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## Free play and its impact on shaping the personality of a kindergarten child: a field study from the point of view of kindergarten teachers

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### Abstract

The study aimed to identify the role of free play and its impact on shaping the personality of a kindergarten child. The study sample consisted of (110) kindergarten teachers in the city of Najran in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 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 and its impact on shaping the personality of the kindergarten child. The questionnaire included 19 paragraphs distributed over three main areas, and the field included The first is "the reality of free play in kindergarten institutions for children," the second is "the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play to shape the child's personality," and the third is "proposals for activating free play in kindergartens and a course in shaping the kindergarten child's personality. The results were processed and the study concluded." To the following results: Free play has an essential role in shaping the personality of the kindergarten child, and it came to a large degree. The study sample agreed that free play is essential for the child's practice.

Keywords: free play, kindergarten child, child personality, kindergarten teachers.

**Introduction**

Free play contributes to shaping the child's personality in the early stage. Play facilitates the child's upbringing process in various aspects, including motor development, where the child can develop his motor skills and enjoy his physical potential. These skills can be learned better when providing activities, materials, and tools that suit his personality. During free play, the child expresses himself positively according to the situation he is in.

Play activities in early childhood vary in form and content, and this diversity depends on the needs of the child at each stage of his development, as well as on the environmental conditions surrounding the child. (Badran PT, 18). Free play for children in kindergarten represents an essential element for normal social, emotional and cognitive development. It makes a person more intelligent and able to adapt.

Many parents and teachers consider children's play to be merely a luxury or a way to spend time among other, more important activities. This assumption or belief that children do not learn anything useful while playing do not even develop or prepare themselves for school and life, and we cannot regard this statement, it is a wrong statement largely. The truth of the matter is that they are listed together under the name or under the word "play." These play activities are among the most important things that young children can do. (Soliman, 1996).

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, p. 283).

There are requirements for the kindergarten teacher while the child is practicing free play, and he must be aware of them, which are: the need for the teacher to be present throughout the activity with full coverage, for the teacher's clothes to be suitable for rapid movement during the activity, and for the teacher's clothes to be free of anything that would harm the children when they come into contact with them. For the children to wear appropriate sports clothing, for the teacher to be close to the high equipment so that she can save any child from any danger as quickly as possible, for the teacher to move in every direction to monitor all the children and be close to all of them, to organize games for students who show some laziness and heavy movement. Taking into account the individual differences between children when choosing games, providing an environment suitable for the child in terms of security, safety, space and tools, comprehensiveness of

exercises while diversifying them, setting clear and appropriate laws for children.

Specialized scientific studies have found that free play has clear contributions to children's development and building their personalities, in addition to the extremely important educational role in forming their knowledge and information about the world around them. Scientists have realized the importance of this in raising children, educating them, and developing their personalities.

On the educational and psychological side, specialists point out the importance of the educational role of games in developing children's physical, mental, sensory and social awareness, concepts and skills, as Jean Piaget's developmental theory indicates that play is linked to the stages of development in children, and that each stage has its own patterns of play.

The style of play at each stage forms the basis of the child's cognitive or mental development, as it is a means of learning, interacting with and discovering the environment. Therefore, play can be viewed as a measure of the development of the mind itself. Therefore, Piaget believes that play is an important way of learning, through what individual or group educational games are provided to children. Play teaches children different behavioral patterns: mental, psychological, social and motor.

Through play, memory, thinking and perception develop. Therefore, educational institutions, especially kindergartens, are interested in organizing play as a good means of learning that the child interacts with and finds pleasure in practicing. During play, they learn a lot of information, discover facts and relationships, and acquire different concepts and skills.

### **The study problem:**

Specialized studies in early childhood education indicate the importance of free play and its impact on shaping the child's personality in the early stage. The kindergarten environment that supports the child's positive development has an essential role in shaping his personality. The first years of a child's life are among the most important and influential stages of life. For a person's future, the first years are considered a formative stage in which the foundations of his personality are laid, and in which he acquires his various habits and patterns of behavior. He is exposed to experiences, relationships, and interactions that have an impact on his future directions.

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

- 1- What is the reality of free play in kindergarten institutions for kindergarten children?
- 2- What is the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play and its impact on developing the child's personality?
- 3- What are the proposals for activating free play in kindergarten and a course in developing the kindergarten child's personality?

### Objectives of the study

- Identify the reality of free play in kindergarten institutions for kindergarten children.
- Identify the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play and its impact on developing the child's personality.
- Coming up with proposals to activate free play in kindergartens and a course in developing the kindergarten child's personality.

