Research article

The quality of family participation processes in play centers as an element of adaptation to dynamic environments

La calidad de los procesos de participación familiar en las ludotecas como elemento de adaptación a entornos dinámicos

Eva María López-Perea[1]**:** University of Burgos, Spain.
emlperea@ubu.es
María Diez-Ojeda: University of Burgos, Spain.
mdojeda@ubu.es
Nuria Alonso Alcalde: University of Burgos, Spain.
nalonso@ubu.es
Vanesa Baños-Martínez: University of Burgos, Spain.
vbanos@ubu.es

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Abstract:

Introduction: Quality management in toy libraries is a little explored scenario, compared to other types of socio-community services that have been the subject of analysis recently, thus translating into improvements in their organization and in the services they offer. Therefore, the starting point of this work is based on the absence of previous research that evaluates the role played by toy libraries in children's learning. **Methodology:** Through the application of the Delphi technique, the aim is to design and validate a guide of indicators focused on assessing and promoting family participation in toy libraries as a quality reference, to promote a process of continuous improvement. **Results:** This guide is structured in 6 areas, articulated

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[1] **Corresponding author:** Eva María López-Perea, University of Burgos (Spain).

in 22 standards and 55 quality indicators. **Discussions:** The main limitation has been the absence of established quality processes, as well as instruments that could facilitate the configuration of initiatives and programs that would value the involvement of families in toy libraries. **Conclusions:** This work contemplates the need to facilitate that involvement and thus optimize the actions aimed at their correct integration into the environment, contributing decisively to child development and education for citizenship.

Keywords: parental participation, playroom, game, evaluation, child development, Delphi, quality management, indicators.

Resumen:

Introducción: La gestión de la calidad en las ludotecas es un escenario poco explorado, frente a otro tipo de servicios socio-comunitarios que han sido objeto de análisis recientemente, traduciéndose así en mejoras en su organización y en los servicios ofrecidos. Por tanto, el punto de partida de este trabajo se basa en la ausencia de investigaciones previas que evalúen el papel que desempeñan las ludotecas en el aprendizaje infantil. **Metodología:** A través de la aplicación de la técnica Delphi se ha diseñado y validado una guía de indicadores enfocados a valorar y promover la participación familiar en las ludotecas como referente de calidad, para favorecer un proceso de mejora continua. **Resultados:** Esta guía se estructura en 6 áreas, articuladas en 22 estándares y 55 indicadores de calidad. **Discusión**: La principal limitación ha sido la ausencia de procesos de calidad establecidos, así como de instrumentos que faciliten la configuración de iniciativas y programas que valoren la implicación de las familias en las ludotecas. **Conclusiones:** En este trabajo se contempla la necesidad de facilitar esa implicación y optimizar así las actuaciones encaminadas a su correcta integración en el entorno contribuyendo decisivamente al desarrollo infantil y a la educación para la ciudadanía.

Palabras clave: participación de los padres, ludoteca, juego, evaluación, desarrollo infantil, Delphi, gestión de la calidad, indicadores.

1. Introduction

In societies that are considered advanced, so-called "free time" has for decades been of rising importance in the day-to-day life of individuals (Valdemoros et al., 2014). Leisure time is an opportunity to activate and to develop the faculties of human experience, and with them to place ourselves before a broad and diversified set of initiatives that go beyond the mere activities of "superfluous time", or "rest time" (Talavera et al., 2018; Caride, 2014).

In this sense, play as a leisure activity that involves interaction between people, can help develop faculties and favour citizen participation, providing experiences necessary for the free and satisfactory development of the individual. Moreover, the benefits of play are not limited to children or adolescents, but extend to all ages, from infancy to old age (Martín et al., 2018; Cuenca, 2011). This approach is framed within the perspective that values participation in play as "an area of pedagogical-social application and expansion, suitable for promoting experiences or initiatives with educational, cultural and therapeutic purposes" (Caride, 2014, p. 37).

Therefore, participation, whether in a game or in any other leisure activity, is a way of using free time that highlights the value of freedom versus that of necessity and elicits the enjoyment of the individual while performing such activity (Gallardo-López, et al., 2018). In other words, "the essential aspect of participation is not the activity, but the attitude of the individual while performing the activity" (Calvo, 1998 p. 212). Participation becomes, then, an instrument that facilitates educating others and educating oneself, in a project of citizenship, change and social

transformation in which social pedagogy finds its raison d'être. It is understood in this way within the discourse and the practices that have been presented in the name of the pedagogy of leisure (Álvarez & Hernández, 2022; Sanz et al., 2018; Caride, 2014; Cuenca, 2011; Puig & Trilla, 1987; Weber, 1969).

