

**LEARNING WHILE PLAYING: THE  
EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF PLAY IN  
CHILDHOOD**



**Dr. Mehmet DEMİRHAN**

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# LEARNING WHILE PLAYING: THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDHOOD

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## **PREFACE**

Play is considered an indispensable element in children's development. Both a natural need and a powerful learning tool, play supports children's physical, social, emotional and mental skills. Play is not only a fun activity, but also a powerful tool that plays a multifaceted role in children's development. Educators and parents should support children's development by increasing their opportunities to play. Play is a valuable teaching method that offers the opportunity to learn by having fun and to have fun while learning. In this context, I believe that this book, which describes the effects of play on children and its contributions to children in detail, will be a basic resource that guides educators, parents and researchers conducting scientific research.

30/04/2025

**Dr. Mehmet DEMİRHAN**



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# **LEARNING WHILE PLAYING: THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF PLAY IN CHILDHOOD**

Dr. Mehmet DEMİRHAN

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Play is a learning activity used in almost every period of human life, especially in childhood. Many definitions of play have been made by scientists. Play is an extremely important activity that develops the physical and mental structure of the child, enables him/her to gain individuality and freedom and to establish a relationship with the world of objects, and also helps him/her to socialize (Gürün, 1984). According to Piaget (2013), play is a process in which children develop their cognitive structures by establishing a relationship with their environment. Play is an entertaining activity that aims to develop mental and physical abilities, emotional maturity and social harmony, has its own rules, takes place in an environment different from real life, does not provide any material benefit at the end, forms a social group through voluntary participation, lasts for a limited time and place, and affects the participants (Tamer, 1987).

Play is a fundamental activity that continues to exist in human life from childhood to adulthood and has an important role in development, especially in childhood. Play can be defined as a natural activity that allows the individual to both have fun and learn. Play is also a tool that supports social, emotional, cognitive and physical

development (Ginsburg, 2007). The game is a kind of competition that is based on calculation, obsession, attention, talent and skill for the development of people's mental and physical abilities and is often played for distraction and at the same time gives pleasure (Seyrek & Sun, 1991).

According to Özyeşer Cinel (2006), play is the common name given to all activities that support children's mental, physical and psychological development, make them happy and often appear as a mirror of social life. Play is a part of real life and the most effective learning process for children, which is the basis of mental, psychological, physical, emotional, social and linguistic development, which may or may not be aimed at a certain goal, may be without rules or with rules, but which the child always enjoys and willingly does (Sormaz, 2011). Games are defined as activities that cause the formation of a certain group through voluntary participation in a limited time and place, with mental and physical abilities, with mental and physical abilities to achieve certain goals, in times outside of people's daily work and occupations, that provide social harmony, have determined rules and develop emotional maturity, require intelligence, skill, attention and ability, affect the people who watch the game and those who participate in the game, experience a sense of tension, do not provide material benefits as a result, and provide pleasure and enjoyment (Hazar, 2000). Based on all these definitions, it can be said that play is a pleasant process that entertains the child,



teaches while entertaining and contributes to the holistic development of the child.

Since the 19th century, people have developed a social consciousness. There have been changes in the perspective on play and children; this change has evolved in a more positive direction compared to previous times. The perception that play is unnecessary or a pastime for leisure time has changed and it has been adopted that play is a necessity that contributes to the development of the child (Bardak & Topaç, 2022). Unlike adults, children can meet some of their physical, mental, social and emotional needs on their own, while in some cases they need external support. One of the most important tools for meeting these needs is play. Play, like nutrition, should be seen as one of the child's basic needs. Regardless of the conditions in which the child finds himself/herself, he/she somehow finds a space and material to play. Play is an indispensable element that enriches his/her life and enables him/her to learn and develop. In any part of the world, in any culture, children are seen to play. This is because play is not only entertainment, but also an integral part of their lives and one of the cornerstones of their developmental process (Gökşen, 2014).

