

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PLAY-BASED PROGRAM IN DEVELOPING SOME LINGUISTIC SKILLS AMONG KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN IN ZAKHO INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION, KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of a play-based program in developing linguistic skills, specifically listening and speaking, among kindergarten children aged 5-6 years. Using a one-group experimental design, the research was conducted in Zakho, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with a sample of 35 kindergarten children (18 males, 17 females). The program consisted of 14 sessions over seven weeks, incorporating various educational games and storytelling activities designed to enhance auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, pronunciation accuracy, and verbal expression. Pre and post-tests measured the development of linguistic skills using standardized assessment tools. Statistical analysis using paired sample t-tests revealed significant improvements in both listening skills ($t=14.36$, $p<0.05$) and speaking skills ($t=6.34$, $p<0.05$) following the intervention, with large effect sizes of 2.42 and 1.07 respectively. Additionally, gender-based analysis demonstrated statistically significant differences favouring females in skills acquisition. The findings confirm the effectiveness of play-based learning in enhancing linguistic competencies among kindergarten children and provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers in early childhood education, highlighting the importance of interactive, play-based approaches in developing fundamental language skills in early childhood.

Keywords

Effectiveness, Program, Games, Language Skills, Kindergarten Children.



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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a critical period for language acquisition and development, laying the groundwork for future academic success and effective communication (Rowe, 2012). Among the various skills children develop during this stage, linguistic competencies—particularly listening and speaking—are fundamental as they constitute the foundation for subsequent literacy development (Dickinson et al., 2010). Contemporary research emphasizes the significance of engaging, child-centered approaches to fostering these skills, with play-based methodologies emerging as particularly effective (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Play-based learning has been recognized as a natural and developmentally appropriate pedagogical approach that aligns with children's innate tendencies and interests (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Through playful interactions, children not only enjoy the learning process but also develop critical cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities in meaningful contexts (Fisher et al., 2013). Educational games and storytelling activities, in particular, offer rich opportunities for language exposure and practice, allowing children to experiment with vocabulary, syntax, and communicative functions in low-pressure environments (Toub et al., 2018).

Despite substantial evidence supporting the efficacy of play-based approaches, traditional instructional methods focusing predominantly on direct instruction and academic preparation continue to prevail in many educational settings (Miller & Almon, 2009). This paradigm often overlooks the developmental needs of young children and the potential of play as a vehicle for meaningful learning. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, kindergarten education faces additional challenges related to curriculum standardization, teacher preparation, and resource availability, as highlighted by Mustafa (2018).

Research by Al-Barakat (2008) underscores the importance of creating supportive classroom environments that nurture linguistic development through interactive storytelling approaches. Similarly, Zoubi (2019) demonstrates how play-based interventions can significantly enhance speaking skills among kindergarten children, fostering not only linguistic competencies but also promoting social interaction and emotional expression.

The integration of games and stories into early childhood education offers numerous advantages beyond purely linguistic benefits. According to Abu Yahya and Al-Falafi (2023), digital storytelling programs can enhance social skills among kindergarten children, suggesting a holistic impact on childhood development. Moreover, Bani Khalid (2014) notes that cooperative play

activities effectively develop fundamental thinking skills among kindergarten students, highlighting the cognitive benefits of playful learning approaches.

This study aims to address the gap in research specific to the Kurdish context by examining how a structured play-based program incorporating games and storytelling can enhance the linguistic skills of kindergarten children in Zakho, Kurdistan Region. By investigating the effectiveness of such interventions, this research seeks to contribute empirically-grounded insights to inform educational practices in early childhood settings and promote more developmentally appropriate approaches to language development.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to determine the effectiveness of a play-based program in developing listening and speaking skills among kindergarten children aged 5-6 years in Zakho, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Measure the impact of educational games and storytelling activities on children's listening comprehension abilities.
2. Evaluate improvements in speaking skills, including pronunciation accuracy, verbal fluency, and coherent expression.
3. Examine potential gender differences in language skills development following program implementation.
4. Provide evidence-based recommendations for incorporating play-based approaches in kindergarten education.