Regardless of the conceptual approaches that can be made to play, it is necessary to pay attention to its essentially ludic meaning, which also acts as a facilitating tool for the processes of participation. Frequently, this is developed within the family, and there is a close and direct link between play developed in the private sphere and participation, since many of the experiences that people have in their free time take place within primary groups (Martínez & Caballo, 2022; Maroñas et, al., 2018). Over the years, many studies have demonstrated its enormous value, either as a natural activity typical of childhood (García, 2019; Gallardo-López et al., 2018; Henricks, 2008; Perinat, 1980; Loizos, 1967; as a didactic activity at the service of the child's learning and development (Linaza, 2013; Frost et al., 2008; Paredes, 2002; Garfella, 1997) or as an excellent ally to maintain positive communication in the family context (Whitebread et al., 2012).

Thus, toy libraries have a great potential for the design of participatory proposals, which provide children and their families with playful actions that accompany the development of children, to help them to be the architects and protagonists of their own growth. Properly oriented, toy libraries can become a participatory place where families, from their own free time, can generate new spaces and proposals for joint development and harmonious growth (García, 2019; Novella et al., 2013; Rodríguez & Trasancos, 2016).

The improvement of participation goes through the creation of environments favorable to the absorption and exploration of individual and collective needs. Achieving this will increasingly be the result of a global, consensual, interdisciplinary and coherent project, through a sustained effort over time, rather than the fruit of a unidirectional or non-participatory solution intended to be applied in an isolated and instantaneous manner (Polo-Garzón & López-Valencia, 2020; Elcano, 1996).

Toy libraries, located in increasingly competitive environments, are in full expansion, adopting different forms and developing various mechanisms to meet the challenges generated by the dizzying changes originating in society and affecting individuals in the different dimensions of their lives (Gueyraud, 2020; Flórez-Romero et al., 2019; Vial, 2019).

Faced with this reality, we will center the development of this work on the normative principles enshrined in Norm ONG 2015 (ICONG, 2015). This general standard is used to address the need for a regulation that will facilitate the functional operation of toy libraries, so that they make a significant contribution to the constant improvement of their efficacy and efficiency. In consequence, the norm permits an approximation to excellence when developing its projects and achieving objectives in the toy libraries (Cortes, 2018).

Quality management in social organisations, as is the case of toy libraries, is based on a set of critical factors such as leadership, quality planning, human resources management, process management, participation of service users and continuous improvement (Romero, 2018; del Río & Martínez, 2007). But when we talk about quality in toy libraries, we must bear in mind the influences that determine the service offered and that are configured on two basic macro-elements: expectations and perceptions (Hernández et al., 2018). Thus, the concept of quality in toy libraries recognises two trends: objective quality and subjective quality. Objective quality is approached from the perspective of the producer (toy library manager), and subjective quality from that of the consumer (users). Perceived quality of services, therefore,

is subjective, as it depends on the individual who is using them and assumes a higher level of abstraction than any of the specific attributes of the product, and finally, it has a multidimensional characteristic (Duque, 2005). In this sense, the quality perceived in these organisations is more complex to assess than that referring to the products (Traba, 2020).

2. Objective

There are few studies aimed at assessing the quality of toy libraries, therefore, given this reality, and based on the NGO Standard 2015, in this paper we aim to design an instrument to measure the quality of toy libraries and to help improve them through participatory processes (Fernández & Salgado, 2011). Therefore, the objective of this research is to design and validate a guide of indicators to evaluate family participation in toy libraries as a reference of quality, to favour a process of continuous improvement, urging at all times the adoption of measures that favour the improvement of the processes of family participation in toy libraries from its globality.

