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The Effect of Role Playing Methods on Social-emotional Development in Preschool Children

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Abstract
Problems that are often experienced by preschool-age children include maladjustment, egocentric, aggressiveness, anxiety, and tend to withdraw from society so that it can cause behavioral problems that reduce social-emotional development. If this problem is not addressed immediately, it can have a negative impact on the health and behavior of children in adulthood. Provision of effective role playing encourages social emotional development of children where through fun playing activities, children get rich experiences so that they can improve social emotional development. This study aims to conduct a literature review review related to the influence of the role playing method on the social emotional development of preschool-aged children. The method used is SLR *(Systematic Literature Review)*. Data collection was carried out by identifying, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. A total of 15 articles used in this study were obtained from the PubMed, Ebsco, Sage, and Science Direct databases. The results show that role play affects children's social emotional development. The role playing method can be the right solution for educators and parents in improving children's better social emotional development.

Keyword: *prosocial behaviour; preschool; role playing method; social-emotional development*

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Introduction
Child development is an important determinant of healthy development throughout the life course (Masten & Barnes, 2018). The early years of early childhood become a golden age because at this time the child will receive various stimuli as a form of developing the full potential of the child in his developmental tasks (Potterton et al., 2016). In developing self-potential in early childhood, five aspects need to be developed, one of these aspects is emotional social development. This is because social-emotional development has a very influential and supportive role in other aspects of development (Howard & Melhuish, 2017).

Social-emotional development is a process of forming a child's ability to manage and express emotions as a whole, both negative and positive emotions, regulate behavior, make decisions, adaptability, interact, establish relationships with peers and adults in their environment, and be active explore the environment through the learning process (Denham, 2006; Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). In essence, social emotional development is one of the important fundamental intelligences that children have, where children can form relationships and develop social skills and adapt to adults and peers which indirectly develop emotional

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abilities (Jeti & Herliyani, 2018). In the context of decreased developmental levels, research has found that preschoolers tend to have worse social functioning problems, such as maladjustment, peer rejection, egocentricity, and aggressive behavior (Donohue et al., 2020). On going socio-emotional developmental problems impact the child's health and behavioral problems as the child matures, such as not completing school, being stubborn, and behaving badly (Brauner & Stephens, 2006), and eventually lead to anxiety, aggression, depression, and low school performance (Denham et al., 2012; Romano et al., 2010).

Methods for stimulating the social emotional development of preschoolers have become an important issue of concern to educators and parents (Jeti & Herliyani, 2018). Singing, playing music, telling stories, moving and singing are methods that can help improve social emotional development (Gresham, 2020). However, these methods have little effect on the active involvement of preschoolers in forming relationships and interactions. Therefore, other strategies that are more effective and comfortable still need to be investigated to improve social-emotional development.

Play is the vehicle behind social-emotional development (Pyle & Bigelow, 2014). Play is a set of physical and mental activities that can provide happiness and enjoyment for players and strengthen positive interpersonal relationships (Choi & Ohm, 2018; Galyer & Evans, 2001). Play is the main source of children's interaction with their environment. During play, children can learn and hone empathy, and imagination, and expand prosocial behavior that is useful for adolescent life and even in adult life (Walker & Weidenbenner, 2019).

One type of play that has received considerable attention in improving children's social-emotional development is role play (Choi & Ohm, 2018; Weisberg, 2015). Role playing or also called pretend play is a positive recommended development tool in shaping children's social-emotional maturity and progressive change (Lillard et al., 2013). Role playing is a series of play activities using symbols represented in subjects, objects, and actions. Through role playing, children get the opportunity to interact and play a role according to the chosen topic (Gmitrova, 2013). Children can explore or experiment with themselves, their playmates, people who are bigger than them, and with people where they are (Bergen, 2013; Smith, 2010). Role playing has benefits for emotional and social maturity, this is because the involvement of children in a situationally dramatic game will create a process of interaction and take emotional maturity (Lillard et al., 2013). In the end, the transfer of children in role playing becomes a fundamental part of the progressivity of social-emotional development.

