



## Play and Its Effect in Child Development Çocuk Gelişiminde Oyun ve Etkileri

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### ABSTRACT

This review was written to evaluate the importance of play in childhood and its effects on children. Regardless of the culture and society, the play, which is the most effective learning tool of childhood, contributes greatly to the development of the child. In recent years, it has been included in the education systems of developed countries. In this education system, there are conscious and planned activities that aim at the physical, mental, emotional and social development of human beings and are accepted as the basic source of the growing generations. These activities, which are an integral part of general education, allow children to learn behaviours such as learning, decision-making, cooperation, ordering, organising, sharing and respecting the rights of others during play. Play enables children to practice, evaluate and perfect the skills they will need in the future. Research shows that play contributes positively to children's mental, emotional and psychomotor development. Although plays are divided into different groups, they basically help children adapt to the real world and are effective in meeting their psychological and physical needs.

**Keywords:** child, play, development

### ÖZET

Bu derleme, çocukluk döneminde oyunun önemi ve çocuklar üzerine etkisini değerlendirmek amacıyla yazılmıştır. Yaşanan kültür, toplum fark etmeksizin çocukluk döneminin en etkin öğrenme aracı olan oyun, çocuğun gelişimine büyük katkı sağlamaktadır. Son yıllarda gelişmiş ülkelerin eğitim sistemlerine de dahil edilmektedir. Bu eğitim sisteminde, insanın fiziksel, zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal gelişimini hedefleyen, yetişen nesillerin temel kaynağı olarak kabul edilen bilinçli ve planlı faaliyetler bulunmaktadır. Genel eğitimin ayrılmaz bir parçası olan bu faaliyetler, çocukların öğrenme, karar verme, iş birliği, sıralama, düzenleme, paylaşma ve başkalarının haklarına saygı gösterme gibi davranışları oyun sırasında öğrenmelerine olanak tanır. Oyun, çocukların ileride ihtiyaç duyacakları becerileri pratik yapmalarını, değerlendirmelerini ve mükemmelleştirmelerini sağlar. Yapılan araştırmalar, oyunun çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve psikomotor gelişimlerine olumlu katkı sağladığını göstermektedir. Oyunlar, farklı gruplara ayrılrsa da, temelde çocukların gerçek dünyaya uyum sağlamalarına yardımcı olurken psikolojik ve fiziksel ihtiyaçlarını karşılama konusunda da etkilidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çocuk, oyun, gelişim

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## INTRODUCTION

The pre-school period is called the magic years of life in the literature and it is a very dangerous period to neglect. Negative physical or psychological developments that may be experienced in this period when development is the fastest after the intrauterine period may cause permanent damages in the future of the individual (Koçyiğit, Tuğluk and Kök, 2007). The main reason for this situation is related to the fact that it covers the process given in the family environment and educational institutions, which covers the time until the beginning of basic education, where developmental areas are largely completed and personality is shaped (Ayan and Memiş, 2012; Bekmezci and Özkan, 2015). In addition, life tasks such as establishing self-control over the child's own behaviour, developing an attitude towards social groups and forming value judgements also take place in this period (Shaffer and Kipp, 2013). The most basic learning tool in all these processes has always been play regardless of culture from past to present (Ayan and Memiş, 2012).

Play is an activity that entertains and gives pleasure to the child as well as providing important benefits to physical, emotional, social, cognitive and language development (Akandere, 2006). In order for children to be developmentally healthy, they need play as much as they need nutrition and sleep (Bekmezci and Özkan, 2015). Play is the most effective way to prepare children for adult life and supports children developmentally in many aspects. In this review, it is aimed to examine the importance of play for children in general and in which aspects it supports children.