3. Methodology

The qualitative design of this research is developed through the Delphi technique, which researchers use to explore the problem and, at the same time, propose solutions (Charlton, 2004). Qualitative methods can provide descriptions from the subjective point of view of the participants about a given observation or experience (Mariscal et al., 2019; Christensen et al., 2011). Gago (2006) defined this technique as:

> A qualitative strategy for collecting information of an inductive and naturalistic nature about why people think or feel the way they do, as it provides information about perceptions, feelings and attitudes from the point of view of the people who are interviewed. (p. 309)

The Delphi technique is a systematised and iterative procedure whose aim is to collect expert and consensus opinions, considering the expert as the individual whose personal situation and resources can be harnessed to contribute to the objective that motivated the launch of another Delphi project (Fletcher & Marchildon, 2014; Willis, 2007; Landeta, 1999). Eight national experts with research training, as well as professionals related to free time and leisure and animators of play as a strategy for child development participated in this research.

The procedure for the elaboration of the Delphi technique included several phases, which are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Design phases of the guide with the Delphi technique

PRELIMINARY PHASE	• Literature review of toy libraries and quality. • Construction of the initial guide (TFM).
PHASE 1	• Bibliographic enlargement. • Creation of the group of experts. • Initial consultation with professional experts.
PHASE 2	• Development of the Delphi technique (four mailings). • Production of the document by consensus.
PHASE 3	• Final Indicators Quality Guide centered on promoting family participation toy libraries.

Source: Authors´ own work.

3.1. Validation of the guide

The validation of the Quality Indicators Guide was carried out by eight professionals of recognised prestige with experience in the field studied (a team that remained stable throughout the validation process). The role of the panel of experts was to review the indicators at different stages of the guide to:

- ✓ Verify that the domains represented the different aspects that should be considered to evaluate the processes of family participation in the toy libraries.
- ✓ To check the representativeness of the standards, making proposals, suggesting changes, or proposing the alternatives they consider appropriate.
- ✓ Define standards and indicators and group them by areas.
- ✓ Ensure the objectivity of the indicators, with the possibility of suggesting changes to them, to ensure that they are objective and really help to measure them.
- ✓ Provide as many suggestions and proposals as they consider necessary to improve the quality and representativeness of the guide.

After sending out five questionnaires, each participant was informed of the result and the methodological steps to be taken in order to apply the guide to a real context.

4. Results

4.1. Description of the Quality Indicators Guide centered on promoting family participation at toy libraries

The Quality Indicators Guide is organized as an instrument of evaluation from an objective perspective (Ogbeifun et al., 2017). It applies the previously mentioned contextual factors to toy libraries, where the families and the children making use of the service are integrated, and which can, both directly and indirectly, have a significant impact on the processes of family

participation within their free-time and leisure.

The characteristic features of this guide for promoting family involvement in play are drawn from the following principles presented below:

- ✓ It is based on the principles of compensatory education and free-time and leisure.
- ✓ It favors training and information on questions related with play and the benefits for the integral development of the child.
- ✓ It strengthens improvements in communicative processes between family members using playful activities.
- ✓ It is a guide that is adaptable to the different socio-community settings.
- ✓ It is based on the joint reflection of experts in education, play, and play libraries.
- ✓ It is a tool created based on the same principles that underlie the mainstream quality assessment models orientated towards free-time and leisure.

The guide is structured into six fields of action, 22 standards, and 55 indicators (figure 2) designed so that it can be used to evaluate and to contribute to activities enhancing play and improvements in the toy libraries.

Figure 2.

Areas, standards and quality indicators of the guide
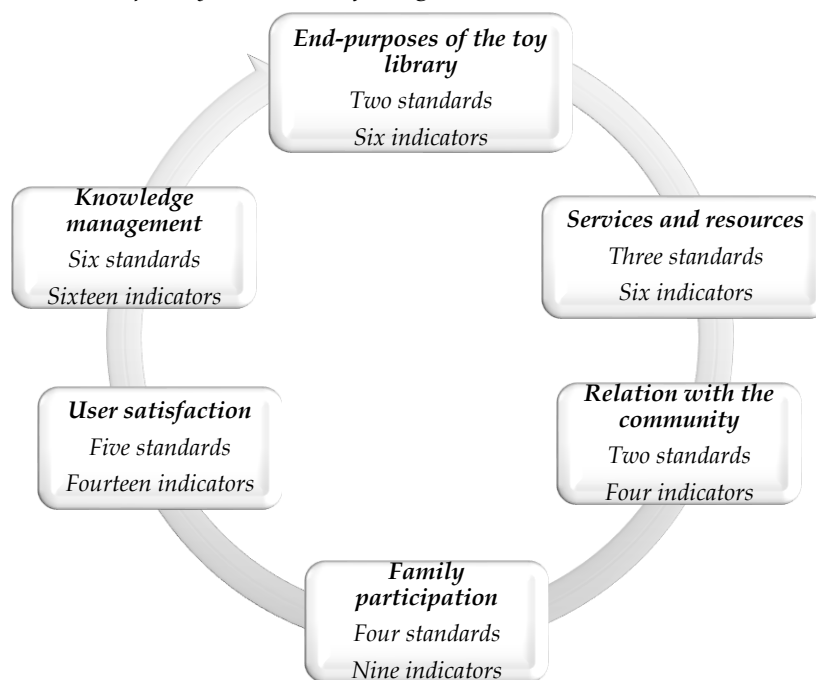
Source: Authors´ own work.

