



## Highlighting Into Early Childhood Teacher's Support of Children's Physical Literacy Through Active Play

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to find out the level and form of teacher support in active play as an effort to develop children's physical literacy. A strong base of physical literacy from an early age is believed to be a driving force for children to love physical activity throughout their lives. This study used a survey research approach by distributing questionnaires to 37 teachers from 5 early childhood education institutions in Jambi City. The data were analysis using descriptive statistics, namely describing the data that had been collected in the form of tables and histograms. The results of the study show that support as a motivator is the strongest support given by the teacher in active play, while support as a stage manager is the weakest support compared to other supports. Basically, highlighting teacher support in active play is a positive input for finding the best way to implement motor development and physical activity policies and practices for early childhood. Teachers play a crucial role in supporting children's physical literacy through active play. However, further research involving a larger sample and a variety of contexts may provide a deeper understanding of this topic. It should be noted that the quality of teacher support and involvement in active play is very important as an effort to help teachers find the best ways to develop and implement motor development and physical activity practices for early childhood. Appropriate teacher support and involvement in active play will be the main key in efforts to encourage the development of physical literacy from an early age.

**Keywords:** *Physical Literacy; Active Play; Teacher; Children*

### **Introduction**

Physical literacy is just as important to children as reading, numeracy and music literacy (Active Healthy Communities & York Region Public Health, 2020). Therefore, children need to get the same attention as other potentials to become basic capital for a lifetime. Physical literacy relates to a child's ability to move efficiently in completing age-appropriate movement tasks (Clements & Scheider, 2017). Poorly developed physical literacy results in children tend to avoid physical activity and sports (sedentary behavior) during leisure time. Physical activity provides many benefits not only on the health aspects of the body, but also on the function of cognition (Abd El-Hady et al., 2018; Álvarez-Bueno et al.,

2017; Bonavita & Tedeschi, 2017; Chen et al., 2017). Conversely, low levels of physical activity, especially in early childhood, have an effect on poorer brain memory performance in elementary school age and adolescence (López-vicente et al., 2017). Sedentary behavior such as watching television for more than two hours per day are also strongly correlated with changes in body composition and decreased fitness as well as prosocial behavior and decreased academic achievement in school-age children and adolescents aged 5-17 years (Tremblay et al., 2011). Conditions like this cannot be allowed to drag on because they have the potential to be an inhibiting factor for children's growth and development that must be avoided early.

Promoting physical activity to reduce sedentary behavior is important at all stages of life (Colley et al., 2013). The elimination of movement potential, especially at an early age, has serious long-term effects on progress in many aspects of its development (Newport, 2013). Regular physical activity will reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, breast and colon cancer, as well as improved mental health and quality of life (World Health Organization, 2018). Childhood is a time of learning to move physically competently so that it can be used as a basis for accessing the next learning (Maude, 2013).

The opportunities to accumulate the most physical activity in a child are found in active play, structured sports activities, active transportation, and physical education at school (Janssen, 2015). Schools can be an appropriate and influential place in promoting active play (Hyndman et al., 2016). Ironically, the gap occurs when facts on the ground show that restrictions on opportunities for physical literacy development through physical education or active play actually occur at school and at home by teachers and parents. There is deep concern among physical scientists about the fact that physical education is marginalized in schools compared to other courses (Lounsbery & McKenzie, 2015).

Various reasons also surfaced such as lack of time to play, concerns about the safety of unsupervised games, danger of strangers, rough games, accidents while playing to get involved in conflicts (Lynch, 2015; McClintic & Petty, 2015; Shi, 2017; Watchman & Spencer-cavaliere, 2017). While in preschool institutions it is found that the pedagogical, diagnostic and practical skills of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers are very limited to effectively develop children's physical literacy (Dinham & Williams, 2019). This means that ECCE teachers are not prepared to train children's movement competence or facilitate physical activity.