Play creates a fun learning environment for children that they will enjoy. Besides its instructive function, play also has an educational aspect. While playing, the child jumps, jumps, runs, jumps, laughs, gets emotional, shouts and calls (Yaman, 2015). It can be said that all these behaviors contribute to the socialization of the child as well as helping him/her to discharge his/her energy. During the play process,

the child gains behaviors such as research, exploring, empathizing, sharing, following rules, developing skills and abilities, gaining experience, etc. by interacting with friends (Sevinç, 2009). (Harmandar, 2004; Kale, 2007; Küçükkaya, 2008) listed the benefits of play as follows:

- Through play, children learn how to succeed, gain power, lose and win. In this way, they develop mentally and physically as well as in terms of controlling their emotions and excitement.
- The child develops and exercises his/her body using his/her muscles.
- Self-confidence increases with the skills the child develops in play.
- Play develops the child's intelligence.
- It teaches children to orient themselves towards a goal, to focus their attention, to see problems that arise during play and to find solutions to these problems.
- Improves decision-making ability.
- In play, children fulfill their need to be free and self-sufficient.
- Play helps the child to establish harmonious relationships with their environment.
- Through games, children try their own strengths, make moves, get rid of the situations under the control of adults, compete

within the limits set by their own age, and learn to accept it like a good athlete even if they lose..

- Play is one of the most effective and important tools in the child's socialization process. Through such activities, the child learns to act together with others, to cooperate, to cope with problems and find solutions, to be a leader, to follow others, to evaluate himself/herself in terms of skills and abilities by comparing himself/herself with others.
- The games the child participates in and chooses and the roles he/she assumes in these games provide clues to reveal his/her personality.
- Through play, the child expresses his/her anxieties, fears and sorrows; he/she also expresses his/her problems, troubles and depressions. He/she gets rid of the burden of his/her worries and discharges.
- The most effective method for treating a child's psychological problems is through play. The best and most effective relationship with the child is established during play. Getting to know the child, finding out the causes of his/her problems and troubles is done through play.
- In the process of play, the person stops listening to himself/herself and enriches his/her perception of the outside world with new clues. This, in turn, can help to eliminate any irregularities and insecurities that may exist in the personality.

Tüfekçioğlu & Özdoğ (2001) stated that play is the most effective and most important educational tool in preschool and primary school in terms of development, motivation and learning of young children. Children who learn through play both actively participate in the learning process and learn by having fun, so they feel excitement and pleasure from the activity they do. This makes their learning more permanent. Play contributes to the child's psychomotor, emotional, social, linguistic, physical and mental development and enables him/her to adopt and understand his/her social role in the society in which he/she lives. Through play, the individual becomes aware of the characteristics that make him/her different from other individuals. In addition, they learn to make decisions, to be entrepreneurial, and to take danger and risk (Pehlivan, 2005).

Bacanlı (2006) explained the effects of play on children as follows: Play facilitates the child's process of adaptation to the world and helps him/her understand what the real world is. It enables them to cope with unwanted situations by playing games; it lays the cornerstones of their development such as language, concepts and sentences through play. They test social roles through play; they find stimuli through play that they often do not find readily available in the real world.

## **2. THE EFFECT OF PLAY ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Children create a pretend scenario by negotiating and talking with peers, and they use props in a symbolic way. Children create specific roles--and rules--for pretend behavior and they adopt multiple themes and multiple roles. Early childhood classrooms provide a unique

setting to foster the kind of dramatic play that will lead to cognitive and social maturity. There are other children to play with, a setting that can be organized to encourage imaginative play, and adults who can encourage the play, guiding children to play effectively with each other. Indeed, this is the cornerstone for all learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Sautot (2006) lists the contributions of play on children as follows:

- **Play is a basic need:** Play is essential for a child's language development, mental processes and emotional balance. While playing, children focus their attention, shape their thoughts, develop decision-making skills and use reasoning strategies. At the same time, through play, they get to know their body better, increase their mobility and discover their strengths.
- **Play promotes socialization:** Since most games are played with more than one person, they relieve children from loneliness and involve them in a social environment. When playing together, children learn to follow rules, understand and respect others. Jointly setting the rules in play strengthens the sense of cooperation and contributes to teamwork.
- **Play is a cultural element:** Play is a common feature of societies and exists in different forms in each culture. It can be seen on television, in the park, at home or on playgrounds. Each society has its own unique games and exploring these games helps to understand the way of thinking and cultural structure of that society.

