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Play for Early Childhood Character Development: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide a review of developing child character through playing activities. Providing a playing space for children might help them instill their characters properly. Playing while learning and learning while playing are the principles of child learning. Playing is an important aspect to stimulate all child development, including the development of religious and moral values, cognitive, language, social-emotional, physical-motor, and artistic aspects. This study used library research methods to describe the trend of research in physical education in the last five years (2018–2022). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were adopted for the research review. Scopus was used as the database in the article search. The article search obtained 385 articles retrieved from the database. After following the exclusion criteria, only 12 articles remained. The study succeeded in analyzing: 1) playing, and exercise for a child's character development, 2) character for early childhood, and 3) character development through education and parents.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the demands in achieving the progress of a nation, the better the education is held, the better the quality of the nation will be. Education is one of the human needs to improve and explore their potentials in different aspects, namely cognitive aspects, psychomotor aspects and affective aspects. According to (Ibrahim, 2013), education is a process of developing human resources to obtain social development capabilities and an optimal individual development providing a strong relationship between the individual and the surrounding community and cultural environment. Learning is a process of interaction among students, educators, and learning resources in a learning environment. Therefore, learning is an assistance provided by educators so that the process of mastering knowledge and skills, forming attitudes, and increasing student self-confidence can occur.

The quality of a nation can be determined from the character of its citizens. Character is the way a person responds morally to a situation and manifests himself in a real action through a good behavior, integrity, responsibility, and respect for others. Character is not just personality. More than that, character is a personality appraisal. A person is said to have a character if he is able to realize the values and beliefs desired by the community and make this character a guide in his life (White, 2017). Character education is essential as it is suitable to be developed to find out more about the meaning of soul values (awareness) and attitudes. In the process of discovering new values, enthusiasm, awareness, and attitudes, a person makes efforts to liberate himself so that he is more able to play a role in society. Character building is laid as the foundation for realizing the vision of community development (Sonuga-Barke et al., 2017). A positive character development can be conducted in Physical Education learning activities and sport classes. Sport activities help children not only for their physical aspects. Exercise can improve positive character and leadership skills. The character building through Physical Education and sports is important to do. Research has shown that children are taught to have cooperative endeavors and to play fairly by the rules. Child participations in sport classes can have a positive effect on character building (Afifi et al., 2017).

Increasing the competence of motor skills and increasing physical fitness are the desired learning out-

comes for school-age children. Physical activity is vital and has a positive impact on child health and development so that it becomes important in their lives (Hailes et al., 2019). Forming quality human beings can be realized through fostering sport activities for the younger generation (Dray et al., 2017). Physical activity-based programs are often focused on character development. A deliberate sport program can help provide positive development for underserved youth.

The true definition of character is "the mental and moral qualities peculiar to an individual". This is interesting because the definition does not give a positive or negative connotation. Character is a mental and moral quality that is inherent in every person. Characteristics can be positive or negative. There are two types of character values in sports, namely social values and moral values. Social values are positive values, but they must be balanced with moral values. A person with a strong outgoing personality may have little or no moral character. A person can be extremely devoted and loyal to immoral causes. Moral personalities, such as honesty, respect, and compassion, are necessary for performing ethical behavior in society. Character education is the foundation for the future as a basis for applying discipline to measure child behaviors. A discipline character reflects the parenting style of the family, especially parents, but parent preventive steps in cultivating a child disciplinary character are still minimal (Mulder et al., 2018). Playing activities are serious but fun, where various tasks can be realized through playing activities. Playing is an activity that children choose not because of its prizes or praise, but because it is fun. They can also practicing skills in playing activities (W. Lee, 2019).

Play can be a character building strategy. Nowadays, it is important to teach children about character development from an early age. It is feared that modern life and various social activities may change and affect a child personality. Cultivating this character can be started from the lowest and closest organization, the family. Likewise, it can be reworked in the educational field and community that surrounds it. It can also be done through fun activities while playing. It can use educational games with media and/or without media. Through this educational game, it is hoped that it can instill good characters in children (Hendren et al., 2017).

METHODS

There are different types of reviews on a topic, for instance narrative reviews, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. As the subject of this study is rooted in educational science, a systematic review was chosen (Otero-Saborido et al., 2021). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) is a published standard for conducting a Literature Review (Shaffril et al., 2019). In addition, PRISMA is designed to encourage transparent and complete systematic review reports and helps authors better describe what has been done, what is found in terms of the review protocol, and what they plan to do (Sarkis-Onofre et al., 2021).

