EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

EZGİ ÇİFTÇİ

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER 2022

Approval of the thesis:

EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY

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ABSTRACT

EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY

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September 2022, 136 pages

The purpose of this study is to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play. Also, their perceptions of play in relation to play course enrollment was examined. The study was a mixed method research and designed as an explanatory sequential design. In the quantitative part of the study, the Play Perception Scale was conducted, and the data was collected from 242 early childhood pre-service teachers from different years of study. In addition, the quantitative data was analyzed with the chi-square test of independence. On the other hand, in the qualitative part, the semi-structured interviews conducted with 24 early childhood pre-service teachers which attended in the first part of the study. The qualitative data was analyzed with content analysis method. The results revealed that pre-service teachers were aware of the features, functions, and importance of play. Also, their perceptions about teacher involvement in play and planning playtime indicated a difference in terms of play course enrollment. Play course enrollment influenced pre-service teachers' play perceptions positively. As a result, play perceptions of pre-service teachers were affected by their play course enrollment

either little or more. The results also pointed out the inefficiency of play course in terms of practical implications. For this reason, the study provided implications for higher education.

Keywords: Early childhood education, pre-service teachers, play perceptions, play

ÖZ

OKUL ÖNCESİ EĞİTİMİ ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ OYUN ALGILARI

ÇİFTÇİ, Ezgi
Yüksek Lisans, Temel Eğitim, Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Serap SEVİMLİ ÇELİK

Eylül 2022, 136 sayfa

Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul öncesi eğitimi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını incelemektir. Aynı zamanda, oyun dersine katılımın katılımcıların oyun algılarını ne düzeyde etkilediği araştırılmıştır. Araştırma karma yöntem araştırması olup açıklayıcı sıralı desende tasarlanmıştır. Araştırmanın nicel kısmında, Oyun Algısı Ölçeği uygulanmış ve farklı sınıf düzeylerinde kayıtlı 242 okul öncesi öğretmen adayından veri toplanmıştır. Ayrıca nicel veriler ki-kare bağımsızlık testi ile analiz edilmiştir. Nitel bölümde ise araştırmanın ilk bölümüne katılan 24 okul öncesi öğretmen adayı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Nitel veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, öğretmen adaylarının oyunun özellikleri, işlevleri ve öneminin farkında olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin oyuna dahil olma ve oyun zamanını planlama konusundaki algıları, oyun dersine katılım açısından farklılık göstermiştir. Oyun dersine katılım, öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını olumlu yönde etkilemiştir. Sonuç olarak, öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları, oyun dersine katılım açısından az veya çok etkilenmiştir. Ayrıca, sonuçlar pratik uygulamalar açısından oyun dersinin yetersizliğine işaret

etmiştir. Bu nedenle, çalışmanın yüksek öğretim için alana katkı sağlanması hedeflenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okul öncesi eğitimi, öğretmen adayları, oyun algısı, oyun

To my family

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Serap SEVİMLİ ÇELİK for her guidance, patience and motivational attitudes. I am so grateful to her academic and psychological support. It has been a great pleasure being her student.

Also, I would like to thank my examining committee members Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasibe Özlen DEMİRCAN and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gökhan KAYA for their great contributions. Their suggestions and contributions made my thesis better. I am so grateful for their valuable suggestions and comments.

I also would like to express my gratitude to Assist. Prof. Dr. Ezgi MOR for her academic guidance and support. She improved my thesis' methodology. I appreciate for this.

Moreover, I would like to thank my dear mentor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Berat AHİ, my partner in crime Ress. Assist. Berna YİĞİTKAYA and lovely Miss Kadriye AKDEMİR for their academic and psychological support.

I also express my special thanks to my family for their support. They encouraged me all the time. My lovely mother Mine ÇİFTÇİ and brother Emircan ÇİFTÇİ, I am so glad I have you.

Additionally, I am grateful to my close friends and partner in crimes, Arjin BİNGÖL and Melis DÜLGER, for their psychological guidance. Despite hundreds of kilometers between us, they always helped me whenever I consulted them.

I also want to express my special gratitude for my lovely friends Sercan HAN, Elif-Berkay SARPKAYA, Aslı Nur PENEZ, and Furkan KAYNAK. They believed and supported me. Thanks for their friendship.

Last but not least, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my beloved Görkem Onur ŞANAL. Whenever I had a disappointment, he always encouraged me to achieve this. I am so glad to have him, and thanks for his love, patience and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the purpose of the study, and the research questions were presented respectively. Also, the definitions of terms used in the current study were addressed.

1.1. Background of the Study

Play, which is one of the fundamental rights of children, is a complicated term to define (Johnson et al., 1999). In general, play is defined as any behavior shaped by children's needs, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment requests, and free choices (Johnson et al., 1999). Besides, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2018) also reported that play requires active participation, fun, and willingness. Gray (2017) declared that play consists of contradictions. It is a serious, imaginative, spontaneous, and childish activity, yet at the same time, it is surrounded by rules, and it takes place in adult life too (Gray, 2017). Moreover, play is a cornerstone for child development. Anderson-McNamee and Bailey (2010) clarified that play has many benefits for children. It supports children's whole development in the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional domains. It promotes children's language and communication skills, creativity, and imagination and provides environments where learning occurs (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010; Weisberg et al., 2013). Additionally, play results in entertaining discoveries and gaining 21st-century skills like creativity, problem-solving, and cooperation (Yogman et al., 2018). Nonetheless, Frost (2012) stated that although there are many benefits of play for children's learning and development, play loses its value in educational settings.

According to Frost (2012), children's play culture has been changing because of the changes in society, technology, and educational, political, and environmental issues. Weber (1984, as cited in Sherwood & Reifel, 2010) stated that teacher-directed activities began to take the place of a play-based kindergarten curriculum in the early 1930s. Children's playtime decreased with the gaining importance of academic content in the early childhood curriculum in the 1990s (Miller & Almon, 2009; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Especially after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed in the USA in 2002, education accountability has increased. According to the accountability systems of NCLB (2002), states can set their own educational goals, including long-term and short-term or specified goals, to decrease inequalities between the students from different states and backgrounds. Additionally, children have to achieve high-stakes tests in math, reading, writing, and science by third grade and reach standards specified by the government (NCLB, 2002). These high-stakes tests and industrial school models negatively affected children's play in classrooms (Miller & Almon, 2009; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Patte (2010) asserted that play durations of children were reduced, eliminated, or altered to prepare children for high-stakes tests. Moreover, the lack of teachers' knowledge about when, how, and to what extent play is integrated into the early childhood classrooms is another reason for to decrease in play (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016).

Bennet et al. (1997) asserted that lack of knowledge is not the only problem in decreasing playtime and quality. The lack of space and time, expectations of parents and administrators, and crowded classrooms are other factors that influence the duration and the quality of play. According to the studies (Ashiabi, 2007; Lynch, 2015; McLane, 2003), the majority of teachers believe the importance of play, value, and the advantages of play. However, they cannot support it because of the limited time, limited resources, and academic pressures (Lynch, 2015; Zhulamanova & Raisor, 2020). Similar to the studies (Ashiabi, 2007; Lynch, 2015; McLane, 2003), Sherwood and Reifel (2010) concluded that teachers believe that play is valuable and contributes to children’s development and learning, directly or indirectly. However, Vu et al. (2015) stated that although teachers believe in the value of play for child development and learning, they have challenges in participating in and expanding

play. They also emphasized a massive gap between teachers' beliefs about play and their actual classroom practices.

As discussed at the international level, play is underestimated at the national level as well, even though it is at the center of the early childhood education programs in Türkiye. According to National Early Childhood Education Program (MoNE, 2013), play is a vehicle that helps children to understand the world around themselves and learn through it. Also, play is seen as children's most critical work in the program (Işıkoğlu-Erdoğan, 2015). According to MoNE (2013), play activities were separated into three categories: unstructured play (free play), semi-structured play, and structured play. These three play types need to be integrated into the children's daily program in balanced (MoNE, 2013). The study conducted by Varol (2013) in the same period when the curriculum was published with the situation of play in our country reveals important results. She stated that teachers do not allow children to play adequately in the classrooms because of the other activities such as transitions, waiting, lunchtime, art/music, language, and so on. According to the study results, approximately 23% of the time was reserved for free activities involving play, while only 5% of the time was reserved for structured play (Varol, 2013). At the end of a period of approximately seven years after the curriculum was published, according to Aras and Merdin (2020), there is a decline in play duration in early childhood classrooms because the focus on academic skills makes teachers limit play time. Similarly, Tuğrul et al. (2019) reported that according to the teachers, the time devoted to play is not adequate for children. Also, they explained play durations are affected by both the lack of time and the expectations of parents and school administrators.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As stated in the studies above, teachers' lack of knowledge about how to participate, support and expand children's play resulted in decreasing play in early childhood classrooms. As one of the most critical stakeholders in early childhood education, teachers and their play perceptions influence their future practices and, obviously, children’ play experiences (Jung & Jin, 2015).