- **Play is a learning tool:** While playing, the child also becomes an active part of the learning process. Through movement, they learn to use their energy in a balanced way, recognize their mistakes and practice correcting them. Facing success and failure, they develop tolerance, analyze the reasons for their mistakes and discover ways to make progress. The game teaches winning and losing, while at the same time strengthening work discipline and motivation.
- **Play supports the educational process:** Play encourages students to learn and increases their interest in lessons. Classroom games stimulate mental skills and enable active learning. Through play, students focus their attention, strengthen their language development and increase their social interaction. It becomes a tool to encourage participation, especially for shy and anxious students. It also creates a closer communication and sharing environment between teacher and student.

Play has positive effects on children's development in many areas including physical/psychomotor, cognitive, social, emotional and language development. These positive effects contribute to the development of children as a whole and help them to become more self-confident, responsible individuals with developed skills and abilities at a later age. In this section, the benefits of play on children are presented under separate headings.

## **2.1. The Effect of Play on Physical and Psychomotor Development of Children**

Playing games is one of the most important events that affect the physical development of the child. Playing games has many contributions to the child's psychomotor and physical development (Ceylan, 2015). The child is born with psychomotor skills and abilities such as attention, readiness to react, flexibility, speed, coordination and stillness. In a play environment, these skills and abilities develop in a healthy way. By making movements through play, children exercise their bodies without feeling too tired (Poyraz, 2003). Through play, especially games that require movement and physical strength such as jumping, running, jumping, climbing, etc., the child's systems such as respiration, circulation and digestion are ensured to work regularly (Yılmaz & Erduran, 2015).

Movement is a very important activity for children activity. During their developmental stages, children have an extreme desire to move. Movement not only allows children to be confident in their own abilities, but also helps to improve their self-confidence. It allows them to gain confidence and self-esteem as a result of experiences in the field of movement (Pehlivan, 2012). Outdoor games help children develop in a healthy way. It helps them gain flexibility and strengthen their muscles. It provides muscle, joint and nerve coordination. The game allows children to eliminate their tensions by removing excess energy (MEB, 2007). In addition, play contributes to the child's physical development, strength development, speed and quickness

development, flexibility and mobility development, endurance, coordination and skill development (Küçükaya, 2008). The sequentiality and repetition of movements during the game increases the performance and strength of the body. Muscles that memorize and encode these repeated movements gain agility and quickness (MEB, 2009). Testing motor responses during play enables the acquisition of fluent, accurate and fast motor skills. During play, the child learns to control his/her own body. While hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills develop when playing with small objects, gross motor skills can be developed when the child plays with larger, bulky and moving objects (Pehlivan, 2005).

Play not only develops the child's mental, emotional and psycho-social abilities, but also contributes to the child's physical development and helps the child to become a physically well-trained individual in later life (Ağbuğa & Aslan, 2010).

## **2.2. The Effect of Play on the Child's Emotional Development**

Play is a powerful tool that shapes not only children's physical and cognitive development, but also their emotional world. Play is a natural learning process that enables children to understand and express their own emotions and recognize the emotions of others. Play in early childhood can strengthen a child's emotional intelligence by developing confidence, self-awareness and coping skills (Ginsburg, 2007).



Children experience many emotions such as anger, rage, jealousy, sadness, joy, fear, violence, pain, anxiety, friendship and enmity while playing games. They learn to cope with these emotions by experiencing them in games, and they learn how to cope with these emotions by eliminating the negative anxiety and worries caused by these emotions (Ağyar, 2014). Play increases the child's abilities and skills and clarifies their emotions. Play not only teaches the child to respect others but also to respect himself/herself. It is an environment where they try what they see and hear, reinforce what they learn and correct their wrong and negative behaviors. Players striving to win the game find different solutions by trying different alternatives. In this way, the game activates those who are passive and encourages those who are cowardly (MEB, 2007).

