

# LEADERSHIP SKILLS IN CHILDREN WHO PREFER RISKY PLAY: A STUDY BASED ON REPUBLIC OF KOREAN CHILDREN

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study was to investigate the difference in leadership skill depending on the preference of risky play in Korean children.

**Methodology:** In order to archive that purpose, we have collected data from 381(215 male and 166 female) Korean elementary school students, upon distributing papers of questionnaire which is composed of Preference to Playing Forms Scale for Children and Scale to Research and Evaluate Youth Leadership Life Skills Development and performed statistical analysis using SPSS.

**Main Findings:** The children who prefer risky play more showed significantly higher scores in all sub-factors of leadership skill such as communication, decision making, human relationship, solving problem, positive belief and consideration than the children who prefer risky play less.

**Implications:** This can mean that the leadership skill of the children who prefer risky play more is superior to that of the children who prefer it less. Therefore it can be suggested that children's participating in well-controlled risky play be an effective method to develop their leadership skill.

**Keywords:** *leadership, risk play, children, play preference, Korean children*

## INTRODUCTION

Present social atmosphere that is complex and difficult to predict future demands the cultivation of leaders with the social skills necessary to lead group and organization through fusion and cooperation with others as a member of society.

The leader's own leading style is referred to as leadership. Leadership has been defined in many ways by many scholars, but it can be summarized as follows: A series of process that induces and encourages members to commit their efforts and energy to the goal in order to effectively achieve the goals set in a given situation. Leadership is a universal human phenomenon found when a group or organization is formed. For an organization to operate successfully, efficient and dynamic leadership is required above all ([Hersey & Blanchard, 1977](#)).

John Dewey considered play as a good way to develop children's social skills and emphasized the importance of play in childhood. Especially, this has more important value because leadership, which is one of the social skills, develops rapidly in childhood when social relations become active. At this time, the playability is determined according to the temperament of the child ([Caspi & Silva, 1995](#)) and the role of the major others who have a large influence on the child, and the preferred play type is determined by the playability.

According to [Caillois \(1958\)](#), the children's preferred play types are specific to the individual. There are children who like to play while competing with others like football, marbling, or dodge, some children like to play luck like cards, roulettes, lotteries, some children like to play imitating another object such as house play, cosplay, and some children like to play with thrill because of the rapid movement such as spinning or falling (e.g. roller coaster, sliding, slacklining etc.).

Among them, we are interested in children who like to play with thrill. They are more likely to be concerned about play doing in some risky environments such as great heights (e.g. trees and other structures to scary heights etc.), rapid speeds(e.g. swing on vines, ropes, slide on sleds, skis, skates, etc.), dangerous tools (e.g. knives, bows, arrows and farm machinery etc.), dangerous elements(e.g. fire and deepwater etc.), rough and tumble(e.g. chase one another around and fight playfully etc.) and disappearing (e.g. play hide and seek, thrill of scary separation from their companions etc.) ([Sandseter, 2011](#)).

According to the evolutionary viewpoint, this dangerous play is necessary for survival ([Spinke, Newberry, & Bekoff, 2001](#)). According to emotional regulation theory, the dangerous play tells young mammals how to control fear and anger ([LaFreniere, 2011](#)). This allows young mammals to be aware of the fear and fears they can manage and to be adaptive in such environments. And they have the potential to cause anger when they are injured while they are playing. At this time, if someone who feels anger, wants to continue playing with the group's peers, he must overcome his anger. In this process, young mammals learn how to control fear and anger and cope up with real risks, and interact with others without giving in to negative emotions.

Some previous studies showed the importance of risky play including physical activity in childhood for their development, learning, mental health, and physical health, and healthy weight ([Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2013](#); [Sandseter & kennair, 2011](#)). In other previous study, children in an experimental group exposed to a 14-week's risky play intervention showed

the improvement in their risk detection and competence, increased and self-esteem, and showed the decrease in conflict sensitivity, when compared to their pre-intervention value, and to children in control group ([Lavrysen, Bertrands, Leyssen, Smets, Vanderspikken, & De Graef, 2015](#)).

A cross-sectional study compared children with and without ready access to unsupervised outdoor play opportunities showed more developed motor skills, social behavior, independence and conflict resolution in the former group ([Hüttenmoser, 1995](#)). Furthermore, the risk experience in childhood is believed to assist with the developing risk management strategies and with the ability to negotiate decisions about substance use, interpersonal relation and sexual behavior during adolescence ([Gill, 2007](#); [Ungar, 2007](#)).

