

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in related concepts, theories, and research studies. The summary of the five main parts is as follows:

- 2.1 Importance of Play in Children
- 2.2 Montessori Method
- 2.3 Multi-Intelligence theory
- 2.4 Perceived Value of Wooden Toys among Thai Parents
- 2.5 Related Research

2.1 IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN CHILDREN

Linn (2008, p.3) said “Play is so fundamental to children’s health and well-being and so endangered that the United Nations lists it as a guaranteed right in its Convention on the rights of the Child”. Roger Callois gave the definition of play as “an activity always freely undertaken. Play is an activity initiated voluntarily, never through force or moral duty. However, the outcome of play is uncontrollable due to the initiatives or creativity of the players. “Play is make-believe, involving an awareness of its ‘unreality’” (Manu, 1995, p.65). According to education research, child specialist, child psychologists, and educational experts agree that play is children’s work and fundamental for a child’s development. Therefore, play in childhood had been studied in detail, and effective play programs have been developed to cultivate children’s development. Play is so important that educational researchers and concerned parties in many countries believed that children in kindergarten should play blocks and be outdoors every day for some time. That is because play helps to develop human skills and abilities in other areas of life. It stimulates physical and mental skills, sensory and motor skills, as well as creativity, logical thinking and planning (p.67). Many studies found that adults are less creative if they had limited play experiences in childhood, especially play that challenged the imagination. This was mentioned both in **Momo** (1973) and **The Neverending Story**

(1979) by Michael Ende, well-known fantasy novels around the world to cite the importance of human imagination.

Child psychologists and therapists also believed that play can cure depression situation. Many child care centers, convalescent hospitals or children's clinics always have toys available for children, not just to entertain them but to heal them in terms of psychology. For example, with children who have problem concerning their parents' relationship or are orphans; dollhouses and miniature dolls can help them to be more fulfilled. In addition, some research studies looked at colors used in toys as well; for instance, orange used in dollhouse for children who were depressed influenced them in terms of psychology. Play can also help children express their thoughts, feelings and anxieties and used as treatments in later steps, and Susan Linn used puppets for play therapy with children. In children who have common development problems, play and toys can enhance their skills. For example, in children who have verbal or language problem, parents can encourage them to speak through role play, and vocabulary games (Stoppard, 1991).

2.2 MONTESSORI METHOD

Montessori is a so-called educational program for children, originated by Maria Montessori during her post-graduate research in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Montessori Method, n.d.). The Montessori Method was first publicized in print in 1909 and later translated into several major languages. The Montessori program is now popular worldwide, especially in the USA, UK, Germany and Australia.

Montessori believed that children could learn from doing and repeating actions; individual knowledge is cultivated internally rather than from listening from teachers and parroting. Montessori programs therefore prioritize on environmental setting to trigger children to discover and learn from play activities. In 1909 Montessori said "Children learn everything without knowing they are learning it, and in doing it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, treading always in the paths of joy and love..."

There have been many toys developed from the Montessori concept to help children's development. Children can learn through discovery processes that stimulate observation skills during play. Most of those activities are related to sensory skills, kinetic movement, spatial refinement, small and large motor skills, and concrete knowledge (Montessori Method, n.d.). "It also believed that children can correct their own mistakes instead of relying on a teacher to give them the correct answer," "Educators also believe that the hand is intimately connected to the development of the brain in children." (Montessori Method, n.d.). Therefore, toys based on sensory development have been developed to serve this belief. Montessori has been applied in many preschool and elementary schools, with program concentrating on children's learning process in Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Mathematics, Geography, Science and Art.

2.3 MULTI INTELLIGENCE THEORY

According to research by Howard Gardner in 1983, fruitful playing experiences in childhood cultivate multiple intelligences in human. The multiple intelligences theory holds that there are nine intelligence dimensions that human could obtain and practice to acquire through activities and play. Multiple intelligences can help one live in harmony with oneself, society, nature and the environment with true understanding. The theory refutes the former belief that Intelligence Quotient (IQ), which considers only one dimension of multiple intelligences theory, namely logical-mathematical intelligence, make humans successful and happy.

- **Linguistic Intelligence (*Word Smart*)** means the ability to learn language and the capability of using language to achieve goals effectively both in writing and speaking skills (Howard Gardner, n.d.).

- **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence (*Number/Reasoning Smart*)** is the ability to analyze problems logically, solve mathematical problems, and do scientific investigation. Furthermore, Gardner also includes the ability to solve problems with deductive reasoning. This skill usually is related to scientific and mathematical thinking.

- **Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence (*Body Smart*)**. This is a skill of using mental ability to coordinate body movement effectively (Howard Gardner, n.d.).

- **Musical Intelligence (*Music smart*)** is capability to perform, compose and appreciate music. Gardner claims that normally this intelligence is related to linguistic intelligence.

- **Spatial Intelligence (*Picture Smart*)** means the capability to recognize and to figure out spaces and depth (Howard Gardner, n.d.).

- **Interpersonal Intelligence (*People Smart*)**. Anyone who has this skill understands people's motivations, desires, and intentions. Therefore, they are able to work with other people, both in terms of achievement and relationships, effectively.

- **Intrapersonal Intelligence (*Self Smart*)** meant the ability to understand the fears, motivations, and desires of oneself. In Buddhist terms, it is a kind of self enlightenment of being able to be aware of emotion of oneself. Consequently, this helps to analyze a problem positively, accurately, and with reason.

