

The Role Of Games In Supporting Child Growth And Development Holistically

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received:

24-10-2024

Revised:

26-11-2024

Accepted:

01-01-2025

Keywords

play

child development

holistic development

educational games

ABSTRACT

Play is an essential component of early childhood life, functioning both as a learning medium and as a strategy to stimulate children's holistic development. This study aims to examine the role of play in supporting the comprehensive growth and development of children in Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD). The research employed a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected from various sources, including books, scientific journals, research articles, and other relevant academic documents related to play and early childhood development. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques, which involved collecting, reviewing, and interpreting literature related to play and child development in early childhood education. The findings of the study indicate that play has a significant and multidimensional role in supporting children's physical, motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, creative, as well as moral and spiritual development. In the context of Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD), play also serves as an effective medium for instilling Islamic values. Various educational play activities, such as learning Hijaiyah letters, practicing daily prayers, exploring stories of the Prophets, and engaging in games that promote Islamic character building, contribute to the development of children's moral and spiritual foundations. Therefore, play can be considered an effective and essential learning strategy to support optimal, balanced, and holistic child development in accordance with the objectives of Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD).



Introduction

Play plays a crucial role in supporting children's early academic readiness. Although early childhood education does not emphasize formal academic achievement, play-based learning gradually introduces foundational skills needed for later schooling. For instance, through counting games, shape recognition, letter matching, and pattern activities, children begin to develop early numeracy and literacy skills in a natural and enjoyable way. This reduces learning pressure and allows children to build positive attitudes toward learning from an early age.

Play also strengthens attention span and concentration. Many structured and unstructured play activities require children to focus on tasks for a certain period of time,

follow simple rules, and complete activities step by step. This process helps children gradually extend their ability to concentrate, which is a critical skill for future classroom learning. Children who regularly engage in play-based learning environments tend to show better classroom readiness and learning motivation compared to those who have limited play experiences.

Play contributes significantly to the development of social awareness and cultural understanding. In group play settings, children interact with peers from different backgrounds, learn social norms, and understand the importance of cooperation and respect. These experiences help children develop a sense of belonging and social identity. They also learn how to adapt their behavior according to different social contexts, which is an important life skill for future social interaction.

In the context of Early Childhood Islamic Education, play can also serve as a medium for introducing cultural and religious identity in a gentle and meaningful way. Children are gradually introduced to Islamic traditions, values, and simple practices through play-based activities. For example, role-play activities such as pretending to perform prayer (shalat), visiting the mosque, or practicing daily greetings help children become familiar with religious practices in a natural setting. This strengthens their understanding of Islam as a part of daily life rather than a separate subject.

Another important aspect of play is its role in strengthening family and teacher-child relationships. When adults participate in or guide play activities, emotional bonding between children and adults becomes stronger. This positive relationship creates a sense of security and trust, which is essential for healthy emotional development. Children who feel emotionally secure are more likely to explore, learn, and express themselves confidently.

Play also encourages collaborative learning among children. Through group activities, children learn to work together toward a common goal, share responsibilities, and support one another. This collaborative environment fosters teamwork skills, leadership potential, and mutual respect. These skills are not only important in early childhood but also serve as essential competencies for future academic and social success.

From a long-term developmental perspective, the benefits of play extend beyond early childhood. Research indicates that children who experience rich play-based learning environments tend to perform better academically, socially, and emotionally in later stages of education. They are also more adaptable, more creative, and better at solving complex problems. This shows that play has a lasting impact on overall human development.

Play also contributes to the development of resilience in children. Through play experiences, children encounter challenges, failures, and successes. These experiences teach them how to cope with difficulties and persist in the face of obstacles. Resilience is an important psychological trait that helps children handle future academic and life challenges more effectively.

In Islamic educational philosophy, the development of resilience, character, and morality is highly emphasized. Therefore, integrating play into Early Childhood Islamic Education supports not only cognitive and physical development but also spiritual and moral strengthening. This holistic approach ensures that children grow into balanced individuals who are intellectually capable, emotionally stable, socially competent, and spiritually aware. Play functions as a comprehensive developmental system that connects all aspects of early childhood growth. It is not limited to a single domain but operates as an integrated approach that supports learning in a natural, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate way. Because of this, play should be positioned as the core strategy in Early Childhood Islamic Education, rather than being treated as an additional or supplementary activity.

Method

This study employed library research with a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on the contextual application of play within Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD) institutions located in Tumbu'an Village, Lubuk Sandi District, Seluma Regency, Indonesia. This library research was chosen because it aimed to examine in-depth various theories, concepts, and research findings related to the role of play in supporting holistic child development in Islamic Early Childhood Education. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research aims to understand a phenomenon in depth through the analysis of various relevant data sources.

