

THE ROLE OF PLAY ACTIVITIES PRACTICED BY KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING BASIC LEARNING SKILLS



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Abstract

The early stages of a child's life are critical and influential in shaping their personality and cognitive development. Therefore, significant attention is given to integrating them into various pre-school institutions, such as kindergartens. These institutions play a crucial role in fostering growth in various skills, particularly cognitive abilities like writing, reading, and arithmetic. Kindergartens achieve this through various play activities such as role-playing, artistic games, and puzzles, each contributing to educational skill development. This study concludes that play activities within kindergartens significantly enhance educational skills, including coloring, storytelling, assembling shapes, and activities that involve letter and number recognition

Keywords

kindergarten;
school;
role-playing;
artistic games;
puzzles.

الكلمات المفتاحية

رياض الأطفال؛
المدرسة؛
لعب الأدوار؛
الألعاب الفنية؛
ألعاب التركيب؛

دور أنشطة اللعب التي يمارسها معلمو رياض الأطفال في تطوير المهارات الأساسية للتعلم

ملخص

إن المراحل الأولى من حياة الطفل هي مراحل حاسمة وخطيرة في تشكيل شخصية ونمو معارف ومدرجات الطفل العلمية والمعرفية لذا يتم الاهتمام به من خلال إدماجه في مختلف المؤسسات ما قبل المدرسة والمتمثلة في الروضة، وذلك لما لها من أهمية بالغة في تحقيق النمو في مهاراته المختلفة وخاصة المهارات المعرفية المتمثلة في الكتابة والقراءة والحساب وغيرها عن طريق ما تقدمه الروضة من أنشطة اللعب المختلفة كالألعاب التمثيلية والألعاب الفنية والألعاب التركيبية، وغيرها من الألعاب الأخرى، حيث لكل منها دور في تنمية المهارات التعليمية. وهذا ما حققته هذه الدراسة إلى أن الأنشطة اللعب الممارسة داخل الروضة لها دور في تنمية المهارات التعليمية وذلك من خلال ممارستهاهم لألعاب التلوين والقص والتركيب وتشكيل أشكال مختلفة وكذلك ألعاب التعرف على الحروف والأرقام ولعب الأدوار.

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Doi:

I- Introduction :

The pre-school stage is a crucial phase in a child's life, defining their educational pathways and significantly influencing their linguistic development in the early stages of education. During this period, children acquire essential skills, mental abilities, and cognitive capacities. Understanding the child's psychology, how they acquire language, and the nature of the language they use within their environment before entering formal schooling is inevitable and essential.

Educators have recognized that the educational process begins before a child formally starts school. They have found that healthy sensory and mental growth depends not only on the home environment but also on the broader environment in which the child lives. This justifies the emphasis placed on social upbringing institutions and their role in teaching children formal Arabic language skills. This responsibility does not solely rest with families but extends to educators and teachers as well.

Language education begins at home, continues in pre-school, and progresses through schooling and beyond. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize the development of fundamental learning skills in these institutions, focusing on enhancing linguistic, mathematical, and writing abilities in children.

I.1. Problem Statement:

Early childhood is one of the most important stages in a person's life due to its flexibility, capacity for learning, and development of various skills. It is a period of preparation and formation of the foundational elements of the child's future personality. Play serves as a vital educational medium that shapes the child during this critical stage of development. Its importance lies in its effective contribution to the child's psychological formation and the establishment of activity foundations that govern their school life. Children begin to satisfy their needs through play, as confirmed by various theories explaining its role. Through play, children acquire numerous essential competencies and skills, whether social, cognitive, emotional, or educational (Tawfiq Mar'i ,2001 ,p.18).

Children's lives, shaping their experiences and interactions with their environment. Therefore, 'Play is directly linked to children's personalities and behaviors. To effectively connect play with 'play becomes a fundamental tool in developing children's personal development, it is necessary to diversify the types of play activities to meet their 'the quality of children's diverse growth needs.

Kindergartens are among the primary institutions that receive children during early childhood. Kindergartens contribute to the growth of all aspects of the child without burdening them, allowing them to enjoy work and activity through diverse and essential play programs and activities. These activities aim to develop, train, and improve the child's cognitive, artistic, physical, and other skills. The primary goal of kindergarten is to prepare children for primary education, a crucial stage in their lives (Mohammed Ahmed Sawalha,2004,P.20) .

Therefore, through this study, we aim to understand the role of play in developing some fundamental skills by posing the following question:

Do play activities practiced by kindergarten teachers play a role in developing basic learning skills?

