

[https://doi.org/ 10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.544-554](https://doi.org/10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.544-554)



African Journal of Biological Sciences

Journal homepage: <http://www.afjbs.com>



Research Paper

Open Access

## Developing a kindergarten child's self-concept through free play, a field study from the point of view of kindergarten teachers

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Article History  
Volume 6, Issue 9, 2024  
Received: 21 Mar 2024  
Accepted : 18 Apr 2024  
Published : 21 Apr 2024  
doi: 10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.544-554

### Abstract

The current study aimed to identify the development of the self-concept of kindergarten children through free play from the point of view of teachers. The study sample consisted of (85) 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 applied during the first semester of the academic year (2023/2024), the study used the descriptive analytical approach, and the researchers designed a questionnaire addressed to kindergarten teachers to find out the development of the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play from the point of view of the teachers. The questionnaire contained 17 items distributed on three main areas. The first area included "the reality of developing the self-concept of the kindergarten child through free play in kindergarten institutions," the second included "the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the self-concept of the kindergarten child through free play in kindergarten institutions," and the third included "proposals for activating the development of the self-concept of the kindergarten child." Through free play in kindergarten institutions from the teachers' point of view. The results were processed and the study reached the following results: Free play has a fundamental role in developing the self-concept of the kindergarten child from the teachers' point of view to a large extent.

**Key words:** Developing self-concept, kindergarten child, kindergarten teachers,

**Introduction**

The concept of the self begins to form from the first moment the child begins to explore his body parts, specialized scientific studies state that self-concept means "the individual's idea of himself" and that this concept is not born with the individual, but rather is acquired.

Therefore, the concept of the self-occupies an important aspect in modern psychological and educational studies and research, as several personality theories have talked about. Self-care skills are considered among the basic skills that kindergarten children need to be taught and trained to help them overcome daily situations. Children's acquisition of these skills leads to raising their competence and ability at all age levels, which gives them the opportunity to deal with life with ease (Muhammad, 2012). Play helps in the child's mental development and has a significant impact on shaping the child's personality, building himself, his self-confidence, and his independence, all through developing physical, social, and moral abilities through individual and group games.

Developing the self-concept and modifying it in a way that is compatible with practical reality and true estimates, away from being immersed in children's wild imagination, is one of the most prominent and precise tasks of parents (Boutros, 2007). The truth is that play does not gain its educational value unless we can direct it on scientific foundations. Every age has its own games, with our interest in playing with our children.

The importance of the self-concept appears in that it constitutes one of the individual's internal motivations that has a certain impact on their adaptation to their educational environment during study. Therefore, knowing how to measure self-concept and an individual's self-perception helps in the process of evaluating the individual in terms of his ability to adapt and his self-confidence. It is also useful in planning by developing programs that help him increase his self-concept (Bani Jaber, 2002). Play helps the kindergarten child become aware of his outside world, and as the child grows older, he is able to develop many skills such as structure, imitation, organization, and exploration.

In addition, it has been shown that the self is the axis upon which influential perceptions towards others are based, and that when the individual accepts himself, he necessarily accepts others, and that the attitudes that form towards the self are reflected in the attitudes towards others (Boutros, 2007). Through play, the child can solve the problems he encounters within the group framework, free himself from the tendency to self-centeredness, and develop the team spirit in his personality.

Rogers, the author of the most prominent theory dealing with the concept of the self, states that the individual has the ability to overcome his problems on his own and that he is capable of making his own decisions freely. Rogers indicates that every human being is equipped with an innate ability that helps him to grow and develop, and he calls it the tendency for self-realization (Al-Aza, 1999). The surrounding physical environment affects the development of the child's personality.

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Scientists and researchers agree that the self-concept is considered the cornerstone of the personality, and that its basic function is to strive for the integration and consistency of the personality so that the individual adapts to the environment in which he lives, and creates an identity that distinguishes him from others. In this context, Rogers believes that by modifying the concept of the self, a change in behavior occurs, and that by introducing new experiences into the organization of the self in an emotional way, the feeling of contradiction and tension disappears. From this standpoint, looking at the task of developing the positive self-concept of the kindergarten child and working to solve the problem of the child's low self-concept is a very important thing, so the teacher must pay attention to it and develop appropriate programs and activities to develop the kindergarten child's self-concept.