Teachers, as the critical component of the educational system, have vital roles in education (Koçyiğit & Eğmir, 2019). According to General Competencies for Teaching Profession Guideline (MoNE, 2017a), the quality of education is parallel with the quality of teachers and teacher education programs. Students' development, academic achievement, and their personal development depend on qualified teachers (MoNE, 2017a). For this reason, teacher education programs, which shape the teachers' identities, are also crucial for high standards in education (MoNE, 2017a). According to Jung and Jin (2015), pre-service teachers are the future professionals in early childhood classrooms. Therefore, to make a change in future classroom practices, the understanding of early childhood pre-service teachers' current perceptions about play is crucial. In order to understand their current perceptions of play, it is necessary to investigate the foundations of their play perception. According to Jung and Jin (2015), pre-service teachers' play perceptions are affected by their education which they received in college, play-related courses, and childhood memories of play. Studies indicate that teacher education programs, including play-related courses, shape teachers' play perceptions (Jung & Jin, 2015; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). When pre-service teachers have taken play-related courses during their education, they tend to develop positive perceptions about play (Jung & Jin, 2015). Moreover, a positive perception of play results in increased intention to incorporate play into their future classrooms (Ashiabi, 2007; Jung & Jin, 2014; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). However, if pre-service teachers' perceptions of play are not investigated, the connection between play-related courses and greater intention to incorporate play in practice may be misleading (Jung & Jin, 2015).

Additionally, studies have investigated that childhood play experiences make contributions to pre-service teachers' perceptions of play. Klugman (1996) studied with early childhood freshmen (n=169) to investigate their understanding of play. Participants shared early childhood experiences related to playing with toys, playing outside, participating in symbolic play, and so on. Study results showed that childhood memories of play were associated with participants in the first year of college. Also, Klugman (1996) stated that although these childhood memories were the foundations of pre-service teachers' current perceptions of play, these could not provide an understanding of the whole picture on play.

In summary, although the importance of play for child development and learning is well known, academic contents replace the place of play in the curriculum. As future professionals, pre-service teachers play critical roles to increase the value of play in their future classrooms. However, their lack of knowledge about integrating, participating in, and expanding play may lead to a decrease in play in classrooms. As stated above, teacher preparation programs and childhood memories of play contribute to pre-service teachers' play perceptions. However, studies cannot explain play perceptions with only the education that they receive or childhood experiences. For this reason, the investigation of their current perception of play provides a better understanding of nature, source, purposes, functions, and the current state of play.

1.3. Significance of the Study

According to various studies (Jung & Jing, 2014; Jung et al., 2016; Klugman, 1996), understanding how pre-service teachers perceive play is significant because their play perceptions, as future professionals, play a critical role in building a bridge between play and curriculum in early childhood classrooms. Moreover, pre-service teachers' attitudes toward play are valuable in order to bring its place back in the early childhood settings (Doğan-Altun, 2018). According to the studies (Jung & Jin, 2014; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010), the perceptions, beliefs, and ideas about play are shaped by several factors such as education received, previous play experiences, and memories. At this point, teacher education programs should provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to shape their perceptions of play and expand their knowledge about play. When they start their profession as a teacher, they tend to practice these ideas in their classrooms (Doğan-Altun, 2018). For this reason, play- related course content of teacher preparation programs needs to be improved and enriched regarding play and play-based learning to contribute to pre-service teachers' perception of play (McArdle et al., 2019).

In the current study, the researcher investigated the participants' play-related backgrounds through the demographic form. The relationship between participants' play course background and play perceptions was analyzed. In the light of these results, teacher educators might have an awareness of the importance of play courses

offered during teacher education. In brief, examining early childhood pre-service teachers' current perceptions about play provides a framework for the quality and efficiency of current teacher preparation programs, the nature and source of play perceptions, and the ideas related to function, purpose, and origins of play perception. The study results also provide a deeper understanding of current play perceptions of pre-service teachers which is related to their future practices. It might be a cornerstone to prevent decreasing play in early childhood classrooms.

Moreover, as discussed above, studies showed that teachers' perceptions of play might be influenced by different factors, such as early experiences of play and play-related courses in college. These factors also affect teachers' future practices in classrooms (Jung & Jin, 2014; Klugman, 1996). In this current study, the origins and sources of pre-service teachers' play perceptions were explained. The understanding of play memories and play experiences of participants might help to make inferences about their future practices. Also, as future professionals in early childhood classrooms, their role is critical to maintaining positive attitudes toward play. For this reason, knowing participants' professional backgrounds is necessary and helps take play's place back.

Play has been the focus of researchers for many years. There are many studies that investigate play, its functions, and its benefits. However, teachers' perceptions of play are studied less (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Because teachers' beliefs, including values, perceptions, and attitudes, shape their classroom practices, it is critical to conduct a study on teachers' perceptions because their perceptions affect children (McMullen et al., 2006). To the author's knowledge, there are limited studies on pre-service teachers' play perceptions regarding its purpose, source, and function, particularly in the Turkish higher education. Accordingly, this thesis contributes to the literature in terms of the play perceptions of early childhood pre-service teachers and brings new perspectives regarding their play perceptions both at the national and international levels.

1.4. The Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions. In addition, the current study aimed to examine the function, the originality and purpose, and the nature/source of the play. Moreover, play course enrollment which may influence pre-service teachers' play perception were addressed in this study.

1.5. Research Questions

This study focused on the following research questions.

1. What are the early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play?

2. What are the play perceptions of early childhood pre-service teachers in relation to their play course enrollment?

3. Do early childhood pre-service teacher's play perceptions differ in relation to their play course enrollment?

    3.1. Do early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions regarding the function of play differ in relation to their play course enrollment?

    3.2. Do early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions regarding the originality of play differ in relation to their play course enrollment?

    3.3. Do early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions regarding the nature of play differ in relation to their play course enrollment?

1.6. Definition of terms

Play: Any behavior shaped by children's needs, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment requests, and free choices (Johnson et al., 1999).

Perception: Defined as "a sensation along with an image," and it is a broad term that includes the meaning of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and values (Zhulamanova & Raisor, 2020). In this study, play perception term involves beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and values regarding play.

Play Perception: Involves beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and values regarding play.

The Function of Play: Involves roles of play, interest, curiosity, and discovery regarding play.

The Originality of Play: Involves past play experiences and play memories.

The Nature of Play: Involves the sources of play.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the theoretical background of the study was presented. It included play and child development, theoretical views on play, self-efficacy theory, the current state of play, teachers' play perceptions, teachers' involvement and their roles in play, and strategies for enriching children's play.

2.1. Play and Child Development

Play can be defined as the behavior that is shaped by children's needs and requests (Johnson et al., 1999). Also, it is a spontaneous and enjoyable activity directed by children (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010). According to Johnson et al. (1999), play has various characteristics to help understand its meaning clearly. For instance, play includes imagination, intrinsic motivation, and flexibility. Also, it provides positive feelings such as pleasure and enjoyment, and it is a process-oriented. In short, any activity having these outstanding characteristics can be identified as play (Johnson et al., 1999).

Play has a significant role in supporting child development, including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Johnson et al., 2005). Play provides relaxation and enjoyment by helping to release excess energy, and it contributes to lifelong learning by practicing many real life skills (Aksoy & Çiftçi, 2019). Moreover, play promotes children's creativity, cognitive thinking, problem-solving and social skills (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010). The benefits of play on child development areas are discussed as follows.

Physical development is the most commonly observable domain during play. According to Centre Research in Early Childhood (CREC) (2013), physical development involves the development of muscles, gross and fine motor skills, and well-being. The benefits of play on physical development differ in terms of type and variety of play. For instance, according to various studies (Koçyiğit et al., 2007; Little & Wyver, 2008; Özer et al., 2006), play requires gross motor movements such as climbing, running, and jumping which increases body functions and promotes growth. Besides, play that involves water-sand activities, cutting, drawing, or painting promotes fine-motor skills. Also, psychomotor skills, including eye-hand coordination, balance, action-reaction pace, attention, and flexibility, are supported through play (Koçyiğit et al., 2007). Moreover, childhood obesity has become a significant problem in these days. Babaoğlu and Hatun (2002) asserted that the prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents has been increasing in developed countries every year. Play provides opportunities for increasing physical activity, developing motor skills, and preventing obesity resulting from a sedentary lifestyle (American Academics of Pediatrics, 2006).

Play is also beneficial for the cognitive development of children. Anderson-McNamee and Bailey (2010) stated that 75 percent of the brain occurs after birth, and play stimulates the connection between neurons and helps brain development. The development of neurons and synapses is significant for long-term memory and learning (Yogman et al., 2018). For this reason, play is necessary for healthy brain development, memory, and learning (Anderson- McNamee & Bailey, 2010). Additionally, play helps children acquire executive functioning and 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Yogman et al., 2018). Pepler and Ross (1981) examined the effects of play on divergent and convergent thinking. Children who were playing with divergent materials offered more creative solutions. Play is also associated with better language skills. Children tend to use more complex language while playing (Ahioğlu, 1999; Yogman et al., 2018; Weisberg et al., 2013).