### The importance of studying

The importance of the study comes from the fact that free play in the early childhood stage has an important role in shaping the child's personality, in addition to identifying the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the child's personality, and then coming up with proposals to activate free play in developing the child's personality, as play has clear contributions to the development of the child's personality. Children and building their personalities, in addition to the extremely important educational role in forming his knowledge and information about the world around him. Scientists have realized the importance of this in raising children, educating them, and developing their personalities.

### Study Justifications:

- A description of the practices carried out by the teacher by encouraging the child to play freely.
- Identifying the role of the teacher in shaping the child's personality through his free play practices, as the success of shaping the child's personality depends on the ability and skill of the kindergarten teacher and the extent of the attention the child receives in terms of guidance and education at this early age.

The limits of the study

The limitations of the study are as follows

Objective: To know the role of free play in shaping the child's personality in the kindergarten stage

Spatial boundaries: Najran city, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Time limits: First semester 2023-2024

Human Frontiers: Kindergarten teachers in Najran

### Terminology of study:

Play:

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).

### Operational definition of play:

*Ali Abd Eltawab Mohamed Etman / Afr.J.Bio.Sc. 6(9) (2024)*

It is an activity that children practice for the purpose of enjoyment and those adults usually exploit to contribute to the development of their physical motor behavior. The concept of play for children. Play is a free, spontaneous, physical, mental, and psychological expression. Its goal in the child's mind is fun and entertainment, and it is a psychological need for the child.

### **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.

Froebel emphasized the importance of free play in revealing the inner feelings of children and considered it a valuable gift that helps the child's mental, physical, social and psychological development. Free play is meant to be a type of play that the child practices openly, without planning and without interference by adults, and the child alone chooses. Place and games. The child may practice it individually or in a group.

### **Kindergarten**

It accepts children from three to six years old.

### **Previous studies**

Study, Ahmed (2016). Which aimed to identify play and its impact on the learning process among pre-school children. This research was limited to studying play and its impact on the learning process among pre-school (kindergarten) children, through cognitive momentum from references, previous studies, and theories explaining play as objective boundaries. For this research, through the theoretical framework of the research from a theoretical study, previous studies, and theories explaining play, the researcher in this research reached the following results: Play has great importance in the education of pre-school children through the knowledge and education they receive through play, which increases In understanding them and opening their understanding, educational research and theoretical studies have proven that there are types of play that have a significant impact in increasing the degree of children's understanding and developing their intelligence in a remarkable way, such as dramatic representational play, artistic (expressive) play, and educational cultural play, and there must be educational conditions that are met. In the type of games that are provided to pre-school children so that they are compatible with their chronological, mental and physical age so that these games achieve their desired goals, this is what the current study has proven. There are factors influencing the play of pre-school children that should be taken into consideration when choosing children's games, including factors. Self-sad (health, age, gender) and environmental factors: (the physical environment, the social and cultural environment), and environmental factors

*Ali Abd Eltawab Mohamed Etman / Afr.J.Bio.Sc. 6(9) (2024)*

including (the natural geographical environment, the industrial environment, and the social and cultural environment). By reviewing the theories explaining play, it turns out that they agree on one fact: Play is based on the child's instinctive and biological needs, while his desires mature as he grows and appear through his toys, regardless of his upbringing style, where he lives, or who is raising him. In addition, play develops mental abilities and helps children learn, and it may the study made several recommendations, which are: The successful teacher in kindergarten is the one who creates purposeful games for children that help them learn willingly and without getting bored. The necessity of using diverse educational games. The kindergarten teacher must diversify her choice on the one hand and diversify her use on the other hand. The teacher must use educational games. As a means of clarification and understanding.

The study, Hamouda (2020), aimed to identify the role of free play in the early discovery of leadership identity among kindergarten children. In order to achieve this, the researcher used the descriptive analytical method, where 30 children from the second level of kindergarten, aged between 5 and 6 years, at the West Tanta Educational Administration in Gharbia Governorate, for the academic year 2019/2020 AD, and the Leadership Identity Note Card was applied. The results indicated that free play has an effective impact on the early discovery of leadership identity among kindergarten children.

#### **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 (110) teachers.

#### **Study Approach:**

The study followed the descriptive 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. and community groups. In addition to its growth and development methods. It also aims to study the relationships existing between different phenomena (Abdel Hafeez, 2000). , s. 84). This is through kindergarten teachers' evaluation of the role of free play in shaping the child's personality in early childhood.

