



THE INFLUENCE OF PLAY ON THE FORMATION OF SPIRITUAL CONCEPTS IN PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

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Abstract

Play is not merely a pastime for preschool-aged children but serves as a crucial medium for assimilating moral and ethical values and shaping their worldview. As one of the most effective tools for children to explore the world and develop cognitive frameworks, play holds significant social and educational importance. This article examines the role of play in forming spiritual and moral concepts in preschoolers, analyzing theoretical perspectives from psychology and pedagogy. Key conclusions highlight how play fosters emotional, cognitive, and social development while reinforcing cultural and ethical values.

Keywords: Play, spiritual concepts, preschool age, child personality, national games, moral development.

Introduction

The spiritual progress of society depends on the content, form, and essence of educational practices. In Uzbekistan, ongoing reforms in the education system emphasize the need to pedagogically reinterpret the phased implementation of updated curricula, particularly in early childhood education.

For preschool children, play serves dual purposes:

1. A **cognitive tool** for understanding objects and phenomena.
2. A **social activity** with profound developmental implications.

Play is the primary activity of preschoolers and a vital means of holistic development. Through play, children begin to form their identities as active participants in social interactions. Historically, play has attracted scholarly attention from psychologists, educators, philosophers, and ethnographers.

Central Asian pedagogical traditions have long emphasized child-rearing. Scholars such as **Al-Farabi**, **Al-Biruni**, and **Avicenna** documented child-rearing practices



rooted in local values. Traditional Uzbek pedagogy extensively utilized play as an educational method.

Key Western Theories:

- **P.F. Lesgaft & K.D. Ushinsky:** Established play as a reflection of labor processes, preparing children for future work.
- **D.B. Elkonin:** Proposed that role-playing games emerge from children's imitation of adult labor, fostering social and moral development.

P.F. Lesgaft (1837–1909) and **K.D. Ushinsky (1824–1870)** were prominent Russian educators who contributed to the development of pedagogical thought. Their views on play were central to understanding its role in child development, particularly in preparing children for their future roles in society.

- **Lesgaft's Contribution:** Lesgaft is known for his theories on the relationship between play, labor, and education. He emphasized that play is a natural reflection of the labor processes that children observe and participate in. According to Lesgaft, children engage in play by imitating the productive activities of adults. This could be physical labor (e.g., mimicking working with tools) or more social forms of labor (e.g., family roles). He believed that children should be encouraged to engage in activities that mimic real-world tasks to prepare them for their future roles in society. The idea is that through these imitative activities, children not only learn to understand the value of work but also acquire necessary life skills.

- **Ushinsky's Contribution:** Ushinsky, a key figure in the development of Russian pedagogy, viewed play as a form of activity that promotes the holistic development of the child. He believed that children's play represents an essential process for shaping their personality and preparing them for the social and economic roles they would eventually fulfill. For Ushinsky, play served as both a means of developing practical skills and a way to introduce children to the basic principles of work and responsibility. His emphasis was on creating a connection between educational activities and real-life experiences, with play serving as a preparatory phase for future productive engagement in society.

- **Theoretical Connection:** Together, Lesgaft and Ushinsky argued that play is not merely a form of entertainment for children, but a crucial process that prepares them for adult responsibilities. They saw play as a reflection of the future world of work, which would eventually define the child's role in society.



D.B. Elkonin (1904–1996) was a Soviet psychologist and pedagogue who developed a theory of play and its relationship to moral and social development in children. His work built on the earlier ideas of Vygotsky and focused specifically on the developmental role of role-playing games.

- **Role-Playing as Developmental Tools:** Elkonin proposed that children engage in role-playing games as a way to understand adult labor and social roles. These role-playing games, often structured as pretend scenarios (such as playing "house" or "store"), were not just about entertainment but about the child's ability to assume different social roles. This imitation of adult roles helped children learn social norms, develop empathy, and understand moral concepts.
- **Social and Moral Development:** According to Elkonin, through these role-playing activities, children develop essential social skills, such as cooperation, negotiation, and understanding other people's perspectives. Additionally, they internalize social norms and ethical behaviors by acting out scenarios that reflect real-life social dynamics. He saw this type of play as a critical means for children to develop not just cognitive abilities, but also the capacity for moral reasoning.
- **Imitation of Adult Labor:** Elkonin's theory emphasized that role-playing games emerge from children's observation and imitation of adult labor. Children, by imitating what they see adults do (such as cooking, working, or caring for others), begin to internalize social roles and expectations. This process was essential for their development as moral and social beings, preparing them for future engagement in society.
- **The Role of the Educator:** Elkonin also recognized the role of the educator in guiding children's play. Teachers and caregivers could shape the kinds of role-playing games children engage in, creating environments where specific social and moral lessons could be learned.

