

# Analysis of play therapy in play activities in early childhood

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## Abstract

Play therapy is vital to support early childhood development. This study aims to analyze the implementation of play therapy embedded in play activities in Kindergarten B children at Lintang Kindergarten Surabaya. Play therapy is a therapeutic activity given to children to help them overcome problems related to cooperation, socialization, and emotions. The play therapy approach places more emphasis on the non-verbal. This research uses a qualitative descriptive research method. The research subjects were two teachers. Class B teachers were chosen because, based on the results of the observations, problems related to students' social interactions most often appeared in class B. The research results concluded that with play therapy, children find it easier to express their feelings and become more relaxed and happy. The contribution of this research is an alternative solution to children's development problems using play therapy.

**Keywords:** Early childhood, Kindergarten, Play Activities, Play Therapy, Teacher.

## INTRODUCTION

Children are individuals usually defined as those under three years of age. Children tend to depend on parents or caregivers. This happens because, in children, the perception arises that parents or caregivers provide a safe, reliable, and calm environment for living, growing, and learning. The environment in question is an environment that supports children in demonstrating their ability to direct their movements, interact with objects, and lead interactions with their caregivers. This usually appears in the form of games. Play is an active process in which an individual is intrinsically motivated to explore themselves, the environment, and interactions with others. Playing creates joy among those who play it (Fiss et al., 2023).

Play is essential for development because it contributes to the maximum cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development of children and adolescents. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. Even though there are benefits to be gained from playing for children and parents, sometimes playtime between children and parents begins to decrease (Ginsburg et al., 2007). Children tend to play as children and even as adults. Different from self-initiated play, play therapy is used as a clinical application of play aimed at treating children suffering

from trauma, emotional problems, and other problems. This paper will highlight the psychological aspects of play therapy, which acts as mind-body healing for children and, in the current scenario, even for adults (Singh and Gudiño, 2023).

Play allows children to create and explore worlds they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes with other children or caregivers. The interactions through play tell children that parents are giving them their full attention and help build lasting relationships (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004). Parents who have the opportunity to glimpse their children's world learn to communicate more effectively with their children and are given another environment to provide gentle, nurturing guidance. Less verbal children may be able to express their views, experiences, and even frustrations through play, allowing their parents to understand their point of view better. Play offers an excellent opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. Play is used by professionals specifically trained to work with children in health settings; everyone involved with children needs to understand how they, too, can use play approaches to support the children and families they meet (Melita and Parson, 2023).

The main function of play in play therapy is the transformation of what is, in reality, unmanageable into a manageable situation through symbolic representation, which provides children with the opportunity to learn to cope. Play therapy is an approach that is well thought out, philosophically structured, developmentally based, and supported by research to help children overcome the challenges they experience in living their lives (Odden, 2019). Play therapy is a developing therapeutic discipline based on play as a medium for self-expression. This approach is primarily non-verbal, where children aged 2 to 12 years freely explore their difficulties, pain, and feelings through play with toys, sand, dolls, clay, art, dance, and natural music (PUTRIANA, 2019)

Play therapy provides children with a consistent and predictable therapeutic relationship and environment to explore their fears, difficulties, struggles, and pain, as well as their hopes, dreams, and fantasies. The underlying assumption of play therapy is that, given these relationships and environments, children have the inner resources to bring about growth and change in their own lives. Play therapists use a variety of theoretical models based on various therapeutic disciplines, including Child-Centered, Gestalt, Adlerian, Psychoanalytic, Jungian, Object Relations, Family Therapy, Erikson, and Cognitive Behavioral. The play therapy models a play therapist uses will vary depending on the therapist's specific training and theoretical orientation (PUTRIANA, 2019). One media that can be used in play therapy is clay (Mufidah et al., 2023). Through the games played in play therapy, children also grow in self-confidence, and they can control themselves better after the intervention (Albariq et al., 2023). Through this research, the researcher intends to analyze the implementation of play therapy embedded in the play activities of Kindergarten B children at Lintang Kindergarten, Surabaya.

## METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods. The research population was teachers at Lintang Kindergarten Surabaya. The research sample consisted of 2 teachers who taught class B. The choice of class B teachers was because, from the results of observations made, problems related to student socialization most often emerged in class B. For example, children did not want to share with friends, tended to play alone, lacked ability. to collaborate with friends. Data collection in this research used interviews and observation. The interview guidelines used are as follows:

**Table 1.** Interview Guidelines

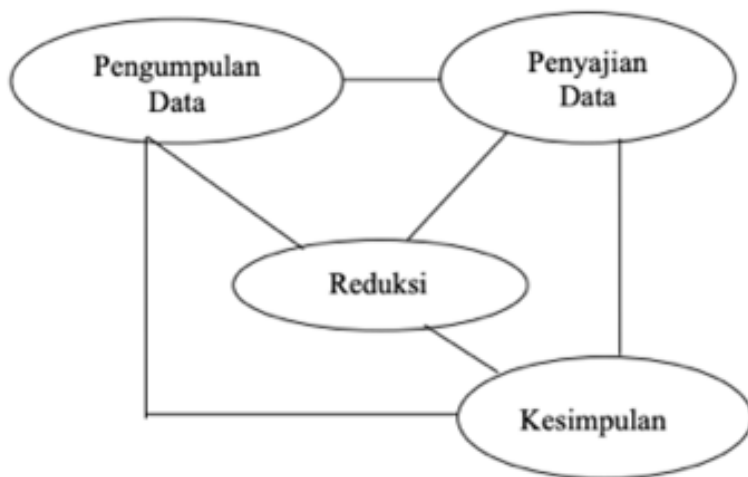
Ability
Self-directed learning
Critical thinking
Creativity

Apart from interviews, observations were also carried out. The purpose of observation is to

describe the setting being studied, the activities taking place, the people involved in the activity, and the meaning of the event seen from the perspective of those involved in the observed event (Munawarah et al., 2024). Observations were carried out to find out how students' behavior changed before and after play therapy. In carrying out play therapy, observations refer to indicators obtained from Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014 concerning Primary and Secondary Education Process Standards), namely: Actively participating in group or team activities, both in class and outside class, able to listen well and respect the opinions or contributions of group members, able to communicate clearly and politely in interacting with peers, able to share responsibility in group tasks and carry out tasks well according to the role given, able to work together and help each other in achieving common goals.

This research explores the implementation of play therapy in each case handled by early childhood education teachers in schools. Each student certainly has different characteristics and unique issues. Just like play therapy supports teachers and parents in utilizing game-based activities to facilitate the expression of children's sadness.

From the results of these observations and interviews, research analysis was carried out which in this case used the Miles and Huberman Interactive analysis model. In this research, data analysis was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process. The analysis flow follows the interactive analysis model as expressed Miles and Huberman (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The techniques used in analyzing data can be visualized as follows:



**Figure 1.** Miles and Huberman's Interactive Analysis Model.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following results were obtained from the research: Problems usually solved using play therapy are (1). Problems related to the ability to interact with others. Through play therapy, children can learn to develop social skills and increase their involvement in activities with other people or peers (2). Difficulty expressing oneself: Some children may have difficulty expressing their feelings verbally. Play therapy provides a creative platform where children can communicate through actions and games that will help them express themselves naturally. (3). Social and emotional difficulties: Children who have difficulty interacting socially or managing their emotions may benefit from play therapy. Through play, they can learn social skills, develop empathy, and understand their feelings and those of others. (4) Adaptation difficulties: Play therapy can help children who have difficulty adjusting to changes, such as parental divorce, moving, or other events that may

affect the stability of their lives. (5) Behavioral problems: Children with behavioral problems such as aggression, disobedience, or other discipline problems may benefit from play therapy.