Studies have confirmed the role of the self-concept in the individual's perception of himself and his environment and directing his behavior, which called for the establishment of a postulate that the individual's perceptions of the characteristics of his personality, ability, values, ideals, goals, and style in life are a comprehensive unit that affects his behavior, organization, and direction, as well as his compatibility and effectiveness (Al-Zoubi, 1994).

It has been proven that an individual's self-concept has a significant impact on many aspects of his behavior. It is also directly related to his mental state and personality in general. Those who see themselves as undesirable, worthless, or bad tend to behave according to the image in which they see themselves. People with an unrealistic concept of themselves also tend to deal with people and life in unrealistic ways. Those who have a deviant or abnormal concept of themselves also tend to behave in deviant or abnormal ways, and therefore information about how the individual perceives himself is important if we try to play a role in helping this individual, or trying to reach his correction.

From this standpoint, the concept of the self is not something that is inherited by a person, but rather is formed through interaction with the environment in which he lives, starting from childhood and through the various stages of development (Al-Zahir, 2004). From the above, we find that there is an urgent need to develop the child's self-care skills through free play from a young age, to be his tools with which he can act later, and for the child to be trained in good and positive behaviors in various life situations that are reflected on him and his environment. The importance of self-care skills for kindergarten children:

The importance of self-care skills lies in the following points: they help in realizing oneself and achieving self-confidence, they help in achieving a great deal of self-independence, they give the individual the ability to bear responsibility, they give the individual the ability to control emotions, they develop the ability to face life's problems, and they develop positive feelings. Within the child, towards himself and towards others in society, (Mahmoud, 2005).

**The study problem:**

The early development of the child's self-concept at this stage is of great importance in his environment and daily life skills and affects various age stages.

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 a kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions?
- 2- What is the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions?
- 3- What are the proposals for activating the development of kindergarten children's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions from the point of view of teachers?

### **Objectives of the study**

- Identify the reality of developing the self-concept of kindergarten children through free play in kindergarten institutions.
- Identify the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions.
- Coming up with proposals to activate the development of kindergarten children's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions from the point of view of teachers.

### **The importance of studying**

- Introducing teachers to the importance of self-awareness for children so that they can guide children and be more self-aware and able to solve problems related to these misconceptions about the self, and then modify the path of growth of the negative self-concept towards realism and positivity.
- Facilitating the gradual reduction of self-centeredness in children; In order to prepare them for school at the required level of development.
- Providing teachers with the opportunity to raise children on self-awareness and independence. By reviewing and increasing the program's methods and various activities.
- Adding a specialized scientific study, including data and information that is useful in developing care, upbringing, and education programs for early stage children.
- The researchers also expect that the current study will be a step towards further studies for those who wish to develop and prepare programs to develop self-concept for the same sample of children in places beyond the scope of the current study population.
- Directing those responsible in light of the preparation, planning, design, guidance and supervision of the child, and to prepare programs that provide him with concepts and experiences, and that give him the attitudes, inclinations and habits that enable him to live in today's society.

**The limits of the study**

The limitations of the study are as follows

Objective: Learn about kindergarten teachers' evaluation of developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play

Spatial boundaries: Najran city, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Time limits: First semester 2023-2024