Search strategies

The 2017 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol was followed to conduct the current systematic review. The author conducted a literature search based on articles published up to 2022. Scopus was the main source for searching articles using relevant keywords. In addition, scopus search was performed to identify relevant articles about impact of play for early childhood character development. This bibliographical database contains information on high-quality and multidisciplinary research published in scientific journals with global significance and allows integration of notes to facilitate this research (Mamun et al., 2022). The search strategy included a combination of variations of keywords “play” and “physical education” or “sports education” and “character in children”. A detailed search strategy is provided in the supplementary material.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria included: (1) duplicate articles, (2) articles not published in journals indexed in the Journal Citation Report (JCR) or Scimago Journal Rank (SJR), (3) articles published before year 2017, (3) articles in languages other than English, (4) journal articles with selected empirical data, meaning that review articles, book series, books, chapters in books and conference proceedings were all excluded.

Data Collection Procedure

A total of 385 articles obtained from Scopus were identified and reduced to exclude duplicates. Most items were discarded because filters applied for the last

five-year articles (2017-2022), ensuring that they met the inclusion criteria. In case of disagreement, final decision was finalized by the first author. After eliminating irrelevant articles, 12 studies were finally included in the review.

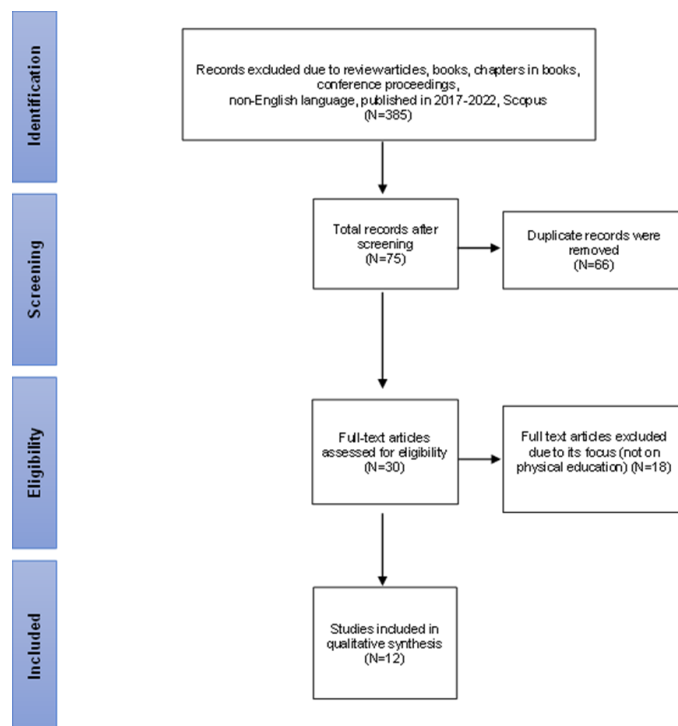


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow-Chart Diagram.

RESULT

This study conducted a literature review to find out games/plays for character development of children, by collecting articles or journals about games for character development of children. The collected articles or journals were then analyzed one by one. A total of 12 articles compiled between 2017 and 2022 articles were described and discussed.

Search process produced 385 articles. Of these, 12 articles met the criteria mentioned above for inclusion. The deleted articles, including 385 articles, were beyond the scope of this review and addressed different topics. Most articles on this topic were from USA, with a total of 4 articles. Other countries included Germany (1 article), Hong Kong (1 article), Scotland (1 article), Israel (1 article), Indonesia (1 article), American (1 article), Canada (1 article), and Turkey (1 article). The reason why other countries were not represented was