### **The Importance of Play for Children**

The Turkish Language Association (TDK) defines play as an activity that improves intelligence and abilities, is formed within the framework of certain rules, and serves to spend a pleasant time (TDK, 2024). However, when child development is considered, it may be insufficient to characterise play only as entertainment. When evaluated from this point of view, play can also be defined as all activities carried out with their own intrinsic motivation. Play is important for children regardless of culture and society. So much so that the play process has been carried to international political platforms and children's right to play has been protected by conventions. The "Convention on the Rights of the Child" adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 was ratified and accepted by the state parties. UNICEF in Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the Convention "States Parties recognise the child's right to rest, leisure, play and age-appropriate recreation, and to participate freely in cultural and artistic life." states that have signed the Convention have taken the child's right

to play under protection (UNICEF, 2004). In the researches, it has been determined that plays contribute to many aspects such as realising their emotions, developing their creativity, making friends, learning social norms, developing their mental activities, and physically developing their muscle and bone structures (Akandere, 2006; Yavuzer, 2001). These contributions are directly related to the type of play and the age of the child. As a need of childhood, play enables the child to develop the skills that he/she will use in the future. In other words, thanks to play, the child will be able to overcome many of the problems he/she will face in the future.

Researches stated that children use their own bodies at the age of one, especially to express their emotional skills, and in the second year, they make progress in interacting with others, living or non-living. He stated that play activities are effective in the child's gaining self-confidence and controlling objects. As he approaches the age of three, he becomes increasingly more coordinated and harmonious in plays. Piaget associates this development with the development of mental processes. Similarly, Vygotsky stated that play helps the child to organise himself/herself and to acquire the skills to perform high-level cognitive operations (Tsao, 2002).

According to Hurwitz (2009), it is possible to categorise children's plays under five headings:

- Practical Plays: These are plays that children play repetitively, such as playing with sand, for recreational purposes only.
- Building Plays: These are plays in which children make or produce something new, such as building blocks.
- Rough-and-Tumble Plays: These are plays with funny, similes and harsh behaviour (not aggressive).
- Drama Plays: These are the plays played by putting the child himself/herself in the place of an object or a person and playing a role.
- Rules Plays: Plays with specific rules.

Colwell and Lindsey (2005) categorised plays into four categories:

- Exercise Plays: These are plays that involve physical strength but do not involve sociability and are played by moving from one place to another in a large area.
- Rough-and-Tumble Plays: It is also possible to call these plays contact-contact plays. They are roughness in a natural environment that involves sociability and is done in play and there is no intention to harm the other party. For example: tickling, wrestling, spinning, chest-to-chest pushing, hitting and running, chasing, rolling together.

- Simulation Plays: These are plays based on pretending to be something or someone else by putting the playtools in the place of another thing or person. In these plays, new names are given to objects and role transitions are made. Such as making a car out of a slipper and driving it.
- Other Plays: These are the types of plays that are not similar to the above. Such as singing, drawing pictures.

### **Play and its effects**

The child's ability to realise his/her vital functions in physical, mental, cognitive and social aspects is parallel with a healthy development. One of the most important dynamic components in this process is learning (Özer and Özer, 2000). Learning is a concept that appears as a product of experiences. Play is the most effective method of learning for children. Thanks to this method, it can provide physical, mental and social development (Aral, Kandır, and Başar, 2002). The child perceives, then understands, then learns and develops concepts, objects, social rules, rights and struggle in play. In general, play affects children in many ways and contributes to their development (Özer, Gürkan and Ramazanoğlu, 2006). While the effects of plays differ according to their types, their general effects have been analysed in terms of physical, emotional, social and mental aspects.

### **The effects of play on the physical development of the child**

In general, play contributes to both growth (measurable increase in height and body weight) and development (maturation of a growing organism as a result of changes in the structure and biochemical composition of its tissues). Children can repeat some movements continuously in their plays, which is an important dynamic that accelerates muscle development. For example, plays that require physical strength such as running, jumping, climbing, leaping and crawling ensure the regular functioning of the child's musculoskeletal system as well as respiratory, circulatory, digestive and excretory systems. Thus, oxygenation increases, blood circulation and nutrient transport to tissues accelerate (Özer, Gürkan and Ramazanoğlu, 2006; Yayla, 2016).

A child who plays a moving play for the first time learns with his/her mind on the one hand and with his/her muscles on the other. Each time the same play is played, both the mind and muscles reinforce the movements related to that play a little more. As a result, a kind of muscle memory is formed. A child who has played an active play many times can, after a

while, easily perform the movements related to that play with the help of muscle memory without using his/her mind much. Muscles perform the movements they have learnt before more easily than the movements they do not know. This comfort accelerates and strengthens muscle development (Kuru, 2009).