Once the process of construction and validation of the guide for the promotion of family participation in play libraries using the Delphi Technique has been completed, the tool is described, which constitutes an evaluation mechanism oriented towards the improvement of family participation processes. To facilitate the understanding of the guide, a series of clarifications on the definition of the areas and the objective of this work instrument are included.

The areas of the Quality Indicators Guide are:

1. End-purposes of the toy library. In this sector, the aim is to present an assessment of the information (through informative catalogues) that are offered to the (registered and potential) families on the end-purposes, the mission and the socio-educational objectives that a toy-library service of this sort strives to achieve. It is an attempt to inform members of the community of the importance of involving families in the practice of child play.

2. Services and resources. The intention behind selecting a sector of this sort is to offer catalogues in which the families receive periodically revised and up-dated information from the services that, whether temporary or permanent, are offered to the user.

3. Relation with the community. Through the construction of this instrument, an attempt is made to integrate this service into the dynamics of daily life, sharing and collaborating with the different social organizations that seek to reaffirm play and the involvement of everybody in its practice.

4. Family participation. Through this sector, active family participation in the practice of play may be encouraged. Effective and efficient mechanisms must be put together with the purpose of achieving adult involvement in the programmatic and energizing processes that take place within the play library. It explains the structuring of channels and mechanisms, all previously organized, so that the users can make requests or inquiries on questions of interest related with play, toys, its benefits, etc. The inquiries from the users of the service must be analyzed within the organization and studied, in an attempt to establish improvement actions and follow up those of benefit to the leisure and free time of families. In Table 1, the Quality Indicators related to this area are presented, meeting the general objective of this investigation.

5. User Satisfaction. In this sector, the mechanisms to establish the degree of satisfaction of the families and children regarding their participation in the set of free-time and leisure-related activities, programs and initiatives are developed.

6. Knowledge management. The toy library as a center for investigation and the promotion of new knowledge. Toy libraries are an excellent center for constructing environments for the study and the analysis of child behaviour, and play is turned into the ideal instrument, so that children show their natural selves to the world. The organization of external channels (using technology) enables the exchange of information between families and professionals and facilitates networking between all the agents involved in the process. To this end, it is essential that the participating organizations consolidate communication channels aimed at strengthening the processes of family participation.

4.2. Methodology for applying the Quality Indicators Guide

Once the guide had been validated by the group of experts, we proceeded to design the methodology for applying the guide by determining:

- ✓ Evaluation team.
- ✓ Evaluation planning.
- ✓ Working sessions.

4.2.1. Evaluation team

The evaluation team is understood as the set of people who perform the appraisal of the variables determined by the indicators that comprise the guide, which can intervene through the management entity in the processes of stimulating family involvement in the services of this nature.

The evaluation team should be composed of at least the following:

- ✓ Lead evaluator: external to the management entity where the evaluation will be performed, with training and experience in evaluation instruments applied to the quality of social services. This professional is in charge of directing the process of indicator application.
- ✓ Manager of the management entity: whose main function is to serve as a guide and an intermediary between the lead evaluator and the organization or service, facilitating access to (internal and external) information, and to everybody who can provide information that will facilitate a comparison of the indicators.
- ✓ User of the toy library service (father/mother): this user will be chosen at random from among those registered with the toy library. The role of the user is centered on facilitating information on the dynamics at work in the toy-library service that is analyzed and the services that are provided, helping to test each one of the indicators with a view to better improvement.
- ✓ A toy librarian: to be appointed by the managing body, his/her role is to provide and facilitate access to information that favours the evaluation of each indicator.