Findings from several previous studies support that role playing has significant benefits and results for children's social-emotional development (Goldstein & Matthew, 2017; Happ et al., 2017; Kalkusch et al., 2021). Jaggy et al., (2023) found that children who did role play showed many positive changes in social skills with peers, and encouraged positive social behavior. As a supporter, Brown et al., (2016) found that role playing can improve social and emotional skills such as understanding emotions or understanding the mental state of others and understanding social situations. Besides that, Goldstein & Matthew (2017) demonstrated that children who participate actively in role play show better emotional control and higher social behavior. A series of studies illustrate that there may be an effect of role playing methods on the social emotional development of preschoolers. Therefore, the role playing method can be widely promoted as a potential strategy. The effect of the role playing method has become a popular scientific topic in the fields of education and health. However, there is no research that summarizes and discusses the application of role playing as a method of enhancing social emotional development. Therefore, it is necessary to study similar research that examines the application of role playing which influences the socio-emotional development of preschoolers

Methodology

This research used Systematic Literature Review (SLR). By using this method researchers conduct research by identifying, studying, evaluating and interpreting all the

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research that researchers have obtained. The researcher conducts a review by identifying or examining the articles properly and systematically. In line with research Xiao & Watson (2019) that by using the systematic literature review method a researcher will conduct a review by identifying several journals systematically according to the steps that have been set.

Article search strategy using the PICOS framework (Schardt et al., 2007), and the study selection process by reading the entire article and selecting using the PRISMA flowchart, that was identification, screening, eligibility, and included (Moher et al., 2009). The article search used keywords and boolean operators (AND, OR) which are used to broaden the search, making it easier to determine which article or journal to use. Search keywords were set as (Preschool OR Child) AND (Role Playing OR Pretend Play OR Dramatic Play) AND (Social Emotional OR Social Skill OR Social Competence OR Emotional Skill OR Emotional Intelligence OR Emotional Regulation). The process used to carry out systematic updates on several research articles published through electronic databases. The electronic databases used are PubMed, Ebsco, Sage, and Science Direct. The article screening process was carried out using the Prism Study Flow Diagram shown in (Figure 1).

