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## International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJMRSET)

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# Influence of Parent–Child Interaction on Social Cognition Development During Early Childhood

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**ABSTRACT:** Social cognition refers to the ability of children to understand, interpret, and respond appropriately to the thoughts, emotions, intentions, behaviors, and social experiences of other people. The development of social cognition begins during infancy and progresses rapidly throughout early childhood as children interact with parents, caregivers, siblings, peers, and teachers. Among these relationships, parent–child interaction is considered one of the most influential factors affecting children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. The present study focuses on examining the influence of parent–child interaction on the development of social cognition during early childhood, particularly among children between 0 and 6 years of age. The study is based on the assumption that responsive, emotionally supportive, communicative, and stimulating interactions between parents and children provide important opportunities for children to develop perspective-taking, empathy, emotional understanding, social communication, cooperation, and awareness of social rules. The proposed research adopts a quantitative descriptive and analytical approach to examine the relationship between the quality of parent–child interaction and children's social cognition development. A sample of young children and their parents may be selected using an appropriate sampling technique from early childhood education centres, preschools, childcare centres, or community settings. Data can be collected using a structured parent–child interaction questionnaire, observation schedule, and age-appropriate social cognition assessment scale. Variables such as frequency of parent–child communication, quality of emotional responsiveness, shared play, storytelling, parental involvement, disciplinary practices, and opportunities for social interaction can be examined in relation to children's social cognition.

**KEYWORDS:** Parent–Child Interaction; Social Cognition; Parenting Practices; Emotional Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is one of the most important periods of human development because significant changes occur in children's physical, cognitive, emotional, language, and social abilities during the first six years of life. During this period, children gradually develop the capacity to understand themselves and other people, communicate their needs, recognize emotions, follow social expectations, participate in relationships, and respond appropriately to different social situations. These abilities are collectively related to the development of social cognition. Social cognition enables children to understand that other individuals have their own thoughts, feelings, desires, intentions, beliefs, and perspectives. The development of these abilities is not determined only by biological maturation; rather, it is strongly influenced by children's experiences and interactions with important people in their environment. Among these influences, parent–child interaction occupies a particularly important position because parents are generally the earliest and most consistent social partners in a child's life.

Parent–child interaction refers to the reciprocal communication, emotional exchange, behaviour, and shared activities that occur between parents and children. These interactions can include talking, playing, reading, storytelling, comforting, teaching, problem-solving, discipline, emotional support, and everyday caregiving activities. Through such experiences, children learn how people communicate, how emotions are expressed and regulated, how conflicts can be resolved, and how social relationships operate. When parents respond sensitively to children's emotional and communicative signals, children receive opportunities to develop trust, emotional security, communication skills, and awareness of other people's feelings. In contrast, limited communication, inconsistent responses, excessive negative interaction, or lack of emotional availability may reduce opportunities for children to practice important social-cognitive skills. The development of social cognition begins very early in life. Infants gradually become aware of familiar people, respond to facial expressions and voices, participate in shared attention, and develop expectations regarding social interactions. As children move into toddlerhood, they begin to imitate others, recognize emotional expressions, engage in simple forms of pretend play, and



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understand increasingly complex social instructions. During the preschool years, children develop more advanced abilities, including understanding different perspectives, recognizing that another person may have knowledge or beliefs different from their own, interpreting intentions, cooperating with others, and responding to social situations. Parents can support these developmental changes by engaging children in conversations, asking questions, explaining emotions, reading stories, encouraging pretend play, and discussing the feelings and perspectives of characters and other people.

Communication between parents and children is particularly important for social cognition. Everyday conversations provide children with opportunities to learn words related to emotions, intentions, desires, and social relationships. For example, when parents ask a child why a character in a story feels sad or why another child may have behaved in a particular way, they encourage the child to consider perspectives beyond their own immediate experience. Similarly, conversations about daily events can help children connect actions with consequences and understand the emotional experiences of others. Parent–child shared reading is another important context in which social cognition may develop because stories frequently involve characters with different goals, emotions, beliefs, and interpersonal conflicts. Play is also an important mechanism through which parent–child interaction contributes to social cognition. During shared play, parents can encourage children to take turns, follow rules, negotiate roles, solve problems, and consider another person's perspective. Pretend play is especially relevant because children may take on different roles and imagine situations that differ from their immediate reality. Parents who participate in such activities can extend children's thinking through questions and explanations. Therefore, the quality of interaction may be more important than simply the amount of time parents spend with children.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social cognition has been studied extensively within developmental psychology because it represents a fundamental component of children's ability to function effectively in social environments. It includes processes such as understanding emotions, recognizing intentions, interpreting social cues, understanding perspectives, predicting behaviour, and developing knowledge about relationships and social rules. Developmental theories suggest that children acquire social understanding through a combination of biological maturation and interaction with their social environment. Early relationships are therefore particularly important because they provide children with repeated opportunities to observe and participate in social exchanges. Parents serve as important models and facilitators of these experiences. Attachment-oriented perspectives emphasize the importance of sensitive and responsive caregiving in early development. When parents consistently respond to children's needs, children may develop expectations that social relationships are predictable and supportive. Such experiences can contribute to children's willingness to explore their environment and engage socially. Emotional security may also create a context in which children can attend to social information and learn about other people's emotional states. Although attachment and social cognition are conceptually different, the quality of early relationships may provide an important foundation for children's ability to understand social interactions.