The variables presented in this study are significantly overlapped with the qualities of the leader (e.g. positive maturity, integrity, tenacity, orientation to moral values, social responsibility, familiarity, ability to control low-level behavior, boldness, low anxiety, and ability to maintain leadership roles in group situations) presented by [Karnes and D'Ilio \(1989\)](#).

These suggest that participating in a risky play in childhood can affect leadership development. Nonetheless, due to safety issues such as accident, injury or kidnapping, children's risky play is limited and research is insufficient.

If the children who prefer to participate in a risky play show higher social ability such as leadership than the children who do not, children's participating in risky play should be encouraged. And for that, of course, it is necessary to make efforts to train risky play supervisors and develop programs to prevent accidents and injuries

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare their leadership between the children who prefer risky play and the children who do not. The results of this study are expected to bring about a change in the current play culture of Korean children that has stagnated due to learning by heart just for scores and excessive safety policy. The following hypotheses were established to achieve the purpose of the study.

**H<sub>0</sub>: There is no difference in leadership according to children's risky play preference.**

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

400 elementary school students who were residing in Incheon Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea involved in this study as participants. To select targeted elementary school, we divided the city into six areas based on administrative district and a selected total of six schools for each area using random cluster sampling method. Finally we selected total of 18 classes, 3 classes of each targeted school using same method. 400 papers of questionnaire were distributed, but only 381 of them were used for statistical analysis, except for 19 those were judged to have been the poorly response. There were 215 male, 166 female and 151 in fourth grade, 109 in fifth grade and 121 in sixth grade.

### Measurement Instrument

Two sets of questionnaires were utilized in this study.

First, to classify children's preferred play type, we adapted the Preference to playing forms Scale for Children developed by [Choi & Lee \(2004\)](#) based on four types of play suggested by Roger [Caillois \(1958\)](#). Caillois classified the play into four types: competition (Agon), chance (Alea), role-playing (Mimicry), and vertigo (ilinx). In this study, the preference of Ilinx, which is a type of play with dangerous was selected as the preference of dangerous play. The scale used the Likert type scale ranged from 1 point (not at all) to 5 points (very much). The higher the score, the more risky play is.

Second, to measure Children's leadership skill, we adapted the Scale to Research and Evaluate Youth Leadership Life Skills Development developed by [Sheevers, Dormody & Clason \(1995\)](#). It consists of six sub-variables: communication, decision making, human relationship, solving problem, positive belief, and consideration. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  showed values of communication .851, decision .865, human relations .794, problem-solving ability .845, positive belief .835, and consideration .856. The higher the score, the better the leadership skill.

### Survey Procedure

After selecting the participants, we visited their schools and explained the purpose and procedure of this study to teachers of selected classes and asked for the agreement to survey. On the survey day, we explained the purpose and procedure of this study to participants and asked for the agreement to participation again, and then conducted the survey. The self-reported method was used to respond, and it took about 10 minutes. As soon as the questionnaire was completed, it was collected on the spot.

### Data Analysis

Making use of programs of SPSS (for Windows) 18.0, we analyzed collected data in the following way. First, a frequency analysis was performed to analyze participants' risky play preference and divided all participants into two groups, a group that prefers risky play more and another group that prefers risky play less, based on the median value depending on their preference. Second, an independent t-test was performed to verify the difference in each sub-variable of leadership skill between above mentioned two groups. All statistical significance levels were set to .05.

## RESULT

After conducting the independent t-test to verify the difference in leadership skill depending on the differences in participants' preferences to risky play, it was turned out that there were statistically significant differences in all sub-variables of leadership skill.

In detail, as can be seen in Table 1, it was turned out that the scores of all sub-variables of leadership were higher in participants who prefer risky play more. First, the scores of the communication factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=3.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Second, the scores of decision making factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=2.932$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Third, the scores of human relationship factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=3.479$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Forth, the scores of a problem-solving factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=3.239$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Fifth, the scores of positive belief factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=3.239$ ,  $p<.001$ ). And finally, the scores of consideration factor were higher in participants who prefer risky play more than who do not ( $t=3.615$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