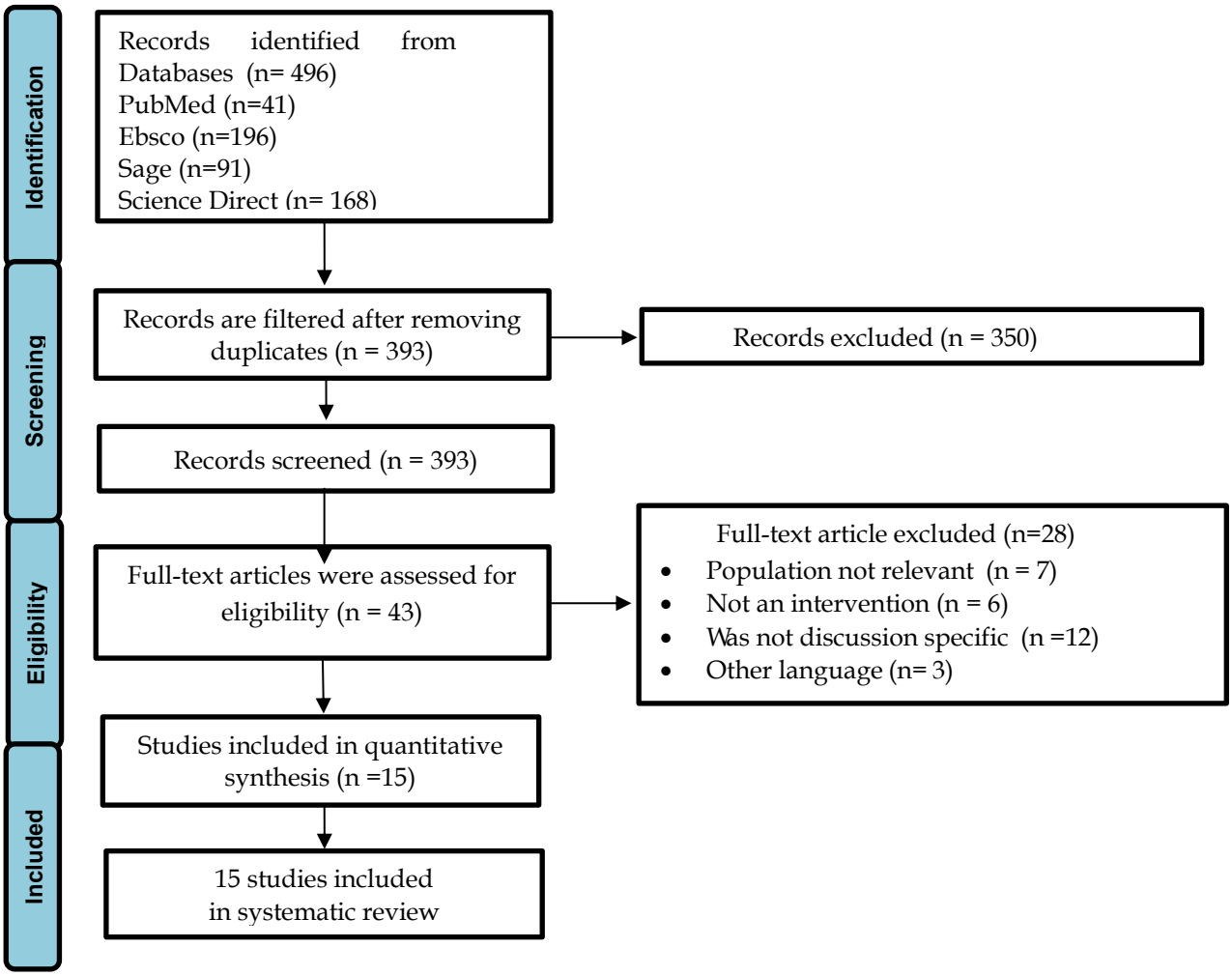

Figure 1. The flow of systematic review by using PRISMA (doi: 10.1136/bmj.b2535)

Inclusion criteria included in the systematic review include: a) publication of full-text articles in English b) research subjects are preschool children aged 3-6 years, c) year limitation of search period 2016-2022, d) research method is quantitative with experimental study design and Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) e) has the main outcome about the application of role playing in improving social-emotional skills. Exclusion criteria are research subjects who

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are not preschoolers (3-6 years old), b) the variables studied are not about role playing c) using a language other than English.

The search results found that 15 full-text articles match the inclusion criteria, so the final results are 15 articles. The 15 selected articles were assessed using the JBI Critical Appraisal Tool where the results were above 50, so 15 articles were used as references for review. A total of 15 research articles were conducted in various countries including China, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Slovenia, Israel, Germany, the Netherlands and the United States. Our search strategy was developed with a PRISMA statement-guided protocol. The sample used in the study varied with a minimum sample of 28 and a maximum of 462 participants. The total number of respondents in this systematic review were 1,728 participants. The participants were preschool children aged 3-6 years. All articles that were reviewed were the most used research designs using a quantitative experimental approach (n = 12), and a Randomized Controlled Trial (n = 3). The articles that have been obtained were analyzed using thematic data analysis techniques to make it easier for researchers to conclude.

Result and Discussion

A summary of the results of the Systematic Review of this research can be seen in table 1 (attachments). The effect of role playing on the socio-emotional development of preschoolers based on article reviews, the results obtained are increasing prosocial behavior and better emotional regulation.

Improved Prosocial Behavior

In relation to the effect of implementing role playing on social development, role playing was investigated in a study involving 101 participants which showed that children's participation in role playing using guided role play materials had a significant impact on prosocial behavior compared to the two groups (playgroup and control group), prosocial behavior is shown by children with a positive and active attitude of cooperation and interaction between children when playing roles (Kalkusch et al., 2021). This is commensurate with four other research studies with 357 participants, two of these studies showed that the application of role playing had a significant effect on children's socialization skills compared to the control group, such as tolerance, cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving well (Bauminger et al., 2020; Kalkusch et al., 2022). The third study showed that preschoolers from the three groups demonstrated an improvement in various aspects of interaction with peers after the intervention, while the control group did not show good development (Bauminger et al., 2020). The fourth study showed that role playing had a positive and significant effect on children's socialization skills, but the child's supportiveness and responsiveness resulted in insignificant results related to the level of role playing (Perren et al., 2019). Subsequent research was conducted with 60 participants, and found the results that social competence before and after the intervention both boys and girls who played and did not role-play showed the same level of peer interaction (Fung & Wing-yi Cheng, 2017).

