

## ***The Place and Importance of Play in People with Disabilities***

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### **Introduction**

Play in children with disabilities is an activity that contributes to both physical and mental development, increases social skills and communication, and increases self-confidence and self-esteem. Through play, children with disabilities can discover their abilities, strengths and weaknesses, interests and needs, adapt to the environment they live in, and develop their imagination and creativity (Kayaalp, 2000). The place and importance of play in people with disabilities may vary according to the type and degree of disability and individual characteristics. The place and importance of play in disabilities may vary according to the type and degree of disability and individual characteristics. For example, visually impaired children can develop their sense of hearing and touch, hearing impaired children can develop observation and imitation skills, mentally disabled children can develop cognitive and language skills, and autistic children can develop turn-taking, symbolic play and interaction skills through play (MEB, 2009). The importance of play for people with disabilities applies not only to children but also to adults. Adults with physical disabilities can protect their health, spend their free time in a pleasant way, and participate more closely with their environment through play (Uzun & Kılınç, 2020).

### **Aim of the Study**

In this study, it is aimed to summarize the place and importance of game practice in the lives of people with disabilities based on the literature.

### **Disability**

Defining disability is not an easy thing to do. The primary goal of theoretical approaches is to lay the groundwork for the subject and to show how the subject is viewed from which perspective. The most well-known theoretical approaches to disability are medical, social, political and cultural perspectives. In addition to these approaches, there are also model studies for the development of feelings and thoughts about disability. It is known that the medical model, which is the first theoretical approach to disability, emerged from the disease view used in medicine. This view explains disability in terms of individual disorders and biology. This view, which emerged in a period when it was very common to be “normal”, emphasizes the requirements for disabled people to be “normal” (Dönmez et al., 2016). Some definitions of disability arising from the theoretical approaches to disability or leading to these approaches are as follows (Darıca et al., 2002). The World Health Organization (WHO) addresses disability in 3 different categories.

1. Impairment: It refers to the deficiency and abnormality in psychological, physiological and anatomical (physical) structure or functions in terms of health.
2. Disability: A limitation or inability to perform an activity in a normal manner or within limits considered normal.
3. Disability (Handicap): It is the restriction or inability to fulfill the roles expected of a person due to age, gender, social and cultural factors due to a disability or handicap. This definition of the World Health Organization emphasizes the “limitation” and “non-normality” of people with disabilities. This definition has had significant effects on the basis of the view of “limitation” and individual pathology underlying the medical model (WHO, 2011). According to Article 1 of the United Nations General Assembly’s Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 3447, annexed to the Declaration of Human Rights, a disabled person is defined as “a person who is unable to perform tasks that a normal person should be able to do for himself/herself in his/her personal or social life due to any deficiency in his/her physical or mental abilities, whether hereditary or acquired”. When we look at these two definitions used internationally, it is seen that “normal” and “restriction” are emphasized. In Turkey, there is no agreed general definition or content study. At the same time, more than one concept related to disability and disabled people is used. Especially recently, the concept of “special needs groups” has been tried to be used. However, since this concept covers all the needs of the poor, in need of protection, disabled and abused, it is a very large generalization (Kayaalp, 2000).

### **Disability and Communication**

The disabled population is estimated to be higher in developing or underdeveloped societies and lower in developed industrialized countries. In underdeveloped or developing societies, the factors that lead to the increase in the disabled population are more and it is difficult to prevent disability (Ulutaşdemir, 2007). Disability can be categorized into two main groups: congenital and acquired. In congenital disability, prenatal, intrapartum and maternal factors are very determinant. Consanguineous marriages, heredity, lack of widespread health services in the society or unequal distribution of these services among regions, low level of women’s education, young age of motherhood, lack of health checks of the mother before birth, giving birth to many children, birth not being performed under the supervision of health personnel, child and mother facing some risks during birth, infectious diseases, various child diseases, fever and the like are considered as factors that lead to disability before and during birth. Factors leading to disability acquired after birth include accidents, diseases and natural disasters (Kökten & Erdoğan, 2014).