4.2.2. Evaluation Planning

This phase begins with a preliminary visit to the service, in which the whole evaluation team could become familiar with and to plan the process. Accompanying the rest of the team, to become acquainted with the organization, will help the lead evaluator to gain an overall picture for the development of the work.

It is useful to define the calendar of working sessions and to estimate the time needed for the application of the instrument. This estimated period will serve as a reference to avoid delays that might negatively impact on the context under evaluation.

4.2.3. Working sessions

The meetings of the evaluation team will take place at the center under evaluation. It is important that all participants have a copy of the guide of indicators for this process as well as the information template, whose layout facilitates noting down the information as they are collecting it.

The evaluation of each indicator is done as follows: a blank is left in the cases in which the indicator is starting. A diagonal slash will follow when the indicator is in process, and it will be crossed when the indicator is achieved.
The decisions taken by the evaluation team have to respond to the highest possible degree of consensus. In any case, faced with disagreement in the valuation of some indicator, the agreement of 3 out of the 4 members of the evaluation team must be forthcoming, one of whom must be the lead evaluator.

4.3. Procedure for the application of the guide

4.3.1. Tabulation of data

The information that is collected can yield two sorts of results. On the one hand, the service will have a graph which facilitates knowledge of its strengths and weakness in relation with the family involvement in toy libraries and, on the other, it is given a global score referring to the quality of the toy library (see table 1).

The drafting of the conclusions is completed by the person responsible for the management entity. Subsequently, that person will convoke the evaluation team to share an initial proposal. Then, there will be a brief period for the revision of the document that has been prepared, so that it can be carefully analyzed, pertinent contributions sent in, finally followed by its definitive approval. The wording of the final report will serve as a reference to trace out a future improvement plan that will be designed based on processes that encourage family participation in the service.

Table 1.

Table of results

Interest	End-purposes of play library	Service and resources	Community relations	Family participation	User satisfaction	Knowledge management
Fundamental interest	3 ; 1 ; 4 (green)	12 (yellow)	17		30 (green) ; 28 (yellow) ; 29 ; 31 (green) ; 34 ; 35 (green) ; 37 (green) ; 38 ; 39	50 ; 51 (yellow) ; 40 (yellow) ; 47 (yellow)
High Interest	5	9 ; 11	13 (green) ; 14 (yellow) ; 16 (red)	18 (yellow) ; 21 (red) ; 22 (green) ; 23 ; 25	26 ; 27 (red) ; 36 (red) ; 33	41 ; 48 ; 54 ; 55
Medium interest	2 ; 6 (green)	10 (yellow)	15 (green)		32	42 ; 44 ; 45 (yellow) ; 53 (yellow)
Weak interest		7 ; 8 (red)		19 ; 20 (green) ; 24 (red)		49 ; 52 ; 43 ; 46

Legend of indicators:

1: Catalogue of services.
2: Information family activities.
3: Catalogue of games and toys (permanent).
4: Boosting programs.
5: Lending service.
6: Dissemination and collaboration campaigns. (encourage play activity)
7: Utilization of play library resources.
8: Participation in management (parents).
9: Coordination with SS.
10: Evaluation of participation.
11: Collaborative community programs.
12: Accepting activities, programs and initiatives.
13: Evaluation of the utilization of the resources.
14: Evaluation of training programs & activities (families).
15: Updating and diffusion of the information.
16: Regular personal Evaluations.
17: Coordination with investigation centres...
18: Support to investigation to strengthen the benefits of play.
19: Dynamizing effect of ICT.
20: Networking improvements.
21: Evaluation of information and training of the network.
22: New lines of investigation.

Source: Adaptation from Cuesta (2009).

4.3.2. Graph of the situation of the organization

Description. The graph represents all the indicators that compose the guide, distributed into different areas of action.
The following can be consulted in the graph:

- ✓ The degree of achievement of each indicator.
- ✓ The number of indicators that the toy library has achieved, or that are in process, or remain unachieved.

✓ The distribution of the indicators according to the levels of interest.

The information provided will help to have a rapid and clear vision of the situation in which the toy library is found, facilitating the completion of the final report and the planning of any necessary improvement actions.

