

A Culturally-Informed Family Role Model: A Conceptualising Family Influences in Children's Cognitive, Emotional and Social Development

Siti Noraisikin Mohd Jazuli*, Teo Cai Qing, Abdul Muhaimin Mohamad Wijayanuddin, Zainudin Hassan

Faculty of Educational Sciences and Technology, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: sitinoraisikin@graduate.utm.my

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Abstract

Children's cognitive, emotional, and social development is fundamentally shaped by the family environment, which provides the primary context for early learning, emotional security, and socialisation. While existing developmental theories offer valuable insights into family influence, many are grounded in Western assumptions and give limited attention to cultural variation in family roles and practices. In multicultural societies such as Malaysia, children's development is closely intertwined with diverse family structures, parenting practices, and culturally embedded values. This concept paper introduces the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM), a framework that reorganises established developmental theories around the culturally mediated enactment of family roles. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory, CIFRM conceptualises parents, siblings, and extended family members as interdependent agents whose roles operate within specific cultural, structural, and contextual conditions to shape children's developmental outcomes. The model was developed through thematic and comparative analysis of existing literature, positioning cultural values as a central mechanism rather than a peripheral context in child development. Presented using a tree metaphor to illustrate interconnected developmental influences, CIFRM offers a holistic lens for understanding family influence across cognitive, emotional, and social domains. The paper outlines implications for family practices, education, policy, and future empirical research, contributing a culturally grounded framework for supporting children's development in diverse social contexts.

Keywords: Children development, family roles, cognitive development, emotional development, social development, cultural values, and CIFRM

Abstrak

Perkembangan kognitif, emosi, dan sosial kanak-kanak dipengaruhi secara signifikan oleh persekitaran keluarga, yang berfungsi sebagai konteks utama bagi pembelajaran awal, keselamatan emosi, dan proses sosialisasi. Walaupun pelbagai teori perkembangan telah menjelaskan pengaruh keluarga terhadap perkembangan kanak-kanak, kebanyakannya berasaskan andaian Barat dan memberi perhatian yang terhad terhadap variasi budaya dalam masyarakat majmuk. Di negara berbilang budaya seperti Malaysia, perkembangan kanak-kanak berkait rapat dengan struktur keluarga yang pelbagai, amalan keibubapaan, dan nilai budaya yang tertanam dalam kehidupan seharian. Kertas konsep ini memperkenalkan *Culturally-Informed Family Role Model* (CIFRM), iaitu satu rangka kerja konseptual yang menyusun semula teori perkembangan sedia ada berasaskan pelaksanaan peranan keluarga yang dimediasi oleh budaya. Berpandukan teori Sistem Ekologi *Bronfenbrenner*, Teori Sosiobudaya *Vygotsky*, dan Teori Kognitif Sosial *Bandura*, CIFRM mengkonseptualisasikan ibu bapa, adik-beradik, dan ahli keluarga terdekat sebagai agen pembangunan yang saling bergantung, beroperasi dalam konteks struktur keluarga, budaya, dan persekitaran yang tertentu untuk membentuk hasil perkembangan kanak-kanak. Model ini dibangunkan melalui analisis literatur secara bertema dan perbandingan, dengan meletakkan nilai budaya sebagai mekanisme teras dan bukan sekadar latar belakang konteks perkembangan. CIFRM digambarkan melalui metafora "pokok" bagi menggambarkan hubungan saling berkait antara domain perkembangan kognitif, emosi, dan sosial. Kertas ini turut membincangkan implikasi terhadap amalan keluarga, pendidikan, dan dasar awam, serta mengemukakan cadangan untuk pengesahan empirikal pada masa hadapan. Secara keseluruhan, CIFRM menyediakan satu lensa berasaskan budaya untuk memahami dan menyokong perkembangan holistik kanak-kanak dalam konteks sosial yang pelbagai.

Kata kunci: Perkembangan kanak-kanak, peranan keluarga, perkembangan kognitif, perkembangan emosi, perkembangan social, nilai budaya dan CIFRM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children's cognitive, emotional, and social development is fundamentally shaped by their immediate environment, with the family serving as the primary context for early learning, emotional security, and socialisation. From birth through adolescence, family environments provide the earliest and most enduring experiences that influence children's developmental trajectories. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that parental beliefs, household routines, and family support systems play a critical role in shaping children's development across stages (Li, Tang, & Zheng, 2023). In particular, responsive caregiving and enriched home learning environments have been associated with positive outcomes in early language development, secure attachment, and problem-solving skills (Lee et al., 2023).

Despite broad consensus regarding the importance of family influence, many conceptual frameworks addressing children's development remain grounded primarily in Western theoretical traditions. Classical developmental theories have generated valuable insights into cognitive, emotional, and social processes. However, they often give limited attention to cultural variation in family

dynamics, parenting practices, and community expectations. This limitation is especially salient in non-Western and multicultural societies, where family roles and child-rearing practices may diverge substantially from Western assumptions (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

In multicultural contexts such as Malaysia, family structures and parenting practices are deeply embedded within ethnic traditions, religious values, and communal norms. Malaysian families encompass diverse configurations, including nuclear, extended, single-parent, blended, and chosen families. Within these structures, caregiving responsibilities, authority relations, and socialisation practices are often shared among parents, siblings, and extended family members. As a result, the direct application of Western-centric models may not fully capture how family environments shape children's cognitive, emotional, and social development in such contexts.