I. 2. General Hypothesis:

Kindergarten teachers use various play activities to develop educational skills.

Specific Hypotheses

- Role-playing activities practiced by kindergarten teachers lead to language development in children
- Artistic activities practiced by kindergarten teachers lead to writing development in children
- Puzzle activities practiced by kindergarten teachers lead to arithmetic development in children

I. 3. Definition of Research Term:

Play Activities : This refers to spontaneous activities in which individuals engage without expecting material or moral benefits. The simple level of play that is easily observed is available in young children before societal interventions organize and use play for social normalization (Hilmi Ibrahim, Farhat Layla ,1998 ,p.24).

Kindergarten : It is an educational institution that accepts children aged 6-4 years. It is a stage different from other educational stages as it helps prepare children for entry into primary education. (Khair Shawahin ,2008 ,p21) .

I. 4. Study Objectives:

- Highlight the types of play activities practiced by kindergarten teachers.
- Understand the role of play activities in developing fundamental cognitive skills in children.

I. 5. Definition of Play:

The topic of play receives significant attention from scholars and thinkers who seek to provide a precise definition. Among these definitions include

Frank Barron :According to Frank Barron, play is considered a source of innate pleasure for children that helps relieve tensions. It is a form of effective preparatory exercise for experiential growth. (Frank Barron ,1979 ,P. 187).

Piaget :Piaget defines play as a process of representation or learning that transforms external inputs to fit the child's needs and desires. (Hanane Abdel Hamid Al-Anani ,2004 ,p.15).

Bruner :1972 Bruner defines play as behavior that allows the individual to explore and practice new behavioral strategies. (Sami Mohsen Al-Khatatneh ,2013 ,p.16).

I. 6. Types of Play:

Pretend Play (Role-Playing):

Pretend play holds significant importance for children. Through it, children learn to manage their emotions by expressing anger, sadness, and anxiety. It offers them the opportunity to think aloud about experiences that may be positive or negative. Dramatic play involves a complex cooperation between the body and mind. Children do not only use their brain and voice but engage their entire body during play. This type of play is prominent among kindergarten children, where they attempt to live out various experiences through imagination. They express their feelings, sensations, emotions, and ideas through these roles they assume with other children. This allows them to acquire skills such as planning, organizing tools, and problem-solving. Additionally, children learn numerous social skills like sharing and cooperation.

Importance of Pretend Play:

- Pretend play is among creative games and an important medium for developing a child's creative thinking as it fundamentally involves imagination, speculation, questioning, and exploration.
- Pretend play helps children develop physical skills through using tools and devices available in their play areas, which contribute to the development of fine motor skills, visual-motor coordination, and visual discrimination.
- Pretend play enriches children's knowledge and understanding of the world around them and helps them store a range of linguistic terms and knowledge.
- Children learn several social skills such as participation, listening, waiting, and cooperation.

Artistic Play:

Artistic play includes artistic expressive activities that stem from emotions, aesthetic taste, and artistic sense. Children engage in various artistic activities such as drawing, coloring, singing, and music. These activities provide children with the opportunity to express their feelings freely and creatively without constraints.

Benefits of Artistic Play:

- During artistic play, children experiment with various resources and materials such as dough, clay, scissors, and coloring pens, which help them discover their properties
- These materials help children develop their muscles and fingers, thereby preparing them better for writing
- Artistic play allows children the freedom to express themselves creatively and enhances their positive self-image.
- It enhances children's confidence in their abilities when they complete their artistic activities and display them on designated boards for all children's works.
- It develops aesthetic taste.
- Artistic play provides children with the opportunity to express themselves and serves as an outlet for positive self-expression. It may also reveal significant emotions that children may be experiencing.

Construction Play:

Construction play is an essential aspect of a child's life, aiming to develop motor skills by creating new shapes through play. Children often use various materials such as clay, blocks, beads, cardboard, and crayons in construction games to design houses, trees, tables, and more.

Benefits of Construction Play:

- **Scientific Thinking Development :**Through construction play, children learn skills related to scientific thinking such as comparison, prediction, observation, and analysis. They grasp the concept of balance and distinguish similarities and differences between shapes, innovating patterns in their constructions.

- **Mathematical Concepts** :Children learn fundamental mathematical concepts such as classification, sequencing, lengths, area, numbers, and fractions through construction play.
- **Contribution to Linguistic and Social Development** :Construction play contributes to the linguistic and social growth of children. It enhances their language abilities and develops their skills in conversation and interaction.
- **Sense of Achievement** :Children experience a sense of accomplishment during construction play, which fosters confidence in themselves and enhances their positive self-image.
- **Social Skills Development** :Engaging in construction play with peers helps children learn various social skills such as cooperation, collaboration, and respect for others 'work.
- **Enhanced Planning Skills** :This type of play assists in developing children's ability to plan. These activities help children transition from random building stages to planning their actions.