Study Hypotheses

The study tests the following hypotheses:

1. There is no statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in listening skills, speaking skills, and overall linguistic skills among the research sample members.
2. There is no statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of sample members in developing listening skills, speaking skills, and overall linguistic skills according to the gender variable.

Research Boundaries

Temporal Boundaries

The study was conducted during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Spatial Boundaries

The research was implemented in kindergartens within the independent Zakho administration, Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Human Boundaries

The sample consisted of 35 children (18 males and 17 females) from Derkar Kindergarten in the Zakho independent administration.

Subject Boundaries

The research focused on implementing a play-based training program to develop linguistic skills (listening and speaking) among kindergarten children aged 5-6 years. The program consisted of 14 training sessions distributed over 7 weeks, including an introductory session, 12 sessions with various linguistic games and storytelling activities, and a concluding session. The program was implemented from January to the end of February 2025, with two sessions per week (Sundays and Thursdays).

Literature Review

Language acquisition in early childhood represents a complex developmental process influenced by multiple factors, including biological readiness, cognitive development, and socio-environmental interactions. Children typically develop language skills in predictable sequences, progressing from receptive understanding to expressive abilities across the early years. According to research by Weisleder and Fernald (2013), the quality and quantity of language input during these critical periods significantly impacts children's linguistic development. Their longitudinal study revealed that children exposed to more child-directed speech demonstrated larger vocabularies and faster lexical processing by 24 months. This early advantage translated into better language skills during subsequent developmental stages, highlighting the cumulative nature of language acquisition (Abdullah et al., 2024).

The preschool period is particularly significant for language development as children rapidly expand their vocabulary and grammatical competencies. Rice et al. (2010) examined grammatical development in typically developing preschoolers, finding that children acquire complex syntactic structures in predictable sequences influenced by both exposure and cognitive maturation. Their research demonstrated that most children master basic sentence structures between ages 3-5, though individual differences in acquisition rates persist. These findings underscore the importance of targeted intervention during this sensitive period to support optimal language development.

Listening skills constitute a foundational component of language acquisition, enabling children to process and understand spoken language. Research by Fernald et al. (2013) using eye-tracking methodology revealed that preschoolers' ability to quickly process spoken language predicts later vocabulary development and reading comprehension. Children who demonstrated faster speech processing at 18 months showed significantly better language and cognitive skills at age 8, suggesting that early receptive language abilities establish trajectories for subsequent linguistic development. These findings highlight the need for interventions that specifically target listening comprehension in early childhood.

Speaking skills emerge gradually as children progress from single-word utterances to complex sentences and coherent narratives. A longitudinal study by Hoff (2013) examining expressive language development found significant associations between early vocabulary size and later grammatical complexity. Children with larger expressive vocabularies at age 2 demonstrated more sophisticated syntax and morphology by age 4-5. Environmental factors, particularly adult-child interactions, significantly influenced these developmental patterns. Children who experienced more linguistically rich exchanges with caregivers showed accelerated rates of expressive language acquisition compared to peers with limited interaction opportunities.

Play provides a natural context for language development as children engage in authentic communication for meaningful purposes. Research by Weisberg et al. (2015) examined children's language use during different play conditions, finding that guided play incorporating adult scaffolding produced the richest linguistic interactions. During these sessions, children utilized more diverse vocabulary, constructed more complex sentences, and engaged in higher-quality discourse compared to free play or direct instruction conditions. These findings suggest that structured play experiences can strategically target specific language skills while maintaining children's engagement and agency.

Educational games designed to promote language development have demonstrated effectiveness across diverse contexts. Hassinger-Das et al. (2016) implemented a six-week intervention using language-focused board games with preschoolers from low-income backgrounds. Children participating in the intervention showed significant gains in vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness, and narrative skills compared to control groups. The researchers attributed these improvements to the games' ability to create meaningful contexts for language use while providing repeated exposure to targeted linguistic concepts. The playful format

maintained children's motivation across multiple sessions, facilitating the extended practice necessary for skill consolidation.

