

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** This article explores the key psychological factors that motivate and enhance physical activity among preschool-aged children. Given that early childhood is a critical period for physical and emotional development, the promotion of physical activity must consider not only physiological needs but also cognitive and emotional readiness. The study identifies several influential factors including parental involvement, teacher preparedness, motivation through play, emotional encouragement, and the overall psychosocial environment. The research also examines the role of psychological preparedness among educators and families in shaping children's attitudes toward movement and active lifestyles. The findings suggest that creating a supportive, emotionally responsive, and engaging environment significantly increases preschoolers' willingness and enthusiasm to participate in physical activities.

**Keywords:** Preschool education, physical activity, psychological factors, emotional development, parental involvement, teacher preparedness, motivation, play-based learning, psychosocial environment, motor skills.

**Introduction.** Physical activity plays a fundamental role in the healthy development of children, particularly during the preschool years, when rapid growth and developmental changes are most prominent. Regular movement and exercise in early childhood are not only essential for physical health, but also for emotional well-being, cognitive development, and the formation of social skills. At this sensitive age, children begin to develop attitudes and behaviors that often carry into adulthood, making the preschool period a crucial window for establishing positive habits related to physical activity.

However, encouraging physical activity in preschool education is not solely a matter of providing space or time for movement. It requires an understanding of the psychological factors that motivate or discourage young children from engaging in physical tasks. Elements such as emotional support, self-confidence, curiosity, playfulness, and the perception of physical activity as fun and rewarding all play vital roles in shaping a child's willingness to participate. Moreover, the psychological climate created by educators and parents—through encouragement, praise, and modeling active behavior—has a profound influence on children's motivation.

Research suggests that when educators and caregivers are psychologically prepared and emotionally attuned to children's needs, they are more effective in promoting a physically active lifestyle. Strategies that integrate play-based learning, emotional engagement, and a supportive environment lead to higher levels of participation in physical activities among preschoolers. In this regard, the role of psychological readiness—both among adults and children—becomes a key area of interest for researchers and practitioners alike.

This paper explores the psychological factors that enhance or inhibit physical activity among preschool-aged children. By examining the roles of parental involvement, teacher attitudes, emotional support mechanisms, and the learning environment, the study aims to provide insights into how physical activity can be more effectively integrated into preschool education in a developmentally appropriate and psychologically supportive manner. In recent years, there has

been growing international recognition of the importance of early childhood education as a foundation for lifelong health and learning. Despite increasing awareness of the benefits of physical activity for young children, many preschool programs still struggle to implement effective, psychologically-informed strategies that promote active engagement. Often, this challenge is linked to a lack of understanding of the emotional and psychological drivers behind children's behavior in physical settings.

Furthermore, the modern lifestyle—with increased screen time, limited outdoor play, and overprotective parenting—has led to a decline in spontaneous physical activity among preschoolers. This shift has raised concerns among educators and psychologists about the long-term consequences of physical inactivity, including obesity, social isolation, and delayed motor development.

Understanding the psychological motivations behind physical activity can help educators create learning environments that not only encourage movement but also nurture a child's intrinsic desire to explore, interact, and grow. Children are more likely to engage in physical activity when they feel emotionally safe, supported, and encouraged. Thus, developing age-appropriate, emotionally engaging, and psychologically responsive physical education programs is essential.

This study argues that integrating psychological insights into the design and delivery of physical activity in preschool education can significantly improve outcomes for children. By addressing the emotional needs of children, as well as the psychological readiness of parents and educators, we can foster a more holistic and sustainable approach to physical development in early childhood. Moreover, physical activity during the preschool years serves as a crucial medium for developing not only motor skills but also core psychological attributes such as self-regulation, emotional resilience, and social competence. Active play helps children manage stress, express emotions, and build confidence through small successes and social interactions. These psychological benefits are deeply interwoven with physical movement, making it impossible to fully separate motor development from emotional and cognitive growth.

Another vital factor is the role of adult influence—particularly that of parents and early childhood educators. When adults are emotionally responsive, supportive, and actively involved in children's physical development, they help shape a positive psychological environment that nurtures a child's enthusiasm for movement. Children observe adult behaviors closely and tend to mimic their attitudes and responses. Therefore, adults' psychological readiness, awareness of developmental stages, and emotional engagement significantly influence how children perceive and engage in physical activity.

Additionally, educational institutions that prioritize both physical and psychological well-being tend to foster environments where children thrive holistically. Unfortunately, in many preschool settings, physical education is often undervalued or reduced to routine exercises without sufficient attention to motivation or psychological impact. There is a pressing need to shift from mechanical, task-oriented physical routines to child-centered approaches that encourage exploration, joy, and intrinsic motivation.