I. 7.Factors Influencing Play:

Studies have demonstrated the existence of influential factors that govern children's play, giving it various forms and patterns. Among these factors are:

Physical Factor :Children suffering from inadequate nutrition and healthcare show less interest in play. Additionally, motor coordination difficulties hinder children from engaging in games that require muscular maturity.

Mental Factor :The inclination towards play correlates with a child's intelligence level and alertness. More intelligent children quickly transition from sensory play to play involving choice and simulation, a development not as evident in children with lower intelligence.

Gender Factor :Clear differences in play have been observed between males and females in most societies. Boys tend to gravitate more towards play symbolizing power and control, whereas girls 'play tends to involve less physical activity.

Environmental Factor :The environment significantly influences children's play. Play patterns vary depending on whether the child resides in a coastal, industrial, rural, desert, affluent, or poor area.

I. 8.Importance of Play for Children:

The importance of play becomes evident through the following points:

- **Satisfying Psychological Needs** :Play fulfills children's psychological needs such as freedom, order, security, structure, leadership, and socialization.
- **Facilitating Learning Preparation** :Play prepares children for learning and enhances their learning tools (language). It attracts their attention to learning and stimulates their interest in it .
- **Opportunity for Expression** :Play provides an opportunity for children to express their needs, inclinations, and desires, which they adequately express in their real psychological life.
- **Means of Expression and Need for Change** :It is considered a means of expression and the need for change accompanies man throughout his life.
- **Transition from Individualism to Collectivism** :It trains children to transition from individuality (ego) to collectivity (we and they). If a child does not play with his or her peers, they become selfish and withdrawn and controlling. However, when they play with other children, they learn participation, taking, giving, and proper social behavior.
- **Discovery of Individual and Collective Creative Abilities** :Play helps children discover their individual and collective creative abilities through various and diverse activities and games.
- **Assistance and the Opportunity for Some Social Roles** :It also provides an opportunity for some social roles (Hindy , 2003P. 44-45).
- **Provoking Thought and Developing Skills and Inclinations** :It also helps to provoke thought and develop skills and inclinations
- **Assisting with Personal Awareness in Children** :It also develops the skills of self-reliance and independence, as well as physical and mental health and personal safety (Sabri, 1996, P.96).

I. 9.Functions of Education in Primary Education:

Current educational systems, including the Algerian educational system, have evolved to place greater emphasis on primary education due to its crucial role in developing students 'competencies. Here are the functions that primary education aims to achieve.

- Teaching Children the Principles of Arabic Language:

This refers to familiarizing students with their national language alongside numeracy, as these are indispensable tools for acquiring knowledge and successfully continuing education in subsequent stages. Teaching language and numeracy includes five skills:

Reading Skills : There are two types of reading:

- Oral reading
- Silent reading
- Silent reading is more useful in daily life and enhances comprehension faster than oral reading

Numeracy Skills :Children need to learn the principles of numeracy to understand the language of numbers, estimate numerical values present in their environment, and solve arithmetic problems encountered in their daily lives. Therefore, they should be trained in numerical thinking and provided with information and abilities that help them in this regard (Turki Rabeh, 1990, P.60).

Listening Skills :Listening is a crucial linguistic skill that must be mastered to facilitate understanding.

Writing Skills :Writing development encompasses more than mechanical copying of written or heard models, although such skills are important. It includes broadening the understanding of writing to include written composition.

Speaking Skills :Oral expression is as important as written expression in the upbringing and education of children (Abdul Fattah al-Bajah ,2003 ,p. 153).

- Empowering Children with Knowledge of Social Environment and Integration:

Teachers should strive to foster affinity among students and provide practical lessons in communicating with others, respecting their rights, and considering their feelings

- Empowering Children with Knowledge of Natural Environment and Adaptation:

One of the functions of primary education is to introduce children to features of the natural environment, including animals and plants. This is achieved through field trips organized by primary schools and lessons in geography (Turki Rabeh, 1990, P.63).

I. 10. Importance of Play in Primary Education:

- **Educational Tool :**Play is an educational tool that helps individuals interact with elements of the environment for the purpose of learning and personal development.