Play also improves children's social and emotional development. Anderson-McNamee and Bailey (2010) stated children learn being a part of a group while

playing with other children. Also, children acquire various skills involving problem-solving, sharing, group-working, cooperation, and negotiation during play (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010; Yogman et al., 2018). Especially in school playtime, children have opportunities to learn and practice social skills, develop a sense of self and communication skills, and make friends (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010). Moreover, children develop a sense of resilience through play that facilitates coping with future challenges. Play does not only help children to understand others' feelings and own feelings, but it also supports empathy, self-confidence, and self-regulation skills (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010; Ginsburg, 2007; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Reed et al., 2012; Tuğrul et al., 2018). Also, studies showed that play decreases toxic stress and anxiety levels of children (Barnet, 1984; Yogman et al., 2018).

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Play

Play has constantly been studied, and many theorists contribute to the studies that establish a basis for play theories. According to Johnson et al. (1999), play theories were divided into two groups: classical and modern theories of play. Classical theories involve the Surplus Energy, Recreation, Recapitulation, and Practice Theory and focus on play's causes and purposes. For instance, the surplus energy theory asserts that children play to get rid of their surplus energy, while recapitulation theory says that children reduce ancient instinctive behaviors via play. On the other hand, modern theories, including the Psychoanalytic, Cognitive, and Arousal theories, focus on the role of play in child development and more comprehensive sides of play (Johnson et al., 1999).

Piaget's and Vygotsky's approaches are emphasized in the studies primarily to provide a framework about cognitive and sociocultural perspectives of research on play. Also, Piaget and Vygotsky are the foremost theorists who asserted the linkage between play and cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). For this reason, in the current study, Piaget's and Vygotsky's views on play were given briefly to provide a theoretical foundation of pre-service teachers' play perceptions.

2.2.1. Piagetian Views on Play

Jean Piaget, the pioneer of the cognitive development theory, believes that play is associated with children's cognitive development (Nicolopoulou, 1993). According to Piaget (1962), the development of intelligence depends on the interaction of assimilation and accommodation. Children construct their knowledge through the process of assimilation and accommodation. Çelik and Şahin (2013) stated that play is a follow-up activity of assimilation and accommodation, and it also contributes to learning.

Piaget's cognitive development theory has four stages (Piaget, 1962). These are sensorimotor (0-18/24 months), preoperational (2-7 ages), concrete operational (7-11 ages), and formal operational stage (adolescent to adulthood). All children follow the same stages in the same order, but their pace differs in terms of maturation and interaction with the environment (Piaget, 1962). According to Piaget, play helps children to practice and strengthen skills and concepts learned before (Johnson et al., 1999). Also, play is both the reason and the consequence of development. Because play does not involve failure, it improves children's self-confidence (Piaget, 1962).

Play development has been divided into three stages, and children follow these play stages concurrently with cognitive development stages. The first stage is practice play. Practice play involves repeated movements and simple activities under two years old. Their play is less advanced because of their immature cognitive and social skills (Johnson et al., 1999). The second stage is symbolic play that occurs between 2 and 7 years old. Practice play begins to involve symbolism and turns into symbolic play. Lastly, around seven years old, children begin to involve in collective activities, and they may need to set up rules for play. Hence, games with rules stage is achieved (Nicolopoulou, 1993).

According to Piaget (1952), play and non-lucid activities may be confusing. For this reason, there are six criteria to distinguish play from non-lucid activities. These are spontaneity, lacking in precision, pleasure, lack of organization, freedom from conflicts, and motivation.

In summary, the Piagetian play perspective is associated with cognitive development. Play and development are reciprocal. In other words, play contributes to development, and development enhances children's play.

2.2.2. Vygotskian Views on Play

Lev Vygotsky, the pioneer of the sociocultural cognitive theory, stated that social environment and culture have an impact on cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Children's cognitive development is associated with their play. Vygotskian theory involves two critical concepts: The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. Vygotsky (1935) defined the ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". To be more precise, ZPD is the distance between the current level and potential level of cognitive development. Also, the process of getting temporary assistance from an adult or competent peer can be defined as scaffolding (Crain, 2014). According to Jones and Reynolds (2011), when teachers participate in children's play as co-player, they can scaffold children's development during the play. As a result, children get more benefits from play.

According to Vygotsky (1933), children's play is spontaneous and imaginative, but it is not free. There are some rules to be followed in children's minds. These rules do not bother children; on the contrary, they take pleasure by ordering them. Also, Vygotsky (1967) asserted that defining play as something that only gives pleasure is incorrect because many things can give pleasure. Crain (2014) stated that play needs to fulfill children's wishes. Children also become free from concrete situations while playing. Especially during the make-believe play, children create an imaginative world where the objects gain new meanings. Play can be distinguished from other activities with some criteria: imaginary situations, and rules. According to Vygotsky (1967), imaginary situations and rules are necessary for calling an activity as play.

In summary, Vygotsky's views on play depend on creating imaginary situations, setting and following rules. Play supports children's development, including cognitive, social, and emotional areas.

2.3. Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy is one of the essential teacher characteristics that directly influence their beliefs, motivation, and performance in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). For this reason, the self-efficacy term, which constitutes the theoretical background of the current study, was explained to provide a general framework about pre-service teachers' perceptions and beliefs on play.

The self-efficacy concept was introduced by Bandura (1977) as people's beliefs in their own capacity or abilities to attain a specific behavior. These self-efficacy beliefs form the basis of motivation, achievements, and emotional well-being, and they are more powerful than their actual skills (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, 2010). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy beliefs come from four main sources. The first and probably the most effective source is the mastery experiences. Successes foster powerful self-efficacy beliefs, while frequent failures at the beginning phase in developing new competencies affect self-efficacy beliefs negatively. Also, research indicated repeated failures decrease motivation and resilient self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). The second source is vicarious experiences that serve models with similar abilities. When people see models with similar skills, abilities, and competencies, their motivation and self-efficacy beliefs rise. The third source that affects self-efficacy is verbal persuasion and verbal interaction. The last source is people's psychological and emotional states, including positive and negative feelings and mood changes (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011).

Studies show that there is a strong relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and students' achievements, classroom practices, planning and organizing skills, trying new methods to meet children's needs, enthusiasm, and commitment of teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Pendergast et al. (2011) claimed that

teachers' self-efficacy beliefs affect their effectiveness in the classrooms. Teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs tend to support children to reach their potential and show strong resilience. On the contrary, teachers with low self-efficacy beliefs are less likely to help children fulfill their developmental needs (Pendergast et al., 2011).

Furthermore, children's play is affected by the teachers' self-efficacy. Shim and Lim (2017) conducted a study investigating the relationship between Korean ECE teachers' work environment, their self-efficacy, interaction with children, and children's peer play. Also, the effects of self-efficacy on peer play interaction of children were examined. The study results indicated that the self-efficacy of teachers directly affected their interaction with children. The teachers with high self-efficacy showed a better-qualified interaction with children. Additionally, according to Shim and Lim (2017), children who have teachers with high self-efficacy show higher social and cognitive skills during play. Also, they participate in play actively and show very little aggressive behaviors rather than children who have teachers with low self-efficacy.

Jung et al. (2017) studied with pre-service teachers (n=337) in a college to investigate the relationship between their play perceptions and intentions to use play in their future classrooms with a survey. Because the self-efficacy of teachers has a connection with their classroom practices, the participants' self-efficacy beliefs were also investigated as the moderating role between play perceptions and intended practices in the study. Preliminary study results concluded that when self-efficacy beliefs were seen as a moderator, the participants' play perceptions and their intention to use play had a significant relationship and were affected by their self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, there was a statistically meaningful difference between participants with high and low level of self-efficacy in terms of their intentions to use play. Additionally, study results proposed that self-efficacy beliefs could be strengthened within the education program in those pre-service teachers were enrolled (Jung et al., 2017). Similarly, Clark and Newberry (2019) also suggested that because teacher education programs contribute to building teachers' self-efficacy, teacher education programs need to be reexamined to provide robust

sources for self-efficacy. For this reason, the teacher education program has a critical role in developing a powerful sense of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is a significant indicator of teacher beliefs, attitudes, classroom practices, and perceptions. For this reason, Bandura's self-efficacy theory contributed to the theoretical background of the current study.

2.4. Current State of the Play in Classrooms

The early childhood education period which covers children's life from birth to 8 years old, is the most crucial developmental period for children. They learn numerous things, develop new skills and habits, and form their identity during this period. In order to achieve the healthy development of children, play has a critical role. MoNE (2013) pointed out how the place of play should be in ECE classrooms. In Türkiye, the current early childhood education curriculum has core principles, and preparing play-based activities is one of them. According to MoNE (2013), play is the most suitable way to learn for children, and all activities need to be prepared play based. Moreover, the curriculum has three play activities categorized as structured, semi-structured, and free play. These categories should also be balanced in ECE classrooms so that children can benefit more from play (MoNE, 2013). In addition to MoNE (2013), various studies at the international level (e.g., Hyvonen, 2011; McInnes et al., 2011; Miller & Almon, 2009; Walsh et al., 2010; Weisberg et al., 2013) suggested the importance of play and play-based education in classrooms.