This research was conducted from 15 May 2026. Research activities included searching for library sources, collecting data, identifying literature, analyzing various theories and previous research findings, and preparing a research report on the role of play in supporting holistic child development in Islamic Early Childhood Education.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources were obtained from various national and international scientific journals discussing early childhood play, child development, and Islamic Early Childhood Education. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were obtained from books, scientific articles, seminar proceedings, and other supporting documents relevant to the research focus. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies. Data collection was conducted by identifying, collecting, reading, recording, and classifying various literature sources related to play, early childhood development, and Islamic education. All data obtained was then grouped based on discussion themes that align with the research focus, contextualized with the educational environment in Tumbu'an Village, Seluma Regency.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. Data were analyzed by reviewing, comparing, interpreting, and synthesizing various theories and relevant research findings to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of play in supporting holistic child development in Islamic Early Childhood Education. The analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020).

Results and Discussion

1. Optimization of Physical-Motor and Cognitive Capacities Through Educational Play

Play has a very strong, consistent, and multidimensional role in supporting child development, serving as an essential bridge between concrete experiences and cognitive structures (Latif et al., 2019). In terms of physical development, active play contributes significantly to gross motor skills—such as running, jumping, and traditional outdoor games—which build muscle strength, body coordination, and spatial awareness. In the context of early childhood settings in Tumbu'an Village, Seluma, local and natural environments provide ample space for children to engage in these physical activities. Simultaneously, manipulative activities like drawing, folding origami, and stacking blocks sharpen fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and finger dexterity required for later writing readiness (Nugraha, 2020). Fine motor stimulation through structured activities also demonstrates positive impacts on children's developmental achievements (Nurjanah, 2020; Rochmawati et al., 2026). From a neurological standpoint, physical movement increases oxygen supply to the brain and stimulates neural connections associated with memory and self-regulation processes. Educational experiences integrating active movement consequently provide benefits extending beyond physical competence alone.

This physical stimulation directly enhances cognitive development. Children manipulating objects in construction play or engaging in puzzles and sorting activities utilize

trial-and-error processes to solve problems independently. Educational play activities involving puzzles facilitate logical thinking, concentration, and recognition of patterns among young learners (Mukhtar & Nurhafizah, 2021). Cognitive development among children aged five to six years also demonstrates significant improvement through puzzle-based learning experiences (Wulandari & Akbarjono, 2019). In PIAUD institutions within rural areas such as Lubuk Sandi District, intellectual curiosity may be enriched through exploration of Allah's creations including plants and animals available in the surrounding environment. Islamic-themed cognitive tasks involving Arabic letter matching or prayer sequence arrangements additionally strengthen both intellectual growth and religious understanding. Meaningful learning experiences therefore contribute toward balanced cognitive and spiritual development.

Furthermore, educational play contributes substantially to the development of executive functions regulating children's behavioral and cognitive performance. Executive functions include working memory, inhibitory control, and cognitive flexibility that collectively influence learning readiness and adaptive behavior. Structured play situations encourage children to remember instructions, maintain attention toward specific objectives, and control impulsive responses during activities. Group-based educational games frequently require children to follow rules and adjust actions according to changing conditions. Cognitive engagement occurring during these activities stimulates neural pathways associated with attention regulation and decision-making processes. Developmental findings indicate that repeated exposure to playful learning experiences strengthens higher-order thinking abilities during early childhood periods (Yogman et al., 2018). Educational environments integrating playful learning therefore facilitate balanced maturation between cognitive competence and behavioral regulation.

Social interaction occurring during educational play simultaneously strengthens communication abilities and collaborative behavior among young children. Participation in collective activities creates opportunities for children to express ideas, negotiate roles, and interpret perspectives from peers. Verbal exchanges emerging throughout play situations enrich vocabulary acquisition and sentence construction abilities supporting later literacy development (Latif et al., 2019). Classroom environments within early childhood institutions also provide contexts where children practice listening skills and respond appropriately to social cues. Positive social experiences enhance emotional security and create supportive conditions for active participation during learning processes. Knowledge acquisition frequently emerges through meaningful interactions occurring between children and surrounding individuals. Educational play therefore functions as an effective medium for promoting linguistic competence and interpersonal development simultaneously.