- **Facilitates Learning Concepts :**Play serves as an educational method that facilitates learning linguistic, arithmetic, and other skills, aiding in the comprehension of meanings.

- **Individualized Learning :**It is an effective tool for individualized learning and organizing it to address individual differences, teaching children according to their abilities and capacities.

- **Communication and Expression Tool :**Play serves as a means of communication and expression. It is a therapeutic method that helps solve children's problems.

- **Stimulates Cognitive Abilities and Enhances Creative Talent :**Games activate cognitive abilities and improve creative talent in children.

- **Aids in Memory, Thinking, Perception, and Imagination :**Play helps in the growth of memory, thinking, perception, and imagination.

- **Builds Self-Confidence :**Through play, children gain self-confidence and discover their existing capabilities (Afaaf Al-Labbadi ,1993 ,P.25).

II– Methods and Materials:

II.1. Survey Study:

This study relied on interviews as a tool to gather information and used open interviews with a sample of 3 educators from the original sample. The questions posed in the interview were as follows

- What are the most practiced play activities in your kindergarten?
- Do the play activities practiced in the kindergarten prepare the child for school entry ?
- Do you believe that the play activities in the kindergarten are related to the curriculum adopted within the primary school ?

II.2. Survey Study Results:

Based on the responses of the survey study participants, the results were as follows

- The most practiced play activities in the kindergarten include pretend play, artistic play, and constructive play.
- Regarding the kindergarten's reliance on the primary school curriculum, respondents indicated that the kindergarten and educators rely on the curriculum and programs of the primary school to use approved play activities within the kindergarten.
- Based on these results, they were used to build the final study.

II.3. Study Sample

The study sample was purposefully selected and included 80 educators distributed across 14 kindergartens in the Teleghma and Ain M'lila districts.

II.4 Study Scope:

Time Frame :The study was conducted from the beginning of April to the end of May 2018 .

Location :The study covered both the Teleghma district in Mila Province and Ain M'lila in Oum El Bouaghi Province.

II.5. Methodology and Tool Used in the Study:

The descriptive methodology was employed for this study, and a questionnaire was used as a research tool to investigate educators' opinions.

- Construction of the Questionnaire:

The questionnaire included 24 statements divided into 3 axes to determine whether play has a role in developing basic skills for the educational process.

- Psychometric Measurement of the Tool:

-Tool Validity : After presenting the tool to a group of experts to measure its apparent validity, errors and flaws in the tool were corrected .

-Tool Reliability : The reliability of the tool was calculated using the SPSS statistical package, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79 was obtained, which is a high degree of reliability. Thus, the tool was deemed suitable for use in the field.

III-Results and discussion :

III.1. Presentation and Analysis of Results:

Hypothesis 1: Pretend play practiced by teachers leads to language development in children.

Table :(1) Represents the responses of teachers regarding the pretend play axis

Expressions	Always		Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1- Assign children to role-play professions	11	13.8	4	5	56	70	6	7.5	3	3.8
2- Ask children to name community professions	29	36.3	20	25	22	27.5	4	5	5	6.3
3- Show children TV programs	14	17.5	15	18.8	45	56.3	5	6.3	1	1.3
4- Tell children some stories	36	45	8	10	34	42.5	1	1.25	1	1.25
5- Engage children in group activities	43	53.8	12	15	19	23.8	4	5	2	2.5
6- Ask children to repeat simple words	60	75	12	15	6	7.5	1	1.25	1	1.25
7- Play a game to name school tools	40	50	20	25	9	11.3	9	11.3	2	2.5
8- Play a game to name household items	23	28.8	26	32.5	22	27.5	6	7.5	3	3.8
9- Play a game to classify animals	21	26.3	11	13.8	27	33.8	13	16.3	8	10
Total	277		128		240		49		26	
Average	30.77		25.6		48		9.8		5.2	

To comment on Table1 :

Based on Table ,(1) which represents the opinions of teachers regarding the role of pretend play in language development among children, the results show agreement among teachers regarding the significant role of pretend play activities in enhancing language skills in children. This is evident from the arithmetic means of the table: the average for frequent practice of pretend play is 30.77 and often is ,25.6 indicating a substantial percentage. In contrast, opinions about occasional practice are ,9.8 and rarely are ,5.2 which are lower percentages among those who do not engage in pretend play in kindergarten. This suggests that teachers in kindergarten rely on pretend play to teach language to children, preparing them for school entry

Hypothesis 2: Artistic play practiced by teachers leads to the development of writing skills in children.