Storytelling represents another powerful vehicle for language enhancement in early childhood. Research by Isbell et al. (2004) compared the effects of storytelling and story reading on preschoolers' language development over a 12-week period. Children exposed to storytelling demonstrated greater improvements in comprehension, oral language complexity, and narrative structure compared to peers who experienced only story reading. The researchers noted that storytelling's interactive nature, incorporating gestures, facial expressions, and vocal modulation, appeared particularly effective in engaging children and enhancing both receptive and expressive language skills.

Digital storytelling has emerged as a contemporary adaptation of traditional storytelling methods. Studies by Yuksel (2016) examining digital storytelling interventions with preschool children found significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition, narrative sequencing, and comprehension. The multimodal nature of digital stories, incorporating visual, auditory, and interactive elements, appeared to support different learning styles and enhance engagement. These findings suggest that integrating traditional and technological approaches may provide complementary benefits for children's language development.

The effectiveness of play-based language interventions has been demonstrated across diverse populations. Han et al. (2005) conducted a year-long study examining the impact of a play-based language curriculum on dual language learners in Head Start programs. Children participating in the intervention showed significantly greater improvements in both first and second language proficiency compared to control groups receiving traditional instruction. The researchers noted that playful learning contexts reduced anxiety and increased motivation among language learners, creating optimal conditions for linguistic risk-taking and experimentation.

Teacher-guided play represents a particularly effective approach for language intervention. Bellon and Ogletree (2000) implemented an 8-week play-based language intervention using teacher facilitation with preschoolers demonstrating language delays. The intervention produced significant improvements in pragmatic skills, vocabulary, and conversational turn-taking compared to traditional pull-out speech therapy. The researchers emphasized that embedding language instruction within authentic play contexts enhanced generalization of skills to natural environments, a critical factor in intervention effectiveness.

Parent involvement further enhances the impact of play-based language interventions. Research by Roberts and Kaiser (2011) demonstrated that training parents to implement language facilitation techniques during play activities significantly improved children's expressive vocabulary and grammatical development. Their meta-analysis of parent-implemented language interventions showed medium to large effect sizes across multiple linguistic domains. These findings suggest that extending intervention principles to home environments can amplify program effects by increasing practice opportunities and consistency across contexts.

Gender differences in language acquisition have been consistently documented across research studies, with potential implications for intervention design. A meta-analysis by Eriksson et al. (2012) examining data from 10 language communities found that girls generally outperformed boys in early language development, demonstrating larger vocabularies and earlier grammatical development. These differences appeared consistent across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, suggesting some biological basis for gender disparities in language acquisition rates. However, the researchers emphasized that environmental factors such as differential adult interaction patterns may amplify initial biological differences.

Neuroimaging research by Yu et al. (2014) revealed differences in neural processing of language between preschool boys and girls, with females demonstrating more bilateral activation patterns during linguistic tasks. However, the researchers cautioned against deterministic interpretations, noting substantial individual variation within gender groups and the continuing plasticity of neural systems during early childhood. These findings suggest that while gender may influence language development patterns, well-designed interventions can effectively support linguistic growth across genders.

The cultural context of language development requires careful consideration, particularly in linguistically diverse regions. Research by Haden et al. (2001) examining narrative practices across cultural communities found significant variations in storytelling styles, parent-child interaction patterns, and communicative norms. These differences shaped children's developing language skills, influencing both the form and content of their linguistic expressions. The researchers emphasized the importance of culturally responsive interventions that recognize and build upon diverse communicative traditions rather than imposing standardized approaches.

In multilingual contexts, language interventions must address additional complexities related to dual language development. A comprehensive study by Hammer et al. (2014) following

dual language learners throughout the preschool period demonstrated that strong first language skills supported rather than hindered second language acquisition. Children who maintained first language development while acquiring a second language ultimately demonstrated stronger metalinguistic awareness and greater proficiency in both languages compared to peers who experienced first language attrition. These findings challenge subtractive approaches to bilingualism and support integrated language development across the child's linguistic repertoire.