Although play has a significant role in children's development and learning, it is diminishing in early childhood classrooms (Pistorova & Ruslan, 2017; Zhulamanova & Raisor, 2020). As discussed earlier, changes in society, technology, focus on academics, and political and environmental issues lead to changes in children's play and a decline in classrooms (Frost, 2012; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). According to Nicolopoulou (2010), play left its place for more academic, didactic, and content-based activities in early childhood classrooms. Similarly, a report published by Alliance for Childhood indicated that children spend their time being tested and learning literacy and math instead of exploration, playing, exercising, and imaginary

activities (Miller & Almon, 2009). They were exposed to high-stakes tests and prescriptive curricula. The prescriptive curricula and developmentally inappropriate practices increase academic pressures and lead to stress in children's lives (Miller & Almon, 2009). Although freely chosen, child-initiated, and intrinsically motivated play is a magical tool for dealing with stress, which was also an underestimated topic in early childhood classrooms (Nicolopoulou, 2010).

As critical members in early childhood classrooms, teachers contribute to children's play by providing time to play, and participating in their play (Johnson et al., 1999). Aras and Merdin (2020) conducted a phenomenological study investigating Turkish early childhood teachers' perceptions and experiences about play-based practices. The study findings showed that teachers consider play as an essential activity for children's learning and development. Also, it helps to understand children's feelings. In addition, Aras (2016) conducted a phenomenological study to examine ECE teachers' perceptions of free play, and implementations in their classrooms. The study results concluded that the teachers believed the value of free play and shared its positive contributions. However, they generally complete the paperwork required by MoNE and prepare for the next activities instead of involving children's play during free playtime (Aras, 2016).

Various studies reveal that teachers believe in the importance of play and play-based activities (e.g., Aras & Merdin, 2020; Lynch, 2015; Mclane, 2003; Nicolopoulou, 2011). However, although play-based learning is valuable, they pay more attention to academic content (Jung & Jin, 2014). Moreover, Johnson et al. (2005) claimed that play is sometimes seen as a waste of time. Some educational stakeholders consider play as an activity interfering with children's learning. Also, they perceive learning as more tangible than play (Jung & Jin, 2014).

2.5. Teachers' Perceptions of Play

Play perception is a comprehensive concept and involves multiple meanings in it. The pre-service teachers' play perceptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes influence their future play practices in classrooms. Studies showed that there is a correlation

between teachers' play perceptions and their intended practices about play (Jung & Jin, 2015; Jung et al., 2017).

In this respect, Jung et al. (2017) carried out a study to examine the relationship between pre-service teachers' play perceptions and their intentions to use play in their future classrooms. The participants were pre-service teachers (n=337), and the data was collected through the survey. The participants' self-efficacy beliefs were also examined as a moderator between their play perceptions and intended practices. The results revealed that participants' perceptions about the importance of play might be the most critical indicator which predicts their intended play practices in the future. In other words, when the participants are aware of the importance of play, they tend to use play in their future practices (Jung et al., 2017).

As clarified by Jung et al. (2017), positive perceptions about play influence their future practices. However, there is another important issue to investigate: where these perceptions came from. Their perceptions are shaped by childhood experiences, family, education, training, and practice with children (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). According to Wang et al. (2008), teachers' beliefs come from two different sources involving explicit and implicit beliefs. Explicit beliefs depend on education, training, and professional competencies, while implicit beliefs come from childhood experiences and experiences with children (Charlesworth et al., 1993; McMullen, 1997, as cited in Wang et al., 2008). In the current study, these sources constituting perceptions of play were presented as follows.

2.5.1. Play Memories and Past Experiences

Perceptions of play depend not only on beliefs, functionality, benefits of play, and expectations but also on play experiences, backgrounds, and memories (Güneş et al., 2020). The functions and benefits of play and the beliefs about play were presented before. However, there is another important concept that influences play perception: play memories. Studies showed that play memories and their elements have a critical role in developing play perception (Eck, 2017; Henninger, 1994; Sandberg, 2001). Klugman (1996) studied with early childhood freshmen (*n*=169) to investigate their

understanding of play. The participants shared their early childhood experiences and memories related to playing with toys, playing outside, participating in symbolic or constructive play, and views on play functions via an open-ended survey. Study results showed that the participants expressed the multiple meanings of play, and these came from their childhood play memories which the participants presented. Klugman (1996) stated that these childhood memories might be the foundations of pre-service teachers' current perceptions of play.

Additionally, Van Hook (2002) carried out a study with ECE pre-service teachers (n=59) to examine their childhood memories at the beginning of the teacher education program through self-reflection assignments. The participants' memories were divided into three categories as positive teacher experiences, negative teacher experiences, and peer interactions. The study results concluded that they brought their previous perceptions to the classrooms. The various childhood memories of pre-service teachers influenced their beliefs on teaching and promoted their reflective thinking. For instance, at the beginning of their profession, they might tend to imitate their previous teachers or provide children similar opportunities enjoyed in their own childhood (Van Hook, 2002). As a result, childhood memories contribute to teachers' beliefs and practices.

Besides these study results, Clevenger (2016) conducted a mixed method study with early childhood freshmen (n=68) and seniors (n=62) to examine their beliefs about play and the differences between their beliefs regarding class year. The data were collected through the survey developed by the researcher and semi-structured interviews. The study results indicated that the participants frequently discussed and exemplified responses with their past play experiences. For this reason, the study results clarified that pre-service teachers' past play memories might shape their current and future play beliefs (Clevenger, 2016).

Similar to these studies, Sherwood and Reifel (2013) conducted a basic qualitative study with seven pre-service teachers to investigate their beliefs about what constitutes play. The participants were chosen purposefully among those who attended a practicum course that included detailed play-related content. The data was

collected via interviews, direct observations and document (course documents) analysis. The study results revealed that although the participants used some shared features of play while defining it, there were no overlapping combinations to describe play. Similar to the results of Klugman's (1996) study, the participants indicated multiple meanings of play and their responses were unique regarding what constitutes play (Sherwood & Reifel, 2013). It was concluded that the participants used the same term, *play*, but they meant different things. Even though all the participants attended the same practicum, they provided various things because they brought diverse beliefs to the college (Schmidt & Kennedy, 1990).

2.5.2. Educational Experiences: Play Course Attendance

Besides previous past experiences and play memories, teacher education programs are another source of teachers' perceptions. According to Abu-Jaber et al. (2010), early childhood teachers' beliefs about educational practices are formed by their education and training. In addition, education that they received, and training contribute to pre-service teachers' beliefs and their future classroom practices. For this reason, the quality and content of their education are critical. When pre-service teachers receive a quality college education during their bachelor's degrees, they are likely to have more equipped with various skills and knowledge in terms of practicing and integrating play in classrooms (Jung & Jin, 2014).

In this respect, Jung and Jin (2014) studied with pre-service teachers (n=207) and investigated their play perceptions in early childhood classrooms regarding the year of study and play-related course attendance. The participants of the study were freshmen (n=72), sophomores (n=55), juniors (n=46), and seniors (n=34) who were enrolled in family and child studies, and ECE programs. The data was collected through the Future Professionals Survey which was developed by the researchers. The study results indicated that students who take play-related courses have higher scores than those who did not take play-related courses. In other words, pre-service teachers enrolled play-related courses develop positive perceptions of play (Jung & Jin, 2014). Moreover, the researchers suggest that teacher education programs need

to be included at least one play-related course to strengthen play perceptions of future teachers (Jung & Jin, 2014).

According to the Council of Higher Education (CoHE, 2008), to become an early childhood education teacher, it is required to complete 240 ECTS in Türkiye. However, there is only one compulsory play course namely "Play Development and Education in Early Childhood" in the program, and it consists of 3 ECTS, all of which are theoretical. Şahin et al. (2013) conducted a descriptive study with ECE pre-service teachers (n=30) and investigated pre-service teachers' opinions about early childhood teacher education programs to determine the current state of teacher education programs in Türkiye. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The study results indicated that the field-related courses are lack in practice, qualified instructors, and intense in theoretical content. In addition, results showed that Play Development in Early Childhood course is evaluated as insufficient and lack in practice. In alignment with these findings, Bartan (2019) carried out a mixed method study to investigate pre-service and in-service ECE teachers' opinions and suggestions about the undergraduate program of ECE teacher education. The participants were ECE pre-service teachers (n=80) and in-service teachers (n=20), and the data was collected through course evaluation forms and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that undergraduate ECE courses were lack in some respects, such as course content, duration, and quality of instructors. Also, the study suggested that pre-service teachers need to involve in more practical courses. Additionally, the participants asserted that the duration of some undergraduate courses, including play course needs to be increased. In brief, Bartan (2019) reached similar findings to Şahin et al. (2013) and concluded that the duration and content of play courses need to be enriched.

As aforementioned before, the pre-service teachers' perceptions of play are influenced by past experiences, play memories, education and training. Their play perceptions are strongly associated with their intentions to use play in their future classrooms. Therefore, teacher education programs influence their future practices. Furthermore, Sherwood and Reifel (2013) clarified that the content of teacher education programs influences their beliefs on integrating play into classrooms.

