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Developing Children's Social Skills Through Group Play Activities at Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh Kindergarten, North Moutong, Moutong District

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ABSTRACT : This article discusses the potential of group play activities to support social skills in early childhood at TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh, Moutong Utara, Moutong District. Social skills include communicating with peers, sharing materials, taking turns, cooperating, following simple rules, showing empathy, and responding constructively to disagreements. The manuscript is organized as a descriptive qualitative study proposal. Suggested data sources include classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and learning documentation. The literature indicates that play can create opportunities for peer interaction, collaborative problem-solving, and social learning when the activity is appropriate to children's developmental levels and supported by sensitive teacher guidance. Since school-specific field data were not provided for this draft, the discussion is presented as a conceptual framework rather than as verified findings from the named kindergarten. Actual observations and interviews must be added before the article is submitted as empirical research.

Keywords: Social Skills; Group Play; Early Childhood Education; Kindergarten; Peer Interaction

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important stage in building the foundation for children’s overall development. During this period, children develop in the areas of

language, cognition, physical-motor skills, religious and moral values, art, and social-emotional growth. All of these aspects are interrelated and develop through the experiences children gain at home, in their play environments, and in educational institutions. Therefore, the learning process in kindergarten is directed not only at the ability to recognize letters and numbers, but also at children's ability to interact positively with others.

Social ability is a skill that helps children build relationships with peers and adults. This skill can be seen when children greet friends, invite others to play, share tools, wait for their turn, express their wishes, listen to friends' opinions, follow group agreements, and ask for help when facing difficulties. Social ability does not mean that children must always agree with what others want. Children also need to learn to express their opinions in acceptable ways, respect differences, and understand that their friends' needs are just as important.

Social development takes place gradually. Each child has a different temperament, family experience, language ability, and opportunity to interact. Some children join groups easily, while others need time to feel safe before participating. Some children can share easily, while others still need examples and reminders. These differences are part of the developmental process, so educators need to observe children individually and provide support according to their needs, rather than labeling a child as naughty, shy, or unable to socialize.

One context that provides opportunities for developing social skills is playing together. Through play, children have goals or experiences that they can share with friends. They can build something together, take turns using materials, create storylines, divide roles, and negotiate rules. These situations give children the opportunity to use language and body movements, read their friends' responses, and adjust their behavior. In well-designed play, social learning can take place naturally without losing the element of joy.

Parten (1932) described the forms of children's social participation in play, from more individual activities to play involving relationships and cooperation with other children. This framework helps educators understand that children's social involvement can vary and should not be assessed from a single observation. Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized the importance of social interaction in the development of learning. In group activities, children can learn with the support of peers and adults, especially when a task is within the child's reach but still requires examples or assistance.

Pretend play or role play can give children the opportunity to take another person's perspective, use language appropriate to a role, and negotiate a storyline. A meta-analytic review by Smits-van der Nat and colleagues on pretend play discusses the link between such play and young children's social competence. Other research on peer collaboration shows that early childhood education settings are an important place for supporting cooperative skills, although the results of interventions may differ depending on their design and implementation (Burns et al., 2024; Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). Therefore, play should not be assumed to succeed automatically; teachers need to choose activities, observe group dynamics, and provide appropriate support.

In kindergarten, playing together can be done through block play, assembling group puzzles, role-playing as sellers and buyers, traditional games, paired movement games, gardening activities, or making joint creations. Each form of play places different social demands on children. Building with blocks together requires communication and sharing of materials, while role play requires agreement on characters and storylines. Traditional games can teach children to follow rules and wait for their turn. Teachers can use a variety of activities to give opportunities to children with different interests and abilities.

The teacher's role is very important in creating a safe and inclusive play atmosphere. Teachers prepare sufficient materials, explain rules in simple language, model social expressions, and ensure that no child is continually left out. When disputes occur, teachers can help children describe what happened, express their feelings, listen to their friends, and find a solution. Help should be given only as much as necessary so that children still have the opportunity to try to solve problems on their own. A guided play approach can combine freedom to explore with teacher support in line with learning objectives (Skene et al., 2022).

The context of TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh in Moutong Utara Village, Moutong District, is a relevant location for studying the use of playing together in early childhood learning. This article focuses on the forms of play activities, observable indicators of social ability, and teachers' strategies for supporting positive interaction. So that the description of the school does not become an untested claim, the specific conditions of the institution need to be explained based on observation notes, teacher interviews, and learning documents that are actually available.