### **The effects of play on the emotional development of the child**

According to psychoanalytic theorists, play is associated with children's emotional development and helps them cope with negative experiences (Barnett, 2013). Play plays an important role in the process of initiating children's emotional relationships and is related to the emotions experienced by children. In addition, play provides an environment where children try to understand their emotions by experiencing them again (Özdoğan, 2004).

Children learn to control various emotional reactions by experiencing them through plays. Especially through plays related to animals, children can gain feelings of empathy, love and protection (Gökçen, 2005; Poyraz, 2003). Play provides a social and psychological environment as well as emotional satisfaction for children. In this environment, children experience various emotions and develop by experiencing these emotions (Uzman and Ersanlı, 2007).

Play helps children learn to control their emotional reactions, escape from their problems and learn to trust themselves (Akandere, 2006). Experiences play an important role in the development of emotions such as love, joy, pain, sadness, fear, anger and jealousy (Tuğrul, 2010). Families should observe their children's plays and communicate with them to understand their emotional development (Başal, 2010; Elibol, Kılış and Burdurlu, 2006). In addition, the recent pandemic, which has negatively affected the whole world and caused social restrictions, has also caused serious psychological problems and home restrictions for children (Kaplan, Kürümlüoğlugil and Bütün, 2021). Again, for such negative situations, plays can be the most important key to emotional relief.

### **The effects of play on the social development of the child**

In the play environment, children interact with each other and learn some social behaviours such as cooperation, helping, sharing, and finding solutions to the problems they face. Children who play plays and communicate with their peers easily learn some skills and behaviour examples related to social life and gain an environment where they can gain various experiences (Yayla, 2016). Play is the most natural socialisation space for children. Children learn social skills, relationships, love and sharing through play. Play helps children to realise

the concepts of "me" and "someone else" and helps them learn to give and receive. At school and in their environment, children live by observing what is right and wrong. Play teaches children to obey rules; because in order to play a play, the rules must be obeyed. In the plays they play among themselves, children shame, condemn or exclude those who do not follow the rules. Similarly, there are rules in social life. Just as not every child can behave freely in a play, not every individual can behave as they wish in society. Plays offer children the opportunity to learn the rules they will follow in their future lives under the guidance of adults (Yavuzer, 2003; Yörükoğlu, 2002).

### **The effects of play on the mental development of the child**

Children produce different solutions by coping with the problems they encounter through plays. This process supports children's fast learning abilities, especially in the preschool period. Play provides children with the opportunity to actively learn and apply information, and in this way, the information learnt becomes more permanent (Kıldan, 2001). In addition, children develop important skills such as curiosity, comprehension skills, intelligence and reasoning while actively using their senses during play. Play contributes to children's mental development and strengthens their cognitive abilities while supporting the learning process (Hazar, 2005).

According to Vigotsky, play is an important order for children's cognitive development and imaginary situations are perceived as reality. Children develop their emotional skills while getting to know their environment and society through plays (Poyraz, 2003). In addition, the experiences shared by children increase the child's knowledge and support mental processes. It is also stated that play contributes to the process of learning mental concepts and applying various mental operations during children's growth process (Akandere, 2006). Finally, it is emphasised that play enables children to enter the literacy process and develops their creative thinking (Poyraz, 2003). In this context, the impact of play on children's mental development, together with children's active participation and experiences, provides an environment that supports their learning and cognitive abilities.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, children's relationship with play is a fundamental part of their development. Play helps children develop their social, emotional, mental and physical skills, while at the same time supporting the learning process and nurturing their curiosity. Play allows children to develop their creativity, problem-solving abilities and communication

skills. Therefore, understanding the importance of play for preschool children contributes to their healthy growth and development. As educators, parents and society, appreciating the value of play and encouraging children to play can help them grow up to be happier, healthier and more successful individuals.

Moreover, the integration of plays into the education system can make children's learning experiences more effective. Play-based learning approaches attract students' attention, increase their motivation and encourage in-depth learning. At the same time, practical applications of skills learnt through plays allow students to solve real-world problems and direct their own learning process. Plays integrated into the education system can help students develop important skills such as critical thinking, co-operation, leadership and empathy. Therefore, the wider use of plays in educational programmes can enable students to learn more deeply, increase their academic achievement and support them to be better equipped for the future.

### **Research Statement**

**Ethical Approval:** The study does not require ethical approval.

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