impact of a lack of play on their children's development and learning. Noor, for instance, is a mother of 3 children aged 1, 6 and 7 years old. She illustrated her children's play experiences, when asked whether play relates to learning and development, explaining:

A lot, a lot [...] my first son was less than 2 when I got the second one. So, I was not able to do too much for both at the same time. There was a difference. I would have

given him more time, because my second one I let him play more. I used to spend too much time with the second one, and I can now see the difference in personality. Now with my third one I am very much like she is the only one [...] I let her play with pens, taking her to the library to see other children, and spend time outside with other children of her age. I think we do not realise this, but it has noticeably significant impact on them when they are growing up.

In the same respect, Malika, who is the mother of a girl aged 13 and a boy aged 5, sadly told her daughter's story about how the lack of play affected her development in several ways, stating:

My daughter since she opened her eyes, [...] her father used to buy CDs for her to keep her busy and quiet because we used to live in a shared house, and we had to keep her quiet and well behaved. So, she was attached to the TV, and then I started switching the TV off for her, so she started drawing the stories, but her reading was delayed, she was 6 and not able to read a word. The TV that was holding her back from reading. Reading and writing was not important for her, only drawing was her language, she was expressing herself through drawing not through writing. She did not play enough this is why she could not learn language. Playing for learning she used it less, she used TV more, but playing for enjoying her time, she did play a lot [...] yes, this is why my daughter was behind in some skills, such as learning language, and her social skills were exceptionally low.

Similarly, Sabrina, who is a mother of 4 children from her current husband has also a 27-year-old son from her previous husband who lives now in France with her mother. She mentioned that she was not letting him play at home because she did not like the mess. It was more

important for her to keep the house clean and tidy than to allow her child to play. She explained her sons' experience with the lack of play saying:

I used to have OCD [...] but now it is changed. I have a son in France who is now 27. When I had only him in France, he used to call my flat the marketing suite. I know that my child did not have a happy childhood, he was psychologically affected because I would not allow him to play. But when I had my other children, it was different. That is why I started parenting courses [...]. I learned a lot and that is why I let them play a lot. Last time I heard them name our flat now the charity toy shop, just to see, from marketing suite to charity shop. Once I showed my children playing to my mum and my older son was with her and when he saw the house he said: mummy are those toys on the floor? He was shocked, I am sure he is still affected by the lack of play in his childhood, he will never forget it. He told me, are you overwhelmed or that is on purpose? I think he felt jealous because I let my other children now play, but yes, now I prefer having happy children than clean house.

It appears that Sabrina regrets not understanding the value of play when she had her first child. She prevented him from playing at the expense of maintaining a clean and tidy house, and she can still observe the negative effect of the lack of play on him. During the interview, she mentioned several times that he continues to blame her for not allowing him to play. Especially when he sees that she is allowing her other children to play. She clearly stated that in the following quote:

I remember, once I was watching a French parenting programme with my mum and I told her look the lady in the programme said that the children when they grow up they don't remember the dust on the furniture, they will remember the time that you spend with them, and my son (the old one) was there. He was not part of our conversation but

when he heard that he turned around, and he said: “and all the time you didn’t spend with them.” Honestly, that was like a knife in my heart when he said that he was about 23 when he said that, so you see he is still affected, he felt the need to come into the conversation and add something about that.

According to their experiences, this group of mothers believe that a lack of play adversely affected their children's development, academic achievement, and psychological and mental wellbeing. Each of the mothers described an experience where their child did not play enough. Although the stories of the three mothers were different, they all shared the belief that lack of play contributed to their children's developmental and learning problems. These mothers stated that it is essential to provide children with multiple opportunities to play in order to encourage them to reach their full potential. It is worthwhile to mention that Malika seems to be deeply affected by the delay in her daughter's cognitive development and academic achievement, which she attributes to a lack of play. She expressed a profound sense of sadness as she discussed her daughter’s developmental delays which she could not prevent due to her life circumstances (see Malika’s quote in this section).

A plausible explanation for the mothers’ perception of the lack of play is that they likely engage in observational and reflective parenting practices, which helped them reflect on the effects of a lack of play. Their awareness of the adverse effects of a lack of play indicates a conscious effort to observe and reflect on their children's behaviour, milestones, and overall development. This might also indicate that mothers continuously monitor their children’s development and their commitment to supporting their children's development showing a high sense of responsibility. As elaborated in the literature review (section 3.7), Bergen (2009) asserted that a lack of play in children’s lives, either at home or at school, results in a gap in experiencing and promoting creative thinking and problem solving, especially later in life. Similarly, the United Nations Educational (1980) considered the child who does not get involved in any type

of play as a sick child, indicating that the lack of play will affect these children by making them fall ill, mentally, and physically. These studies strongly support the mothers' notion that play is important for children's development, as stated by Lillard et al. (2013), and that the lack of play may delay the development.

As further elaborated in the literature review (sections 3.4 and 3.8), pioneering theorists in developmental psychology like Piaget (1962, 1968) and Vygotsky (1978, 1987, and 1997) highlighted the significance of play in cognitive and social development. Contemporary research, such as Ginsburg (2007) and Whitebread et al. (2017) reinforce the idea that play is essential for the development of various skills, including language, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and mental well-being. All these researchers and theorists highlighted the social and emotional benefits of different types of play, emphasising its role in fostering positive peer interactions and emotional well-being, helping children develop social skills and emotional regulation. Through social play, whether it is indoors or outdoors, according to Whitebread et al. (2017), children learn to negotiate, share, and understand others' perspectives. As a result, the authors argued that the lack of these types of play opportunities may hinder the development of these important social and emotional competencies.

Mothers also noticed that their children's academic achievement (Malika), and psychological well-being (Sabrina) were negatively affected, relating these developmental issues to the lack of play. The mothers' notion that play effects academic development is elaborated in the literature review (section 3.3.1) and supported by many child development theorists. Singer et al. (2009), for instance noted that lack of play may inhibit children from learning how to count, understand when others talk, respond to simple instructions, and recognise their names. Additionally, the mothers' notion that the lack of play may have an impact on children's psychological and mental well-being is also strongly supported by Gray's (2011) study. In his exploration of the potential links between the decline of play and the rise of mental health

issues in children due to his concern that children are increasingly engaged in sedentary activities, such as watching TV or using electronic devices, at the expense of engaging in outdoor play and imaginative play, Gray (2011) found the decline in play to be linked to a rise in psychopathology in children and adolescents. Concluding that the prolonged lack of play may have long-term consequences, affecting academic achievement, social relationships, and mental well-being. Therefore, restrictions on play, according to Gray (2011), could potentially contribute to increased stress and anxiety in children.

However, while the literature overwhelmingly supports the positive impact of play on child development, proving a direct causal relationship between the lack of play and children's development has been challenging. Pellis, Pellis and Bell (2010) emphasised the need for a more nuanced understanding of play, considering its complex nature and its impact on different aspects of development. Arguing that the concept of the "lack of play" requires nuanced consideration, because there are several factors that make it difficult to establish a direct correlation between lack of play and children's development including genetics, individual differences, environmental factors, and socioeconomic status. Drawing on these arguments, it is worth mentioning that Malika's assumption that her daughter's developmental delay was due to a lack of play needs a wider and deeper investigation taking into consideration the other factors such as personal abilities. Because Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012) asserted that among the studies that explored the impact of play on children's development no study was found so far guarantees that the lack of play inhibits children to develop certain skills, which necessitates further research to fully understand the impact of a lack of play on children's development. However, the overwhelming agreement remains that play is a fundamental and positive force in children's development.

From the above, mothers seem to strongly value play and its role in children's development. They showed nuanced notions of the importance of play while relating their children's developmental challenges to the lack of play. However, as clarified by Wenner (2009), any argument that the lack of play hinders children's development would need further research and cross-disciplinary perspectives.

7.3.1.6. The importance of attending nursery at an early age and learning through play until the age of 7

Out of the 16 interviewees, three mothers (Noor, Farida, and Sara) seem to prefer that children attend nursery from early age, so that they can play more, learn more, and enjoy their time more. Noor, for instance, as a mother of 2 boys and a girl aged 1, 6 and 7 years old, believes that children should attend nursery early to get maximum opportunities to play. This is because playing at this early age helps them learn many critical skills for their future life, saying:

I personally prefer that the children start going early to the nursery, [...] the child who is going directly to reception they are 100% different from all other kids. [...] the child that goes to nursery early, already knows how to go to the toilet, he has confidence to speak to the teacher, and to play. He has experienced all those things. While the child going directly to the reception is so messed up [...] he does not know the concept of learning, [...] how to listen and how to sit down quietly when the teacher is talking, this is the example.

With the same point of view, the two other mothers (Farida and Sara) mentioned that play for children under 7 is more important for their learning and development than academics. They prefer children to learn through play for the first 7 years of their life. Farida, who is a mother of a boy and 2 girls, aged 3, 8 and 9 years old, mentioned that she plays with her 3 years old as she used to do always with her older children, because she believes that play is the most important thing the children should keep doing until their 7th year of age, saying:

Play is the most important thing for development. For me it is important than learning at school. Playing is until 7 years. Our prophet was absolutely right when he said 'play with them for 7 years'. Children should start reading and writing from 7 and above, it is important, and children learn while they play, they become more creative, and they use imagination.

Sara shares the same perception of the importance of play for children under 7 years old. She extensively explained her point of view saying:

I know how important play is, and I do not think there is enough play in schools [...] the model of British education, in particular, does not incorporate enough play [...] I do not understand why children at year 1 stop playing. The section in nursery, kids play so much, then year 1 there is a massive jump where everyone is sitting in tables and chairs. A lot of children struggle from reception to year 1 [...] the Scandinavian model is far better. If you look at the academic outcomes between the two countries, it is different. The Northern Island are changing the school age, I do not know why they are doing that. I think they should push it until 7. They should teach through play until 7 and start introducing the academic kind of learning after that.

Attending nursery, according to this group of mothers, at an early age and providing young children with opportunities to learn through play for the first 7 years of their lives can be an invaluable experience for them. Mothers believe that attending school at early age helps children develop confidence and other important skills such as communication, cooperation and problem-solving (e.g., Noor). They also believe that it helps to foster a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (e.g., Farida). Any academic learning, according to these mothers, should happen after the 7th year of children's life, considering that children under the age of seven are still in the preliminary stages of learning, and play is an ideal way

to help them develop the skills they need to succeed. These mothers discovered through their parenting experiences that play provides children with opportunities for hands-on exploration and discovery (Fatima, section 7.3.1.1.), and fosters creativity and imagination (Sofia, section 7.2.1.1). This explains why they consider play based learning method more effective than academics at teaching children various skills. Moreover, they believe that attending nursery and playing for the first 7 years can build a sturdy foundation for a child's educational journey, as stated by Sara who believes that play sets the stage for a lifetime of learning. Not only this, but it can also prepare children to adapt to new environments, as stated by Noor, giving them the confidence to succeed.

Mothers' belief that children should learn through play until the age of 7 before academic learning starts, reflects a perspective that values and prioritises the role of play in early childhood development, echoing Singer et al.'s (2009) argument that children who do not play will begin school with less ability to use proper language, they show more reliance on teachers, less self-regulation and less interest in learning (Noor). Mothers who hold this belief are likely to have an awareness of child development principles, recognising that the early years are crucial for fostering a broad range of foundational skills through play, such as social skills, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and emotional regulation as pointed out by (Lillard et al., 2013). This mothers' belief may also suggest that they emphasise cognitive readiness for formal learning, understanding that waiting until the age of 7 allows children to reach a stage where they are better equipped to handle more structured academic content, as explained by Noor. More plausible explanation to this belief is that it can be rooted in mothers' culture. Mothers who share this belief may come from a cultural background that values play-based approach to early education.

The mothers' belief that play is more useful for learning than academics especially for children under seven years old, is well aligned with the statement of the National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009), that calls for the need for teachers to get children engaged in play activities that are developmentally appropriate. Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2011) and Gallant (2009) asserted that this practice, despite being guided by the teacher throughout the learning process, must also be child-centred. In addition, as indicated in section 3.3.1 of the literature review, many researchers in child development and developmental psychology such as Lillard et.al. (2013) agree with the mothers' belief that the only activity that children should engage in before the age of seven should be play. Highlighting that a child's sole concern at an early age should be to play and get involved in a variety of play activities to the greatest extent possible.

While discussing the significance of play for children under 7, Sara highlighted that the most successful education systems worldwide are the ones that initiate academic learning after the age of 7, enabling children to learn through play before that age. As example, she cited the Scandinavian education system that is known to allow children to play until 7, and she compared it to the British system that traditionally starts formal learning at an earlier age. The claim about the success of the Scandinavian education system, as asserted by Sahlberg (2011) is supported by international assessments such as PISA (the Programme for International Student Assessment), where Scandinavian countries, Finland in particular, consistently performs well. However, comparing the Scandinavian education system for young children with the British education system, according to Morgan (2014), involves considering various aspects such as pedagogical approaches, curriculum structures, and cultural influences.

Sara's citation of the Scandinavian model may suggest that she sees merit in play-based learning during the early years. This could indicate a belief that children benefit significantly from unstructured play in terms of developing foundational skills and a positive attitude toward learning, as the Scandinavian system, with its emphasis on play until the age of 7, is often associated with fostering not only academic skills but also social, emotional, and creative

development (Morgan, 2014). At the same time, Sara's comparison of the Scandinavian with the British education system for young children might indicate that she is concerned about the potential stress and pressure associated with early formal learning, as seen in the British system. This suggests a preference for an approach that prioritises a more relaxed, exploratory learning environment in the early years, also supported by Hutt et al. (2022). Another explanation is that Sara may align her views with research in developmental psychology that emphasises the importance of age-appropriate learning experiences, reflecting an understanding of the developmental stages of early childhood (Cheraghi et al., 2022).

However, despite the mothers suggestion that play based learning approach should be used for children under 7 can be taken into consideration while teaching young children, it is also important to recognise individual differences among children and appreciate an educational system that allows flexibility to accommodate diverse learning styles and development paces as part of the quest for balance. In this respect, Miller (2010) suggested that successful education systems can incorporate a variety of pedagogical approaches, and what works in one cultural context may not be directly transferrable to another.

7.4. Mother's attitudes towards play

This section further deals with answering research question number 2. While section number 2 was concerned with exploring the mothers' perceptions about play, this section is concerned with exploring the mothers' attitudes towards play. Understanding the mothers' attitudes towards play was achieved through analysing 24 items in the quantitative data (see appendix H: tables H.10 & H.11) and analysing the open-ended interview questions that were related to the mothers' practices in relation to play. This section is organised in a way that helps create an overview of mothers' attitudes towards play, while discussing this in relation to the literature. The mothers' attitudes towards play can be seen through their encouragement for

play, their involvement in their children's play activities and through the play environment they provide for their children.

Quantitative results showed that, 91.3% of the mothers often allow their children to play at home and 63.1% allow their children to play as long as they want, 92.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they prefer their children to not play at home. At the same time, 58.3% of the mothers either agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer their children to play outside, while 32% remained neutral regarding this statement. Despite, only 10 mothers, from the 103 participants (10.7%) agreed/strongly agreed that they prefer their children to spend time learning letters and numbers instead of playing, 23.3% of them agreed/strongly agreed to restrict playing time for their children at home, so they can find time to learn letters and numbers. A total of 94 mothers (91.2%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement that says: 'Play is just for fun, and it does not contribute too much to my child's learning and development (see appendix H: table H.10). The remaining 9 mothers either agreed with this statement (5 mothers), or strongly agreed (2 mothers), while two remained neutral.

At the same time, qualitative results revealed that all 16 interviewees showed a positive attitude towards play, mentioning that they allow, and encourage their children to play. However, some of them found it inevitable to regulate play time on several occasions. Every mother mentioned her reasons for allowing, encouraging, or controlling her children's play time. These reasons are presented and discussed in the subsequent sections.

Mothers, also referred to diverse ways of getting involved in their children's play. Evidently, these mothers provide the play environment at home differently.

7.4.1. Mothers encourage play

Two distinct themes emerged based on analysing the reasons for mothers' encouragement of play. 1) The impact of mothers' previous play experiences, 2) mothers' positive perception of

the benefits of play for learning and development. Some mothers were impacted by their own positive play experiences as children, while other mothers encourage their children to play because they hold positive perceptions about the benefits of play for learning. Noted that many mothers fall into both themes, attributing their encouragement of play to both reasons mentioned above.

7.4.1.1. The impact of Mothers' childhood play experiences in their attitudes towards it

Some mothers encourage their children to play because, as children, their parents were encouraging them to play, and some of them their parents also prepared a convenient play environment for them. These mothers recalled the joy they experienced while playing as children. Farida, for instance, as a result of her positive play experiences as a child, developed a positive attitude towards play. This was clear in her quote while demonstrating her continuous encouragement of and engagement in play, saying:

I let my children play and I play with them [...] because I was playing too much, and my mum was doing the same thing. I remember, she was playing with us, she was making doll for us with wood and sticks [...] and recently she visited me and she was doing the same thing with my children.

Hasina also encourages her children to play because she remembers how it feels when you are allowed to play as a child and how much you can learn from play at that early age. She happily described her play experiences as a child, and how that impacted her attitude towards play, saying:

In my generation, playing was fun, it was good, and that affected the way I am raising my kids, because I spent a lot of time playing when I was a kid that is why I want my children to spend time playing.

Similarly, Fatima added, describing the positive play environment her parents provided for her as a child, and how that impacts her attitude towards play, saying:

I was raised in an environment that encouraged play, and I am trying to create an environment for my children that helps encourage play, by buying toys and putting equipment for play in the garden, swing, slide and sand. They love sand, and even if I need to take them to the park after school, of course I do that.

This group of mothers seem to hold positive memories of their own play time and recognise its cognitive, social, and emotional benefits, indicating an awareness of the impact of their own play experiences on the way they perceive play and, how they engage their children in play. Many studies in the literature showed that previous play experiences can have a significant impact on how mothers encourage their children to play, such as Pellegrini and Smith (2003) who suggested that if a mother had positive play experiences as a child, she is more likely to encourage her children to engage in play, and more likely to provide them with access to toys, games, and playgrounds (e.g., Fatima). On the other hand, Burdette & Whitaker (2005) argued that mothers who had negative play experiences, which are likely to be accompanied with unresolved feelings of frustration, boredom, or lack of enjoyment (which is not the case for any participant in this study) are more likely to undervalue play and restrict their children's playtime or limit their access to play resources. Mothers, in the current study, used their own positive play experiences to shape their encouragement for play, e.g. Fatima: *"I played a lot and I want my children to play as much as possible."* This highlights the powerful influence of the intergenerational experiences on parenting practices which agrees with studies like (Bandura & Walters, 1977, who emphasises the dynamic interplay between personal factors (personal experiences, cognitive process, and emotions) and environmental factors (social influences). that interact and influence each other in a bidirectional way shaping the way individuals acquire new behaviours and navigate social interactions. Furthermore, while the cultural transmission

theory (Lamaison & Bourdieu, 1986) views mothers' positive attitude towards play that they learned from their parents as a cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990), attachment theory (Bowlby, 2008) explained it as a secure emotional between parents and children.

Despite the wealth of evidence in the literature that parents have a significant impact on shaping their children's play experiences, as elaborated in the literature review (section 3.3.2), and that parents' perceptions and priorities of play greatly influence children's play behaviours and experiences (Clark & Dumas, 2020), it is imperative to acknowledge that relating children's play activities solely to mothers' choices overlooks children's agency and autonomy. Children, themselves, have their preferences, interests, and choices when it comes to play activities that may not be entirely dictated by maternal influences. Ginsburg's (2007) observed preschool children taking charge of their playtime, displaying their agency and creativity, engaging in complex decision-making processes to select their playmates, actively negotiate their play choices and taking ownership of their play activities. This challenges the notion that children's play choices are derived from their mothers' choices only. Based on the above explanation, although mothers' positive play experiences seem to have influenced their attitude towards play, it is important to recognise that they might also be influenced by other factors, such as certain level of parenting and child development knowledge, not just previous play experiences.

7.4.1.2. The impact of mothers' positive perceptions of play in their attitude towards it

Based on the data, all the 16 interviewed mothers seem to encourage their children to play because they are aware of the importance of play. They consider it as a vital aspect of children's life in their early years. Malika is one of the mothers that encourage all types of play, as play, for her, is vital for learning, and children cannot get involved in any play activity without learning something. She explained when asked about her attitude towards play saying:

I always encourage them to play, always [...] Outdoor they used to play every day 1 or 2 hours, in the park, and at home they play all day [...] I also play with them hide and seek and stuff like this, but this is not in the park we play this at home, because I am very protective, and I can't close my eyes and let them run away, it is not safe, so we choose safe games outside [...] Most of the time I get involved and I always try to find educative games and educative toys for them. Like puzzles and board games. When they ask me to play with them, I stop everything and I just play with them, and I am happy to play with them.

Farida is another mother who encourages her children to play as she also believes that play is a vital component of a child's learning process. Her positive attitude towards play was demonstrated through her explanation of how she encourages, and actively participates in her children's play activities. As part of her involvement, she also aims to strengthen family ties and relationships in addition to creating memories with her children. She illustrated this by saying:

Playing with your children is important, when you play with your children it is not only good for them, but even for me as a mother, it helps me relax and have quality time with them, and I always think that they will grow up and I will not have these moments with them when they grow up.

It is evident that the mothers in this group hold positive attitudes towards play, stating their active encouragement and participation in their children's play activities to help them learn, grow, strengthen family ties, and create memories. One of the main reasons why mothers may have a positive attitude towards play is their awareness of the importance of play for children (Pellegrini, 2009). By encouraging play and taking the time to play with their children, mothers indicated that they could create meaningful experiences and help their children learn and grow, something also discussed by Jayaraj and colleagues (2022), in their study with parents,

highlighting that the majority of parents, in their study, recognised the importance of play in children's development, had positive attitudes towards various types of play such as pretend, physical, and educational play, believing that play promotes cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. These parents also reported actively participating in their child's play activities, demonstrating engagement and support.

For other mothers in this study, play seems to be a way to help children learn and grow in a safe environment (Malika), offering them a chance to teach life skills, such as problem-solving, communication, and cooperation (e.g. Sabrina when mentioned that her four children play a lot together and play is helping them to learn how to compromise and negotiate turns). This aligns with Moore's (2017) argument that play, as an essential aspect of childhood, allows children to explore and understand their environment, at the same time fostering their growth and learning. Furthermore, for some of these mothers' playtime is also an opportunity to bond with their children, developing a sense of trust and security (Farida). This is also evident in several studies such as Roeters & colleagues (2010), Popov & Ilesanmi (2015), and Aron, Aron and Norman (2003), who argued that when mothers actively engage in their children's play, they naturally exhibit positive interactions such as warmth, love, responsiveness, and attentiveness towards their children, which enhances the mother-child bond and fosters a sense of trust and security. As a result of mothers' high awareness and knowledge of all these benefits in the current study, playtime was viewed with a more positive attitude.

7.4.2. Mothers regulate play time

While most mothers encourage their children to play without limits, some of them regulate their children's play, sometimes by reducing play time. This is due to different life circumstances that do not indicate a lack of value for play. Notably, they need time to rest at home due to being tired, for employed mothers, or avoiding the mess to avoid cleaning. Some

of these mothers frequently restrict their children's play because they have a routine during the week, dividing their children's time between school/nursery, homework, eating, and sleeping.

Iman, for instance, illustrated the reason she controls her children's play time by saying: *'I let them play, but when they do paint, I must control them because I do not want the mess.'*

Farida also stated: *'I push them to play, and I play with them. The ones who are under 7, I do not stop them from playing but the ones who are attending school, I ask them to do their homework first and then I let them play.'*

Noor also showed a positive attitude towards play by mentioning that she strongly encourages play. However, she also mentioned that it is useful to regulate play time during the school days, and following a certain routine allows for a balance between her children's play, studies, eating well, and getting some rest at the same time. She explained her daily routine saying:

There is a routine. When they are outside, they can play all the time. When they come home, they must change, and play for a bit, for like half an hour, and then we sit down, and we go for learning. In between they can have a break for like half an hour. They can choose what they want to do. They want to sit down, relax with mummy, they want to watch something, they want to come upstairs, and sometimes they can play with their toys inside their room, or play with each other, before they go to sleep.

Sabrina also showed a very positive attitude towards play; however, she also agrees that playtime needs to be regulated occasionally, especially if the mother is in need for rest. As a working mother, she illustrated this point adding: *'I work and when I am tired, I just send them to their rooms to read or draw, so I can have some rest.'*

Results indicated that despite some mothers' positive attitude towards play, there are instances when they may feel the need to restrict their children's playtime for a variety of reasons. One of the most common reasons seems to be tiredness, especially for working mothers (Sabrina).

Some mothers try to avoid the mess that requires an effort to clean up (Iman) and some others find it necessary to achieve a certain balance during the weekdays between different life activities (playing, studying, eating, and sleeping well) (Noor). Many references in the literature support that working mothers often need to juggle multiple responsibilities and tasks, which might leave them tired and without enough energy to watch over their children or to engage in their play. Deater-Deckard and colleagues (2010), for instance, argued that mothers may show reactive negativity in parenting by displaying negative emotional reactions, such as anger or frustration, in response to challenging or stressful life situations such as work/home responsibilities. It is important for these mothers to find some flexibility in work which might help balancing their family life, as suggested by Jeffrey Hill and colleagues (2008) who found workplace flexibility to have a significant impact on reducing family-to-work conflict, stress, and burnout.

Although mothers in this study often feel a need to restrict play time at home, they are still aware that playtime should not be seen as wasted time, but as an important part of a child's growth and development as suggested by Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012), who provided a literature review that emphasised the significance of play in children's development, finding that play is not only a source of entertainment, but it also promotes physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth in children and provides opportunities for creativity, problem-solving, and self-expression.

