

ERGOTHERAPY IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH PSYCHOPHYSICAL DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

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Abstract

This article examines the significant role of occupational therapy in child development and how it can help children facing physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges. It focuses on developing self-care skills, increasing independence, and improving children's quality of life. The article emphasises the importance of early intervention, ongoing assessment, and active family involvement in the therapeutic process.

The article keeps the spotlight on the ideology of occupational therapy: helping people live as self-sufficiently as possible. Occupation is a general term providers use to refer of any daily tasks you do.

Occupational therapy for children is a modern approach that helps children not only restore or refine skills but also acquire new ones for everyday life. Thanks to this therapy, children adapt more easily to society, feel more confident at school, and become more independent in their daily activities.

Occupational therapy intervention for children promotes engagement and participation in children's daily life roles. Children's roles include developing personal independence, becoming productive and participating in play or leisure

pursuits. Inability to participate because of disease, disability or skill deficits can cause marginalisation, social isolation and lowered self-esteem. Occupational therapists select interventions for children based upon an analysis of the child's performance of daily life roles, how their performance is affected by their disability, and how their environment supports or constrains their performance (Mandich, A., & Rodger, S., 2006, pp. 115–135).

Through occupational therapy, children gradually acquire:

- self-confidence;
- independence in daily activities;
- better attention and learning ability;
- effective communication skills;
- preparation for kindergarten or school without unnecessary difficulties.

Since play is children's main occupation, occupational therapists often use it to improve playfulness.

Play is spontaneous, intrinsically motivating, and autonomous. Active involvement and a focus on the process, not the end product, are key aspects of play. Play, according to occupational therapists, is considered the main occupation of the child, since it is the vehicle for learning and contributes so significantly to optimal development. Play could also be a milestone to achieve functional or performance-based goals, such as enhancing activities of daily living (G. Rautenbach et al., 2024).

Although many factors influence a child's development, occupational therapy plays a crucial role in supporting children with a variety of developmental challenges.

Keywords and phrases: Occupational therapy, sensory integration, fine and gross motor skills, adaptation, cognitive skills.

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մանկավարժական գիտությունների թեկնածու,
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Համառոտագիր

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է էրգոթերապիայի նշանակալի դերը երեխայի զարգացման, ինչպես նաև ֆիզիկական, ծանաչողական կամ հուզական դժվարությունների բախվող երեխաների աջակցման գործընթացում: Հատուկ ուշադրություն է դարձվում ինքնախնամքի հմտությունների ինքնուրույնության զարգացմանը և երեխաների կյանքի որակի բարելավմանը: Ընդգծվում է վաղ միջամտության, շարունակական գնահատման և թերապևտիկ գործընթացում ընտանիքի ակտիվ ներգրավվածության կարևորությունը: Հոդվածը ուշադրության կենտրոնում է պահում էրգոթերապիայի գաղափարախոսությունը՝ օգնել մարդկանց ապրել հնարավորինս ինքնաբավ: Էրգոթերապիան ժամանակակից մոտեցում է, որը օգնում է երեխաներին ոչ միայն վերականգնել կամ կատարելագործել հմտությունները, այլև ձեռք բերել նոր հմտություններ առօրյա կյանքի համար: Այս թերապիայի շնորհիվ երեխաներն ավելի հեշտությամբ են հարմարվում հասարակությանը, ավելի վստահ են զգում դպրոցում և ավելի անկախ են դառնում իրենց առօրյա գործունեության մեջ: Հիվանդության,

հաշմանդամության կամ հմտությունների պակասը կարող է հանգեցնել մարզինալացման, սոցիալական մեկուսացման և ինքնագնահատականի նվազման (Mandich, A. & Rodger, S., 2006):

Էրգոթերապիայի շնորհիվ երեխաներն աստիճանաբար ձեռք են բերում.

