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## Kindergarten teachers' attitudes towards free play and its role in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children

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### Abstract

The study aimed to identify the attitudes of kindergarten teachers towards free play and a course in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children. The study sample consisted of (103) kindergarten teachers in the city of Najran in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who were selected from government kindergarten institutions in a random manner. The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year (2023/2024), the descriptive analytical approach was used in the study, and the researchers designed a questionnaire addressed to kindergarten teachers to find out the role of free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children. The questionnaire included 15 items distributed over three main areas. The first field included "the reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for the kindergarten child", the second "the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through free play activities", and the third "proposals for activating free play in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child in kindergarten institutions". Children, and the results were processed and the study reached the following results: Free play has an essential role in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children to a great extent.

Keywords: free play, motor skills, kindergarten, kindergarten teachers.

## Introduction

The child's motor activity is necessary, as movement is considered the basic form of life and is the basic way of expressing ideas, feelings, concepts and the self in general. It is a noticeable physical response to a stimulus, whether internal or external. Movement is one of the oldest forms of communication and emotional participation. It was used by ancient man to protect himself and his group, as well as being one of the most important means of fun and enjoyment by practicing activities in free time, which in turn leads to the elimination of stress, anxiety, and anger.

Despite the difference among scholars in the interpretation of play, an important educational medium works to form the child at this crucial stage of human development. Play is an important activity practiced by the individual and plays a major role in shaping his personality (Hanna 1999, 12-17)

(Zahran, 2005, p. 306) defined play as any behavior that an individual performs without a prior practical goal. All members of the human race play, and so do the children of higher animals.

Froebel defines play as: the pure spiritual activity of man, as it contains sources of goodness. Susanna Miller defined it as an important behavioral activity that plays a major role in forming the individual's personality and confirming the heritage of the group. It is a behavioral phenomenon in living organisms and is characterized by higher vertebrates and humans in particular.

A child's motor skills in the early stage include three skills: first: transfer skills: Crawling/crawling, walking, running, hopping, running and hopping on one foot, partridges, exchanging hops, stepping, jumping, hopping and landing on one foot, (lib) sliding, and secondly, non-transitional skills, which are balance, rolling, climbing, twisting, and transferring weight. The body, swinging, wiggling, bending, stretching, jumping, and landing in place, and thirdly, processing and handling skills, which are throwing, catching, kicking, and hitting Knocking, flying, receiving, moving.

Play is classified into two basic categories: organized play: which is the type of play that is subject to certain rules and laws, and unorganized (free) play: which is random play that is not subject to specific rules, and organized and unorganized (free) play may be individual or group. It may be directed or undirected.

### Play functions:

It helps children control anxiety, fears, and minor psychological conflicts. It helps children develop social participation, interaction with others, and desirable social traits. Play helps develop motor skills and physical growth. Play helps develop the arousal and development of mental abilities.

5- Play helps develop children's perceptions, develop their thinking, and solve their problems. Play helps children get to know themselves and reveal their potential. (Aql 1989, 274).

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Play has psychological importance in education, diagnosis, and treatment. Play is considered one of the most important means for the child to understand the world around him, and it is one of the important means by which the child expresses himself, and some consider it the child's profession.

Toys and play tools are a reflection of the civilization in which the child lives, and the experiences he goes through. Play can also be considered a mixture of muscular activity and mental activity within a social civilizational framework. (Hanna 1999, 17). Play plays an important role in developing muscles and acquiring good motor skills and motor balance. Sports games, such as running, jumping, and some other games, such as football and chasing, tame and develop the body. Play is also a means of discharging excess energy in children. Spencer confirmed that children have excess energy and that Playing rids him of the vital energies he has accumulated and which he needs more.

It suffices to demonstrate the importance of play that those who practice sports have strong muscles, great stamina, and few different injuries. Physiological studies on playing confirm that there are certain changes that occur to the body's systems that train these systems (Aql 1989, 283).

Game theories:

There are a number of play theories that attempt to explain why people of all ages should play. The most important of these theories are the following.

- Excess energy theory: Play is viewed as a non-purposeful release of excess energy in the individual.

- The Instinctive Theory: Its proponents say that some instincts do not become clear all at once, but gradually, and therefore their expression or satisfaction is in the form of play, which provides an opportunity to refine, train, and practice the necessary instinctive activities in adult life before they mature.