2.6. Teachers in Play

Teachers play a critical role in enhancing, encouraging and implementing play in classrooms. As clarified by Doğan-Altun (2018), from the sociocultural perspective, teacher or adult involvement in play can positively affect children's play and their learning. Also, children's play skills may be improved, and their social, cognitive, and linguistic development can be enhanced through teacher involvement (Enz & Christie, 1993). Teacher involvement and their interaction with children are necessary to construct the ZPD and provide temporary assistance. In this respect, Aras (2016) affirmed that if the teachers do not participate in children's play, the creation of ZPD and scaffolding would be challenging. Similarly, Jones and Reynolds (2011) claimed that when teachers participate in children's play, they can scaffold children's development during play, and as a result, children get more benefits from play. In brief, teacher involvement in play is critical for children's play, development, and learning. However, it is more critical how they involve and which roles they take in children's play. Thus, in the following part, teacher roles in play are stated.

2.6.1. Teacher Roles in Play

Teachers have a critical role in promoting children's play and development. According to Johnson et al. (1999), how teachers involve in play is more critical than the duration of involvement. Thus, children's play can be enriched if teachers involve in their play in responsive and supportive ways. Teacher roles were classified by various researchers (e.g., Christie & Enz, 1993; Jones & Renolds, 1992; Roskos & Neuman, 1993) and Johnson et al. (1999) classified the teacher roles in play under two categories: facilitative roles and precarious roles. These roles were determined by their positive or negative effects on children's play. The facilitative roles involve onlooker, stage manager, coplayer and play leader roles and positively impacts on children's play. On the contrary, precarious roles includes uninvolved and director/instructor roles and influence children's play negatively. The facilitative and precarious roles were presented briefly as follows.

The first facilitative role is ***onlooker*** role. In onlooker role, teachers stand near the play area, watch children's play, observe them and provide nonverbal signs. However, teachers do not involve in play actively (Johnson et al., 2005).

The second one is ***stage manager*** role. In stage manager role, teachers do not join children's play. However, teachers help children to prepare play and provide assistance once while children set their play. Moreover, teachers may extend children's play by giving suggestions (Johnson et al., 1999).

Another facilitative role is ***co-player***. In co-player role, teachers participate in children's play actively and become play partners of children equally. Also, teachers have minor roles in dramatic play (Johnson et al., 1999).

The last one is ***play leader***. In play leader role, teachers involve children's play in actively, like having co-player role. However, in order to enrich and extend children's play, teachers make more effort and deliberately behave. When children's play starts to disappear or they have challenges in starting new play, teachers can be play leader (Johnson et al., 1999).

In addition to facilitative teacher roles, there are two precarious roles in play. The negative effects of involvement on play occur when teachers are either too little involved (uninvolved) or too involved (director) (Johnson et al., 1999). The first precarious role is ***uninvolved*** role. In uninvolved role, teachers ignore children while they are playing. Enz and Christie (1993) determined uninvolved teacher roles as planning next activities, socializing with other adults, or completing paperwork.

Another precarious teacher role is ***director/instructor*** role. In director role, teachers use directions and instructions extensively and decide all of the things about play theme, materials, and roles in play (Enz & Christie, 1993). There are various studies that investigate teacher roles in play. While some studies focused on teacher roles in free play or outdoor play, some of them pointed out influencing factors of teacher roles. In the following part, some examples of these studies are presented.

Doğan-Altun (2018) investigated the pre-service teachers' (n=55) play perceptions and their views about teacher roles in play. The data was gathered from the written responses of senior pre-service teachers. Regarding the roles of teachers in play, the findings were coded under three categories: partial participation, non-participation, and full participation. Results indicated that the majority of the participants (n=40) stated that teachers should be partially involved in children's play. For instance, the teacher can involve in play when children need assistance, or problematic situations occur in play (Doğan-Altun, 2018).

In addition to study of Doğan-Altun (2018), Meran (2019) conducted a mixed method study to investigate ECE pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and roles of teachers. The participants (total n=467, n=425 for questionnaires, n=24 for interview) were seniors in ECE. The data was collected through two questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Regarding the roles of teacher, study results showed that the most prominent roles were stated as stage manager, co-player, and onlooker roles in play. The participants less frequently stated the play leader role. Also, some of the participants were confused about the teacher roles in play such as director and guider roles. Meran (2019) suggested that their beliefs about teacher roles in play need clarification, and teacher education programs might contribute to it.

Studies showed that there might be an inconsistency between teachers' views on teacher participation in play and their actual practices. In this respect, Kandemir (2020) investigated how the early childhood teachers' (n=12) roles should be in outdoor play time. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations. In that study, teachers stated that teachers should have generally supportive roles involving co-player (n=6), stage manager (n=5), play leader (n=4), and onlooker (n=3) roles. Also, a precarious role involving the director/ instructor (n=3) role in a play was also asserted (Kandemir, 2020). However, there was inconsistency between their responses and actual practices. The participants mostly showed director roles in play, even if they stated teachers should take on co-player role. Similar to these findings, Vu and colleagues (2015) asserted there is a gap between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. Furthermore, Vu et al. (2015) clarified that although teachers believe in the value of play for child

development and learning, they have challenges in participating in and expanding children's play.

Teachers' roles in play might be influenced by different factors such as professional backgrounds and the physical environment in which play is held. Ivrendi (2017) conducted a survey study to examine ECE teachers' roles in free play. The participants (n=141) had diverse educational backgrounds and years of experience. The data was collected through a questionnaire developed by the author and the findings were analyzed with appropriate statistical tests. The results showed that the participants were generally involved in children's play by taking on onlooker, uninvolved, director, and co-player roles. However, during free play time, they tend to have leader roles. Also, results showed that children's age, teaching experiences in profession, class size and the number of learning centers influenced teachers' involvement in play. For instance, when teachers had fewer than 20 children in their classrooms, they attended children's play as co-players more than teachers with more than 20 children (Ivrendi, 2017). As a result, various factors might affect teacher roles in a play.

Besides Ivrendi (2017), Van Der Aasvoort et al. (2015) carried out an international comparative research project to investigate the perspectives of trainee teachers about play features and their roles in play. The participants (n=127) were from Finland, Germany, Netherlands, and Wales. The data was collected through open-ended questions after watching video clips about play. The study results showed that their responses differ in terms of their countries. Some stated co-player roles, while some pointed out supervisor role. The results also concluded that the teachers' limited interference in play was determined negatively. The Finnish and Welsh participants are evaluated as more comfortable in terms of teacher roles in play comparing to the German and Dutch participants. Consequently, their beliefs about play and teacher roles might differ in terms of teacher education programs in their own culture (Van Der Aasvoort et al., 2015).

2.7. Enriching Children's Play

The quality of play is essential as well as the presence of it. High-quality play enables children to get benefits at the maximum level. For this reason, their play needs to be enriched to offer high-quality play for children. According to Johnson et al. (1999), three basic strategies to enrich play exist. These strategies involve providing sources for play, observation of play and involvement in play supportively and responsively.

The first strategy is to provide sources for play. These are specified as time, space, materials, and experiences that prepare children to play (Johnson et al., 1999). The time of play contributes to the quality of play. Koçyiğit and Fırat (2020) investigated the teachers' activities in playtime in terms of planning, starting, and ending processes. The data was collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. The study results concluded that teachers allocated different amounts of time for children's play starting from 17 minutes to 2 hours. The teachers take short children's play duration because they have limited time to teach something, and playtime is seen as a waste of time. Miller and Almon (2009) stated that play time should be at least 30 minutes so that children create, develop and extend play.

In addition to the time of play, play spaces has a critical role in enriching children's play. For instance, Bento and Dias (2017) stated that outdoor play environments are open and changing constantly. Thus, it provides children to play freely, and create a connection with nature. In contrast, kitchens and family rooms promote children's make-believe play (Johnson et al., 1999). In brief, different play spaces contribute to children's play differently.

Another enriching resource of play is the play materials. Play materials influence the quality of children's play. In the study of Trawick-Smith et al. (2015), it was investigated the influences of nine toys on the quality of 60 children's play through 240 hours of video recordings. The findings were coded with the Play Quality with Toys (PQT) instrument developed by Trawick-Smith et al. (2010). The study results revealed that play materials had an impact on the quality of play by depending on

play materials (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). However, it was also concluded that each toy enhanced play differently because the way of playing changed regarding the children's cultural background, gender, or socio-economic status (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). The accessibility of materials is also important in early childhood education. Nilsen (2021) interviewed with the teachers (n=13) to investigate their views about the accessibility of play materials in ECE classrooms. The majority of the participants concluded that if play materials are available in the classrooms, they enrich children's play and support their development and learning (Nilsen, 2021).

Besides these play-enriching strategies, observation and teacher involvement also contribute to the quality of children's play. When children need assistance to extend or develop play, observation help teachers to know what is going on now and when they involve in play (Johnson et al., 1999). Teacher involvement types and its benefits were previously discussed in a detailed way. It was clear that observation and the teacher involvement in play are other enriching play strategy.

2.8. Summary

In the present study, the study's theoretical framework is based on self-efficacy theory and Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivist approaches about play. Even though play has a significant role in child development, it decreases in classrooms for many reasons. Self-efficacy is a significant concept for teacher education, and it is strongly related to classroom practices. Teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs have a tendency to integrate play into their future classrooms (Jung et al., 2017). Also, childhood memories of play, past experiences, and teacher education programs involving play-related courses contribute to the development of pre-service teachers' play perceptions. However, studies cannot explain play perceptions with only teacher education programs or childhood experiences. For this reason, in this study, pre-service teachers' current play perceptions were investigated to provide a better understanding of nature, source, purposes, functions, and the current state of play. In addition, children's play can be enriched by various factors such as teacher involvement, providing play materials, efficient play time, and play spaces.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological procedure of the study. It covers the study design, the study purpose and research questions, participants, instruments, the data collection procedure, analysis of data, ethical consideration, and trustworthiness and credibility.

