

The Place and Importance of Playgrounds in Terms of Children's Development

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Introduction

Play is considered a universal language; children learn through play, and the development of children who play is positively impacted. Children who play make sense of themselves and their world (Aly Amer, 2019). Burriss and Tsao (2002) emphasized that play should not be viewed solely as a fun activity; children engage in many profoundly meaningful learning experiences while playing. While playing, a child's basic need, they also acquire the skills necessary for survival. The reasons why play is so important are that children participate voluntarily, direct play as they wish, and express their feelings and thoughts within play (Pilten and Pilten, 2013). Gaming has been a part of our lives since the dawn of time, an activity in which people of all ages, young and old, spend a significant portion of their time. With technology making every aspect of our lives easier, it has also become increasingly widespread, particularly in the areas of entertainment and gaming (Özmen, Alıncak & Cağdanlıoğlu, 2023). Play helps children to feel good about themselves (Alıncak, 2016). Play is an outlet for the child's happiness and excess energy in life (Nutku, 2006). Play enables children to discover themselves and recognize the characteristics that distinguish them from others. Imitative games, especially housekeeping games, imaginary games, and role-playing games that simulate various professions and situations, make significant contributions to children's psychosocial development. While playing, children learn social skills such as communicating with others, sharing, cooperating and helping each other, and solving problems together. They acquire social rules and moral values more easily through play. For example, play supports the learning of values and rules such as waiting for one's turn, respecting the rights of others, taking responsibility, and distinguishing right from wrong. It increases their experience of social life and reinforces what they have learned. In addition, play

activities contribute to physical development by supporting the development of fine motor skills, such as hand-finger coordination, and gross motor skills, such as leg-arm coordination. Games that require muscle strength (running, jumping, climbing, etc.) in particular help growth by exercising the body system (Cirhinlioğlu, 2001). Play is one of the basic building blocks of personality, which includes various values such as sociability, ability and intelligence. Play is the most important element that prepares the child for life and guides him/her in his/her life, as well as internalizing the right behaviors in the child's social life (Alıncak and Tuzcuoğulları, 2016). Attitudes are one of the important concepts in human life. Attitude is not a concept that can be measured directly, but it is possible to measure an individual indirectly through behavioral patterns (Öztürk et al., 2017). Numerous remains of clay dolls have been found in ancient Egyptian tomb excavations, and other excavations have revealed that children of that period played with rattles filled with seeds and small wheeled toy carriages. In ancient Greek civilization, dolls made of baked clay with joints have been found, and it is known that hopscotch was a game that was quite popular among adults as well as children (Onur, 1992). It is thought that children living in Roman civilization played almost the same games as Greek children, and it is noted that old engravings, believed to be related to the game of hopscotch, have been found in the Roman Forum in Rome. It is thought that various children's games were played in every corner of medieval Europe, and most of these games can be traced back to books of the period or illustrations of daily life drawn on paintings (Johnston, 2011).

Play is a form of learning that involves the discharge of excess energy, relaxation and pleasure (Aksoy and Çiftçi, 2014). At the same time, play is an activity that allows children to recognize themselves (Yıkılmaz and Kurşun, 2018; Ayan et al., 2017).

Under the conditions of the era, owning and playing with a toy represented, for children, the class differences in their community and the class of their families (Onur, 1992). Thus, the games children played could be considered to reflect their families' social standing, lifestyles, and class differences. It is generally believed that children from peasant families used clothing scraps, candles, animal bones, sticks, and stones found at home, transforming them into playthings such as dice, marbles, balls, and so on, according to their own resources. However, it is known that craftsmen in towns made the same toys using wooden materials, such as puppets and spinning tops. In line with the daily conditions of the era, one of the behaviors children observed in their families' lives and repeated as play was hunting. Village boys spent their time hunting small animals with homemade traps, bows, and arrows (Elliot, 2004).

In Wittgenstein's (2010) *Philosophical Investigations*, it is emphasized that all elements of games, such as play, rules, and competition, fail to adequately define what games

are. According to Wittgenstein, “play is defined as a rule-following activity. For Wittgenstein, the activity of use is considered one of the most fundamental elements” (Anlı, 2013). However, Wittgenstein does not bother with a terminological definition, but rather prioritizes identifying similarities among the games played, thus creating class-based groupings. Indeed, language is defined through similarities. Another point in Wittgenstein’s work is his interpretations of desire. In Wittgenstein, desire, or desiring, ceases to be a negative characteristic and assumes a productive character within the context of language play, enabling desire to reproduce itself (Baker, Hacker and Wittgenstein, 1991). These inferences Wittgenstein draws do not provide conceptual clarity. Geras (2009) states that Wittgenstein was criticized by many people, such as Thomas Hurka, and that his definitions were more widely accepted.

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the role and importance of playgrounds in terms of child development.