4.3.3. Construction

The table is presented to the evaluation team. The level of compliance with each indicator is recorded in the table. The recording template is a double-entry table in which the columns specify the domains with their corresponding standards. The rows reflect the interest or importance of the indicators that articulate the guide and are divided into blocks where the importance of the indicator is established as: fundamental, high, medium and low interest. The members of the evaluation team must fill in the registration template following the established indications.

After the data collection, for a quick interpretation, they will be reflected by means of colours in the organisation's situation graph, in such a way as to facilitate visual consultation of the degree of achievement of the toy library's indicators. To show that an indicator is at the beginning of the process, it will be presented in red. If it is in process, it is yellow, and if it has been achieved, it is green. Having completed this process, the organisation will have a graph of the results of the quality indicators guide.

Finally, once the data collected has been recorded and shown in the results graph, the overall score obtained makes it easier to check the level at which the organisation is (see table 2).

Table 2.

Global score of the organization

SCORE	LEVEL	MEANING
54 to 44 **Indicators achieved**	Excellent	The organization promotes a high level of dynamizing processes oriented towards encouraging the participation of families in the toy libraries and assuming the need to develop a process of continuous improvement.
44 to 33 **Indicators achieved**	Very good	The organization promotes processes of family dynamization in all its sectors, although some organizational questions must be modified. Some observations are proposed whose incorporation will help to raise the level of family participation in the toy libraries.

32 to 21 **Indicators achieved**	Good	The organization promotes participative processes, although some suggestions for improvement must be considered, especially those referring to the indicators of fundamental interest.
20 to 12 **Indicators achieved**	Improvable	A new application of the guide is required with reviews of compliance with the non-achieved Indicators. The organization can improve the participative processes between the users of the toy library and to do so must design an improvement plan and once again apply the guide after the necessary time has elapsed for implementing the improvements that are considered opportune
11 or less **Indicators Achieved**	Very improvable	A new application of the whole guide is required. The organization or the service has not implemented any type of mechanism that strengthens or improves the processes of family participation in the toy libraries. An improvement plan is necessary, its immediate application and subsequent reevaluation.

Source: Adaptation from Cuesta (2009).

The process of applying the Quality Indicators Guide ends with the preparation and presentation of a final report by the evaluation team, the aim of which is to guide the processes of family participation towards improvement with the application of the plan, the configuration of which is the responsibility of the management of the entity managing the service.

5. Discussion

The main limitation found has been the absence of established quality processes, as well as instruments that could facilitate the configuration of initiatives and programs that would value the involvement of families in toy libraries.

This work is based on the idea that the implementation of quality processes should focus on fostering participatory processes, providing social recognition in the management of organisations, as stated by Alberich (2018), ICONG (2015), Santamaría and Mejías (2013), Lindsay and Evans (2008), García et al. (2003), Martín (2001), stimulating the desire for improvement, motivation and participation of the agents involved and making use of self-assessment tools for the diagnosis of management (Álvarez et al., 2019; Martínez-Valdes & Juárez-Hernández , 2019; Sanz, 2018). Therefore, the different models and quality standards that can be applied in toy libraries have been analysed, such as those developed by Fernández and Salgado (2011), which contemplate the need to facilitate the involvement of families in these institutions and thus optimise actions aimed at their correct integration into the environment.

In line with what was stated by Fernández and Salgado (2011), it has been corroborated that there are no continuous mechanisms in the toy libraries aimed at promoting participatory processes, being reduced to activities or initiatives that were developed on an ad hoc basis in some services.

The Quality Indicators Guide, the result of this research, incorporates aspects related to quality in line with what authors such as ICONG (2015), Ayensa (2010), García et al. (2003), propose as variables that must be considered by all social organisations to ensure their survival and continuity of projects, in a context as changing as the current one.

These mechanisms or strategies, which are incorporated in the Quality Indicators Guide, in line with those highlighted by Issó (2012), should be communication and information that encourage the undertaking of internal and external evaluation procedures to gather information and configure instruments, programmes and initiatives in which parents can participate in the development of their children.

The results obtained in this paper facilitate the presentation of future lines of research that could complement this study or at least open new paths.