Furthermore, existing frameworks tend to prioritise parent-child interactions while underrepresenting the developmental roles of siblings and extended family members. In collectivist societies, these family members frequently contribute to caregiving, social learning, and the transmission of cultural values. Cultural influences are also often treated as background contextual factors rather than as active mechanisms shaping family roles and parenting practices. These conceptual limitations highlight the need for a framework that integrates family roles, parenting styles, and cultural values as interconnected and dynamic influences on children's development.

To address these gaps, this concept paper proposes the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM). CIFRM reorganises established developmental theories around the culturally mediated enactment of family roles, offering a framework that reflects contemporary family realities across diverse sociocultural settings. By integrating family structure, parenting styles, cultural values, and contextual factors, CIFRM provides a comprehensive lens to guide research, policy development, and practice in family education and child development.

By situating the family within both its immediate relational environment and its broader cultural context, this paper advances a culturally responsive understanding of children's development that is theoretically grounded, contextually sensitive, and applicable across diverse social settings.

■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The family constitutes the primary and most enduring social context in which children's cognitive, emotional, and social development unfolds. Through everyday interactions, caregiving practices, and role modelling, family members shape children's developmental trajectories from early childhood through adolescence. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that family environments influence learning processes, emotional regulation, and social competence, highlighting the central role of families in children's development.

Existing literature on family influence draws from a range of developmental theories and empirical studies. However, much of this scholarship remains fragmented, with theoretical perspectives often examined in isolation and empirical studies frequently focusing on limited aspects of family life. In particular, dominant frameworks tend to prioritise parent-child interactions and nuclear family structures, while giving comparatively less attention to the roles of siblings and extended family members. Moreover, cultural values are frequently treated as background contextual variables rather than as active mechanisms shaping family roles and developmental processes.

These limitations are especially apparent in multicultural and collectivist contexts, where family structures, caregiving responsibilities, and socialisation practices differ substantially from Western normative assumptions. In such settings, extended family involvement, interdependence among family members, and culturally embedded role expectations play a central role in children's development. As a result, existing models may inadequately capture the complexity of family influence across diverse sociocultural environments.

Accordingly, this literature review synthesises key theoretical and empirical contributions on family roles in children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, while critically examining their conceptual boundaries. By identifying gaps related to cultural specificity, family role integration, and contextual sensitivity, this review provides the foundation for the development of the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) proposed in this paper. CIFRM seeks to integrate established developmental theories within a culturally grounded framework that reflects the diversity and dynamism of contemporary family systems. Collectively, this body of literature highlights the need for an integrative framework that moves beyond fragmented theoretical and empirical perspectives to account for culturally embedded family roles across diverse family structures.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Understanding children's development requires an integrative theoretical perspective that accounts for cognitive, emotional, and social processes as they unfold within family environments. A range of established developmental theories has contributed to this understanding by highlighting how learning, behaviour, and identity formation emerge through interaction with caregivers and the surrounding social context. However, while these theories provide important conceptual foundations, they are often applied in isolation and with limited attention to culturally specific family roles and practices.

2.1.1 Cognitive Development Theory

Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasises children's active construction of knowledge through interaction with their environment. Within family contexts, cognitive development is supported through everyday experiences such as guided exploration, problem-solving activities, and exposure to language-rich interactions. Family expectations, caregiving practices, and culturally shaped interpretations of learning influence how children engage with these experiences and progress through developmental stages.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory extends this perspective by foregrounding the role of social interaction in cognitive development. Learning occurs through guided participation and scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable others, including parents, siblings, and extended family members. These interactions transmit culturally embedded knowledge, language, and problem-solving strategies, highlighting the central role of family roles in mediating children's cognitive development.

Bandura's social cognitive theory further complements these perspectives by emphasising observational learning and modelling. Children acquire behavioural patterns, emotional responses, and social norms by observing family members' actions and interactions. The concept of reciprocal determinism underscores the bidirectional nature of development, whereby children both influence and are influenced by family practices and cultural expectations.

2.1.2 Emotional Development and Attachment

Attachment theory provides a foundational explanation of emotional development within family relationships. It emphasises the role of consistent, sensitive, and responsive caregiving in fostering secure attachment patterns. Secure attachment supports children's emotional regulation, resilience, and capacity to form stable relationships, while insecure attachment may increase vulnerability to emotional and behavioural difficulties. Importantly, attachment processes are shaped by culturally informed caregiving norms, expectations of dependence or autonomy, and patterns of emotional expression within families.

2.1.3 Motivation, Needs, and Emotional Security

Maslow's hierarchy of needs offers a complementary lens for understanding emotional and motivational development within the family context. The theory highlights the importance of fulfilling children's fundamental physiological and psychological needs, particularly safety, belonging, and emotional security, as prerequisites for higher-order development such as learning, autonomy, and self-actualisation. Families play a central role in meeting these needs through caregiving practices, emotional availability, and relational stability. Cultural values strongly influence how needs are prioritised and expressed, shaping children's experiences of security, motivation, and emotional well-being.

2.1.4 Psychosocial Development and Identity Formation

Erikson's psychosocial theory further emphasises the role of family environments in supporting children's emotional and social development across life stages. Through interactions with caregivers and family members, children navigate psychosocial challenges related to trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity. Family expectations, role assignments, and culturally defined norms influence how children resolve these developmental tasks and construct a sense of self.

2.1.5 Ecological and Systems Perspectives

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory provides an overarching framework for integrating these theoretical perspectives by situating children's development within nested environmental systems. The family operates as a central microsystem through which broader cultural, social, and structural influences are transmitted. While culture is often conceptualised at the macrosystem level, the theory underscores how cultural values shape everyday family interactions, caregiving practices, and role expectations.