3.1. The Research Design

In this study, a mixed-methods study design was used to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), mixed-methods research is a methodology for collecting, analyzing, and merging qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a better understanding of the research problems and questions. The mixed methods are delineated as "multiple ways of seeing" as well (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As clarified by Creswell (2015), mixed methods research enables the researcher to benefit from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative study designs are mainly used to gather data from larger samples with the help of instruments or documents such as questionnaires and close-ended interviews. On the other hand, qualitative studies enable the researcher to understand the different perspectives of participants through open-ended interviews, questions, and observations. Despite the differences in collecting and analyzing data, the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods makes the study powerful (Creswell, 2015).

According to Creswell (2015), mixed methods research varies by design, and there are six sub-dimensions of mixed methods research, including the basic and advanced

designs (Creswell, 2015). The explanatory sequential design, which is one of the basic designs, is matched for the nature of this study. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) clarified that the explanatory sequential design offers opportunities to explain or extend quantitative study results by using the qualitative database. First, quantitative data needs to be collected. Then, qualitative data are gathered to clarify and expand on study results in the explanatory sequential study design. It also helps understand the topic more in detail (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In the current study, the quantitative part of the study is survey research, and the qualitative part of the study is phenomenological study. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), survey research mainly aims to collect information in order to describe the characteristics such as abilities, opinions beliefs and attitudes, of the population. On the other hand, phenomenological study aims to examine various perceptions of a phenomenon and provide insight into perceptions and reactions of the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In light of this information, this study aims to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play through the Play Perception Scale in the first quantitative phase of the study. Afterward, the subsequent semi-structured interview is conducted for the further explanation of the quantitative study results in the second qualitative phase. Figure 1 indicates the data collection procedures.

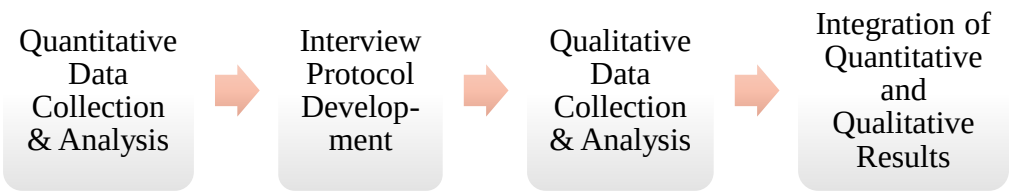

Figure 1 *Data collection procedures*

3.2. Participants

According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), the convenience sampling method requires selecting participants who are available and accessible for the study. Besides, the feasibility of accessing to participants needs to be considered (Punch, 2009). The feasibility of the study is a significant issue in terms of time, money, and effort

(Fraenkel et al., 2012). For this reason, the convenience sampling method was used for the quantitative part of the mixed methods design.

As clarified by Fraenkel et al. (2012), studies, that summarize the characteristics such as preferences, abilities, and perceptions, require a minimum of 100 participants to draw a satisfactory conclusion. In this study, the Play Perception Scale was administered to undergraduate students (N=242) who are studying in the early childhood education program at Kastamonu University, which is located in the black sea region of Türkiye.

The qualitative part of the study consists of semi-structured interview questions to support the quantitative database of the study. As discussed earlier, qualitative data can be used to explain quantitative data in a detailed way (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In the current study, the Play Perception Scale provided a general framework about early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play. Then, the semi-structured interview was conducted to expand the research problem and support the quantitative data. In the following part of the study, the purposive sampling method was used. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012), researchers can use personal decisions to select study participants by regarding the purposes of the study and previous knowledge about the population. In this part of the study, the participants were selected from participants who attended the first part of the study. Besides, the researcher considered participants' scores during the selection procedure. Their total play perceptions scores were calculated and listed in relation to grade levels. They were chosen by regarding three highest and three lowest play perception scores within each grade level. In qualitative studies, the number of participants is usually between 1 and 20 (Fraenkel et al., 2012). For this reason, the semi-structured interview was carried out with participants from each grade level (year) (N=6 for each) with total of 24 students.

3.2.1. Participants Demographics for the Quantitative Part

For the quantitative part, 242 early childhood pre-service teachers participated in the study. While only 39 (16,1%) participants were male, the majority of the participants

(n=203, 83,9%) were female. Table 3.2.1. demonstrates the gender distribution of the participants.

Table 3.2.1.

Gender distribution of participants

Gender	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
Female	203	83,9
Male	39	16,1
Total	242	100

The pre-service teachers' age range was from 18 to 40 and the average age is 21,26. 160 of them (66,1%) were located in the 18-22 age range; 73 of them (30,2%) were between 23-26 years old; 4 of them were between 27-30 age range and 5 of them (2,1%) were 30 years old and more. The summary of the age distribution of the participants was demonstrated in Table 3.2.2.

Table 3.2.2.

Ages of participants

Age	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
18-22	160	66,1
23-26	73	30,2
27-30	4	1,7
30+40	5	2,1
Total	242	100

The pre-service teachers were categorized according to their years of study. 57 (23,6%) pre-service teachers were freshmen; 66 of them (27,3%) were sophomores; 67 (27,7%) pre-service teachers were juniors, and lastly, 52 (21,5%) of them were seniors. Table 3.2.3. summarizes the distribution of grade levels of the participants.

Table 3.2.3.

Participants' years of study

Grade Levels	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
Freshmen	57	23,6
Sophomores	66	27,3
Juniors	67	27,7
Seniors	52	21,5
Total	242	100

The educational background of the participants was given at the Table 3.2.4. Nearly half of the participants (N=127, 52,5%) were graduated from Anatolian high school, 36 of them (14,9%) were from vocational high school, 34 of them (14%) were studied at religious vocational high schools, and the rests of them were graduated from various high schools such as multi-program, social sciences, open education, and teacher training high schools (Anatolian Teacher Training High School which taken with entrance exam), and other high schools. Table 3.2.4. summarizes the educational backgrounds of the participants.

Table 3.2.4.

High school types of participants

High School Types	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
Anatolian High School	127	52,5
Vocational High School	36	14,9
Religious Vocational High School	34	14
Multi-Program High School	8	3,3
Social Sciences	7	2,9
Open-Education	6	2,5
Anatolian Teacher Training	3	1,2
Other	21	8,7
Total	242	100

3.2.2. Participants' Demographics for the Qualitative Part

For the qualitative part of the study, a semi-structured interview protocol was conducted with 24 early childhood pre-service teachers who were participated in the first phase of the study. 19 (79,16%) were female, and only 5 (20,84%) were male. Table 3.2.5. demonstrates the gender distribution of the participants.

Table 3.2.5.

Gender distribution

Gender	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
Female	19	79,16
Male	5	20,84
Total	24	100

The participants' age range was from 19 to 26, and the average age was 21,5. The 14 of them (58,34%) were in the 19-21 age range; 7 of them (29,16%) were between the 22-24 age range, and three pre-service teachers (12,5%) were located in the 25-27 age range. The summary of the age distribution of the participants was displayed in Table 3.2.6.

Table 3.2.6.

Ages of participants

Age	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
19-21	14	58,34
22-24	7	29,16
25-27	3	12,5
Total	24	100

Also, participants were chosen from all grade levels equally, and the six pre-service teachers (25%) were from each year of study. Besides, 13 of the participants (54,16%) were graduated from Anatolian high school, 5 of them (20,84%) were studied at vocational high schools, 3 of them (12,5%) were from religious vocational high schools, 2 of them (8,34%) graduated from multi-program high schools and

lastly, 1 participant (4,16%) was graduated from regular high schools. The educational background of the participants was demonstrated in Table 3.2.7.

Table 3.2.7.

High school types

High School Type	**Frequency *(f)***	**Percentage *(%)***
Anatolian High School	13	54,16
Vocational High School	5	20,84
Religious Vocational High School	3	12,5
Multi-Program High School	2	8,34
Basic High School	1	4,16
Total	24	100

3.3. Instruments

The current study used the Play Perception Scale (PPS) and semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive information about early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play.

3.3.1. The Play Perception Scale

For the quantitative part of the study, the Play Perception Scale (See Appendix B) was administered to learn general perceptions of early childhood pre-service teachers on play. Participants' age, gender, grade level, educational background regarding high school types, play-related courses, and activities that contribute to their professional development were asked in the demographic part of the scale. Additionally, it includes open-ended questions like "Which games/play did you involve in your childhood? Can you give examples?" and "When you think about your daily routine, which play/games do you involve in?". Also, the participants were asked to complete the missing sentence that asked the definition of play: "Play…….".

The Play Perception Scale, developed by Güneş et al. (2020), aims to examine the play perceptions of pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, parents, and pedagogues. The PPS is a five-point Likert type scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) and consists of 20 items with three-factor structures. These three subscales are the function of play, the originality of play, and the nature of play (Güneş et al., 2020). In other words, the PPS provides a framework for play perceptions of participants, including functions, purposes, origins, nature of the play and personal play experiences, and play memories.