- **Natural Intelligence (*Nature Smart*)** involves the ability to understand nature, which includes plants, animals, weather, etc. In other words, anyone who has a high level of this intelligence can live in harmony with nature and utilize their expertise to make a living also.

- **Existentialist Intelligence (*Life smart*)**. Gardner explained existential intelligence was capability to raise and reflect questions about life, death, and ultimate realities.

In 1999 Gardner said "Play influences problem solving" and "play is knowing how to balance between divergent thinking and convergent thinking." He also suggested that the two personal intelligences would always complete the other seven intelligences and they tend to work together. None of the intelligences can work independently and lead humans to success. Finally, the theory of multiple intelligence clearly explains the difference among people and can help today's parents better understand their children, and enable them to grow up happily as well as make their own living in the future.

2.4 PERCEIVED VALUE OF WOODEN TOYS AMONG THAI PARENTS

Customer Perceived Value (CPV) is the gap between customer's evaluation of something and its cost (Customer perceived value, n.d.). On the other hand, perceived value is the evaluation between perceived benefits that a product delivers and its perceived price. This is why many people are willing to spend more money for Lego bricks than common plastic bricks. People feel that Lego bricks will satisfy their children or provide more benefits than other brands.

Although there have not been any comparative studies between foreigners' and Thai parents' perceived value of wooden toys, there have been several qualitative research studies. We could conclude from domestic pre-test research by พัชรา นุตรอำคา in 2551 and U.S. research by California State University, Hayward in 2006 that Thai parents perceived value towards wooden toys is lower than U.S. parents. And quantitatively, there is only a small proportion of middle-end consumers in Bangkok and cities throughout Thailand who are aware of the superior attributes of wooden toys. In addition, many reference sources imply that the perceived value of wooden toys is formed internally in an individual through culture and playing experience. For example, if a parent had play experiences with wooden toys, they would have higher perceived value of wooden toys than other parents who had no similar play experience. In other words, the first group parents would appreciate wooden toys. According to pre-test research by พัชรา นุตรอำคา, a MBA student at NIDA in February 2008, parents in the wooden toys target group decided to pay for plastic toys more than wooden toys, 38% and 22% respectively.

This meant that they had a higher perceived value of plastic toys than wooden toys when comparing product benefits and cost. Although some of them perceived that wooden toys were better than plastic toys, they finally made the decision to buy plastic toys because price elasticity was important. The research also underlines that the reason that Thai parents bought toys for their children in general was for education and fun. In the mean time, safety was one of the top three criteria in buying a toy.

2.5 RELATED RESEARCH

According to previous research studies and interesting issues in the international toy market in 2007-2008, Thai parents had less information about toy safety standards until the recall case of Thomas the tank lead-toxic products in June 2007 and the announcement by Dr. Adisak Phalidpholkanpim about 31 dangerous toys after random inspection in the domestic market in October 2007. After those cases, many Thai parents began questioning whether the paint was non-toxic and the toy complied with safety standards in general or not before buying a toy for their children. A lot of parents nowadays are smarter and will be convinced only with evidence that is measurable, reliable and valid.

The research study by the Bachelor's degree students of the Commerce and Accountancy Faculty, Thammasat University in 2005 regarding Behavior in Buying and Consuming Media of Wooden Toys Consumers, looked at 200 parents of children aged under 6 years old using the quota sampling method at St. Francis Xavier Convent School through questionnaires and in-dept interview. In the study, 74.0% of the respondents were female, and majority of the group was in the age range of 35 – 39 years old with an educational background of Bachelor's degree 55.0% and Master's degree 28.5% . In addition, the majority of the group (37.0%) had family income of more than 80,000 baht per month. The study reported the factors which were influential in buying wooden toys ranked by priority were safety, encourages child's development (intelligence, physical, and emotional), quality, and reasonable price.

Moreover, according to the open-ended questions, the majority of respondents strongly believed that wooden toys would significantly cultivate a child's development, imagination, and creativity. The motivations to buy wooden toys for their children were for educational aids (92.0%), for presents on special occasions (30.5%), and for rewards for their children (14.5%). Regarding the person influencing buying decisions, the research study found out that the predominant group was "parents and children" (54.5%), "parents" (36.0%), and "children" (7.5%). Last but not least, the research also indicated that the places where parents normally went to

buy toys were department stores (91.5%), special events (49.5%), and the internet (0.5%).

Global Edge Partners Consulting (2006) at California State University found that US parents prioritized quality and safety, price, and packaging in buying toys for their children respectively. The research categorized consumers into three groups: wooden toy buyers, no preference, and plastic toy buyers. For the wooden toy buyers group, they had a high perceived value of wooden toys, especially educational value. This group had a strong negative perceived value regarding electronic toys and believed they limited a child's imagination. According to the research, the wooden toy buyers were also concerned about the environment, social responsibility and the goodwill of the companies who made toys.

Lindstrom and Seybold (2003) explained in their research that young consumers nowadays have a big influence to their family's expenditures. Their influence is not limited only to children goods anymore (e.g. cereal, toys, kids' accessories and outfits), children recognized brands and preferred certain products, and demanded to participate in family's decision regarding vacations, dinner, sports, etc. Furthermore, Lindstrom and Seybold also referred to the Build-A-Bear case study in the USA that the toy company applied brand experience to the target group, which were children and tweens.

According to literature review, each study and theory persuaded the researcher to find out the Perceive Value of Thai Parents towards Wooden Toys. The researcher also utilized the literature review in the development of the questionnaire and preparation the research summary through data evaluation and supporting and opposing views in the literature review.