- ✓ Application of the guide in different toy libraries and complement the work carried out with longitudinal monitoring focused on measuring how the improvement proposals derived from it generate transformations in the toy library.
- ✓ Assess the degree of quality achieved in the implementation in different sociocultural contexts (associations, entities, socio-educational institutions).
- ✓ Analysis of the impact that play and family participation in play centres have on the cognitive and emotional development of the child.
- ✓ Design permanent training programs aimed at playwrights, specifically focused on play and family participation.
- ✓ Studies on play in toy libraries as a strategy to reduce situations of vulnerability.
- ✓ Analyse the impact of the toy library in the community as a socio-community resource.

6. Conclusions

From socio-educational institutions, as is the case of toy libraries, new styles of learning and social and civic progress must emerge, based on play and on development and training activities (Polo-Garzón & López-Valencia, 2020; Parra, 2004) and it is here where the participation of families in the management of toy libraries makes great sense (Loredo, 2019). They must become committed agents and actively collaborate in socio-educational projects, and in the dynamics of their organisational functioning, ceasing to be mere clients or consumers of citizen services.

To understand the importance of family participation in toy libraries, as well as all the moulding activities that take place in them, methodological proposals must be designed to facilitate the configuration of the personality of these institutions that require the active involvement of parents and existing social and educational agents in the community (Caride et al., 2020; Oliveira & Gebara, 2010). It is important to achieve a commitment to support and encourage children in their learning, through the participation of family members as well as toy library professionals. These requirements are necessary to set up services that are based on shared management, favouring attitudes of dialogue and communication that will have an impact on improving the planning and evaluation of these entities.

The potential of this work makes full sense when one considers the possibilities that such an institution offers, not only to children and families, but to the whole community (Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011). It should be thought that play can become an important catalyst for family and community dynamisation processes, making a decisive contribution to child development and citizenship education (García-González & Guerrero, 2019).

The conclusions that close this research is intended to open a door that allows reflection on toy libraries as centres for learning and development. To this end, this work proposes some quality criteria that allow for the improvement of the comprehensive services for personal and social growth that toy libraries should offer.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS, FINANCING AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AUTHORS:

Eva María López Perea
University of Burgos.

She holds a PhD in Educational Sciences from the University of Burgos, where she obtained the distinction of Outstanding Cum Laude in 2018, and a degree in Pedagogy since 2008. Currently, she works as a contract doctoral professor in the Department of Educational Sciences at the same university. Her main lines of research include neurodidactics and quality of socio-community services. She has presented more than 40 communications in national and international

conferences and has published numerous articles and book chapters, highlighting those indexed in WOS and Scopus (JCR), as well as in prestigious publishing houses, focused on community development, sociocultural animation and teaching-learning processes in various educational stages.

emlperea@ubu.es

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1352-0430

María Diez Ojeda
University of Burgos.

She holds a PhD in Experimental Sciences, with a specialization in Environmental Science and Engineering from the University of Burgos. She currently teaches in the area of Didactics of Experimental Sciences in the Faculty of Education at the same university. In addition, she is coordinator of the children and primary area at the Science and Technology Station of Burgos and collaborates with the Scientific Culture and Innovation Unit of the University of Burgos. As principal investigator, she has led numerous national and international competitive projects. Her lines of research focus on the initial training of teachers in science education and the promotion of scientific vocations from the STEAM approach.

mdojeda@ubu.es

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1075-3079

Nuria Alonso Alcalde
Universidad de Burgos

She holds a PhD in Education Sciences from the University of Burgos, where she also obtained a degree in Pedagogy and a diploma in Social Education. In addition, she is a University Specialist in Social Services, with a focus on the elderly, people with severe mental disorders and immigrants. Currently, she is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Burgos and has experience as a Child Care Technician and Educator of people with functional diversity. Her lines of research include volunteering and prosocial behavior, people with disabilities, and children at risk of social exclusion.

nalonso@ubu.es

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/000-0002-9741-3316

Vanesa Baños-Martínez
Universidad de Burgos.

She holds a PhD in Educational Sciences from the University of Burgos, where she also obtained a degree in Pedagogy. Currently, she works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences of the same university. In addition, she coordinates the Senior Training Programs and directs FAPSA (Future Advanced Pedagogy Skills Academy). Her main lines of research focus on active aging, university training for the elderly and preparation for retirement.

vbanos@ubu.es

Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3162-3652