Play can boost children's self-confidence. In particular, games based on physical skills can strengthen the self-confidence of children who experience a sense of achievement. Moreover, when they succeed in solving complex tasks, their self-belief is reinforced. Research shows that children's experience of risk-taking during play is critical for the development of self-confidence (Whitebread & Basilio, 2013). Environments such as family, school and friend groups are the environments where emotions are best experienced and reflected. Ensuring that the child expresses his/her reactions in certain environments during the play age can be a sign of a healthy emotional development for the child. In these environments, the child can gain emotional development characteristics such as love, respect, losing,

struggling, winning, personality development, living together and cooperation (Şimşek, 1998). During play, we can clearly see the joy, excitement and happiness of the child. Through play, the child learns to control his/her reactions. His/her self-confidence increases. It gets rid of selfishness and thinks about its friends (Maden Ellialtıoğlu, 2005).

In order to get to know his/her students in the best possible way, an ideal teacher constantly observes them and tries to understand their psychological state through their behavior in the game. If necessary, he/she interacts with parents and psychological counselors and cooperates with them to solve the psychological problems of his/her students (Seyrek & Sun, 2003). Küçükkaya (2008) listed the contributions of play to the child's emotional development as follows:

- The child learns to manage and control his/her emotional reactions.
- He/she gets rid of constantly waiting for the attention of adults.
- It gets away from its problems and also reveals its emotional problems in the game.
- They feel joy and pleasure.
- The child develops self-confidence.
- Aesthetic appreciation develops.

During play, children learn to cope with different emotional states. For example, experiencing the roles of winner and loser in group play

helps children learn how to cope with disappointment (Berk, 2013). In addition, imaginative play increases children's emotional regulation skills, allowing them to cope with stress. According to research, children who play dramatic play perform better in developing their emotional awareness and coping strategies (Russ, 2004).

### **2.3. The Effect of Play on the Child's Social Development**

It can be said that play is one of the most important tools that initiate the child's relationship with the outside world. The child's desire to meet his/her basic needs (loving, being loved, making friends, approval, rejection, being included in a group, cooperation, sharing, etc.) can meet his/her psycho-social development in the best way in the company he/she establishes with other children (Dinç, 1993). Play is as vital to a child's healthy growth and development as nutrition and love. Through play, children express their emotions; they express their sadness, anxiety, love, jealousy and dreams. This process helps them discover themselves and become aware of their individual characteristics. In particular, imaginative play, pretend play and dramatic play to portray professions contribute greatly to children's social development. While playing games, children learn to communicate effectively with others, share, cooperate and help each other. They also develop problem-solving skills through various situations they encounter in play. Social rules and ethical values are adopted more naturally and easily through play. Therefore, play is not only an activity in which children have fun, but also an important

element in shaping their character and skill development (Cirhinlioğlu, 2001).

A game is a group activity and all games have certain rules. If these rules are not followed, they are excluded from the game. Since children are aware of this situation, they do not go beyond the rules and accept them even at the risk of being defeated. Likewise, there are certain rules in society. Children learn socialization rules such as expressing their thoughts and respecting the thoughts of others, defending their rights, respecting the rights of others, and accepting differences through play. Thus, children who protect and preserve the order of society and obey the rules are raised (Hazar, 2000). The contributions of play to the child's social development are as follows (Filiz & Küçükkaya, 2008):

- The child learns to socialize.
- The child understands his/her sexual role in society.
- Children who protect their personal rights and freedoms learn to respect the rights and freedoms of others.
- They learn cooperation, solidarity, sharing and collaboration.
- The child learns the rules of etiquette and morality and applies these rules. They learn to protect living and non-living beings and objects around them and not to harm them.
- They learn to be a leader or a member, to win and lose.

- The child learns the family roles in the game and the responsibilities, duties and behaviors in the family. Repeats and reinforces the appropriate ones.
- Play is an important method for children to gain social and personal habits such as self-confidence, self-control, quick decision-making, accuracy and discipline.
- Children learn about professions and their duties through play.
- While playing, children develop their ability to communicate with people and observation skills.
- Through play, children learn social rules such as listening to others, saying thank you, obeying traffic rules, talking on the phone, and waiting their turn.
- Through play, children learn moral concepts such as good-bad, beautiful-ugly, right-wrong, right and wrong.
- Children make friends through games.
- Children develop communication skills during games.
- The rules in games are a preparation for the rules of real life.
- In addition, children learn about losing, patience and anger control in games.

