The role of play in shaping early childhood character: A systematic literature review

By didi suryadi

The role of play in shaping early childhood character: A systematic literature review
Peran bermain dalam membentuk karakter anak usia dini: Sebuah tinjauan literatur yang sistematis

Review Article

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Abstract.

Background Early childhood character development plays a crucial role in the educational process. However, in practice, it is often overlooked. The concept of "learning through play and playing while learning" is fundamental to children's education. Play serves as a vital tool for stimulating various aspects of child development, including religious and moral values, cognitive abilities, language skills, social-emotional growth, physical-motor skills, and artistic expression.

Objectives This study aims to explore the role of play in fostering character development in children. Providing children with opportunities to engage in play allows them to internalize positive character traits effectively.

Methods This study employs a library research approach, utilizing secondary data obtained from previous studies rather than direct observations. A total of 13 national journals discussing children's character development were analyzed. These journals were sourced from Google Scholar using the keyword ("children's character development").

Results Based on the reviewed literature, it can be concluded that play is highly effective in fostering children's character development. The findings highlight three key aspects: (1)The role of play and physical activities in shaping children's character.(2) The importance of character development in early childhood.(3) The influence of education and parental involvement in character-building.

Conclusion The study results indicate that integrating play into sports-based learning significantly contributes to early childhood character formation. Through sports, children develop essential values such as responsibility, mutual respect, perseverance, teamwork, and integrity.

Keywords: play, character development, childhood.

Abstrak.

Latar belakang Pengembangan karakter anak usia dini memainkan peran penting dalam proses pendidikan. Namun, dalam praktiknya, hal ini sering diabaikan. Konsep "belajar sambil bermain dan bermain sambil belajar" merupakan hal yang mendasar dalam pendidikan anak. Bermain berfungsi sebagai alat vital untuk menstimulasi berbagai aspek perkembangan anak, termasuk nilai-nilai agama dan moral, kemampuan kognitif, kemampuan bahasa, pertumbuhan sosial-emosional, keterampilan fisik-motorik, dan ekspresi artistik.

Tujuan Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran bermain dalam menumbuhkan perkembangan karakter pada anak. Memberikan kesempatan kepada anak-anak untuk terlibat dalam permainan memungkinkan mereka untuk menginternalisasi sifat-sifat karakter positif secara efektif.

Metode Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kepustakaan, dengan memanfaatkan data sekunder yang diperoleh dari penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya, bukan dari observasi langsung. Sebanyak 13 jurnal nasional yang membahas tentang perkembangan karakter anak dianalisis. Jurnal-jurnal tersebut diperoleh dari Google Scholar dengan menggunakan kata kunci "pengembangan karakter anak".

Hasil Berdasarkan literatur yang ditinjau, dapat disimpulkan bahwa bermain sangat efektif dalam mendorong perkembangan karakter anak. Temuan ini menyoroti tiga aspek utama: (1) Peran bermain dan aktivitas fisik dalam membentuk karakter anak (2) Pentingnya pengembangan karakter pada anak usia dini (3) Pengaruh pendidikan dan keterlibatan orang tua dalam pengembangan karakter.

Kesimpulan Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mengintegrasikan permainan ke dalam pembelajaran berbasis olahraga secara signifikan berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan karakter anak usia dini. Melalui olahraga, anak-anak mengembangkan nilai-nilai penting seperti tanggung jawab, saling menghormati, ketekunan, kerja sama tim, dan integritas.

Kata kunci: bermain, pengembangan karakter, masa kanak-kanak.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges faced by Indonesia today is the gradual erosion of moral values and national identity among the younger generation. The affective aspects of education are increasingly fading due to the influence of globalization and modernization (Mariati et al., 2024). The education system in Indonesia tends to prioritize intellectual development, while the affective and moral dimensions receive less attention (Baharun, 2017). Early childhood is a crucial phase of growth encompassing physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and language development. This progression is systematic, continuous, and holistic, meaning that optimal development occurs when children are physically healthy, receive proper nutrition, and are educated effectively.