**Table 2.** Interview Results

Interview guidelines	Results
What problems are usually solved using play therapy?	Play therapy is something new in overcoming problems in kindergarten. With play therapy, problems related to children's socialization and emotions can be resolved well. So play therapy is very effective in overcoming these problems.
How is play therapy implemented?	Play therapy is implemented for Kindergarten B students and is carried out with professional assistance so that the process takes place more optimally. Implementation of play therapy is effective in addressing issues in young children. This is because through play therapy, children can express their feelings, concerns, or internal conflicts in a more comfortable and natural way. Some of the problems addressed include difficulties in communication, feelings of anxiety or fear, social and emotional issues, changes in the family, experiences of trauma or difficulty, and learning and skill development.
What are the results of implementing play therapy in solving student problems?	The results of play therapy are considered effective in dealing with problems experienced by students

## Discussion

Apart from that, from the results of interviews conducted, the implementation of play therapy has several stages, all of which require professional assistance. This is of course adjusted to the conditions of individuals who are different from each other. Apart from that, before starting play therapy, it is also necessary to understand the background, history and problems faced by the child or client so that from this initial evaluation you will be able to identify the appropriate goals of the therapist. Play therapy emphasizes play therapy to recognize, acknowledge and utilize the therapeutic power of the play therapy process. This strength lies in the process of changing mechanisms to help overcome student problems (Nash and Schaefer, 2011). Play therapy challenges the clinician to combine multiple play interventions into one treatment program that is comprehensive and designed specifically for a particular client (Schaefer and Drewes, 2015). Play therapy is useful for overcoming problems of violence experienced by children (Smith and Landreth, 2003). Play therapy is a developmentally responsive intervention that is widely used by child therapists but is often criticized for its lack of a research base capable of supporting its emerging practice (Odden, 2019)

From this research have results indicate that several problems have been addressed using play therapy. Among these issues are children who have difficulty in communication. Play therapy helps children develop verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Additionally, play therapy can facilitate children in expressing themselves through play, thereby enhancing their communication. For children experiencing socio-emotional problems, play therapy can build social and emotional skills. Through social interaction in play, children can learn about relationships and conflict resolution. The research findings align with other studies that describe play therapy significantly improving social-emotional skills ( $P < 0.001$ ). These skills include self-awareness, self-regulation, social interaction, empathy, adaptation skills, and control (Chinekeshe et al., 2014). The criteria for the success of play therapy are that children are empowered in the therapeutic process, intrapsychic factors, rules in the family, intervention in the therapy process (Guerney and Guerney Jr, 1987).

Similar studies have utilized play therapy in counseling trauma healing for young children (Widha, Aulia, et al., 2019). In this research, children were unable to express their feelings of anxiety, leading the researchers to employ play therapy. Several studies have explored the effectiveness of play therapy in various contexts, including in preschool children. These studies highlight the benefits of play and play-based interventions in enhancing social skills, cooperation, and child development. Recent

research has started to explore the potential of Lego play in improving cooperation and social skills in children and evaluated the effectiveness of a Lego play therapy program in enhancing social skills and cooperation in children with developmental issues (Boyne, 2014). The results showed a significant improvement in social skills and cooperation after participating in the play therapy program. Another study examined the effectiveness of Lego-based play therapy in improving social skills and cooperation in children with autism spectrum disorders (Lindsay et al., 2017). The research found that play therapy using Lego significantly improved social skills and cooperation in autistic children. Matthews (2017) researched the effectiveness of Lego play intervention in improving cooperation and social skills (LeGoff, 2004). The study showed that Lego play could help enhance social skills and cooperation in children with developmental disorders. The key differences between this research and previous studies lie in several factors:

1. Research Focus: This study specifically focuses on the analysis of play therapy on the play activities of young children, with a focus on using play therapy as an intervention to address issues faced by young children. Other studies may have different focuses, such as testing the effectiveness of play interventions using different tools or methods or exploring other aspects of child development.
2. Research Method and Design: Each study employs different research methods and designs. This study on the analysis of play therapy on children's play activities uses a qualitative descriptive approach.

Each existing play therapy session is usually used regularly and has a certain duration. During the session, children are given the freedom to play and explore the chosen toy or activity. In addition, the effectiveness of play therapy can vary depending on individual factors, such as the characteristics of the child, the type of problem, or the conditions faced. The success of play therapy can also be measured in the form of changes in behavior, improvement in social skills and improvement in the child's emotional well-being. Cognitive-behavioral play therapy has a positive effect on reducing student aggression and anxiety (Mehrafza et al., 2022). Play therapy dimensional models answer these questions, and often handle them skillfully regarding decision making (Chown, 2014).