This phenomenon is of course contrary to the fact that the early journey of physical literacy, namely childhood and adolescence, should receive guidance and support by significant others in the individual's life (Whitehead, 2013a). Optimal involvement and support of parents and teachers in the early stages of the literacy journey will be very meaningful in cultivating a basic love of physical activity in adulthood. Therefore, further investigation is needed on how teachers can actually carry out their role in supporting physical literacy through active play. Some of the relevant research that has been done (Hussain, 2016; Hyndman & Lester, 2016; Janssen, 2015; Lorente, 2017) more informs about the importance of active play for early childhood. While other studies focus more on various forms of teacher support when accompanying children to play (Aras, 2016; Brown et al., 2009; Fleer, 2015; Mclachlan et al., 2017). However, there has been no research that explores specifically how the form and level of teacher support in active play has occurred in Early Childhood Education institutions.

The holistic concept of 'physical literacy' has its roots in emerging philosophies in the study of monism, phenomenology, and existentialism. Monism holds that mind and body are an inseparable whole. While the concept of existentialism explains the uniqueness of individuals that arise from the results of their interaction with the world, and phenomenology explains that individual experiences have formed unique perspectives in their perspective (Whitehead, 2013b). This is where the concept of physical literacy comes from where the main thought of this philosophical view is associated with the importance of building the body to be able to face various environmental challenges and experiences with all its potential (Roach, 2016)

At an early age, physical literacy aims to understand the important factors that influence children's physical activity including cognitive, affective, physical, and behavior that affect movement and non-movement behavior in children (Taylor, 2018). Physical literacy that develops in children in the early stages can be seen in their ability to coordinate the whole body in activities such as jumping, climbing and implementing these movement patterns in various settings (Whitehead, 2013a). The physical activity child has the motivation, confidence, knowledge, skills and fitness necessary to enjoy a physically active lifestyle and is committed to healthy movement habits, including the recommended routine physical activity and restricted sedentary behavior (Longmuir & Tremblay, 2016).

Early childhood has the ability to build a strong foundation in physical literacy by achieving optimal physical competence, through active play (Maude, 2013). Active Healthy Kids Canada mention that "*Active play refers to Physical Activity comprised of games or symbolic play and includes playground activities, ball games played in the street, and backyard games like tag and red rover* (Active Healthy Kids Canada, 2013). From this it is known that active play refers to physical activity consisting of games or symbolic games and includes playground activities, street ball games, and yard games such as tag and red rover. Active play is also said to be a form of gross motor activity or total body movement in which children exert energy in ways that are freely chosen, fun and unstructured. Types of active play such as running, swinging, jumping and other unstructured activities. Active play locations can occur indoors or outdoors, but most occur outdoors (Truelove et al., 2017).

As stated by Hassinger and the team that playing has always existed in every generation and it is something that is everywhere, even happening to all creatures, both animals and humans. Without any instruction, children of all races and genders, in all cultures of the world continue to invent and invent play (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017). With regard to physical literacy, the game approach to children's learning is built on the general view that movement skills and physical literacy develop naturally as a consequence of age, maturity, general movement experience, and self-discovery (Macnamara et al., 2015). Thus, this study aims to explore teacher support indirectly in the development of physical literacy through active play based on the teacher's own assessment. It is hoped that the results of the research can become a mapping of the strengths and weaknesses of teacher support in active play, so that it becomes the basis for follow-up in optimizing the teacher's role in improving the quality of education services for early childhood.

## **Methods**

This study used a survey research approach and involved 37 teachers from 5 ECE located in 3 of the most populous sub-districts in Jambi City including Kota Baru (2 institutions), South Jambi Regency (1 institution) and Telanaipura Regency (2 institutions) recruited for this study. The teacher group consisted of 35 female teachers and 2 male teachers. The age range of teachers from the youngest is 19 years old and the oldest is 48 years old, with a distribution of 48.6% aged between 30 to 40 years, 27% aged between 19 to 29 years, and the remaining 23.4% aged between 41 to 48 years. The teachers had work experience between 6 months to 23 years in early childhood education institutions, 83.8% of the teachers had undergraduate or graduate education background and 10.8% were SMA/SMK graduates, while 2.7% of the participants were graduates D3 and master of early childhood education.