The problem underlying this study is the need for a systematic picture of how playing together can be used to provide children with social experiences. The

research questions are formulated as follows: (1) how can playing-together activities be designed to support children's social ability; (2) what social behaviors can be observed during play activities; and (3) how do teachers guide interaction and the resolution of simple conflicts during play. These questions help limit the discussion so that it does not expand to all aspects of child development.

The aim of this study is to describe the potential of playing-together activities in supporting children's social ability at TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh Moutong Utara. Specifically, the discussion is directed at explaining the forms of play that enable cooperation, identifying observable indicators of social behavior, and describing the teacher's actions in facilitating interaction. Practically, this article is expected to serve as material for reflection for teachers in designing enjoyable activities, providing fair opportunities for participation, and respecting differences in each child's development.

The theoretical benefit of this study is to clarify the relationship between play, peer interaction, and the development of social ability in early childhood. The practical benefit is to provide examples of observation indicators and guidance steps that teachers can adapt. For parents, an understanding of the social value of play can support continuity between children's experiences at home and at school. However, these benefits should be understood as expectations that must be tested through real implementation and evaluation, not as results that have been proven for all children.

The novelty this paper seeks to build lies in focusing the discussion on playing together in a single institutional context, with operational social indicators and teacher guidance strategies. The article does not discuss play merely as a recreational activity, but also as a learning situation that allows children to practice communication, cooperation, sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts. To state the novelty of the research academically, the author still needs to review relevant previous studies and compare them directly with the field data.

Thus, developing social ability through playing together needs to be understood as a process that requires planning, observation, reflection, and cooperation between teachers and families. The right activity is not merely the liveliest game, but one that gives children the opportunity to interact safely, take on roles, and experience support when facing difficulties. This framework serves as the basis for the method and discussion in the next section.

II. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design to understand children's social behavior in everyday play activities at TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh, Moutong Utara Village, Moutong District. Participants are the classroom teacher, selected purposively for their knowledge of planning, implementing, and evaluating activities, and the children who join playing-together activities. Children are observed during ordinary lessons without labeling or any harmful treatment, and the research requires school permission, parental or guardian consent, confidentiality of identities, and no publication of photos or personal information without proper permission. Data are collected through observation of concrete, recordable behaviors (inviting friends to play, sharing materials, taking turns, following rules, helping friends, resolving conflicts), semi-structured teacher interviews, and documentation such as lesson plans, anecdotal notes, and permitted photos. Observation uses a simple indicator sheet covering eight social indicators, from initiating play to resolving disputes with appropriate help, each paired with example behaviors.

Data analysis follows an interactive process of data condensation, data display by theme (sharing, cooperation, communication, rule compliance, empathy, conflict resolution), and drawing and verifying conclusions. Validity is strengthened through source and technique triangulation, teacher review of interpretation summaries, explanation rather than removal of inconsistent data, and reflective notes separating observed events from interpretation. Because no field data from the school has been provided, this section is a planned design, not a report of completed research. Before submission as an empirical article, the author must add the actual dates, number of sessions, general participant characteristics, and the procedures and analysis truly carried out, and must not describe anything as done that was not.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Playing Together as a Context for Social Learning and Observable Social Behavior

Playing together gives children a meaningful situation for interacting with peers. Unlike one-way instruction, group play often needs contributions from several children to reach a goal. Children can propose ideas, accept or decline suggestions appropriately, build simple strategies, and adjust when the game changes. This enriches social experience only when every child has room to take part. Play should be chosen with a clear purpose. If the aim is sharing and turn-taking, the teacher can

provide materials used in rotation. If the aim is cooperation, the teacher can offer challenges that need several children, such as building a block bridge or making a group collage. If the aim is communication, role play can encourage children to ask, answer, and share ideas. Small groups usually give each child more chances to speak and use materials. Large groups suit movement games or songs, but the teacher must watch for children who are less involved. Children who are not yet comfortable joining can be offered a simple role or the chance to watch first. The goal is to widen participation gradually, not to make every child show the same behavior at the same time.