Family systems theory and role theory further conceptualise the family as an interdependent system in which each member's role contributes to the functioning of the whole. Family roles are socially constructed and culturally mediated, shaping expectations regarding caregiving, authority, and responsibility. These roles influence children's access to emotional support, learning opportunities, and socialisation experiences, particularly in contexts where caregiving responsibilities are distributed across parents, siblings, and extended family members.

2.1.6 Summary

Understanding children's development requires an integrative perspective that accounts for the complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Drawing on key developmental theories, the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) highlights how family roles, shaped by cultural norms, influence children's developmental trajectories. Theories such as Piaget's cognitive development theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory emphasise the importance of interaction, guided learning, and modelling in shaping cognitive and behavioural outcomes within family contexts. Emotional development is further informed by attachment theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which underscore the role of emotional security, caregiving consistency, and the fulfilment of basic psychological needs in supporting children's well-being and motivation. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory situates these processes within broader cultural and structural contexts, while family systems theory and role theory provide a structural lens for understanding how family roles shape emotional regulation, autonomy, and social learning.

Taken together, these theories converge on the view that children's development is shaped through ongoing interactions between cognitive stimulation, emotional security, social modelling, and environmental context, yet they remain insufficiently integrated with respect to culturally specific family role enactment. While each framework offers valuable insights, they are often applied in isolation and with limited attention to culturally specific family roles. CIFRM synthesises these perspectives by positioning family roles as culturally mediated mechanisms that shape children's cognitive, emotional, and social development across diverse family structures and sociocultural settings.

2.2 Family Structures and Parenting Styles

Beyond theoretical considerations, family structures and parenting styles exert a direct and meaningful influence on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Family structures refer to the organisational arrangements and relational patterns within a household or caregiving unit. These structures shape children's everyday environments and developmental experiences, reflecting broader social norms,

cultural expectations, and economic conditions. Importantly, developmental outcomes are not determined solely by family form, but by the quality of relationships, caregiving consistency, and culturally embedded parenting values within each structure (Li et al., 2023; Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

Five primary family structures are commonly identified in the literature: nuclear, extended, single-parent, blended, and chosen families. Nuclear families, consisting of two parents and their biological or adopted children living together, are often regarded as the traditional family unit in Malaysia. This structure is typically associated with close parental involvement and clearly defined role expectations, which may support stability and consistency in child-rearing practices. However, limited access to extended family support may constrain caregiving resources in some contexts (Li et al., 2023).

Extended families include relatives beyond the nuclear unit, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, who may co-reside or maintain regular and close contact. This structure is particularly prevalent in collectivist cultures, where intergenerational caregiving and shared responsibilities are valued. Extended family arrangements often provide emotional support, economic assistance, and cultural continuity, thereby enriching children's social and emotional environments (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

Single-parent families are led by one caregiver who assumes primary responsibility for raising children due to divorce, separation, death, or personal choice. While such families may face challenges related to financial strain, time constraints, and caregiving demands, many demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Strong parent-child bonds and supportive social networks can mitigate potential risks and contribute to positive developmental outcomes (Li et al., 2023).

Blended families are formed when one or both parents bring children from previous relationships into a new family unit, resulting in step-parent and step-sibling relationships. These families often require renegotiation of roles, boundaries, and emotional attachments. Successful adjustment within blended families depends on effective communication, mutual respect, and flexibility as family members adapt to new relational dynamics (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

Chosen families consist of non-biological networks formed through intentional and affective relationships rather than legal or genetic ties. These structures are particularly significant for individuals or couples without children, those estranged from biological relatives, and communities that emphasise communal caregiving. In Western contexts, chosen families are notably prominent within LGBTQ+ communities. Such arrangements can provide emotional security, identity affirmation, and social support comparable to, or exceeding, those found in traditional family structures (Li et al., 2023).

The influence of family structure on children's development is therefore shaped less by structural type than by relational quality, caregiving stability, and culturally informed parenting practices. Cultural context plays a central role in both the formation and functioning of family structures. For example, extended and multigenerational households are often regarded as normative and advantageous in collectivist societies, whereas nuclear or single-parent families are more common and socially supported in individualistic contexts (Li et al., 2023; Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

In addition to family structure, parenting styles play a critical role in shaping children's developmental trajectories. Parenting styles refer to the psychological and behavioural strategies employed by caregivers in raising children, influencing emotional well-being, academic achievement, and social functioning. Baumrind's typology identifies four primary parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved, distinguished along dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness (Bhandari & Bhatt, 2024).

Authoritative parenting, characterised by high responsiveness and high demandingness, has been consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes, including emotional regulation, social competence, and academic success. In contrast, authoritarian parenting emphasises control and obedience with limited emotional responsiveness and is often linked to increased anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and social withdrawal, despite short-term behavioural compliance.

Permissive parenting involves high responsiveness but low demandingness. Parents adopting this style are nurturing and communicative but tend to avoid enforcing firm boundaries or consistent rules. As a result, children may experience difficulties with self-regulation, decision-making, and respect for authority. Uninvolved parenting, characterised by low responsiveness and low demandingness, is associated with the most adverse developmental outcomes. In such households, caregivers may be emotionally detached or minimally involved, resulting in increased risks of attachment difficulties, poor academic performance, emotional instability, and feelings of rejection or insecurity among children (Bhandari & Bhatt, 2024).

Parenting styles do not operate in isolation, and real-world parenting practices often reflect a combination of approaches shaped by situational demands, cultural expectations, and children's individual temperaments. Cultural norms strongly influence perceptions of effective parenting. For example, authoritative parenting is often idealised in Western societies that emphasise independence and self-expression, whereas authoritarian approaches may be viewed more positively in cultures that prioritise obedience, respect for elders, and familial hierarchy, such as in many Asian contexts, including Malaysia. Ultimately, while authoritative parenting is most consistently associated with positive developmental outcomes across populations, the effectiveness of any parenting style depends on cultural compatibility, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and caregivers' adaptability to children's needs.