- ինքնավստահություն,
- անկախություն առօրյա գործողություններում,
- ուշադրության կենտրոնացում և ուսումնական հմտություններ,
- արդյունավետ հաղորդակցման հմտություններ,
- նախապատրաստում մանկապարտեզին կամ դպրոցին՝ առանց ավելորդ դժվարությունների:

Քանի որ խաղը երեխաների հիմնական զբաղմունքն է, էրգոթերապիստները հաճախ օգտագործում են խաղը՝ որպես խաղային ակտիվությունն ու խաղալու կարողությունը զարգացնելու միջոց: Հատկանշական է, որ խաղը ունի ինքնաբերական բնույթ, հիմնված է ներքին դրդապատճառների վրա և ինքնավար է: Ակտիվ ներգրավվածությունը և գործընթացի, այլ ոչ թե վերջնական արդյունքի վրա կենտրոնացումը խաղի հիմնական առանձնահատկություններն են: Էրգոթերապիստների կարծիքով՝ խաղը համարվում է երեխայի հիմնական զբաղմունքը, քանի որ այն ուսուցման կարևորագույն միջոց է և զգալիորեն նպաստում է երեխայի օպտիմալ զարգացմանը (G. Rautenbach et al., 2024):

Թեև բազմաթիվ գործոններ ազդում են երեխայի զարգացման վրա, էրգոթերապիան կարևոր դեր է խաղում զարգացման տարբեր խանգարումներ ունեցող երեխաներին աջակցելու գործում:

Բանալի բառեր՝ էրգոթերապիա, զգայական ինտեգրացիա, մանր և խոշոր մոտորիկա, հարմարվողականություն, ճանաչողական հմտություններ:

Introduction

Occupational therapy for children with various disabilities is driven by the need to return them to as independent and active a life as possible. Occupational therapy is a key element of modern multidisciplinary rehabilitation. Occupational therapy is highly individualised, and specialists select treatment methods based on each child's unique needs of each child. They work closely with parents, guardians, and teachers to provide comprehensive support to the child in a variety of settings. Although many factors influence a child's development, occupational therapy plays a crucial role in supporting children with various developmental challenges. Occupational therapy is a holistic approach to health aimed at helping children of all ages perform everyday activities. For children, this may include tasks such as play, learning, communication, and self-care (The Role of Occupational Therapy in Child Development, 2025).

Here are some key areas where occupational therapy plays a vital role in a child's development:

- **Fine and Gross Motor Skills:** Occupational therapists help children develop fine motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination and precise hand movements needed for activities like writing, drawing, and using utensils. They also assist in the development of gross motor skills, which involve large muscle movements and are necessary for tasks like walking, running, and playing sports. Through a variety of therapeutic activities, children can improve their motor skills and coordination.
- **Sensory Processing:** Many children experience difficulties in sensory processing, which can impact their ability to process and respond to sensory information. Occupational therapists use sensory integration techniques to help children with sensory challenges feel more comfortable. This can improve attention, self-regulation, and overall well-being.
- **Social and Emotional Development:** Occupational therapy can help children develop crucial social and emotional skills. Therapists can use play-based techniques to help children with autism, ADHD, or other developmental disabilities improve social interaction, communication, and emotional regulation.
- **Academic Success:** Children who struggle with academic tasks may benefit from occupational therapy. Occupational therapists help improve a child's ability to concentrate, organise tasks, and manage time, which are crucial for school success. They also help children overcome learning barriers, such as difficulties with handwriting, reading, and math.
- **Self-Care Skills:** Occupational therapy helps children master self-care skills such as dressing, eating, and personal hygiene. This is especially important for children with physical disabilities or developmental delays, allowing them to gain independence and confidence in everyday life.
- **Adaptation to Disability:** Occupational therapy plays a crucial role in helping children with disabilities adapt to their condition and achieve a high quality of life. Therapists support the use of assistive devices, adaptive techniques, and strategies to increase the child's independence and participation in various activities.
- **Behaviour and emotional regulation:** Some children may exhibit challenging behaviour or have difficulty regulating emotions. Occupational therapists can identify factors that trigger such behaviour and develop strategies to help children better manage their emotions and behaviour. This may include relaxation techniques, self-soothing, and improved communication (Keyes, C. L. M. et al., 2009).

Early intervention and ongoing support from occupational therapists can make a significant difference in the lives of children with developmental difficulties, enabling them to reach their full potential. This underscores the

fact that occupational therapists work with children to improve their physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being, striving to maximise their potential in all aspects of life (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2022).

Purpose of the study. To study the role and effectiveness of occupational therapy in the development of children with various disabilities, and to determine its impact on the development of motor, sensory, social-emotional, and self-care skills to increase their level of independence and quality of life.