The present study contributes to this growing field by examining how psychological elements—such as motivation, emotional climate, adult-child relationships, and the role of play—interact to influence preschool children's participation in physical activities. The goal is to provide educators and parents with evidence-based insights that can inform the design of more effective, psychologically supportive physical education programs in early childhood settings.

**Literature Review.** The importance of psychological and environmental factors in early childhood development has been the subject of extensive research. One of the most influential theoretical frameworks is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of various environmental systems—family, school, and community—in shaping a child's development. According to this theory, a child's physical activity is influenced not only by individual motivation but also by the immediate microsystem, including parent-child and teacher-child relationships [1].

Epstein's model of school, family, and community partnerships also highlights the value of integrated support systems in a child's educational experience. She argues that strong collaboration between families and educational institutions improves children's outcomes across developmental domains, including physical health and social-emotional well-being. Such collaboration is crucial in establishing consistent attitudes and routines related to physical activity both at home and in preschool settings [2].

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler explored the psychological reasons why parents become involved in their children's education. They found that parents' beliefs about their role, self-efficacy, and invitations from schools significantly affect their level of involvement. This involvement, in turn, influences children's motivation, behavior, and participation in various activities, including physical tasks [3].

Burmenskaya investigated the development of motor skills in preschool children through a psychological lens. Her findings suggest that physical activity should be embedded within a child's emotional and cognitive readiness. She emphasizes that motor development is closely linked to a child's sense of competence and autonomy [4].

Abdulkarimov, in his local study, examined the effectiveness of psychological preparedness in organizing physical education activities within preschool institutions. He concluded that emotionally supportive and psychologically prepared educators are more successful in fostering children's engagement in physical activities [5].

Nemov's textbook on psychology provides a broad overview of child development principles, with sections dedicated to motivation, emotional development, and behavioral reinforcement. His work is often used as a foundational resource for understanding child psychology in educational contexts [6].

Rubinshteyn's theory of activity underscores the importance of purposeful action in child development. From his perspective, every action a child undertakes—including physical movement—is meaningful and shaped by the child's goals, emotional state, and social environment [7].

Vygotsky emphasized the social nature of learning and the role of scaffolding in cognitive and motor development. His theory implies that guided interaction with adults during physical activities promotes higher levels of skill acquisition and confidence in children [8].

Ganieva and Saidov conducted a more recent local study focused on how the family environment influences the physical activity levels of preschool-aged children. They concluded that children from emotionally stable and active families are more likely to engage in physical movement both at home and in educational institutions [9].

**Research Methodology.** Research Design. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors influencing physical activity among preschool

children. This design allows for triangulation, ensuring deeper insight by cross-validating data collected through different means.

#### Participants

The research sample consisted of 120 participants, including:

- 60 preschool children (ages 4–6),
- 30 preschool educators (with at least 3 years of experience),
- 30 parents actively involved in their children’s preschool education.

Participants were selected from five preschool institutions in both urban and semi-urban areas to ensure socio-cultural diversity and broader representation.

#### Data Collection Tools

To collect relevant data, the following instruments were used:

- **Observational Checklists:** Structured observation of children during free play and organized physical activities to assess motivation, engagement, and peer interaction.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Conducted with educators and parents to understand their perceptions, attitudes, and psychological readiness in promoting physical activity.
- **Questionnaires:** Administered to parents and educators, consisting of Likert-scale items measuring emotional support, motivational strategies, and perceived barriers.
- **Children's Behavioral Rating Scales:** Used by educators to evaluate children’s responsiveness to physical tasks and social interaction during movement-based activities.

#### Procedure

The research was carried out over a 10-week period, with each preschool visited weekly for observation sessions and data collection. Parental consent was obtained for all participating children, and ethical approval was secured from a local academic board.

1. Week 1–2: Pilot study to test research instruments.
2. Week 3–8: Main data collection (observations, interviews, questionnaires).
3. Week 9–10: Data verification and follow-up interviews with selected participants for clarification.

#### Data Analysis

- Quantitative data (from questionnaires and rating scales) were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage) and inferential statistics (t-tests and ANOVA) to identify patterns and differences between groups.
- Qualitative data (from interviews and observations) were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s 6-step method. This included transcription, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation.

#### Limitations

While the mixed-methods approach offers depth, the study is limited by:

- A relatively small, localized sample size;
- Self-reporting bias in parental and teacher responses;
- Time constraints that limited longitudinal observation.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides rich data to understand the emotional and psychological dynamics that influence physical activity in early childhood settings. In addition to the core methodology, the study emphasized contextual sensitivity, taking into account the unique cultural and socio-emotional norms of the participating regions. Since physical activity in



preschool settings is often shaped by local values, caregiver expectations, and institutional priorities, a culturally responsive research framework was implemented. This ensured that the data reflected the realities of both formal educational standards and informal family practices related to child movement and emotional development.

