

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data**
الممارسات التربوية في مؤسسات الرعاية الطفولة المبكرة (الروضة): تحليل
سوسيولوجي نقدي لبيانات ميدانية

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Date of submission: 14/03/2026 Date of acceptance: 26/05/2026

Date of publication: 30/06/2026

Abstract:

This study critically examines kindergarten educational practices through a sociological lens, drawing on Bourdieu's cultural capital and Bernstein's pedagogical classification theories.

The descriptive analytical approach was employed, and the research was conducted on a sample of 150 early childhood educators in Ain Defla.

The results showed that most participants possess moderate professional experience, while some viewed current practices negatively, indicating professional awareness of developmental gaps. Academic instruction dominated free play, reflecting strong institutional classification.

Keywords: Sociology of Childhood, Educational Practices, Kindergarten, Cultural Capital, Socialization, Play Pedagogy.

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المخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل نقدي سوسيولوجي لممارسات الروضة، مستندةً لنظريات بورديو وبرنشتاين.

تم توظيف المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، وتم البحث على عينة حجمها 150 ممارساً تربوياً في ولاية عين الدفلى.

أظهرت النتائج أن أغلب أفراد العينة يملكون خبرة متوسطة، بينما يقيم البعض الممارسات الحالية سلباً، مما يعكس وعياً مهنيًا بالفجوات التنموية. يهيمن التعليم الأكاديمي على اللعب الحر، مما يعكس تصنيفاً مؤسسياً قوياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سوسيولوجيا الطفولة، الممارسات التربوية، الروضة، الرأسمال الثقافي، التنشئة الاجتماعية، بيداغوجيا اللعب.

1. Introduction

The kindergarten institution plays a pivotal role in primary socialization, transitioning the child from the private family sphere to the public institutional domain (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.85). However, this transition does not occur in a social vacuum; rather, it reflects and reproduces broader societal representations and values (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.52). This study addresses a central problem: How is pedagogical power exercised within kindergarten spaces, and what are the sociological implications of prevailing practices on the construction of children's social identity ? .

Two main hypotheses guide the research

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Traditional pedagogical practices are inversely related to practitioners' professional satisfaction, aligning with Bourdieu's model of institutional norm reproduction .

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The marginalization of play (13.33%) reflects an institutional priority oriented toward measurable academic skills, necessitating a pedagogical rebalancing that respects children's developmental rights .

The study is motivated by social, scientific, field-based, and pedagogical justifications, emphasizing the critical need to bridge the gap between symbolic institutional value (acknowledged by 90% of stakeholders) and critical internal evaluations (42%). Its theoretical importance lies in enriching Arab sociological literature through mixed quantitative-qualitative interpretation, while its practical value provides actionable indicators for policymakers and trainers to design targeted, evidence-based professional development programs.

1-1-Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The selection of this research topic was grounded in a set of scientific, social, and field-based justifications:

Social Justification: Early childhood constitutes a critical developmental window for shaping the child's social *habitus*. Any structural flaw in early educational practices may adversely impact future adaptation to formal schooling and broader community integration.

Scientific Justification: There is a marked scarcity of critical sociological studies in the local context that transcend mere statistical description to

Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions (Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data

Sadik Hattabi

interpret field data through theoretical lenses such as socialization theory and cultural capital reproduction.

Field Justification: Exploratory surveys preceding the main study revealed a striking paradox: while 90% of stakeholders affirm the symbolic importance of kindergarten institutions, 42% critically evaluate internal pedagogical practices. This discrepancy between institutional legitimacy and practical quality necessitates rigorous sociological investigation.

Pedagogical Justification: A noticeable institutional shift toward academic instruction at the expense of play-based pedagogy threatens children's developmental rights and prematurely transforms kindergarten into a "miniature school," undermining age-appropriate learning.

1-2- Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

Descriptive Objective: To map the socio-professional profile of a stratified sample of 150 early childhood practitioners (including educational background, professional experience, and institutional affiliation) to contextualize the operational dynamics of the field.

Analytical Objective: To assess practitioners' attitudes toward prevailing pedagogical practices and quantify levels of professional satisfaction or critical rejection of current educational models.

Evaluative Objective: To examine the distribution of daily activities within kindergarten settings (academic instruction, free play, care, and social activities) to identify structural imbalances in pedagogical prioritization.

