

PLAY ACTIVITIES IN THE PROCESS OF EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL
DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. This article explores the crucial role of play activities in shaping the emotional and intellectual development of preschool children. Play is regarded not merely as entertainment but as an essential medium through which children learn, communicate, and construct their understanding of the world. The study emphasizes how different types of play — symbolic, constructive, social, and cognitive — contribute to developing empathy, creativity, problem-solving skills, and emotional regulation. Attention is given to the pedagogical role of teachers and parents in organizing play environments that stimulate curiosity and self-expression. The paper concludes that structured yet flexible play is one of the most powerful instruments in nurturing a child’s holistic growth and readiness for school life.

Keywords: preschool education, play activity, emotional development, intellectual development, creativity, communication.

INTRODUCTION

Play is the natural language of childhood. It is through play that children make sense of the world, interact with others, and express their emotions. Long before formal education begins, play serves as the foundation of all learning processes, stimulating both emotional and intellectual development. Psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget have long demonstrated that play is not a peripheral activity but a core mechanism of human cognitive and social evolution. Vygotsky described play as a “leading activity” in preschool age, through which children internalize cultural norms and learn to regulate behavior. Piaget, in turn, saw play as a form of symbolic assimilation that allows children to reconstruct reality according to their own experience and imagination [1].

The preschool period, typically from three to six years of age, is a time when emotional sensitivity and intellectual curiosity reach their most active stages. Children begin to observe, ask questions, and engage in imaginative scenarios that help them explore feelings, social roles, and logical relationships. Play, therefore, becomes the child’s laboratory for emotional understanding and intellectual discovery — a space where thought and emotion are intertwined.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Play activities can be classified into several major types, each contributing uniquely to a child’s emotional and intellectual growth. Symbolic play — such as pretending to be a doctor, teacher, or parent — allows children to experiment with roles, develop empathy, and understand complex emotions. Through role-playing, they learn to anticipate others’ reactions, negotiate social rules, and process inner experiences. For instance, when a child comforts a “sick doll,” they are not merely imitating adults but also internalizing emotional regulation patterns like empathy, reassurance, and compassion [2].

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Constructive play, such as building with blocks or drawing, enhances spatial reasoning, creativity, and problem-solving skills. During such activities, children learn to plan, predict, and reflect on outcomes, developing early cognitive functions necessary for logical thinking. Each construction, drawing, or model reflects the child's attempt to bring order to their perception of reality. The mistakes made along the way become valuable learning experiences that foster perseverance and adaptability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Equally important is social play, which involves cooperation with peers. When children share toys, follow rules in group games, or create joint stories, they develop communication skills, patience, and self-control. Social play teaches the value of mutual respect, teamwork, and fairness — traits that will later support successful adaptation in school and society. Group games also help children experience healthy competition, learn to manage disappointment, and celebrate collective achievements.

From the perspective of emotional development, play serves as a mechanism of psychological balance. In a playful environment, children freely express joy, anger, fear, or excitement without social judgment. This safe expression of feelings helps them develop resilience and emotional intelligence. Play is thus a natural form of psychotherapy for children, allowing them to release tension and build confidence. Teachers and caregivers who observe children's play can identify emotional difficulties early and provide support through guided activities that nurture stability and self-esteem [3].

Intellectually, play promotes the formation of abstract thinking and language development. When children engage in storytelling or make-believe games, they construct complex narratives that stimulate imagination and linguistic creativity. According to Montessori, the child's mind at this stage is an "absorbent mind" — capable of learning vast amounts of information through sensory experience and repetition. Hence, educational play that involves rhythm, sound, color, and movement enhances both cognitive flexibility and memory.

The design of the play environment plays a decisive role in shaping developmental outcomes. A rich and varied environment — equipped with books, manipulatives, art materials, and natural objects — provides opportunities for exploration and experimentation. The teacher's role is not to direct play rigidly but to observe, guide, and enrich it with meaningful prompts. Effective educators strike a balance between freedom and structure: they allow autonomy while subtly introducing new concepts, questions, and challenges that expand the child's understanding.

Family involvement is another pillar of successful play-based education. Parents who actively participate in play create stronger emotional bonds with their children and model social and cognitive behaviors. Simple household play, such as cooking together, sorting objects by color or size, or reading picture books aloud, contributes significantly to emotional security and intellectual readiness. The consistency between the home and preschool environments reinforces a child's sense of stability and confidence.

CONCLUSION

The emotional and intellectual development of preschool children cannot be separated from the quality and nature of their play experiences. Play is not simply recreation but a developmental necessity that shapes personality, cognition, and emotional intelligence. Through various forms of play — symbolic, constructive, social, and creative — children develop empathy, communication, imagination, and analytical reasoning.

Educators and parents must therefore recognize play as the cornerstone of early education, ensuring that children are provided with environments rich in stimulation, freedom, and emotional warmth.

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Play-centered pedagogy lays the groundwork for lifelong curiosity, resilience, and the capacity for meaningful relationships. In nurturing the joy of play, society invests in the balanced, innovative, and compassionate minds of the future.

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