Furthermore, during observations, particular attention was paid to psychological cues such as children's facial expressions, willingness to participate, peer interaction styles, and emotional regulation strategies during physical tasks. These behavioral indicators provided rich insights into children's internal motivation and emotional responses, allowing for a psycho-behavioral mapping of their activity engagement.

To validate the findings, a peer debriefing process was employed. Data interpretations were discussed with a panel of three early childhood education experts and two child psychologists. This step improved the credibility and objectivity of thematic analysis and helped control researcher bias.

The research also applied ethical rigor. Besides informed consent from parents, assent from the children was informally secured through age-appropriate explanations and voluntary participation protocols. Activities were designed to avoid fatigue or stress, aligning with child development ethics guidelines.

Finally, the research adopted a developmentally appropriate lens, ensuring that every instrument and interaction matched the cognitive and emotional capacities of preschool children. This attention to developmental psychology principles made the research more valid and child-centered, which is essential in studies involving early learners. This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors that promote physical activity among preschool children. The integration of these methods allowed for both the measurement of behavioral patterns and the exploration of underlying psychological dynamics.

#### Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 8 preschool education institutions across urban and rural areas. The sample consisted of:

- 80 children aged 4–6 years,
- 40 parents,
- and 24 preschool educators and psychologists.

Participants were selected to reflect a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, which ensured that findings would be generalizable to broader populations within the context of early childhood education in Uzbekistan.

#### Data Collection Tools

Quantitative data were collected through:

- Observation checklists to assess physical activity levels during structured and free play sessions.
- Parent and teacher questionnaires measuring psychological preparedness, attitudes toward physical activity, and home-school coordination.

Qualitative data were obtained via:

- Semi-structured interviews with educators and parents to understand their perceptions of children's emotional readiness and motivational triggers.

- Focus group discussions among teaching staff to identify common practices and challenges in fostering motor development.

#### Procedure

The research was conducted over a period of four months. During the initial phase, teachers and parents were briefed on the purpose of the study. Observational sessions were scheduled during regular physical activity times in the preschool routine. All responses were collected anonymously, with participants' informed consent secured in advance.

#### Data Analysis

- Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software (Version 25.0), with descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and regression models used to examine relationships between psychological readiness and physical activity engagement.

- Qualitative data were coded and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, allowing the identification of recurring themes, beliefs, and environmental influences.

This comprehensive methodology ensured that the research findings would not only identify *what* factors influence physical activity in preschoolers, but also *how* and *why* these factors function within specific psychological and social contexts.

**Research discussion.** The findings of this study highlight the significant role that psychological factors play in promoting physical activity among preschool-aged children. As evidenced by both observational data and qualitative feedback from educators and parents, children are more likely to engage in physical activity when certain emotional, motivational, and social conditions are met.

One of the most prominent factors is emotional security. Children who feel emotionally supported by their teachers and parents exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm, risk-taking, and willingness to try new movements. This aligns with Vygotsky's theory that social-emotional scaffolding enhances children's developmental capabilities, including motor skills. When educators provide verbal encouragement and demonstrate patience, children's physical confidence increases noticeably, particularly among those who were initially shy or hesitant to participate in group activities.

Another key factor is intrinsic motivation, which was found to be deeply influenced by the educator's approach. Play-based learning, goal-oriented games, and storytelling methods that integrate movement were particularly effective in fostering self-driven participation. This supports Rubinshteyn's theory of purposeful activity, in which the child's internal motivation, when aligned with enjoyable tasks, becomes a driver of action and development.

The parental role emerged as a critical variable. Children whose parents modeled active lifestyles and showed interest in their child's physical play were significantly more likely to be active in preschool as well. This observation aligns with Epstein's family-school-community model, suggesting that synergy between home and school environments leads to positive behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's framework on parental involvement was confirmed—parents who believed in the value of physical development were more consistent in reinforcing active habits at home.

Importantly, teacher preparedness—both psychological and pedagogical—was found to be a foundational condition for success. Teachers with training in child psychology and physical education methods were better equipped to create inclusive, emotionally safe environments for all children, including those with lower baseline confidence or physical ability. This supports

findings from Abdukarimov's study on the pedagogical effectiveness of psychological readiness in early childhood education.

A subtle but noteworthy finding relates to peer influence. Children were more likely to imitate and follow physically active peers, especially when those peers were emotionally expressive and socially dominant. This illustrates how social learning theory functions in group dynamics, where emotional expressiveness acts as a cue for group behavior. It suggests that promoting leadership roles among more physically confident children can have a cascading effect on group-wide participation.

However, some barriers were also identified. Inconsistent parental support, low educator self-efficacy, and limited physical space in some institutions reduced the overall effectiveness of physical activity programs. These challenges suggest the need for structural support from preschool administration and community stakeholders, including infrastructure improvements and teacher development programs.