Sharing and waiting for a turn develop through real experience. When children want the same material at the same time, the teacher can set simple rules: use tools in turn, ask permission before taking, and return materials when finished. The rules should be short and come with examples children can understand. When a child manages to wait, the teacher can give specific reinforcement by describing exactly what the child did. A child who is not yet willing to share should not be labeled negatively. The teacher can help the child understand the order of turns, offer a substitute tool, or use a visible turn marker. Songs, turn cards, or visual sequences can also support waiting. The teacher should prevent one child from always controlling the materials while others wait without limit, because fair distribution of opportunities is part of managing the play environment. Development should not be judged from a single event. Notes from several occasions give a better picture of the support a child needs.

Cooperation appears when children work toward a shared goal and coordinate their actions with others. In block building, one child may choose blocks, another may stack them, and another may keep the structure balanced. Roles should be flexible so that every child can try different tasks. Open-ended prompts from the teacher, asking how the building could stand or what a friend could do, invite children to plan solutions. Good group play does not always have to end in a perfect product. Listening to ideas, revising plans, and trying again are also important social experiences. When a structure collapses or the result differs from expectations, the teacher can help children treat it as a chance to try another strategy. Children then learn that mistakes or differences of opinion need not end cooperation. Research on peer collaboration in early childhood settings supports a cautious view. Burns and colleagues (2024) reviewed interventions to improve peer collaboration and found variation in results, so group play offers learning opportunities but its success depends on activity design, the teacher’s role, and children’s needs.

Social communication includes starting conversations, responding to others, expressing wishes, and listening. In role play, children can use language to decide who is the seller, buyer, doctor, patient, or family member. Teachers can model sentence frames such as asking to join, saying they would like a turn after a friend finishes, or suggesting taking turns, which give children language options in common social situations. Children whose language is still developing can use gestures, pointing, or short expressions. Teachers need to accept these varied ways of communicating and give children time to respond. Peers can also serve as language models when they talk and work together in play. A review of peer interaction and language development in preschoolers indicates that the form and frequency of interaction, and the abilities of communication partners, can shape children's language experience (Washington-Nortey et al., 2022). To keep communication from being dominated by certain children, the teacher can assign speaking turns, invite quieter children to share, and make sure their ideas are heard. Children who are not ready to speak before the whole class should not be forced. Pair or small-group conversations can be a more comfortable first step.

Empathy in young children can be seen in simple actions: noticing that a friend is struggling, offering help, checking whether a friend is all right, or adjusting play when a friend feels uncomfortable. These behaviors should be viewed according to age and context. Teachers can help children recognize feelings through stories, puppets, pictures of expressions, and short discussions after play. Pretend play can give children the chance to take on roles different from their own experience. When playing a doctor, seller, or family member, children can imagine others' needs and adjust their actions to the role. A meta-analytic review on pretend play discusses its link with young children's social competence (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024). Perspective-taking develops gradually, so teachers should provide support instead of assuming every child will immediately understand a friend's viewpoint. Together, these behaviors (sharing, turn-taking, cooperation, communication, and empathy) form the main observable indicators of children's social ability during play.

Teacher Guidance, Environment, Family Involvement, and Observation Framework

Rules help children understand that shared activities need agreement. Rules should be short, positive, and consistent, such as using tools safely, waiting for a turn, and talking about problems without hurting others. Teachers can involve children in

agreeing on simple rules so they understand that rules protect everyone's chance to play. Too many rules at once can confuse children, so only truly necessary rules should be chosen. Minor conflicts can arise from differing ideas, competition for materials, or disagreement over roles. Conflict does not always signal a failed activity. With suitable guidance, it can become a chance to learn to express feelings, listen, negotiate, and find solutions. The teacher must act immediately if a child's safety is threatened, then help children understand what happened once the situation is safe. The teacher can approach calmly, describe the observed behavior without blaming, let each child speak, and help them choose a reasonable solution, such as taking turns, using different materials, rebuilding together, or choosing another role. Teachers should not always solve every problem for children, but give gradual help suited to their abilities.