A subsequent study conducted with 28 participants who applied three types of role playing or pretend play showed the results that social and abstract role playing had a strong influence on various types of children's social skills (assertiveness, cooperation, and self-control), whereas concrete role play did not (Li et al., 2016). This result is strengthened by research Jaggy, Perren, Sticca, et al (2020), that children with higher role playing skills showed higher socio-emotional qualities.

Two studies conducted with 131 participants showed opposite social development outcomes in role playing. The first study showed that both the role-playing group and the control group in children's ability to accept peer interaction did not show a significant difference (Petersen et al., 2020). The second study stated that the prosocial behavior between the experimental group and the control group in the involvement of children in role playing proved to be no significant difference (Richard et al., 2020).

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Better Emotional Regulation

In emotional development, role playing was investigated in five studies involving 723 participants. The first study showed that children's participation in role-playing activities resulted in a stronger increase in emotional control than the control group (Goldstein & Matthew, 2017). The second study showed that the group that was given the role-playing treatment had better emotional abilities than the control group (Richard et al., 2020). The third study showed the results that role playing skills in preschoolers had a significant effect on children's emotional regulation, organization, and imagination through a short intervention of 8 weeks (Fehr et al., 2021). The fourth study showed that there was a significant decrease in children's aggressive behavior and progress in children's social competence during the measurements observed in dramatic play activities (Korosec & Zorec, 2019). The fifth research by Petersen et al. (2020) corroborating the results that children's ability to regulate reflective emotions significantly increased peer group acceptance of role playing.

Finally, two studies reported that children with higher role-play competence displayed higher socio-emotional skills. These results strengthen the evidence that role playing has a significant and positive impact on children's emotional understanding and social skills, and that the quality of role playing is positively related to a child's age.(Jaggy, Perren, Mainhard, et al., 2020; Jaggy, Perren, Sticca, et al., 2020)**.**

The main objective of this systematic review is to identify the influence of role playing on the social-emotional development of preschool children. 1,728 participants in this systematic review, on average they had improved social-emotional development after engaging in role-playing activities. Most studies, 13 out of 15, confirmed that role playing on the socio-emotional development of preschoolers in the intervention group showed a significant effect compared to the control group. Playing a role like a child playing a certain role and playing his ideas in an imaginary scenario is not something without meaning. By playing certain roles, and taking part in pretend play (Kalkusch et al., 2022).

The results of the feasibility study in this systematic review indicate that the application of role playing carried out is that the child positions himself as a certain character where the child acts as a chef, a salon worker, a restaurant employee, a magician/magician, plays the role of a parent, plays the role of father, mother. , and child (Fung & Wing-Yi Cheng, 2017; Goldstein & Matthew, 2017; Petersen et al., 2020; Richard et al., 2020). Children can play a role in certain work settings, including hospital settings acting as doctors and nurses, firefighter settings, and market settings (as sellers and buyers) (Jaggy, Perren, Sticca, et al., 2020; Kalkusch et al., 2021; Perren et al., 2019). All the characterizations are carried out with a certain scenario with real equipment. Pretend play allows children to fantasize in a series of different scenarios in which they assign pretenders to a particular role and a variety of different points of view (Bergen, 2013)**.**

In role playing, children will be introduced to various instructions by doing stories or scenarios on game tools such as doll figures that include animals or objects (such as toy cars, rubber balls, and others). This role teaches children to be able to manage various forms of emotional expression, the ability to behave aggressively, and the ability to prosocial behavior (Fehr et al., 2021; Jaggy, Perren, Mainhard, et al., 2020; Korosec & Zorec, 2019; Marcelo & Yates, 2020). A study in the Netherlands applied role-playing and incorporated this method into a part of the curriculum in a daycare centre. This method naturally contributes to the child's self-regulation in the emotional aspect (Slot et al., 2017).