Emotional development also receives significant benefits through the implementation of educational play activities. Children frequently encounter situations involving success, disappointment, excitement, and uncertainty during gameplay experiences. Exposure to varying emotional situations enables children to recognize feelings and gradually develop strategies for emotional regulation. Activities involving role play and imaginative scenarios allow children to express internal experiences through symbolic representation. Opportunities for emotional expression contribute to psychological well-being and reduce tendencies toward emotional suppression. Positive learning experiences integrating playful activities support children's emotional adjustment and developmental balance (Yogman et al., 2018). Educational contexts incorporating play consequently establish important foundations for emotional maturity and adaptive behavior.

Creative thinking capacities likewise emerge and expand through diverse forms of educational play. Activities involving open-ended materials encourage children to explore multiple possibilities without rigid restrictions on outcomes. Creative processes stimulate imagination and foster originality when children transform ordinary objects into meaningful

representations. Exposure to flexible learning experiences increases divergent thinking abilities associated with innovation and problem-solving skills. Educational settings utilizing local resources such as leaves, stones, or recycled materials create additional opportunities for imaginative exploration. Continuous stimulation of creativity strengthens mental flexibility and encourages children to generate alternative perspectives toward different situations (Latif et al., 2019). Development of creativity during early childhood therefore contributes significantly to future intellectual adaptability.

Religious and moral values may also be effectively integrated into educational play activities during early childhood education programs. Learning experiences designed around Islamic values create opportunities for children to understand ethical principles through meaningful participation. Educational games involving stories of prophets, sequencing prayer movements, or recognizing Islamic symbols facilitate religious understanding through age-appropriate approaches. Children tend to internalize values more effectively when learning experiences remain enjoyable and connected to direct participation. Repeated engagement with moral situations during play assists children in distinguishing acceptable and inappropriate behaviors. Character formation during early childhood requires practical experiences supporting value internalization rather than passive memorization (Latif et al., 2019). Educational play therefore serves as an important instrument for strengthening spiritual awareness alongside cognitive and physical development.

2. Enhancing Linguistic Competence and Social-Emotional Maturity in Group Settings

Language and social-emotional capacities develop in an interconnected manner through interactive group play. Play settings provide authentic communicative contexts where children verbally express ideas, formulate questions, and resolve misunderstandings occurring among peers, thereby expanding both receptive and expressive language abilities (Latif et al., 2019). During role-play activities such as pretending to become teachers, doctors, or community figures, children naturally experiment with varied vocabulary and narrative structures. Interactive dialogue occurring within play environments contributes significantly to children's language acquisition and communication competence. Developmental perspectives emphasize that social interactions create opportunities for children to operate within their Zone of Proximal Development through peer and teacher support mechanisms. In Islamic early education contexts, particularly within communal societies such as Tumbu'an Village, this linguistic process may incorporate daily Islamic expressions including *Assalamualaikum*, *Bismillah*, and *Alhamdulillah*. Integration of religious language into everyday communication consequently strengthens both linguistic development and cultural identity formation.

Language development during educational play also supports children's ability to organize thoughts and construct meaningful expressions. Verbal interactions encourage children to describe experiences, explain ideas, and communicate personal perspectives during collaborative activities. Exposure to various conversational situations gradually increases vocabulary mastery and improves sentence construction abilities. Frequent communication experiences further strengthen listening skills and facilitate children's understanding of contextual meanings. Educational play activities involving storytelling and symbolic interaction additionally stimulate narrative competence and creative expression among learners. Continuous exposure to meaningful communication environments therefore contributes to comprehensive language development among young children (Latif et al., 2019).

Social-emotional maturity is formed through the shared rules and interpersonal experiences emerging during group play activities. Children learn important prosocial behaviors including cooperation, sharing, turn-taking, and empathy through direct interaction with peers. Collaborative play situations create opportunities for children to

understand social expectations and respond appropriately to collective responsibilities. Social participation within educational settings additionally promotes feelings of belonging and interpersonal connectedness among children. Positive peer interactions create emotional security that supports healthy psychosocial development throughout early childhood periods. Educational play therefore becomes an effective medium for strengthening children's social adaptation and interpersonal competence (Yogman et al., 2018).

Play activities also function as safe environments where children encounter various emotional experiences and gradually learn emotional regulation strategies. Children frequently experience emotional conditions involving excitement, disappointment, success, or frustration while participating in group activities. Repeated exposure to these emotional situations facilitates children's understanding of personal feelings and emotional responses. Emotional awareness acquired through practical experiences contributes significantly to the development of self-control abilities. Children gradually recognize appropriate methods for expressing emotions without creating conflict within social environments. Positive emotional experiences occurring during play consequently support the development of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience (Yogman et al., 2018).