Summary of Theories

- **Lesgaft & Ushinsky:** Emphasized play as an imitation of labor, preparing children for adult work through engagement in realistic activities that mirror the tasks they will later perform.
- **Elkonin:** Focused on role-playing games as a means for children to understand and internalize social roles, norms, and moral values through imitation of adult behaviors. These games were essential for fostering social and moral development.



These theories underscore the critical role of play in early childhood education as a way to prepare children for their future roles, both in the workforce and within the social fabric of society.

Psychological Foundations

- Play facilitates **emotional regulation, moral self-adjustment, and personal agency** across three developmental phases:

1. **Ages 3–4:** Emotional self-regulation strengthens.
2. **Ages 4–5:** Moral self-adjustment dominates.
3. **Ages 5–6:** Development of proactive personality traits.

Uzbek national games are categorized into:

1. **Active Folk Games:** Promote physical health, courage, and resilience (e.g., *Kurash, Kopkari*).
2. **Cultural Folk Games:** Transmit historical, moral, and aesthetic values (e.g., storytelling, traditional songs).

Educational Objectives:

- Integrate national values into daily activities.
- Use games to cultivate patriotism, respect for heritage, and ethical virtues (patience, bravery, empathy).
- Organize competitions between preschools, families, and communities.

Spiritual concepts in children develop gradually, influenced by:

- **Social changes and family environment.**
- **Cultural traditions and parental education levels.**
- **Stereotypes** perpetuated through repetitive social interactions (e.g., gender roles, professional biases).

Integrating national values into daily activities means embedding key cultural, societal, and moral principles into the everyday experiences of students. These values often reflect the shared history, traditions, and beliefs of a nation and are integral in shaping a child's identity and understanding of their role within society.

- **Definition of National Values:** National values refer to the core ideals that define a nation's identity and social fabric. These values often include principles such as:

- **Patriotism:** A sense of pride and loyalty to one's country.



- **Respect for National Heroes:** Appreciation of the contributions of figures who have played significant roles in the country's history.
 - **Social Responsibility:** A commitment to contributing positively to society, whether through acts of kindness, service, or civic engagement.
 - **Unity and Diversity:** A recognition of the importance of both national unity and the celebration of the country's diversity (in culture, religion, ethnicity, etc.).
 - **Ways to Integrate Values into Daily Activities:**
 - **Classroom Discussions and Reflections:** Teachers can engage students in regular conversations about the national values that are significant to their society, encouraging critical thinking and reflection on how these values can be enacted in everyday life.
 - **Thematic Learning Activities:** Curriculum topics can be designed around national history, important national symbols (such as the flag or national anthem), and public holidays that commemorate national milestones or historical figures.
 - **Role Modeling:** Teachers and staff can model these values through their own behaviors. Children learn a great deal from adult actions, so educators should exemplify national values such as respect, responsibility, and fairness.
 - **Community Engagement Projects:** Encouraging students to participate in community service activities helps them practice social responsibility and respect for national values in real-world contexts.
 - **Benefits of Integrating National Values:**
 - Strengthens a child's sense of belonging to their country.
 - Encourages responsible citizenship.
 - Promotes social cohesion and unity among diverse groups within the nation.
 - Fosters pride in one's cultural heritage and national achievements.
- Play acts as a **bridge** between societal norms and individual cognition, embedding these stereotypes in children's activities.
1. **Play as Social Activity:** Reflects real-life dynamics and evolves with societal changes.
 2. **Foundation for Learning:** Play-based activities enhance school readiness and future work skills.
 3. **Moral Development:** Games instill discipline, cooperation, and respect for rules.



Play profoundly impacts preschoolers' spiritual and moral development. By engaging in culturally rich games, children not only acquire skills but also internalize ethical values, emotional intelligence, and social norms. Educators and parents must prioritize purposeful play to nurture holistic growth.

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