The Importance of Play

One of the primary criteria for children’s playgrounds is the selection of a suitable location. Playgrounds that are easily accessible, safe, and designed with parents and children in mind will be preferred by users. Playgrounds serve as recreational areas for children and their accompanying parents. Urban recreational areas can be created where all city residents can spend quality time. Playgrounds should be of an appropriate distance and size from residences and schools. They should be easily accessible by car or on foot. Areas away from traffic should be chosen for both safety and to avoid noise and air pollution. The slope and drainage conditions of the area should be considered when selecting the location, and a healthy drainage system should be established (Aklıbaşında, Tırnakçı and Özhancı, 2018; Bulut and Kılıçarslan, 2009; Yılmaz and Bulut, 2002). Locations that are free from noise, safe and accessible in terms of transportation, and rich in oxygen should be selected. Entrances, paths, signs, and boundaries should be provided to ensure maximum access to and use of the area (Onay and Şahin, 2019). Today, with changing living conditions and developments in technology, children’s games and the spaces where these games take place may undergo changes. It is possible to emphasize that traditional children’s games today take place on the streets under parental supervision and within a competitive concept. These changes in play can be linked to the disappearance of natural children’s play areas, the instrumentalization of free play time, and the isolation and institutionalization of children’s games. Indeed, children’s games are being shaped by technology in today’s conditions. As a result of modernization and urbanization, the free time and space available for play are becoming limited. As the number of natural children’s play areas decreases, children are being drawn into closed spaces, and as a result, they are turning to digital games (İnal, 2017).

Children's Playgrounds

Children's playgrounds are the first spaces outside their homes that children, who are beginning to communicate and socialize, embrace and feel a sense of belonging in. In an urban environment shaped by buildings, they connect with nature and engage in exercises that develop their physical, psychological, and physiological structures through play elements (Bal, 2005). Children learn about the world and the new stimuli they encounter in their environment using their senses. Therefore, it is important to consider children's health and development during the design phase of playgrounds, to include engaging elements in playgrounds, to create recreational areas that contribute to children's development, and to encourage children to interact with living and non-living things (Taştepe, Başbay and Yazıcı, 2016). Research has shown that children aged 6-8 prefer to go to the park with their families, while this situation changes for children aged 9-10. In this context, access distances to playgrounds should be determined based on age groups (Veitch et al., 2006). From past to present, playgrounds, like children's playgrounds, have held a significant place. While in the past, many children could be seen playing in the streets, this has now diminished to almost nothing. This can be attributed to the increase in the number of vehicles and the resulting traffic, the replacement of vacant lots with new buildings or apartment buildings, a lack of trust in the outdoors among families, and the rise in mobile or computer games. Traffic is a significant factor preventing children from playing outdoors. As children age, the risk of inattention or driver errors and carelessness has become unavoidable. For this reason, parents prefer not to send their children to play in areas where vehicles can pass (Yılmaz and Bulut, 2002). The study found that 76.7% of children did not want to play outside because they were worried about traffic, and their parents approved and supported them in this. With increasing urbanization, children had difficulty finding free space to play. Therefore, going outside gradually decreased, leaving their focus on indoor alternatives. With the advancement of technology, playing with toys also decreased significantly, giving way to mobile and computer games. This situation has both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect was that children did not fall behind in developing technological devices, developed themselves by learning their many functions, and kept up-to-date. However, the negative impact was primarily physical (Coşkun, 2015). Children's playgrounds have become important for developing spatial awareness and for learning and reinforcing basic concepts such as direction, distance, number, and color. The most important factor for children's playgrounds is safety. When designing playgrounds, the following safety considerations should be made (Erkan, 2011):

The characteristics of the land, whether it is flat or sloping, and its location, as well as its sociocultural suitability for the environment, are important.

- Outdoor playgrounds should be designed with winter in mind. It is crucial to prevent ponding in the event of rain or snow, and to ensure that water is transported away without damaging the area or the play equipment, without accumulating.

- Shading should be provided, especially in the summer months, to block some sunlight. This can be achieved by selecting appropriate trees. Trees can also help prevent strong winds.
- Care should be taken to ensure that playgrounds are away from sources such as gas, water, and sewage.
- Playgrounds should be located in a location that provides easy access. Furthermore, access roads should not be hazardous.
- To increase the safety of playgrounds and to identify specific areas within the playground, children-friendly fences should be provided.

The location and importance of children's playgrounds

Children one of the primary criteria for playgrounds is the selection of a suitable location. Playgrounds that are easily accessible, safe, and designed with parents and children in mind will be preferred by users. Playgrounds serve as recreational areas for children and their accompanying parents. Urban recreation areas where all city residents can spend quality time can be created. Playgrounds should be of an appropriate distance and size from residential areas and schools. They should be easily accessible by car or on foot. To ensure both safety and distance from noise and air pollution, areas away from traffic should be selected (Aklıbaşında, Tırnakçı and Özhancı, 2018). Locations should be selected that are free from noise, safe and accessible in terms of transportation, and rich in oxygen. Entrances, paths, signs, and restrictions should be in place to ensure maximum access to and use of the area (Onay, 2019).

The quality of children's playgrounds

Kevin Lynch's (1977) book, "Growing up in Cities," is one of the few books addressing the needs of young people in public spaces. Research following Lynch's has emphasized the importance of spaces that include private recreational opportunities where young people can socialize, observe their surroundings, and remain unseen. Such spaces should be taken into consideration by designers.