In relation to social-emotional development, the application of role playing is useful in growing children's skills to communicate, interact, be creative, and foster self-confidence and courage through a guided scenario. With the direct involvement of children in role playing, stimulates children to live, express, and feel how to become a character. Children's socialization skills will show more complex interactions when children role-play with their peers (Kalkusch et al., 2022). This is in line with the review by Fung & Wing-yi Cheng (2017), which states that the involvement of children in certain characterizations in role playing makes a positive

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contribution where children can learn how to communicate and interact well, cooperate, and be able to adapt to their peers. This is shown how the child behaves prosocially and actively maintains the game. Role playing has a big role in children's social maturity (Kalkusch et al., 2021, 2022; Perren et al., 2019).

Direct involvement of children by characterizing certain roles can develop children's social interactions and as long as the interactions that occur in their roles children can develop playing themes with their play partners even in simple forms (Kalkusch et al, 2021). The involvement of children in characterizing roles such as being an animal and certain human characters can make children learn to control their emotional reactions by understanding their involvement in the scenario played (Goldstein & Matthew, 2017). Similar to Petersen et al (2020) that the ability of children in taking certain roles has an impact on children's emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is seen when children manage their emotional expressions by showing the roles they play.

The application of role playing is very useful in increasing children's imagination, and organization, and influencing children's expression in playing (Fehr et al., 2021). A study applied abstract and concrete role play in which children used a tool such as a stick to be interpreted as a sword. The results of this intervention show a strong influence on the cooperation skills, assertiveness, and self-control of children, besides that children's imagination becomes very developed when doing play activities (Li et al., 2016).

Dramatization carried out by children using symbolic props, such as dolls in small groups provides opportunities for children to build interactions with prosocial peers and practice social-emotional skills, one of which is conflict resolution so that children's aggressive behavior decreases (Korosec & Zorec, 2019). It is equivalent to (Jaggy, Perren, Mainhard, et al., 2020; Jaggy, Perren, Sticca, et al., 2020; Marcelo & Yates, 2020; Slot et al., 2017) from the results of his study that when children are instructed to play freely and makeup stories with game tools, children's prosocial behavior will develop by itself, reduce aggressive behavior, and emotional skills will naturally manifest in the interactions that take place.

Thus, the interpretation of all the findings of the articles reviewed has convinced and proved that a series of the progressive development of children in the social-emotional aspect can positively be realized with a role-playing strategy. This review only focuses on the socio-emotional aspects of preschoolers, how to role-play interventions stimulate and enhance children's interactions with peers and other people, and how children can manage their emotions in role-playing activities. With the interaction that is established, communication, cooperation, the emergence of an attitude of tolerance and empathy. Another limitation of this review is that the authors did not assess the extent to which instrument quality played a role in each of the article's findings.

Conclusion

Some strong evidence show that the application of the role playing method has proven to be effective and has a significant effect in building and encouraging preschool children's social-emotional skills which include increased prosocial behavior and better emotional regulation. However, not all preschoolers are encouraged to do role-playing activities, this will be a challenge for health workers, educators and parents in stimulating children who have social-emotional problems to play roles in order to achieve social-emotional development that is appropriate for their age development.

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Attachment

Table 1. Articles Summary Results

Author (Year)	Sample	Implementation of Intervention	Instrument	Intervention Duration	Main Results
Goldstein & Matthew D. Lerner (2017)	97	1. Children play the role of certain characters. 2. Children were randomly divided into four groups 3. Each group did a story/role-play activity per day and it was different every day. 4. Children act as babies, cooks, and other characters according to the order of the game	1. Self-management skill Observation Sheet 2. Social awareness skill observation sheet : Social Interaction Observation System (SIOS) 3. Relationship skills observation sheet 4. Interview with Parents	24 sessions, three times per week, 20 minutes each time. Sessions were conducted on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings for 8 consecutive weeks.	Children's participation in activities role playing resulted in a stronger increase in emotional control than the control group
Fung & Wing-Yi Cheng (2017)	60	1. Children play characters in several themes 2. The theme of "salon" and "restaurant" was chosen as the theme of the work in role playing	Social competence measurement tool using the Peer Interactive Play Rating Scale (PIPRS) Assessment Sheet written in Chinese	1.20 sessions for 1 month (each session 45 minutes) 2.Each theme is carried out for 2 weeks	Pre and post-social competence both boys and girls who were role-playing and non-role-playing showed similar levels of peer interaction. Children value each other's advantages and can to resolve conflicts
Kalkusch et al. (2021)	101	1.Children play characterize roles in scenarios with the theme of playing firefighters 2.Children use standardized sets of roleplay materials (helmets, vests, garden hoses, yellow, red, and orange silk scarves, and wooden blocks)	Children's Social Pretend Play Quality (SPPQ) Assessment Sheet which was made by the researcher refers to the characteristics and normative developmental steps of pretend play by the researcher Thompson & Goldstein (2019).	1.Between the pre and post-tests the intervention phase took place, with six consecutive playing sessions of 30 minutes each. 2.The Individual activity was assessed over four 5-minute cycles. This cycle is selected six per game sessions. Up to 24 cycles per child (ie, 6 sessions of 4 cycles each) were assessed. On average, 3.5 cycles per child, and	Children's participation in role playing using roleplay materials has a significant impact on social development compared to the other two groups (playgroup and control group).