Within the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM), family structures and parenting styles are conceptualised as interrelated mechanisms through which family roles are enacted. Together, they shape how warmth, discipline, and responsiveness are expressed within culturally specific contexts, influencing children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. A culturally informed framework therefore recognises family influence as dynamic, context-dependent, and deeply embedded within societal values and traditions. Overall, the literature suggests that family structure and parenting style function less as fixed predictors of developmental outcomes and more as culturally mediated contexts within which family roles are enacted.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Family Roles in Children's Development: Emphasizes on Cognitive, Emotional and Social Development

Children's development unfolds primarily within the family context, where cognitive, emotional, and social competencies are cultivated through daily interactions, guidance, and modelling. Building on the theoretical foundations outlined earlier, this section synthesises empirical evidence to examine how family roles influence children's development across these domains, while accounting for cultural and

structural variation. Particular attention is given to the contributions of parents, siblings, and extended family members within the child's immediate social system.

2.3.1 Cognitive Development

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that families shape children's cognitive development through both direct instruction and indirect environmental enrichment. During infancy, responsive caregiving practices, such as naming objects, describing actions, and encouraging exploration, support sensorimotor development and early representational skills (Frosch et al., 2019). In early childhood, activities including storytelling, pretend play, and interactive reading enhance language acquisition, memory, and symbolic thinking, aligning with Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives. Parental involvement in schoolwork, problem-solving activities, and educational play during middle childhood and adolescence further promotes logical reasoning and abstract thinking, corresponding to Piaget's concrete and formal operational stages (Ansoorge et al., 2024).

Cultural values influence which forms of knowledge and learning are prioritised within the family. For example, collectivist cultures may place greater emphasis on memory, discipline, and conformity, whereas individualistic contexts often encourage creativity and critical thinking (Li et al., 2023). Socioeconomic conditions further shape cognitive opportunities, with families of higher socioeconomic status typically providing richer learning environments through access to books, digital resources, and extracurricular activities (Xu et al., 2022).

2.3.2 Emotional Development

The family also represents the primary context for children's emotional development. Secure attachment relationships formed through consistent and sensitive caregiving provide a foundation for emotional security, regulation, and resilience (Shi et al., 2021). Through everyday interactions, parents' model emotional regulation strategies, such as calm communication during conflict and expressions of empathy, which children gradually internalise. Siblings and extended family members offer additional contexts for emotional learning, including managing jealousy, resolving conflicts, and sharing positive emotional experiences (Kakunje, 2024).

Parenting styles play a pivotal role in shaping emotional outcomes. Authoritative parenting is associated with higher emotional competence through warmth, guidance, and appropriate autonomy, whereas authoritarian or neglectful parenting styles have been linked to increased anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and aggressive behaviour (Frosch et al., 2019). Cultural norms further moderate emotional development by shaping expectations regarding emotional expression, emotional restraint, and relational obligations within the family (Syakhrani & Aslan, 2024).

2.3.3 Social Development

Social development emerges as children learn to engage with others, internalise social norms, and build relationships within the family environment. Families provide children's earliest models of respectful communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Early interactions with parents and siblings foster skills such as turn-taking, empathy, and negotiation, while extended family members offer broader social exposure and diverse interpersonal roles (Sundram, 2020).

Erikson's psychosocial theory highlights the importance of supportive family environments in facilitating the successful resolution of developmental tasks related to trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity. Positive family communication strengthens children's ability to form friendships and navigate peer relationships, whereas family instability or conflict may contribute to social withdrawal or externalising behaviours (Briggs et al., 2019). Bandura's social cognitive theory further underscores the role of observational learning in the acquisition of prosocial behaviours, while Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective situates the family as a central component of the microsystem shaping social outcomes.

2.3.4 Empirical Evidence on Family Roles

Beyond specific developmental domains, empirical research consistently identifies the family as the foundational social institution shaping children's development. Parental roles have been most extensively examined, with studies demonstrating that parental nurturance, guidance, discipline, and resource provision are strongly associated with children's cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes. Baumrind's (1991) typology remains influential, with authoritative parenting linked to positive developmental outcomes across cultural contexts (Pinquart, 2016). Recent research has increasingly highlighted paternal involvement, particularly in emotional and educational domains, as a contributor to improved cognitive performance, self-esteem, and social competence (Lamb, 2010). Nevertheless, maternal roles continue to dominate the literature, leaving co-parenting and paternal dynamics underexplored.

Siblings also function as important agents of socialisation within the family system. Positive sibling relationships have been shown to foster empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills, whereas persistent sibling conflict is associated with externalising behaviours such as aggression and defiance (McHale et al., 2012; Tucker et al., 2013). The role of siblings in moral development and academic motivation is an emerging area of interest, particularly in cultural contexts where older siblings assume caregiving and educational responsibilities (Whiteman et al., 2011).

Extended family members, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other close relatives, often play critical roles in children's development, especially in collectivist societies and in situations where parents face economic or caregiving constraints. Empirical studies have linked grandparental involvement to enhanced emotional well-being, stronger cultural identity formation, and greater resilience among children experiencing adversity (Dunifon et al., 2014). Despite this evidence, extended family roles remain insufficiently integrated into mainstream developmental frameworks, which continue to privilege nuclear family models.