Children experience development across multiple domains, including gross and fine motor skills, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional growth (Zulnadila et al., 2025). At this stage, play plays a fundamental role in child development, allowing children to experiment, explore, and test their abilities. Through play, they engage in enjoyable experiences while simultaneously enhancing their learning and developmental tasks. The experiences gained from play serve as a strong foundation for acquiring essential life skill that will help them navigate future challenges (Harianto et al., 2023). Character education serves as the cornerstone for achieving the national development vision: "Creating a noble, moral, ethical, cultured, and civilized society based on the philosophy of Pancasila" (Nasional, 2011).

Early childhood, defined as the period from birth to six years old, represents a critical stage where children possess great potential that must be nurtured (Mariati et al., 2024). To optimize their development, activities that support and enhance every aspect of growth are essential (Harianto et al., 2023). Play is an enjoyable activity conducted voluntarily for amusement (Haïdara et al., 2023). It occurs without concern for specific outcomes and progresses through various developmental stages, including manipulative, symbolic, exploratory, experimental, and recognizable phases (Galak & Rivero, 2022). Play is an integral part of human life, particularly during childhood. Games can take different forms, including virtual reality, augmented reality, physical activities, and even imaginative play (Lai et al., 2018).

In today's modern era, fostering character development from an early age is more critical than ever. Modern life, with its rapid social changes, significantly influences children's personalities. Character formation should begin within the family unit and extend to educational institutions and the broader community. While formal education plays a role in shaping children's personalities, character-building can also be achieved through engaging and enjoyable play activities (Harianto et al., 2023). Educational games are particularly effective in instilling positive character traits in children (Hendren et al., 2017). The strength of a nation is closely linked to the character of its citizens. Character is demonstrated through moral responses to situations and is reflected in actions such as integrity, responsibility, and respect for others. It is not merely a component of personality but rather an evaluation of one's personal values. A person is considered to have good character when they internalize societal values and use them as guiding principles in life (Evans et al., 2018).

While social values are inherently positive, they must be balanced with moral values. A strong and outgoing personality does not necessarily equate to moral character. The formation of discipline in children is heavily influenced by parenting styles, yet parental efforts to instill discipline often remain insufficient (Mulder et al., 2018). From an educational perspective, children learn through various strategies, methods, and media. Since play is central to childhood, educators frequently incorporate games into teaching and learning activities (Dhia et al., 2023). Character education encourages children to recognize, appreciate, and practice good values. It integrates moral and ethical education, fostering virtues such as creativity, honesty, discipline, tolerance, hard work, and patience (Aprilianto & Mariana, 2018).

A nation's quality is determined by the character of its people. Character is reflected in how individuals morally respond to situations and act accordingly. It manifests through ethical behavior, integrity, responsibility, and respect for others. Character extends beyond personality—it represents the application of values and beliefs upheld by society. An individual with strong character not only understands these values but also applies them in everyday life (White & Shin, 2017). Character education is essential for individuals seeking to deepen their understanding of moral values, awareness, and attitudes. Through this process, people strive for personal growth, enabling them to contribute positively to society. Character-building serves as the foundation for achieving the broader vision of community development (Sonuga-Barke et al., 2017).

Positive character formation can be effectively nurtured through physical education and sports activities. Sports play a crucial role in children's development, extending beyond physical benefits (Suryadi et al., 2023; Aziz et al., 2023). Engaging in sports fosters character development by enhancing leadership skills, teamwork, and discipline. The integration of character education within physical education is vital, as research has shown that children learn to collaborate, follow rules, and engage fairly through sports. Participation in sports not only strengthens physical fitness but also instills essential moral values, helping shape well-rounded individuals (Afifi et al., 2017).

METHOD

Research Design

The method used in this research is literature review. All types of research require literature studies, especially historical research types where all data are mostly obtained through literature review. But literary studies are, of course, much more than just reading and recording literature and books, as many people well understand. Library research, or what is often called library research, is a set of activities related to how library data is collected, how research material is read and retrieved and processed (Surya, 2017).