Generally, mothers, in this study seem to hold very positive attitudes towards play, and they want to ensure that their children get adequate playtime, even if it means making some adjustments to their own routines to make it possible.

7.4.3. Mothers' involvement in play

Regarding the mothers' involvement in their children's play, quantitative results revealed that, 68% of the mothers always or often dedicate some time to play with their children, 65% of

them, always or often take any opportunity to play with their children, and 57.2% always or often look forward to playing with their children. However, 62.1% of the mothers reported that they occasionally or rarely play with their children after a long and busy day. Meanwhile, 43.7% found playing with their children a chore. Moreover, 90.3% of the mothers, either never or rarely think that it is not important to play with their children, and 87.4% never think that they should not play with their children because play is only for children, at the same time 68.9% of them often or occasionally prefer to let their children play on their own.

Of the 103 mothers, none, (0%) mentioned that they always have some days that go by without dedicating some time to play with her child, while 71.9% occasionally or rarely do so. At the same time, 6.8% indicated that it is always difficult for them to find time to play with their children every day, while 40.8% rarely or never find it difficult to find time to play with their children every day (see appendix H: table H.11).

As for the qualitative strand, results revealed that all the 16 mothers get involved in their children's play, however there is a difference on the type of involvement. Some mothers get actively involved in their children's play, showing a prominent level of enjoyment while playing with their children, and willingness to prepare a stimulating play environment at home, while a second group of mothers expressed their interest to engage in their children's play, but in a more passive manner. It is worth noting that many mothers seem to get both actively and passively involved depending on their time availability, capacity and play situation as well as play activity needs. Both types of involvement are presented and discussed below.

7.4.3.1. Active involvement

Quantitative results revealed that 88.3% of the mothers, when they play with their children, always or often give them their full attention and they try to actively engage, and 57.3% mentioned that when they play with their children, they always or often choose the game that allows both of them to take turn and play together. Another 60.1% indicated that when their

children lose interest in a game they always or often try to get them involved in a new game. Of the 103 participants, 80 mothers (77.7%) usually or often encourage their children to lead the game and they follow, while only 4.9% of them usually lead the game, and their child follows (see appendix H: table H.11).

Qualitative results, similarly, showed that most of the mothers (13 out of 16 interviewees) prefer to get actively involved in their children's play. Malika, for instance, when asked whether she gets involved in her children's play, she said:

Yes, most of the time I get involved. When they ask me to play with them, I stop everything and I just play with them, and I am happy to play with them. Yes, I play with them [...] I play with them board games, and we take turn to read stories, and outside I also play with them in the park some fun games [...] I play like I am a child. My husband tells me you are still a child.

Selma also mentioned that she gets actively involved and she enjoys every moment playing with her daughter, by stating: *'Oh yes, we play together all the time, putting the cup on her head and try to balance it, she giggles because she finds it funny.'* Moreover, Sofia explained the way she gets involved and how she turns play time into fun time, by saying:

I have always wanted my children to play all the time, and I get involved most of the time. When my daughter struggles with something, or she refuses to put her clothes on, she is at that age where they try to challenge you. We play like, oh I lost my daughter's hand, where is your hand gone baby? It is like that, then it comes out of her top. It is a way to get her clothes on. Even putting her shoes on is became a game, she likes it.

Some mothers went beyond active involvement and enjoyment while playing with their children, they explained more how they successfully managed to turn play into enjoyable

learning games, where their children enjoy play and learn at the same time, highlighting that they used play for learning. Rowena, stated this point, explaining:

Yes, I play with them, and I teach them many things. My child, for example, refuses to do the spelling at school. What I started to do is let him write the spelling as a game, and when we play together, my children are leading.

This group of mothers get actively involved in their children's play for several reasons, such as their belief that active engagement is critical to achieving better play potential in addition to fun and entertainment, and their desire to provide enrichment, help with different skills, believing that through their active involvement in play, they can help their children explore and make connections in their own minds, as well as the world around them. The mothers' notion is strongly supported by Vygotsky's (1978) and Vickerius and Sandberg's (2006) emphasis on the importance of adults' active involvement in play, providing guidance, and scaffolding children's learning experiences, highlighting the significance of promoting positive relationships and interactions with and among children during play, which contribute to their social and emotional development. This group of mothers seem to recognise the importance of using play to connect with their children, bond with them, and share experiences through board games, outdoor activities (e.g., Malika and Sofia), or even just communicating (Malika and Farida). This notion aligns with what is generally assumed by many theorists and researchers that parents who spend more time with their children develop safe and healthy bonds and relationship with each other, e.g., Rebold et al. (2016), Arnas and Deniz (2020) and Seekamp, Dolman and Rogers (2019) who found mothers' active and direct engagement in their children's play to allow for naturally exhibiting positive interactions such as warmth, responsiveness, and attentiveness towards their children, which enhances the mother-child bond and fosters a sense of trust and security. At the same time, both self-expansion theory (Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2003) and attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1992) advocated that

spending time together through joint activities can be one of relationship-specific investments that participates in strengthening parent-child mutual commitment and promoting children's positive mental health outcomes and overall wellbeing including stress reduction, positive attachment and bonding and cognitive and socio-emotional development.

Additionally, some mothers, through their active involvement they could provide educational and entertaining challenges that are age-appropriate and can help children develop other skills such as academic achievement and interpersonal skills, e.g., Rowena (teaching spelling and leadership skills), similar to Smith and Sheridan (2019) and Jeon and colleagues' (2020) who argued that the engagement of families in children's education supports indirectly children's academic, social, behavioural and emotional development, indicating that parents who actively participate, in their child's education, such as reading together and engaging in educational play, their children demonstrate higher levels of readiness for school and life in general.

In summary, by appreciating and practicing the active involvement in play, mothers in this study showed very positive attitudes towards play. This may be due to their understanding and awareness of the importance of engaged play in providing learning and growth opportunities that allow for enhancing many educational and personal skills.

7.4.3.2. Passive involvement

Many mothers indicated their passive involvement in their children's play. Quantitative data revealed that 59.3% of the mothers, when their children want them there, usually or often sit and keep watching them playing to make sure they are safe, and 37.9% of them, when playing with their children, they usually or often prefer watching them to see whether they are playing with the toys properly (see appendix H: table H.11).

Similarly, the qualitative data also indicated passive involvement in children's play among some mothers. Although all interviewees mentioned that they get involved in their children's

play, some of them were found to get passively involved in some occasions. Some mothers prefer to supervise their children in the playground from a distance, to ensure their safety, in case more than one child is playing and making sure the children do not fight. Some other mothers prefer to watch their children playing to ensure they play safely with toys and not mishandling them, while some other mothers watch their children while painting to control the mess. Moreover, some mothers' involvement depends on the type of play; some were happy to play football, for instance, while others showed more likeliness to participate in group games. Other than that, these mothers prefer to give their children space to play freely and keep them under supervision. It is worth mentioning that the practices of active and passive involvement can be fluid, and not mutually exclusive, where the same mother can do both active and passive, depending on the context and the child, as elaborated by Zippert et al. (2020).

Rowena, for example, said: *"Sometimes, they play by themselves while I am watching them, it is good for them to build their personalities. I do not want them to be always depending on me."* And Sofia said, when she was asked whether she gets involved in her children's play: *"Not all the time to be honest. Whenever I see them nice, playing calmly, I just let them. Sometimes they are happy playing independently, so I just let them play and watch them."* Regarding the same point, Iman said: *"I let them play all the time, I watch them more than I play with them, when they do paint, for example, I must sit beside them because I do not want the mess."*

Sabrina stated:

Sometimes I get involved, but I am busy with my Quran, sometimes with my business, with all my courses. So, most of the time if they do not need me, it is fine for me to not play with them. I try to take that time when they are busy to do something for myself as well [...] but I keep watching them.

According to the results, it seems that mothers can often get passively involved in their children's play for a variety of reasons. One factor seems to be the desire of being available to their children if they need help or attention and offer helpful advice and guidance. Passive involvement seems to allow mothers to observe their children in their natural environment, get a better understanding of their interests and strengths, ensuring they are interacting appropriately with other children (e.g. Rowena), recognise any potential issues or dangers that their children may face, ensure safety, and intervene when necessary. This finding is consistent with Zippert and colleagues' (2020) who found that mothers get passively engaged to provide support, encouragement, and advice when appropriate, without taking away from the child's freedom to explore and learn and without being over-engaged in their play. Through passive involvement, mothers in this study seem to provide support and guidance while also allowing their children to explore and play freely, allowing them to model appropriate behaviour and introduce innovative ideas and concepts. This finding is consistent Obradović, Sulik and Shaffer (2021), who predicted poor self-regulation and poor self-confidence, when parents get over-engaged in their children's play, suggesting that excessive control and involvement by parents may hinder the development of these skills and other skills in young children. Therefore less-engaged involvement (passive involvement), according to Shin et al. (2023) is sometimes required, emphasising the need for parents to strike a balance between involvement and autonomy in order to enable their children to develop important cognitive and social-emotional abilities.

Moreover, all mothers agreed that passive involvement gives them a sense of satisfaction to watch their children develop and grow freely, at the same time to be a part of their journey. This finding is supported in the literature notably by Wilson and Ryan (2006), Coplan et al. (2015), Zippert et al. (2020) and Ihmeideh (2019), noting that with non-directive involvement, mothers are allowing children to navigate social interactions independently, and develop their

communication, negotiation, and cooperation skills Wilson and Ryan (2006). This, according to Coplan et al. (2015), helps children build healthy relationships with peers and adults, which enhances their social competence and overall social development, enhances levels of cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution skills (Zippert et al., 2020), as well as their levels of self-regulation and creativity (Ihmeideh, 2019). However, Berk and Winsler (1995) reported that the effectiveness of passive involvement depends on the child's personality, parent-child relationship type, developmental stage, and the nature of the play activity. Some children might thrive with minimal intervention while others might require more active involvement of parents.

Although literature indicates positive outcomes of parent's passive involvement in play, as discussed above, and although mothers in this study recognise it, the long-term effect of passive involvement needs further exploration to determine how early social skills and complex social situations translate into adulthood (Zippert et al., 2020).

7.5. The play environment prepared by the mothers at home

Quantitative and qualitative results both revealed that mothers are always ready to provide a convenient play environment. Descriptive results showed that mothers are happy to provide toys and play equipment for their children (see section 7.5.1, and appendix H: table H.9) and at the same time provide a safe, enjoyable, and stimulating play environment. Qualitative results revealed that the play environment provided for children is intimately linked to the mothers' perceptions of the importance of play, and their own experiences with the play environment provided for them as children. Mothers strongly refer to these two elements, as being the elements that impacted the way they prepare play environment for their children at home. Some mothers creatively managed to establish a stimulating play environment at home, and some of them engage their children in creating their own play environment, such as Lama

who said: *“they use their toys, I made shelves and they put all their toys, and books. They put their cars, they use their animals, and they play pretend.”*

Fatima as a mother, believes that she provides a positive and stimulating play environment for her children because her parents used to provide the same environment for her as a child. She explained by saying:

My parents were extremely interested in play, and they were encouraging us to play. They were interested in building all the play equipment inside the house. Clubhouse, swings, slides, and they used to buy for us bicycles. And me also I did put all these equipment for my children, but they used them more when the weather is nice.

Sara also explained that she provides a play environment because she believes that play is important for children’s learning and development. She commented that play environment should be aligned with what parents want their children to learn, stating:

My daughter was trying to learn about money [...] doing it on paper is very abstract for the children. So, we set up a shop at home [...] She is a shop keeper, and I would go pick up some items and ask how much they cost [...] She uses her play money to figure the change [...]. Now because she moved from the abstract [...] she understood it. I did it through play [...] her life is full of this kind of play going on at home.

Sabrina found it important to create a social play environment at home. Where the whole family gets together sometimes during the week to participate in play activities. Which helps promoting children’s enjoyment, entertainment and gaining some social skills. She explained this point saying:

Three to four times a week at least we have an activity together. That can be a game, or sitting all together, reading something [...]. Sometimes I play with [...] when there are some games outside, or we go to the museum [...] we do it together [...]. My father

used to do that. I remember he would teach us to do stuff like making us use our hands or do gardening or something that would be useful in life, he was- and I am like him- keen on things that have purpose.

It is obvious from the mothers' comments that the play environment mothers create for their children closely links with their attitude towards play. The mothers' understanding of the significance of play can be seen in the way they create an environment that is age appropriate and conducive to playing. The literature suggested that the mother who understands the value of play may create a play area with a variety of toys, books, and art supplies that encourages children to explore and discover, as elaborated by Hofferth and Sandberg (2001). All mothers in this study mentioned that they do so, and they also provide their children with opportunities to interact with other children, such as visiting a playground or participating in organised activities (e.g., Khadija, Selma, and Sabrina). This finding is consistent with Menaghan and Parcel (1991) noting that maternal characteristics including maternal education level were positively correlated with a nurturing and stimulating home environment including play environment. Each mother in this study emphasised the significance of preparing a stimulating play environment at home, and none of them seemed to underestimate the importance of creating an engaging space for their children's playtime. They all recognised the importance of providing convenient play environments (Pellegrini, 2009) by discussing the type of toys they prefer to buy, the type of games and play activities they prefer their children to get involved in, as elaborated in sections 7.2.2 and 7.5.1. Without a stimulating play environment, these mothers found it challenging to facilitate meaningful play experiences, as indicated by Sabrina who said: *"it is difficult to play with nothing. We need toys."*

Overall, all mothers seemed to have a positive attitude towards play, which was obvious in their description of the play environment they provide in order to promote learning and development, such as Sara who created a shopping environment to teach math skills, Fatima

who provided outdoor play equipment and many toys, and Sabrina who provides blocks and Legos and encourages indoor and outdoor social play (see section 7.5.1).

Many studies are well aligned with mothers' perspectives about the importance of providing the right play environment for children. Scharer's (2017) study is an example of the studies that emphasise the significance of providing developmentally appropriate play spaces that cater to the children's unique needs, taking into consideration the skills parents want their children to learn, their age and their gender. Because every element in the play environment, (Scharer, 2017), fills the child with wonder, curiosity, enthusiasm, and passion for playing discovering, learning, and experiencing the required development. Rodrigues, Saraiva and Gabbard (2005) also found the home environment to be of a significant importance in shaping a child's motor development by assessing the home environment's influence on motor development considering numerous factors such as the availability of space, toys, equipment, and parental support. Results showed the home environment's positive impact on motor skills acquisition and development in children. Additionally, Vickerius and Sandberg (2006) advocated for the provision of both structured and unstructured play opportunities, along with safe and inclusive play spaces to support children's holistic growth. Many mothers in this study showed the same perspective while discussing their role in providing a play environment for their children. Yasmine, as elaborated in section 7.3.1.1, buys all the toys her children need, Sabrina, in section 7.3.1.2, said that playing with nothing is challenging, children should have toys, and Fatima said that she equipped the indoor and outdoor play spaces with different developmental play equipment.

An additional interesting finding of this study is that mothers highly appreciate the social play that brings family members together and that they are always willing to prepare the right environment for this type of play. Mothers mentioned that the bonding experience that this type of play provides cannot be overstated, as it strengthens family relationships, promotes social

connections, and creates lasting memories. The positive effects of playing collective games on family dynamics (Sabrina & Sara), is highly supported by research in the field of psychology and family studies. Gopnik et al. (2015) considered social play a type of explorative play and they recognise its advantages in promoting creativity, communication, open-mindedness, and cognitive flexibility. They also asserted that parents and educators should design learning environments that encourage and allows for the acquisition of these skills. This was clearly stated and supported by mothers in the current study.

Mothers' own childhood experiences with play were also found to be a major factor in how they create a play environment. This finding is associated with the findings of many studies, such as Clark and Dumas (2020) who argued that if a mother had positive play experiences as a child, she may be more likely to provide her children with similar activities (e.g., Fatima and Sabrina). She may also be more inclined to allow her children to explore freely and to be creative and imaginative, and if a mother had negative play experiences as a child, she may be less likely to allow her children the same opportunities she was denied, which is, as previously mentioned in section 7.4.1.1, not the case for any of the current study's participants.

Generally, mothers in this study seem to understand the importance of play environment in helping children enjoy and learn several skills while playing, and they seem to work hard in order to provide their children with a stimulating play environment.

7.5.1. Mothers' perception of playing with toys

For a deeper and broader understanding of the play environment, it was important to investigate the mothers' perceptions of play using toys, as toys are an integral part of the play environment. Quantitative results showed that some mothers have negative perception, and negative attitude towards using toys in their children's play. Most of the mothers in the questionnaire showed a neutral attitude, if not negative, towards most of the items that contain playing with toys. Despite, 75.7% agreed/strongly agreed that they often buy toys for their children, 50.5% of the

mothers agreed/strongly agreed that they do not prefer their children to play in the house with toys and 47.6% do not prefer their children to play with toys more than playing other types of play such as free play. Results also revealed that, although 34.9% of the mothers find toys to be expensive, 88.4% of them buy toys for their children, 96.1% find toys to be beneficial for their children, and 88.3% agreed/strongly agreed that playing with toys helps their child's learning (see appendix H: table H.9).

In the qualitative results, interviewees had more space and time to explain their points of view in-depth and support their explanations with examples. Qualitative results showed that the mothers' perceptions of playing with toys were, somehow, divided into five different groups with five distinct types of perceptions. With some mothers falling into more than one group, which indicates that they hold more than one perspective.

7.5.1.1. Mothers who are happy for their children to play with toys

Four out of sixteen mothers (Yasmine, Fatima, Nadia, and Sabrina) stated that toys are essential for children's learning. Therefore, they do not mind buying toys for their children, believing that toys help children develop various skills, including identifying colours, and shapes, and building vocabulary through musical toys. These continuously encourage their children to engage in play with toys, thereby creating a positive and stimulating environment that fosters learning and development.

Yasmine as an example, is pleased to purchase toys for her children by saying:

I buy toys for them [...] especially my 4 years old, she loves playing with toys dolls, princesses, and teddies. She has her stories. She spends long time playing with her toys. She does not care too much about electronic games. That is why I do not mind buying her toys.

Fatima, when asked what she thinks about investing in toys, she said: *“For me, it is an important investment. Like maybe if I have 100 pounds, I would spend 60 pounds on toys. Legos, cubes, building constructions (blocks), magnetic shapes, and magnetic blocks [...] my son also loves sand activities.”*

Nadia is a mother of a girl aged 6 and a boy aged 9, and she is one of the mothers that purchase many toys for their children. Nadia said:

In the beginning when I bought a lot of toys, I thought, what they are going to do with all these toys? But when we started playing all together, I found out another thing, my kids loved them, not just because of the shapes or the colours, but they learn a lot of things [...] my son started learning about shapes from very early age. My girl was creating relationships between the dolls, she puts all of them beside each other and she starts playing the role of the mum [...] what I was teaching her she was repeating it through play.

Sabrina said: *“it is hard to play with nothing, so it is important to have toys. Yes, we need toys, I do buy toys.”*

According to this group of mothers, toys are a wonderful way for children to express themselves and learn about the world and how to interact with it. This group of mothers who indicated their appreciation and encouragement for playing with toys likely recognise the significance of play in child development and understand the role of toys in supporting cognitive development, emotional expression, and regulation in children. The mothers' notion of toys aligns with Parten' s (1932) idea that toys often facilitate social interactions among children and help them gain social and communication skills. Encouraging play with toys may also reflect mothers' awareness of creating enriching environments for their children. Parents

who encourage play with toys, according to Parten (1932), may understand the importance of socialisation and the development of interpersonal skills through shared play experiences.

Mothers in this group also purchase and encourage various toys that are designed to stimulate different aspects of cognitive growth such as Legos and sand (Fatima). This is well aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) perspective while emphasising the role of the play environment, including the availability of stimulating toys, in fostering cognitive and socio-emotional development. Dolls, action figures, or stuffed animals, for example, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) can serve as outlets for emotional expression and imaginative play, which was clearly noticed by Nadia when mentioning that her daughter creates relationship between dolls.

Mothers' purchase and encouragement of toys may not be only influenced by their awareness of the importance of toys but, it might also be influenced by the pervasive consumer culture and marketing strategies related to children's toys, as argued by Lillard et al. (2013). Linn (2003) and Louv (2008) explored the impact of commercialisation on parental choices regarding toys and its implications for child development, they emphasised the need to critically assess, while buying toy, whether there might be unintentional pressure or overemphasis on specific types of play.

In summary, mothers' appreciation for and encouragement of play with toys can indicate a positive understanding of the importance of play in child development. However, it is crucial to consider cultural influences, potential commercial pressures, and the need for a balanced approach to play that encompasses a variety of experiences. Sanders (2008), for instance, suggested that mothers are advised to consider convenient studies regarding the potential benefits of playing with toys and the impact these toys may have on the development of their children. Proposing that child development, parenting, and play literature provides a rich foundation for understanding these dynamics and their implications.

7.5.1.2. Mothers who do not prefer their children to rely on toys while playing

Two out of sixteen interviewed mothers (Sofia and Farida) stated that they do not buy many toys for their children. However, they are still happy for them to play with certain toys. These mothers prefer to give their children space to practice free play without being guided or limited by a specific type of toys, believing that this provides the child with opportunities to think, inquire, discover, and invent. Sofia, for instance, is a mother of 2 girls aged 3 and 6 years old. When asked what she thinks about buying and using toys, she said:

Ok, well, I do not buy toys all the time, and not all kinds of toys, in some special occasions for example, birthday, Eid, [...] but not everything they see on the TV we buy it [...] So, I would buy, but to a certain point. I limit their play with toys because I noticed that my girls love painting and drawing. This is a good activity for them, for imagination and good things. We do different games, jumping, cycling, for their physical wellbeing. Puzzles for their brain, picking up small stuff, and building constructions blocks [...] they do wonderful things when we play together.

Farida is another mother who holds the same belief as Sofia regarding playing with toys. Farida wants to encourage her children to be creative and create things to play with by themselves through limiting the toys purchase and providing only the minimum toys for them and when necessary. Farida said:

I do not spend too much on toys. I do not mind buying sometimes [...] but I prefer that they create things to play with, themselves, instead of buying all the toys they see. Sometimes, the girls like to get similar things as their friends, I allow them, but still, I push them and help them create things by themselves.

These mothers strive to ensure that their children have meaningful and engaging play experiences. They recognise that toys can be fun and educational, but they prefer their children

to focus their energy on activities that require interaction and creativity, such as playing pretend, drawing, and colouring, or building with blocks. These mothers believe that, despite toys being educational and useful for learning, they are, still, not a substitute for free play.

The mothers' notion of prioritising free play without an abundance of toys may indicate their belief in fostering creativity and imagination in their children through encouraging their innate abilities and self-motivation, considering that free play encourages children to use their minds to become more creative, more engaged, and more inventive (Farida). This is aligned with Sutton-Smith's (1997) argument that free play, unstructured by specific toys, can stimulate imaginative thinking and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, limiting the number of toys and providing space for free play might indicate the mothers' support of intrinsic motivation in their children by encouraging them to explore and inquire independently, which was clearly stated by both mothers Sofia and Farida. Aligned with the mothers' notion, Deci and Ryan (2008) suggested through their Self-Determination Theory that is based on the concept of intrinsic motivation, that individuals have inherent psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and they engage in activities for the inherent satisfaction and enjoyment derived from the activity itself, rather than relying on external rewards or incentives, and this is what intrinsic motivation means. Mothers' preference for free play also aligns with constructivism theories of child development, which emphasise the active role of children in constructing their knowledge, as widely argued by Piaget (1968) and Vygotsky (1978). Piaget's (1968) theory of cognitive development emphasises the child's active role in constructing knowledge through interaction with the environment, suggesting that children, through hands-on experiences and creative activities, engage in the assimilation and accommodation of new information, which supports their cognitive development, and fosters their adaptation. At the same time, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the mothers' notion of encouraging play with less toys and more adults' involvement as stated by Sofia when she said: '*We do*

jump, cycling, for their physical wellbeing. Puzzles for their brain, picking up small stuff, and building constructions blocks [...] they do wonderful things when we play together.'

Sociocultural theory introduces the concept of (ZPD) as a range of tasks that serve as collaborative and scaffolding activities for the child to perform with the help of a more knowledgeable person, such as parents or peers (see more details in section 3.3.1).

Considering Roopnarine and Krishnakumar's (2006) argument that cultural factors can shape parenting practices, including attitudes toward toys and play, the mothers who limit toys may be influenced by cultural norms that emphasise experiential learning and open-ended play. Although mothers did not explicitly relate their perception of playing with toys to any cultural reasons, the implicit influence of cultural norms and values on parents' perceptions about playing with toys, as highlighted by Rogoff (2003), is a complex and pervasive aspect of parenting. Even when not explicitly discussed, cultural influences play a substantial role in shaping attitudes, preferences, and decisions related to children's play. However, in this group, the mothers' perceptions about playing with toys could also be attributed to individual experiences as well as to cultural influences.

In summary, while advocating for free play, and recognising the importance of nurturing the children's innate abilities these mothers who limit toys, according to Tamis-LeMonda and Song (2012), may also strike a balance by providing a supportive environment where children can explore independently while supported with certain toys that are educational and help developing many skills.

7.5.1.3. Mothers who are happy for their children to play with toys, but very selective

Three out of the sixteen interviewed mothers (Selma, Lama, and Malika) showed a positive perception of children playing with toys. However, they are very selective when it comes to the toys they purchase and those they prefer their children to play with.

Selma, for instance, is a mother of 3 boys and a girl aged 4, 7, 8, and 15 years old. She mentioned that she buys toys but careful of what is worth to spent money on:

Something like Legos and stuff need to be spent on, because it is a whole concept of building. Some other things you do not need to spend money on. So, it depends on what kind of toys is, you need to spend on colouring pencils and felt tips, but you do not need to spend too much, you just need to get the correct toys [...] toys that help children develop.