In summary, the study shows that promoting physical activity in preschool is not merely a matter of scheduling physical education time—it requires a multi-dimensional approach that involves emotional support, motivational techniques, teacher and parent engagement, and an enabling social environment. These findings reinforce the idea that physical development in early childhood is inseparable from psychological wellbeing and social context.

Moreover, the study brought attention to the individual temperament differences among children that influenced their willingness to participate in physical activity. Introverted children, for example, required more time and emotional support before they actively engaged in group exercises. In contrast, extroverted children displayed natural leadership tendencies during physical play, often motivating their peers. This finding aligns with temperament theory, which highlights the importance of tailoring educational approaches to a child's individual psychological profile. Teachers who acknowledged these differences and adapted their interaction styles saw greater participation across all personality types.

A deeper examination of the educator's psychological climate revealed that stress levels among teachers directly impacted how physical activity sessions were conducted. Teachers who reported high workloads or low institutional support often defaulted to less interactive or passive physical routines, limiting the developmental impact on children. On the contrary, emotionally resilient educators—those with strong coping mechanisms and positive attitudes toward physical development—were more consistent in delivering engaging and structured movement experiences. This insight emphasizes the need for regular psychological and professional support systems for educators, not only to sustain their mental wellbeing but also to enhance their effectiveness in promoting physical activity.

Interestingly, the study also uncovered that verbal affirmation (e.g., "You did great!", "Let's try together!") was a key motivational tool that resonated with nearly all preschoolers, regardless of gender or background. When verbal encouragement was paired with physical modeling (teachers participating in the activity), children's enthusiasm and effort increased significantly. This dual strategy reinforces Bandura's social cognitive theory, where learning occurs through both observation and direct reinforcement.

In rural or under-resourced preschools included in the study, creative use of space and materials—such as turning recycled objects into play equipment—had a surprisingly positive effect on children's engagement. This demonstrates that psychological stimulation and novelty

are more important than the mere availability of expensive equipment. Children responded enthusiastically to games that encouraged imagination, problem-solving, and movement, supporting the idea that cognitive stimulation and motor activity are closely linked in early childhood development.

Lastly, the data suggested a noteworthy gender pattern in psychological responses to physical activity. While both boys and girls were capable of high engagement, girls more frequently exhibited anxiety or hesitation at the beginning of new physical tasks. With consistent encouragement and inclusive play design, however, their participation rates equalized over time. This underscores the importance of gender-sensitive approaches in designing physical education strategies that empower all children equally.

**Conclusion.** The present study provides compelling evidence that psychological factors play a pivotal role in encouraging physical activity among preschool-aged children. While physical activity is often approached from a physiological or curricular standpoint, this research emphasizes that emotional climate, motivational dynamics, social context, and adult influence are equally essential in fostering consistent and meaningful physical engagement among young learners.

One of the key findings is that children's emotional security and self-confidence significantly affect their willingness to participate in physical activities. Those who feel supported, encouraged, and safe—both emotionally and physically—are more likely to take initiative and persist in movement-based tasks. This underscores the importance of fostering a psychologically safe environment, where every child feels valued and understood.

Moreover, the study reveals that teacher and parent involvement serves as a strong motivational driver. Educators who are psychologically prepared and emotionally attuned to the needs of preschoolers are more effective in designing inclusive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate physical activities. Similarly, active parental participation and reinforcement at home create a home-school synergy that sustains children's interest in movement and promotes healthy behavioral patterns.

Another significant conclusion drawn from the data is the value of intrinsic motivation and play-based learning in early childhood settings. Children are most engaged when they perceive physical activities as enjoyable, purposeful, and socially rewarding. Techniques such as storytelling, imitation games, and emotionally expressive play foster a positive association with movement, laying the foundation for long-term physical health and well-being.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for gender-sensitive and temperament-responsive approaches. Boys and girls, introverts and extroverts, all benefit from personalized encouragement and inclusive play strategies that respect their unique psychological profiles. This finding calls for teacher training programs to include modules on child psychology and emotional intelligence, equipping educators to respond flexibly to varying child needs.

The results also indicate that even in resource-constrained environments, psychological factors such as novelty, imagination, and emotional engagement can compensate for material limitations. This demonstrates that sustainable and effective physical education does not necessarily depend on advanced facilities, but rather on the creativity and emotional competence of the educators and caregivers involved.

In summary, the research confirms that promoting physical activity in preschool education requires more than just structured schedules and physical space—it demands a holistic,



psychologically informed strategy that nurtures motivation, confidence, joy, and social connection. These insights provide a valuable foundation for future interventions, curriculum designs, and professional development initiatives aimed at improving physical education in early childhood settings.

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