Developmental-Therapeutic Objective: To formulate evidence-based, sociologically informed recommendations for reframing early childhood practices to align with the child's best interests and contemporary developmental standards.

1-3- Significance of the Study

The significance of this research stems from both theoretical and practical dimensions:

Theoretical Significance: It contributes to Arab sociological literature by integrating the New Sociology of Childhood with empirical quantitative data, thereby advancing cumulative knowledge on how early socialization institutions reproduce or transform cultural capital.

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

Applied Significance: It provides policymakers, trainers, and kindergarten administrators with precise diagnostic indicators (e.g., the 33.33% dominance of academic instruction versus 13.33% for free play) to design targeted, context-sensitive professional development programs.

Social Significance: It advocates for the protection of children's developmental rights by promoting pedagogical models that respect early childhood specificity, thereby mitigating unintended forms of symbolic violence embedded in rigid institutional routines .

2- Theoretical Framework

2-1- Institutional Socialization and Spatial Regulation

Socialization within kindergartens transforms into an institutional practice regulated by what(Goffman, 1961, p.61) terms the "total order" of institutions, structuring time, space, and daily interactions, This regulatory framework often prioritizes predictability over spontaneous exploration.

2-2- Cultural Capital and Symbolic Reproduction

Bourdieu's(Bourdieu, 1986, p.243) concept of cultural capital explains how early educational practices shape children's future academic trajectories, Children from families whose cultural capital aligns with school culture experience smoother transitions, while others face "symbolic violence" through the implicit imposition of institutional norms.

2-3- Childhood as a Social Construction

Adopting the New Sociology of Childhood perspective, children are recognized as social actors rather than passive recipients(Prout & James, 1997, p.12). This paradigm challenges pedagogical models that marginalize children's voices and advocates for participatory spaces that enhance child agency.

2-4- Play Pedagogy vs. Instructional Framing

Bernstein(Bernstein, 2000, p.67) distinguishes between strong and weak classification in pedagogical discourse. Strongly classified activities (e.g., early academic instruction) rigidly separate "serious" knowledge from "interactive" play, often undermining intrinsic motivation. Contemporary developmental consensus affirms play as a foundational mechanism for cognitive and socio-emotional resilience(Fleer, 2022, p.89).

3- Methodology

The study employs a critical descriptive-analytical design, integrating quantitative data with qualitative sociological interpretation (Blaikie, 2010, p.112). A five-point Likert-scale questionnaire covering socio-demographic profiles, pedagogical practices, and professional attitudes was piloted on 15 practitioners (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). The target population comprised 420+ accredited kindergarten educators in Ain Defla. A stratified random sample (N=150) was selected based on institution type (public/private) and geographic location (urban/suburban), meeting the 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970, p.608). Data were processed using SPSS and interpreted through the theoretical lenses outlined above

4- Results and Sociological Analysis

4-1- Socio-Professional Profile: Experience and Institutional Stability

Table N°1: Distribution of the Sample According to Years of Professional Experience

Years of Experience	Frequency (N)	Percentage(%)
Less than 5 years	5	3.33
5-10 years	130	86.67
More than 10 years	15	10.00
Total	150	100

Descriptive Reading of Data:

The overwhelming dominance of mid-career practitioners (86.67% with 5–10 years' experience) indicates a workforce that has surpassed initial professional socialization and entered a phase of relative maturity. This distribution minimizes the likelihood that critical evaluations stem from inexperience, instead reinforcing the hypothesis that critique emerges from accumulated professional awareness.

Expanded Sociological Analysis :

According to Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 1993, p.73), accumulated experience constitutes a form of "professional capital" that grants practitioners legitimacy within the educational field. However, this capital does not automatically translate into innovative capacity if the institutional habitus rewards routine compliance over pedagogical renewal. The high concentration of mid-career practitioners suggests a "latent critical

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

asset": they possess sufficient field knowledge to diagnose gaps but may lack institutional tools or training support to transform critique into alternative practice. This situation intersects with the concept of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p.34), wherein traditional practices are reproduced not through coercion but through the internalization of institutional norms as "natural." Consequently, this cohort represents a strategic opportunity for peer-mentoring initiatives that link field experience with contemporary childhood science, converting professional stability into developmental dynamism rather than automatic reproduction (Rogoff, 2023, p.93).