Assessment of language intervention effectiveness requires comprehensive approaches capturing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of linguistic development. Justice et al. (2010) examined various language assessment methods, finding that integrating standardized measures with authentic performance assessments provided the most complete picture of children's linguistic competencies. They advocated for assessment approaches that capture children's language use in naturalistic contexts rather than relying solely on decontextualized testing situations. This comprehensive assessment approach provides more valid information about intervention effects while guiding ongoing program adjustments.

Longitudinal research examining the sustained impact of early language interventions has demonstrated enduring effects on children's developmental trajectories. A follow-up study by Bierman et al. (2015) tracked children who participated in a preschool language and literacy intervention through third grade, finding persistent advantages in reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and academic language proficiency compared to control groups. These findings highlight the cumulative nature of language development, where early advantages create foundations for continued linguistic and academic growth throughout the educational continuum.

The quality of implementation significantly influences intervention outcomes. A study by Piasta et al. (2012) examining implementation fidelity in preschool language interventions found that children whose teachers implemented the program with high fidelity demonstrated significantly greater linguistic gains than peers experiencing low-fidelity implementation. The researchers identified teacher training, ongoing coaching, and administrative support as critical factors influencing implementation quality. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive professional development systems supporting intervention delivery.

In conclusion, the research literature strongly supports play-based approaches for enhancing linguistic skills in early childhood. Games and storytelling activities provide developmentally appropriate contexts for language acquisition and practice, engaging children's intrinsic motivation while targeting specific linguistic competencies. The effectiveness of these approaches has been

demonstrated across diverse populations and contexts, suggesting their applicability to various educational settings, including the Kurdish context examined in the current study.

METHODOLOGY

First: Research Methodology

The one-group experimental design was selected for the current study, as it is considered one of the most precise and commonly used methodologies in psychological research, and the most appropriate for this research titled "The Effectiveness of a Play-Based Program in Developing Some Linguistic Skills Among Kindergarten Children." This methodology allows for processing variables, testing hypotheses, and then drawing study conclusions.

Second: Research Population

The current research population includes kindergarten children in Zakho city, totaling 3,290 children (boys and girls), distributed across 8 government kindergarten centers during the 2024-2025 academic year, as shown in Table (1):

Table 1. Names of Kindergartens in the Independent Zakho Administration

No.	Kindergarten Name	Location	Number of Children
1	Nergiz Children's Kindergarten	Ashé Chami	622
2	Zakho Children's Kindergarten	Takhi Rk Ava	371
3	Batifa Children's Kindergarten	Qaza Batifa	163
4	Pélin Children's Kindergarten	Takhi Abbasik	747
5	Derkar Children's Kindergarten	Nahiya Derkar	220
6	Lanaz Children's Kindergarten	Takhi Shqav	863
7	Chamé Daré Children's Kindergarten	Komelgeha Rzgari	136
8	Batel Children's Kindergarten	Nahiya Batel	168
Total			3,290

Third: Research Sample

The researcher selected a sample consisting of 35 children (boys and girls), aged between 5-6 years, randomly chosen from Derkar Kindergarten, representing the target sample in the research. This sample was selected due to its appropriateness for the current research objective.

Fourth: Research Tools

To achieve the research objectives, the researcher prepared a tool to measure some linguistic skills among kindergarten children, based on the scales of Bla Hajji (2024) and Shabab and Saghiri (2022). The scale was divided into two main skills:

Listening skill (15 items)

Speaking skill (15 items)

Fifth: Tool Validity

To ensure the validity of the scale and the play and story-based program and its face validity, it was presented to a group of specialized experts in the fields of special education, psychology, measurement and evaluation, numbering 28 experts. Their opinions were sought regarding the clarity of test instructions, scale printing, the appropriateness of the items and their linguistic formulation, in addition to the validity of the play and story program, and the correctness of selecting program components, session titles, and objectives for each session. This was done during the period from 19/11/2024 to 15/12/2024. The evaluators unanimously agreed that the scale and program were good, with the scale receiving 90% of the evaluators' opinions confirming its face validity. In light of the evaluators' opinions, the wording of some items in the scale was modified, as 60% of the evaluators suggested adjusting some items. The most prominent of these modifications were in the listening skill items (13, 14, 15) and speaking skill item (28), to ensure the scale's comprehensiveness for all targeted areas: listening and speaking.