The technique used is as follows puppet play, wayang puppet play, tell stories, play, play with sand. Dolls provide a non-threatening way for children to play with their thoughts and feelings. While playing with dolls, children do the following things: a. Identifying with the doll b. Projecting one's own feelings in game figures c. Transferring the conflict to game figures. In puppet play, the therapist gets information about: a. Child's view of mind b. Child's feelings c. Doll child behavior in play therapy includes; a. A baby doll that is the size of a baby, b. Anatomically correct dolls, both male and female c. Doll family d. Animals made of cloth e. Human dolls from various races and ethnicities (Java, Batak, Papua, America, Africa, etc.) f. Doll equipment such as house, clothes, bed etc. The movement of wayang or dolls allows children to tell stories rich in symbolic form and to create their fantasies. Benefits of puppet play: a. Through the movement of puppets, children can face thoughts and feelings that are difficult for them to recognize as themselves. b. By using dolls, children can create other people and interact and express their thoughts and feelings as well as their anger which they cannot do in real life. c. Children can also create characters they cannot express themselves Playing with dolls can be an interesting group activity and can be used with larger or smaller groups of children, especially in a school setting. By playing with dolls in a group, children can respect each other's points of view, problem solving and social skills.

Psychologically, reading or telling stories is one of the healthiest forms of play. Most young children prefer stories about people and animals they know. Apart from that, because young children tend to be egocentric, they like stories that center on themselves. At first, children like imaginary, imaginative stories, then as children's intelligence and school experience develop, they become more realistic, and their interests shift to stories of adventure, violence, luxury and love and education.

Telling stories provides a fun way to develop rapport and learn about children. When children tell their stories, they communicate important information about themselves and their families while learning to express and master their feelings. By listening to children's stories, therapists can better understand children's self-defenses, children's conflicts, and children's family dynamics. In analyzing a child's story, the therapist must look for recurring themes that can provide important insights into the child's feelings and struggles. The therapist must be very familiar and skilled in interpreting the symbolic communication of Play Therapy to deal with problems in children naturally. This all depends on the skill and judgment of the therapist. Play during childhood has different characteristics compared to adolescent and adult play. Young children's play is spontaneous and informal. Gradually playing becomes more and more formal. As children's thinking abilities develop, children begin to develop games with rules. Individual and group play helps children learn how to divide into groups and play by rules. Games teach children about self-discipline, and learn to win and lose. Games used for play therapy can be played alone or in groups. Play therapy includes therapeutic relationships, sustainability, social competence and empathy (Gardner, 2021).

Children love playing in the sand. With play therapy using sand, children are given joy, relaxation and are a therapeutic medium. While in the playroom, children are free to play in the sand and use as many miniatures as they wish. During the process of sand play, children decide what to make, what figures to use, and how to use them. Children are free to create scenes, make up views or anything else as a way of describing experiences that they cannot describe in words. By observing children while playing with sand, the therapist gets information about the child's thoughts, feelings and behavior. Sand games also often involve symbols that have special meanings. Non-directive play therapy can improve and accelerate the emotional/social development of children with severe autism (Josefi and Ryan, 2004). Play therapy and creative arts therapies make use of both verbal and nonverbal interactions and draw from a wide range of psychotherapy approaches, such as Humanistic, Psychodynamic, Gestalt, Adlerian, and Narrative (Yasenik and Gardner, 2016).

### **Implication and Conclusion**

Based on the results of research conducted by researchers regarding the implementation of play therapy on student social interaction. The research results show that play therapy can increase student social interaction which is characterized by students' expressions when interacting.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

M contributed to the study of play therapy for early childhood. Meanwhile, IH contributed to the analysis of early childhood activities in Kindergarten. EFM contributed to helping M assess the urgency of play therapy for early childhood.

### **DECLARATION**

The authors of this study declare that we have NO affiliation with or involvement in any Organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; advocacy, employment, consulting, Stock Ownership, or other equity interests; and testimonials experts or patent licensing arrangements), or non-financial interests (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript..

### **DATA AVAILABILITY**

The dataset generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author On reasonable request.

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