Human Frontiers: Kindergarten teachers in Najran

**Terminology of study:****Self-concept:**

Saleh defines the self as the image with which a person identifies himself. It is the framework in which a person can imprint himself; So that he is aware of what is within himself, and the information that a person obtains about himself is considered things that he learns about himself. For this reason, he was able to portray himself in a way through which he can learn a lot about his true nature (Saleh, 1985). (Jad, 2016) stated that the kindergarten and the family must provide the child with opportunities for curiosity, exploration, and freedom to express his opinion within a framework of love, friendliness, tenderness, respect, and appreciation of the child's self, as accepting them leads to positive results that affect the child's personal and social adjustment and achieves more fulfillment for him. The knowledge, information, skills, attitudes, habits, inclinations, interests and values that he accepts. Studies have shown the positive effects of early childhood education programs on the educational and vocational aspect of the individual in the later stages, as well as on the achievement and performance of the child himself. Qasim (1998) defines it as a child's perception of himself and his description of it positively and negatively through a set of ideas and beliefs through which he expresses his physical characteristics, his general appearance, the extent of his competence, his view of his relationship with others - companions and adults - and his internal emotions towards himself. Imad al-Din Ismail's (1961) definition of the concept of the self sees it as the concept that the individual forms about himself as a biological and social being, that is, as a source of influence and influence for others. Zahran (1967) defines it as an organized, unified, and learned cognitive formation of emotional perceptions, perceptions, and generalizations about the self, which the individual crystallizes and considers as a psychological definition of himself (Zahran, 2005). Ibrahim definition of the concept of the self: It is a cognitive, emotional and social organization that includes the individual's responses to himself in internal and external situations that have a direct relationship to his life, and it constitutes an important dimension of his personality that has the greatest impact on his actions and behavior (Bani Jaber, 2002). There are positive effects of using educational play in the early childhood stage, which is working on the development of children socially, emotionally, physically and mentally, which helps them interact and develop their social skills in the later stages. Early childhood care and education is the most efficient and cost-effective investment in setting children on a path to lifelong learning and ensuring that all

of them have a fair chance to realize their potential.

**The concept of self-care skills:**

It is the child's reliance on himself to meet his various needs and his ability to bear the responsibility that qualifies him to interact with the society in which he lives, which leads to increasing the child's self-confidence. (Farraj, 2019).

**Kindergarten:**

Qenawi defines it as an educational and developmental institution that raises the child and gives him life values - considering that its role is an extension of the role of the home - and prepares him for regular school. It provides him with health care, ensures the child's growth, satisfies his needs in an equal manner, and allows him to engage in various toys so that he discovers himself, knows his abilities, works to develop them, and absorbs the culture of his society, so he lives happy and in harmony with himself and his society (Qenawi, 1993).

**Free play**

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**

Understanding the nature of children's games helps parents understand their children's need to play and provide appropriate games for them, but that alone is not enough without parents engaging in the activity of playing with their children. Therefore, many psychological needs can be satisfied while parents play with their children. A study (Mohammed, 2012), which pointed out the importance of life skills that help the child deal successfully and positively in his environment and confront the problems that he encounters in his daily life, and improve the style and quality of his life, which are represented in the skill of self-care, dealing with others, and other skills. The study (Azza Abdel Moneim Radwan, 2016) reviewed the role of enrichment activities in developing mathematical concepts among kindergarten children. In addition, the study (Fatima Sobhi Afifi, 2018), which indicated the importance of an enrichment program to develop some technological concepts among children in kindergarten institutions. Giving the child the freedom to use the toys he prefers, and to use them in a spontaneous way, as free play helps in developing the child's imagination and creativity.

**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 (85) 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

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identifying common practices and identifying opinions, beliefs and trends among individuals, in addition to ways of their growth and development. It also aims to study the existing relationships between different phenomena (Abdel Hafez, 2000), through kindergarten teachers' evaluation of the role of free play in developing the concept of self-care among 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 (17), 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 self-concept of kindergarten children from the point of view of teachers in kindergarten institutions, 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 a kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions	6	85	0.854
role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions	5	85	0.935
proposals for activating the development of kindergarten children's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions from the point of view of teachers	6	85	0.849

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

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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.

Table 2: means and standard deviations of the reality of developing the self-concept of kindergarten children through free play in kindergarten institutions

the reality of developing the self-concept of kindergarten children through free play in kindergarten institutions	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=85)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. Kindergarten helps achieve a great deal of autonomy for the kindergarten child in developing the self-concept.	2.47	0.885	High
2. Kindergarten gives the kindergarten child the ability to bear responsibility	2.55	0.976	High
3. Kindergarten gives the kindergarten child the ability to exercise emotional control	2.73	0.938	High
4. Kindergarten develops the kindergarten child's ability to face life's problems	2.69	0.948	High
5. Kindergarten develops positive feelings within the child towards himself and towards others in society.	2.49	0.859	High
6. Kindergarten helps the child establish social relationships with others	2.58	0.964	High

By reviewing the results of Table No. (2), the arithmetic averages of the responses of the sample members of kindergarten teachers to the items in this field range between (2.47-2.73), which is a large arithmetic average, and this indicates the knowledge and skills that kindergarten institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia assign to the child. Kindergarten regarding the importance of free play and its role in developing self-concept at this early stage, which depends on research, experimentation and exploration through various mechanisms that allow the child to 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 to develop self-concept through free play.