Types of Research

This exploration is a library exploration husing a quantitative approach (Finanda & Wiwaha, 2017). Library research is a research method carried out by studying written materials in the form of books, journals, articles, documents, Reports on research topics as the Internet and rationale. The data used in this study are secondary data, data derived from the results of studies done by previous investigators rather than direct observations. A library survey is a survey used to gather information and data with the help of colorful accountrements in a library similar as documents, books, journals, literal stories (Sari & Asmendri, 2020). Literary studies play a veritably important part in exploration. Some people distinguish between library exploration. There are essential differences between library exploration and field exploration, the main difference being the purpose, function, or positioning of library checks as the first step in establishing a exploration system, we aim to acquire similar research information and deepen theoretical research.

Procedures

The data collection system used is the attestation system (Yudha Prawira et al., 2021). Combinatorial methods are methods of gathering data by in-depth searches for data, such as in the literature related to what is involved in the problem formulation. The strategy for searching for articles, journals, and publications is to type keywords on Google Scholar. Articles or journals are retrieved according to the criteria, then analyzed. After going through the selection criteria, 10 articles are obtained. The journals studied are in Indonesian in PDF format with the subject of games for character development in children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

A literature review was conducted to examine the role of games and play in children's character development by collecting and analyzing relevant articles and journals. Each collected article was systematically reviewed and evaluated. A literature review is a structured, transparent, and reproducible approach used to identify, assess, and synthesize research findings and ideas contributed by scholars and practitioners. Its primary objective is to analyze and integrate existing studies to identify

gaps and opportunities for further research (Driya et al., 2022). The collected articles were then analyzed using the Critical Assessment Table to address the research objectives and compare the findings with a baseline measurement. The following articles and journals reviewed are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Result Article Review

No	Author	Year	Title	Study Result
1	Ajri Faujiah, Ahmad Tafsir, Sumadi	2018	Children's character development at the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF)Depok	In the management of education management and school management in Indonesia, the Haretage Foundation is organized professionally, marked by several things, such as structured organization and lines of coordination running according to their respective duties. respectively.
2	Andika Aprilisnto, Wahyuni Mariana	2020	Educational Games as a Character Education Strategy	Planting character education in children from an early age is very much needed. Through fun activities, character education can be instilled. Playing games or playing a game is a fun activity, especially for children.
3	Arie Ramadhani	2018	Identification of Character Education Values in Traditional Children's Games	15 identification results show that children's traditional games have character education values. Aspects of personal character and social character are often found in traditional games. Another aspect is the national character and religious character.
4	Banu Setyo Adi, Sudaryanti, Muthmainnah	2020	Implementation of Traditional Games in Early Childhood Learning as National Character Builders	Traditional games have been proven to develop children's characters such as patience, honesty, sportsmanship, discipline, persistence, independence, self-confidence, and cooperation. This activity is beneficial for PAUD teachers.
5	Cucu Sophia	2021	Impact of Online Learning on Character Education	Online learning has a negative impact because the way teachers present learning through materials, media, methods and build children's knowledge is less relevant to early childhood who still need to play.
6	Erick Burhaeni	2017	Traditional Game Activities based on Neuroscience Learning as Character Education for Children with Tunalaras	Optimization of learning occurs through the contribution of synergy between traditional games and neuroscience-based learning. The results of the adaption of these mechanisms are suitable to reduce behavioral disorders in children with behavioral, emotional, and social disorders so that children are more controlled on their emotional and social sides.
7	Fadilah Utami, Iis Prasetyo	2021	Family Care for the Development of Disciplined Character in Early Childhood	Development of a child's discipline character is told by the parenthood pattern entered from parents. Different forms of parenthood have different goods on children.
8	Oki Witasari, Novan Ardy Wiyani	2020	Traditional Games to Shape Early Childhood Characters	According to the survey results, Diponegoro 140 Lawalo Kindergarten has a three-stage approach to shaping children's character through traditional games. First, we introduce the value of kindness through traditional play. Second, to help children perceive good value when playing traditional games. Third, give instructions to the children to bear well while playing traditional games. In carrying out the three stages, the schoolteacher not only accompanies and teaches the play, but also becomes a part model for children to do good effects while playing traditional games.
9	Puji Asmaul Chusna	2017	Media Gadget on Children's Character Development	Gadgets are indeed needed as a means of communication for everything. However, parental supervision and guidance of children must always be carried out.
10	Puput Widodo, Ria Lumintuarso	2017	Development of Traditional Game Models to Build Character in High School Elementary School Students	The result of the exploration are the development of traditional game models comforming of 3 types of games, tvidelicet (1) goteng game, (2) Board/ square run, and (3) baseball hand. Based on the assessments of material experts and physical education teachers, it can be concluded that the development of the traditional game model is veritably well structured and effective, so that the game model is suitable for use in learning physical education for upper grade students.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of various research articles and journals, it was found that character development in children can be effectively fostered through education and parental involvement. According to Faujiah et al. (2018), schools and educational institutions implement character-building strategies by involving parents, as they serve as the child's first role models (Utami, 2021). Instilling character in children can be done through guidance, role models, illustrations, and reinforcement. Character education is a deliberate effort designed to help individuals understand, internalize, and act based on core ethical values. Therefore, character formation in children requires careful planning, specific objectives, assessments, and evaluations (Antara, 2019).