Table 1. Literature Search Results

No	Autho/Year/ Country	Title	Content	Result	Source and Database	
1	Şirin et al. (2018) Turkey	Implementing Character Education Program Through Music And Integrated Activities In Early Childhood Settings In Taiwan	Organizational Cynicism, Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Physical Education	Physical education teachers were found to have higher perceptions of transformational leadership when compared with transactional leadership and they were found to have moderate levels of organizational cynicism.	Universal Journal of Educational Research	
2	Agans et al. (2017) US	Peer Motivational Climate And Character Development: Testing A Practitioner-Developed Youth Sport Model	Achievement Goal Orientations, Character, Positive Youth Development, Youth, Peer Motivational Climate.	Peers can influence adolescents' sports experiences and shape their motivation and different peers	Journal of adolescence	
3	Egert et al. (2018) US	Impact Of In-Service Professional Development Programs For Early Childhood Teachers On Quality Ratings And Child Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis	Professional Development, In-Service Training, Early Childhood Education And Care, Meta-Analysis	Results demonstrate that quality improvement is a key mechanism for accelerating early childhood development.	Review of educational research	
4	Madigan et al. (2018) Canada	A Meta-Analysis Of Maternal Prenatal Depression And Anxiety On Child Socio-Emotional Development	Child Socioemotional Behavior; Meta-Analysis; Prenatal Stress.	Moderator analysis showed that effect sizes were stronger when depression was more severe and when socio-demographic risk increased.	Jamaed child adolesec psychiatry	
5	Mcintosh et al., 2018 Scotland	Experimental Confirmation Of A Character-Facing Bias In Literacy Development	Literacy Development; Mirror-Writing; Orientation Discrimination; Statistical Learning.	The first experimental of bias confronting characters in literacy development, showing that the implicit knowledge gained from exposure to written language readily generalizes to new letter-like forms.	Journal of experimental child psychology	
6	Felfe & lalive (2018) Germany	Does Early Child Care Affect Children's Development?	Early Child Care, Child Development, Marginal Treatment Effects, Rationing	Finding strong but different effects on children's motor and socio-emotional. Children who are most likely to attend ECC benefit in terms of their motor skill development. Children who are least likely to attend ECC gain in terms of their socio-emotional development skills, especially boys and children from less affluent families, such as those with low educational or migratory backgrounds.	Journal of public economics	
7	Shoshani (2019) Israel	Young Children's Character Strengths And Emotional Well-Being: Development Of The Character Strengths Inventory For Early Childhood (Csiec)	Character Strengths; Virtue; Well-Being; Children; Mentalhealth; Via; Inventory	Children Transcendence, intellectual and interpersonal strength are positively related to children's emotional well-being, and children's modesty and interpersonal strength are negatively related to socio-emotional difficulties.	Journal of positive psychology	
8	Saptatiningsih & Permana (2019) Indonesia	Early Childhood Character Building Trough Technological Education	Character, Technological Education	Early childhood character education can be formed through school and family collaboration which is carried out in kindergartens.	Journal of physics: conference series	
9	Cantor et al. (2019) US	Malleability, Plasticity, And Individuality: How Children Learn And Develop In Context	Malleability, Plasticity, Individuality.	Understanding of the holistic, self-constructive character of development and the interrelationships between the individual and the physical, social, and cultural context offer transformational opportunities for learning and influencing children's trajectories.	Applied developmental science	
10	Osher et al. (2020) US	Drivers Of Human Development: How Relationships And Context Shape Learning And Development	Human Development, Learning, Development.	Human development occurs through mutual co-action between individuals and their contexts and cultures, with relationship as the main driver.	Applied developmental science	
11	Macdonnell et al. (2021) US	Exploring The Impact Of A Social-Emotional And Character Development Intervention In The Middle Grades	Social-Emotional Learning, Character Education, Youth Development, School Climate, Urban Schools	Character Reading, Word Reading, Morphological Awareness, Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension.	Significant relationship between seed reflection and academic achievement. Partial mediation was also observed, with an indirect relationship between seed reflection, student-teacher relations, and academic attainment.	Rmle online
12	Jue et al. (2022) Hong Kong	Games Of Character: Team Sports, Games, And Character Development In Victorian Public Schools, 1850-1900	Character Reading, Word Reading, Morphological Awareness, Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension.	Character and word reading may reflect slightly different processes in Chinese literacy: theoretically, these results underscore the importance a reading model that integrates the unique features of the Chinese language.	Contemporary educational psychology	

because many articles met the exclusion criteria and did not focus on developing child characters. The research consisted of quantitative, qualitative, mixed research (quantitative and qualitative), and heuristic approaches carried out on a variety of content. Based on this review, the aims, content of the discourse, and the results they developed, we found five research groups. The five research groups included (i) physical education teacher leadership, (ii) principal and department leadership, (iii) student leadership, (iv) school leadership, and (v) cultural leadership. Of these five research groups, transformational leadership was the most frequently discussed (Şirin et al., 2018)

Play and Exercise for Character Development of Children

Character does not come by itself, but is taught in Physical Education and sports programs. The teaching of moral reasoning and sporting values involves the systematic use of certain strategies. In sport activities, character values, such as honesty, sportsmanship, discipline, and leadership, are needed. The activities included compassion, fairness, sportsmanship, and integrity. Character is defined as values, attitudes, and behaviors that can be accepted by the wider community. Being ethical, democratic, respectful, responsible, trustworthy, fair, just, and caring are sourced from community values, national ideology, citizenship, national cultural values, religion, and ethnicity and are widely accepted by Indonesian people (Agans et al., 2017).