Lama, similarly, indicated that she is selective when buying toys and she revealed the reason:

I choose which toy I buy for my children, I have a goal in my mind, and I want my children to reach this goal via toys. For example, Legos, construction blocks, or sometimes from this kind of educative toys. My mum was like that, so I follow her.

Malika stated that although she is selective, she purchases toys, but encourages free play more.

She explained her point of view:

I buy toys, but not any toy, I am selective, I would not allow some kind of toys, even if they like them [...] some toys negatively affect children's thinking. They prevent them from thinking [...] I also do not encourage imaginary stories like Cinderella because it is not real. My daughter is always behind in her mental abilities. To understand the real life, it is always hard for her [...] She is 13 and she cannot go outside by herself or go to the shops for example to buy something, she is scared, scared from a lot of stuff, from real life, basically [...] Imaginary play changes the personality of the children [...] playing with dolls made her realise real life really late. This is because she did not use the right toys and the right games to learn from them.

These mothers seem to have a positive perception of children playing with toys, finding them a wonderful way for children to express themselves and develop their skills, but they are

selective in their toy choices. This may highlight various aspects about their parenting philosophy, values, and beliefs about child development. They might be prioritising quality over quantity, emphasising the importance of providing children with toys that have educational or developmental value (e.g., Malika).

Board games and building blocks are examples mothers listed as educative toys they prefer their children to use (Lama and Selma). Emphasising this type of toys might be based on mothers' recognition of the possible potential of these toys in supporting cognitive and motor development. The mothers notion aligns with Newman et al.'s (2016) discovery after investigating the relationship between block building activities and board games and their impact on individual's ability to perceive and navigate through three-dimensional spaces referred to as 'spatial ability' using an fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) to explore the brain mechanisms underlying these cognitive activities, that these activities may have similar effects on spatial ability, and engaging in any of these activities could potentially improve children's spatial skills. This understanding appears to be held by the mothers in this section.

Mothers' selectiveness of toys was mainly driven by a consideration of developmental appropriateness, e.g., Selma who said: *"you just need to get the correct toys [...] toys that help them [children] develop."* This might indicate that mothers are highly aware of what is beneficial for their children in terms of toys, and they want their children to achieve specific developmental goals while playing with toys, therefore they find it important to be selective. Findings in the current study regarding reasons behind mothers' selectivity of toys, are found to be similar to the findings of a study conducted by developmental psychologists Hassinger-Das et al. (2021), who conducted a comprehensive study to investigate caregiver toy selection decisions and the reasons behind their choices. The findings revealed several key factors that influence caregivers' toy selection decisions, including considering the child's age,

developmental stage, and cognitive abilities when selecting toys. Similar to the mothers in this section, parents, and caregivers in Hassinger-Das et al.'s (2021) study aim to provide toys that are age-appropriate and stimulate the child's cognitive growth.

Malika said: *"I do not encourage imaginary stories like Cinderella, because they are not real."*

This statement may indicate that this mother is choosing not to encourage imaginary stories like Cinderella because they are not reflective of real life. This is a perspective that may align with concerns about the relevance of fantasy narratives to children's understanding of the world. This perspective was reflected in Malika's explanation when she related her daughter's delay in reading and writing and making sense of the world around her to playing with non-real character toys such as Cinderella, believing that this type of activities keeps children in the fantasy world. The question of whether fantastical stories or real stories are more beneficial for children's cognitive development was long investigated by many educational psychologists such as Fiorella and Mayer (2016) who strongly support Malika's concern that overly fantastical stories could potentially confuse young children who are still developing their understanding of reality and fantasy, suggesting that incorporating real-life scenarios into learning materials can enhance children's understanding and retention of information. However, other developmental theorists, e.g., Piaget (2013) asserted that fantastical stories may also be useful for children's development. While real stories provide concrete examples for understanding the immediate world, as put forward by Fiorella and Mayer (2016), Piaget (2013) suggested that fantastical stories may enhance symbolic thinking, that supports children's cognitive growth, especially when children engage with abstract concepts, and may create a rich environment for moral and ethical lessons that can shape children's moral reasoning and contribute to ethical understanding as argued by Kohlberg (1984) and Haidt (2001). However, Piaget (2013) also emphasised the importance of developing children's ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, because focusing on concrete and real-life

experiences is crucial in early childhood. It might be important to mention that Malika's daughter's delayed learning could be due to other factors that need to be assessed rather than relate it to a lack of play, as elaborated in section 7.3.1.5, or to using wrong toys as indicated in this section.

Generally, this group of mothers want to ensure that their children can have fun at the same time benefit from the toys they play with. They also consider developmental goals for their children, especially cognitive development, by focusing on toys that help achieve specific educational goals.

7.5.1.4. Mothers who relate the purchase of toys to a budget

Six out of sixteen interviewed mothers (Rowena, Farida, Sofia, Khadija, Iman, and Hasina) showed an incredibly positive perception of the potential of play, but when it came to playing with toys, they showed a slightly different point of view. These mothers strongly related the purchase of toys to a budget. They mentioned that they do not buy many toys for their children, not because toys are not useful, but because it must be within the budget, or/and, for some mothers, they want to teach their children that they cannot always get everything they desire.

Khadija stated, when asked what she thinks about investing in toys: *'I don't spend a lot of money on toys, most of my daughter's toys are second hand or given to her from my friend.'*

She was asked whether she would mind buying toys for her child, regardless of their state or price. She replied: *'Oh, yes, not at all, I don't mind buying toys, yes definitely yes, I don't mind.'*

Similarly, Iman who is a mother of a 3 year old boy and a 5 year old girl, mentioned that she likes her children to play with toys because toys are beneficial for learning, saying: *'my kid is learning numbers, because in the bus toy there is numbers, and when we go to the bus stop, he learned that our bus is 225, so he is learning numbers from his toy buses'*. She also stated that herself and her husband purchase toys that are within their budget. She said, after she was asked

what she thinks about investing in toys: *‘Yes, I buy toys. Where I live there are many charity shops, they sell cheap toys in a good condition. So, my husband every week he buys for the children toys, because they are not expensive and in a good condition.’*

Farida is also one of the mothers who relate toys purchase to the budget, however, she adheres to a specific parenting philosophy, aiming to teach life lessons and instil a sense of financial responsibility on her children. Mirroring the realities of life, Farida mentioned that she wants her children to learn that not everything they see or desire can be instantly acquired, saying: *“I don’t mind to buy toys, but sometimes unexpansive toys, but I want them to learn that not whatever they see or whatever they want they get it or they can buy it, no.”*

It is apparent that these mothers have no objection for their children to play with toys, however, they relate toys purchase to a budget, which may indicate an understanding that toys can be expensive, and how quickly costs can add up. Thus, they take the time to weigh the cost of toys and consider how much they can spend. These mothers seem to seek out the best deals and discounts and tend to look for stores that offer the best quality and the best value trying to find a balance between budget and quality. They also seem to be highly aware of the principle of minimalism. They tend to apply this principle in their lives and transfer a message to their children to adopt it in the future. At the same time, these mothers showed that they value toys, and they are pleased for their children to use toys in their play.

One plausible explanation of mothers considering budget constraints when purchasing toys is their prioritisation of financial responsibility and their recognition of the importance of teaching their children about delayed gratification and managing desires, e.g., Farida when she said: *“I want them to learn that not whatever they see or they want they get it or they can buy it.”* These mothers’ need to make informed and mindful financial decisions, even in the context of spending on toys, may indicate a commitment to financial responsibility. They strive to create opportunities for their children to develop a sense of financial responsibility by setting

limits on toy expenditures may indicate that they may be engaging critically with consumer culture, adopting both, the concept of consumer socialisation Ward (1974) and minimalism Dittmar and Hurst (2017). Consumer socialisation is the process by which individuals learn and acquire the attitudes and behaviours related to their consumption practices, and minimalism is the practice of living a simpler and more intentional life, with a focus on reducing clutter and possessions. By adopting these concepts, especially the concept of minimalism, mothers promote the idea of embracing simplicity and reducing one's reliance on material possessions. This finding is well aligned with Dittmar and Hurst (2017) suggestion that parental attitudes toward materialism and consumption influence children's values and behaviours, and to successfully transfer conception related values to the children, Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) introduced the concept of imprinting, which is a cognitive process where individuals form attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours as a result of early experiences that can have a lasting impact on their subsequent attitudes and behaviours, even when they are exposed to different information or situations later in life. This is what some of the mothers in this section (e.g., Farida) seem to be trying to instil in their children.

The mothers' consideration of budget constraints can also highlight and influence of cultural and socioeconomic factors. Although no connection was made by the mothers between their culture and their toys purchase, and although no mention was made about their socioeconomic status, they clearly indicated that they highly consider toys that are affordable for them (e.g., Iman and Khadija). This aligns with Conger et al.'s (2010) and Kasser's (2011) suggestion that cultural and socioeconomic contexts shape parental attitudes toward money and financial management including financial decisions related to children's needs and desires. Thus, the potential cultural and socioeconomic effect on these mothers' behaviour towards toys purchase should not be ignored.

From the above we can conclude that these mothers place a significant emphasis on financial responsibility. They understand the importance of making mindful choices in their spending habits and some of them are likely to model responsible financial behaviour for their children. We can also conclude that these mothers are actively engaged in financial awareness within the family, controlling their financial situation and fostering an early understanding of budgeting and responsible spending.

7.5.1.5. Mothers' preferences for toys over electronic games

An additional aspect of play and learning that four mothers (Malika, Selma, Sara, and Sabrina) mentioned, without being asked, was electronic games and TV time and how they perceive their impact on their children. Some of these mothers mentioned that they work on reducing screen time as much as possible, while some others focused more on explaining the negative impact of the prolonged screen time. Malika, for instance, mentioned that TV has had an enormous negative impact on her daughter who is currently 13 years old (see section 7.3.1.5). The girl would spend most of her time watching TV rather than playing when she was a child and that, according to the mother's assumption, delayed her learning and development in several ways. This made this mother encourage her 5-year-old now to play as much as possible. These mothers revealed how they perceive electronic games vs play showing, somehow, a negative perception of electronic games, mentioning that they tend to reduce screen time and encourage their children to get involved in diverse types of play instead. Commenting on this point, Selma said:

My children get very little screen time, once in 2 days like for half an hour only but playing more. My daughter [...] would read a book, and make up her story out of that book, we would make pastries together, I can make her an egg and I get her to whisk the egg, crack the egg, so she gets involved whenever.

Sara also stated her point of view saying: *‘We do lots, lots, of conversation and talking. When you say play that is the kind of play I get involved in, especially if there is any direct learning element involved [...] and that is why I limit screen time for them. Through play they learn more.*

Sabrina Added:

I try to limit screen time as much as I can, to make it on a website where they can still learn something. I am not comfortable with tablets, and stuff, because they are 4 siblings and they are very similar in age they do not really need electronic games, they can play together, they have toys they have cars and blocks. I do often activities with them, like crafting or making books together, like cutting and sticking stuff, or colouring.

It is obvious from the results that this group of mothers emphasise the negative impact of screen time, compared with the positive impact of active play on children’s development. They encourage children to unplug from their electronic devices and engage in more meaningful play which will help them develop important skills and foster strong relationships. Mothers seem to believe that unplugged play can foster and refine children’s skills more.

Mothers’ expression of a negative perception of electronic games may indicate their concerns about excessive screen time and its potential impact on children's health and their preference for diverse types of play. This suggests their desire to promote a well-rounded set of experiences for their children. Mothers push their children to engage in various forms of play, such as physical, imaginative, and social play, which may indicate their awareness of the importance of active play in development. Mothers' emphasis on reducing screen time aligns with guidelines from health organisations recommending limits on screen-based activities for children. The AAP (2016) (American Academy of Paediatrics), for example, as presented by

Guram and Heinz (2018), provides guidelines on screen time limits based on age, emphasising the importance of balancing screen activities with other developmental activities. These recommendations aim to support parents, caregivers, and healthcare professionals in promoting a healthy media environment for children, by making informed decisions about children's prolonged sedentary time and media consumption.

On the other hand, there are arguments (Kabali et al., 2015; Linebarger & Walker, 2005; Spence & Feng, 2010) that screen time can provide access to educational content that may promote language, math, and science and other cognitive skills. However, it is important for parents to be aware of the types of programmes their children are exposed to. Linebarger and Walker (2005) examined the impact of television viewing on language skills and found that television content can enhance cognitive skills. However, exposing children to low-quality programming and content not designed for their age group, may have a negative effect on their language acquisition, more than the amount of television viewing.

The effect of video games on children's development, was also widely measured by researchers as it is a worldwide phenomenon. Spence and Feng (2010) observed, while exploring the effect of video games in learning and development that individuals who engage in regular video game play demonstrate enhanced spatial abilities compared to those who do not play video games. As some video games such as first-person shooters and real-time strategy games, were found particularly beneficial, and have a positive impact on spatial cognition as they provide players with extensive experience and practice in spatial tasks, because they require players to make rapid judgments and decisions about spatial locations. Additionally, the visual and auditory cues through video game play lead to improved mental representations of spatial information.

While some TV programmes and some video games can be beneficial for children's development, Subrahmanyam et al. (2000) urged parents to strike a balance through an active

parental guidance to mitigate potential negative effects and create a holistic and positive media experience for children by ensuring moderation and age-appropriate content.

In summary, this group of mothers seem not to be considering the benefits of electronic games and educational TV programmes due to the pervasive idea of screen time's negative effect on children's health and wellbeing. They seem to be focusing on minimising or completely restricting screen time, rather than prioritising the quality of content and determining how electronic engagement can contribute positively to their children's learning. Guram and Heinz (2018) suggested that informed decision-making, setting guidelines, along with promoting media literacy helps parents to create a positive and developmentally enriching screen time experiences for their children.

7.6. Summary of chapter 7

As presented and discussed above, quantitative, and qualitative results on the perception of play among Muslim mothers revealed a positive outlook regarding the role of play in learning and development in early childhood. Section 7.2.1 showed that Muslim mothers define play as an activity that provides learning opportunities as well as joy and interaction, indicating a strong appreciation for play as a means of learning, similar to Pellegrini and Smith (2003). Section 7.2.2 showed that children prefer play activities that promote not only joy and entertainment but also learning and development, as Louv (2008) suggested, demonstrating that mothers are highly aware of the importance of play in early childhood education and development. Section 7.3 revealed that Muslim mothers are more likely to engage in play activities with their children and view play as a useful way to teach skills, understand children's abilities, discover their talents, and interact and bond with them, which is important for fostering a children's cognitive, physical, and emotional development, as well as their social and language skills, similar to Vygotsky (1978).

It is also obvious from the quantitative and qualitative results that mothers in this study hold positive attitudes towards play. Although, a small group of mothers showed a positive attitude with less engagement towards play which was presented in getting passively involved in their children's play activities and regulating play time, still, all mothers seem to be aware of the potential benefits of play. These diverse attitudes towards engaging with play might be due to a number of reasons, some of which are explored below.

Moreover, some mothers related their positive attitude towards play to the joy and fun they experience watching their children interact and explore, which reminds them of their joy while playing as children themselves. As the positive previous play experiences had a positive impact on mothers' attitude towards play. At the same time, some mothers indicated that the attitude of their parents towards play significantly affected their ability to provide a convenient play environment for their children. Resulting in mothers whose parents provided a convenient play environment for them as children have more willingness to provide the same for their own children (Singh & Gupta, 2012).

On the other hand, although all mothers showed highly positive attitude towards play, some of them demonstrated, less engaged positive attitude, which is often rooted in the mothers' desire to protect their children, ensure their safety, or worry that playing could interfere with their child's academic performance, and distracts them from more important activities, such as studying, practicing valuable skills, or even just finishing a necessary chore (Brussoni et al., 2021; Lyu et al., 2023). Additionally, some mothers may feel overwhelmed with their own responsibilities and worries and need rest so they regulate play at home, because the perceived messiness or noise associated with play can be a source of stress for them (Deater-Deckard et al., 2010). Section 7.5.1 also revealed that Muslim mothers are eager for their children to play with toys, even if some of them shewed some reservations such as being selective on toys prioritising educational ones, considering financial restraints while purchasing toys (Hassinger-

Das et al., 2021), and preferring, and encouraging free play, either by reducing the use of toys or by reducing screen time (Guram & Heinz, 2018).

Generally, it is obvious throughout this chapter that the mothers were continuously mindful that play is an essential part of a child's development, and it is important for them to provide convenient play environment and find ways to engage positively with their children in play activities. While it may be necessary, in some occasions to set limits on playtime.

The next chapter is chapter 8, which will present, interpret, and discuss the results related to the societal conceptualisation of play. This will include answers to RQs 3 and 4.

Chapter 8: Societal conceptualisation of play

8.1. Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets, and discusses the results on mothers' societal conceptualisation of play, answering research questions 3 and 4. Research question 3, focused on the factors that might have influenced mothers' perceptions of play, notably social, cultural, and religious factors. Social factors include the impact of mothers' childhood play experiences and the impact of mothers' parents' attitude towards their play as children. Cultural factors focus on how the mother's indigenous culture and background view play, and the religious factors explore what Islam, as a religion and a way of life says about play at early years. Related to this question, this chapter will also present and discuss some correlation tests that explored relationships between these factors and some other variables of interest, and their impact on mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play. While research question 4 focused on how best mothers can be support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play.

8.2. Factors impacting mothers' perceptions of play

- Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? (RQ 3)

This question explored how the mothers describe their play experiences as children (social factors), how would they describe their parents' attitude towards play (cultural factors), and how they discuss play according to their culture and religion revealing what Islam says about play in early years (religious factors).

8.2.1. Social factors: Mothers' childhood play experiences

Research question 3 was quantitatively and qualitatively explored. Descriptive results showed that 82.6% of the mothers either disagreed /strongly disagreed that in their childhood they did

not play much, 83.5% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that, as children, they used to spend a long time playing and only 4.9% of the mothers disagreed with this statement. None of the participants (0%) strongly agreed that their parents' thought play was a waste of time, while 73.8% of the mothers either disagree/strongly disagree with this statement. However, when the mothers were asked whether their parents thought that play helps children learn, 41.7% of them either remained neutral or disagreed with this statement, while 57.3% of them agreed or strongly agreed with this item (see appendix H: table H.12).

Qualitative results revealed that all mothers had positive childhood play experiences. In describing their play experiences as children, mothers used different terms such as “good,” “excellent,” “wonderful,” and “amazing” to depict the joy they experienced during their playtime. They all expressed enthusiasm as they recounted childhood play stories, by sharing memories of playing tag, hide and seek, or spending hours making up imaginative games. Some mothers even remembered the joy of playing with siblings or neighbourhood friends, as well as mentioning their parents’ attitude towards play. All mothers recognised their parents’ positive attitudes towards play and their role in encouraging them and providing them with different play opportunities.

Fatima, for example, who is originally Arabian born and raised in Bahrain, said:

I was born in Saudi Arabia, but I was raised and brought up in Bahrain. After school, I used to spend around 4 hours playing outside with sand; I love sand. My dad used to get us sand dunes to play with, and we had a clubhouse in a tree as well. We were playing in the clubhouse, swings, and a slide. So, I feel that I inherited the love of playing and I am transferring this to my children. I was playing in the nature more than indoor, climbing trees, under the trees, building homes with natural elements in the garden, and riding bikes, and I play with my older and younger siblings.

Likewise, Nadia who is an Algerian born and raised in Algeria, shared her play experiences as a child saying:

I was raised in a big family, 9 brothers and sisters [...] there was also my relatives living near us. My uncle had 9 children, [...] we lived together, and we played all together. We were more creative, we used to create our own toys [...] we were playing for a long time. After school we used to go outside and play in big groups, with neighbours also [...] my parents had no problem that we play. As young children under 6 years they allow us to play outside but under their supervision, especially my dad, so until the age of 9, I was still playing as much as I wanted.

Selma is an Indian mother, born and raised in the UK. She shared her play experiences on her childhood along with the role of her parents in her play and their attitude towards it, saying:

My mum [...] played with us, but I remember playing more on my own, when cousins are around, we play together. [...] with my dad I remember playing a lot more, like bike ride with him, doing stuff in the garden, or having water fights [...] I remember there has always been encouragement. We have always had toys in our house, my mum, I remember for Eid [...] bought me a kitchen toy. I was 7 years old. So, my mum did encourage me about that, and she did buy me toys [...] yes, we have always had toys, like scooters and bicycles, balls, a rocking horse, and my mum used to send us to summer play schemes [...] that was amazing.

It is apparent, according to the mothers' quotes, that childhood play experiences can have a significant impact on shaping an individual's personality and development. Fatima confirmed that when she said: "I feel that I inherited the love of playing and I am transferring this to my children." And when Selma expressed her joy about her childhood play experiences saying: "that was amazing." According to Cohen (2008) the positive childhood play experiences of

the mothers reflect a positive impact on their roles as parents. In this study, through various expressions such as "good," "excellent," "wonderful," and "amazing", mothers enthusiastically recounted their fond memories of play activities during their younger years, highlighting the significance of these experiences in their lives. The enthusiasm with which the mothers spoke of their childhood experiences was infectious. Many of them fondly recalled about the games they used to play with their siblings and friends. Some of them talked about the creative and imaginative aspects of their play, and how they used to produce their own rules and stories and how they created their own toys (Amel). This finding is well aligned with Pellegrini's (2009) study which highlights the importance of play as a natural and instinctive behaviour that is observed across cultures and societies, focusing on the cognitive benefits of play, emphasising how it enhances creativity, problem-solving and decision-making abilities, imagination, critical thinking, and helps developing a sense of autonomy.

Playing with siblings and neighbourhood friends seems to be an important and impactful aspect, as it was emphasised by all mothers. In relation to this, Go, Ballagas and Spasojevic (2012) argued that play among siblings and neighbourhood friends promotes important social and emotional skills such as cooperation, conflict resolution, and empathy, providing children with a unique context to learn about relationships, negotiate roles, as demonstrated in the example with Sabrina in section 7.3.1.4, and develop a sense of belonging within the family unit and within the community. These experiences not only shape a mother's understanding of sibling and community dynamics but also influence her parenting practices later in life (e.g., Amel). Mothers in the current study recall forming strong bonds with their siblings and neighbourhood friends through shared play experiences (e.g., Sara, section 8.2.2). These relationships seem to not only have enhanced their enjoyment of play but also fostered a sense of belonging and social connections, something confirmed by McHale et al. (2012).

It is apparent that participating mothers had positive associations with their childhood play and believed that it was a valuable, enjoyable, and unforgettable experience (Clark & Dumas, 2020). They spoke of the feeling of freedom, the simplicity of the moments, and the joy of being surrounded by friends. These memories seem to have shaped their positive perception and attitude towards play and instilled within them a deep appreciation for the value, enjoyment, and lasting impact of play. As a result, mothers reported investing time and money to provide their children with the same play opportunities by creating safe and stimulating play environments. This finding is consistent with Dhas and colleague's (2022) systematic review protocol that examined parents' awareness, knowledge, and experiences of play and its benefits in child development by synthesising the available literature. The review indicated that parents play a significant role in promoting their children's overall development by providing them with stimulating play opportunities.

Overall, relevant literature such as Clark and Dumas (2020) strongly supports the notion that childhood play experiences have a lasting impact on individuals. Positive experiences can lead to an increased willingness to provide the children with opportunities to explore and engage in play, while negative experiences can lead to a less supportive attitude. In either case, it is important for mothers to be aware of their own experiences and how they may affect their attitude towards play, something also supported by Dhas et al. (2022).

However, while the quotes emphasise the importance of positive childhood play experiences, there might be underlying complexities and additional factors influencing how these mothers prioritise play for their children. One relevant theoretical perspective, for instance, is cultural and socioeconomic factors. This perspective was discussed in theories of play section, including Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory (see section 3.8.2) and Super and Harkness' (1986) ethno-theories (see section 3.8.1). These perspectives emphasise the role of social interactions and cultural contexts in shaping peoples' behaviour. Incorporating sociocultural

and ethno-theories perspectives, means that the complex interplay of the social, cultural, and environmental factors may also contribute to how mothers prioritise play for their children (Super & Harkness, 1986).

A possible alternative reason could be religious norms. Mothers may feel compelled to adhere to dominant religious expectations, which may or may not align with their own childhood experiences, forcing them to balance personal experiences with broader cultural or religious beliefs (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000) (see section 8.2.3 for more details about religious factors). Economic factors might also influence the way mothers prioritise play. Bradley et al. (2001) asserted that economic circumstances may affect the availability of toys, safe play spaces, the possibilities for organising play activities which in turn might influence how mothers facilitate play. This was present in this study, as some of the mothers mentioned that their purchase of toys strongly depends on the budget (e.g. Khadija and Iman in section 7.5.1, group 4). This is in addition to other factors such as educational trends, parenting styles (Noor, section 7.4.2), mothers' work-life balance (Sabrina, section 7.4.2), child's individual needs and preferences (section 7.2.2), media and technology, as well as parenting advice and guidance mothers receive from experts (Goldschmidt, 2020).

In summary, although mothers recognise the significant impact of their childhood positive play experiences in their attitude towards play, other factors might also have participated in forming this attitude, such as cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors.

8.2.2. Cultural factors: Mothers' parents' beliefs and attitudes towards play

Regarding the mothers' cultural beliefs about play, quantitative results showed that 66.1% of them either agreed or strongly agreed that, in their culture, play is important for young children. Despite, 65% reported that according to their culture, children should spend most of their time playing, 59.2% agreed or strongly agreed that in their culture children should give equal time to learning and playing, and 58.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed that according to their

culture, children should spend most of their time learning about their religion. At the same time, 62.1% of the mothers disagreed or strongly disagreed that in their culture play is only for young children and adults should not get involved, and over 75% reported that according to their culture, play is not only for young children and adults should be involved and play with their children (see appendix H: table H.12).

According to the qualitative data, mothers attributed the cultural beliefs about play to their parents' attitude towards play. They seem to comprehend how their culture views play based on the way their parents dealt with play activities. Their encouragement, the amount of time they allowed them to play, and the quality of the play environment they provided for them when they were young. The mothers stated different types of their parents' positive attitudes, such as positive attitude with encouragement and/or involvement, positive attitude with encouragement and less or no involvement, and positive attitude with gender specific encouragement.