### **The Game**

Game is defined in the Turkish Language Institution (TDK) Great Turkish Dictionary as “an amusement that develops talent and intelligence, has certain rules, and serves to have a good time” or “any kind of competition based on agility, which is made to develop physical and mental abilities”. As can be understood from this definition, games are actions that involve the functioning of the body and mind together and are performed by the participant for the purpose of “having fun”; on the other hand, they lead to the “development of talent and intelligence” in line with the objectives of education. While playing, the individual thinks, knows, remembers and implements the rules, and directs his/her body according to his/her thinking. In other words, it maintains a state of action that requires the harmony of mind and body (Burghardt, 2010). In this respect, play is analyzed as an evolutionary phenomenon with an adaptive role that affects and is affected by all aspects of development (physical, cognitive, social, etc.) (Lancy, 1980). In other words, play emerges as a species-specific evolutionary phenomenon and mediates adaptation by realizing physical, cognitive, social-communicative and emotional developmental goals (Burghardt, 2005). Similarly, it is also a part of social

and emotional life in non-human species and contributes to mental development (Smith, 1982; Pellegrini, 2009). Accordingly, play is a natural (species-specific) process that is embedded in social life, has communicative and emotional aspects, and affects mental development (Burghardt, 2005; Vandenberg & Kielhofner, 1982; VanHoorn et al., 2014). With all these developmental connections, it is naturally closely related to the educational process (Baker, 2018). Therefore, play can be considered as a part of education, and it can gain form and meaning as a facilitator of achieving the goals of educational activities and as a trigger for motivation processes in education (Seyrek & Sun, 2003).

### Importance of the Game

Children's games have an important place in the education of children and the development of their personality. In order for children to develop in a positive way, it is necessary to know their world of emotions and thoughts. Play also develops and matures children's emotional and intellectual abilities. The pleasure the child derives from the game stems from changing and living his/her experiences to suit his/her wishes (Yeltekin & Alıncak, 2021; Alıncak & Tuzcuogulları, 2016).

Children's games are important in terms of child education and social culture, as well as education and psychology. Play, which is the most effective way in the education of children, learns the behaviors, knowledge and skills necessary for the child spontaneously in the game. Human relations, cooperation, talking, acquiring knowledge, gaining habits and experience, understanding the roles of life, the child comprehends, adopts and reinforces the phenomena in play. The child's personality emerges and develops with more distinct lines in play (Dönmez, 2000).

In order to plan for play, certain conditions must be met. These are

Determination of educational objectives related to play

Selection of the activity within the game

Sequencing of activities

Determining the duration of the activities

Determining the necessary tools and materials for the game ((Aral, Kandır, & Yaşar, 2002).

### Play and the Child

Play is a set of entertaining activities that begin with birth in childhood and continue throughout the life of a human being, sometimes with purpose and sometimes without purpose. Play in childhood is an activity that facilitates the child's understanding of himself and his environment. The concept of child and play are two elements that complement each other (Ünal, 2009). Article 31 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989, emphasizes that children have the right to leisure time, rest, play age-appropriate games and participate in cultural and artistic activities (Pehlivan, 2016).

Children's games have four basic functions. These are;

- 1) It reduces tension and provides emotional expression,
- 2) plays an important role in the socialization of children,
- 3) is an important part of the learning process and
- 4) play, in another way, causes people to come out of disappointing situations successfully and in a way that allows for self-realization.

The successful fulfillment of these functions of the game is important in terms of bringing individuals who are both physically and mentally healthy and in harmony with others into society (Bekmezci & Özkan, 2019). There is a direct relationship and interaction between play and the child's physical, mental, cognitive, affective and social development (Gökşen, 2014 Campos, Rodrigues, & Pinto, 2010). Play prevents children from experiencing stress. If play can be combined with treatment and procedures, it helps the child to tolerate some procedures and prevents them from experiencing stress. In addition, play is the most effective tool for communicating with the child (Altay, 2008).

Today, due to the positive effects of games on children, playgrounds and game rooms are available for children in the pediatric clinics of many institutions providing health care. Providing the child with a place and opportunity to play in the hospital environment makes him/her feel safe and spend his/her energy (Ghabeli, Moheb, & Nasab, 2014).

### **Play in Children with Disabilities**

Children with disabilities, as well as children with normal development, should be supported from early childhood in order to develop their abilities, to be in harmony with their environment and to establish positive social communication. Thus, the first step in the adaptation of children with disabilities to the society will be taken. Although children with disabilities cannot show the same developmental characteristics as other children without disabilities in the process after birth, the common point of both groups in terms of discharging internal energy, ensuring general development and gaining experience is play (Demirci & Toptaş Demirci, 2014; Frey & Kaiser, 2011).