Children are guided during the game by hidden or established rules. There is no risk of failure in the game, the children themselves decide what to do and how to do it. Younger children can create rules that fit

their role or object use, or they can change the rules and play in a different way. Older children accept the predetermined rules that guide the game (Aksoy & Çiftçi, 2014). It is very important for children to know their limits and act according to certain standards in games determined by rules in order to socialize and comply with social rules.

Children learn to cooperate and share during play. Especially in group play, children experience the importance of taking turns, setting common goals and working together to achieve these goals. Research shows that games that require social interaction develop children's social skills such as sharing and empathy (Rubin et al., 2006). Play is the most natural way for children to create and negotiate. When children come together, they begin to share toys and play, sometimes without even learning each other's names. Because play functions as a common language for children. Through play, children develop a friendship and this is very beneficial for their socialization (Seyrek & Sun, 2003).

Play is the most natural environment of socialization, communication and agreement for children. Randomly gathered together, children start playing games before they even learn each other's names. Thus, children learn to share, socialize, communicate with each other, relate to people, respect and love through play (Kale, 1997). As a member of a group of friends, the child learns about himself/herself through his/her experiences in play. In addition to his/her existing place in the family, he/she will be aware of a more realistic and objective structure

of his/her own self when he/she is with peers. He/she can discover his/her potential and talents and see what he/she can contribute to the group in a social environment. In this way, he/she discovers his/her strengths and weaknesses and can face social experiences such as exclusion or acceptance. The child will discover his/her real limits with the skills he/she gains during play (Sevinç, 2009).

Children with strong social skills both adapt more easily to their environment during childhood and develop the ability to adapt to different situations in adulthood. In order for children to acquire these skills, it is crucial to involve families and community members in preschool education settings. Adults who interact with young children and experience the learning process themselves can better understand the importance of play. Play offers critical skills that cannot be acquired in traditional learning environments. By engaging in active learning, families can observe how play helps children express themselves, develop problem-solving skills and make their learning more effective. This convinces them of the powerful effects of play on children's development (Thyssen, 2003).

#### **2.4. The Effect of Play on Children's Language Development**

Play also supports children's language skills. Especially in group play, children develop their ability to communicate, ask and answer questions. According to Vygotsky's social learning theory, play is an important tool that accelerates children's language development through social interaction (Nicolopoulou, 2010). During play, children can express themselves verbally as well as through body language by

communicating with their friends, and develop skills such as comprehending, perceiving, describing and summarizing events (Carlson & Gingeland, 1961 as cited in Öncü & Akbay, 2006).

Children develop both listening and comprehension skills during play. For example, explaining the rules during play or following the narrative in story-based games reinforces both receptive and expressive aspects of language (Singer et al., 2006). During play, children use language for developing vocabulary, understanding verbal expressions, using verb tenses in events, cognitive evaluation, asking and answering questions, sequencing, giving orders, expressing feelings and thoughts, telling imaginary situations, transferring information, analyzing, problem solving, predicting, learning the names and tasks of tools and objects (Filiz, 2008). Akandere (2004) draws attention to the fact that the language used by children in games is used as a tool to develop their vocabulary, to make sense of words, and to convey feelings and thoughts. Even when children play alone, they talk to themselves or their toys and express their feelings and thoughts. Through play, children learn to ask questions and give answers to these questions. They distinguish various sounds and learn the names given to these sounds. They recognize tools and objects and express the differences between them (MEB, 2011).

A child who does not play or is prevented from playing cannot develop in a healthy physical and psychological way. This is because play has stimulating effects on the child and these stimuli stimulate the child's developmental areas. It has been observed that children



who grow up playing games are more socially active and sociable than children who do not play games, their creativity skills are higher, their speech and expressions are smooth and their vocabulary is richer (Davaslıgil, 1989).

Ellialtıođlu (2005) stated that playing games such as drama that require long sentences will make a great contribution to the development of vocabulary. A child who develops feelings such as helping others, protecting the weak, and unity during play and gains these values also contributes to the formation of a healthy social structure when he/she grows up in the future. A child who learns new words during play, learns and uses their meanings, learns what the toys he/she plays with are for and for what purpose they are used, develops the ability to both understand and explain. The child learns to form well-organized and meaningful sentences with the new concepts and words he/she learns and gains the ability to express his/her thoughts comfortably in the community (Tuncar, 1999). It is a fact that the communication skills of the child who interacts with his/her friends in the game will improve, and at the same time the vocabulary of the child who discovers new words and concepts will be enriched.