Sixth: Tool Reliability and Psychometric Properties

To verify the tool's reliability and extract the psychometric properties of the scale, the researcher applied it to a pilot sample of 150 individuals. After correcting the data and arranging it in descending order, the variance for each item and the total score variance was calculated. To confirm the scale's overall reliability, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which showed a value of 0.92, which is statistically acceptable.

Seventh: Scale Scoring Key

The scale for measuring some linguistic skills in kindergarten children (aged 5 to 6 years) is answered by selecting one of three alternatives: (Always), (Sometimes), (Never). Scores are assigned based on the response as follows:

3 points for responding with (Always)

2 points for responding with (Sometimes)

1 point for responding with (Never)

Eighth: Play and Story-Based Program

The proposed experimental program in the current research represents a collection of games and stories with educational, social, and moral characteristics directed at children in the preparatory stage (5-6 years). The researcher built the program based on the experimental approach using a one-

group design, with pre and post-tests between which the proposed program for developing some linguistic skills was applied. The program relies on games and storytelling activities that include 14 sessions distributed over 7 weeks, as shown in Table (2).

The program aims to develop skills such as: auditory discrimination, auditory memory, visual discrimination, pronunciation accuracy, performance precision, verbal fluency, coherence and cohesion, and performance function skills among preparatory stage children. The researcher used various techniques such as: narration, dialogue and discussion, simulation and imitation, role-playing, homework, drama, songs, and card-based games, alongside feedback and both moral and material reinforcement.

The researcher designed the program to develop some linguistic skills among the sample members. In the planning and preparation phase of the program, the researcher relied on a set of previous studies and Arabic references, such as the studies of Koraba and Kidoush (2020), Bla Hajji (2024), Daoud and Al-Madhiya (2018), Fa'iza and Amal (2020), Bosna and Al-Aboudi (2022), Al-Masri (2023), in addition to reviewing some books related to linguistic skills and games, such as the children's stories booklet and the book "Psychology of Play and Its Effect on Children's Learning" by Abdul Hadi (2004), as well as the "I Read - Ethics Oasis" series booklet (Rashid, 2024).

The researcher also conducted a field visit to some non-governmental kindergartens under the supervision of German organizations for two weeks, with the aim of benefiting from their experience in (Camp Bersevi and Jaysh Mashko) in Zakho. He also relied on some educational channels for children on "YouTube," such as the "Zvuci Zivotinja - Ucenje sa zvucima" channel, kindergarten teachers, the preparatory department of Fati, and some educational pages for children from the social networking site "Facebook" such as the "Intelligence Games" page and the "I Learn with My Children" page. Some educational images were taken from these pages and modified to suit each game.

Table 2. Play-Based Program for Developing Some Linguistic Skills in Kindergarten Children
in its Final Form

Session Duration	Tools and Methods Used	Session Objectives	Session Title	Session Number
45 minutes	Techniques: Interview Reinforcement Tools: researcher gets to know all children's names, Establishing a good relationship with children Reinforces (sweets - games and colors)	Introduction between researcher and child, researcher gets to know all children's names, Establishing a good relationship with children	Introductory Session: Introduction between researcher and children	01