- Summarization theory: It assumes that every child repeats the product of the human race in his play and considers play activity a summary of the motor habits of the human race in its past and present. The proponents of this theory say "Look at the child swimming, building caves, and climbing trees... He summarizes what his ancestors taught him."

- The theory of rejuvenating activity by playing: Play is seen as a means of renewing activity and entertainment when the individual feels tired and stressed at work.

Recreation theory: where a person plays to relax his tired muscles and exhausted nerves.

**The study problem:**

The problem of the study crystallizes in the importance of free play in childhood, as there is a strong relationship between free play and the development of motor skills. Play is not only a way for the child to enjoy, spend his time, and discover his world, but it is also the activity that achieves balanced development for the child in all areas of his life, in addition to Piaget's belief. Play is the basis of all higher forms of mental activities. Therefore, it acts as a bridge from motor intelligence to

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the intelligence of complex and abstract higher processes. From this standpoint, the problem of the study is represented in the following questions:

Therefore, the study problem can be formulated in the following questions:

- 1- What is the reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for kindergarten children?
- 2- What is the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through free play activities?
- 3- What are the proposals for activating free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions?

### **Objectives of the study**

- Identifying the reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for kindergarten children.
- Identifying the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's motor skills through free play activities.
- Coming up with proposals to activate free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions.

### **The importance of studying**

The importance of the study stems from considering that the first eight years (early childhood) have an important and fundamental role in forming the child's balanced personality, as motor activity is an integral part of the general curriculum of kindergartens, and that developing basic movements and growth in children is a basis for developing their future lives, and accordingly the interest came. Kindergarten curricula and activities, especially movement, because it has a tangible impact on physical development and some movement characteristics in children.

Here comes the role of kindergarten teachers in meeting the child's desires and needs necessary for his healthy motor development in childhood, as it is the most important stage the child goes through in forming the child's personality and acquiring many skills.

### **The limits of the study**

The limitations of the study are as follows

Objective: To know the attitudes of kindergarten teachers towards free play and its role in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children

Spatial boundaries: Najran city, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Time limits: First semester 2023-2024

Human Frontiers: Kindergarten teachers in Najran

### **Terminology of study:**

Play:

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It is an innate and natural predisposition, and for the child it is one of the necessities of life, like eating and sleeping. The child not only needs to learn to play, but he also needs guidance and organization (Hanna, 1999).

**Motor development:**

It is the gradual ability to control the movement of the body, especially the voluntary muscles, and the child's ability to perform a number of motor skills. (Zahran 2005, p. 171).

**motor development:**

A type of change that occurs in a child's motor behavior during different stages of life. That is, motor development is a physiological process that includes organic and functional change in the various organs of the human body.

**Free play**

It is what children decide and do with minimal adult involvement. Free play develops mental skills in the child, such as creativity, flexibility in solving problems, concentration, imagination, and quick wit. Studies have stated that one of the best ways to shape a child's personality is to listen well to the child.

Allow free play, set aside time to use technology tools, help the child form a distinctive personality, avoid giving negative names, share his interests with the child, and accept the child And embodying a good example.

**Previous studies**

A study (Mansourieh, 2012) entitled "The effect of using a proposed educational program with some small games in developing basic motor skills among primary school girls." The study aimed to develop a proposed educational program based on small games to develop some basic motor skills among primary school girls, and it was applied to a sample. It consisted of 36 female students and used the experimental method in its study. The results of the study resulted in: The proposed educational program based on small games worked to develop the basic motor skills of primary school students, and the proposed educational program based on small games contributes to the development of running and jumping skills. Throwing, standing, and static balance among members of the experimental group.

A study by (Al-Amiri) entitled "A comparative study of the motor activity and physical growth of children belonging to kindergarten and not belonging to it." The study aims to know and compare the motor activity and physical growth of children belonging to kindergarten and not belonging to it. The descriptive approach was used using the survey method because it is appropriate for solving the problem and was conducted. The study was conducted on a sample of thirty-six children aged 4-5 years, and the results of the study showed that measuring growth among children who belong to kindergarten is better than children who do not belong to it, except in terms of weight, so there are no differences in that.