**Table 1. Differences in leadership skills depending on risky play preferences in children**

Sub-variables	Preference level for risky play	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Communication	High	212	3.6585	.80636	4.128	.001
	Low	169	3.3041	.86385		
Decision making	High	212	3.6623	.85137	2.932	.004
	Low	169	3.4083	.82559		
Human relationship	High	212	3.9119	.82777	3.479	.001
	Low	169	3.6075	.87388		
Solving problem	High	212	3.9340	.76498	3.239	.001
	Low	169	3.6817	.74304		
Positive belief	High	212	3.9340	.76498	3.239	.001
	Low	169	3.6817	.74304		
Consideration	High	212	3.8358	.75479	3.615	.001
	Low	169	3.5550	.75142		

## DISCUSSION

Most parents are always concerned about the safety of their children and one of which is injured when children play. In recent years, Korea has become very sensitive to children's safety due to large and small accidents. Therefore, children's risky play both socially and at home is considerably limited. Should we limit children's risky play for their safety?

Some previous studies report that although children's participation in risky play may cause injury, the majority of related injury incidents result in minor injuries that require little or no medical attention ([Child & Youth Unintentional Injury, 2007](#); [Hagel, 2005](#); [Vollman, Witsaman, Comstock, & Smith Vollman, 2009](#)). Furthermore, it is associated with the development of various health-related variables as well as promoting holistic growth ([Brussoni et al. 2012](#); [Engelen, Bundy, Naughton, Simpson, Bauman, Ragen, Baur, Wyver, Tranter, Niehues, Schiller, Perry, Jessup, & van der Ploeg, 2013](#); [Hüttenmoser, 1974](#); [Lavrysen et al. 2015](#); [Sandseter & Kennair, 2011](#); [Weinstein & Pinciotti, 1988](#)). Therefore, the recommendation on children's participation in risky play can be beneficial to the developmental aspect of children when considering the advantages and disadvantages of that. As shown in the results of this study, children who prefer risky play showed high scores in all the sub-variables of leadership (Communication, Decision making, Human relationship, Solving problem, Positive belief, Consideration).

This result is supported by the previous study, performed by [Engelen et al. \(2013\)](#) where it was reported that children's risky play can improve their social skill and so it should be increased the time for children to participate in risky play.

According to the previous studies related to children's leadership, children with higher level of leadership were reported to be superior in emotional intelligence, more popular in peer-group, and higher in creative thinking, ability of self-management and interpersonal relationship than children who did not ([Mun, Hong, & Kim, 2013](#); [Youn, 2005](#)). Intellectual ability, such as creative thinking, affects academic achievement ([Yoo, 2001](#)), the popularity from peer group affects self-

concept formation ([Chambliss, Muller, Hulnick, & Wood, 1978](#)) and interpersonal relationship ability affect peer relationship formation ([Jeon & Ju, 2018](#)). Since these variables such as academic achievement, self-concept formation, and peer relationship formation are closely related to the desirable development of adolescence, children's participating in various activities to improve their leadership level can be meaningful for their future.

Many of risky play requires a high level of physical ability. For example, climbing and jumping on a high, moving on a single log bridge, hanging and moving on a zip-line, sledding at high speed and intense struggle play requires a various factor of physical fitness such as muscular strength, muscular endurance, power, agility, and balance. Therefore, participating in risky play can help to enhance physical ability in children.

Previous studies also reported that physical activity affect brain development in children ([Endres, Gertz, Lindauer, Katchanov, Schultze, Schröock, Nickenig, Kuschinsky, Dirnagl, & Laufs, 2003](#); [Gapin & Etnier, 2010](#); [Swain, Harris, Wiener, Dutka, Morris, Theien, Konda, Engberg, Lauterbur, & Greenough, 2003](#); [van Praag, 2008](#)). According to them, physical activity has a positive influence on enhancing neuroplasticity and ultimately enhancing cognitive ability by increasing brain size, cerebral blood flow and availability of brain growth factor and changing brain structure.

Children's participation in risky play will never be dangerous if social efforts such as safely establishing playground facilities, placing professionally trained supervisors responsible for safety, and developing safe play programs are followed. And it also can be an effective method to improve their social skills such as leadership. Therefore, we should encourage children to participate actively in various activity programs contains well-controlled risk factor such as Scouts.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study was to investigate the difference of children's leadership skill depending on their preference of risky play and concluded that the children who prefer risky play more have better leadership skill than the children who prefer risky play less. Further studies are needed to verify why children prefer or don't prefer risky play and how to increase their desire to participate in risky play.

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