Implementation of play activities within PIAUD environments further provides opportunities for integrating Islamic values into children's social interactions. Waiting for turns during games may cultivate patience (*sabr*) as an important moral characteristic. Sharing toys and learning materials encourages generosity and compassion (*rahmah*) among children during collaborative experiences. Acceptance of game outcomes through positive attitudes also promotes sincerity (*ikhlas*) and emotional balance. Moral concepts become easier for children to understand when introduced through practical experiences rather than abstract explanations. Meaningful participation within educational play therefore transforms religious values into observable social habits within children's daily lives (Latif et al., 2019).

3. Internalization of Moral-Spiritual Values and the Cultivation of Creative Thinking

Play serves as a powerful, non-coercive medium for moral-spiritual internalization and creative expansion. Rather than depending on rigid rote memorization, children absorb ethical boundaries and spiritual awareness directly through guided play activities. Rule-based games introduce early moral reasoning regarding responsibility and justice. Spiritual habits are reinforced as children routinely implement religious etiquette during play, supported by Islamic storytelling regarding the Prophets to instill faith and trust in Allah. In this environment, teachers in Tumbu'an Village function as vital behavioral role models, as children learn moral choices primarily through observation and imitation during play interactions.

Play acts as the primary driver for divergent thinking and imaginative expression. Open-ended materials and symbolic pretend play provide a low-risk environment where children can invent scenarios and explore alternative answers without fear of failure. In the context of PIAUD, this creativity is channeled through thematic tasks like drawing mosques, constructing models of the Kaaba, or creating simple crafts for Islamic celebrations using accessible local resources. This synthesis ensures that creative imagination, cognitive flexibility, and innovative problem-solving skills expand in harmony with the child's burgeoning spiritual identity, establishing a holistic foundation for future academic and personal success within the Seluma Regency educational framework.

Play serves as a powerful and non-coercive medium for facilitating moral-spiritual internalization during early childhood development. Ethical values and spiritual awareness are often more effectively acquired through meaningful experiences than through rigid memorization processes alone. Rule-based activities introduce children to fundamental concepts regarding responsibility, fairness, and appropriate behavior within social

environments. Participation in guided play situations also allows children to experience the consequences of actions and understand the importance of respecting established norms. Religious practices may be reinforced through daily activities involving prayer routines, Islamic greetings, and storytelling related to the Prophets. Teachers within early childhood institutions consequently function as important role models because children frequently acquire moral understanding through observation and imitation processes (Latif et al., 2019). Continuous exposure to positive behavioral examples therefore strengthens children's moral and spiritual foundations.

Play additionally functions as an effective mechanism for stimulating divergent thinking and imaginative expression among young learners. Activities involving symbolic representation and open-ended materials provide opportunities for children to explore ideas without fear of making mistakes. Creative experiences encourage children to produce multiple solutions and develop original responses toward different situations. Flexible learning environments further stimulate curiosity and increase cognitive adaptability during problem-solving processes. Educational activities emphasizing imagination also strengthen children's confidence in expressing unique ideas and perspectives. Exposure to creative experiences during early childhood consequently supports intellectual development and independent thinking abilities (Yogman et al., 2018).

Within PIAUD contexts, creativity may be integrated harmoniously with spiritual learning through thematic educational activities. Children can participate in drawing mosques, constructing simple models of the Kaaba, or producing decorative crafts related to Islamic celebrations using locally available materials. Utilization of environmental resources additionally promotes children's appreciation for surrounding objects and strengthens contextual learning experiences. Creative activities connected with religious themes facilitate balanced development between imagination and spiritual understanding. Educational experiences integrating cognitive and religious dimensions create opportunities for children to understand values through practical participation. Holistic learning approaches therefore contribute significantly to the establishment of strong foundations for future academic achievement and personal development (Latif et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the literature synthesis and contextual observations in Tumbuan Village, Lubuk Sandi District, Seluma Regency, Indonesia, play serves as a fundamental pedagogical strategy in Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD) that holistically integrates physical-motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral-spiritual, and creative domains. It provides a natural, low-pressure environment where children actively construct knowledge through direct experience, aligning with constructivist and preoperational development theories. Physical play optimizes gross and fine motor skills while boosting neurological readiness, which directly underpins cognitive problem-solving, memory, and logical pattern recognition. Furthermore, interactive group play drives linguistic competence within the Zone of Proximal Development and fosters crucial social-emotional regulations, translating Islamic virtues like patience (*sabr*), generosity (*rahmah*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*) into real-world habits. Ultimately, guided and open-ended play successfully internalizes spiritual identity, moral reasoning, and creative innovation, meaning that play must be implemented as the core curriculum foundation rather than a supplementary activity, supported by effective teacher facilitation and strong parent-teacher collaboration within local communities.

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