4-2- Educational and Training Background: Technical vs. Academic Cultural Capital

Table N°2: Educational Qualifications

Qualification	Frequency (N)	Percentage(%)
Secondary + Vocational Certificate	80	53.33
University Degree (Education/Psychology/Sociology)	70	46.67
Total	150	100

Descriptive Reading:

The distribution reveals a near-equilibrium between vocationally trained practitioners (53.33%) and university-educated professionals (46.67%), indicating a workforce shaped by regulatory compliance alongside emerging academic professionalization.

Expanded Sociological Analysis:

From a Bourdieusian perspective, this educational profile reflects a field structured by competing forms of *institutionalized cultural capital*. The vocational cohort (53.33%) primarily embodies technical-operational capital, acquired through standardized training modules and field apprenticeships. This form of capital prioritizes procedural competence, classroom management, and regulatory adherence, which often translates into the replication of inherited practices through behavioral imitation and routine stabilization (Bourdieu, 1986, p.247). Conversely, the university-trained segment (46.67%) carries academic-theoretical capital, characterized by exposure to developmental psychology, critical pedagogy, and evidence-based childhood studies. This duality generates an epistemological

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data**
Sadik Hattabi

stratification within the professional field, where practical know-how and theoretical reflexivity coexist but are not yet fully integrated.

The coexistence of these two credential profiles signals a hybrid professional field in transitional equilibrium. Rather than indicating institutional deficiency, this distribution reveals structural capacity for endogenous renewal. Vocational practitioners provide operational stability, contextual familiarity, and field-tested classroom strategies, while academically trained professionals introduce critical discourse, developmental frameworks, and participatory methodologies. When left unmediated, this duality may produce latent professional tension or epistemic friction; however, when strategically bridged through structured peer-mentoring and reflective practice communities, it can function as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation rather than stagnation.

This educational landscape also challenges deficit-oriented narratives about early childhood workforce quality. The data suggests that the field does not suffer from a lack of human capital, but rather from an underutilized *complementary capital structure*. As Tisdall and Punch (Tisdall & Punch, 2022, p.161) emphasize, sustainable quality enhancement in kindergarten settings requires moving beyond credential-based hiring toward competency-driven, practice-embedded professional development. Institutionalizing dialogic training models that pair experienced vocational practitioners with academically trained newcomers can facilitate mutual knowledge translation, transforming theoretical insights into actionable field strategies and grounding academic frameworks in practical realities.

Ultimately, this distribution underscores the necessity of rethinking continuous professional development as a relational and participatory process rather than a top-down knowledge transfer. By leveraging the synergistic potential between technical proficiency and theoretical sophistication, kindergarten institutions can transition from custodial care models toward developmental empowerment paradigms, ensuring that pedagogical practices remain both contextually grounded and scientifically informed.

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

4-3- Evaluation of Pedagogical Practices: Professional Alienation as Critical Consciousness

Table N°3: Practitioner Attitudes Toward Current Practices

Attitude	Frequency (N)	Percentage(%)
Positive	29	19.33
Neutral	39	26.00
Negative	63	42.00
Unspecified	15	10.00
No Response	4	2.67
Total	150	100

Descriptive Reading:

The distribution reveals a pronounced evaluative asymmetry: critical/negative attitudes dominate the sample (42%, N=63), followed by neutral responses (26%, N=39), while positive endorsements remain marginal (19.33%, N=29). The residual 12.67% (unspecified or non-response) further underscores professional ambivalence or strategic non-engagement. This pattern signals a structural disconnect between institutional mandates and practitioners' lived pedagogical realities.

Expanded Sociological Analysis:

The elevated rate of critical evaluation (42%) does not signify institutional rejection or professional cynicism, but rather reflects a multidimensional form of *professional alienation* structurally embedded in early childhood settings. Drawing on Seeman's classical typology, this alienation manifests through three interlocking dimensions: powerlessness (practitioners lack agency in curriculum design and pedagogical decision-making), meaninglessness (daily routines are decoupled from developmental theory and reduced to administrative compliance), and normlessness (conflicting directives between pedagogical best practices and bureaucratic accountability metrics). The data thus capture not individual dissatisfaction but a collective structural condition wherein professional identity is strained by institutional constraints.