Teachers act as environment designers, observers, role models, and facilitators. Before play, they ensure tools are safe and sufficient, space is adequate, and children understand the purpose and rules. During the activity, they watch who is active, who has not yet had a chance, and what situations cause difficulty. After play, they can invite children to reflect on what they did together and how they took turns. Arrangement of space and materials affects the quality of interaction. Materials within easy reach encourage independence, while overcrowded areas can increase disputes. Reviews of the physical and sensory environment in early childhood education indicate that environmental conditions relate to social-emotional experience, although findings on specific interventions are not always uniform (Tamblyn et al., 2023). Teachers therefore need to observe their own classroom and adjust to children's needs. Guided play balances children's exploration with adult support. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Skene and colleagues (2022) shows that guided play outcomes depend on the type of learning outcome and the comparison used. This does not mean one method is best for every purpose. Teachers must decide when to allow full freedom, when guiding questions are needed, and when direct help is required.

Children's social ability also develops through relationships at home and in the surrounding community. Schools can tell parents which indicators are being practiced, such as asking permission, sharing, or expressing wishes in words. Parents can give children chances to play with siblings or friends with suitable supervision. Two-way communication helps teachers understand children's experiences outside school and avoid overly narrow interpretations of classroom behavior. Family cooperation need not be complicated. Teachers can suggest simple

conversations at home, such as inviting children to tell about games they like, how they took turns, or how they handled differences. What matters is giving children room to speak and showing examples of respectful interaction. This approach should avoid blaming families when a child still needs social support. Progress reports to parents should describe specific behaviors and practical suggestions, not comparisons between children. For example, a teacher can report that a child has begun inviting one friend to play but still needs help waiting for a turn. Information like this is more useful than general judgments that do not explain the next step.

Systematic observation helps teachers distinguish the intended goals of an activity from behavior actually seen. An observation sheet can record the date, type of play, social indicator, description of the event, teacher support given, and follow-up. Children's names should be replaced with codes in analysis documents and stored securely. Observation should take place on several occasions so conclusions are not drawn from events that happened to appear on a single day. Indicators that can be recorded include starting or responding to invitations, using materials in turn, following rules, expressing wishes, listening to friends, giving help, and joining the search for solutions during disputes. For consistency, indicators should be defined operationally. Cooperation, for example, can mean a child acts in support of the group's goal or adjusts their actions to a friend's contribution. After the activity, the teacher can reflect on whether all children had opportunities, whether materials were sufficient, whether rules were understood, what conflicts arose, what support helped, and what should change next time. This reflection makes play part of learning plans rather than an extra activity without clear purpose.

The discussion here explains the potential and principles of playing together based on the literature. It does not claim that any indicator has improved among children at TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh. Without field notes, the author cannot conclude how many children developed, how large the improvement was, or which games worked best at the school. Separating theory from local data is essential for academic honesty. To apply this framework, the school can start with one or two types of play, set a simple social goal, make initial observations, run the activity several times, and compare notes carefully. Results can then be presented by theme, supported by authentic teacher quotations and anonymized examples of behavior. The author can compare local findings with earlier studies, including research on children's social behavior during peer play (Ren et al., 2023), peer collaboration interventions (Burns et al., 2024), and pretend play (Smits-van der Nat et al., 2024), showing both agreement and difference rather than claiming all studies support the same

conclusion. Overall, playing together can be seen as a pedagogical strategy that lets children practice social skills in a meaningful context. This potential is easier to realize when teachers have clear goals, a safe environment, adequate materials, simple rules, and a responsive attitude toward children's needs. Conclusions about effectiveness at TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh must be set only after real data are collected and analyzed.

IV. CONCLUSION

Playing together has the potential to support the development of social ability in young children because it provides opportunities for direct interaction with peers. Through play that fits their developmental stage, children can practice sharing, taking turns, communicating, cooperating, following rules, showing concern for friends, and finding solutions to simple disputes. These activities are more meaningful when teachers set clear social goals and observe the process, not only the end result of the play.

The teacher's role includes preparing a safe environment, modeling social language, ensuring fair opportunities to participate, and giving help according to need. Group play does not automatically produce social development; its success is influenced by the quality of planning, teacher support, children's characteristics, and opportunities for repeated practice. Family involvement can help maintain continuity between children's social experiences at school and at home.

This article is a literature-based draft and research design for the context of TK Alkhairaat Nurul Falakh Moutong Utara, Moutong District. Because the school's observation, interview, and documentation data are not yet available, this paper cannot yet be used to state specific empirical results about the children at the institution. The author needs to complete the methods and results based on actual research, check all references, and ensure that every quotation in the text matches the source listed. Further research can observe several play sessions and document behavioral changes systematically without comparing children or giving them negative labels.

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