Fatima, for instance, explained that her Arabian parents had a positive attitude and strongly encouraged play, by saying:

My parents used to love it when we are playing. They used to leave us outside until sunset. When it gets dark, they tell us to come in, and of course directly to the shower. They were interested in play, and they were encouraging us to play. They were interested in building all the play equipment inside the house. As I said, the clubhouse, the swings, the slide, and they used to buy us bicycles. And me also, I did put all these things for my children.

Another positive attitude towards play from a cultural point of view was stated by a Pakistani mother, born, and brought up in the UK, Khadija who stated:

My mum worked in crèche all her life [...] I remember when I was young my mum spent all her time just playing with us. Some of my best memories is just playing with my mum. Her attitude was that children need play. My dad would spend most of his time working [...] so he did not have time to play with us [...] so, my mum's role in terms of play was very substantial.

The Algerian mother Intisar, who was born and raised in Algeria, recalled her parents' positive attitude towards play and her mothers' meaningful involvement saying:

At home, we had no problem to play all the time. My parents used to encourage us and they used to buy many toys for us, such as those kitchen stuff for children, and my mum used to show me how to make cloths for my dolls with paper, because she was afraid that I use the needles, so she was cutting for me papers, and we had many other things to play at home, I used play with my tiny kitchen toys.

Meanwhile, some mothers recalled their parents' lack of involvement in their play, despite their persistent encouragement. But it was obvious that these mothers were not impacted by their parents' lack of engagement, as much as they were impacted by their encouragement of play.

Sara who is a white British mother, born and raised in the UK, mentioned that her parents never stopped her and her siblings from playing, however, she does not hold any memories about their involvement in play, by saying:

My parents never played with us, ever. I come from a large family, I am one of 6 siblings, [...] all of us can play together, so we played one another, we did not necessarily need our parents to play with us. I have no reflection of our parents ever playing with us.

Selma, an Indian born and raised in the UK, explained her parents' attitude towards play as a very positive attitude with less engagement from her mother and more engagement from the father, stating:

My husband plays hide and seek with my daughter, I catch you, I catch you, or he would play racing with her, but I have never remembered that with my mum [...] I remember playing more with my dad than with my mum. But she would encourage play a lot [...] she would buy toys for us and send us to summer camps.

Another contradictory cultural attitude was mentioned by a mother. It was not related to involvement, rather, it was more related to gender. When asked how she would describe her parents' attitude toward play, Nadia, who was born and raised in Algeria, said:

They had no problem that we play [...] they allowed us to play outside under their supervision, especially my dad. [...] Until the age of 9, I was still playing as I wanted, but after 9, the girls start learning other things, in my culture. [...] My mum preferred that I played indoors, at the same time she reduced my play time to teach me how to cook and do the housework. I was not happy, because it was still early to stop playing and become responsible, and I could learn that through play [...] this has nothing to do with religion, it is like a tradition, culture.

The above quotes represent a sample of mothers' childhood play experiences about their own parents' attitudes towards play. In line with the theoretical framework of this study, parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the quotes (e.g., Intisar: 'we had no problem to play all the time. My parents used to encourage us, and they used to buy many toys for us') indicate cultural factors that might have influenced their attitude towards play. In general, many mothers seem to be influenced by a positive outlook on play in their culture, which has, in turn,

impacted their own attitude towards play. Most mothers mentioned that they encourage their children to play because their parents encouraged them to do so and facilitated positive play opportunities for them (e.g., Fatima) and also Lama who said: *“I choose which toy I buy for my children, I have a goal in my mind, and I want my children to reach this goal via toys. My mum was like that, so I follow her.”* This finding is consistent with Lin, Li & Yang’s (2019) study that explored the role of parental ethno-theories in shaping young children's play experiences in China. The study highlighted the significance of parental beliefs and values in influencing children's play behaviours and outcomes, concluding that parental ethno-theories, parents' beliefs about the purpose of play, the desired outcomes, and the role of structured learning impacted the types of play activities Chinese parents engaged in with their children.

Similar findings were also supported in the literature by Singh and Gupta’s (2012) study that emphasised the influence of parental beliefs, socio-cultural factors, and parental involvement on children's play experiences. The study involved observations and in-depth interviews with a diverse group of Indian parents selected from various socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure a comprehensive understanding of parental perceptions across different contexts. The study focused on exploring parents' attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to their child's play. Results showed that parents from different backgrounds had different views on the importance of play and the types of activities that were deemed suitable for their children. Indicating that parents' perceptions of play are influenced by several factors, including cultural norms, societal expectations, economic status, and personal beliefs about childrearing. This view provides an insight into the diverse contexts that shape children's play and the role of parents in facilitating meaningful play opportunities. In this study, all these factors were discussed in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

At the same time, while some mothers found it acceptable to consider their parents’ cultural beliefs and practices about play, some others who recognise the potential of play have chosen

not to be influenced by any negative attitude of their parents towards play, similar to what Farver and Lee-Shin (2000) indicated. More specifically the parents who exhibit gender-specific preferences when encouraging children's play, preferring girls, for example, to reduce play and engage in learning how to do the housework such as cooking and cleaning from young age (e.g., Nadia). Mothers commented that it is beneficial for girls to acquire skills that assist them in becoming responsible mothers in the future, however, this should not come at the expense of them playing, especially at such an early age when they still have a need to play. At the same time, it was pointed out by mothers that girls can learn all these skills through play, particularly if their mothers engage in play activities with the intention of passing on the skills to their daughters.

Halpern and Perry-Jenkins' (2016) study suggested that these gender-specific preferences can influence children's perceptions of themselves and their abilities, which reinforces the traditional gender stereotype, indicating a strong association between parents' gender ideology and children's gender-role attitudes, arguing that children tend to adopt similar attitudes to those displayed by their parents. However, in the current study, this did not seem to be the case. Mothers, in the current study, as stressed by Cohen (2008), found it important to maintain and benefit from their own culture, but they also found it essential to consider what to pass on to the next generation, mentioning that this should be the case especially in an ever-changing world, where ideas and perspectives can help shape the future, which requires finding ways to evolve one's culture while still preserving its core values and beliefs. Knoblauch (2023) found mothers' negotiation between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to today's rapidly changing societal values and practices to be a complex and deeply personal process, as it varies significantly based on individual circumstances, level of education, religious beliefs, cultural background, and specific traditions in question. Smyth et al. (2013) propose that mothers who understand that societal values and practices are not static, and they should not be navigated

with sensitivity need to nurture their children's appreciation for their heritage while prepare them to thrive in a diverse and rapidly changing world. Ways to achieve this balance, and create a harmonious coexistence with evolving societal values, and fostering a sense of tolerance and acceptance, as pointed out by Stockinger (2022), could be exposing children to diverse cultures, encouraging them to appreciate and respect different perspectives and traditions, creating safe spaces for discussions about societal changes, explaining the reasons behind evolving values, and guiding the children in making informed choices.

In summary, although mothers in this study showed cultural influences on their attitudes towards play, they also demonstrated an awareness about finding creative ways to adapt cultural traditions to align with changing societal norms by reinterpreting and personalising these traditions and making them relevant and meaningful in the context of their lives today, something also discussed by Smyth et al. (2013).

8.2.3. Religious factors: Play according to Islam

Quantitative results about religious beliefs of play revealed that 58.3% of the mothers agreed or strongly agreed that Islamic religion encourages parents to allow their children to play and play with them, so they can learn about their religion through play, 54.3% either agreed or strongly agreed that parents, according to the Islamic religion, should allow their children to play and play with them, so they can learn about their religion through play, while 28.2% remained neutral about this statement. Results also showed that none of the mothers (0%) agreed that according to the Islamic religion, parents should not play with their children, so they can find more time to practice their religion, and 90.3% of the mothers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, while 8.7% showed a neutral attitude towards it (see appendix H: table H.12).

Qualitative results revealed that all the 16 interviewees, without exception, mentioned with comprehensive explanations, that Islam has a positive view about play at early years, stating

that Islam encourages Muslim parents to allow their children to play, give them quality time and play with them. Mothers also clarified that in their religion, children during their early childhood should play more than doing academic studies, mentioning Prophet Mohammed's advice (PBUH) that parents should dedicate the whole first 7 years of their children's life to play, and that Islam and Quran strongly encourage children's play in their early years, as it is a valuable means of learning, exploring, and growing.

Islam, according to the mothers, also encourages Muslim parents to create a safe and stimulating environment for their children to play and explore, also ensuring that the type of play is appropriate, educational, and moral. In this respect, mothers from diverse backgrounds and cultures shared their point of view about play according to the Islamic beliefs and values. Intisar, for instance, illustrated her point of view in relation to what Islam says about play, saying:

Our religion is encouraging us to play with our children, and Islam is asking us to teach our children many kinds of sports. The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) advised us to teach our children swimming, horse riding and archery, because this helps them to learn many skills, at the same time, this is play for young children. They enjoy these activities, and they learn from them.

Similar illustration was made by Malika, when asked how she evaluates play according to her religion, stating:

Islam told us to play with our children for 7 years, and the following 7 years teach them and then be friend with them. Islam did tell us [...] to feed them when they are babies, not only with food, feeding their brains also with knowledge because even when they are babies, we need to read for them and talk to them. It means that we must take

general care of them. And when they start walking, we start playing with them, we make them enjoy their life and make them happy and share every moment with them.

Fatima, also showed a similar positive perception of play in Islam, by adding:

Play is very important in Islam. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) was encouraging the children to play including his grand children who used to play on his back while praying. Although the prayer is so important to be done properly, he used to stay bending when his grandchildren climb his back until they are done playing and then he stands up and continue his prayer. Play is one of the children's rights in Islam.

Khadija, when asked what Islam says about play in early years, she stated her opinion emphasising the importance of combining play with teaching to instil Islamic values on children, saying:

I know our Prophet (PBUH) used to play with Hasan and Hussain (his grandchildren), and he would always treat them with respect, even when he was praying, they would play around him. So, I suppose you take that role model [...] I think play is one of the most important aspects in Islam, because you can imbed Islam into them while playing.

Furthermore, Selma, illustrated her experience of how she uses play for enjoyment and learning Islamic values, saying:

I am encouraging my daughter to learn Quran and prayer [...] what I do is a handful of Duaa's (prayers). I teach that through play [...] One thing I would love my daughter to become is a hafiza (Quran memoriser) [...] We play together, and when I am reading Quran, she would follow me [...] she would do her own way like she thinks her Quran sounds. There is a lot of playing there as well [...] See, Islam encourages play. It is part of our din (religion).

It is evident that all quantitative and qualitative participant mothers agreed that Islam supports and encourages play, advocating that, according to Islam, children are encouraged to engage in play and leisure activities since the beginning of Islam (e.g., Malika, Selma, and Fatima). This notion is strongly supported by Ubale et al. (2015) who explained that during the formative years of Islam, play emerged as a means to foster social bonds, encourage creativity, and develop essential skills. Allah's (God) teachings in the Quran provide guidance for parents to ensure that their children have an enjoyable and healthy childhood. Rahman et al. (2020) asserted that this is supported in many verses that emphasise play in the holy Quran, such as verse 20 in surah Al-Hadid (57) where Allah says: *"Know that this worldly life is no more than play, amusement, luxury, mutual boasting, and competition in wealth and children [...]"*. In another surah, Allah also says: *"Those who took this faith of Islam as mere amusement and play and were deluded by their worldly life today we will ignore them just as they ignored the coming of this day of theirs and for rejecting our revelations."* (Al-Araf, 7:51, Quran).

Ismail et al. (2010) asserted that Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) enhances Allah's guidance by emphasising the importance of teaching young children, the values, and the morals of Islam through play, by engaging them in various forms of play that serve as a platform for learning and socialisation, including traditional games, storytelling, poetry recitation, music, sports, and imaginative role-playing. This was mentioned by all interviewed mothers in this study, stating that the Prophet (PBUH) was playing with his grandchildren (e.g. Fatima & Khadija), and that he encouraged parents to teach their children swimming, horse riding and archery which start as fun games, but they teach children many skills (e.g., Intisar). According to Al-Ghazali (1988), swimming teaches confidence and self-control, horse-riding teaches patience, balance, responsibility, and leadership skills, and archery teaches precision, focus, and determination, and these skills can extend to other areas of life in the future. This was also supported by Sulaiman (2008), who stated that, based on his famous statement: *"Let them play; the earth is*

the pasture of the children!” that highlights the importance of allowing and encouraging children to play and enjoy their surroundings, the Prophet (PBUH) was known to play games, tell stories, and engage in light-hearted conversations and playful interactions, such as carry his grandchildren on his back and play horse riding with them, racing with them, fostering a sense of trust, love, and happiness.

Mothers further mentioned that the Prophet (PBUH) encouraged parents and caregivers to engage in playful activities with their children, which fosters a warm, loving and nurturing environment, applying one of his statements that says: *"Whoever has a child should be like a child with him"* (Rahman et al. 2020), emphasising the importance of adopting a childlike approach when engaging with own children in play. This statement resonates well with one of the findings of this study. Many mothers mentioned that they apply the Prophet's advice and be childlike when engaging in play, e.g., Selma and Sofia, who play with their children as if they are children themselves, and also Malika whose husband told her that she was still a child because she becomes like a child when engaging in play (see section 7.4.3.1). Sulaiman et al. (2014) supported this notion by emphasising the importance of parents' engagement in play, arguing that embodying childlike qualities in parenting, can foster a deeper connection, understanding, and create a secure, joyful, and nurturing environment for the children's growth and development.

Mothers, in this study, seem knowledgeable about Islamic parenting practices and mindful that early childhood education holds immense importance in Islam. As it plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' character, values, beliefs, and life practices. They also seem aware of their crucial role in shaping their children's personality from early age. Out of 16 interviewees, 10 mothers stated that during the first seven years of children's life, Muslim parents should play with them and provide a nurturing environment. For the following seven years, they should teach them the values of Islam to instil good habits in them. Finally, during the last seven years

(at the age between 14 and 21 years old), parents should embrace friendship relationship with their children, encouraging them to be independent and to make their own decisions. Al-Ghazali (1988) strongly supported this notion considering this process as a key part of the Islamic tradition and parents should keep it in mind when they are raising their children, as it ensures the best possible upbringing allowing children to develop into well-rounded and confident young adults.

It is likely that this notion is derived from the mothers' belief that Islam is more than just a faith. It is a way of life, as elaborated by Gil'adi (1992) while exploring the constructive fabric that shaped and sustained the Islamic empire throughout its history, attributing this powerful construction to the political, cultural, and social dynamics including the daily practices that are embedded in Quran and Sunnah (Prophet's guidance). Aligned with this reality, countless ancient Muslim scholars (e.g., Al-Daqqi (12th-13th centuries); Al-Dimyati (13th-14th centuries); Al-Sakhawi (15th century)), as well as contemporary scholars including Al-Ghazali (1988), Cheikh-Moussa (1994) and Sulaiman et al. (2014), stressed the necessity for Muslims to memorise and understand the Quran and also memorise specific prayers (Duaas) to recite in a daily basis. As a result of this belief, mothers in this study seem to be eager to instil a love for Quran and Duaa (prayer) in their children's hearts and fostering a lifelong habit of turning to Allah in times of need by using repetition and playful approaches, e.g., Selma who teaches her daughter Duaas and aims for her to become Hafiza (Quran memoriser). This finding is consistent with that of Gil'adi (1992) and Mohamed et al. (2015) regarding the Islamic way of life, which holds that parents are responsible for instilling this behaviour in their children. Mothers also emphasised the importance of passing on this Islamic knowledge to the next generation by, not only encouraging children to memorise Quran and Duaas, but also teaching them the Islamic norms and values from young age by ensuring that their play activities incorporate these values. Nawaz and colleagues (2022) supported this finding suggesting that

Islam seeks to raise individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also possess strong moral values and a deep connection with their faith, by providing a comprehensive education that encompasses intellectual, moral, and emotional development to individuals from early age.

However, although mothers did not mention the challenges that might face them while teaching Islamic norms and values to their children, it is worth mentioning that for Muslims living in a multicultural society (UK), as stated by Jackson (2014), it can be challenging to reconcile Islamic religious values with broader social norms and expectations in the context of play and learning. Jackson (2014) also stated that finding the balance between Islamic religious values and secular views, when practicing or teaching these values, can be even more challenging. Secular education systems, as noted by Shahin (2018), may prioritise values and practices that conflict with Islamic teachings, leading to concerns about cultural assimilation or moral conflicts. In order to manage these conflicts, many researchers and theorists explored the different ways to achieve the balance in multicultural societies. Some, such as Bouchard (2009), Jackson (2014) and Van der Kooij et al. (2013), argued that religious values and secular views on play and learning can coexist harmoniously, asserting that religious principles, such as the value of knowledge and nurturing good character, align with secular ideals of education and the importance of play in child development. Based on this argument, several studies provided insights about how the shift towards integrating religious values greatly influenced the educational landscape in different secular countries such as Turkey (Reed, 1954; Guven, 2019), Egypt (ElGuindi, 1981), Uganda (Hassan, 2015), and Indonesia (Jamaa, 2018), where the coexistence point between Islam and secularism was achieved. Said et al.'s (2006) study is one of the studies that explored how Islamic education can adapt to contemporary needs while preserving religious values through the concept of "dynamic Islam", considering Islam to be dynamic and not static and can adapt to contemporary changes, as well as considering the

interfaith dialogue important in promoting peaceful coexistence and challenging stereotypes and misconceptions.

Although Muslims can navigate the intersection of Islamic values and secular norms through cultural adaptation and negotiation, balancing Islamic religious values and secular norms in play and learning requires a nuanced approach. Miedema et al. (2004) urged parents and educators to integrate Islamic teachings into children's lives while acknowledging the benefits of secular education and play. In this context, Knauth & Körs (2011) mention the role of the European Network for Religious Education through Contextual Approaches (ENRECA) which is an organisation that promotes religious education and fosters intercultural dialogue, aiming to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices in religious education among educators, researchers, and policymakers across Europe. ENRECA advocates for a holistic approach that recognises the significance of religious education in promoting mutual understanding, respect, and peaceful coexistence among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds, as discussed by Miedema et al. (2004).

Based on the discussion above, mothers in this study seem to be aware of the importance of ensuring that the religious and cultural values, traditions, and customs are kept alive and passed down to the next generation, however they might need to be mindful that of the importance of considering how this culture can be adapted to reflect the changing world around them.

8.3. Relationship between the factors and its impact on mothers' perceptions about play

Following the complete examination of the factors that might have influenced mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play, it was important to examine the potential interrelationship between these factors. This attempt aimed to provide deeper insights into the complex interactions between these factors which offers a broader understanding of their collective impact on mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play.

In order to examine these interrelationships, correlational analyses were conducted between different variables of interest, using both parametric and non-parametric tests. Results of the assumptions of normality that assess whether the data is normally distributed (Field 2018), showed that only three variables were found normally distributed, namely, 1) total scores of mothers' enjoyment while playing with their children ($w(103) = .984, p = .239$), 2) total scores of play environment ($w(103) = .981, p = .153$), and 3) total scores of cultural and religious beliefs ($w(103) = .984, p = .254$). Consequently, the parametric correlation test (Pearson's rho) was conducted to determine the relationship between these three variables.

It is important to mention that while Likert scale data may provide valuable insights, there is an ongoing debate among researchers regarding the appropriateness and interpretation of parametric correlations (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Many existing psychological studies and theoretical frameworks rely on parametric correlation, making it a familiar and widely accepted method for analysing Likert scale data, especially, (Norman, 2010), when Likert scales have 5 or more points and large sample sizes are involved. Carifio and Perla (2008) explained that parametric statistics have been routinely applied to Likert scale data in many fields, including psychology, and that this has become common practice due to the robustness of these methods.

There are valid reasons why some researchers may choose to conduct parametric correlations with Likert scale data. For instance, data transformation; parametric correlations allow for the transformation of Likert scale data into a quantitative format, allowing for easier and more comprehensive data analysis (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Another reason is efficiency; parametric correlations, according to De Winter and Dodou (2010), offer a straightforward statistical approach that can be conducted using widely available statistical software. An additional reason is that many researchers, e.g. Murray (1983), discussed how parametric statistics are routinely used in educational research for analysing Likert scale data, including correlations (between student ratings and teaching effectiveness, for instance) showing how

widely accepted such practices are in the field. Based on the above reasons, the parametric correlation was conducted in this study.

On the other hand, the assumptions of violation results showed that the rest of the variables of interest are not normally distributed. 1) Total scores of play benefits ($w(103) = .936, p < .001$), 2) total scores of mothers' involvement and engagement ($w(103) = .969, p = .015$), 3) mother's level of education ($w(103) = .622, p < .001$), 4) mother's ethnic background ($w(103) = .682, p < .001$). For this reason, a nonparametric correlation test (Spearman's rho) was performed to determine correlations between these variables. Additionally, only nonparametric tests were considered when testing correlations between normally distributed and non-normally distributed variables. As the parametric correlation test (Pearson) can only be used when both variables are normally distributed. In this regard, all variables of interest were correlated to examine the relationship between them (see appendix H: tables H.13 & H.14).

Correlation results revealed a relationship between some variables. Pearson's product correlation of play environment and play enjoyment showed a significant low positive correlation ($r = .337, p < .001$), and results of play environment correlation with mothers' cultural and religious beliefs indicated a significant positive correlation ($r = .196, p = .048$). Furthermore, a Spearman test between benefits of play and mothers' ethnic background revealed a significant low positive correlation ($r = .198, p = .046$), and the Spearman test between mothers' level of education and mothers' cultural and religious beliefs, also found a significant low positive correlation ($r = .262, p = .007$). The Spearman test detected the same low positive and statistically significant correlation between mothers' level of education and mothers' ethnic background ($r = .292, p = .003$) (see appendix H: tables H.13 & H.14).

The interpretation and discussion of the correlation results is presented below, focusing more on the five significant correlations between: 1) mothers' ethnic background and their understanding of the benefits of play, 2) mother's ethnic background and their level of

education, 3) mothers' level of education and their cultural and religious beliefs, 4) mothers' cultural and religious beliefs and play environment they provide for their children, 5) play environment the mothers provide for their children and their enjoyment while playing with them. Figure 8.1 illustrates these correlations highlighting the variables that are related.

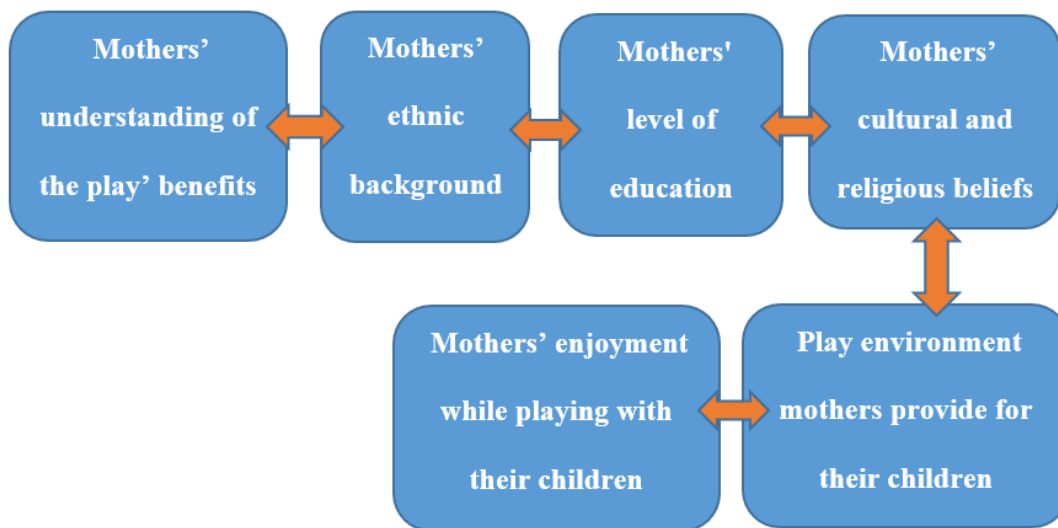


Figure 8.1. The five significant correlations

The significant correlation between mothers' ethnic background and their understanding of the benefits of play may indicate that mothers from different ethnic backgrounds have different approaches to play with different views of its importance due to the diversity of values and beliefs that exist between diverse cultures, as argued by Harkness and Super (2006). Mothers in this study emphasised the importance of cultural and ethnic background while talking about their countries of origins and their parents' attitudes towards play (see chapter 7) and how they are affected by their indigenous culture (see sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2), echoing the perspective of parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983) and sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These theories, as elaborated in section 3.8, acknowledge the richness of cultural diversity in parenting practices, arguing that mothers from

different ethnic backgrounds may have varying approaches to play because culture plays a significant role in shaping parenting beliefs and behaviours. However, Harkness & Super (2006) noted that this does not mean stereotyping and overlooking the individual variability within cultural groups and assuming that all mothers from a particular ethnic background share the same beliefs and practices. This was evident in this study, as some mothers (e.g., Nadia, in section 8.2.2) critically analyse the cultural heritage of their parents and choose what to adopt. Based on Bornstein, Tal and Tamis-LeMonda's (2013) argument that different cultural backgrounds can result in variations in parenting styles, disciplinary approaches, and views on child development, mothers in this study, as Muslims living in a multicultural society (UK), may find it challenging to identify which cultural factors are impacting their perceptions of play, because immigrant mothers, according to Berry (2017), may blend elements of their cultural heritage with the practices of their host culture, which may complicate the relationship between ethnicity and parenting. This led Mikelson (2008) to emphasise the importance of considering cultural factors while developing parenting interventions and educational programmes, by adapting strategies to fit the unique needs of diverse families, which makes these programmes contextually sensitive and relevant. This, as Ward and Geeraert (2016) added, also helps for acculturation, which Berry (2017) defines as the process of adapting to a new culture, indicating the importance of understanding the cultural perspectives of different ethnic backgrounds when considering how best to support mothers in their understanding of the benefits of play.