Since it is a mirror of child development, play is especially used in the evaluation of children at risk (Stagnitti K.2004). In the education programs prepared according to the results of the evaluation, play activities that support development are given a wide place. In the literature, it has been stated that families with children with disabilities think that their children exhibit more similar behaviors to their peers with normal development during play activities (Aslan et al., 2015- Kocakaya, 2006). Children with disabilities cannot spontaneously develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to lead an active and healthy life. This development is only possible through the learning process. Play can be utilized at every stage of the learning process. Through games, children cope with their problems by realizing their own abilities and competencies, finding healthy solutions to their inadequacies, and reorganizing the past, present and future. Thus, they discover the power of the characteristics they possess through games. In addition, the movements in the game can significantly improve the child's ability to move and use their muscles. The desired skills and characteristics gained by the disabled child through play will form the basis for the transition to regular physical activities later (Demirci & Toptaş Demirci, 2014- Frey & Kaiser, 2011).

### ***Benefits of the Game for Children with Disabilities***

- Contributes to increasing attention and awareness.
- Contributes to the development of hand-eye coordination.
- Allows him to release his accumulated energy in an acceptable way.
- Allows the child to learn concepts more easily.
- The child's sense of self-confidence develops.
- Learns problem solving more easily.
- Their interests and abilities are evaluated more objectively.
- Games using materials such as play dough and clay help children develop their hand muscles.
- They learn to obey the rules.
- Learns to take responsibility through games and toys.
- Contributes to language development.
- Communicates more easily and learns to share.
- It enables the child to exhibit less problematic behaviors.
- It allows them to reinforce what they have learned.
- Children give information about their inner state by reflecting the emotions they cannot reflect through play.
- The anxieties of disabled children who are new to education can be eliminated through play (Kocakaya, 2006).

Play is effective in the development of social, emotional, psychomotor, cognitive, language and self-care skills of every child. Especially children with disabilities have

more and different effects in some areas of development. For example, visually impaired children can use their hearing and touch senses better by concentrating their attention. Hearing-impaired children develop their ability to learn through observation by being in the same environment with their peers. In addition, the play environment encourages the use of language and language skills develop in children with speech retardation. In addition to cognitive skills, emotional, social, linguistic and to a certain extent motor development in mentally disabled children improves with play activities, and in autistic children imitation, taking turns, playing with toys according to their purpose and symbolic play skills develop (MEB, 2007).

### ***The Effects of Play on Child Development***

Development refers to the functional changes of the individual. In order for the child to function at a high level, his or her abilities must emerge and progress. Maturation and learning are key elements in developmental processes (National Education: Considerations (MoNE, 2008). Learning is a concept that emerges as a product of experiences. Play contributes to the child's physical, mental and social development (Dirim, 2000). The child's desire to play continuously is an expression of his/her movements towards the future. The child perceives, then understands, then learns and develops concepts, objects, social rules, rights and struggle in play. In general, play affects the child in many ways and contributes to his/her development. While the effects of games vary according to their types, their general effects can be listed as follows (Ünver, 2003);

- 1- Physical effects of play,
- 2- The social impact of the game,
- 3- The psychological and emotional impact of play,
- 4- The mental impact of the game.

### ***Physical Effects of Play on Disabled People***

The physical impact of play on the disabled may vary according to the type, duration and degree of disability. In general, play can positively affect muscle development, respiratory and circulatory systems, digestive and excretory functions, and psychological health (Sima, Bayramoğlu, & Demirel, 2016; Uzunoğlu, 2021). For example, games that require physical activity such as running, jumping, climbing can increase the physical skills and endurance of people with disabilities. In addition, play can also improve the self-confidence, creativity, social skills and problem-solving abilities of people with disabilities (Uzunoğlu, 2021). However, the physical impact of gaming on people with disabilities may not always be positive. Some games, especially digital games, can be addictive and can cause people with disabilities to experience serious problems such as unhealthy diet, sleep disorders, vision and hearing problems, skeletal problems and depression<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the physical impact of gaming on people with disabilities depends on the dose, appropriateness and supervision of the game (Kamil et al., 2018).

### ***Social Impact of Play on People with Disabilities***

The social impact of play on people with disabilities is that play helps people with disabilities develop skills such as communication, cooperation, empathy, friendship and social adaptation. Play allows people with disabilities to express themselves, interact with others, respect differences and gain self-confidence (Kamil et al., 2018). Play contributes to the socialization of individuals both with their own groups and with other groups and to the creation of a common language (Alıncak, 2017). The social impact of the game on the disabled may vary according to the type, duration, environment, number of participants and the degree of disability. While some games allow people with disabilities to develop their social skills more, some games may be less effective. For example, educational games can help people with disabilities learn social studies and adapt to social values. Digital games can allow people with disabilities to expand

their social networks and meet different cultures. However, the social impact of gaming on people with disabilities depends on its moderation, appropriateness and control. Excessive or inappropriate gaming can negatively affect the social development of people with disabilities (Seyhan, 2018).