#### **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 (18), 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 shaping the child's personality, 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
the reality of free play in kindergarten institutions for children	7	110	0.848
the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play to shape the child's personality	6	110	0.943
proposals for activating free play in kindergartens and a course in shaping the kindergarten child's personality	6	110	0.968

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 free play in kindergarten institutions for children

The reality of free play in kindergarten institutions for children	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=110)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. Children in kindergarten decide what to do.	2.43	0.882	High
2. Adults do not interfere in children's work while carrying out activities	2.66	0.928	High
3. Guides the child to experiment and explore.	2.53	0.929	High
4. It directs the child to recognize and discover his environment	2.87	0.929	High
5. The child directs according to his inclinations and desires and explores what is around him.	2.66	0.882	High
6. Kindergarten develops children's self-confidence.	2.77	0.928	High
7. Kindergarten develops the child's skills.	2.84	0.929	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 (2.43-2.87), 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 shaping the child's personality in kindergarten. 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 undoubtedly helps in developing the child's personality. Play on unscheduled schedules allows for peer interaction, which is important in social-emotional learning.

Table 3: means and standard deviations role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play to shape the child's personality.

role of the kindergarten teacher in developing free play to shape the child's personality.	Responses of kindergarten teacher's teacher (N.=110)		
	Mean	Std.	Practice degree
1. The kindergarten teacher supervises the children's free play period	2.69	0.877	High
2. The kindergarten teacher provides safety for every child and keeps him away from any physical or psychological danger	2.58	0.965	High
3. The kindergarten teacher constantly observes the children during free play	2.78	0.945	High
4. The kindergarten teacher organizes free play in the corners.	2.56	0.935	High
5. The kindergarten teacher develops children's social interaction skills	2.48	0.887	High
6. The child goes without restrictions in the period of free play	2.87	0.868	High

By reading, the results of the table above, we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample of kindergarten teachers who responded to the items in this field are high. The average ranged between items (2.48-2.87), which is a large arithmetic average. This indicates that the role of the kindergarten teacher in activating free play for the kindergarten child is necessary, 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 of the proposals for activating free play in kindergartens and a course in shaping the kindergarten child's personality**

proposals for activating free play in kindergartens and a course in shaping the kindergarten child's personality	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=110)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. Helping the child to provide sensory stimuli that positively affect the development of the child's personality in the kindergarten stage.	2.55	0.974	High
2. Preparing the child for school life and moving him gently and easily from self-centeredness to shared social life	2.65	0.829	High
3. Gently and easily transferring the child from his self-centeredness to shared social life with his peers, through rehabilitative programs and educational activities prepared for the child.	2.78	0.987	High
4. Providing programs that rely on the principle of freedom of choice and teaching responsibility to children	2.88	0.924	High
5. Preparing kindergarten classrooms to be prepared for children of this stage according to their developmental characteristics	2.56	0.988	High
6. Providing linguistic, numerical and scientific experiences according to the characteristics of the child's development without boredom and fatigue	2.87	0.982	High

It is clear from the previous table that 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. This indicates that the proposals mentioned by kindergarten teachers about proposals to activate free play in kindergarten institutions and how it is required that the teacher prepare the appropriate environment for the kindergarten child at this early age in terms of appropriate equipment, as free play plays an essential role in shaping the child's personality.

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

### Conclusions:

In light of the results of the current study, the results contributed to emphasizing the importance of free play for kindergarten children and its significant impact on

*Ali Abd Eltawab Mohamed Etman / Afr.J.Bio.Sc. 6(9) (2024)*

shaping the child's personality at this early stage. 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 observe and guide them in a way that does not force them to engage in activities.

- The study showed the extent of kindergarten teachers' awareness of the importance of free play and its role in shaping the child's personality because of its great impact on the child's direction of research, experimentation and exploration.

- The study confirmed the effective role of free play, as children learn responsibility, build self-confidence, and move toward social interaction with others.

#### **Study recommendations:**

In light of the results of the study related to kindergarten children's free play and its impact on shaping the child's personality, some recommendations and proposals can be made, including the following:

- Increasing the use of practical activities and direct experiences in children's free play.

- The Ministry of Education must involve relevant community institutions in activating free play by creating positive educational and recreational programs and activities that improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes in the early childhood stage.

- Raising the efficiency of teachers in activating free play for kindergarten children by giving them training and educational courses in this aspect, which is called continuous professional development for the teacher.

- Benefiting from the experiences of developed countries in activating free play programs in kindergartens, for example the German experience in supporting the family in the process of communication and cooperation with kindergartens, and trying to benefit from it in a way that suits the conditions.

- Directing the results of this study to those in charge of managing kindergartens at the Ministry of Education to determine the extent to which the quality of upbringing, education, and care of the kindergarten child is improved by activating free play at this early stage.

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