25 minutes 20 minutes	Colored cards with animal images and different objects Short story: (The Shepherd's Lie)	Child distinguishes between different sounds, Identifies, source or direction of sounds Imitates sounds heard, Recognizes different images and sounds	Training on listening skill (auditory discrimination skill + visual discrimination skill)	02
20 minutes 25 minutes	Picture cards of danger sources Story: (Angry and the Bees)	Child distinguishes meanings of words heard, Child expresses views about images shown - Child learns about danger sources	Enhancing communication skills and understanding danger sources	03
20 minutes 25 minutes	Song (Baran) Short story (The Ugly Duckling)	Improving pronunciation and comprehension skills through listening to short stories and songs, and helping children understand words and repeat them correctly	Enhancing listening and verbal expression through songs and stories	04
20 minutes 25 minutes	Free games Fruit activity	Interacts easily and quickly with others, uses appropriate concepts in context while expressing to interact with other children	Speaking skill and social interaction	05
25 minutes 20 minutes	Situation analysis cards game - Story (I Won't Bother Anyone)	Can clearly explain ideas to others, distinguishes between words heard	Understanding and talking about situations and listening	06
25 minutes 20 minutes	Profession cards Short story narration and discussion	Presents ideas coherently and sequentially, presents ideas coherently and sequentially, links professions with tools used in them	Understanding and talking about professions	07
25 minutes 20 minutes	Emotions matching game Emotions riddle game	Able to easily express feelings and needs	Learning emotions to improve expression and communication skills	08
25 minutes 20 minutes	Play about seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter), Interaction and connection between sentences and scenes	Child practices dialogue skills with peers and connects sentences with theatrical scenes	Dialogue and acting skills	09
20 minutes 25 minutes	Cup game Fruit activity	Learning how to pronounce words and recognizing names of vegetables and fruits, social interaction to form relationships between children	Developing listening and speaking skills through interactive games	10
25 minutes	Double cards game Matching shadow with	Child distinguishes between similar shapes, developing	Developing visual skills through	11

20 minutes	original image	child's visual perception abilities and understanding image meanings, enhancing social interaction and building relationships between children	matching images and shadows	
45 minutes	Role-playing games, doctor and patient game, store or market game	Enhancing child's ability to express feelings and needs comprehensibly, and increasing interaction with others through interactive activity that helps in natural and comfortable communication	Social communication and emotional expression	12
45 minutes	Worksheets containing various images (animals, home furniture, letters, games), Pencils or colors for children, Explanatory cards (if needed for additional clarification) Dialogue, discussion, and material and moral reinforcement	Developing visual discrimination skills between different shapes, training children to classify things based on their characteristics (type, color, use), enhancing children's ability to connect objects with their groups	Developing visual discrimination skill through classifying different images	13
60 minutes	Sweets, drinks, gifts, such as tangible materials from the program like story samples, educational games	Celebrating children's success in the program, reviewing their acquired skills development, preparing for the final test to evaluate progress	Closing Session	14

Ninth: Program Evaluation Methods

1. The researcher directly observed the child's activity during the session.
2. The researcher asked children some questions after the activity ended.
3. The researcher applied the linguistic skills scale pre and post-test to the study sample members.

Tenth: Statistical Processing

To answer the study questions and test its hypotheses, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 0.26) was used, employing the following statistical methods: arithmetic mean, median and mode, skewness and kurtosis coefficients, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normal distribution, t-test for independent samples, Pearson correlation coefficient, Cronbach's alpha equation, t-test for paired samples, One-Way ANOVA, Least Significant Difference (LSD) test, and effect size equation.

Chapter Four: (Presentation and Discussion of Research Results)

First Hypothesis:

There is no statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of the pre and post-tests in the two skills (listening, speaking, and overall) among the research sample members.

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher calculated the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the research sample members in both tests and overall. Then used the t-test for paired samples, with results included in Table (3):

Table 3. Results of t-test for Paired Samples in Listening, Speaking Skills, and Overall

Skills	No.	Arithmetic Mean			Standard Deviation of Difference	t-value		Significance	Cohen's Effect Size
		Pre- test	Post- test	Difference		Calculated	Tabulated		
Listening	35	32.37	40.91	8.543	3.518	14.36	2.03 (0.05)	Significant	2.42
Speaking		30.91	36.46	5.543	5.170	6.34	(34)	Significant	1.07
Overall		63.29	77.37	14.086	6.947	11.99		Significant	2.02

We note from Table 3 that the calculated t-value for listening skill (14.36), speaking skill (6.34), and overall scores (11.99) were all greater than the tabulated t-value of (2.03) at the level of (0.05) and degree of freedom (34). Based on this, the null hypothesis (indicating no difference) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis stating that there is a difference between the pre and post means in favor of the post-test was accepted. The results also showed that the effect size was large, with values of (2.42) for listening skill, (1.07) for speaking skill, and (2.02) for overall scores.