Methodological Basis

Delays in social skill development can stem from a variety of factors. One of the main causes is the presence of various developmental characteristics in the child, primarily a diagnosis or specific conditions. These can impact physical and cognitive development. To address this issue, occupational therapists use a variety of evidence-based methods tailored to the unique needs of each child. Therapy often includes therapeutic activities such as games, movement exercises, and sensory activities designed to be engaging and functional. The use of adapted tools also plays a key role in the learning process. For example, special pens, cutlery, or clothing with simple fasteners can significantly facilitate task completion. Occupational therapists help select the most appropriate tools to match the child's physical abilities.

Sensory integration techniques such as swings, tactile play, and deep pressure exercises help children process and respond to sensory stimuli more effectively. Adaptive strategies include modifying the daily routine or environment to remove barriers to participation.

Occupational therapists identify the key activities for each age group and begin their work with those activities. The occupational therapists work with the child based on the key activity for their age group, most often play. To develop socialisation, the following methods are used: play therapy, role-playing and social scenarios, group activities, art therapy, behaviour modelling, life skills training, and the creation of a supportive environment. Feedback plays an important role, helping the child become aware of their actions and emotions. Occupational therapy also includes active interaction with the family: specialists train parents so they can support the child's development in everyday life and facilitate their successful socialisation (Klassen et al., 2004)

For many years, specialists have used a wide range of approaches in various combinations, believing they best meet each child's individual needs of each child. Sensory and cognitive approaches are most often combined with other methods, such as visual information analysis, biomechanical, and psychosocial approaches. These methods aim to create accessible, meaningful, and age-appropriate learning environments that address the diverse needs of children with disabilities (50 occupational therapy activities for kids, 2021).

The goal isn't to "fix" a child's cerebral palsy or autism; it's to reduce the gap between what the disability makes hard and what the child needs to do. That

distinction matters. It shifts the focus from deficit to function, changing how sessions are designed and what counts as success.

Key Takeaways:

- Occupational therapy helps children with disabilities build skills for daily life, from handwriting and self-care to sensory regulation and social participation.
- Early intervention produces the strongest developmental gains; the earlier therapy begins, the greater the impact on long-term outcomes.
- Play is the primary therapeutic medium in pediatric OT, not a reward for doing the “real work.”
- Parents and caregivers are active participants in the therapy process, not observers; family carry-over is essential to lasting progress.
- Occupational therapy is tailored to each child’s specific diagnosis, strengths, and functional goals, with no single approach fitting every case.

Examples include modelling with play dough to strengthen hands, completing sensory obstacle courses, using tweezers to develop fine motor skills, and playing with textured materials to improve sensory tolerance. In their work with children with cognitive and physical disabilities, occupational therapists use engaging, hands-on activities to help children learn to regulate their emotions, improve fine motor skills, and reach other developmental milestones. But occupational therapists aren’t the only ones who can use occupational therapy with children. Parents can also integrate therapeutic methods into their child’s daily life through games and crafts that engage all the senses.

For example, tracing letters is a great way for children just beginning to write in print to gain confidence in handling writing instruments. This activity also helps develop hand-eye coordination and strengthen the fine hand muscles. Furthermore, after tracing, children can colour the entire printed drawing, which further develops fine motor skills and is a fun activity. Drawing on a grid helps children develop observation skills and drawing skills. Breaking the drawing down into smaller sections helps them understand how shapes fit together and how to notice details. Colouring the picture, in turn, helps strengthen hand muscles.

During these activities, children manipulate objects and tools (such as scissors and crayons), developing fine motor skills of the hand, wrist, and fingers. This helps children improve manual dexterity and motor coordination, as well as their ability to regulate their emotions (Psychology and Behavioural Science International Journal, 2018).

Special attention is paid to the process of functional, continuous assessment, a key component of intervention planning. The assessment identifies children’s cognitive abilities, communication styles, adaptive behaviour, sensory characteristics, and emotional state. Based on these data, individualised educational and therapeutic programs are developed, including clearly defined

goals, appropriate strategies, and measurable outcomes. It is also noted that the continuous nature of the assessment allows for timely revision of the methods used and their adaptation to the child's developmental dynamics (Barton, E. E., et al., 2015).

Research Methods

Occupational therapy methods help enhance children's self-awareness and focus, facilitating better task completion and skill development. The methods include visual information analysis, which leverages children's cognitive skills, enabling them to extract visual information from the environment and integrate it with other sensory input. This approach is based on developmental approaches, sensory integration, and cognitive analysis.

Occupational therapy methods also help enhance children's self-awareness and focus, supporting better task completion and skill development.