### ***Psychological and Emotional Impact of Play***

The psychological and emotional impact of play on people with disabilities is that play helps people with disabilities develop skills and emotions such as self-recognition, expression, managing emotions, coping with stress, creativity, self-confidence, empathy and happiness (Seyhan, 2018). Play allows people with disabilities to solve their emotional problems, reduce their anxiety, relax and experience positive emotions. Play contributes to the disabled to establish emotional bonds with both their own groups and other groups and to receive and give social support (Bekmezci & Özkan, 2015). While play has a positive effect on the psychological and emotional development of people with disabilities, it also supports their cognitive, physical and language development. (Seyhan, 2018). The psychological and emotional impact of the game on the disabled may vary according to the type, duration, environment, number of participants and the degree of disability. While some games allow people with disabilities to develop their psychological and emotional skills more, some games may be less effective. For example, educational games can help people with disabilities learn psychological knowledge and adapt to emotional values (Kyle, 2008).

### ***The Effect of Play on the Mentally Disabled***

The mental impact of play on the disabled is that it helps them develop skills such as intelligence, memory, language, perception, creativity, problem solving and learning. Play allows disabled people to recognize themselves, make sense of the world, acquire knowledge and learn new things (Kocakaya, 2006). Play contributes to the disabled to establish mental interaction with both their own groups and other groups and to create a common language (Ayan et al., 2012). While play has a positive effect on the mental development of disabled people, it also supports their physical, emotional and social development (Kocakaya, 2006).

The mental impact of the game on the disabled may vary according to the type, duration, environment, number of participants and the degree of disability. While some games allow people with disabilities to develop their mental skills more, some games may be less effective. For example, educational games can help people with disabilities learn cognitive knowledge and adapt to cognitive values. Digital games can allow people with disabilities to mentally relax and have fun. However, the cognitive impact of gaming on people with disabilities depends on its moderation, appropriateness and control. Excessive or inappropriate gaming can negatively affect the intellectual development of people with disabilities (Lieberman & MacVicar, 2003).

### ***Games by Type of Disability***

Games according to the type of disability are interesting, fun and instructive games that are suitable for the development of children with disabilities. The play needs and skills of children with disabilities may vary according to their disability status, age, individual characteristics and environmental factors. Therefore, when selecting and preparing games according to the type of disability, games suitable for children's needs, abilities, interests and strengths should be preferred (Darica et al., 2002).

Games according to the type of disability can be generally classified as follows:

#### ***Games for Children with Intellectual Disabilities***

Children with intellectual disabilities generally enjoy games that are simple, concrete, repetitive, and involve visual and auditory stimuli. Games for children with intellectual

disabilities should support their cognitive, language, social, emotional and physical development. For example, games such as jigsaw puzzles, memory cards, matching, classification, colored cubes, picture books, puppets, musical toys, balls, skipping rope, bicycles are suitable games for children with intellectual disabilities (Metin, et al., 2019).

### ***Games for Visually Impaired Children***

Visually impaired children enjoy playing using their senses such as touch, hearing, smell and taste. Games for children with visual impairments should support their sensory, motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. For example, Braille books, audio books, playing cards written in Braille, tactile recognition games, musical instruments, audio toys, rope games, sack races, spinning tops, and hoops are suitable games for visually impaired children (Lieberman & MacVicar, 2003).

### ***Games for hearing impaired children***

Children with hearing impairments enjoy games that include visual, tactile, kinesthetic and motor stimuli. Play for children with hearing impairments should support their visual, motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. For example, picture books, picture cards, puzzles, lego, blocks, puppets, painting, coloring, dough games, jumping rope, bicycles, slides, swings are suitable games for hearing impaired children (Lieberman & MacVicar, 2003).

### ***Games for Children with Physical Disabilities***

Children with physical disabilities enjoy games that require little or no physical activity and develop cognitive, sensory, language, social and emotional skills. Play for children with disabilities should support their physical, cognitive, sensory, language, social and emotional development. For example, games such as storytelling, singing, rhymes, riddles, puzzles, board games, card games, computer games, painting, drawing, dough games, bead stringing, origami, model making are suitable games for children with physical disabilities (Karal, Akkoç, & Ayyıldız, 2010).

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