Social learning perspectives provide another important explanation for the relationship between parent–child interaction and social cognition. Children learn through observing and imitating the behaviour of significant adults. Parents demonstrate ways of communicating, expressing emotions, resolving disagreements, cooperating, apologizing, and responding to other people's needs. Children may internalize these observed patterns and reproduce them in interactions with siblings and peers. Consequently, parents function not only as caregivers but also as social models. Positive parental behaviour can provide children with examples of appropriate social responses, while highly conflictual or inconsistent interaction may expose children to less adaptive social patterns.

Language development is closely connected with social cognition. Parent–child conversations provide children with vocabulary and conceptual tools for understanding emotions, desires, intentions, and beliefs. Parents who frequently engage children in meaningful conversations may provide more opportunities to discuss social situations. Research in developmental psychology has particularly emphasized the importance of parental mental-state talk. When parents use words such as “think,” “know,” “want,” “feel,” and “remember,” they help children attend to internal mental experiences. Discussions about why people behave differently can similarly encourage children to recognize that individuals may have different perspectives and intentions. Shared book reading has also received substantial attention in early childhood research. During interactive reading, parents can ask questions about characters' feelings, motivations, and decisions. Rather than simply reading the words on a page, parents can encourage children to predict what might happen, explain why a character acted in a particular manner, and compare the character's experience with their own. Such discussions may support children's understanding of mental states and social relationships. Therefore, the effectiveness of shared



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reading may depend not only on exposure to books but also on the quality of parent–child discussion surrounding the story.

### III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study may adopt a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the influence of parent–child interaction on social cognition development during early childhood. The target population would consist of children between 0 and 6 years of age and their parents or primary caregivers. Because social cognition develops considerably during this period, children may be divided into appropriate developmental groups, such as infancy, toddlerhood, and preschool age, depending on the research setting and availability of participants. The study may be conducted in selected preschools, childcare centres, early childhood development centres, community settings, or other appropriate institutions. A sample size may be determined according to the objectives of the research, available population, statistical requirements, and ethical considerations. Participants can be selected using a suitable sampling method such as purposive, convenience, stratified, or simple random sampling, depending on the accessibility and characteristics of the study population. The independent variable in the study would be parent–child interaction, while the dependent variable would be social cognition development. Parent–child interaction may be assessed across several dimensions, including frequency of communication, emotional responsiveness, shared play, storytelling, shared reading, parental involvement, encouragement, problem-solving discussions, and supportive guidance. The study may also collect information about parenting practices, communication patterns, and opportunities for joint activities. Social cognition may be assessed through an age-appropriate standardized developmental scale, structured observation, or researcher-developed assessment tool. Depending on the age group, indicators may include recognition of emotions, response to social cues, imitation, joint attention, understanding of simple intentions, empathy, perspective-taking, cooperation, turn-taking, and understanding of social rules.

A structured demographic information schedule may be developed to collect information regarding the child's age, gender, birth order, family structure, parental education, occupation, socioeconomic background, and access to early childhood education. A parent–child interaction questionnaire may then be administered to parents. Items could assess how frequently parents engage in activities such as talking with children, reading stories, playing together, discussing emotions, asking children questions, responding to children's concerns, and explaining social situations. Responses may be measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from low to high frequency or quality of interaction.

Observation can provide valuable information about actual parent–child behaviour. A structured observation schedule may be used to record behaviours such as eye contact, verbal responsiveness, turn-taking, emotional support, joint attention, encouragement, problem-solving, and responsiveness to children's signals. Observations should be conducted in a comfortable environment that minimizes unnecessary stress for the child. Researchers should maintain consistent observation procedures across participants. If video recording is used, explicit parental consent should be obtained and recordings should be stored securely. The social cognition assessment should be developmentally appropriate. For younger children, indicators may include recognition of familiar emotions, response to caregivers, imitation, joint attention, and simple social communication. For older preschool children, assessment may include emotion recognition, understanding of desires and intentions, perspective-taking, cooperative behaviour, pretend play, and responses to hypothetical social situations. The researcher should ensure that the assessment instrument has acceptable validity and reliability. If a researcher-developed tool is used, content validity can be established through expert review, while reliability may be evaluated through appropriate statistical procedures.