Character is fundamentally a moral concept that encompasses values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, fairness, and respect for oneself and others (Heidari et al., 2016). Character education, on the other hand, is a structured approach aimed at introducing and teaching these moral values systematically (Birhan et al., 2021). Physical education serves as an essential medium for character development, combining learning with physical activities and experiences (Liu et al., 2022). It focuses on gross motor skills and incorporates games, sports, and other physical movements. The core of character education in physical education is in developing students' affective domain.

Several studies have emphasized the role of traditional games in children's character development. According to Ramadhani (2018), playing traditional games enhances children's sense of sportsmanship and teamwork. Similarly, research by Adi et al. (2020) supports the idea that local and traditional games help shape children's character. Pranoto et al. (2014) highlight the development of traditional game models as a means of instilling positive values in children. These games not only introduce moral principles but also guide children in demonstrating appropriate behaviors while playing (Febrianty & Nugrahanta, 2021). Furthermore, adapting these traditional game mechanisms can help reduce behavioral, emotional, and social disorders, fostering better emotional and social control in children (Burhaein, 2017).

Character education plays a crucial role in shaping students with positive behaviors (Maghfiroh, 2020). Implementing character-building activities through engaging and enjoyable means, such as play, encourages children to be more empathetic and socially aware (Sopiah, 2021). Despite the widespread application of character-based games in education, many initiatives remain superficial and fail to achieve their intended goals effectively. Playing is a valuable method for character development (Marlina et al., 2020), and instilling good character from an early age is essential for holistic child development (Rohmah, 2018).

In Indonesia, character education is generally implemented through two main strategies: macro and micro approaches. The macro strategy involves a nationwide effort encompassing all educational stakeholders, while the micro strategy focuses on holistic character development within individual educational institutions (Pradana, 2021). However, in modern times, children's increasing preference for gadgets presents both opportunities and challenges. While gadgets can facilitate communication and learning, they also require parental supervision to prevent negative influences (Chusna, 2017).

In conclusion, early childhood character education aims to instill commendable behaviors, including religious values, social manners, and ethical interactions with others and the environment. Character education occurs in all aspects of a child's life, beginning at home, where parents play a crucial role in fostering positive behaviors. Parents should not solely rely on teachers for character development, as they are primary role models for their children. The formation of strong character is influenced by the interaction of knowledge, values, and moral principles (Winarno, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The identification results indicate that character formation in children can be effectively achieved through play. Various games incorporate elements of both personal and social character. Additionally, aspects of national and religious character are also present. Further research is needed to develop suitable learning models that can be implemented in educational settings and broader community life. Character development should be approached systematically and holistically, involving families, educational institutions, the government, civil society, mass media, as well as the business and industrial sectors. However, the most feasible and far-reaching approach is through educational institutions, as education is a fundamental necessity for all individuals. In the education system, character education is integrated into all subjects, whether in schools or higher education institutions, including physical

education and sports. Engaging in sports fosters numerous positive character traits, such as responsibility, mutual respect, perseverance, teamwork, and high levels of honesty.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

MDH and NHI were responsible for conceptualizing and designing the research, collecting the data, and drafting the manuscript. ZN and JD contributed to the data search, interpretation of results, and critical revision of the manuscript. DS also acted as the corresponding author, handling all correspondence and revisions related to the publication.

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