## **2.5. The Effect of Play on the Mental/Cognitive Development of the Child**

Play has an important place in children's natural learning process. Especially in early childhood, learning through play plays a key role in the development of cognitive skills. Cognitive development can be

defined as the progression of children's thinking, understanding, problem solving and information processing abilities (Piaget, 2013). Play teaches reasoning, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, paying attention, making choices, and setting and pursuing a goal. It enables the development and acceleration of mental processes such as comprehension, perception, sorting, classification, thinking, analysis and synthesis, problem solving and evaluation. It enables the acquisition of many concepts such as size, volume, weight, time, place, ground, hot, cold, shape, color, etc. It acquires the ability to solve the problems it encounters by using this knowledge (MEB, 2009).

Different types of play support cognitive development in different ways. Strategy games develop children's planning, decision-making and problem-solving skills, while structured games support memory and information processing abilities (Singer & Singer, 2009). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, play enables children to construct their conceptual knowledge by interacting with the world (Vygotsky, 1978). The contribution of play to mental development is new learning. The child recognizes all kinds of objects and all kinds of concepts in play and learns the tasks, purposes and usage characteristics of these concepts and objects. This learning is the result of work and the accumulation of knowledge in the mind. At the same time, the use of learned concepts and objects in various forms by adding them to vocabulary and language vocabulary contributes to language development (Seyrek & Sun, 1991). Play is

one of the most important and widespread methods of learning, especially at a young age. Some of the research on learning and the brain is based on this data. Associating the data collected in the brain with each other, analyzing, synthesizing, making evaluations and establishing cause-effect relationships are realized through learning (Bardak & Topaç, 2022).

Problem solving is often encountered during play. Children learn to generate alternative solutions and think logically through play. For example, building games with blocks develop children's spatial awareness and analytical thinking skills (Berk, 2013). Studies show that creative and problem-solving games increase children's cognitive flexibility (Weisberg, et al., 2016).

Through play, children develop skills such as perception, comprehension, problem solving, analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, etc., as well as cognitive skills such as establishing cause-and-effect relationships between events, creative thinking, and producing practical solutions to problems (Altunay, 2004). During play, the child is constantly engaged in a mental activity. In other words, play can be called the child's mental training. Because the child, who recognizes and learns to use new concepts and objects, unconsciously tries to understand the properties of these objects and concepts by comparing them with each other. During play, the child is constantly engaged in mental activity in terms of abstract abilities such as comprehension, thinking, symbolization and perception. This is one of the most

important factors affecting mental development (Hanbaba, 2011).

Play:

- Concepts, recognizing objects, intended uses of objects,
- Establishing cause-effect relationships, reasoning, goal setting and management, concentration, focusing,
- It activates the functioning of mental processes such as sorting, classification, comprehension, analysis and synthesis, thinking, problem solving and evaluation (MoNE, 2007).

### **3. CONCLUSION**

In a contemporary approach, play is the child's it is an important opportunity for children to express themselves, to realize their talents, to reveal and use their creative potential, and to develop their language, mental, social, emotional and motor skills (Can & Çava Kuru, 2018). Play is a tool used to learn how to learn at every stage of life, but especially in early childhood and childhood. Play is an indispensable tool in the development of the individual and one of his/her natural learning processes. For children, play is not only a fun activity but also a platform for developing life skills. Educators and parents should encourage play environments to support children, taking into account these important functions of play. While playing with friends, children learn to value other people's opinions, learn that they can have different views, learn to get rid of self-centeredness and learn to respect other people's opinions and freedoms. In the process of play, children learn values and rules such as waiting for their turn,

taking responsibility, respecting the rights of their friends, right-wrong, right and wrong (Yılmaz & Erduran, 2015).