Before data collection, ethical approval should be obtained from the relevant institutional authority where required. Parents or legal guardians should receive information about the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent should be obtained before involving children in the study. Children's dignity, privacy, safety, and comfort should remain priorities throughout the research process. Participants should have the right to withdraw without penalty. Personal identifying information should not be included in the research report. Data collection would proceed systematically. After obtaining consent, demographic information would be collected, followed by administration of the parent–child interaction measure and social cognition assessment. Where observation is included, trained researchers should follow a standardized protocol. Data should be coded and entered into an appropriate statistical software package. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and range may be used to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistics such as Pearson's



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correlation, t-test, analysis of variance, or regression analysis may be used according to the nature and distribution of the data. Statistical significance may be evaluated using an appropriate significance level, commonly  $p < 0.05$ .

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is an essential component of the present study because it enables the researcher to organize collected information, identify patterns, examine relationships between variables, and determine whether the study objectives have been achieved. After data collection, completed questionnaires and assessment records should be checked for completeness, coded systematically, and entered into statistical software. Each participant can be assigned a unique identification number to maintain confidentiality. The analysis should begin with descriptive statistics to provide an overall picture of the sample. Frequencies and percentages can be calculated for categorical variables such as child's age group, gender, family type, parental education, and socioeconomic category. For continuous variables such as parent-child interaction scores and social cognition scores, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values can be calculated.

The first stage of analysis should describe the level of parent-child interaction among participating families. Interaction scores may be categorized into low, moderate, and high levels according to predetermined criteria or distribution-based cut-offs. The mean score can indicate the general level of interaction, while the standard deviation can show variation between families. Separate dimensions, such as communication, emotional responsiveness, shared play, storytelling, and parental involvement, can also be analyzed individually. This would help identify which aspects of parent-child interaction are most frequently practiced and which may require greater attention. The second stage should examine children's social cognition scores. Descriptive statistics can be used to identify the average level of social cognition within the sample. If children are divided into developmental age groups, mean scores can be compared across groups. Such comparisons may demonstrate whether social cognition increases with age, although cross-sectional data alone cannot establish developmental change over time. The researcher may also examine individual domains of social cognition, including emotion recognition, social communication, perspective-taking, empathy, cooperation, and understanding of social situations.

The central analysis should investigate the relationship between parent-child interaction and social cognition. Pearson's correlation coefficient may be used when the variables meet the assumptions required for parametric analysis. A positive correlation would indicate that higher-quality parent-child interaction is associated with higher social cognition scores. The strength of the correlation can provide information about the magnitude of this relationship. For example, a weak positive association would suggest that interaction contributes to social cognition but is only one of several relevant influences, whereas a stronger association would indicate a more substantial relationship. Regression analysis can provide additional information by examining whether parent-child interaction predicts social cognition after accounting for selected background variables. A multiple regression model could include child age, parental education, socioeconomic background, family structure, and parent-child interaction dimensions. This analysis would help determine whether the relationship between interaction and social cognition remains significant when other factors are statistically controlled. Separate regression models could also examine whether communication, shared play, emotional responsiveness, or storytelling are particularly strong predictors of social cognition.

Group comparisons may also be conducted. For example, children from families reporting high levels of parent-child interaction may be compared with children from families reporting moderate or low levels of interaction. An independent-samples t-test could be used when two groups are compared, whereas analysis of variance may be appropriate when three or more groups are examined. The statistical test should be selected according to the research design, number of groups, measurement scale, and assumptions of the data. Reliability analysis should be conducted for multi-item questionnaires to determine internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha may be used where appropriate. Missing data should be handled using a clearly documented procedure rather than being ignored without explanation. The researcher should also inspect the data for outliers and assess whether statistical assumptions are reasonably satisfied. The findings should ultimately be presented using tables and appropriate graphical representations. Tables may include demographic characteristics, parent-child interaction levels, social cognition scores, correlation coefficients, and regression results. Bar charts or other appropriate graphs can visually present group differences. However, statistical results should always be interpreted in relation to the research questions rather than simply reporting numerical values.