Mother's ethnic background was also significantly correlated with their level of education highlighting the complex interaction between socio-demographic factors and cultural perspectives on early childhood development including the role of play, as reported by Harkness and Super (2006). Borjas (2000) asserted that mothers from different ethnic backgrounds may have distinct levels of education, which can impact the way they view the

role of play in early childhood. Some cultures, influenced by educational systems and socioeconomic factors, according to Fler (2018), may emphasise academic achievement and prioritise structured learning activities at a young age, while other cultures, as argued by Piaget (1968) and Vygotsky (1997), may view playtime as more essential for a child's development. In the current study, results indicated that a total of 21 different backgrounds participated in both quantitative and qualitative data. The education level of the mothers was mostly high; out of 119 participants, 99 (85 quantitative and 14 qualitative) hold degrees in higher education (bachelors, masters, and doctoral), and the remaining 20 participants, hold either GCSE certificates, A level, or level 3 qualifications (see section 6.2.1.8 table 6.1). Huang, et al. (2017) proposed that mothers with higher levels of education may have been exposed to educational theories and research that emphasise the benefits of play in child development, which might make them more inclined to support play-based learning. Mothers in this study, showed high awareness of the potential benefits of play and positive attitudes towards it (see chapter 7), and showed eagerness and self-motivation to gain more knowledge about early childhood education by enrolling in parenting and child development courses (see section 8.4 & 8.4.1), this might not only be attributed to their high levels of education, because Malika, for example, holds GCSE level, but she is highly aware of the benefits of play (see section 7.3.1.), which indicates that other factors contributed in shaping her perception such as social, cultural or religious and personal factors, echoing Eisenberg, et al.'s (1999) suggestion that although cultural diversity may enrich our understanding of parenting practices, cultural or religious norms can prescribe specific parenting practices, which might lead to tensions for mothers with higher education levels who endorse a different approach.

Mothers' education level was also significantly correlated with their cultural and religious beliefs indicating that education can have a powerful influence on one's values and beliefs as pointed out by Pellegrini & Smith (2003), and might provide individuals with knowledge and

understanding of diverse cultures, religions, and ways of life, which can be reflected in their beliefs and values indicating appreciation of different perspectives, as suggested by Borjas (2000). Although higher education, according to some studies, such as Maussen et al. (2012), can equip individuals with conflict resolution skills that facilitate navigating cultural and religious differences, Manow (2021) argued that socio-political and ideological factors can influence how education shapes one's attitudes towards cultural and religious beliefs, including their views about play. Furthermore, as proposed by Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2009), the impact of education on respect for other beliefs can vary widely based on the quality of education, curriculum, and the individual's receptiveness to diversity. This makes the impact of this correlation between mothers' level of education and cultural and religious beliefs on their perceptions of play significant, highlighting Yogeewaran and Dasgupta's (2010) perspective that mothers with a higher level of education can be more knowledgeable of the principles of their culture and religion, which is likely to make them more open, respecting and accepting other cultural beliefs and religions.

Cultural and religious beliefs were also significantly correlated with the play environments mothers provide for their children, which might underscore the complex relationship between family dynamics, cultural transmission, and early childhood development, as explained by Middle-Range and Mtters (2015), who further indicated that this complex relationship has significant implications for children's overall development and their sense of identity within the family's cultural and religious framework. Moore and Lippman (2006) suggested that when mothers create a play environment that reflects their cultural and religious beliefs, they are providing their children with opportunities to learn and grow within the context of their family's values, which helps building a strong connection between the children and their family's beliefs and shaping their future decisions and behaviours. Because the early exposure to family's cultural and religious traditions, according to Rogers (2018), enriches family heritage and helps

pass down traditions to ensure continuity across generations, and develops a strong sense of identity. However, although families are recognised as primary agents of cultural transmission, including religious and cultural beliefs, as pointed out by Middle-Range & Mitters (2015), Berry (2017) suggested that in multicultural societies (such as UK), mothers may face challenges in balancing their cultural values with the dominant culture, which requires, according to Lansford et al. (2018), negotiation and flexibility in the play environment to achieve the balance between transmitting cultural values and allowing room for a child's exploration and adaptation. However, balancing cultural and religious traditions with the evolving needs and influences of the modern world, according to Mukoko (2017), can be challenging for families and may create tension that, according to Ochs and Izquierdo (2009), can impact the play environment provided for children. This study clearly showed the strong relationship and the interaction between mothers' cultural and religious beliefs and the play environment they prepare at home, highlighting how they manage to create a play environment that fosters their cultural and religious beliefs (see section 7.5).

Play environment was also found significantly correlated with mothers' enjoyment while involved in play activities. This may highlight the significance of the physical and emotional context in shaping parent-child interactions, indicating that a nurturing and stimulating play environment is essential for mothers to engage and enjoy playing with their children, as put forward by Goncu & Gaskins (2007). This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1997) argument, that providing an appropriate play environment is important for mothers to bond with their children and foster their development. Such an environment that is tailored to the developmental needs of the child, as argued by Goncu and Gaskins (2007), can help mothers to enjoy their time with their children, as it enables them to better understand their children's needs and interests. This was evident in this study, and extensively explained by mothers in section 7.3.1.4. Additionally, maternal enjoyment during play has been linked to mothers' psychological well-being and their

children's socioemotional development. Eisenberg et al. (1999), for instance, concluded that when mothers provide enriching play environments, they may experience greater satisfaction in their parenting roles. However, as noted by Biblarz and Gottainer (2000), it is important to recognise the potential challenges some families may face in providing such an environment, because not all families may have access to extensive play materials or a dedicated play area. This was mentioned in this study by some mothers whose play environment at home was strongly dependent on a budget (e.g., Khadija and Iman who relate the purchase of toys to a budget (see section 7.5.1.4). Nevertheless, understanding this correlation that highlights the relationship between play environment and mothers' enjoyment when engaging in play, can guide efforts in supporting families in creating enriching play spaces for their children, however, taking their socioeconomic status into consideration is crucial to achieve the best support, as proposed by Bornstein, Tal and Tamis-LeMonda (2013).

In summary, these five correlations provided a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationships between the factors and their collective impact on mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play, and also provided a comprehensive overview of how mothers in this study perceived and dealt with these complex impacts.

8.4. Supporting mothers to gain better knowledge about the potential of play

- How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play? (RQ 4)

Quantitative results revealed that 68.0% of the mothers were happy to read books and articles about play and its benefits, 23.3% were keen to ask the preschool teachers about the benefits of play, 46.6% watch movies and videos that show the benefits of play. Most of the mothers (73.8%) were keen to visit different websites that give advice about the importance of play, while 55.3% were happy to provide different play opportunities to their children and see how

they benefit from play. Furthermore, when mothers were asked whether they stop their children from playing to see how that will affect them, 97.1% said no (see appendix H: table H.15).

Qualitative results concerning the ways mothers can gain more knowledge about the potential of play were remarkably similar to the quantitative results. Most of the answers were related mostly to reading books and/or articles and watching online videos, along with asking professionals and practitioners, such as preschool teachers, health visitors and psychologists. Whilst some of the mothers might benefit from, such called, experienced people (friends who already have children, mothers, sisters, and mothers/sisters in law), some others were willing to conduct research and/or take accredited parenting courses, with some others have completed or they are currently enrolled in parenting courses. The word cloud below (figure 8.2) shows all the mothers' suggestions regarding the best ways to gain more knowledge about play.



Figure 8.2. Word cloud showing the diverse ways, listed by the mothers, which help them gain more knowledge about the potential of play

According to the mothers, the best way to gain knowledge about play's potential benefits is to ensure access to reliable, accurate, and unbiased information resources from which they can

gain the necessary knowledge and education, such as online websites, books, article, and YouTube videos. Seeking reliable and up to date information from unbiased sources may reflect the mothers' awareness of their crucial role in shaping their child's development and that accessing accurate information is vital. This resonates with Rothbaum et al.'s (2008) principles of evidence-based parenting that emphasise the importance of parents making decisions based on scientific evidence to support positive child outcomes. Parents, as noted by Bornstein, Tal and Tamis-LeMonda's (2013), who actively seek information and engage in their child's play and learning process tend to provide more supportive and enriching play and learning environments, that is why Rideout and Katz (2016) urged parents to critically evaluate online information and rely on reputable sources. However, although the use of online resources for parenting information is in line with modern trends, Oliver, Raney, and Bryant (2019) found it important to acknowledge the potential challenges in discerning the quality of these resources, because not all online information is evidence-based and accurate which might lead to misconceptions. Therefore, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) consider information literacy a valuable skill for parents to gain in order to critically evaluate sources for credibility and relevance in the digital age, suggesting that teaching parents to assess the quality of information empowers them to make informed choices.

Additionally, talking to experienced people (e.g., own mothers, sisters, mothers/sisters in law and friends) to learn more about their experiences with play, is in line with Mikelson's (2008) suggestion that engaging with family members and friends provides mothers with a support network based on shared real-life experiences. However, Mikelson (2008) shows concerns that this engagement, although it provides practical advice and emotional support for mothers, it also allows for a culturally contextualised understanding of play's significance which makes it important to recognise the influence of familial and social networks in shaping parenting practices. This might raise the question of how traditional practices align with contemporary

knowledge, and how the balanced can be achieved. This balancing between cultural values and contemporary evidence-based practices, as clarified by Harkness and Super (2006), can be a complex task for these Muslim mothers living in a multicultural society (UK), making it important for them to recognise and respect cultural perspectives on child-rearing practices while also integrating evidence-based approaches.

Moreover, seeking advice from local paediatricians, health visitors, child development and early childhood professionals, along with attending play-related workshops and online forums highlights mothers' awareness of the importance of specialised advice. This aligns with Koepke and Williams (1989) that consulting with professionals is a wise and proactive approach from the mothers to ensure access to specialised knowledge. These professionals can provide mothers with sound advice and guidance about the potential benefits of play and how it can be used in a child's development. They can also offer evidence-based recommendations tailored to a child's unique needs. However, according to Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2006), although considering professional guidance in child development and early childhood education can be highly beneficial, and although expert advice can help parents make informed decisions, the challenge can be the limited access to professional guidance in certain communities or during challenging times (e.g., lockdowns). Moreover, despite professionals offer valuable insights, they may provide diverse perspectives and variable advice. In this case, Zigler and Bishop-Josef (2006) advise mothers to be aware of it and navigate conflicting advice. On the other hand, Lareau (2011) advised professionals to consider the cultural and contextual backgrounds of the families they serve, by providing culturally sensitive and relevant recommendations. Because, professional guidance should complement, rather than replace, parental intuition and knowledge, as clarified by Sanders and Mazzucchelli (2013).

Another source of knowledge stated by mothers is exploring diverse types of play to gain a better understanding of how each type of play can benefit their child through playing board

games or going on nature walks or even joining a play groups. This may indicate mothers' awareness of the different impacts different play activities can have on children's development in terms of learning and improving diverse skills, at the same time, it aligns with Jull and Miranda (2011) and Needham and Jackson (2012) that exposing children to different play activities is vital for enhancing different skills.

In summary, seeking advice from a range of sources might indicate that mothers in this study recognise the value of diverse perspectives, which allows for a wider overview of the parenting process and helps gaining a wide range of knowledge that allows them to be better equipped to support their child's development. This is widely argued by Epstein (2010) who noted that providing mothers with access to local playgroups, after-school programmes, offering individualised support, such as one-on-one counselling or workshops, creates environment where mothers feel comfortable to ask questions and express concerns, and this can help them understand the potential benefits of play and feel empowered to provide their child with the best possible environment to support their development.

8.4.1. Mothers' parenting courses related to play

Four of the interviewed mothers (Lama, Malika, Sabrina, and Nadia), expressed more passion and more enthusiasm for learning in general, and learning about parenting and child development in particular, through enrolling in parenting courses to better support their children and help them reach their full potential. These mothers were more passionate about giving their children the best start in life and wanted to ensure they had the skills and knowledge to do so.

Lama is a mother of 4 boys and is extremely interested in parenting courses. Attempting to understand and manage the behaviour issues of her children, she began to study child development. Then, her passion for children's development motivated her to become a source

of help for other mothers. When asked what she thinks about play and learning relationship, she answered saying:

Because I did research about this topic, I am now more convinced that play is the most important thing that our children can do, because it affects their brain's development, in sense of using their senses, so there is more neurons and more connections [...] and this is kind of helping their brain to grow. Play, in general, helps them strengthen their fine motor skills, their hands, their legs, their feet, their muscles. Play helps everything to be better. Yes, I learned about all this.

Similarly, Malika showed an extreme interest in gaining knowledge in general and gaining the best possible knowledge about parenting in particular. My interview with her was the longest and the richest. This mother seems to perceive play differently for several reasons. One reason is that her 13 years daughter had learning difficulties, and she relates that to how she used to play in her early years. Play had many depths and dimensions in her perception, which made our conversation remarkably interesting. Although she gave up her studies early and did not do any higher education, she compensated that by reading a lot about how to help her children grow and develop by gaining knowledge about life and about Islam. She, also participated with interesting information about play in Islam, indicating that she dedicates a significant amount of time and effort for learning in general and gaining the maximum knowledge about parenting in particular.

Sabrina was equally passionate about learning as much as possible about every aspect related to children's learning and development. This provided her with the confidence to engage with her 4 children, aged between 4 and 10, in a positive and constructive manner. She expressed her passion and enthusiasm for parenting courses saying:

Do you know 'the parenting puzzle' course? I have done it twice, once in a community centre, and another time with Islamic booklet and I have done two others. One was more for teenagers. And I had another one with a lady from Birmingham. I cannot remember the name, but it was a parenting course. This one is an Islamic one, and I will share that with everybody. Because I really wanted to share the tips, I learned about parenting that are easy to implement but we never thought about them. That would really change the atmosphere at home.

Sabrina also mentioned that the whole family gets together at times during the week to share the play environment which promotes children's play and learning. She explained this point saying:

I learned a lot from my parenting courses and that is why I let my children play a lot. I hear them naming our flat 'the charity shop' [...] yes, I prefer having happy children than clean house. I remember I was watching a French parenting programme [...] The lady in the programme said that children, when they grow up, they will not remember the dust on the furniture, they will remember the time that you spend with them.

Mothers' passion for learning about parenting was an unexpected positive outcome of this study. Their passion and eagerness for learning about parenting by enrolling in courses might indicate the mothers' commitment to continuous personal and parental growth aiming to enhance their parenting skills and gain a better understanding of child development. This dedication and passion to continuing education is consistent with Woods (2000) and Sanders (2008) who both emphasised the importance of lifelong learning for effective parenting and the importance of passion as an innate drive that fuels individuals' desires, ambitions, and interests, as a self-motivation component. Woods (2000) added that nurturing passion, and understanding the emotional authenticity is crucial for personal growth and fulfilment.

The parenting courses seem to have provided mothers in this study with resources that helped them understand their children's needs better and create a more harmonious home environment. They seem to have learned how to engage in meaningful play with their children, how to create a sense of connection and trust, how to create a nurturing play environment, and how to use playtime effectively, as they explained throughout chapters 6 and 7. Aligned with this reality, Barlow and Coren (2018) found that parenting programmes, especially evidence-based parenting programmes such as Lindsay and Totsika's (2017) universal parenting programmes, have a positive impact on improving parental skills, reducing child behaviour problems, increasing confidence in parenting abilities and enhancing family functioning. This was further confirmed by Ingemann and colleagues (2022) and Moran & Ghatge (2005) who explored the impact of parenting support programmes on the well-being and development of children and families, and the key findings of their studies highlighted improvement in parenting skills, enhancement in parent-child relationship, positive child outcomes, and long-term benefits.

While enrolling in parenting courses can be very beneficial for mothers and children, Ramirez (2003) who explored the challenges faced by parents in gaining knowledge about how to effectively engage in their children's education, suggested that achieving the balance between the pursuit of knowledge and the demands of parenting and household responsibilities requires mothers to find support to manage their time effectively. At the same time, while some mothers in the current study expressed passion for gaining more knowledge about child development and the benefits of play, and managed to achieve that by enrolling in parenting courses, it is important to acknowledge that this doesn't mean that all parents have equal access to educational resources, due to parental and familial responsibilities, as well as to socioeconomic factors, as suggested by Bornstein et al. (2013).

Overall, the parenting courses proved to be a remarkable success, providing the mothers in the current study with the skills and knowledge to be better parents, and giving their children a

solid foundation for learning and growth. It is likely that these same mothers will continue to take advantage of such courses in the future, as they strive to be the best parents they can be. Their dedication and commitment to their children's development was highly admirable.

8.5. Summary of chapter 8

Chapter 8 summarises the mothers' societal conceptualisation of play, answering research questions 3 and 4. Results revealed that although all participant mothers were Muslims, they descend from 21 different cultural backgrounds, and despite their diverse backgrounds, they all showed positive perceptions and positive attitudes towards play. However, although they all showed positive perceptions and attitudes towards play, they also showed some differences in their definitions of play, the activities they encourage their children to engage in, the way of their engagement in play, their perception about the use of toys, the way they prepare play environment, along with the ways their parents perceived and acted towards play, which aligns with Sutton-Smith (1999) that parents from diverse cultures and backgrounds may perceive play differently.

Despite these differences mothers also showed many common points in relation to play perceptions and attitudes. 1) Their perceptions and attitudes towards play seemed to be positively influenced by their positive play experiences in childhood (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005) as well as by their parents' positive attitudes towards play. 2) The Islamic religion and Islamic teachings including Quran and Sunnah (prophet's guidance) (Sulaiman et al., 2014), along with the parenting courses (Barlow & Coren, 2018), echoing Sanders's (2008) lifelong learning notion, seem to have had an undeniable influence on their positive views and attitude towards play. They provided them with a great understanding of the importance of play and shaped their interactions with their children during play. 3) The interplay among the factors that influenced mothers' perceptions seem to have created a more complex impact, as evidenced by the significant correlations identified among various variables (section 8.3).

Overall, despite the evidence that mothers are influenced by their social and cultural beliefs, the Islamic religion, and the knowledge they gained about play seem to have greatly participated in uniting their perceptions and attitudes towards play despite the diversity of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The next chapter (chapter 9) will conclude this thesis by discussing the main outcomes of this study, its original contributions to knowledge, the challenges, and the limitations of the study along with the implications and recommendations for future research. Finally, the researchers' final thoughts and reflection on the doctoral journey will be provided at the end of chapter 9.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the insights gained from exploring the intersubjective meaning of play and the dynamic factors that might shape the understandings and practices of Muslim mothers who live in the UK. The study delved into how these mothers perceive and interpret play as a foundational element in children's growth and development within diverse multicultural communities.

The sections of this concluding chapter will set out as follows: section 9.2 summarises the study and its aim and the key findings to answer the research questions. This section serves as an overview of the insights gathered from the extensive exploration of Muslim mothers' perceptions of play as a base for children's learning and development, through discussing answers shared by the participants. Section 9.3 highlights the research's original contribution with new understandings and perspectives to knowledge, both at the theoretical and empirical levels. Section 9.4 examines the study's limitations, recognising the challenges and the boundaries that may accompany any research, while at the same time this section highlights what future research might explore and expand on. Section 9.5 explores the implications of the study's findings for educators, policymakers, and practitioners to provide a link between theory and practice. Section 9.6 wraps up the researcher's PhD journey by providing academic and personal reflections and annotations. In section 9.7, the researcher's final thoughts are presented to provide readers with the final scope of this study.

9.2. Summary of the Study and its Main Findings

This study was conducted to explore how Muslim mothers, who come from different backgrounds and live in the UK, perceive, and interpret the play as a learning tool and development for young children, especially children aged 3 to 6 years old. At the same time, it explored the factors that might have impacted Muslim mothers' perceptions of play, notably

social, cultural, and religious factors, along with the different methods used by the mothers to gain more knowledge about play's potential benefits. The explorations and the discussions of this study were centred on answering the following research questions:

1. How do Muslim mothers define play? (RQ1), what are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question)
2. How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? (RQ2)
3. Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? (RQ 3)
4. How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play? (RQ4)

The following sections will conclude the findings of this study including the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play, their attitude towards play, and the factors that might have impacted the way these mothers perceive, interpret, and act towards play.

9.2.1. Mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play

This section concludes answers to questions 1, and 2: How do Muslim mothers define play? What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (RQ1). How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning? (RQ2). These questions are interconnected to provide a general insight into the mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play.

Results revealed that, despite the difference in backgrounds, Muslim mothers who live in the UK seem to hold positive perceptions of play and its potential for learning and development. They see play as an element that accelerates children's learning and facilitates the acquisition of skills in a dynamic and engaging manner. Aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) and Piaget's

(1968) developmental theories, as elaborated in the theories of play (section 3.8), the detailed exploration of mothers' definitions of play (section 7.2.1) provided a rich understanding of their perspectives, revealing multiple views by using multiple synonyms to reflect the multifaceted and complex nature of play, notably, "pedagogical way of learning" reflecting the learning perspective, "fun and joyful" reflecting the enjoyment perspective, and "social interaction and integration," reflecting the interactive perspective.

Moreover, consistent with existing literature such as Hirsh-Pasek (2009), mothers seemed to perceive play as a valuable tool for their children's learning and skill development, considering that play can be employed to teach specific skills. As well as considering play as a low-stakes environment where children can take risks, gain insights into their capabilities, refine skills, and explore their interests, echoing Bornstein, et.al's (2013) view (see section 7.3.1.2). Furthermore, most mothers seemed to recognise play as a powerful medium for observing a child's developmental progress in a natural context and discovering and nurturing their children's talents, as elaborated in section 3.2.1 of the literature review. Results also indicated that mothers recognise the role of play in teaching and assessing creativity, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills through their emphasis on integrating play into learning, as highlighted by Dewey (1938) (see section 7.3.1.4).

One of the interesting findings is linking some children's developmental challenges to a lack of play. Although Pellis and Pellis (2010) indicated that establishing a direct causal relationship between the lack of play and children's development is challenging and needs a consideration of many factors (genetics, individual differences, and environmental elements), some mothers linked their children's academic struggles and psychological well-being (e.g., Malika & Sabrina) to a lack of play by sharing individual stories that highlight their concerns about the adverse effects of a lack of play on their children's growth and learning.

Additionally, aligned with the recommendations of educational bodies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009), which advocates for developmentally appropriate play activities, mothers in this study also advocate for the value of play-based learning approach for children under the age of seven, asserting that attending nursery in early age and engaging in play during the first seven years of a child's life is crucial for holistic development (see section 7.3.1.6). Mothers compared the Scandinavian education system, which emphasises a play-based approach for early years and delays formal academic approaches to learning until, approximately, age of 7, with the British education system which starts formal academic learning from a younger age (Morgan, 2014). Foundation stage 5 to 7 years in England, Scotland, and Wales, and 4 to 6 years in Northern Ireland (King & Howard, 2014). This comparison indicated a preference for the play-focused approach of the Scandinavian model that is, according to Sahlberg (2011), considered successful based on the international assessment PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). This success, as indicated by PISA, supports mothers' belief in play-based learning efficacy during the early years.

Results further indicated that all mothers had positive perceptions regarding playing with toys although some showed reservations, despite they view toys as a valuable tool for children to express themselves, explore creativity, and enhance socio-emotional skills. Aligned with Parten's (1932) emphasis of the benefits of toys in facilitating interactions and building social skills among children, all mothers appeared to actively support their children's development by encouraging play using toys designed to stimulate different aspects of growth (see section 7.5.1). However, some of these mothers demonstrated a preference for prioritising free play experiences over an abundance of toys, believing that such an approach can foster creativity, imagination, and independent exploration in children, echoing Sutton-Smith's (1997) argument that unstructured play stimulates imaginative thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition

to some other mothers who demonstrated a selective approach towards toys. They seemed to prioritise quality over quantity, aiming to provide their children with highly educative and stimulating toys, showing a keen awareness of developmental appropriateness, as highlighted by Selma's statement emphasising the need for "*toys that help them develop.*" Within these mothers diverse perspectives were evident highlighting a nuanced context-dependent nature of parenting choices, with some prioritising real-life scenarios for their practical lessons (e.g., Malika), while others showed no objection on fantastical stories (e.g., Sara), reflecting Piaget's (2013) perspective that fantastical stories may also enhance symbolic thinking especially when children engage with abstract concepts. Some other mothers exhibited a high level of budget consciousness when it comes to purchasing toys reflecting a commitment to making informed and mindful financial decisions, maintaining a balance between budget and quality and teaching concepts such as delayed gratification (Dittmar & Hurst, 2017), as exemplified by Farida's statement who emphasised the importance of not instantly acquiring every desired item (see section 7.5.1.4).

Finally, reflecting a broader awareness of the potential risks associated with prolonged sedentary time and media consumption, and aligned with the guidelines of health organisations such as American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP, 2018) which advocate for limits on screen-based activities for children, some mothers seemed to prioritise active play over screen time. Although, there are arguments, e.g., Kabali et al. (2015), suggesting that screen time can offer educational benefits through interactive and educational apps, these mothers seem to lean toward a cautious approach recognising the importance of parental guidance in shaping children's media consumption habits, echoing Guram and Heinz's (2018) perspective (see section 7.5.1.5).

In summary the study's findings reveal that Muslim mothers who live in the UK, originating from diverse backgrounds, seem to hold positive perceptions of play and its significant impact

on children's learning and development, and their perceptions and understandings of play were found to be well aligned with the evolving understanding of play in the field of child development.

Regarding mothers' attitudes towards play, findings revealed a unanimous positive attitude among participants as elaborated in section 7.4. Mothers' own positive play experiences and the belief that play is crucial for learning and development emerged as main factors in shaping their positive attitude towards play. Despite their positive attitude towards play, mothers sometimes felt compelled to restrict their children's playtime due to various reasons such as tiredness experienced by working mothers, highlighting the challenges of balancing work and parenting responsibilities and the attempt to create a balanced routine at home that allows for eating, sleeping, playing and doing some academic learning for children who attend preschools (see section 7.4.2).