This research was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 37 teachers after previously the researcher obtained permission and socialized the concept of active play separately in the five institutions where the teachers worked. The questionnaire in this study was designed based on theoretical constructs related to teacher support in active play from various literatures. Pearson Product Moment and Cronbach's Alpha with SPSS were used to test the validity and reliability of the instrument. This questionnaire is closed and includes six main aspects of teacher support in active play, namely as observers and recorders, stage managers, facilitators, motivators, models, and playing partners. There are 30 questions with 5

answer choices that the teacher must choose in the questionnaire adapted from the Silver Strong rating scale, the teacher's self-assessment (Silver strong & Associates, 2011). To see how the teacher's support in active play is presented in table 1. as follows.

Table 1. Rating Scale for Responding Questions in Questionnaire

Role Category	Score	Description
No role (NR)	1	I never do this role
Beginner role (BR)	2	I rarely do this role in my class, because it lacks a positive effect on my performance and student performance
Skilled role (SR)	3	I sometimes do this role in my class, because it has quite a positive effect on my performance and student performance
Advanced role (AR)	4	I perform this role well and get consistent positive effects on my performance as well as student achievements
Expert role (ER)	5	I see this role as my strength. I can even adapt this role to fit the needs of my students and see positive results that are consistent and significant in student achievement

The data that has been collected from the questionnaire is then analyzed descriptively statistically, namely describing or describing the data that has been collected in the form of tables and histograms.

### Finding

The results showed that the most prominent teacher support in active play was support as a motivator (score 136.8), followed by support as a model (score 127.3), support as a play partner (score 118.5), support as a facilitator. (score 117.4), support as an observer and recorder (score 115.8) and support as a stage manager (score 97.3) as the lowest score. Data distribution can be seen in Figure 1 below.

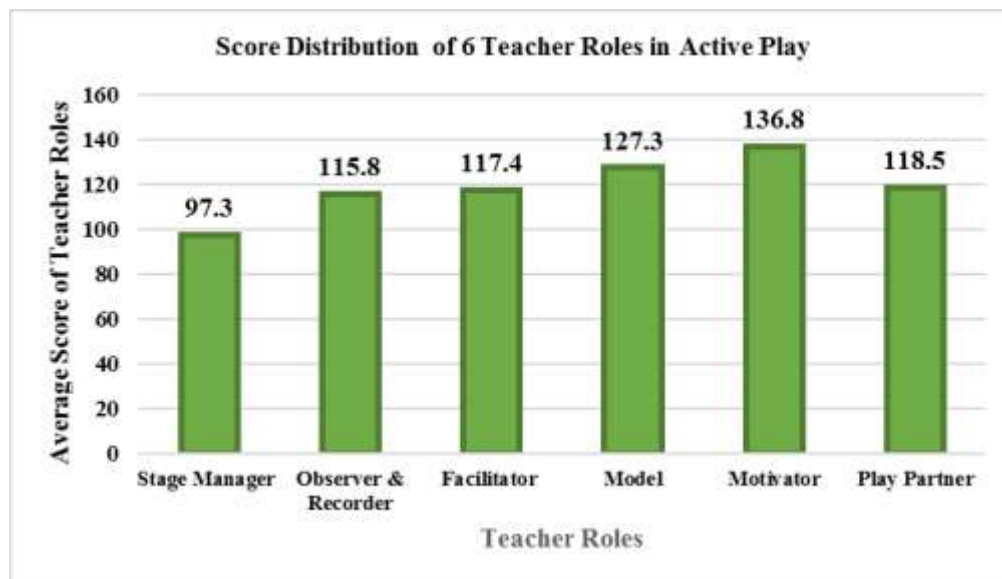


Figure 1. Distribution Score Graph of 6 Roles of Teachers in Active Play

In general, teacher support as a stage manager (score 97.3) is the support with the lowest total score compared to the other five supports. This achievement occurred because of the 37 teachers

involved, an average of only 10.1% thought that support as a stage manager was their proficient support which was able to run well and provide a consistent positive effect on student performance as well. In fact, less than 1% of teachers only 0.68% of teachers feel that support as a stage manager is their strength or support as an expert.