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Author (Year)	Sample	Implementation of Intervention	Instrument	Intervention Duration	Main Results
				play sessions are rated	
Richard et al (2020)	79	1. Children play roles in game situations with the themes of Father/Mother, Hospital, and Daughter/Knight. 2. Children explore roles and develop scenarios.	1. Emotional label understanding assessment sheet 2. Prosocial behavior worksheet	Eleven one-hour weekly sessions (first 2 sessions given twice for 30 minutes during the week)	There is an increase in the emotional competence of the experimental group compared to the control group, and there is no significant difference between the experimental and control groups for prosocial behavior
Perren et al. (2019)	50	1. Play activities in which children are asked to role-play using simple attributes (helmet, hose, or bandage and white coat) 2. Role playing activities are conditioned in a theme. Firefighter theme in Sessions 1-3 and Hospital theme in Sessions 4–6)	1. Social skills assessment 2. ToM skill assessment using the German version of the Extended Theory of Mind Scale 3. standardized assessment manual developed by researchers on role playing	A total of six intervention sessions with an interval of 1 week were conducted in the context of a playgroup session lasting 30-40 minutes. Six sessions of 4 cycles each per child (24 cycles)	The positive and significant effect on children's socialization skills and children's cooperative behavior is not significantly related to the level of role playing.
Petersen et al. (2020)	52	1. The role playing intervention was carried out in two groups, the experimental group, and the control group 2. The intervention was carried out where the child took on the role of a magician who bewitched another magician with props "magician's cloak and magic wand" 3. Children in the control group received only direct verbal instructions, without encouraging any specific strategies.	1. Role Play Characteristics Assessment Sheet by watching children perform tasks from a role perspective 2. Rating of the Joy of Play 3. The level of acceptance of children's peer groups is assessed by: BIKO Screening Basic Competency Development for Children Aged 3 to 6 Years 4. Assessment of the regulation of reflective emotional expression through impression analysis	3x in each episode (4-10 seconds duration per episode)	There was no significant difference between the role playing group and the control group in the children's ability to accept peer groups. However, children's ability to regulate reflective emotions significantly increases peer group acceptance.

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Author (Year)	Sample	Implementation of Intervention	Instrument	Intervention Duration	Main Results
Kalkusch et al. (2022)	214	1. The role playing intervention was carried out in two groups, the experimental group, and the control group 2. The intervention was carried out with the thematic focus "let's play firefighter" with a set of game materials (helmet, vest, garden hose, yellow, red, and orange silk scarf, and wooden blocks). 3. Children perform role-playing actions in the themes and materials provided	1. Social pretend play competence (RPPC) scale 2. HSA (Holistic Student Assessment) 3. BIKOs behavioral regulation of subscales 4. SOCOMP (Self- and Other-oriented social COMPetences .) assessment 5. Children's SPPQ (Social Pretend Play Quality)	24 cycles per child (6 sessions of 4 cycles each). Four 5-minute cycles	Role playing guidance and the provision of role playing materials had a positive effect on social role playing competence compared to the control group and showed a positive effect on self-oriented social skills.
Fehr et al. (2021)	33	1. The child performs role-playing actions with a set of play materials (plastic animal dolls and figures, a plastic car, three plastic cups, and a "fluffy" rubber ball). 2. Children are instructed to play and make up stories and imagine	1. The Affect in Play Scale (APS) 2. Child Behavior Assessment Sheet	8 sessions for 20-30 minutes	Role playing skills in preschool children have a significant effect on the emotional regulation, organization, and imagination of children. Through a short intervention of 8 weeks
Bauminger et al. (2019)	65	1. Children are divided into three separate groups that focus on interact, converse or play interventions 2. Children perform the act of playing together with their peers with several sets of toys provided (plastic foodstuffs, transportation of toys, animals, and plastic fences) 3. Children are instructed to communicate, interact in all group activities and engage with other children in the group	1. Peer Play Scale 2. Social Play Questionnaire (SPQ)	6-month period in three 45-minute sessions per week	Preschoolers from the three groups showed improvement in various aspects of peer interaction after the intervention, while the control group did not show good development