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A study (Al-Hayani 2010) entitled "The effect of a proposed motor training program on developing some motor abilities for pre-school children aged 4-5 years." The study aims to reveal the effect of a proposed motor training program on developing some motor abilities for pre-school children aged 4-5 years. (4-5) years, and the experimental approach was used, and the results of the study reached: The proposed motor training program had a positive impact on the development of some motor abilities of pre-school children aged (4-5) years, and the children of the experimental group excelled in the post-test over the children of the group. Control in the development of motor abilities.

### **Study population and sample:**

The study population consisted of kindergarten teachers in kindergarten institutions in the city of Najran. The study was implemented during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024, and consisted of a random sample of kindergarten teachers, numbering (103) teachers.

### **Study Approach:**

The study followed the descriptive and analytical approach, which is the approach that is concerned with collecting accurate scientific descriptions of the studied phenomenon, describing the current reality and its interpretations, as well as identifying common practices and identifying opinions, beliefs and trends among individuals, in addition to the ways of their growth and development. It also aims to study the existing relationships between different phenomena (Abdul Al-Hafiz, 2000), through kindergarten teachers' evaluation of the role of free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children.

### **Study tools:**

The researchers developed the study tools (questionnaire) after reviewing the information related to them and related studies, and based on the information available to the researchers. They prepared the questionnaire in its final form. The number of items was (15), and their suitability was taken into account when constructing the questionnaire. Since the study is descriptive, the researchers tried to diversify the statistical processing method, as they used the SPSS program to convert non-parametric values (yes - no) into parametric values that can be compared. He calculated the mean, standard deviation, and practice score. The average of 1 to 1.66 is weak in practice. As for the average from 1.67 to 2.32, its practice is considered average in reality, while the average from 2.33 to 3 is considered great practice. To answer the study questions, the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each item of the scale and percentages were extracted.

### **Stability of study tools:**

Table No. (1) shows the importance of the reliability of the study tool (kindergarten teachers' questionnaire) in evaluating the role of free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Data derived from the total sample were used, and the following are data for reliability coefficients:

Questionnaire axes	Number of items	Number of participants	Reliability coefficient
		Kindergarten teachers	Kindergarten teachers
reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for kindergarten children	5	103	0.944
role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through free play activities	5	103	0.838
proposals for activating free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions	5	103	0.927

Table one before shows that values of Alpha- Cronbach indicate a high degree of internal consistency, which, in turn proves that the scale contains high degrees of reliability significance.

### Statistical processing

Since the current study is descriptive and analytical, the researchers tried to vary the methods of statistical treatments. The SPSS program was used to change the non-parametric values (yes - no) to parametric values that can be compared. Then they calculated the average range and the degree of practice. For example, the practice was described A practice whose average ranges from 1.00 to 1.66 is classified as weak, a practice whose average ranges from 1.67 to 2.32 is classified as moderate, while a practice whose average ranges from 2.33 to 3.00 is classified as very strong. Finally, to answer the study questions, scores, percentages, and standard deviations were calculated for all items of the study scale separately. Results of the study.

Table 2: means and standard deviations of the reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for kindergarten children

the reality of developing motor skills in kindergarten for kindergarten children	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=103)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. In kindergarten, the child is encouraged to practice individually and explore.	2.65	0.847	High
2. The child's creativity is enhanced in kindergarten	2.49	0.987	High
3. The child is trained to solve everyday problems and interact with different life situations.	2.38	0.938	High
4. The child adapts positively in his surroundings.	2.87	0.987	High
5. The child is effectively trained to cope with the demands and challenges of daily life	2.78	0.882	High

It is clear from Table No. (2) that the arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample members of kindergarten teachers to the items in this field range between (2.38-2.87), which is a large arithmetic average, and this indicates the knowledge and skills that kindergarten institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attach to the kindergarten child with regard to The importance of free play and its role in

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developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through various mechanisms that allow the child to experiment, explore and practice. Hence, many of the answers to the questionnaire items came with a high degree of verification, which means that kindergartens provide children at an early age with the knowledge and concepts necessary for free play and allow them to play freely without coercion, and this helps develop the child's motor skills.