Across cognitive, emotional, and social domains, empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that children's development is embedded within family systems characterised by role-based interactions, cultural norms, and contextual conditions. Parents, siblings, and extended family members contribute in distinct yet complementary ways, with their influence shaped by socioeconomic circumstances and culturally informed expectations. These findings underscore the limitations of parent-centric and culturally neutral models and reinforce the need for an integrative framework, such as the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM), that captures the complexity and cultural embeddedness of family roles in children's development.

■ 3.0 METHODOLOGY

In response to the theoretical fragmentation and cultural gaps identified in the preceding literature review, this study adopts a qualitative, concept-driven methodological approach to synthesise existing research and develop an integrative framework. This approach is appropriate given the aim of the paper, which is not to test hypotheses empirically, but to synthesise existing theoretical and empirical literature in order to propose a culturally informed conceptual framework. Accordingly, the methodology focuses on literature synthesis, gap identification, and conceptual model development to construct the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM).

3.1 Identification of Gaps

As this study employs a conceptual research design, the identification of research gaps was based on a systematic review and synthesis of existing theoretical and empirical literature. Sources were selected using predefined inclusion criteria, with emphasis placed on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and authoritative academic publications released between 2010 and 2024. Studies were included if they examined family roles, parenting styles, or cultural influences on children's cognitive, emotional, or social development.

Particular attention was given to research conducted in collectivist and multicultural contexts, including Malaysia and other Asian societies, to enhance cultural relevance and reduce Western-centric bias. Through this review, several key conceptual gaps were identified. First, existing frameworks rarely integrate the roles of parents, siblings, and extended family members within a single developmental model. Second, much of the literature disproportionately focuses on nuclear family structures, despite the prevalence of extended and non-traditional family forms globally. Third, limited attention has been given to how family roles are evolving in response to contemporary societal changes, such as digitalisation, changing gender roles, and shifting labour patterns. Finally, the developmental contributions of siblings and extended family members remain underrepresented, particularly in relation to cognitive and moral development.

These gaps underscore the need for an integrative and culturally responsive framework that captures the complexity of family roles across diverse social and cultural contexts.

3.2 Methodology Process

This concept paper adopts a structured methodological process consisting of literature review, thematic and comparative analysis, and conceptual model development. This process enables the systematic integration of fragmented theoretical perspectives and empirical findings into a coherent framework that reflects both traditional and evolving family dynamics.

3.2.1 Literature Review and Source Selection

A comprehensive literature review formed the foundation of the methodological approach adopted in this study. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and established theoretical works in developmental psychology and family studies were systematically examined. Key academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, ResearchGate, and the UTM e-Resources Library, were utilised to identify relevant sources.

The inclusion criteria focused on studies that examined family roles, parenting styles, and children's cognitive, emotional, and social development across diverse cultural contexts. Non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded unless they were used solely for definitional clarification. This selection strategy ensured that the proposed model was grounded in established academic scholarship while minimising Western-centric bias.

3.2.2 Thematic and Comparative Analysis

The collected literature was subjected to thematic analysis, whereby data were coded and categorised into themes aligned with the study's three developmental domains: cognitive, emotional, and social development. Additional thematic coding was undertaken to capture the distinct contributions of parents, siblings, and extended family members to each developmental domain. In parallel, a cross-cultural comparative analysis was conducted to examine variations in family roles and parenting styles between individualistic societies (for example, the United States and the United Kingdom) and collectivist societies (such as Malaysia and Indonesia). This analytical step was essential for embedding cultural sensitivity within the proposed model and for identifying culture-specific family dynamics.

Thematic analysis was selected because it allows for the systematic identification, organisation, and synthesis of recurring patterns across diverse bodies of literature. This method is particularly suitable for conceptual research, where the objective is to integrate fragmented theoretical perspectives into a coherent framework. Coding focused on themes related to family member roles, parenting styles, cultural mediation, and developmental domains. Microsoft Excel was used as a practical tool to organise themes and facilitate comparative analysis across cultural contexts.

3.2.3 Conceptual Model Development

Building on the thematic and comparative findings, a conceptual model was developed to represent both visually and narratively the dynamic interactions between family roles, children's developmental domains, and moderating contextual factors. The model highlights the role of parenting styles as a key mechanism shaping these interactions and emphasises bidirectional and systemic influences, consistent with ecological and family systems theories. Diagramming tools, specifically Canva, were utilised to produce a clear and interpretable visual representation of the model.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the methodological process followed a structured sequence beginning with a systematic review of the literature, followed by source selection based on predefined inclusion criteria. The selected studies were then subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across cognitive, emotional, and social developmental domains. This was complemented by comparative analysis to examine variations in family roles and parenting practices across cultural contexts. The final stage involved the integration of these analytical outcomes into the development of the conceptual model, synthesising theoretical perspectives and empirical insights into a coherent framework.

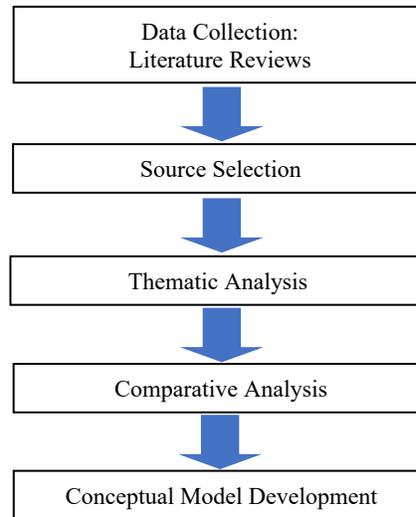


Figure 1 The Methodology of the Study

This conceptual approach enables a holistic and culturally responsive understanding of family influences on children's development. Unlike empirical studies that often isolate individual variables or focus on narrowly defined contexts, the methodology allows for flexibility in integrating diverse theoretical perspectives, depth in addressing underexplored family roles, and breadth in encompassing contemporary and global family dynamics. It also establishes a foundation for future empirical validation, whereby the proposed model may be examined through qualitative interviews, survey-based studies, or longitudinal research designs.