As clarified by Güneş et al. (2020), the Cronbach Alpha value is calculated as .728, and item-total correlation coefficient values are between .157 and .656 ($.157 \leq r \leq .656$). These values indicated that the Play Perception Scale is a reliable and valid instrument.

3.3.2. Semi-structured Interviews

For the second part of the study, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol to obtain an in-depth information about early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions. After preparing the interview questions, four early childhood education expert opinions were consulted. In the light of their suggestions, the researcher modified the interview protocol. Afterward, the semi-structured interview was conducted with three pre-service teachers to pilot the questions and practice the interview protocol. According to the pilot study results, the researcher modified the flow of the interview items from general to the specific. Also, one of the main questions that ask their previous play experiences were removed from the main part and asked as warm-up question. Additionally, the question “how do you use play in teaching?” was changed as “how do you use play as a teaching tool when you want to teach a concept?”. After these arrangements through the expert opinions, the interview questions were administered to the selected participants.

The last version of the semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 11 questions involving a few probe questions and four warm-up questions. The two questions of the protocol were asked for participants the courses they took. Other nine questions

were about pre-service teachers' views on the definition, developmental and educational contributions of play, factors that affect it, planning to playtime, and teachers' and play materials' roles in play (see Appendix C).

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

In this study, early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions were examined. Before collecting the data, the researcher received the necessary permissions from the Ethical Committee of Middle East Technical University and the authors of Play Perception Scale. After the permissions, instructors were informed about the study and requested to make time for data collection in their courses. In the fifth and sixth weeks of the 2021-2022 fall semester, the demographic form and Play Perception Scale (PPS) were administered to early childhood pre-service teachers studying at Kastamonu University which is located in the black sea region of Türkiye. After explaining the study's purpose briefly, completing the PPS took a maximum of 10-15 minutes for each participant.

For the second part of the study, the researcher invited the participants to conduct the semi-structured interview protocol in their available time. The times of the interviews were scheduled during the second and third weeks of the 2021-2022 spring semester. Firstly, a pilot study was conducted with three participants from different year of study. Then, the rest of the participants attended the interview protocol at their scheduled time. The interviews were recorded following by participants' permission. The semi-structured interview took approximately 15-20 minutes for each participant. Tape recordings were transcribed right after the interviews.

3.5. Analysis of Data

During the quantitative data analysis, the researcher followed the interrelated steps stated by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2015). Firstly, data was prepared and organized for the analysis. This process includes preparing a codebook, stating score types, scoring data, choosing a program, and inputting and cleaning data (Creswell & Plano

Clark, 2015). An appropriate statistical analysis program was used during analyzing quantitative data. After preparing the codebook, attaining the ID number for each participant, and cleaning missing data, the quantitative data of 242 participants were inputted carefully. Then, descriptive analysis was carried out before starting the inferential analysis. The researcher conducted normality test and mean (M=66,31), 5% trimmed mean (M=66,16), Skewness (,592-,156) and Kurtosis (1,249-,312) values were calculated. Also, Kolmogorov-Smirnov (sig= .000) value indicated that participants' play perception scores do not show a normal distribution. For this reason, one of the non-parametric techniques was used. Since all of the dependent and independent variables contain at least two categoric variables and the assumptions of normality were met (Pallant, 2015), the Chi-square test of Independence was decided to apply. The results of the tests were reported, interpreted, and discussed, and necessary figures were provided in the following chapter.

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2015), six interrelated steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data need to be followed for the analysis. Firstly, the researcher needs to prepare and organize data and decide how to analyze data by hand or by computer. The interview audiotape recordings are converted into text data. Then, the data analysis process begins. The researcher needs to explore a general sense of data through a preliminary exploratory analysis and prepares codes into broad themes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015). In the light of information stated by Creswell and Plano-Clark (2015), first of all, audiotape recordings were transcribed. Afterward, texts were reviewed for the coding process. Creswell (2015) clarified that coding is the labeling process to describe a text segment. Text segments involve sentences or paragraphs that all of them are associated with a single code (Creswell, 2015). During the coding process, the texts are divided into small parts like sentences, paragraphs, or phrases and labeled by the researcher. Besides, the coding labels arise out of the participants' exact words (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

After coding themes into layers, the next step is the representation and reporting of findings. Creswell and Plano Clark (2015) asserted that there are various ways to

indicate data, such as comparison tables, tree diagrams, maps, figures, demographic tables, and so on. In the current study, qualitative findings were displayed in the appropriate tables. Finally, interpretation of the data was provided. In qualitative studies, personal views cannot be separated from interpretations. For this reason, interpretation of data includes making sense of the study findings based on past studies and personal views (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2015). The researcher compared findings with the literature and provided limitations and suggestions.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

Before conducting the study, ethical permissions were obtained from METU Ethical Board. In addition, the researcher asked participants to fill out the informed consent form before collecting data. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable.

3.7. Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness and credibility are critical parts of quantitative and qualitative studies. According to Merriam (2009) and Yin (2009), the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the study influence trustworthiness. For this reason, increasing validity, reliability, and generalizability will increase the trustworthiness of the study. Using various data collection technique increases the validity and reliability of the study (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this study, semi-structured interviews and the Play Perception Scale were used to increase the reliability and validity of the study. Moreover, in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, the semi-structured interview questions were prepared with the help of four experts in the field of early childhood education. Also, the pilot study was conducted with three early childhood pre-service teachers to test the clearness and understandability of the questions. During the interview process, clarifications of the questions were checked after mistaken questions to prevent misunderstandings. Also, the researcher selected the participants that created appropriate rapport with it so that they could feel comfortable during the interview.

The external audit is another way to increase trustworthiness (Creswell, 2015). In this study, the researcher asked an early childhood specialist from outside of the study to check study findings while analyzing the qualitative data. Additionally, the coding process was performed separately with a PhD student in early childhood education. The codes that emerged from the transcripts were noted independently and compared later. Regarding the findings of the qualitative study, inter-rater agreement was calculated as 92% by using the formula (Miles & Huberman, 2015). It increased the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the current study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study are addressed respectively. Firstly, descriptive statistics are provided. Then, quantitative, and qualitative study results are given.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

In this part, descriptive statistics of research were addressed. Firstly, pre-service teachers' background information related to their professional development about play, and their experiences in play-related media content was collected. Then, the participants were asked which games they played during their childhood. Lastly, descriptive statistics of Play Perception Scale items were given.

Regarding the pre-service teachers' professional development experiences, among 242 pre-service teachers, while the majority of them (n=203) indicated that they did not attend any professional development experience, 23 of them indicated that they attended a play seminar, 12 of them participated in a play certificate program, 4 of them attended other activities and only 1 attended a congress. The summary of their responses was shown at the Table 4.1.

Table 4.1.

Professional Development Experiences

Type	**Frequency *(f)***
Seminar	23
Certificate Program	12
Congress	1
Other	4
None	203
Total	243

Note: One participant attended both congress and seminar.

Regarding their experiences in following a play-related media content, small number of participants responded yes to the question by indicating following early childhood specialists on social media (n=32), educational websites (n=6), children's magazines (n=6), educational video platforms (n=5), and educational TV channels (n=1). The majority of them (n=196) stated that they did not follow any play-related media content (see Table 4.2.).

Table 4.2.

Following Play-Related Media Contents

Responses	**Play-related Media Contents**
Yes	ECE specialists on social media (n=32)
	Websites (n=6)
	Children's magazines (n=6)
	Educational video platforms (n=5)
	Educational TV channels (n=1)
No (n=196)	

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

Additionally, the participants were asked about their past and present play memories. Regarding the past play memories, the participants mainly indicated physical play (n=875) such as hide and seek, blind man's bluff, hopscotch, dodgeball, and so on. Moreover, object play (n=113) such as ticktacktoe, marbles, chess, and the puzzle

was frequently stated. In addition to object play, the participants asserted pretend play (n=77) such as playing house. Social play (n=12) such as kutu kutu pense, originally ecoutez ecoutez pensez, was also indicated. Lastly, the participants stated online games (n=7) as well.

Regarding the current play memories, 76 of the participants did not indicate their answers to the question. However, among the responses given, the majority of the participants (n=166) indicated online games (n=74) including console, mobile, tablet, and PC games. Also, table games (n=69) such as backgammon, rummikub, chess, and card games were stated. Besides, the participants asserted board games (n=36) such as tabu and scrabble. Lastly, physical play (n=29) involving volleyball, football, and basketball were also mentioned. The summary of the past and present play memories can be seen in the Table 4.3.

Table 4.3.