This evaluative landscape also resonates with Foucault's analysis of institutional "technologies of discipline." Kindergarten spaces, though framed as developmental environments, frequently operate through temporal partitioning, spatial surveillance, and standardized activity sequencing. The marginalization of positive endorsements (19.33%) suggests that

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

practitioners internalize these regulatory logics, resulting in performative compliance that suppresses pedagogical creativity and child-led exploration. In this context, the high negative rating functions as a form of *quiet* resistance—a professional acknowledgment that institutional routines often prioritize order and measurability over developmental authenticity.

The substantial neutral segment (26%) and the unspecified/non-response categories (12.67%) warrant critical sociological reading. Rather than indicating apathy, these responses reflect what Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54) terms *habitus-institutional friction*. Practitioners may withhold explicit judgment due to professional caution, fear of institutional repercussions, or lack of discursive frameworks to articulate nuanced critique. This strategic neutrality operates as a protective mechanism within a field where institutional legitimacy often depends on visible conformity rather than pedagogical innovation. It reveals a professional culture caught between normative expectations and practical constraints, awaiting institutional scaffolding to safely voice critical perspectives.

Critically, the overall evaluative pattern demonstrates emergent reflexive awareness (Giddens, 1984, p.25). Practitioners are not passive reproducers of inherited routines; they actively monitor the mismatch between daily practices and contemporary developmental science. This reflexivity, however, remains latent without mechanisms to translate individual critique into collective pedagogical agency. As (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2021, p.589) emphasize, sustainable transformation in early childhood education requires environments where practitioners' experiential knowledge is legitimized alongside empirical research. Institutionalizing reflective supervision, peer-mentoring networks, and co-constructed curriculum planning can convert structural alienation into professional empowerment, repositioning the kindergarten from a site of regulatory compliance to a space of developmental co-construction. Ultimately, the 42% critical evaluation should be read not as a deficit indicator, but as a diagnostic resource: a clear empirical signal that the field is cognitively prepared for participatory pedagogical renewal, provided institutional structures evolve to support rather than suppress professional voice.

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

4-4- Activity Prioritization: Strong Classification and the Reproduction of Epistemic Hierarchy

Table N°4: Distribution of Core Activities

Activity Type	Frequency (N)	Percentage(%)
Academic Instruction	50	33.33
Health/Physical Care	30	20.00
Social Activities	25	16.67
Free Play	20	13.33
Other	25	16.67
Total	150	100

Descriptive Reading:

Academic instruction leads the distribution (33.33%), while free play occupies the lowest rank (13.33%), reflecting a clear institutional priority toward measurable, assessable skills.

Expanded Sociological Analysis :

This distribution empirically validates Bernstein's (Bernstein, 2000, p. 69) hypothesis of "strong classification," demonstrating how institutional discourse hierarchizes knowledge to revolve around formally assessable activities. This epistemic hierarchy reflects not merely pedagogical choices but reproduces a broader social logic that equates educational value with quantifiability. From a neurodevelopmental perspective, marginalizing free play (13.33%) contradicts scientific consensus affirming play as the foundational mechanism for building executive functions and socio-emotional resilience. (Fleer, 2022, p.91). Sociologically, this disparity can be read through Habermas's (Habermas, 1987, p.154) concept of "instrumental rationality," which subordinates educational processes to short-term efficiency logic at the expense of holistic long-term development. Gradually reintegrating play into daily schedules does not weaken academic dimensions but rather strengthens them by enhancing attention and working memory, thereby achieving a "dynamic pedagogical balance" aligned with the child's best interests (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2021, p. 248).

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

4-5- Reception of Modern Pedagogical Statements: Symbolic Resistance and Renewal Potential

Table N°5: Agreement with Contemporary Pedagogical Concepts

Response	Frequency (N)	Percentage(%)
Agree/Strongly Agree	50	33.33
Neutral	30	20.00
Disagree/Reject	70	46.67
Total	150	100

Descriptive Reading:

The distribution reveals a pronounced evaluative asymmetry: critical/negative attitudes dominate the sample (42%, N=63), followed by neutral responses (26%, N=39), while positive endorsements remain marginal (19.33%, N=29). The residual 12.67% (unspecified or non-response) further underscores professional ambivalence or strategic non-engagement. This pattern signals a structural disconnect between institutional mandates and practitioners' lived pedagogical realities.