Table 3: means and standard deviations the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through free play activities.

role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the motor skills of the kindergarten child through free play activities	Responses of kindergarten teacher's teacher (N.=103)		
	Mean	Std.	Practice degree
1. The teacher develops the child's motor skills through free play	2.45	0.887	High
2. The teacher encourages the child to play freely through exploration and experimentation	2.67	0.945	High
3. The teacher trains the child to solve his daily problems through the child's motor activities	2.78	0.948	High
4. The teacher develops the child's basic movement to control and manage the different parts of his body efficiently.	2.46	0.938	High
5. The teacher encourages children to play freely, and rejects coercion and coercion, but rather focuses on the principles of flexibility, creativity, innovation, and inclusion.	2.56	0.859	High

By reading the results of the previous table, we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample of kindergarten teachers who responded to the items in this area were high and achieved to a large degree. The average ranged between the items (2.45-2.78), which is a large arithmetic average. This indicates that the role of the kindergarten teacher in activating the kindergarten child's free play in developing motor skills has been achieved in all the sample responses, as she helps the child to practice play without forcing and under her supervision.

In light of calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\geq \alpha$  0.05) between the responses of the study sample members to statements in this field.

**Table 4: means and standard deviations the proposals for activating free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions**

proposals for activating free play in developing the motor skills of kindergarten children in kindergarten institutions	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=103)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. Encouraging the kindergarten child to play freely through exploration and experimentation to develop his motor skills.	2.47	0.854	High

2. Developing the child's basic movement to control and manage the various parts of his body efficiently	2.67	0.928	High
3. Encouraging the child to play freely while performing the motor skills necessary for his daily life with ease, ease and understanding, by applying the basic concepts of what is called motor education.	2.45	0.938	High
4. Encouraging the child to play freely, rejecting coercion and coercion, but rather focusing on the principles of flexibility, creativity, innovation and inclusion	2.56	0.967	High
5. Developing the natural innate motor capabilities available through the child's body, which are called basic motor skill	2.77	0.974	High

In light of the table mentioned above, we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the sample members' responses to the items in this field ranged between (2.55-2.88), which is a high arithmetic average and was achieved in the responses of the study sample. This indicates that the proposals mentioned by kindergarten teachers regarding proposals for activating play Free play in kindergarten institutions and its important role in developing the child's motor skills has been achieved to a great extent, as free play plays an essential role in developing the child's motor skills. Developing the child's fine motor skills includes using the child's small muscles in his hands, wrists and toes, and requires the child's skills. Motor and mental coordination between the child's brain and the execution of the desired movement. Motor skills include various things, such as pressing and grasping with pincers, holding a fork or spoon to eat.

### Study conclusions:

In light of the results of the current study, it contributed to emphasizing the importance of free play for kindergarten children and its impact on the development of the child's motor skills. Among the results reached by the study;

- It is necessary for the children to practice free play without interference from the teacher, and for the teacher to monitor them and direct them towards the goals and activities to be achieved and to work on developing the children's motor skills, and this was greatly demonstrated by the results of the study.

- The study showed the extent of kindergarten teachers' awareness of the importance of free play and its role in developing the child's motor skills because of its significant impact on the child's orientation toward research, experimentation, and exploration.

- The study showed the positive and effective role of free play, where children learn responsibility and interact with each other, which helps develop the child's motor skills.

### Study recommendations:

Through the results related to this study, which aimed to identify kindergarten teachers' attitudes toward free play and its role in developing the motor skills of

kindergarten children, some recommendations and proposals can be presented, including the following:

- Increasing activities that depend on free play and letting the child play his games and develop his motor skills.
- The Ministry of Education involves relevant community institutions in activating free play by creating positive educational and recreational programs and activities that improve the quality of education and learning outcomes in early childhood.
- Activating sustainable development for kindergarten teachers, by activating training courses in free play for kindergarten children by giving them training and educational courses in this aspect, which is called continuous professional development for the teacher.
- In light of contemporary global trends, it is necessary to benefit from the experiences and expertise of developed countries in activating free play programs in kindergartens, for example the German experience in supporting families in the process of communication and cooperation with kindergartens, and trying to benefit from them in a way that suits the circumstances.
- Concerned parties can benefit from this study, such as those in charge of managing kindergartens at the Ministry of Education, to determine the extent to which the quality of upbringing, education, and care for kindergarten children can be improved through activating craft play during early childhood.

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