As this is a conceptual paper, the model was developed exclusively from secondary sources and existing literature, without primary data collection. Consequently, the proposed framework remains theoretical and interpretive. The findings may reflect limitations inherent in the existing literature, particularly where certain family forms or cultural contexts are underrepresented. In addition, rapidly evolving influences, such as digital parenting practices and changing gender roles, may necessitate ongoing refinement of the model over time.

■ 4.0 THE CULTURALLY-INFORMED FAMILY ROLE MODEL (CIFRM)

Building on the methodological approach outlined in the preceding section, this paper proposes the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) as an integrative conceptual framework for understanding how family roles shape children's cognitive, emotional, and social development within diverse cultural contexts. CIFRM was developed in response to limitations identified in existing developmental frameworks, particularly their tendency to privilege nuclear family structures and Western-centric assumptions while underrepresenting the roles of siblings, extended family members, and culturally embedded parenting practices.

CIFRM conceptualises the family as a dynamic system in which multiple actors, parents, siblings, and extended relatives, interact within specific structural and cultural conditions to influence children's developmental outcomes. Rather than treating culture as a peripheral contextual variable, the model positions cultural values as a central organising mechanism that shapes family roles, parenting practices, and expectations placed on children. In doing so, CIFRM integrates insights from ecological systems theory, sociocultural theory, social cognitive theory, family systems theory, and role theory into a unified and culturally responsive framework.

The model emphasises that family influence on children's development is neither linear nor uniform. Instead, cognitive, emotional, and social development emerges through ongoing and bidirectional interactions between family members and their surrounding cultural and contextual environments. Parenting styles, family structure, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural norms operate simultaneously to mediate how family roles are enacted and how children interpret and internalise developmental experiences. CIFRM therefore captures both stability and variability in family influence, recognising that family roles may evolve across developmental stages and in response to broader social change.

Conceptually, CIFRM is organised around three interrelated developmental domains, cognitive, emotional, and social development, situated within the broader family system. Each domain is influenced by distinct yet overlapping family roles. Parents typically function as primary caregivers and regulators; siblings act as agents of peer-like socialisation; and extended family members contribute to emotional support, cultural transmission, and caregiving continuity. These role-based influences are moderated by cultural values, family structure, and contextual conditions, reinforcing the importance of a culturally informed lens when interpreting developmental outcomes.

By foregrounding the interaction between family roles and cultural context, CIFRM provides a structured yet flexible framework for analysing family influence across societies. The model is particularly relevant for multicultural and collectivist contexts, such as Malaysia, where extended family involvement, hierarchical relationships, and interdependence are salient features of family life. At the same time, CIFRM remains adaptable to individualistic settings by allowing for variation in family composition, parenting norms, and developmental expectations.

Overall, CIFRM offers a comprehensive conceptual tool for researchers, educators, and policymakers seeking to understand and support children's development in culturally diverse settings. As a conceptual model, CIFRM does not claim empirical validation; rather, it provides a theoretically grounded foundation for future research, policy development, and practice-oriented interventions aimed at promoting positive developmental outcomes for children.

4.1 Components of the CIFRM

While the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) emphasises the influence of family roles, parenting styles, and cultural values, it also recognises children as active agents in their own development. Individual characteristics, including temperament, personality traits, and biological predispositions, interact dynamically with family practices and expectations. Children with different temperamental profiles may respond differently to similar parenting approaches or role demands. Accordingly, CIFRM adopts a transactional perspective, recognising that development emerges through continuous and reciprocal interactions between children and their culturally informed family environments.

Based on the synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature, CIFRM comprises five interrelated components that interact dynamically to shape children's development:

- family members' roles;
- family structures and parenting styles;
- cultural values and beliefs;
- contextual factors; and
- children's developmental domains.

The first two components operate within the child's immediate family environment. Family structure, whether nuclear, extended, single-parent, blended, or chosen, provides the primary relational context within which caregiving, attachment, and socialisation occur. Different family forms offer distinct configurations of caregiving arrangements, role expectations, and relational dynamics. Parenting styles constitute the second component of this immediate system. CIFRM incorporates established parenting typologies, namely authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting. Importantly, the model recognises that parenting styles do not operate independently of family structure or culture; rather, they are enacted within culturally shaped expectations that influence how authority, warmth, discipline, and autonomy are expressed and interpreted by children.

The third component of CIFRM comprises cultural values and belief systems. Cultural norms, traditions, and religious or moral frameworks mediate family practices and shape priorities across cognitive, emotional, and social development. For example, collectivist cultures may emphasise filial piety, group harmony, and respect for elders, whereas individualistic cultures may prioritise autonomy, independence, and self-expression. These orientations influence how family roles are defined, how parenting practices are enacted, and how children interpret developmental expectations.

The fourth component consists of contextual factors representing broader environmental conditions within which family practices operate. These include socioeconomic status, technological exposure, community resources, educational systems, and policy environments. Such factors may either support or constrain family functioning and, consequently, shape children's developmental experiences. Contextual influences interact with cultural values and family roles rather than acting as isolated determinants.

The final and central component of CIFRM is children's developmental domains, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social development. CIFRM conceptualises these domains as interrelated rather than independent, such that development in one domain may reinforce or constrain development in others through ongoing family interactions. This perspective aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Bandura's principle of reciprocal determinism, both of which emphasise bidirectional influences between individuals and their environments. The following Figure 2 presents the visual representation of CIFRM, illustrating the interaction among these five components within a culturally informed family system.