Expanded Sociological Analysis:

The elevated rate of critical evaluation (42%) does not signify institutional rejection or professional cynicism, but rather reflects a multidimensional form of professional alienation structurally embedded in early childhood settings. Drawing on Seeman's (Seeman, 1959, p.785) classical typology, this alienation manifests through three interlocking dimensions: powerlessness (practitioners lack agency in curriculum design and pedagogical decision-making), meaninglessness (daily routines are decoupled from developmental theory and reduced to administrative compliance), and normlessness (conflicting directives between pedagogical best practices and bureaucratic accountability metrics). The data thus capture not individual dissatisfaction but a collective structural condition wherein professional identity is strained by institutional constraints. This evaluative landscape also resonates with Foucault's (Foucault, 1977, p.138) analysis of institutional "technologies of discipline." Kindergarten spaces, though framed as developmental environments, frequently operate through temporal partitioning, spatial surveillance, and standardized activity sequencing. The marginalization of positive endorsements (19.33%) suggests that practitioners internalize these regulatory logics, resulting in performative compliance that suppresses pedagogical creativity and child-

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

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Critically, the overall evaluative pattern demonstrates emergent reflexive awareness (Giddens, 1984, p.25). Practitioners are not passive reproducers of inherited routines; they actively monitor the mismatch between daily practices and contemporary developmental science. This reflexivity, however, remains latent without mechanisms to translate individual critique into collective pedagogical agency. As Hirsh-Pasek (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2021) emphasize, sustainable transformation in early childhood education requires environments where practitioners' experiential knowledge is legitimized alongside empirical research. Institutionalizing reflective supervision, peer-mentoring networks, and co-constructed curriculum planning can convert structural alienation into professional empowerment, repositioning the kindergarten from a site of regulatory compliance to a space of developmental co-construction. Ultimately, the 42% critical evaluation should be read not as a deficit indicator, but as a diagnostic resource: a clear empirical signal that the field is cognitively prepared for participatory pedagogical renewal, provided institutional structures evolve to support rather than suppress professional voice.

5- Discussion of Results: Toward a Participatory Developmental Approach

The results reveal a fundamental paradox: while an overwhelming majority (90%) affirm the symbolic importance of kindergarten institutions—reflecting deep belief in their social value—critical evaluation of internal practices prevails (42%), indicating professional awareness of existing gaps .

This paradox can be interpreted through Habermas's (Habermas, 1987, p.119) distinction between the life world and the system. Families and society view kindergarten as a space for child socialization, yet the institution itself may operate under an administrative-bureaucratic logic prioritizing measurable standards over spontaneous interaction .

Furthermore, the results positively support the social reproduction thesis: the institution possesses the structural capacity for change and requires only participatory training mechanisms that link field experience with contemporary developmental knowledge, ensuring kindergarten's transition from a space of regulation to one of holistic development.

- Conclusion and Recommendations

The sociological analysis of field data concludes that the studied kindergarten institutions follow a stable professional trajectory but face challenges in keeping pace with contemporary pedagogical transformations. The current gap reflects not deficient intentions but an urgent need for supportive mechanisms bridging field experience and contemporary educational knowledge. Based on this, the following participatory developmental recommendations are proposed:

- **Participatory Continuous Training Programs:** Design workshops based on peer exchange between mid- and long-career practitioners to integrate field knowledge with modern childhood science frameworks, replacing traditional didactic models.
- **Strategic Integration of Play Pedagogy:** Gradually embed free play activities into daily schedules aligned with children's developmental rhythms without disrupting existing academic activities, achieving internationally recognized pedagogical balance.
- **Institution-Family Dialogue Platform:** Engage families and practitioners in periodic review of educational projects to enhance alignment between family expectations and institutional logic, reducing evaluative gaps through participatory transparency.

**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data
Sadik Hattabi**

- Support for Specialized Cultural Capital: Encourage partnerships with faculties of education and sociology to provide field consultations and short-cycle certification programs, enhancing staff readiness to meet national and international standards without compromising existing professional identity.

Through these approaches, current challenges can be transformed into sustainable developmental opportunities, ensuring kindergarten's leading role in social socialization while preserving professional dignity and children's developmental rights.

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**Educational Practices in Early Childhood Care Institutions
(Kindergarten): A Critical Sociological Analysis of Field Data**
Sadik Hattabi

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