

Analyzing the effectiveness of recreational experiences on developing social skills and improving children's emotional intelligence (Case study: Tehran Book Garden Children's Home)

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ABSTRACT

Research Problem:

In today's world, where the development of children's social and emotional skills has become a major concern for educational systems, the role of physical environments and recreational spaces in the formation of these capabilities has received more attention than ever before. However, a deep and accurate understanding of how the design of child-centered spaces affects children's emotional and social development still requires field and scientific research. Successful child-centered spaces are usually accompanied by features such as flexibility, safety, visual appeal, and the possibility of choice and independence in movement; features that strengthen children's sense of control, self-confidence, and social understanding. Children's social interactions in structured educational environments are influenced more than anything by the design of the space and its layout. Environments that allow active participation, group activities, and cooperative games lead to more effective and sustainable social interactions. Tehran's Book Garden Children's Home, as one of the prominent examples of such spaces, has provided a suitable platform for studying children's recreational experiences by utilizing approaches such as free play, meaningful recreation, and indirect interaction with content.

Research Question:

The present study aims to analyze the effectiveness of recreational experiences in this space in promoting emotional intelligence and developing children's social skills, and attempts to examine the relationship between environmental design, the quality of experience, and children's individual capabilities by utilizing field methods and analytical approaches. This study also relies on theories of social-emotional development and child-centered environmental design models to answer the question: How can the design of recreational spaces be used to empower the social and emotional well-being of the next generation?

Research Method:

This research is practical in terms of purpose and seeks to present findings that can be used in the optimal design of child-centered spaces to promote emotional intelligence and social empowerment of children. In terms of method, this study is a mixed type and both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to achieve the research objectives. The research structure is designed based on a sequential exploratory model in which qualitative data were first used to identify indicators and components and then these indicators were measured quantitatively. The statistical population of the qualitative part of the research consisted of experts and specialists in the fields of child environment design and developmental psychology. To select these individuals, purposive sampling was used and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 specialists until theoretical saturation was reached. In the quantitative part, the statistical population consisted of parents of children aged 4 to 12 years whose children had continuous educational and recreational experiences in one of the child-centered spaces (Tehran Book Garden Children's House). In the quantitative part, a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 43 items was used in two main parts. The first part measured children's recreational experiences in child-centered spaces, and the second part examined the emotional intelligence questionnaire and the Matson Social Skills Scale (with adjustment and localization) to assess the status of children's emotional intelligence and social skills. SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data.

The Most Important Results and Conclusion:

The present study aimed to analyze the effectiveness of recreational experiences in child-centered spaces on developing social skills and improving children's emotional intelligence, focusing on the Book Garden Children's Home in Tehran,

and achieved significant results. Data collected through quantitative and qualitative methods, statistical analyses including Pearson's correlation test, variance test, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), were able to clearly reveal the relationships between environmental design components and children's social and emotional psychological indicators. The findings indicated that creative games, group interactions, and sensory and movement stimulation had a direct and significant effect on emotional self-awareness, empathy, and ability in verbal and nonverbal communication. Also, components such as social problem solving and emotion management played an important role in improving the level of emotional intelligence. The results showed that spaces that allow for interactive, free, and recreational experiences can provide the basis for the development of various social-emotional dimensions of children. In summary, the present study showed that the design of educational and recreational spaces for children should not be merely functional, but should pay special attention to the sensory, emotional, and social experiences of children. This perspective can play a fundamental role in the formation of a healthier, more capable, and more social generation. Finally, to answer the main research question, it can be stated that the social and emotional empowerment of children, as one of the main pillars of the sustainable growth of the future generation, requires environments that, instead of controlling and restricting, provide the possibility of experience, interaction, and creativity. The design of child-centered recreational spaces, especially by focusing on the principles of interactive and game-oriented architecture, can be an active platform for cultivating these capabilities. As a result, the intelligent design of recreational spaces not only meets part of the physical needs of the child, but also serves as a bridge for him to pass towards social and emotional maturity. A capable future depends on spaces that not only give children a field, but also prepare them for life.

KEYWORDS

Child-centered spaces, Recreational experiences, Social skills, Emotional intelligence, Environmental design