Additionally, results highlighted a high motivation among mothers to engage in their children's play, believing that their, both active and passive, engagement is instrumental in unlocking their children's play potential, fostering entertainment, and creating positive interactions that enhance mother-child relationship (see section 7.4.3). Moreover, mothers demonstrated a strong connection between their attitudes towards play and the play environment they create at home. They seemed to intentionally design stimulating and age-appropriate play spaces at home, including outdoor equipment, a variety of educative toys, books, and art supplies that foster exploration and discovery (see section 7.5). In addition, to prioritising free play over screen time, by providing opportunities for pretend play and social interactions, whether through visits to playgrounds or participation in organised activities, echoing the positive correlation between maternal characteristics and a nurturing home play environment proposed by Menaghan and Parcel (1991).

Overall, the study indicated generally positive attitudes towards play among mothers, with variations in approaches shaped by personal experiences and a strong belief in the educational and developmental benefits of play including engagement in play activities and the intentional design of play environments.

9.2.2. Mothers' societal conceptualisation of play

This section concludes answers to questions 3, and 4, highlighting the factors that might have affected the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play: Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background? (RQ3). How can Muslim mothers support themselves to gain more knowledge about the potential benefits of play? (RQ4). These questions are interconnected to provide a general insight into the factors that might have affected the mothers' perceptions of play.

According to results regarding the social factors, the mothers' positive childhood play experiences with siblings and neighbourhood friends, were recalled with enthusiasm and fondness, and appear to have contributed to shaping mothers' current perceptions of play.

Regarding the cultural factors and aligned with parental ethno-theories and sociocultural theories elaborated in the theories of play (section 3.8), the mothers expressed positive outlook on play rooted in their cultural background, emphasising how their own parents' encouragement and facilitation of positive play experiences shaped their attitudes towards play. However, while some mothers embraced their parents' cultural beliefs regarding play, others consciously chose not to be influenced by negative attitudes (see section 8.2.2), especially concerning gender-specific preferences in play by recognising the importance of allowing both boys and girls to play freely while acquiring essential skills through play, as proposed by Farver and Lee-Shin (2000). Mothers also recognised the importance of passing down cultural values and traditions to the next generation, adopting Cohen's (2008) perspective, with a strive to create a balance between educating children about cultural heritage while fostering open-

mindedness, appreciation for diversity, and the ability to navigate evolving societal norms, as suggested by Berry (2017), which indicated an awareness of the multicultural nature of the society where they are raising their children.

Regarding the religious factors, the study revealed a consensus among quantitative and qualitative participant mothers that Islam supports and encourages play (see section 8.2.3). Mothers exhibited of a strong awareness of Islamic parenting practices, emphasising the importance of play in the early years and gradually transitioning to teaching Islamic values in order to create well-rounded individuals, taking in consideration the tension between different spheres in the society combined with verses from the Quran and the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) examples of engaging in playful activities with children as highlighted by Sulaiman (2008). At the same time, mothers seemed to be aware of the importance of integrating Islamic teachings into children's lives while acknowledging the benefits of secular education and play, as Miedema et al.,2(004) proposed.

One of the interesting positive outcomes of this study was mothers' passion and eagerness for learning about child development and parenting (section 8.4). While some mothers emphasised the importance of gaining more knowledge about play's potential benefits through access to reliable and unbiased information resources including online websites, books, videos, and discussions with other parents, and professionals, some other mothers demonstrated eagerness to enrol in parenting courses, in order to enhance their understanding of child development and engage more effectively with their children (section 8.4.1), echoing the Islamic principles, as advised by Al-Ghazali (1988), of lifelong learning for effective parenting.

9.3. Research's original contribution to knowledge

The purpose of this section is to highlight the original contributions made by this study to the existing literature on Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and its relation to children's learning and development.

9.3.1. Giving voice to Muslim mothers living in Berkshire (England)

Drawn from a review of the academic literature, this study contributes to research understandings in child development and early years education in the UK and worldwide by highlighting some ongoing questions and challenges around how Muslim mothers who come from different backgrounds and live in the UK perceive and define play, how they identify what constitutes play, how they explore its purposes and benefits, and how their culture and Muslim background accommodate their perceptions.

It is believed by the researcher that prior to this study little was known about how Muslim mothers' who come from different backgrounds and live in the UK, more specifically in Berkshire, perceive and interpret play as a learning and developmental tool for young children, with limited knowledge concerning the factors that might participate in shaping mothers' perceptions of play. This study appears to be the first study that explored how Muslim mothers who live in Berkshire construct the intersubjective meaning of play. The study revealed numerous realities about Muslim mothers regarding their understanding of the benefits of play. At the same time, the study also revealed whether the mothers' practices related to play originate from a cultural or religious (Islamic) perspective. Highlighting that Muslim mothers rely more on Islamic than cultural principles in their daily practices including practices related to play.

Moreover, using a mixed methods approach to data collection (see section 4.4) contributes to exploring how Muslim mothers construct the intersubjective meaning of play in the Islamic context of diverse backgrounds more in-depth, and provides more comprehensive insights regarding broader cross-cultural understanding in the field of research on parenting and child development, especially, because it involved Muslim mothers from various cultural contexts.

9.3.2. Extending the understanding that Islam is a way of life and not only a faith

This study seems to be a first attempt to explore the differences between the daily practices related to play among Muslim mothers who come from different backgrounds and live in the same social context. It explored the connection between Muslim mothers from 21 different cultural backgrounds (see section 6.2.1.2) and their Islamic daily practices related to play, through an examination of how these mothers integrate their cultural and religious beliefs into their children's play experiences. Despite the differences in cultural backgrounds, this study revealed significant similarities in Muslim mothers' practices related to play, including new converts. These similarities are found to be based on Islamic rather than cultural principles, indicating that Islam is a way of life rather than merely a religious belief. This might have been what resulted in Muslim mothers sharing the same acknowledgement of adopting Islamic principles in their practices concerning child-rearing generally and play particularly, regardless of their indigenous culture. The study further revealed that Islamic principles prevail over cultural ones in case they are in conflict, taking into consideration Muslim scholars' argument, notably Al-Ghazali (1988) that Islamic principles concerning play and childrearing allow children to develop into well-rounded and confident young adults.

9.3.3. Enhancing the understanding of the theoretical framework theories

This study enhances the understanding of parental ethno-theories (Harkness & Super, 1983, 1992, 2006), and contributes to extending sociocultural theories (Vygotsky, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1999; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1991). The integration of parental ethno-theories in this study's framework (see section 3.8) is enriched by the findings that present Muslim mothers' diverse perspectives about the potential benefits of play. These findings provided insights into the impact of cultural background and childhood experiences in shaping mothers' ethno-theories regarding play. This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the way parental beliefs and practices related to play are influenced. At the same time, sociocultural

theories related to the role of culture in impacting parental play practices were extended through this study, as it explored play perceptions in multicultural contexts, by navigating cultural values, fostering open-mindedness, and embracing diversity in parenting. This added depth to existing sociocultural theories. Moreover, the findings of this study underline the intersectionality of the factors influencing Muslim mothers' perceptions of play (see section 8.3). The relationships and the interactions of the social, cultural, and religious factors require parenting theories to understand the complex intersections of the mothers' beliefs, experiences, and play practices.

9.3.4. Rich understanding of Muslim mothers' definitions of play

The rich data collected from both quantitative and qualitative participants about how Muslim mothers define play and how they identify what constitutes play (see section 7.2.1) allowed this study to contribute to knowledge with a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of Muslim mothers' definitions of play, revealing multiple perspectives. The mothers' definitions capture the multifaceted nature of play through the use of various synonyms to identify what constitutes play. The study offers an extra contribution to the body of knowledge by emphasising how different factors, notably, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional, interact within the domain of play and constitute what the mothers consider as play.

9.3.5. Linking play to learning and development: addressing developmental and educational advocacy and advocating play-based learning in early years

This study establishes a clear link between play and learning in the perceptions of Muslim mothers. Building on existing literature, the findings highlight how Muslim mothers perceive play as a valuable tool for accelerating their children's learning and skill development (see section 7.3). At the same time, this research brings attention to an important aspect by exploring how some mothers link their children's developmental challenges, including academic struggles and psychological well-being, to a lack of play (see section 7.3.1.5). While

acknowledging the complexity of establishing a direct causal relationship between a lack of play and children's development, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the potential impact of play on children's growth and learning, and the potential adverse impact of a lack of play, although highlighting that the latter needs to be further explored.

The study's findings further advocate for the value of play-based learning for children under the age of seven, echoing recommendations from educational bodies such as National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009). The comparison between the Scandinavian and British education systems provided a unique contribution by highlighting Muslim mothers' preference for the play-focused approach of the Scandinavian model, supported by international assessments like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). This underscores the potential benefits of delaying formal academic approaches in favour of play during early childhood.

9.3.6. Exploring the factors that influenced Muslim mothers' perceptions of play

One of the original contributions to knowledge derived from this study lies in the nuanced exploration of Muslim mothers' perceptions of play, considering the impact of social (SES), cultural, and religious factors (see chapters 7, and 8). The study not only delved into the multifaceted definitions and attitudes towards play but also uncovered the depth of influences shaping Muslim mothers' perceptions of play.

This study reflects an important negotiation of socio-cultural and religious values and contemporary perspectives among mothers. It adds to current knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of how social and cultural factors shape mothers' perceptions of play by uncovering the positive influence of parents' encouragement of play experiences in shaping mothers' attitudes (see section 8.2.2), similar to findings from Singh and Gupta's (2012) study that emphasised the influence of parental beliefs, socio-cultural factors, and parental involvement on children's play experiences. At the same time, the study acknowledges the

conscious choices made by mothers to challenge negative cultural attitudes, particularly regarding gender-specific preferences in play, highlighting their awareness of the multicultural context in which they are raising their children. This is similar to Halpern and Perry-Jenkins' (2016) study, which indicated a strong association between parents' gender ideology and children's gender-role attitudes, arguing that children tend to adopt similar attitudes to those displayed by their parents, therefore, individuals need to be conscious of the cultural attitudes they adopt.

Moreover, this study added depth to the understanding of the Islamic perspective on play by incorporating the Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) playful interactions with children as a model for parenting and the Quran's teachings about parenting (see section 8.2.3). These findings allow for the contribution of this study to the broader discourse on Islamic parenting practices.

9.3.6.1. Recognising Socioeconomic Variability

Recognising that Muslim mothers in the UK are not a homogenous group, the study reflected upon how socioeconomic status (SES) impacts perceptions of play and access to resources. By considering the SES as a factor, SES plays a pivotal role in shaping access to resources, including those related to play and learning. Muslim mothers' perceptions of play can be influenced by their SES (Croll, 2004), as it affects the availability of time, space, and materials for play, as well as access to structured early childhood programmes. Mothers from higher SES backgrounds may have greater access to educational resources and structured play opportunities, while those from lower SES backgrounds may face constraints in integrating play into their children's lives (Maussen et al., 2012). SES, as elaborated in section 3.3.3, intersects with cultural and religious values, further shaping how Muslim mothers perceive the role and importance of play in child development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). This research highlights how mothers from different economic backgrounds experience varying levels of access to educational resources, particularly toys (see section 7.5.1.4), which influences their

views on play-based learning and reinforces the need for equitable early years education policies. By considering the SES of the mothers, this study highlights that high educational attainment of the mothers can positively influence their perceptions of, and attitudes towards play as discussed in section 8.3.

9.3.6.2. Culturally Informed Parenting Practices

This study explored how cultural and religious factors intersect to inform parenting practices, providing a nuanced understanding of how mothers blend Islamic teachings with Western educational norms in play practices, as discussed in section 8.3. This contributes to a more inclusive understanding of play across different contexts.

This study illuminates the complex, nuanced interaction between cultural, religious, and educational frameworks in shaping parenting practices among Muslim mothers. By examining how Islamic teachings intersect with Western educational norms (see sections, 8.2.1, 8.2.2, and 8.2.3), this study expands the understanding of parenting beyond a dichotomous East-West model, instead presenting a dynamic integration that respects traditional values while engaging with contemporary pedagogical approaches.

The study's focus on diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds within the Muslim community challenges homogenised interpretations that often dominate in early childhood education research broadening the concept of "play" across various contexts (Super & Harkness, 1994). Furthermore, it emphasises the adaptability and resilience of parenting practices, highlighting how Islamic values can coexist with or adapt to Western educational practices (Stockinger, 2022), promoting both religious integrity and developmental goals for children. This study enriches discourses on multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the role of religion in child-rearing by addressing how mothers navigate these intersections between the different factors providing educators, policymakers, and researchers with insights into how these families support children's holistic development in multicultural

societies. This contributes to a more inclusive understanding of parenting practices in Muslim communities and has practical implications for creating supportive, culturally-sensitive educational environments.

9.3.7. Contribution to broader cultural context, beyond the UK

This research, while focused on the UK context, has broader relevance, beyond the UK, for both multicultural Muslim-minority societies and Muslim majority societies across the globe, offering significant implications for educational policy, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices in diverse contexts. In Muslim-minority societies such as in parts of Europe, North America, and East Asia, this study highlights the importance of designing play-based curricula that are sensitive to the cultural and religious contexts of Muslim children. Findings of this study can be used by educational policymakers in these societies to develop curricula that bridge secular and Islamic perspectives on child development (Jackson, 2014). At the same time, this study is also contributing to promoting intercultural understanding, especially in multicultural classrooms, where play offers opportunities for children to engage with peers from different cultural and religious backgrounds, promoting empathy and respect for diversity, and reducing marginalisation (Knauth & Körs, 2011).

While, in countries where Islam is the dominant religion, such as in the Middle East, North Africa, and Southeast Asia, findings of this research can strengthen the integration of play-based learning into Islamic educational frameworks by providing a framework for integrating modern play-based pedagogies with traditional Islamic values (Shahin, 2018), offering a balanced approach to child development that can be adopted in countries such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt.

9.3.8. Passion for learning and parenting courses

One of the initial aims of the study was to explore how Muslim mothers could be best supported in gaining more knowledge about the potential benefits of play. The assumption was that

Muslim mothers might be in need for external support mechanisms, educational resources, or interventions to enhance their awareness and understanding of the role of play in child development. However, the outcomes of the study revealed a different reality, which is the mothers' inherent passion for learning about parenting. Contrary to the initial assumption that mothers might need external support to enhance their knowledge about the benefits of play, the study contributes with findings that Muslim mothers showed a proactive and self-driven approach to enhancing their parenting skills through demonstrating a noticeable eagerness to seek knowledge through various networks, including online resources and parenting courses, reflecting one of the main principles of the Islamic religion. Without being explicitly declared by the mothers, it is worth mentioning that Islam considers the pursuit of knowledge as a religious duty, and this can be one interpretation of the mothers' eagerness for the pursuit of knowledge.

The first revelation to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) began with the command to "Read", in Arabic 'Iqra', in the holy Quran (Surah Al- 'Alaq, 96:1) highlights the importance of knowledge in Islam. The word 'Iqra' in the first revealed verses of the Quran (Al-Ghazali, 1988) signifies not only reading but a broader concept of seeking knowledge. It implies a proactive engagement with learning, encouraging believers to explore, understand, and reflect upon the world around them. Not only that but numerous verses in the Quran and sayings of the Prophet emphasise the value of acquiring knowledge (Sulaiman et al., 2015). This religious instruction is believed to have fostered the mothers' culture of continuous learning, in addition to the contemporary society that is urging people to adopt the idea of continuous learning due to the rapid pace of change in the modern life, technological advancement and globalisation (Laal & Salamati, 2012).

9.4. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

9.4.1. The inability to generalise the findings

While the mixed methods approach employed in this study allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions by combining both qualitative and quantitative data, generalising the findings posed certain challenges due to limited sample representativeness as the study's findings were based on a specific sample of Muslim mothers residing in the UK. Even with the participants being all Muslims and originating from 21 different backgrounds, the characteristics and experiences of this particular group may not be fully representative of all Muslim mothers, even within the UK context. Particularly because the sample of the respondents was selected according to the old statistics (2011 UK census), since the 2021 census, statistics were released after the data collection for this study was completed, showing that the number of Muslims in the UK increased (see section 4.7.1). A larger sample of participants could result in varied perspectives and practices that perhaps were not fully captured by this study. Moreover, the specific cultural backgrounds of the participating mothers, together with the unique socio-cultural context of the UK, contributed to a set of results that may not be universally applicable to Muslim mothers in different cultural or geographical settings.

Thus, further research with a larger sample of participants and a broader context could allow for gaining a far-reaching insight into the nuances of Muslim mothers' perceptions and attitudes towards play. Expanding the scope of future research could be by: 1) including Muslim mothers from different geographical settings, within and beyond the United Kingdom, 2) conducting comparative and cross-cultural studies that explore the differences in perceptions among Muslim families in different cultures and different regions considering ethnic and linguistic diversity, 3) undertaking longitudinal studies that follow Muslim mothers and their children over an extended period to observe changes in their play perceptions as their children grow and

as different social and cultural influences evolve, taking into consideration larger population that allows for generalisation of findings.

One more recommendation for future research could be the exploration of Muslim fathers' perspectives about play. Investigating how fathers contribute to and perceive the role of play in children's development can extend the focus on Muslim families' perspectives about play. At the same time, it can also allow for diverse explorations, such as exploring the differences and similarities between mothers' and fathers' perspectives about play, exploring the challenges and barriers that fathers may face in effectively participating in play with their children, and assessing the impact of fathers' engagement in play on the quality of father-child relationship.

9.4.2. Translating the interviews

The use of multiple languages, including French and Arabic, in addition to English in conducting interviews introduced challenges related to the translation which had the potential to impact the credibility and accuracy of the data. However, the researcher's multilingual competence helped to mitigate these challenges. The researcher's proficiency in English, French, and Arabic was a strength in this scenario and allowed for directly engaging with participants in their preferred languages, fostering a more natural and culturally sensitive conversation. This competence was crucial for understanding the nuances of responses and ensuring accurate translation. Moreover, to enhance credibility, the researcher took the crucial step of confirming the accuracy of translations with participants after translating responses from French or Arabic into English. The translations were shared with the respective participants, seeking their feedback and confirmation. This added a layer of credibility to the translated data. Additionally, to ensure more credibility, the researcher engaged, throughout the translation process in reflexivity, adopting Darawsheh's (2014) view that reflexivity is an

integral aspect of qualitative research, reflecting on her own positionality, biases, and potential influences on the translation which contributed to transparency and research integrity.

9.4.3. Remote interviews due COVID-19 restrictions

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, it was not possible to conduct interviews face-to-face. Although conducting interviews remotely had its advantages such as saving time and conducting more than one interview a day without facing the travel challenges. To control the challenges, that might face the remote interviews, such as technical problems or distractions, precautions were taken by the researcher prior to each interview to ensure a smooth process. The researcher conducted a pre-interview technical check with participants to address any potential issues related to internet connectivity, audio, and video, providing clear instructions on the platform to be used and troubleshooting common problems in advance. This enhanced the interview experience. In relation to the lack of ability to observe participants' non-verbal cues during remote interviews comprehensively, such as body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal communication, the researcher used video calls as much as possible which helped to capture some of these elements and allowed participants to express themselves more effectively. During remote interviews, participants are likely to be in environments with potential distractions that compromise the depth and focus of the conversation, with the possible impact on the quality of the responses. To mitigate this limitation, it was important to be flexible with scheduling to accommodate participants' preferences and potential challenges they might face in their environment. This flexibility contributed to a more relaxed and focused interview setting, as well as being adaptable during the interview, allowing for pauses and adjustments based on participants' comfort. This flexibility contributed to a more natural and accurate exchange of information.

9.4.4. The mothers' educational levels:

Most of the mothers who participated in this study had higher education degrees. Although the predominance of highly educated Muslim mothers in this study (see sections: 6.2.1.8 and 6.2.2), this is not considered as a limitation, because the mothers' level of education was not a criterion for participation. However, it is still worth mentioning as it might pose a limitation in terms of the generalisability and representativeness of the findings. Highly educated mothers may approach parenting, including their views on play, with a different set of expectations and priorities compared to those with lower educational backgrounds (see section 8.3). From the SES lens, as elaborated in section 9.3.6.1, the knowledge, educational credentials and skills acquired through formal education can shape the way individuals approach parenting. Aligned with Bourdieu (1997), highly educated mothers, like those predominant in this study, are likely to possess greater cultural capital, which influences their parenting practices, including their attitudes towards play. Their education may afford them a broader understanding of the developmental and cognitive benefits of play, leading them to prioritise educational play, structured activities, or learning through play (Fleer, 2018).

This skew in participant demographics was considered in this study, as it might highlight perspectives that align with higher educational ideals and potentially overlook perspectives from other educational levels. However, after screening the mothers' answers, no difference was noticed in information between the mothers who hold higher education degrees and the ones with lower levels of education. As an example, the interview with one of the qualitative participants with an A-level (Malika) was the lengthiest and informationally the richest, which might indicate that the acquisition of knowledge is not always reliant on holding a university degree. Results highlighted the contemporary reality that people gain knowledge from diverse sources, making mothers more lifelong learners (see section 8.4.1), as it became one of the contemporary world's requirements, due to the rapid pace of change in the modern life,

technological advancement, and globalisation, as discussed by (Laal and Salamati, 2012). This reality challenges the traditional belief that those with higher education degrees possess greater knowledge, suggesting that perhaps this skew in participant demographics may have not necessarily affected the reliability of the findings. However, future research should strive for a homogenous sample of Muslim participants, using inclusive recruitment strategies that allow for recruiting participants with varying levels of education. To ensure more inclusive representation of the participants in these studies, researchers may collaborate with educational institutions and community organisations.

Additionally, higher education attainment, as elaborated in section 3.3.3, may correlate with a certain socioeconomic status. The overrepresentation of participants with Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD degrees, in this study, may not accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of Muslim mothers from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, which might limit the applicability of the findings to a broader population of Muslim mothers with varying socioeconomic statuses. Another recommendation for future research could be to explore the socioeconomic diversity of the Muslim mothers by using intentional sampling strategies that involve a range of educational levels, income, and occupational statuses to capture more the heterogeneity of the Muslim community. Also undertaking longitudinal research studies that explore the impact of educational attainment on parenting perspectives over time which provides insights into mothers' views that evolve throughout the different stages of their educational and parenting journeys.

9.4.5. The new converts

Although the study included only two new convert mothers, it is noteworthy that, even if this might not be considered as a limitation because they are now Muslims and they both became Muslims more than 15 years ago. Despite the new converts' participation enriching the exploration of social and cultural factors as they are a French and a British mothers, this is

highlighted as something that may have affected the exploration of the religious factor in this study. It is worth noting that converting to Islam, as noted by Zebiri (2014), requires a strong belief rather than a prior knowledge about Quran or other Islamic principles, and the new converts learn about Islam more by practicing after they become Muslims. Despite the fact that these mothers showed knowledge about Islamic principles related to play and child-rearing, some of their knowledge might be derived from their husbands who were born Muslims. While this indirect exposure is valuable, it may not fully capture the personal religious experiences, and the depth of the understanding that often come with a lifelong affiliation with Islam. The perspectives of these mothers might reflect their husbands' interpretations rather than their own direct experiences. These mothers might, to some extent felt, consciously or subconsciously, that they should align with their husbands' perspectives, leading to responses that mirror their husbands' views. This potential influence could have impacted the authenticity of individual responses, particularly when discussing the religious factors shaping their perceptions of play. To mitigate this limitation, these mothers were encouraged to share not only their understanding of Islam but also their individual interpretations and reflections. Moreover, the researcher was equipped with knowledge about the French, British and Islamic culture (being Algerian speaking French and familiar with French culture, and being resident in the UK for more than 23 years, and born Muslim), which allowed her to navigate the complexities of these cultures and enhanced her ability to interpret responses accurately and ensure that religious and cultural nuances are appropriately considered.

9.4.6. Limited resources for Islamic references

The study's reliance on Islamic resources was constrained by the limited availability of such materials in Western academic settings. The global travel restrictions, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, further hindered the researcher's ability to personally visit Arab and Islamic universities and libraries which affected the direct exploration of hard copies and unique

materials that might have been available on-site. However, to minimise this limitation and its possible influence on the comprehensiveness and depth of the literature review, the researcher was able to obtain specific materials relying on contacts within Arab universities notably Algerian and Iraqi, for access to Islamic resources. This presented some dependency on external assistance, although, many valuable Islamic resources were found online.

Some recommendations to control these challenges could be: 1) establishing online platforms dedicated to researchers studying Islamic perspectives on parenting, child development and play, 2) developing virtual exchange programmes between Western and Islamic academic institutions, 3) creating and maintaining comprehensive databases of Islamic resources related to parenting, child development and play.

9.4.7. The use of the follow up interviews data

The utilisation of the follow-up interviews as an additional data collection method to explore the mothers' perceptions of play more in-depth, was an attempt to explore the potential benefits of this technique. The follow-up interview was incorporated as a supplementary data collection technique for the aim of gaining further depth in mothers' perceptions and practices around play. However, even after many attempts, only three mothers ended up participating in this follow-up phase due to limited enthusiasm from the number of participants involved in the questionnaire and main interviews. The limited participation, in addition to the repetitive nature of the information gathered in the follow-up interviews compared to the primary questionnaire and main interviews, which sufficiently answered research questions, suggested reaching data saturation (Francis et al., 2010). This led to the decision to not treat this data as distinct follow-up information, instead it was integrated with the primary interview data.

Despite the limited participation, and although the data collected using this technique was not distinctively utilised, the attempt to explore the potential benefits of this technique represents

a methodological contribution to this study and a methodological initiative that might be proven more useful for future research.