The researcher attributes this to the effect of the play-based program in developing listening and speaking skills among children. The program was designed to include interactive educational activities based on games and stories, helping children improve their linguistic skills in a flexible and attractive educational environment. Games are considered an effective means to motivate children to interact and pronounce, contributing to improved attention and general linguistic skills development.

The research proved the impact and effectiveness of the play-based program in developing listening and speaking skills among the entire current research sample. Based on statistical results and theoretical interpretation, it was concluded that the play-based program had a positive and significant impact on improving listening and speaking skills among children in the pre-school stage, proving its effectiveness in developing these skills. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is accepted.

Second Hypothesis:

There is no statistically significant difference at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of sample members in developing skills (listening, speaking, and overall) according to the gender variable.

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher calculated the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the development scores according to the gender variable. Then used the t-test for independent samples, with results included in Table (4):

Table 4. T-Test for Independent Samples for Each Skill and Overall According to Gender Variable

Skill	Gender	Number	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Effect Size η^2
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Listening	Males	18	7.11	3.496	2.69	2.03 (0.05) (33)	0.17
	Females	17	10.06	2.926			
Speaking	Males	18	3.61	5.237	2.43		0.15
	Females	17	7.59	4.360			
Overall	Males	18	10.72	6.596	3.36		0.25
	Females	17	17.65	5.488			

We note from Table 4 that the calculated t-value for the listening domain (2.69), speaking skill (2.43), and overall scores (3.36) were all greater than the tabulated t-value of (2.03) at the level of (0.05) and degree of freedom (33). Based on this, the null hypothesis (indicating no difference) was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted, indicating a statistically significant difference between males and females in developing listening and speaking skills and overall scores in favor of females. The results also showed that the effect size was large, with values of (0.17) for listening skill, (0.15) for speaking skill, and (0.25) for overall scores.

The researcher attributes these results to the effect of educational activities based on games in developing listening and speaking skills among children. These activities were designed to include interactive games and educational tools that help children improve their linguistic skills in a stimulating and enjoyable educational environment. Games play an important role in motivating children for verbal interaction and pronunciation, contributing to enhancing their listening and speaking abilities effectively. These activities also create an environment rich in stimuli that contribute to increasing children's attention and developing their linguistic skills in general.

Based on these results, it is observed that female children included in the research showed greater ability than male children in acquiring listening and speaking skills during the experiment. This aligns with what specialists have pointed out, who note that girls speak faster than boys and precede them in developing their linguistic skills. In general, females are characterized by greater

accuracy in pronunciation and richer vocabulary compared to males, and this difference can be observed even at the age of five (Yu et al., 2014).

The study by Muhammad (2018) also supports these results, confirming that females generally outperform males in physical and emotional development due to innate readiness, affecting their social and cultural interests. Consequently, they develop similar social experiences due to socialization in similar stereotypical environments (Muhammad, 2018: 107).

Based on statistical results and theoretical interpretation, the alternative hypothesis indicating a statistically significant difference between males and females in developing listening and speaking skills in favor of females was accepted. This confirms the effectiveness of educational activities based on games in improving linguistic skills among kindergarten children. Therefore, the second research hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

The research results confirmed the effectiveness of the program used in the current research based on games in developing some linguistic skills among kindergarten children. This result agrees with the study of (Al-Khatib, 2011), which indicated that using stories and presenting them in an interesting and attractive way has a role in developing linguistic skills among kindergarten children. This highlights the importance of techniques used in presenting stories or implementing games in acquiring main linguistic skills, such as listening and speaking skills and developing the child's linguistic repertoire.

