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Toys as a Mirror of Civilization: Evolution, Types, and Cultural Significance

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ABSTRACT

Toys have become an important instrument in human development, reflecting cultural values, technological advances, and social dynamics in every era. This study will trace the history of toys from prehistoric times to the digital era, categorize the types of toys based on function, culture, and materials, and analyze their role in education, identity, and globalization. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method where in this study the researcher will explain the history of toys from ancient times to the present along with their materials, functions and uses where the purpose of this study is as a basis for other researchers in examining the visuals of a toy and the development of the function and material of the toy itself. The results of the study show that toys are not only for entertainment, but also as a medium for transmitting knowledge, markers of social stratification, and products of multi-sectoral collaboration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Toys are cultural artifacts that record traces of human civilization (Semiz, 2022). Since prehistoric times, toys have also been a cultural product in the form of objects, where toys are one of the traces of civilization and technology when they were made. Toys have become a learning tool, ritual, and expression of creativity. The research will trace the evolution of toys from prehistoric times to the digital era (Crawford, 2009). Where toys experience changes in shape, features, and function according to the technology when the toys were made, and then group the types of toys based on function and cultural context (Chang, 2025; Riede et al., 2023; Rochanavibhata & Marian, 2022; Hamlin, 2003). Toys have various types and functions, such as toys that function as objects that are played with as stress relievers, or as displays that are enjoyed for their beauty, or learning to increase the knowledge of their users, after analyzing the relationship between toys and technological developments, and social norms (Qian et al., 2023; Mertala et al., 2016; Heikkilä, 2022; Kultti & Pramling, 2015). Toys must have a relationship with technological developments when they were made. For example, toys in the past were usually physical and made from materials found in nature, such as wood and stone, and today's toys are digital, such as video games and virtual reality (Afifah et al., 2022; Bowersox, 2022; Qian et al., 2023; Fassaoula et al., 2020).

This research was made as a basis for future research that will be made. Thus, by knowing the history of this toy, the next researcher can use it as a reference or reference for the toy that will be studied. Indeed, we know the origin of the toy being studied, whether it has been made, or a development of what has been made, or is completely new. For example, a spinning top (Figure 1) that has been found since ancient times, which is made of bamboo and then popularized again with a different material in the form of plastic, and made faster and better in terms of appearance. Or video games that have not existed before.

Based on previous studies regarding game for education (Rusyani et al., 2021; Lathifah et al., 2021; Hanna et al., 2021; Albion et al., 2021; Rusyani et al., 2022), the purpose of this study is to find out the materials, functions and workings of toys that have been made so far, where by knowing this, new materials, functions and workings of toys can be developed or this knowledge can also be used as a basis for reference to popularize the old toy will be popularized

gets economic
maintain the
region through



again. Thus, it
benefits, or can
culture of a
the toy.

Figure 1. Spinning tops in ancient and modern times.
(Source: <https://www.wcpo.com/>).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In its development, toys have changed form, function, and materials, which are divided into several eras.

2.1. Prehistoric and Ancient Times

At this time, toys were still made from simple materials from nature, such as soil, animal skin, and plants, such as clay dolls (Mesopotamia, 3000 BC) and leather balls (Ancient Egypt) used for rituals and games. Other games are board games such as Senet (Egypt) and Mehen, symbolizing a spiritual journey where this game consists of boards and dolls from the Egyptian gods at that time (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2. Senet

(Source: <https://es.pinterest.com/pin/515310382341654052/>).

2.2. Classical Period (Greece and Rome)

At this time, toys began to be more diverse, although they were still made from materials from nature, such as wood and plants, but they already had more complicated mechanisms. One of the toys in this era was a toy that was an educational tool, such as a Yo-yo and spinning tops, which were useful for training motor coordination. And there were also strategy games. Such as Ludus Latrunculorum (Rome) as a simulation of war tactics ([Elvins, 2004](#)) (**Figure 3**).



Figure 3. Ludus Latrunculorum

(Source: <https://jp.pinterest.com/>).

2.3. Middle Ages

In this era, toys were made more complex and had complicated rules and mechanisms for playing with the toys, one of which was Feudal Toys, such as Miniature knights and wooden

forts, reflecting social hierarchy. Then, in other parts of the world, there were several other games such as Traditional Asian Games, namely Chaturanga (India) and jianzi (China) (**Figure 4**).