9.5. Implications for policy and practice

The results of this study offer a significant contribution to knowledge (as discussed in section 9.3) which suggests an implication for childhood development practice and policy. The results of this study contribute to developing our understanding of what mothers' beliefs about play and the learning through play approach are, which allows to make recommendations in relation to early years practice including home-based practice. In addition, the outcomes of this study can help in raising Muslim mothers' awareness of the importance of play, and they also reveal important ideas and practices in relation to play, which are unique to the Islamic culture. At the same time, this study empowered the Muslim community, particularly, Muslim mothers by giving them voice to state their opinion and express themselves, which can be considered as a good opportunity to the minority of Muslim mothers living in the UK to participate with ideas originated from their cultural background about the considerations and the practices they associate with the importance of play. A recommendation for practice and policy is presented below.

9.5.1. Culturally and religiously sensitive family programmes

Although the current study revealed that many Muslim mothers are self-motivated to gain knowledge about the benefits of play by enrolling in parenting courses, however not all of the Muslim families in the UK can afford to take private courses. One recommendation would be to develop affordable culturally and religiously sensitive family programmes tailored for Muslim families that emphasise the significance of play addressing cultural and religious challenges. These inclusive programmes may offer an integration of Islamic values into play-based activities, guidance on navigating a multicultural society, and addressing challenges related to diversity such as appreciation for different cultures, and strategies for maintaining

cultural identity in a diverse environment like the UK. At the same time, these programmes should be tailored to be inclusive, considering cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity and they should be assessed for their effectiveness in enhancing play-related knowledge in cultural and religious contexts.

These culturally and religiously sensitive family programmes may provide educational components for parents with information that culturally/religiously empower Muslim parents, especially parents who newly converted to Islam, with the knowledge and skills needed to engage in effective and enriching play with their children that builds up and maintains their Islamic identity. These programmes may serve as a reference for parents facing challenges raising their children in a multicultural context with a non-Muslim majority, as in the UK. Where secular norms and education differ from Islamic teachings, providing assistance for these parents in establishing a balance within this blend of practices and perspectives (Zebiri, 2014).

9.6. Reflection on researchers' doctoral journey

Doctoral journeys are often characterised as a solitary and challenging pursuit for PhD students, yet they also offer substantial rewards and opportunities for personal, professional, and intellectual development (McAlpine, 2012). Initially, as a PhD researcher I did not anticipate the potential impact of my research on knowledge advancement; however, upon investing time and effort into my study, I discovered its significant impact and benefits. This PhD journey served as a platform for continuous learning and growth, equipping me as a researcher with vital cognitive and interpersonal skills such as analytical, empirical, and critical thinking abilities, as well as proficiency in academic writing and literature engagement. Moreover, it fostered my competence in research methodology design, data collection, and analysis, alongside familiarity with various software programmes including SPSS, NVIVO, and referencing tools such as EndNote and Mendeley.

The transformative nature of the data collection journey is particularly noteworthy. I was not only provided with valuable information from the participants but also opportunities to engage with extraordinary mothers from diverse backgrounds and learn more about their cultures and their personal experiences. Our interaction during the interviews not only yielded substantial insights into parenting experiences but also showed their keen pursuit of knowledge through enrolment in parenting courses, highlighting their enthusiasm for gaining more knowledge and their steady commitment to nurturing strong, competent, and responsible future adults. Additionally, evidence of the transformational power of education and parental commitment to continual learning provided by the Islamic religion could be seen in this enthusiasm and commitment to continuous learning.

Academically, this journey facilitated meaningful connections, with international PhD students and university staff, particularly with my supervisors Maria Kambouri and Billy Wong, who provided not only academic support but also served as invaluable companions throughout the research process.

Nevertheless, the journey was not without challenges, particularly in balancing academic pursuits with familial responsibilities as a mother, a spouse and full-time student. Negotiating these responsibilities required strength and patience. However, it validated my capability to manage competing demands effectively, and strengthened our familial bonds, demonstrating an unwavering support of my husband and an evident pride of my children. An additional challenge was caused by the COVID-19 lockdown, necessitating remote study and isolation, posing further limitations to social and academic interactions. Despite these difficulties, the experience conveyed essential life skills, notably commitment, resilience, patience, and time management. This academic and personal journey with its rewards and challenges was transformative, leading to increased confidence, enhanced my capabilities, and heightened my self-motivation, positioned me to perceive future achievements with a sense of accomplishment

and determination, echoing Le Guin's quote that "*It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.*" (Le Guin, 2012).

9.7. Final thoughts

This PhD study explored the perceptions of the Muslim mothers from diverse backgrounds regarding play, and it contributes to the body of knowledge with valuable insights into the interplay of social, cultural, and religious factors that shape mothers' perspectives on the benefits of play and its relation to children's growth and development. The study gave voice to Muslim mothers who live in the UK and come from different backgrounds by inviting them to participate with their views and perceptions about play. This undoubtedly, provided broader and deeper understanding of how Muslim mothers perceive and interpret play, as Muslims living in a multicultural society as the UK, and adopting Islam as a way of life and not only as a religious belief.

My motivation to conduct this study, as mentioned in section 1.1.2 was that I noticed when explaining the play-based teaching approach to parents, as a preschool teacher, was that some parents, especially mothers, reacted negatively, often saying: 'I sent my child to this school to learn, not to play'. At that time I wondered what is the source of their reaction, but after conducting this research, it is important to acknowledge that this study served as a discovery for me, as a researcher and as a Muslim mother myself living in the UK, as it made me aware of how other Muslim mothers approach play, and how they apply the Islamic values and beliefs in their daily parental practices including practices related to play. It was very interesting discussing the play topic in depth with the mothers who participated. This allowed, not only to know what they think about play, but also to understanding their parenting philosophies in bringing up a balanced, well rounded, and confident individuals. This empowered my thoughts about my future plans for parents and children, as I am interested in developing skill-based programmes tailored for parents to help them acquire the skills that help them teach their

children the skills they need according to their developmental phases, within both Islamic and non-Islamic context. I will conclude this thesis with one of the mothers' most interesting quotes that is common and well known in the Islamic teachings and contains three main steps required to bringing up children, and my own message to all parents is to consider these simple but wise steps in their parenting journeys:

During the first seven years of children's life, parents should play with them and provide a nurturing environment. For the following seven years (7 to 14 years old), they should teach them all the skills they need for future life. Finally, during the last seven years (14 to 21 years old), parents should embrace friendship relationship with their children, encouraging them to be independent and to make their own decisions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Project title: Muslim Mothers' Intersubjective Perceptions of Play in the Early Years: A UK
Case Study Focusing on Berkshire

Thank you for your interest in this study. The study is only for Muslim mothers of young children between 3 and 6 years old, living in the UK. So please only proceed if you fulfil these 4 criteria after confirming below.

Thank you.

1. Meeting the criteria

1. Please confirm that you meet the criteria: *

- Please confirm that you are the mother (who will be completing this questionnaire).
- Please confirm that you live in the UK.
- Please confirm that you have at least one child aged between 3 and 6 years old.
- Please confirm that you are a Muslim.

2. Background: the following information will help to understand the participants' demographics

2. What is your age? *

- Under 18 years old
- 18-30 years old
- 31-50 years old
- Over 50 years old

3. Which of the following best describes your gender? *

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other

4. How many children do you have, under the age of 18? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

5. How many children do you have between the age of 3 and 6? *

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

6. Which of the following best describes your situation? *

- Taking care of my child (ren) on my own (e.g. single parent, spouse or partner not actively helping).
- Taking care of my child(ren) with help from spouse/partner
- Taking care of my child(ren) with help from others (e.g. grandparents)
- Other (please specify)

7. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? *

- Employed, working full time
- Employed, working part time
- Unpaid work in the home (i.e. parenting/housekeeping)
- Self employed
- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, not looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work
- Other (please specify)

8. Which of the following best describes your spouse's/partner's employment status? If not applicable please choose N/A. *

- Employed, working full time
- Employed, working part time
- Self employed
- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, not looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work
- N/A
- Other (please specify)

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed? *

- Elementary/primary school
- A level/ level 3 qualification
- GCSE
- Higher Education/ Degree
- None
- Other (specify)

10. Do you currently live in the UK? *

- Yes
- No

11. Choose one of the following options that best describes your ethnic group or background

*

- White - British
- Other white background
- Black British - black African
- Black British - black Caribbean
- Other black background
- Asian British - Indian
- Asian British - Pakistani
- Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Other Asian background
- Mixed - white and black African
- Mixed - black and white Caribbean
- Mixed - white and Asian
- Other mixed background
- Arab
- Chinese
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

12. What is your country of birth?

13. What is your country of origin?

14. Is English your first language? *

- Yes
- No

15. Please specify, by choosing a statement below, how confident you feel when you communicate in English: *

- Extremely confident
- Somewhat confident
- Neutral
- Somewhat not confident
- Extremely not confident

Main Questionnaire: Parent's attitude towards play

1. What does play mean to you? Can you describe it with few words?

2. Can you give a few examples of what your child does when she/he plays (e.g. plays with toys, jumps, sings, pretends, dress up).

3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please only choose one answer. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. *

Statements	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1. Play can help my child develop thinking abilities.					
2. Playing at home will help my child in school.					
3. My child can learn social skills through play.					

4. If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others.					
5. Through play my child develops new skills and abilities.					
6. Playing at preschool will help my child in elementary school.					
7. Play helps my child learn to express his/her feelings.					
8. Play helps my child improve and practice language and communication skills.					
9. Play can help my child develop social skills.					
10. Playing together helps me build up a good relationship with my child.					
11. Play provides my child with opportunities to explore new experiences and learning new skills and abilities.					
12. Play helps my child's ability to solve problems (e.g. solve conflicts with peers).					
13. Through play, my child learns to express positive as well as negative emotions (e.g. happy or sad).					
14. Play is just for fun, and it does not contribute too much to my child's learning and development.					
15. I often buy toys for my child.					
16. I often allow my child to play.					
17. I often think play is valuable for children.					
18. I think play is good for my child.					

Main Questionnaire: Involvement, engagement, enjoyment, and Environment

1. **Involvement:** Please choose your answer based on how often you do the following things. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. *

Statements	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. When my child wants to play with me, I encourage him/her to play alone with toys instead.					
2. Some days go by without dedicating any time to play with my child.					
3. If my child wants to play with me, I stop what I am doing and play with him/her.					
4. I dedicate approximately some time every day to play with my child.					
5. It is difficult for me to find time to play with my child every day.					
6. I think it is not important to play with my child.					

2. **Engagement:** Please state to what degree you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. *

statements	Degree of agreement				
	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. When I play with my child, I prefer watching to see whether she/he is playing with the toys properly.					
2. When I play with my child, I choose a game that allows both of us to take turns and play together.					
3. When my child is playing, I sit and keep watching him/her playing to make sure s/he is safe.					
4. When I play with my child, I give him/her my full attention and I try to actively participate in the game.					
5. When I play with my child, I usually lead and my child follows.					
6. When I play with my child, I usually follow and my child leads.					

7. I do not play with my child, as play is only for children.					
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3. Enjoyment: Please choose the best option for you for each one of the following statements. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are now right or wrong answers. *

Statements	Degree of agreement				
	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. Playing with my child can be a chore.					
2. After a long and busy day, I play with my child.					
3. I take any opportunity to play with my child.					
4. I prefer to let my child play on his/her own.					
5. I look forward to playing with my child.					
6. When my child loses interest in a game we are playing together, I try to get him/her involved in a new game.					

4. Play environment: Please state to which degree you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. *

Statements	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree
1. I do not buy toys for my child.					
2. I do not see the benefit of toys.					
3. Toys are expensive.					
4. I buy as many toys for my child as I can					
5. Playing with toys helps my child learn					
6. I prefer that my child plays more with toys					
7. Toys are beneficial for learning.					
8. I prefer that my child does not play at home.					
9. Play is messy.					

10. I prefer that my child spends his/her time at home learning letters and numbers.					
11. I allow my child to play at home as long as s/he wants.					
12. I restrict playing time for my child at home, so s/he can find time to learn letters and numbers.					
13. I prefer that my child plays in the house with toys.					
14. I prefer that my child plays outside.					

5. Which type of play does your child like to play most at home, in terms of adult direction? Please choose one of the two options, depending on what applies most times.

- Free play (child-initiated play activities without any adult guidance)
- Guided play (activities chosen, ruled, and directed by an adult)

6. Which kinds of play does your child like to play most at home? This is based on the activity itself (rather the interaction or not of an adult). You can choose more than one option and a maximum of three. *

- Socio-dramatic play (e.g. acting play, playing roles)
- Object/quiet play (e.g. playing with puzzles, painting, colouring, writing)
- Constructive play (e.g. building things, playing with blocks)
- Outdoor/exercise play (e.g. climbing, running, jumping)
- Social play (any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game or while making something together)
- Symbolic play (e.g. using objects, actions, or ideas to represent other objects e.g., using a cardboard tube as a telescope)
- Exploratory Play (using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them e.g. a baby mouthing an object)
- Something else – Please tell us what your child likes playing the most:

.....

Main Questionnaire: Culture and Religion

1. Please choose the answer that best represents you. Please be as honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. *

Statements	Degree of agreement				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree

1. As a child, I used to spend a long time playing.					
2. My parents thought that play would help me learn.					
3. As a child, I did not play much.					
4. My parents thought that play was a waste of time.					
5. As a child I had a lot of toys.					
6. As a child, I did not have toys, because my parents could not afford it.					
7. In my culture, play is considered to be important for young children.					
8. In my culture, children should spend most of their time playing.					
9. According to my culture play is not considered to be important.					
10. According to my culture, the children should spend most of their time learning about their religion.					
11. According to my culture, children should give equal time to learning and playing.					
12. According to my culture, toys should be made in a way that helps children to play and learn about their religion.					
13. According to my religion, parents should allow their children to play and play with them, so they can teach them their religion through play.					
14. According to my religion, parents should play with their children, so they can teach them their religion through play.					
15. According to my culture parents should not play with their children.					
16. According to my culture, play is only for young children.					

17. According to my religion parents should not play with their children, so they can find more time to practice their religion.					
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2. If you wanted to know more about the potential benefits of play, which of the following actions would you take?

- You can choose more than one option *

- Read books and articles about play and its benefits.
- Ask preschool teachers about the benefits of play.
- Watch movies and videos that show the benefits of play.
- Provide different play opportunities to my child and see how s/he benefit from play.
- I stop my child from playing and see how that will affect him/her.
- Visit different websites that give advice about play and its impact on the children and follow that advice.
- Something else – Please specify:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your participation is very important. The information you have provided is valued. Your responses are vital in helping me understand your views as Muslim mothers about play and play based learning.

We would like to follow up with an interview to find out a bit more. The interviews will be approximately 45 minutes long and audio recorded. All data will be anonymised. Please let us know if you would be interested in this, by ticking the appropriate box bellow.

- I do not wish to take part in the interview.
- I wish to take part in the interview (please write your contact details bellow, email address or phone number so we can get in touch to schedule the interview. Your information will not be shared with anyone.)

Appendix B: Semi-structured interview

Interview schedule

At the beginning of the interview, I will remind the participants of the purpose of the study and their rights or anonymity, confidentiality and right to withdraw at any time. I will also confirm that the participants:

- Agree to take part to an interview.
- Agree to have the interview audio recorded.
- Agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

The interview questions:

1. How would you define play?
2. What are the activities your child gets involved in at home that you consider as play?
 - a- How many hours a day does your child spend playing at home?
 - b- What do you think about spending/investing on toys?
3. How would you describe your engagement and involvement in your child's play?
 - c- How do you get involved in your child's play?
 - d- How often do you play with your child during the week?
4. How would you evaluate play according to your religion? How does your religion see play?
5. Could you, please, tell me about your play experiences at home when you were young?
6. How would you describe your parent's attitude towards play?
7. What do you think about play and its relationship with children's learning and development?
8. If you wanted to find out more about the potential of play, what action would you take?

Appendix C: Follow up interview

The 6 weeks follow up plan:

After the completion of the interviews, 5 of the mothers who have already participated in an interview, will also be invited to participate in a fortnight short follow up to understand a bit more of their daily life and practice with their children in relation to play activities at home. The follow up approach will be planned as follows: during the duration of 6 weeks, after the interview data is collected, the mothers will be invited to have a quick 5-7 minute phone call with the researcher every other week (3 follow ups). The mothers will be invited to keep some notes (e.g. a diary) if they want to, of ideas, thoughts, and activities they have been doing with their children and share those with the researcher during the call. The researcher will adopt a flexible semi-structured approach to the interview and will adjust the questions depending to the mother and the context. Some of the possible questions to ask will include:

The questions:

- How have you been since last time we spoke?
- Tell me about how you have been spending your time with your child since last time we spoke.
- Can you describe a typical day of your life from the last 1-2 weeks?
- How are your current interactions with your child? What have you been doing together?
- Is there anything new your child has been doing that you would like to share?
- Is there anything new that you have been doing, or other members of the family, with your child that you would like to share?
- Do you think your child has learnt anything new since last time we spoke? What and how? No worries if not!
- Is there anything you would like to add?

The aim is to explore and understand more about the mothers' perspectives and experiences, and this will be done in a safe and welcoming way, without judging the mothers' practices or putting any pressure or expectations on them.

Thank you for participating in this study. Your participation is very important and much appreciated. The information you have provided is valued and your responses are vital in helping me understand your views as a Muslim mother about play and play based learning.

Appendix D: Information sheet for Participants



Supervisor: Dr Maria Kambouri

Phone: +44 (0)118 378 2660

Email: m.kambouri@reading.ac.uk

Researcher: Amel Abada

Phone: +44

Email: jt812526@student.reading.ac.uk

Information sheet for Mothers Participants

Research Project: Muslim Mothers' Intersubjective Perceptions of Play in the Early Years:
A UK Case Study Focusing on Berkshire

Project Team Members: Amel Abada (PhD research student), Dr Maria Kambouri
(supervisor) and Dr Billy Wong (second supervisor)

Dear participant,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study I am undertaking that aims to explore mothers' ideas in relation to play.

What is the study?

My study aims to investigate the intersubjective meanings constructed by Muslim mothers living in the UK, about play as a basis for learning. This means that I aim to understand what Muslim mothers think about play and play based learning. The study aims to explore how the Muslim mothers perceive play and play based learning, and to which extent it is present in their children's daily activities.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

All Muslim mothers living in the UK that have children between 3 and 6 years old are welcome to take part in this study. You may have found the invitation on a social media site (e.g. Facebook) or you may have been invited personally, as a result of being a member of my personal network or a mother that has already taken part to the study.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you give your consent to participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you, by contacting the researcher, Amel Abada, email: jt812526@student.reading.ac.uk

What will happen if I take part?

You are invited to complete an online questionnaire which will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will contain four small sections: the first section is about gathering some personal details (country of origin, your place of residence, age of your children who are attending preschool etc.) which will help me understand a little bit about your background as a participant. The remaining sections contain questions related to the main focus of the research which is your perceptions around play and play based learning.

You will also have the option to express an interest in taking part in an interview at the end of the questionnaire. The interview will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour, it will be scheduled at a mutually convenient date and time, and it will be online (via Microsoft Teams). This will require access to a laptop, PC, or smartphone, with internet connection. If you do not have access to one of these, the interview can also be conducted via phone. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed and anonymised for analysis.

In addition to the interview, you might also be interested in taking part in a 6-week follow up plan, where you will be invited to answer a few questions, every other week to complete 3 follow ups, about your experience and your child/ren's play at home. The researcher will call you at a pre-agreed time of your convenience to have a quick chat about how your week have been and ask a few simple questions about your experiences. If you want, you are also welcome to keep some notes or a diary to help you with remembering this, but this is not a requirement. This will help to understand more about your child's play.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The information given by participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the research team listed at the start of this letter. Neither you nor your family will be identifiable in any published report resulting from the study. Information about individuals will not be shared with the University.

What will happen to the data?

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. We will transcribe the recordings from the interviews and anonymise them before analysing the results. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and will be referred to by that pseudonym on all records. Research records will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and only the research team will have access to the records. In line with the University's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. All anonymised research data will be retained indefinitely whereas any identifying information such as consent forms will be disposed of securely after the research findings have been written up. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. We can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, we will discard your data.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Dr Maria Kambouri, University of Reading; Tel: +44 (0)118 378 2660, email: m.kambouri@reading.ac.uk .

Where can I get more information?

For more information, please contact Amel Abada, email: jt812526@student.reading.ac.uk

If you are happy to take part, please tick the appropriate box bellow to confirm that you have read the information and that you are happy to proceed with taking part to the study.

Thank you very much in advance,
Amel Abada

Appendix E: Consent form for participants and data protection for information sheet

Consent form:

I have read the information sheet about the project.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what is required of me to do. All my questions have been answered.

- I consent my involvement in the project as outlined in the information sheet.
- I agree to complete the questionnaire.
- I agree to take part in an interview.
- I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
- I agree to take part in the 3 follow up interviews.
- I agree to the use of anonymous quotation in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

Note: The above information sheet and consent form will be part of (the first section) of the online questionnaire. Participants will have to read and provide their consent, by ticking the appropriate boxes, in order to proceed to completing the questionnaire.

Data protection for information sheet

The organisation responsible for protection of your personal information is the University of Reading (the Data Controller). Queries regarding data protection and your rights should be directed to the University Data Protection Officer at imps@reading.ac.uk, or in writing to: Information Management & Policy Services, University of Reading, Whiteknights, P O Box 217, Reading, RG6 6AH.

The University of Reading collects, analyses, uses, shares, and retains personal data for the purposes of research in the public interest. Under data protection law we are required to inform you that this use of the personal data we may hold about you is on the lawful basis of being a public task in the public interest and where it is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. If you withdraw from a research study, which processes your personal data, dependant on the stage of withdrawal, we may still rely on this lawful basis to continue using your data if your withdrawal would be of significant detriment to the research study aims. We will always have in place appropriate safeguards to protect your personal data.

If we have included any additional requests for use of your data, for example adding you to a registration list for the purposes of inviting you to take part in future studies, this will be done only with your consent where you have provided it to us and should you wish to be removed from the register at a later date, you should contact Professor Suzanne Graham – s.j.graham@reading.ac.uk

You have certain rights under data protection law which are:

- Withdraw your consent, for example if you opted in to be added to a participant register
- Access your personal data or ask for a copy
- Rectify inaccuracies in personal data that we hold about you
- Be forgotten, that is your details to be removed from systems that we use to process your personal data
- Restrict uses of your data
- Object to uses of your data, for example retention after you have withdrawn from a study

Some restrictions apply to the above rights where data is collected and used for research purposes.

You can find out more about your rights on the website of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) at <https://ico.org.uk>

You also have a right to complain the ICO if you are unhappy with how your data has been handled. Please contact the University Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

Appendix F: Ethical Approval and risk assessment form

University of Reading

Institute of Education

Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2019)

Tick one:

- Staff project: _____ PhD EdD _____

Name of applicant (s): Amel Abada

Title of project: Muslim mothers' intersubjective perceptions of play and play-based learning in the early years.

Name of supervisor (for student projects): Dr. Maria Kambouri and Dr. Billy Wong

Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.

	YES	NO
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:	✓	
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	✓	
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	✓	
c) gives a full, fair, and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	✓	
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	✓	
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	✓	
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention, and disposal	✓	
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	✓	
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	✓	

i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included, and their name provided	✓		
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants			✓
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.'	✓		
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	✓		
Please answer the following questions			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	✓		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	✓		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?			✓
4) Staff Only - have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/PeopleDevelopment/newstaff/humres-MandatoryOnlineCourses.aspx Please note: students complete a Data Protection Declaration form and submit it with this application to the ethics committee.	✓		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form (included below with this ethics application)?	✓		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	✓		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?			✓
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			✓
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			✓
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data ² , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	✓		

² Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			✓
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		✓	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is “yes”, does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			✓
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		✓	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is “yes”, please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			✓
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		✓	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is “yes”: My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University’s insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			✓
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

- Complete **either** Section A **or** Section B below with details of your research project.
 - Complete a risk assessment.
 - Sign the form in Section C.
 - Append at the end of this form all relevant documents: information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules, evidence that you have completed information security training (e.g. screen shot/copy of certificate).
 - Email the completed form to the Institute’s Ethics Committee for consideration.
- Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.**

A: My research goes beyond the ‘accepted custom and practice of teaching’ but I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	✓
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The participants are one category that includes only mothers who have young children at the age between 3 and 6 years old, and they attend preschool. - The number of participants is aimed to be 115: 15 participants will be interviewed and 100 participants will be completing a questionnaire. 	
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. title of project <p>Muslim mothers' intersubjective perceptions of play and play-based learning in the early years.</p>	

2. purpose of project and its academic rationale

The study aims to explore how Muslim mothers, who descend from different backgrounds and live in UK, see the role of play and play-based learning in early years in achieving holistic development for their children.

3. brief description of methods and measurements

This study is a mixed methods case study of Muslim mothers living in the UK. Two instruments will be used for data collection: 1) questionnaire that will be sent online and completed by approximately 100 mothers, through an online platform such as Facebook and WhatsApp, Tweeter and LinkedIn. 2) Interviews that will be conducted with 15 Muslim mothers living in UK and will be conducted remotely using phone calls or one of the online platforms, such as Microsoft Teams. We are offering, both, phones and online interviews to make it possible for all the participants with and without access to the internet to take part, in case the participant is having issues with connecting to the internet the alternative, which is phone call, is available, which will help the data collection process to be done easily and without any delay.

4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

The participants are all females. They will be recruited according to two methods: 1) snowball sampling method to recruit 100 mothers who will be completing the questionnaire, 2) convenience sampling method to recruit 15 mothers who will be interviewed, with an expression of interest at the end of the questionnaire.

The mothers will be 18 or over, they will be recruited according to specific criteria: 1) must be Muslims living in the UK, 2) must have at list one child aged between 3 and 6 years old.