Table :02 Represents the responses of teachers regarding the artistic play axis

	Never	Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Expressions
%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	
2.5	2	8.75	7	1.3	1	12.5	10	75	60	1- Encourage children to engage in manual activities
5	4	10	8	30	24	27.5	22	27.5	22	2- Ask children to cut out their drawings and paste them on cardboard
15	12	5	4	17.5	14	32.5	26	30	24	3- Rely on guiding children by colors and naming them 4- Assign children to color pictures of numbers
1.25	1	2.5	2	7.5	6	18.8	15	70	56	4- Assign children to color pictures of numbers
1.25	1	2.5	2	3.8	3	18.8	15	73.8	59	5- Assign children to color pictures of letters
1.25	1	1.25	1	13.8	11	22.5	18	61.25	49	6- Assign children to color pictures of animals
11.3	9	11.3	9	35	28	12.5	10	30	24	7- Ask children to shape different forms with clay
2.5	2	3.8	3	20	16	17.5	14	56.3	45	8- Play a game to recognize letters in space
	32		36		103		130		381.37	Total
	7.11		8		22.08		28.88		42.37	Average

Commentary on Table 2:

According to Table ,02 which represents educators 'opinions on the role of artistic play in developing children's writing skills, the results indicate through percentage ratios. Educators largely agree on the significant role played by regular artistic play activities, with percentages of %42.37 often and %28.88 mostly, compared to their opinions on occasional participation at %8 and rare participation at .%7.11 This shows a significant preference for continuous engagement in artistic play activities within kindergarten settings. It can be concluded that kindergarten educators rely on artistic play to teach and enhance writing skills in preparation for school entry.

Hypothesis 3: Engaging in constructive play facilitated by educators contributes to children's mathematical development.

Table :03 Represents educators 'responses regarding the constructive play axis

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Expressions
%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F		
2.5	2	11.3	9	18.8	15	27.5	22	40	32	1- Ask children to count the toys they play with	
2.5	2	6.25	5	6.3	5	10	8	75	60	2- Play a counting game	
11.3	9	11.3	9	35	28	12.5	10	30	24	3- Ask children to shape different forms from clay	
3.8	3	6.3	5	27.5	22	17.5	14	45	36	4- Assign children to correctly assemble cubes	
10	8	17.5	14	26.3	21	17.5	14	28.8	23	5- Assign children to build other shapes using wooden geometric shapes	
1.25	1	2.5	2	8.8	7	21.3	17	66.3	53	6- Ask children to identify geometric shapes by color	
2.5	2	12.5	10	33.8	27	7.5	6	43.8	35	7- Focus on engaging in physical movement games	
3.8	3	7.5	6	22.5	18	15	12	51.3	41	8- Play a game to recognize numbers in space	
	30		60		143		108		304	Total	
	6.66		13.33		31.77		22.88		67.55	Average	

Commentary on Table 3:

Through Table ,03 which represents educators 'opinions on the role of constructive play in developing children's mathematical skills, the results indicate through percentage ratios. Educators largely agree on the significant role played by regular constructive play activities, with percentages of %67.55 often and %22.88 mostly, compared to their opinions on occasional participation at %13.33 and rare participation at .%6.66 This shows a strong preference for continuous engagement in constructive play activities within kindergarten settings. It can be concluded that kindergarten educators rely on constructive play to teach and enhance mathematical skills in preparation for school entry.

III.2. General Analysis of Results:

The results of the study regarding the role of practiced play activities within kindergarten in preparing children for school entry, both theoretically and practically, have led to the following conclusions regarding the research problem: What are the play activities practiced by educators within kindergarten that contribute to the development of foundational learning skills?

To address this question, the study constructed the following procedural hypotheses:

- Pretend play practiced by educators contributes to language development in children.
- Artistic play practiced by educators contributes to writing development in children.
- Constructive play practiced by educators contributes to mathematical development in children.

The study showed that educators engage in various play activities, including role-playing, storytelling, coloring, cutting, and assembling shapes, which are fundamental for children's psychological development and serve as an educational tool in building early learning. This reaffirms the validity of the hypotheses.

Based on the above, it can be said that the play activities practiced by educators within kindergarten play a role in child development and preparation for school entry.

IV-Conclusion:

Play practiced by educators within kindergarten plays a crucial role in building children's foundational skills, preparing them to acquire knowledge through various means and fostering a desire for learning before entering elementary school. This stage is critical in shaping the child's cognitive abilities and serving as a functional gateway to subsequent stages of education. However, the study's broad scope necessitates further research and studies from various perspectives due to its utmost importance, as it determines the success and future of the child and student.

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