Early childhood educators know how important play is in children's lives. Play is not only an enjoyable and spontaneous activity of young children but it also contributes significantly to children's psychological development (Verenikina vd., 2003). Children's games are important in terms of child education, development and social culture, as well as in terms of pedagogy. According to educational sciences, the most effective way of educating children is play. The child learns the knowledge, skills, behaviors, etc. necessary for life through improvisation in play. They comprehend, adopt and reinforce phenomena such as cooperation, bilateral relations, life roles, habits and speech in play. The talents of the child can be better discovered in play and the necessary guidance can be given for the development of these talents. In addition, the child's personality emerges clearly in play (Seyrek & Sun, 2003). In this context, games can be seen as an opportunity for parents and educators. A good educator and a good observer of a child's play can use it very effectively in child education.

Through play, children have the opportunity to explore various concepts and events. Play helps them recognize and name objects in their environment and understand their functions. In this process, they use many cognitive skills such as paying attention, sorting, perceiving, establishing cause and effect relationships, analyzing and problem solving. Through play, children learn the distinguishing characteristics of objects from other objects and grasp the concepts that express these

characteristics. The new concepts they learn guide them in solving different problems they encounter. For this reason, play has an important place in children's mental development (Sağlam, 2016).

Many people may think that children's play is just fun and has no special purpose. However, play is very important for children in terms of developing and controlling motor and mental skills. Through play, children learn different concepts, gain social awareness and improve their social behavior. During childhood, play is a natural and indispensable process that supports learning and development. Play, which is a part of children's lives from an early age, not only entertains them but also enables them to experiment, explore, learn and interact with their environment. In this process, children gain independence and develop the ability to stand on their own feet. In addition, important social skills such as cooperation, sharing and human relations are strengthened through play. Therefore, play in childhood is very valuable and beneficial for the all-round development of children (Çelik, 2024). Play is an essential element in a child's cognitive development. Different types of play enrich children's learning and thinking processes, helping them to develop stronger cognitive skills. Educators and parents should use play effectively to support children's cognitive development. Play has a multifaceted impact on children's language development. Different types of play and social interaction expand children's vocabulary and strengthen their communication skills. Educators in schools and

parents at home should actively use games to develop children's language skills and provide children with a rich play environment.

Games create a fun learning environment for individuals of all age groups. It can be said that games should be used as an effective learning tool in preschool years, as well as games should be used as an educational tool/material for primary school children to pass the lessons effectively and efficiently. It is understood that thanks to games, children's interest and active participation in lessons and subjects increase. In addition to increasing the learning level of children, the game provides socialization of students (Özyürek & Çavuş, 2016). Games and toys are of great importance for physical and mental health at every stage of development. The family in the home environment, teachers in educational institutions and health workers in the hospital environment can make significant contributions to all areas of development (physical, intellectual, emotional and social) of children by using play effectively. Play is an indispensable element of child development. For this reason, families, teachers and health professionals should create appropriate play environments for children, provide them with the necessary materials for play, give them the necessary opportunities and support their play (Bekmezci & Özkan, 2015).

One of the types of games that teachers should play at school is educational games. It is possible to define educational games as games that can be done for course objectives within the framework of rules. Word games, finding rhyming words, finding synonyms and

antonyms, guessing the word based on the picture, explaining the intended word without forbidden words, forming meaningful words from mixed letters can be shown as examples of educational games frequently used in language education (Aytaş & Uysal, 2017). Children need to acquire many important competencies such as exploring, taking risks, and developing fine and gross motor skills during their development. These skills can be learned effectively and naturally through play-based activities. Because children are naturally predisposed to learning through play. Especially for young children, lessons and learning processes are much more efficient when shaped through play. Play offers children the best learning experience, encouraging them to explore, learn and develop. In the educational process, play is not only a fun activity, but also a powerful tool that enables children to acquire skills (Güneş, 2017).

Play contributes significantly to children's social development. Skills such as cooperation, sharing, empathy, problem solving and belonging are key social competencies that children can learn naturally during play. Teachers and parents should consciously structure and encourage play environments to support children's social development. In conclusion, play has a great contribution to children's exploration of their emotional world and their healthy guidance of this world. Games that contribute to the development of both individual and social emotional skills support children to become individuals with stronger emotional intelligence skills in their future lives.



Educators and parents can support this process by consciously structuring play environments.

### **Ethics Declaration**

This book is intended for academic and scientific purposes only and the results of the research will not be used for any personal gain or manipulated with conflicts of interest in mind.

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