Support as a motivator (score 136.8) is the teacher's strongest support because on average 63.2% of teachers rate support as 'proficient', for example support that they have done well and consistently. In fact, 10.3% of teachers felt that this support was their expertise or strengths and as many as 18.9% considered that motivating support as skilled support had benefits for student performance and achievement even though it was still not consistently implemented.

Support as a model (score 127.3) has the most distribution in the advanced support category with an average of around 51.3% of teachers, even 4.1% of teachers think that they can be called on to carry out expert support as a model, while the number is not small. 35.8% of teachers chose the skilled category with the explanation that this support had not been implemented consistently.

Support as playmates (score 118.5) and facilitator (score 117.4) did not differ much in the level of scores. The selection of the rating scale distribution on role play partners obtained an average of around 37.8% of teachers who considered themselves proficient or teachers felt capable of being good playing partners and getting a consistent positive influence on student achievement performance, even around 3.4% of teachers who were given Expert support ratings indicate that being an active playmate for children is a strength in that they are able to adapt this support to student needs and see significant positive and consistent results in student achievement.

In addition, support as a facilitator (score 117.4) is spread almost evenly across all categories of skilled and proficient support, respectively 39.5% and 38.9% teachers only 2.7% choose assessment as expert support and the remaining 10.8% rated it as novice support and 8.1% said they did not provide support. Support as an observer and recorder (score 115.8) is in the bottom 2nd place indicating that 27% of teachers consider this support to be proficient

## ***Discussion***

Basically early childhood education teachers have understood the importance of providing opportunities to 'move actively' for early childhood will have a positive effect on their health development (Mandigo et al., 2012). However, there needs to be an effective development strategy to help teachers take a role in active play in kindergarten rather than just raising teacher awareness about the benefits of play (Lynch, 2015). The active involvement of educators in particular is an important factor in increasing children's physical activity (Tandon et al., 2015).

All teachers always have limitations in their professional abilities (Tsai, 2015). Therefore, exploring how they support them in the field, especially in actively playing with children, is very necessary. The results of this research indicate that support as a stage manager in active play includes the teacher's contribution in planning and deciding on the type of play experience, play materials, duration of play time, and game rules, which is a type of support that is weak for teachers. From the results of distributing questionnaires to 37 teachers from 5 Early Childhood Education in Jambi City, there are still many teachers (around 40.5%) who assess support as beginners or very rarely design active play activities based on basic development concepts. movement skills (fundamental movement skills) as a basis for developing physical literacy in early childhood. In fact, 21.6% or 8 teachers admitted that they had never prepared an active play design aimed at developing children's basic movement skills.

In addition, teachers stated that they tend to follow the child's desire to determine the type of active games they like rather than teachers who are only looking for ideas to determine the types of games

to be carried out. This condition in one case shows that the teacher is quite democratic because it involves children in preparing lesson plans, but on the other hand it also shows a lack of ideas about active play. Kangas is of the view that basically teachers do have the freedom to choose and improvise in designing game-based teaching and learning processes, but teachers must also understand fun learning ideas and apply appropriate methods to achieve learning objectives (Kangas et al., 2017).

The results of this research also reveal the fact that many teachers still experience difficulties in choosing the right type of play experience, the right tools and rules that are appropriate to the child's level of development. This is certainly quite worrying because teachers do not have the right work format to be able to develop children's basic mobility skills as a basis for developing physical literacy. This is in accordance with the statement made by Clement and Scheider (2017), emphasizes that teachers should minimize errors during physical literacy development activities. Teachers should start from a careful written plan regarding the format of the actions to be carried out, the main learning objectives, learning tasks for children as well as the tools and materials used to introduce children to various movement skills (Clements & Scheider, 2017).