Occupational therapy methods are tailored to the specific needs of children with diverse disabilities. Here are some of the methods used to assist children:

- **Play-Based Learning:** Play helps children with sensory processing disorders better integrate and respond to sensory information.
- **Sensory Integration Therapy:** This therapy helps children with sensory processing disorders to manage sensory input and improve their ability to participate in daily activities.
- **Fine Motor Skill Development:** Occupational therapists work on improving fine motor skills, which
- are essential for self-care and daily living activities.
- **Social Skills Training:** Group activities and play-based learning teach children with autism spectrum disorder how to interact with peers and develop social skills.
- **Visual Perceptual Skills Training:** This training helps children with visual impairments to improve
- their visual perception and cognitive abilities.
- These methods are designed to address the unique challenges faced by children with disabilities,
- promoting their overall well-being and development (Occupational Therapy for Children with Disabilities: Empowering Special Needs Kids, 2024)

Results

Analysis of ergotherapy methods shows that they play a significant role in the development of children's independence. In particular, the development of fine and gross motor skills, the promotion of sensory integration, and the formation of self-care skills contribute to improving the quality of a child's daily life. The use of sensory integration methods is effective both from the point of view of regulating the child's behavioural reactions and from the point of view of the development of attention and self-regulation skills. The use of deep

tactile contact, regulated light and sound environment, as well as appropriate motor exercises helps to maintain the child's emotional balance and increase his involvement in the educational process (Scottish Educational Review, 2015).

These ergotherapy methods help increase the child's self-awareness and focus attention, contributing to better performance of assigned tasks and skill development of skills in the process of performing them. Some therapists also believe that the cognitive approach promotes respect for the child's ideas, increases his sense of control and motivates him to achieve his goals. These methods include the analysis of visual information, which uses children's cognitive skills to extract visual information from the environment and integrate it with other sensory methods. This approach is based on the approaches of development, sensory integration and cognitive analysis. Although only five occupational therapists in the scientific world have mentioned the use of the approach of visual information analysis, in the framework of occupational therapy it is observed that almost all methods are based on aspects of this approach. Some therapists indicate that they used the approach of visual perception as opposed to the analysis of visual information, describing similar methods (Richtlinie über die Verordnung von Heilmitteln in der vertragsärztlichen Versorgung, 2023).

Ergotherapy methods aim at developing the child's independence and everyday life skills. Ergotherapy focuses on fine and large motor skills, sensory integration, self-care skills and adaptation to the environment. Various exercises and activities are selected according to the level of development of the child and encourage active participation. In the case of sensory difficulties, special methods are used to regulate the child's reaction to external stimuli.

Conclusion

Thus, the analysis shows that ergotherapy is an important and effective component of the complex rehabilitation of children with various developmental characteristics. The application of individualised approaches based on the child's age, cognitive and physical characteristics contributes to the formation of key skills – motor, sensory, social-emotional and self-care skills (National Institute of Mental Health, 2025).

The use of games, sensory and cognitive methods, as well as adaptation of the environment, allows for a significant increase in the level of independence of the child and his involvement in everyday and educational activities. Of particular importance are early intervention and systematic assessment, which ensure timely correction of programs and the achievement of sustainable results. Research shows that an in-depth assessment of the developmental characteristics of each child allows for the development of targeted and effective individual programs aimed not only at the development of academic skills, but also at the promotion of independence, communication skills and social adaptation.

The introduction of functional and continuous assessment ensures the flexibility of interventions and their adaptation to the dynamics of the child's

development. In addition, an important component of ergotherapy is the active inclusion of the family in the rehabilitation process, which increases the effectiveness of the activities and promotes consolidation of skills in the natural environment (Effectiveness of ergotherapeutic and occupational therapeutic program implemented for children and youths with disabilities in family-type residential centres, 2021)

Finally, cooperation between specialists and parents is of special importance, since it is one of the pillars of the child's continuous development and the effective implementation of inclusive education. One of the key elements contributing to the effectiveness of the cooperation model is that, by working together, team members gain a shared understanding of each other's experience. This generates new ideas, which are incorporated into joint assessment, planning, implementation, and ongoing monitoring of progress in relation to results for the child and the family.

Thus, ergotherapy acts as a holistic, multifunctional tool aimed at improving children's quality of life of children, revealing their potential, and supporting their successful integration into society (Maltseva, M. N. et al., 2017).

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