Character education, which can be interpreted as value education, and moral education develop the ability of students to make good and bad decisions, maintain goodness, and sincerely realize this goodness in everyday life. Physical Education and sports are laboratories for human experience, thus Physical Education teachers must target opportunities to shape child characters. The character of the students in question is inseparable from the character of the Indonesian nation and the complete personality of the child. Apart from having to be carried out by every parent in the family, efforts can also be made in schools. The formation of personality can occur in the process of teaching and learning in extracurricular activities. Promoting character development can also be carried out in primary schools through community involvement in school culture (Jue et al., 2022).

Characters for Early Childhood

The formation of child characters starts from the family environment. The family is the first environment of the formation of child characters. Two important and fundamental aspects of character education are the character values of honesty and responsibility. Instilling the value of honesty and responsibility from an early age is an asset in preparing children to the next level (Shoshani, 2019).

Character Development through Education and Parents

Character education programs have gained increasing interest over the last decade and are designed to build students who are wise, ethical, morally responsible, community-oriented, and self-disciplined (Felfe & lalive, 2018). Physical Education and sports are education that use movement as a medium to achieve goals. Character formation is a long process and is influenced by contextual variables throughout life. If sport education becomes a part of a person life and experience in sports education will influence the formation of his character, it is hoped that a positive character will emerge. To produce quality and civilized education, character development should be planned holistically and systematically in all educational units and levels which can be carried out in various ways, such as self-control, empathy, submission, and moral thinking (Saptatiningsih & permana, 2019).

Several types of characters that are important in character building through Physical Education are honest, fair, responsible, peaceful, confident, respectful, and caring for others (Osher et al., 2020). Physical Education taught in schools is the right medium to increase a child passion for sport activities. In Physical Education, sport is a tool used to educate children to further improve the quality of Physical Education, thus teachers need to create innovative teaching methods that adapt to the conditions of students. Since most of the time is spent at school for learning and activities, school is the only institution that can be used to develop and socialize sport activities as a vehicle for character formation. Living in a world full of challenges and hopes requires a high level of commitment in realizing the expectations of every parent for children. This desire requires a continuous and quality care process (Madigan et al., 2018).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this article was to describe research on developing child characters through play. The research examined articles on child character development published in the last five years. Based on the study, the analysis was divided into six categories, namely 1) author and year, 2) country, 3) title, 4) content, 5) result, 6) sources and databases. However, author and year were excluded from this review. In this article review, character development of children had been spread in various countries, namely USA, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Indonesia, American, Taiwan, Canada, and Scotland. Based on these countries, USA became the country that had published many articles on this topic. Meanwhile, in this study, there were three research groups, namely: 1) playing and exercising for character development of children, 2) character for early childhood, 3) character development through education and parents. Playing and exercising for character development were discussed in (Agans et al., 2017) (Jue et al., 2022), character for early childhood in (Shoshani, 2019), character development with education and parents in (Felfe & lalive, 2018), (Saptatiningsih & permana, 2019), (Madigan et al., 2018), (Osher et al., 2020), (A. Lee, 2016).

From the literature and discussion above, early childhood character education sought to instill commendable behavior, including behavior in worship, societal behavior, courtesy, interactions with other people and the environment, and commendable behavior conducive to success in life. Character education occurs in every environment of children. Home terrain is the first terrain children discover. Parents have a responsibility to instill a good attitude in their children. Parents should not rely on teachers to build characters of their children. Parents and mentors are models who model the behavior of their children. The growth and development of good behavior will encourage students to actualize themselves properly and for the benefit of their lives. Character is formed from the relationships of knowledge, values, and something that is true (Dishon, 2017).

CONCLUSION

According to the analysed journals and articles, it was found that character development of children is

influenced by parenting. In addition, character development can be carried out by introducing traditional games and playing. A quality character must be formed and nurtured from an early age. Failure to develop a good personality at an early age could result in a problematic personality later in adulthood. Introducing traditional games could help develop child characters by introducing good values through play, encouraging children to realize good values, and giving instructions to children to display good gestures when playing traditional games. In addition, parents should continuously monitor and guide the children for the formation of characters in children.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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