Quality from the Designer's Perspective: Designers focus on three fundamental elements when designing a children's playground. These elements (Frost, 1985):

1. Pre-design (Human factors, safety, materials),
2. During design (Games, accessibility, connectivity, modular play elements),
3. Post-design (Trained play leaders). These criteria, which must be considered before, during, and after design, are directly related to the usability of the playground.

Usability can be achieved by decision-making groups developing appropriate and appropriate solutions. The most important criteria here are safety, enabling play variety, and guiding and training play leaders. However, trained play leaders can only exist in specific, systematic, and institutionalized play areas. Play quality is another criterion for usability. The factors that determine the quality of play are the qualities of the play area

and play elements. The qualities that determine the “quality” of the play area and play elements are listed below (Heseltine and Holbrn, 1987):

Time: The ability to hold the child’s attention for the longest period of time without allowing repetition.

Modifiability: The ability of the play area and play elements to be frequently changed.

Interest: The ability of the play area and play elements to meet the child’s personal expectations.

Possibilities: The abundance of opportunities the play area offers the child.

Suitability: The ability of the play area to meet the expectations of different age groups and groups.

Collaboration: The ability of the play area and play elements to encourage group play and cooperation among them.

The impact of children’s play areas on child development

The child’s physical environment varies in terms of housing, the immediate surroundings of the home, school, playgrounds, etc., in parallel with the child’s physical, perceptual, and socio-emotional development. Therefore, the physical environment with which the child interacts is of great importance in the child’s socialization and development as a member of society (Eroğlu and Ertosun, 2015).

Social Skills:

Play is formed and shaped by its own unique rules. In this way, children learn to follow rules through play. Along with a competitive environment, they learn to respect others, say thank you, apologize, defend their rights, and not infringe on the rights of others. These skills enable them to become healthy individuals in later years and to be compatible within society.

Emotional Skills:

Children express their emotions through play. Therefore, play is a tool for children to express their emotions. When children are acknowledged, appreciated, and supported while playing, it enables them to be happy and confident. Conversely, children who are not appreciated, acknowledged, or loved become unhappy and insecure.

Cognitive Skills:

Children perceive objects and concepts through play. This perception supports and develops the child’s cognitive activity. They learn basic discrimination skills such as contrast, compatibility, and incompatibility through play. Play areas are a spatial educational environment designed to support activities that are essential for physical development and education. The play space should allow for different types of play, such as creative play, play with natural elements, water and sand play, quiet play, and

shared open space play. A well-designed, well-managed play environment provides children with opportunities for development, such as motor skill development, social development, learning, decision making, fantasy play, and playing for fun (Alqudah, 2003).

Physical activities are essential for children. Children want to spend most of their time outdoors doing physical activities (Sallis, Prochaska and Taylor, 2000). The most important places for children to spend time outdoors are playgrounds. Children's playgrounds are important public spaces in urban areas. These places are open spaces where children can engage in activities and form social relationships. Play activities in open green spaces not only make children happy but are also healthier than those in enclosed spaces such as shopping malls and cafeterias (Nemutlu, Akdeniz and Çamayaz, 2018).

Children are people's most valuable assets. Providing natural playgrounds away from the hustle and bustle of the city has become the sole purpose of adults (Timur et al, 2018). One of the primary criteria for playgrounds is the selection of a suitable location. The playground should be easily accessible to homes and schools. Areas away from traffic should be chosen for both safety and to avoid noise and air pollution. Parents usually accompany their children in these areas. When play areas are designed appropriately, they can become urban recreation areas where all city residents, from young to old, can spend quality time (Bulut and Kılıçarslan, 2009).

The importance of children's play areas in urban areas

Children's parks are important public spaces in urban areas. These places are open spaces where children can engage in activities and form social relationships. Play activities in open green spaces make children happy and are healthier than indoor spaces such as shopping malls and cafeterias (Nemutlu, Akdeniz and Çamayaz, 2018). They serve as recreational areas for children and their accompanying parents. When well-planned and provided with suitable conditions, urban recreational areas can be created where all city residents, from young to old, can spend quality time. Children are people's most valuable assets. Providing natural children's play areas away from the hustle and bustle of the city has become the goal of adults. Nature has been educational for everyone. Outdoor play areas designed with inspiration from nature have given children the opportunity to learn by doing. Children feel more peaceful and comfortable in open green spaces, where they have fun and use their imagination and creativity to create their own games (Timur et al, 2018). Children's play areas are the first place outside their homes where children, who are beginning to communicate and socialize, feel a sense of belonging. In an urban environment shaped by buildings, it is a place where children interact with nature and engage in exercises that develop their physical, mental, and physiological structure with play elements (Bal, 2005).

Conclusion

When a child is born, they are unconscious and innocent. Moreover, the world is quite complex and meaningless to them. Play makes the world more meaningful in the child's eyes and helps them adapt. A child's job is to play. It provides an environment for them to engage in activities and fulfill responsibilities that they will continue to pursue later in real life as an adult.

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