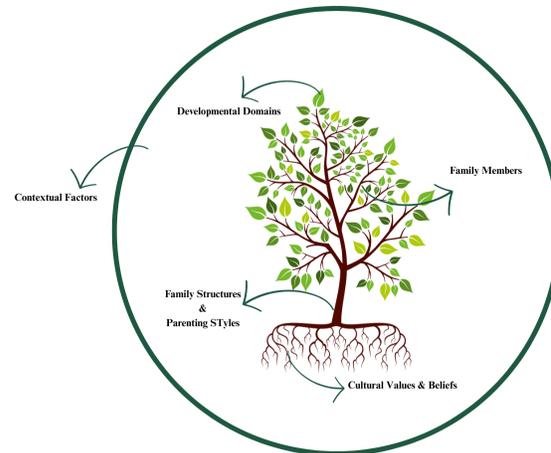


Figure 2 The CIRFM Model

Figure 2 illustrates the direct and interactive effects of family roles on children’s development within the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM). The model adopts a “tree” metaphor to represent the holistic and interconnected nature of children’s development. As depicted in the figure, children’s developmental outcomes are shaped through continuous interactions between family members, family structure and parenting styles, cultural values, and broader contextual factors.

Within this metaphor, the roots represent cultural values and beliefs, which provide the foundational grounding for family practices and developmental expectations. The trunk symbolises family structure and parenting styles, forming the core support system through which caregiving, discipline, and role modelling are enacted. The branches correspond to family members’ roles, including parents, siblings, and extended family members, who actively transmit cognitive, emotional, and social influences through daily interactions. The leaves, positioned at the top of the tree, represent children’s developmental domains, cognitive, emotional, and social development, which emerge as observable outcomes of these interconnected influences.

Surrounding the tree, contextual factors such as socioeconomic conditions, community resources, technological exposure, and policy environments are depicted as external influences that shape the strength, direction, and expression of family roles. These contextual conditions may either support or constrain family functioning and developmental processes. Importantly, the model emphasises that all components are interconnected and dynamic; no single element operates in isolation, and changes in one component may influence the others over time. The whole metaphors are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 The CIFRM’s Elements and Interpretations with The Tree’s Parts.

CIFRM Element	The Tree Part	Description
Family member’s roles	Main branches	Represent the members in the family that play crucial roles in the child’s development. Parents’ roles of nurturing, discipline and teaching. Siblings’ role modelling, conflict negotiation and companionship. While extended family roles of cultural transmission and emotional support. The thickness or length of the branches that vary represents the intensity or frequency of involvement of the family members.
Family structures and parenting styles	Trunk	Represent as the support system holding everything together. This is where the “delivery” of influence happens. The stability or instability much depends on structure and style.
Cultural values and beliefs	Roots	Represent deeply held societal norms, traditions, religion and collectivist vs. individualist tendencies. These are unseen but essential. It is feeding into everything above.
Children’s developmental domain’s outcome	Leaves	Represents the developmental domains, particularly in this study the cognitive, emotional and social development. However, lots of leaves indicate that the holistic children’s development, its other domains and its skills involve in each domain. These represent the visible outcomes of everything below.
Contextual factors	Background (within circle)	Represent elements that surround the tree for it grow, include water, sun, oxygen and other elements. While children’s development includes socioeconomic status, digital environment, community and other elements significant for children’s development. These shape how the tree grows but are not part of the tree itself, which this adopted from the Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory.

Table 1 further details each component of CIFRM and its corresponding role within the model. By employing the tree metaphor, CIFRM visually communicates the layered and systemic nature of children's development, reinforcing the view that developmental outcomes are not linear but emerge from reciprocal interactions between individuals and their culturally informed family environments. This representation aligns with ecological systems theory and social cognitive theory, highlighting bidirectional influences between children and their surrounding systems.

4.2 The Novelty of CIFRM

The Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) offers a novel contribution to the field of child development by synthesising established developmental theories within a framework that foregrounds cultural and contextual specificity. Unlike traditional models that often treat culture as a secondary or background variable, CIFRM positions cultural values as a core organising mechanism shaping family roles, parenting practices, and children's developmental trajectories. In doing so, the model recognises that developmental processes are not culturally neutral but are deeply embedded within the social norms, belief systems, and environmental conditions of specific societies. This orientation enables CIFRM to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of children's development across diverse populations and family contexts.

CIFRM further contributes to scholarly debates concerning the universality versus cultural specificity of child development theories. While classical developmental frameworks offer robust explanations of cognitive, emotional, and social processes, they frequently assume Western, nuclear-family structures and parenting norms. In contrast, CIFRM situates family roles within culturally embedded practices that are particularly salient in collectivist societies, where extended family involvement, hierarchical relationships, and shared caregiving responsibilities are normative. By explicitly integrating parental, sibling, and extended family roles within a culturally mediated framework, CIFRM extends existing models and offers a contextually grounded interpretation of children's development that is more reflective of non-Western and multicultural realities.

In addition, CIFRM aligns with and extends Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by embedding cultural values not only at the macrosystem level but also within everyday family interactions. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of how cultural norms operate at the micro-level to shape parenting styles, role expectations, and developmental outcomes. Empirical studies on Asian parenting practices have consistently highlighted the importance of family cohesion, respect for elders, and interdependence, elements that are explicitly incorporated within CIFRM as active mechanisms influencing development rather than as passive contextual factors.