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Li et al. (2016)	28	Children perform play actions with three types of role play: 1. Concrete role play, where children involve concrete objects using a stick as if a sword 2. Abstract role play. The child performs the act of playing with his imagination 3. Social role play. Children play a role by involving their peers	The social skills assessment system	45 minutes to an hour over a 2 weeks	Social and abstract role play had a strong influence on various types of children's social skills (ie assertiveness, cooperation, and self-control), whereas concrete role play did not.
Korosec & Zorec (2019)	462	1. Children do guide drama activities 2. Children dramatize or improvise using creative dolls	Child Social Behavior Assessment Scale Sheet	3 months	There was a significant decrease in children's aggressive behavior and progress in children's social competence during the measurements observed in dramatic play activities.
Jaggy, Perren, Sticca, et al. (2020)	67	1. Children are given a game set with the ability to engage in role-playing games with "shopping themes" and "theft themes" (scenarios of children playing as buyers and playing as sellers). 2. Children are guided by an introductory story about a panda family going on a picnic on a lake. The story is played by researchers and partly by children with small animal figures. After being given an introductory story, the children are free to act out their ideas and play together with the help of other playing characters.	1. The Tools of the Play Scale (ToPS) 2. Dyadic Pretend Play Assessment (DPPA) 3. Social pretend play competency scale (RPPC)	Children's behavior was assessed for 5 minutes and carried out in 5 cycles per child. Interventions are carried out 1-2 times a week for 2-3 hours	Children with higher role playing competence showed higher socio-cognitive skills and social-emotional skills.
Slots et al., (2017)	113	1. Children carry out play activities using a standard set of kitchen toy play materials 2. Children are instructed to do a role play	1. Self-Regulation in Play Scale (SRPS) observation sheet (cognitive and emotional approach)	The role-play intervention was carried out for 45 minutes	Role playing has a significant effect on children's emotional self-regulation, but

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		with the kitchen toys provided	2. Smilansky Scale for Evaluation of Drama and Sociodramatic Drama		the effect size is smaller
Marcelo & Yates (2020)	250	1. Children role-play with a set of toys: Five small stuffed animals (i.e., hippopotamus, bear, big dog, small dog, shark), three plastic cups, one small car, four plastic zoo animals (i.e., elephant, giraffe, zebra, and tigers), and one small colored ball. 2. Children are instructed to play freely and makeup stories with game tools	1. Observational Assessment 2. Affect in Play Scale (APS) 3. The five-item Prosocial Scale of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997, 2001	Each child plays for 5 minutes according to APS standards. Follow-up assessment completed over 2 years	The theme of prosocial influence expressed by role playing positively influenced prosocial and aggressive behavior observed during task sharing over the next two years, but not significantly prosocial and aggressive behavior in the school environment.
Jaggy, Perren, Mainhard, et al. (2020)	57	1. Children role-play and engage in a scenario using standard role-playing materials (small animal figures) 2. Children are free to act out their ideas and play together	1. Dyadic Pretend Play (DPPA) Assessment Sheet 2. German Version of Emotion Understanding Test	Children role-play together for 5 minutes, each child was assessed at 30-second intervals with 5 cycles per child. The intervention was carried out for 6 consecutive weeks.	Role playing has a significant and positive impact on children's emotional understanding and social skills, and the quality of role playing is positively related to a child's age