The research results showed that games and storytelling activities, through employing multiple techniques such as narration, dialogue, discussion, role-playing, plays, songs, and feedback, contributed significantly to developing listening skills among children. Children became able to distinguish sound intensity and its rising or falling, and differentiate between linguistic sounds and other sounds. They also became able to identify similar and different words, distinguish sound directions, and recognize animal and bird sounds in the environment.

Additionally, children became able to remember words or sentences after hearing them in stories, and imitate sounds they hear. Their ability to identify the sound beginnings of heard words, distinguish objects based on their characteristics, and distinguish words that are phonetically similar in rhyme also improved. They also became more capable of distinguishing between similar and different, linking shapes and images, as well as words and images, in addition to recognizing similarities and differences between similar drawings.

This confirms the importance of training children on purposeful linguistic games that contribute to developing listening and communication skills, and creating a productive verbal interactive environment. These games also provide opportunities for children to express verbally, and train them in good listening, effective attention, and proper speaking. Thus, they become able to communicate and interact verbally in a good and correct manner.

The activities of the play-based program also contributed to developing speaking skills among children, such as pronunciation accuracy, performance precision, verbal fluency, and performance function. Children began to interact with their peers during play through speech and dialogue. They also became able to pronounce letters correctly, and articulate words from their sound sources accurately. Additionally, they became able to express images in their own language, narrate stories clearly, and express their positive and negative feelings in different situations using appropriate words and sentences. This is attributed to the interactive atmosphere provided by storytelling games, which drives children to actively participate and engage in play and interaction with the story through role embodiment.

Anthropological studies have proven that the types of stories conveyed to children have a significant impact on their personalities. This impact is positive when the stories are educationally sound, because in this case, they unleash their imagination and creative energy, develop their awareness and way of understanding life, develop their perception of the beauty of knowledge, and build in them a pivotal human personality. (Aziz, 2007, p.31). This requires developing linguistic skills, including listening and speaking skills, which form the basis for the child to live a life full of activity and vitality.

CONCLUSIONS

First: Conclusions

In light of the research results, the following conclusions can be reached:

1. The current research has proven the impact and effectiveness of the play-based program in developing listening and speaking skills among the research sample.
2. Development in listening and speaking skills occurred among the research sample members of children in the kindergarten stage in general. This means that as the child advances in age and undergoes the experimental process, an increase in the development of their listening and speaking skills is observed.

3. Children in the current research sample enjoy a clear and logical level of development in the linguistic skills included in the research in general.
4. There is no convergence in the development of listening and speaking skills among children according to the gender variable, which proves the effect of the play-based program in developing these skills among children, in favor of females.

Second: Recommendations

Based on the research results, the researcher recommends the following:

1. University professors in the fields of education and psychology need to conduct awareness courses for parents and educators in kindergarten institutions on proper social upbringing methods with children, and provide them with the necessary knowledge on how to use their capabilities to develop children's linguistic skills.
2. Training programs should be prepared for this age group, using modern educational tools that encourage children to interact and actively participate in the learning process.
3. Educational courses should be organized for educators in the pre-school stage, conducted by specialists in psychology and education, to provide them with the necessary knowledge to develop children's linguistic skills.
4. Unifying and implementing the curriculum in all kindergartens: It is important for the concerned ministry to pay more attention to unifying the kindergarten curriculum, ensuring its strict application in all kindergartens to ensure providing an integrated and equal educational experience for all children.
5. Integrating stories and games into educational activities: It is important to include interactive stories and linguistic games as part of daily activities within the kindergarten, as stories contribute to enhancing listening and speaking skills, while games allow children to practice language in a fun and enjoyable way.

Third: Suggestions

Within the framework of completing the benefits and recommendations for the current research, we suggest the following:

1. Conducting a similar study on developing other linguistic skills such as reading and writing among kindergarten children in the Independent Zakho Administration.
2. Conducting a comparative study on developing linguistic skills among kindergarten children in other governorates in the Kurdistan Region, including other variables not studied

in the current research such as the family's living situation, number of family members, and parents' life status (alive or deceased).

3. Conducting a study on the role of media in developing linguistic skills among kindergarten children.

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