5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)

The consent for completing the questionnaire will be obtained online before proceeding. The participants will be invited to tick a box to confirm that they read the information sheet for the research project and give their consent to participate in the questionnaire. The consent for the interview will be obtained online as well, the participants who complete the questionnaire will be invited to take part in the interview and tick a box at the end of the questionnaire, along with providing contact details, so they can easily be contacted for interview arrangements.

6. A clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

The data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The participants will be assigned a pseudonym and will be referred to by that pseudonym throughout the project. Research records will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and only the researcher will have access to the records. In line with the University's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. All anonymised research data will be retained indefinitely. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. The participants can receive an electronic copies of these publications if they wish.

<p>Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a requirement for social distancing. Therefore, if this is still the case when conducting the interviews, then the interviews will be conducted online.</p>	
<p>7. estimated start date and duration of project</p> <p>The estimated date for starting pilot study is mid- July 2021, and the actual first round of data collection with the questionnaires in August, 2021. The first round of data collection is estimated to last about 8 weeks or until the 100 participants target is achieved, allowing two extra weeks to cover any unexpected situations that may occur and delay the data collection. The interviews will take place during the summer and autumn of 2021 and as participants are recruited (through the questionnaires). The Microsoft forms platform will be used for the questionnaire and the link will be shared on social media, on Facebook through my own page, through some groups of Muslim mothers that I have already joined and through my network and contacts from previous events and trainings. At the end of the questionnaire, participants will be prompted to provide their contact details if they would like to take part in the interview.</p>	
<p>B: I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute’s Ethics Committee.</p>	
<p>Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.</p>	
<p>Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. title of project 2. purpose of project and its academic rationale 3. brief description of methods and measurements 4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria 5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary) 6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them. 7. estimated start date and duration of project 	

RISK ASSESSMENT: Please complete the form below

<p>Brief outline of Work/activity:</p>	<p>The project requires a completion of a questionnaire that will be sent online via a specific survey platform (Microsoft Forms) and the participants will complete it online using their phones or their computers.</p> <p>The project also includes interviews that will be done remotely as well. The participants will be interviewed by phone calls or an online platform such as Microsoft Teams. We are offering both phones and online interviews to make it possible for all the participants with and without access to the internet to take part, in case the participant is having issues with connecting to the internet</p>
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	the alternative, which is phone call, is available, which will help the data collection process to be done easily and without any delays.	
Where will data be collected?	Data will be collected in UK.	
Significant hazards:	<p>There are no significant hazards, as the data will be collected remotely with the participants staying safe in their homes. They will choose the most convenient and comfortable time and place to do the interviews by phone calls or using an online platform such as Microsoft Teams.</p> <p>Considering the potential risks for online data collection methods I will be using Microsoft Teams which is what the university recommends as data are stored securely on this platform in line with university policy. The recordings of the interviews will be safely stored on a password protected computer.</p>	
Who might be exposed to hazards?	No one at all will be exposed to any hazard. The social distancing will be applied and the participants will not be met face to face at any time and under any circumstance during the process of data collection.	
Existing control measures:	The data collection will be in two ways: completing a questionnaire by 100 volunteer participants, and interviewing 15 participants. Both methods will be easily completed remotely using the internet and the phones. Which ensures the participants' safety and wellbeing.	
Are risks adequately controlled:	Yes	
If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed: ...

..... Print Name: Amel Abada

Date: 07/06/2021

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE
INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: ...

... Print Name... Holly Joseph... Date: 23/8/2021

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)*

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

Appendix G: Data protection declaration form for ethical approval

Information Management and
Policy Services



DATA PROTECTION DECLARATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

This document can be used to provide assurances to your ethics committee where confirmation of data protection training and awareness is required for ethical approval.

By signing this declaration I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the requirements for data protection within the *Data Protection for Researchers* document located here:
http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/imps/Data_Protection_for_Researchers__Aug_18.v1.pdf
- I have asked for advice on any elements that I am *unclear on* prior to submitting my ethics approval request, either from my supervisor, or the data protection team at: imps@reading.ac.uk
- I understand that I am responsible for the secure handling, and protection of, my research data
- I know who to contact in the event of an information security incident, a data protection complaint or a request made under data subject access rights

Researcher to complete:

Project/Study Title: Muslim Mothers' Intersubjective Perceptions of Play in the Early Years: A UK Case Study Focusing on Berkshire

NAME	STUDENT ID NUMBER	DATE
Amel Abada		07/06/21

Supervisor signature

Note for supervisors: Please verify that your student has completed the above actions

NAME	STAFF ID NUMBER	DATE
Maria Kambouri		07/06/21

Submit your completed signed copy to your ethical approval committee.

Copies to be retained by ethics committee.

VERSION	KEEPER	REVIEWED	APPROVED BY	APPROVAL DATE
1.0	IMPS	Annually	IMPS	

Appendix H: Tables

Table H.1: Research Question, Questionnaire Statement, and Quantitative Analysis Matrix

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>questionnaire item</i>	<i>Quantitative Analysis</i>
<p>RQ1: How do Muslim mothers define play? What are the types of play the children prefer to play most at home? (Sub-question).</p>	<p>Narrative containing mothers' own definition of play in few sentences.</p>	<p>Descriptive statistics including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.</p>
<p>RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?</p>	<p>Q24/2. Playing at home will help my child in school. Q24/4. If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others. Q24/6. Playing at preschool will help my child in elementary school. Q24/10. Playing together helps me build up a good relationship with my child. Q24/14. Play is just for fun, and it does not contribute too much to my child's learning and development. Q24/15. I often buy toys for my child. Q24/16. I often allow my child to play. Q24/17. I often think play is valuable for children. Q24/18. I think play is good for my child.</p>	<p>Descriptive statistics, including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.</p>
<p>RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?</p>	<p>Q24/1. Play can help my child develop thinking abilities. Q24/3. My child can learn social skills through play. Q24/5. Through play my child develops new skills and abilities. Q24/7. Play helps my child learn to express his/her feelings. Q24/8. Play helps my child improve and practice language and communication skills. Q24/9. Play can help my child develop social skills. Q24/11. Play provides my child with opportunities to explore new experiences and learning new skills and abilities. Q24/12. Play helps my child's ability to solve problems (e.g. solve conflicts with peers). Q24/13. Through play, my child learns to express positive as well as negative emotions (e.g. happy or sad).</p>	<p>Descriptive statistics, including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.</p>

RQ2: How do Muslim mothers perceive the importance of play in early years and its relation to learning?

Involvement and engagement

- Q25/1. When my child wants to play with me, I encourage him/her to play alone with toys instead.
- Q25/2. Some days go by without dedicating any time to play with my child.
- Q25/3. If my child wants to play with me, I stop what I am doing and play with him/her.
- Q25/4. I dedicate approximately some time every day to play with my child.
- Q25/5. It is difficult for me to find time to play with my child every day.
- Q25/6. I think it is not important to play with my child.
- Q26/1. When I play with my child, I prefer watching to see whether she/he is playing with the toys properly.
- Q26/2. When I play with my child, I choose a game that allows both of us to take turns and play together.
- Q26/3. When my child is playing, I sit and keep watching him/her playing to make sure s/he is safe.
- Q26/4. When I play with my child, I give him/her my full attention and I try to actively participate in the game.
- Q26/5. When I play with my child, I usually lead and my child follows.
- Q26/6. When I play with my child, I usually follow and my child leads.
- Q26/7. I do not play with my child, as play is only for children.

Descriptive statistics, including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.

Enjoyment

- Q27/1. Playing with my child can be a chore.
- Q27/2. After a long and busy day, I play with my child.
- Q27/3. I take any opportunity to play with my child.
- Q27/4. I prefer to let my child play on his/her own.
- Q27/5. I look forward to playing with my child.
- Q27/6. When my child loses interest in a game we are playing together, I try to get him/her involved in a new game.

Play environment

- Q28/1. I do not buy toys for my child.
- Q28/2. I do not see the benefit of toys.
- Q28/3. Toys are expensive.
- Q28/4. I buy as many toys for my child as I can
- Q28/5. Playing with toys helps my child learn
- Q28/6. I prefer that my child plays more with toys
- Q28/7. Toys are beneficial for learning.
- Q28/8. I prefer that my child does not play at home.
- Q28/9. Play is messy.
- Q28/10. I prefer that my child spends his/her time at home learning letters and numbers.
- Q28/11. I allow my child to play at home as long as s/he wants.
- Q28/12. I restrict playing time for my child at home, so s/he can find time to learn letters and numbers.
- Q28/13. I prefer that my child plays in the house with toys.
- Q28/14. I prefer that my child plays outside.

Types of play

- Q29/1. Free play (child-initiated play activities without any adult guidance)
- Q29/2. Guided play (activities chosen, ruled, and directed by an adult)
- Q30/1. Socio-dramatic play (e.g. acting play, playing roles)
- Q30/2. Object/quiet play (e.g. playing with puzzles, painting, colouring, writing)
- Q30/3. Constructive play (e.g. building things, playing with blocks)
- Q30/4. Outdoor/exercise play (e.g. climbing, running, jumping)
- Q30/5. Social play (any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game or while making something together)
- Q30/6. Symbolic play (e.g. using objects, actions, or ideas to represent other objects e.g., using a cardboard tube as a telescope)
- Q30/7. Exploratory Play (using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them e.g. a baby mouthing an object)

RQ3:

Is there a link between the Muslim mothers' perceptions of play and other factors related to their social, cultural, and religious background?

- Q32/1. As a child, I used to spend a long time playing.
- Q32/2. My parents thought that play would help me learn.
- Q32/3. As a child, I did not play much.
- Q32/4. My parents thought that play was a waste of time.
- Q32/5. As a child I had a lot of toys.
- Q32/6. As a child, I did not have toys, because my parents could not afford it.
- Q32/7. In my culture, play is considered to be important for young children.
- Q32/8. In my culture, children should spend most of their time playing.
- Q32/9. According to my culture play is not considered to be important.
- Q32/10. According to my culture, the children should spend most of their time learning about their religion.
- Q32/11. According to my culture, children should give equal time to learning and playing.
- Q32/12. According to my culture, toys should be made in a way that helps children to play and learn about their religion.
- Q32/13. According to my religion, parents should allow their children to play and play with them, so they can teach them their religion through play.
- Q32/14. According to my religion, parents should play with their children, so they can teach them their religion through play.
- Q32/15. According to my culture parents should not play with their children.
- Q32/16. According to my culture, play is only for young children.
- Q32/17. According to my religion parents should not play with their children, so they can find more time to practice their religion.

1. Descriptive statistics, including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.
2. Parametric and Non-parametric analysis (correlation) in order to explore the possibility of relationship between some variables.

RQ4:	Gaining more knowledge about play	Descriptive statistics, including measures of frequency, measures of dispersion and measures of central tendency.
How can Muslim mothers be supported to become more aware of the potential benefits of play?	Q34/1. Read books and articles about play and its benefits. Q34/2. Ask preschool teachers about the benefits of play. Q34/3. Watch movies and videos that show the benefits of play. Q34/4. Provide different play opportunities to my child and see how s/he benefits from play. Q34/5. I stop my child from playing and see how that will affect him/her. Q34/6. Visit different websites that give advice about play and its impact on the children and follow that advice.	

Table H.2: The Number of the Mothers Who Meet the Full Criteria

Variables	N/n	n%
Inclusive criteria	103	
1- Please confirm that you are the mother (who will complete this questionnaire).	103	(100%)
2- Please confirm that you live in the UK.	103	(100%)
3- Please confirm that you have at least one child aged between 3 and 6 years old.	103	(100%)
4- Please confirm that you are a Muslim.	103	(100%)

Table H.3: Participants' Ethnic Groups and Backgrounds Including the Country of Birth, and Country of Origin.

Variable	N/n	n%
Participants' ethnic background	103	
White – British	3	2.9%
Other white background	11	10.7%
Asian British – Indian	1	1.0%
Asian British – Pakistani	5	4.9%
Asian British – Bangladeshi	4	3.9%
Other Asian background		
Mixed - white and black	1	1.0%
African	5	4.9%
Arab		
Chinese	65	63.1%
Prefer not to say	1	1.9%
Other	2	1.9%
	2	1.9%
Participants' country of birth	103	
Algeria	55	53.4%
Bangladesh	1	1.0%
Belarus	1	1.0%
China	1	1.0%
Egypt	1	1.0%

France	1	1.0%
Germany	1	1.0%
Iraq	1	1.0%
Jordan	1	1.0%
Kenya	1	1.0%
Kuwait	2	1.9%
Lebanon	2	1.9%
Libya	2	1.9%
Lithuania	1	1.0%
Morocco	3	2.9%
Pakistan	3	2.9%
Palestine	1	1.0%
Saudi Arabia	8	7.8%
Sri Lanka	1	1.0%
Sudan	1	1.0%
Syria	1	1.0%
Tunisia	2	1.9%
United Arab Emirates	1	1.0%
United Kingdom	11	10.7%

Participants' country of origin **103**

Algeria	56	54.4%
Bangladesh	4	3.9%
Belarus	1	1.0%
China	1	1.0%
France	1	1.0%
India	1	1.0%
Iraq	1	1.0%
Jordan	1	1.0%
Kenya	1	1.0%
Lebanon	2	1.9%
Libya	1	1.0%
Lithuania	1	1.0%
Morocco	3	2.9%
Pakistan	4	3.9%
Pakistan and India	1	1.0%
Palestine	5	4.9%
Saudi Arabia	9	8.7%
Sri Lanka	1	1.0%
Sudan	1	1.0%
Syria	1	1.0%
Tunisia	2	1.9%
United Kingdom	5	4.9%

Table H.4: Descriptive Statistics for Participants' Significant Biographic Information

Variables	<i>N/n</i>	<i>n%</i>	Min-max
Participant's age	103	100%	18- over 50
18-30	16	15%	
31-50	86	83.5%	
Over 50	1	1.0%	

Gender	103		
Female	103	100%	
Male	0	0%	
Relationship status	103		
- Married	99		
- Divorced	1		
- Separated	3		
Number of children under 18	103		1- 5 or more
- 1 child	9	8.7%	
- 2 children	48	46.6%	
- 3 children	34	33.0%	
- 4 children	10	9.7%	
- 5 or more	2	1.9%	
Number of children between 3 and 6 years old	103		1-3
- 1 child	65	63.1%	
- 2 children	34	33.0%	
- 3 children	4	3.9%	
Caring responsibilities	103		
Taking care of children on their own	15	14.6%	
Taking care of children with help from spouse	87	84.5%	
Taking care of children with help from others	1	1.0%	
Participants' employment status	103		
Full time employed	17	16.5%	
Part time employed	18	17.5%	
Not employed looking for job	28	27.2%	
Not employed not looking for job			
Disabled not able to work.	26	25.2%	
Other.	1	1.0%	
	13	12.6%	
Partners' employment status	103		
Full time employed	68	66.0%	
Part time employed	17	16.5%	
Not employed looking for job	7	6.8%	
Not employed not looking for job			
Disabled not able to work	2	1.9%	
Not applicable	2	1.9%	
Other	5	4.9%	
	1	1.0%	

Table H.5: Preferred Type of Play by the Children

Type of play	N/n	n%
Free play	74	71.8%
Guided play	16	15.5%
Both (free and guided play)	13	12.6%

Table H.6: Preferred Kinds of play by the Children

Kinds of play	N/n	n%
Q30/1. Socio-dramatic play (e.g. acting play, playing roles).	48	46.6%
Q30/2. Object/quiet play (e.g. playing with puzzles, painting, colouring, and writing).	66	64.1%
Q30/3. Constructive play (e.g. building things, playing with blocks).	61	59.2%
Q30/4. Outdoor/exercise play (e.g. climbing, running, jumping).	74	71.8%
Q30/5. Social play (any social or interactive situation where the expectation is that everyone will follow the set rules - like during a game or while making something together).	29	28.2%
Q30/6. Symbolic play (e.g. using objects, actions, or ideas to represent other objects e.g., using a cardboard tube as a telescope).	34	33.0%
Q30/7. Exploratory Play (using senses of smell, touch and even taste to explore and discover the texture and function of things around them e.g. a baby mouthing an object).	28	27.2%
Something else	10	9.7%

Table H.7: Other Kinds of Play that Mothers Added as Something Else Other Than the Listed Ones

Participants' number	Other kinds of play
1	Small World
2	Drawing, painting, and craft.
3	Play with us
4	He loves to play with LEGOs, puzzles and cars
5	With play dough and magic sand
6	Playing with siblings
7	Playing with water, mud, and sand
8	Video games
9	Cards, skipping rope, cooking
10	Board game with an adult.

Table H.8: Play and Learning Relationship

Scale items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q24/11. Play provides my child with opportunities to explore new	84.5%	15.5%			

experiences and learning new skills and abilities.					
Q24/1. Play can help my child develop thinking abilities.	91.3%	7.8%	1%		
Q24/10. Playing together helps me build up a good relationship with my child.	90.3%	8.7%	1%		
Q24/5. Through play my child develops new skills and abilities.	88.3%	10.7%	1%		
Q24/18. I think play is good for my child.	82.5%	16.5%	1%		
Q24/2. Playing at home will help my child in school.	71.8%	27.2%	1%		
Q24/8. Play helps my child improve and practice language and communication skills.	74.8%	23.3%	1.9%		
Q24/13. Through play, my child learns to express positive as well as negative emotions (e.g. happy or sad).	66.0%	32.0%	1.9%		
Q24/7. Play helps my child learn to express his/her feelings.	69.9%	27.2%	2.9%		
Q24/6. Playing at preschool will help my child in elementary school.	68.0%	29.1%	2.9%		
Q24/9. Play can help my child develop social skills.	72.8%	23.3%	3.9%		
Q24/12. Play helps my child's ability to solve problems (e.g. solve conflicts with peers).	63.1%	33.0%	3.9%		
Q24/3. My child can learn social skills through play.	78.6%	19.4%	1%	1%	
Q24/4. If I take time to play with my child, s/he will be better at playing with others.	55.3%	31.1%	8.7%	4.9%	
Q24/17. I often think play is valuable for children.	73.8%	17.5%	2.9%	3.9%	1.9%
Q28/9. Play is messy.	4.9%	22.3%	19.4%	33.0%	20.4%

Table H.9: Mothers' Perceptions about Children Playing with Toys

Scale items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q24/15- I often buy toys for my child.	18.4%	57.3%	19.4%	4.9%	
Q28/13- I prefer that my child plays in the house with toys.	5.8%	43.7%	35.9%	13.6%	1%
Q28/4- I buy as many toys for my child as I can.	9.7%	28.2%	28.2%	30.1%	3.9%
Q28/5- Playing with toys helps my child learn.	48.5%	39.8%	9.7%	1%	1%
Q28/6- I prefer that my child plays more with toys.	13.6%	38.8%	33.0%	13.6%	1%
Q28/7- Toys are beneficial for learning.	31.1%	59.2%	8.7%		1%
Q28/2- I do not see the benefits of toys.			3.9%	35.9%	60.2%
Q28/3- toys are expensive.	2.9%	32%	35.9%	19.4%	9.7%
Q32/5- As a child I had a lot of toys.	8.7%	32.0%	28.2%	24.3%	6.8%
Q32/6- As a child, I did not have toys.	7.8%	14.6%	23.3%	37.9%	16.5%
Q32/12- According to my culture, toys should be made in a way that helps children to play and learn about their religion.	2.9%	13.6%	42.7%	33.0%	7.8%
Q28/1- I do not buy toys for my child.		1.0%	10.7%	43.7%	44.7%
Q25/1- when my child wants to play with me, I encourage him/her to play alone with toys instead.		18.4%	56.3%	24.3%	1.0%

Table H.10: Mothers' Attitude towards Play

Scale items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Q24/16 I often allow my child to play.	57.3%	34.0%	1.9%	5.8%	1%
Q28/11- I allow my child to play at home as long as s/he wants.	23.3%	39.8%	24.3%	12.6%	
Q28/8- I prefer that my child does not play at home.		1.9%	5.8%	39.8%	52.4%
Q28/14- I prefer that my child plays outside	14.6%	43.7%	32.0%	9.7%	
Q28/10- I prefer that my child spends his/her time learning letters and numbers.	1%	9.7%	35.9%	47.6%	5.8%
Q28/12- I restrict playing time for my child at home, so s/he can find time to learn letters and numbers.	2.9%	20.4	25.2%	35.0%	16.5%
Q24/14- Play is just for fun, and it does not contribute too much to my child's learning and development.	1.9%	4.9%	1.9%	41.7%	49.5%

Table H.11: Mothers' Involvement and Engagement in their Children's Play

Scale items	Always	often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Q25/4- I dedicate approximately some time every day to play with my child.	20.4%	48.5%	24.3%	6.8%	
Q27/3- I take any opportunity to play with my child.	26.2%	38.8	29.1%	5.8%	
Q27/5- I look forward to playing with my child.	32.0%	25.2%	35.9%	5.8%	1.0%
Q27/2- After a long and busy day, I play with my child.	4.9%	31.1%	38.8%	23.3%	1.9%
Q27/1- Playing with my child can be a chore.	10.7%	33.0%	27.2%	18.4%	10.7%
Q25/6- I think it is not important to play with my child.	7.8%	1.9%		8.7%	81.6%
Q26/7- I do not play with my child as play is only for children.		1.0%	4.9%	6.8%	87.4%

Q27/4- I prefer to let my child play on his/her own.	1.9%	30.1%	38.8%	25.2%	3.9%
Q25/2- some days go by without dedicating any time to play with my child.		21.4%	43.7%	28.2%	6.8%
Q25/5- it is difficult for me to find time to play with my child every day.	6.8%	28.2%	24.3%	35.0%	5.8%
Q26/4- when I play with my child, I give him/her my full attention and I try actively to participate in the game.	42.7%	45.6%	9.7%	1.9%	
Q26/2- When I play with my child, we choose the game that allows both of us to take turns and play together.	14.6%	42.7%	29.1%	8.7%	4.9%
Q27/6- When my child loses interest in a game we are playing together, I try to get him/her involved in a new game.	18.4%	41.7%	25.2%	11.7%	2.9%
Q26/6- When I play with my child I usually follow and my child leads.	19.4%	58.3%	20.4%	1.9%	
Q26/5- when I play with my child, I usually lead, and my child follows.	4.9%	15.5%	24.3%	42.7%	12.6%
Q26/3- when my child wants me there, I sit and keep watching him/her playing to make sure s/he is safe.	28.2%	31.1%	24.3%	11.7%	4.9%
Q26/1- When I play with my child, I prefer watching to see whether s/he is playing with toys properly.	11.7%	26.2%	35.9%	20.4%	5.8%

Table H.12: Mothers' Cultural and Religious Beliefs about Play

Scale items	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
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Q32/3- As a child I did not play much.	2.9%	6.8%	7.8%	44.7%	37.9%
Q32/1- As a child I used to spend a long time playing.	44.7%	38.8%	11.7%	4.9%	
Q32/4- My parents thought that play was a waste of time.		6.8%	19.4%	43.7%	30.1%
Q32/2- My parents thought that play would help me learn.	21.4% 57.3%	35.9%	35.9%	5.8%	1%
Q32/7- In my culture, play is considered to be important for young children.	28.2%	37.9%	26.2%	5.8%	1.9%
Q32/8- in my culture children should spend most of their time playing.	16.5%	48.5%	28.2%	5.8%	1.0%
Q32/11- According to my culture, children should give equal time to learning and playing.	9.7%	49.5%	23.3%	15.5%	1.9%
Q32/9- According to my culture, play is not considered to be important.	1.9%	9.7%	19.4%	41.7%	27.2%
Q32/10- According to my culture, the children should spend most of their time learning about their religion.	2.9%	7.8%	31.1%	43.7%	14.6%
Q32/16- according to my culture, play is only for young children (adults should not be involved).	3.9%	17.5%	16.5%	32%	30.1%
Q32/15. According to my culture parents should not play with their children.	2.9%	7.8%	31.1%	43.7%	14.6%
Q32/13- According to my religion, parents should allow their children to play and play with them, so they can learn about their religion through play.	15.5%	38.8%	30.1%	13.6%	1.9%
Q32/14- According to my religion, parents should play with their children, so they can teach their children about their religion through play.	14.6%	43.7%	28.2%	11.7%	1.9%
Q32/17- According to my religion, parents should not play with their children, so they can find more time to practice their religion.	1.0%		8.7%	42.7%	47.6%

Table H.13: Spearman's rho Correlations between Variables of Interest

	Benefits of play	Mothers' Involvement/engagement	Mothers' play Enjoyment	Play environment	Mothers' cultural and religious beliefs	Mothers' ethnic background	Mother's level of education
Benefits of play	--						
Mothers' Involvement/engagement	-.098	--					
Mothers' play Enjoyment	.068	.170	--				
Play environment.	.029	.168	.344**	--			
Mothers' cultural and religious beliefs.	-.060	.069	.085	.234*	--		
Mothers' ethnic background.	.198*	-.171	-.102	-.028	.009	--	
Mother's level of education	.057	.017	.068	.071	.262**	.292**	--

*p < .05, **p < .001.

Table H.14: Pearson's Correlations between Variables of Interest

	Mothers' play enjoyment	Play environment	Mothers' cultural and religious beliefs
Mothers' play enjoyment	--		
Play environment	.337**	--	
Mothers' cultural and religious beliefs	.061	.196*	--

*p < .05, **p < .001.

Table H.15: The Ways Used by Mothers to Gain more Knowledge about the Benefits of Play

Statement	yes	No

34/1- I read books and articles about play and its benefits.	68.0%	32.0%
34/2- I ask the preschool teachers about the benefits of play.	23.3%	76.7%
34/3- I watch movies and videos that show the benefits of play.	46.6%	53.4%
34/4- I provide different play opportunities to my child and see how s/he benefits from play.	55.3%	44.7%
Q34/5- I stop my child from playing and see how that will affect him/her.	2.9%	97.1%
34/6- I visit different websites that give advice about play and its impact on the children and follow that advice.	73.8%	26.2%