Figure 4. Chaturanga (<https://www.labrujulaverde.com/>).

2.4. Industrial Revolution

At this time, toys were made of complex materials such as metal, porcelain, and cloth and were mass-produced by factories. One example of this was porcelain dolls (Germany) and miniature trains (Märklin) became icons of industrialization. And, one of the most famous is the Commodification toy, such as the Teddy Bear Doll, which was marketed as a commercial product. And we know it today (**Figure 5**).



Figure 5. Teddy Bear
(Source: <https://etna.com.pe/>).

2.5. 20th Century to Digital

In the 20th century, plastic was discovered and changed everything around us. Besides that, with the discovery of plastic, toy production became very fast and mass, so that the existing toys became more and more types and varieties, and Plastic triggered the birth of LEGO in 1949 and action figures. Lego itself is a building block toy that can be formed into anything according to the player's wishes and action figures are toys in the form of figures or characters that have articulated movements that we can move and pose according to the player's wishes, usually in the form of characters that are very famous at that time such as comic characters or famous films at that time. And with the discovery of electronic goods, toys such as

Tamagotchi in 1996 and Roblox in 2006 were born, revolutionizing the concept of interactivity and can be played through the screen (**Figure 6**).



Figure 6. Video Game

(Source: <https://brennaf-bootee.blogspot.com/> (2025))

3. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach, the qualitative approach itself is an approach using descriptive data. Descriptive data itself is a written language in the form of an explanation of the observed object. This approach is taken to analyze phenomena, events, social dynamics, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of individuals or groups. The method used itself uses historical analysis and literature studies. This historical analysis is used to facilitate tracing the development of toys over time to time while literature studies are used to collect data from various sources such as books, journals, and related documents. The stages carried out first data and information from various sources are then summarized into a chronological timeline to facilitate understanding of the toy itself. The data that has been collected is divided and then explained based on the material, function, and type, and is associated with the cultural and social context of each era. For example, in prehistoric times, toys such as clay dolls and leather balls reflected the limitations of manufacturing materials and ritualistic functions, while in the digital era, toys such as LEGO and Roblox reflect technological advances and changes in societal culture (Jenkins, 2006).

4. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This study explains the development of toys from prehistoric times to the current digital era, where toys not only reflect technological progress, but are also related to the conditions and social conditions that exist in society at that time. For example, in ancient prehistoric times, it turned out that toys not only functioned as a means of entertainment but could also be a spiritual medium, namely a symbol of the substance they worshiped, then in classical times (Greece and Rome) toys turned into a relevant educational medium at that time, namely war strategy education, and when entering the Middle Ages, knights and fortress toys explained about social where at that time social structure was one of the important things for society. After that, entering the era of the Industrial Revolution, toys were mass-produced with materials such as metal etc. In this era, it can be concluded that toys can be industrialized and begin to be marketed widely. This change influenced people's perceptions of toys. Then, in the 20th century, to the digital era, the discovery of plastic and electronic technology revolutionized the toy industry, where toys reflect various concepts. For example, Lego is a toy that reflects creativity and personalization, then video games and Tamagotchi define the concept of interactivity. Thus, toys are not only physical but can also be digital and allow users

to interact virtually at the global level. This era shows that technology has changed the way humans play and interact.

Overall, this study explains that toys are a reflection of cultural values, technology, and social change in society at that time. Each era has unique and different characteristics from each other, apart from the different materials and technologies used in that era. But there are also needs and beliefs from society at that time. Thus, the implications of this finding are in the form of a conclusion that toys can be a window to find out the dynamics of history, culture, and human society that occurred in that era.

The implication of this research is to develop toys so that toys are not only a means of entertainment but can also be a means for culture to reflect the values of that culture, so that toys have other functions and are positive for cultural development, thus this research is expected to be a reference for other researchers in analyzing toys and can also relate them to a broader context such as materials, functions and even culture. Finally, this adds new information regarding game that can be used for education (Rusyani *et al.*, 2021; Lathifah *et al.*, 2021; Hanna *et al.*, 2021; Albion *et al.*, 2021; Rusyani *et al.*, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

Toys are part of a culture that has a multidimensional history and narrative that connects aspects of culture, technology, and pedagogy. From clay dolls to AI robots, and always evolving as a reflection of the times, further research is needed, such as the impact of digital toys on children's cognitive abilities.

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7. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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