On the other hand, quite encouraging results are that many teachers consider that they are very proficient and even expert in motivating children to actively play. This result is in line with Brown et al., (2009) that teacher enthusiasm and participation in play activities is very important in efforts to increase children's physical activity, especially early efforts. Most teachers also admitted that they basically had enough understanding of how to model healthy and active living behavior that children could emulate (Brown et al., 2009). These results show that teachers already have knowledge capital regarding the importance of active and healthy living, and this is very important in supporting their support for active play. According to Schumacher (2017) Teachers' concern for children's health is a driving force for teachers to educate children about the importance of nutrition and physical activity (Schumacher, 2017).

Other results show that teachers are more able to provide support as observers, such as supervising children while playing, rather than as note takers or preparing notes/records of children's developmental achievements in active play. Meanwhile, when providing support as a play partner, most teachers answered that they provided more support when children had problems playing actively and needed their help rather than being a play partner for the child. This situation is in accordance with Aras's research that most teachers are involved in games when children have problems and need help (Aras, 2016). Tsai also found a similar situation in that teacher intervention during play was if the teacher encountered child behavior that was contrary to class rules (Tsai, 2015). Whereas when the teacher sits close to the children during play time, he or she has the opportunity to enter into the children's play and support them (Fleer, 2015) .

According to Hadley, there are two types of teacher involvement in play, namely the type outside the plot (when the teacher only directs the child to develop the game without involving himself directly); and type in the plot, (the teacher positions himself into the game directly) (Hadley, 2010). The in-groove type is said to be a more attractive and contributive way of playing because the teacher can appreciate every action and words that will be said according to the context of the game. Meanwhile, the results of this research show that the out-of-line type is more often carried out by ECE teachers. This situation is also as stated Fleer (2015) in the results of his research that most teachers position themselves outside children's play.

In general, the results of this study are also similar to those presented by Dinham & Williams (2019) regarding the conditions of teachers in developing children's physical literacy, that basically teachers have extensive knowledge, commitment and self-confidence. It's just that their diagnostic and practical pedagogical skills are limited in effectively developing children's physical literacy (Dinham & Williams, 2019). Therefore, it is important to change teacher behavior in using physically active learning methods to increase students' physical activity levels (Martin & Murtagh, 2015). More

specifically, ECE teachers need more practical ways to educate children about nutrition and physical activity (Schumacher, 2017). This is actually a challenge for ECE managers in the future, that there is still a lot of hard work that must be trained and understood by them in carrying out the important task of developing movement competence as well as motivating children to be active through active play activities. As stated by Connelly et al., (2018) clarifying expectations regarding the support of ECE teachers can strengthen ties between families and ECE institutions which are expected to provide better results for children's health and growth and development (Connelly et al., 2018).

Support for active play is more relevant to be applied by ECE practitioners who do not have a scientific background in physical education. Active play places more emphasis on an atmosphere full of excitement but still targets a certain achievement. This context is very flexible and is an entry point for early childhood to 'love being active' in their lives now and in the future Active play has provided more opportunities for ECE teachers to contribute to the development of children's physical literacy. This view clearly implies that to help children develop their physical literacy, it is not enough for teachers to simply understand and realize the importance of active play for children. Furthermore, teachers need to be actively involved in active play itself with children and know more about the forms of involvement and how to provide support so that knowledge, motivation and basic movement skills of children can become provisions for them to enjoy physical activity for a lifetime.

## Conclusion

From the research results, support as a motivator in active play is the teacher's strength, while support as a stage manager is the weakest support compared to other supports. Teacher support in learning is the most important part of education. The teacher is the spearhead of success, because he is the executor of all the strategies that have been set in a lesson plan. Teachers do not only understand and realize the importance of active play for children, but also need to know how to design quality active games, how to support active play with children while developing their competence through joint exploration. Paying attention to the quality of teacher support and involvement in active play is very important as an effort to help teachers find the best ways to develop and implement motor development and physical activity practices for early childhood. Appropriate teacher support and involvement in active play will be the main key in efforts to encourage the development of physical literacy from an early age.

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