Table 3: means and standard deviations the role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions.

Role of the kindergarten teacher in developing the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions	Responses of kindergarten teacher's teacher (N.=85)		
	Mean	Std.	Practice degree
1. The kindergarten teacher helps to achieve a great deal of autonomy for the kindergarten child in developing the self-concept	2.56	0.845	High
2. The kindergarten teacher gives the kindergarten child the ability to bear responsibility	2.87	0.987	High



3.	The kindergarten teacher gives the kindergarten child the ability to exercise emotional control	2.45	0.965	High
4.	The kindergarten teacher develops the kindergarten child's ability to face life's problems	2.86	0.967	High
5.	The kindergarten teacher develops positive feelings within the child toward himself and toward others in society.	2.68	0.858	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 field were high and achieved to a large degree. The average ranged between items (2.45-2.78), which is a large arithmetic average. Which indicates that developing the self-concept of the kindergarten child through free play is greatly activated by the kindergarten teachers, and in light of calculating the arithmetic mean and standard deviation, it was found that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level ( $\geq \alpha 0.05$ ) between the responses of the study sample members. For phrases in this field.

**Table 4: means and standard deviations the proposals to activate the development of kindergarten children's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions from the point of view of teachers**

proposals to activate the development of kindergarten children's self-concept through free play in kindergarten institutions from the point of view of teachers	Responses of kindergarten teachers teacher (N.=85)		
	Mean	Std.	Rank Practice degree
1. Training the child in kindergarten to develop self-skills through research, experimentation, and exploration	2.66	0.976	High
2 Giving the kindergarten child activities based on free play and giving him a great deal of autonomy to develop Self skill	2.59	0.946	High
3 The kindergarten develops positive feelings within the child towards himself and towards others in society and gives him the opportunity to develop his self-concept	2.45	0.848	High
4 Giving the child the opportunity to rely on himself in nurturing some of his needs and trust him	2.76	0.967	High
5 Helping children gain self-confidence while encouraging them to develop a clear, positive self-concept that will be a strong support for the formation of an integrated, balanced personality.	2.87	0.978	High
6 The kindergarten encourages the child to gain independence in his life, which helps him deal with others and adapt to society	2.48	0.858	High

In light of the results of the aforementioned table, we find that the weighted arithmetic averages of the sample members' responses to the items in this field ranged between (2.45-2.87), 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 to activate free play in kindergarten institutions and its important role in developing self-concept have been achieved to a large extent, as free play plays an essential role in developing the child's self-concept.

### **Study conclusions**

- Kindergarten teachers rate the development of the child's self-concept to a very high degree, and they have a high self-concept.
- It appeared from the evaluation of kindergarten teachers regarding the assessment of self-concept development that it is high and evaluated positively, so that children can be trained on it in light of regular training and guidance.
- It was clear from the results of the study that involving children in extended group activities and games for free play had a significant impact on improving the development of self-concept.
- The kindergarten teacher's use of continuous encouragement and praise and avoiding criticism or reprimand helps children accept themselves better.

### **Study recommendations:**

Through the results related to this study, which aimed to develop the kindergarten child's self-concept through free play from the teachers' point of view, some recommendations and proposals can be presented, including the following:

- Increase activities that rely on free play to develop self-concept
- Involving relevant community institutions in activating free play to develop the kindergarten child's self-concept by creating educational and recreational programs and activities by providing the child with the opportunity to play freely and without restrictions.
- 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.
- Benefiting 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 manner appropriate to the circumstances.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors are thankful to the Deanship of Scientific Research at Najran University for funding this work under the Research Priorities and Najran Research funding program grant code (NU/NRP/SEHRC/12/4).

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