Overall, CIFRM makes three key contributions to the literature on child development and family studies. First, it advances existing frameworks by conceptualising culture as an active and dynamic mechanism embedded within the enactment of family roles, rather than treating it solely as an external backdrop. Second, the model moves beyond parent-centric perspectives by systematically incorporating the developmental roles of siblings and extended family members, which remain underrepresented in many Western-based theories. Third, CIFRM integrates cognitive, emotional, and social developmental domains within a single culturally grounded framework, offering a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of children's development, particularly in collectivist and multicultural societies.

Beyond its theoretical significance, CIFRM also offers practical relevance for researchers, educators, and policymakers working with families from diverse backgrounds. In research contexts, the model provides a conceptual guide for examining cultural variation in family roles and developmental processes. In educational settings, CIFRM can inform culturally responsive parenting programmes and teacher training initiatives. From a policy perspective, the framework supports the development of family-centred policies that respect cultural diversity while promoting children's holistic well-being.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) provides a structured foundation for translating theory into practice across research, education, and policy domains. By foregrounding cultural values, family roles, and contextual influences, the model offers practical insights for supporting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development within culturally diverse settings. Importantly, CIFRM bridges theoretical understanding with empirically observed family practices, particularly within collectivist and multicultural societies such as Malaysia, where intergenerational relationships, cultural norms, and contextual constraints shape developmental experiences.

5.1 Implication for Practice

CIFRM offers practical implications for families, educators, and community-based services. For families, the model may be used as a reflective guide to examine parenting styles, communication patterns, and culturally grounded caregiving practices. By encouraging positive parenting strategies, secure attachment formation, and enriched home learning environments, CIFRM supports children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

For educators, CIFRM highlights the importance of integrating cultural sensitivity into teaching practices and family engagement strategies. Schools may implement social-emotional learning programmes that align with local cultural values and provide workshops to equip parents with knowledge on child development and positive discipline practices. Such initiatives can strengthen home-school partnerships and enhance children's developmental outcomes.

Community and social service providers may also benefit from CIFRM by developing culturally tailored parenting support programmes, peer mentoring initiatives, and accessible mental health resources for families facing socioeconomic or psychosocial challenges. By recognising diverse family structures and caregiving arrangements, services can become more inclusive and responsive to community needs.

5.2 Implications for Policy

CIFRM also offers important implications for public policy. First, in relation to family-friendly policies, policymakers should promote initiatives that support work–life balance, parental leave, affordable childcare, and community-based family programmes. These policies enable families to provide nurturing and developmentally supportive environments for children.

Second, with regard to cultural inclusion, national frameworks on child development and family education should explicitly incorporate cultural diversity. Policy tools may include multilingual resources, culturally appropriate intervention models, and recognition of diverse family structures, including extended and non-traditional families.

Finally, CIFRM contributes to child protection policy by supporting the development of systems that safeguard children from neglect, abuse, and harmful parenting practices. Policies should also address structural challenges such as the digital divide to ensure equitable access to educational resources and developmental opportunities.

Overall, CIFRM provides a culturally grounded and holistic framework that informs family practices, educational strategies, and policy development, supporting inclusive, supportive, and equitable environments for children across diverse sociocultural contexts.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on insights derived from the development of CIFRM, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen research on family roles and children’s development. These recommendations aim to support scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in advancing culturally responsive and contextually relevant approaches.

First, empirical validation is required. Future studies should empirically test CIFRM across diverse cultural and socioeconomic groups to examine its applicability, robustness, and adaptability in different contexts.

Second, longitudinal research is recommended to track family practices and children’s developmental trajectories over time. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the dynamic and reciprocal interactions among CIFRM components, particularly within multicultural settings.

Third, cross-cultural comparative studies should be conducted to distinguish universal developmental processes from culture-specific family influences. These comparisons would enrich global understanding of children’s development and contribute to the refinement of culturally informed frameworks.

Collectively, these recommendations underscore the scholarly and practical value of CIFRM in shaping culturally responsive approaches to children’s development. Through continued empirical exploration and application, CIFRM may be further refined, validated, and implemented across diverse settings. Ultimately, the model holds potential as a transformative framework that bridges theory and practice while promoting equitable developmental outcomes for children worldwide.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This concept paper has proposed the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model (CIFRM) as an integrative framework for understanding children’s cognitive, emotional, and social development within diverse cultural and family contexts. By synthesising established developmental theories with cultural values, family roles, parenting styles, and contextual influences, CIFRM offers a comprehensive and adaptable lens through which family influence on children’s development can be interpreted.

The novelty of CIFRM lies in its explicit positioning of culture as a central organising mechanism rather than a peripheral contextual factor. In multicultural societies such as Malaysia, where family structures, caregiving practices, and value systems vary considerably, CIFRM provides a culturally responsive framework that more accurately reflects lived family realities. The model demonstrates that children’s development is shaped not only by universal developmental principles but also by culturally embedded family roles, intergenerational relationships, and contextual conditions.

Beyond its conceptual contribution, CIFRM offers practical relevance across research, education, and policy domains. It provides a foundation for developing culturally responsive parenting programmes, informing teacher education and family engagement practices, and guiding family-centred policy initiatives. At the same time, the model establishes a coherent basis for future empirical research aimed at validating and refining its components across diverse sociocultural settings.

In conclusion, the Culturally-Informed Family Role Model advances the discourse on family roles in children’s development by integrating theory, culture, and context within a single conceptual framework. It calls for continued collaboration among researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers to ensure that developmental supports are inclusive, culturally attuned, and responsive to the complex realities of contemporary family life. Through ongoing refinement and empirical investigation, CIFRM holds the potential to contribute meaningfully to the promotion of equitable and holistic developmental outcomes for children across societies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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