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### V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

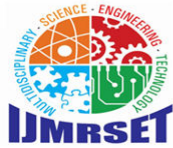
The results of the proposed study are expected to demonstrate a meaningful relationship between the quality of parent–child interaction and children's social cognition development during early childhood. If the hypothesis is supported, children who experience frequent and responsive interactions with their parents would be expected to obtain higher social cognition scores than children whose interactions are less frequent, less responsive, or predominantly directive. The findings may show that children who regularly participate in conversations, shared play, storytelling, reading, and emotional discussions demonstrate greater ability to recognize emotions, understand social intentions, cooperate with others, and respond appropriately to interpersonal situations. One expected finding is that emotional responsiveness may be positively associated with social cognition. When parents recognize and respond appropriately to children's emotional signals, children receive opportunities to learn about emotions in an immediate social context. For example, a parent who helps a child identify sadness, frustration, happiness, or fear may help the child develop a vocabulary for emotional experiences. Over time, children may become increasingly capable of recognizing similar emotions in other people. This may explain why emotionally responsive parenting is often associated with stronger social and emotional competence.

Another expected result concerns parent–child communication. Children who regularly participate in meaningful conversations may demonstrate stronger understanding of social situations because conversation provides opportunities to discuss thoughts, feelings, intentions, and consequences. Parents who ask children questions rather than simply providing instructions may encourage children to explain their reasoning. Similarly, discussions about why people behave differently can help children recognize that different individuals may have different perspectives. Thus, the quality of communication may be more important than the number of verbal interactions alone. Shared reading and storytelling may also emerge as important contributors to social cognition. Stories provide children with opportunities to observe characters experiencing emotions, facing problems, making decisions, and interacting with others. When parents discuss these experiences with children, they can encourage perspective-taking by asking questions such as why a character felt a particular emotion or what another character might be thinking. Such interactions may support children's developing understanding of mental states. The findings would therefore reinforce the idea that ordinary family activities can become valuable developmental opportunities when parents engage children actively.

The results may also indicate a positive relationship between shared play and social cognition. During parent–child play, children practice communication, turn-taking, cooperation, symbolic thinking, and problem-solving. In pretend play, children may adopt different roles and learn that different roles involve different expectations. Parents can extend this learning by introducing new situations and encouraging children to consider alternative solutions. Therefore, play should not be viewed merely as entertainment but as an important context for cognitive and social learning. Age-related differences may also be observed. Older preschool children may obtain higher social cognition scores than younger children because social cognition generally becomes more complex with increasing age and experience. Older children have had more opportunities to engage in conversations, social play, peer relationships, and educational experiences. However, the presence of age differences should not be interpreted as evidence that parents have less influence on older children. Instead, parental interaction may change in form as children become more independent. The interaction that is appropriate for an infant may differ substantially from the interaction appropriate for a five-year-old. The findings may further suggest that parent–child interaction does not operate independently of other environmental factors. Socioeconomic conditions, parental education, family structure, childcare arrangements, cultural practices, and access to educational resources may contribute to differences in children's development. Consequently, positive parent–child interaction should be understood as one important component of a broader developmental environment.

### VI. CONCLUSION

The development of social cognition during early childhood is a complex process influenced by biological maturation, individual characteristics, family relationships, language development, educational experiences, and broader social environments. Among these factors, parent–child interaction represents one of the most immediate and consistent influences available to young children. The present study focuses on understanding how the quality and nature of parent–child interaction may contribute to children's development of social-cognitive abilities during the first six years of life. The study recognizes that children develop their understanding of emotions, intentions, relationships, perspectives, and social expectations through repeated interactions with the people around them.



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The proposed research suggests that positive parent–child interaction may be associated with stronger social cognition. Responsive communication, emotional support, shared play, storytelling, reading, joint problem-solving, and discussions about thoughts and feelings can provide children with valuable opportunities to understand themselves and other people. Through these everyday activities, children gradually learn that people have different emotions, desires, intentions, and perspectives. They also learn how to communicate, cooperate, negotiate, regulate emotions, and respond appropriately to social situations.

In conclusion, parent–child interaction is an important developmental context in which children learn to understand emotions, perspectives, intentions, relationships, and social behaviour. A warm, responsive, communicative, and stimulating family environment can provide children with a strong foundation for social-cognitive development. Supporting parents in creating such environments may therefore contribute significantly to children's social competence, emotional well-being, school readiness, and future interpersonal relationships. The early years represent a particularly valuable period for intervention because children's social and cognitive abilities are developing rapidly. Strengthening positive parent–child interaction during this period can help establish the foundations for healthy social development throughout childhood and beyond.

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