Past & Present Play Memories

Past Play Memories	**Frequency *(f)***	**Present Play Memories**	**Frequency *(f)***
Physical play	875	Online games	74
Object play	113	Table games (backgammon, rummikub, chess, cards)	69
Pretend play	77	Board games (Tabu, Scrabble, Jenga)	36
Social play	12	Physical play	29
Online games	7		
Total	242		166

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

In this part, descriptive statistics of the Play Perception Scale in terms of subdimensions were indicated. The first subdimension was the function of play. Regarding the function of play, the participants were asked ten questions. Some of them were "Children should participate in games voluntarily and play the way they want." (Q2), "Play is a primarily effective teaching tool for children." (Q3), "Play is a

primarily fun activity for children." (Q4), "Play is a child's means of discovering herself/himself and the world." (Q6), and "Play where children can explore themselves and the world are the most useful play for them." (Q15) (See Appendix B). The majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the scale items which were related to the function of play. For example, one of the items was measuring participants' answers with the question of "Children should participate in games voluntarily and play the way they want." (Q2) and the majority of the participants (n=122) marked it as strongly agree. Similarly, another item asking about "Play is a child's means of discovering herself/himself and the world." (Q6) was marked it as strongly agree by most of the participants (n=176). Also, the mean scores of participants' answers were calculated as a minimum 4 out of 5, which indicated the consistency in their answers (see Table 4.4.). Table 4.4. summarizes the descriptive statistics regarding the function of play.

Table 4.4.

Function of Play

Function of Play		**Strongly Disagree**		**Disagree**		**Neutral**		**Agree**		**Strongly Agree**	
	M	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**
Q2	4,3	4	1,7	8	3,3	21	8,7	**87**	36	**122**	50,4
Q3	4,66	2	,8	4	1,7	5	2,1	**52**	21,5	**179**	74
Q4	4,51	3	1,2	3	1,2	10	4,1	**78**	32,2	**148**	61,2
Q5	4,33	2	,8	7	2,9	16	6,6	**102**	42,1	**115**	47,5
Q6	4,67	2	,8	2	,8	4	1,7	**58**	24	**176**	72,7
Q9	4,31	0	0	7	2,9	21	8,7	**104**	43	**110**	45,5
Q12	4,45	0	0	6	2,5	7	2,9	**102**	42,1	**127**	52,5
Q15	4,5	1	,4	5	2,1	10	4,1	**83**	34,3	**143**	59,1
Q18	4,41	0	0	3	1,2	10	4,1	**114**	47,1	**115**	47,5
Q19	4,11	1	,4	9	3,7	29	12	**126**	52,1	**77**	31,8

Another subdimension of the PPS was the originality of play. Regarding the originality of play, participants were asked six questions, and some of them were "Children must abide by the rules of the game while playing." (Q1), "In children's

learning processes, playing has a more important role than structured activities." (Q13) and "The child needs special toys and technological materials in order to gain benefits from play at the highest level." (Q17). As seen in Table 4.5., there were fluctuations in participants' answers on scale items regarding the originality of play. For instance, for the first scale item (Q1), which measured the participants' answers regarding the originality of play, the participants (n=97) marked it as agree while some of them (n=62) marked it as disagree. Also, some participants (n=43) stated neutral to the statement. A small number of participants (n=25) marked it as strongly agree, and only a few numbers of them (n=15) marked it as strongly disagree. Similarly, for the 13th scale item (Q13), the participants (n=100) marked it as agree and (n=67) strongly agree. Moreover, some of the participants (n=57) marked it as neutral, and a small number of the participants (n=17) marked it as disagree. Only one participant (n=1) marked it as strongly disagree (see Table 4.5.). Table 4.5. summarizes the descriptive statistics of the originality of play.

Table 4.5.

Originality of Play

Origi-nality of Play		**Strongly Disagree**		**Disagree**		**Neutral**		**Agree**		**Strongly Agree**	
	M	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**
Q1	3,23	15	6,2	62	25,6	43	17,8	97	40,1	25	10,3
Q10	3,87	4	1,7	21	8,7	47	19,4	100	41,3	70	28,9
Q13	3,89	1	,4	17	7,0	57	23,6	100	41,3	67	27,7
Q14	3,57	9	3,7	39	16,1	50	20,7	94	38,8	50	20,7
Q16	2,61	40	16,5	87	36	55	22,7	47	19,4	13	5,4
Q17	2,12	93	38,4	76	31,4	34	14	30	12,4	9	3,7

The last subdimension of the PPS was the nature of play. Regarding the nature of play, participants were asked four questions and they were "In order to understand the pedagogical value of play, the information resources about it are sufficient in terms of quality and quantity." (Q7), "Instead of discovering a new play, children prefer play they have always had fun." (Q8), "In order for children to have fun in

play, they do not need to be spontaneously involved in it." (Q11) and "The action in which the child does not participate spontaneously or voluntarily is not a game." (Q20). As seen in Table 4.6, which demonstrated the descriptive statistics of participants regarding the nature of play, there were fluctuations in participant answers on scale items (see Table 4.6.). To exemplify, for the 7th scale item (Q7), the majority of the participants (n=104) marked it as neutral. Also, some of them (n=59) marked it as agree, while some of them (n=46) marked it disagree. A small number of the participants (n=22) marked it as strongly agree and only a few numbers of them (n=11) marked it as strongly disagree. Similarly, for the 8th scale item (Q8), some of the participants (n=82) marked it as disagree while some of them (n=60) marked it as agree. In addition, some of them (n=53) marked it as neutral while some (n=29) marked as strongly disagree. Also, a few numbers of the participants (n=18) marked it as strongly agree (see Table 4.6.). Table 4.6. summarizes the descriptive statistics regarding the nature of play.

Table 4.6.

Nature of Play

Nature		**Strongly Disagree**		**Disagree**		**Neutral**		**Agree**		**Strongly Agree**	
of Play	***M***	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**	***f***	**%**
Q7	3,14	11	4,5	46	19	104	43	59	24,4	22	9,1
Q8	2,82	29	12	82	33,9	53	21,9	60	24,8	18	7,4
Q11	2,71	39	16,1	65	26,9	78	32,2	48	19,8	12	5
Q20	3,1	21	8,7	55	22,7	76	31,4	59	24,4	31	12,8

4.2. Results of the Quantitative Study

In this part, the Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to investigate whether there was any significant difference between the play perception scores of the participants who took play courses and who did not. The results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence were presented in the following sections.

4.2.1. Play Perceptions and Play Course Enrollment

Of the 242 participants, while 122 of them took a play course, 120 of them did not take a play course (see Table 4.7.). Play course, one of the compulsory courses of the ECE curriculum, is taught in the spring semester of second year of study. For this reason, while juniors and seniors took a play course before, freshmen and sophomores did not take it. In addition, the play course included the definition, importance and characteristics of play, play theories, factors that affect play, and designing and implementing play activities.

Table 4.7.

Play Course Enrollment

Play course	**Frequency *(f)***
Yes	122
No	120
Total	242

Regarding the impact of taking a play course on the play perceptions of the participants, the Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted. Accordingly, six scale items showed a statistically significant relationship between play course enrollment and participants' answers. These six scale items were related to the functions of play, teacher involvement, benefits of play, and play materials.

The first item "*play is a child's means of discovering herself/himself and the world"* (Q6) showed a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. That is, while 42,1% of the participants who took a play course strongly agreed with the statement, this response rate dropped to 30,6% for those who did not take a play course. Additionally, only 7% of them who took a play course chose 'agree' for this statement, and 16,6% of them who did not take a play course rated it as agreed. To sum up, a chi-square test for independence indicated there was a statistically significant relationship between Q6 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 15,37, p= .004. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .25) (see Table 4.8.).

The second item *"teacher involvement in play is important for children getting high benefit from play"* (Q10) also showed a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. While 16,9% of the participants who took a play course strongly agreed with the statement, this response rate dropped to 12% for those who did not take a play course. Moreover, 16,1% of them who took a play course agreed to the statement, and 25,2% of them who did not take a play course agreed. In addition, 10,7% of them who took a play course and 8,7% of them who did not take a play course were neutral to the statement. Moreover, 5,4% of them who took a play course and 3,3% of them who did not take it disagreed with the statement. Lastly, 1,2% of pre-service teachers who took a play course chose the 'strongly disagree' option, while 0,3 of them who did not choose it. Consequently, a chi-square test for independence indicated there was a statistically significant relationship between the Q10 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 9,60, p= .048. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .19) (see table 4.8.).

The third item *"teachers need to be involved in play as well for play to be fun and exciting "*(Q14) showed a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. To be more precise, while 8,7% of the participants who took a play course strongly agreed to the statement, this rate increased to 12% for those who did not take a play course. Similarly, 16,1% of them who took a play course agreed to this statement, and this rate rose to 22,7% for those who did not take a play course. On the other hand, 12,4% of pre-service teachers who took a play course and 8,3% of them who did not take it were neutral to the statement. Also, 9,9% of pre-service teachers who took a play course disagreed with the statement, while 6,2% of them who did not take a play course disagreed with it. Lastly, only 3,3% of them who took a play course and only 0,4% of those who did not take a play course strongly disagreed with the statement. As a consequence, a chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the Q14 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 13,50, p= .009. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .23) (see Table 4.8.).

Another item *" the fact that the expected positive gains of play are not observed on children during play shows that play is not beneficial for the children"* (Q16) showed

a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. Whereas 1,7% of the participants who took a play course strongly agreed with the statement, only 3,7% of them who did not take a play course strongly agreed with it. In addition, 6,2% of them who took a play course agreed to the statement, and this rate rose to 13,2% for those who did not take a play course. Also, 7,9% of them who took a play course and 14,9% of them who did not take were neutral for this statement. On the other hand, 23,6% of them who took a play course and 12,4% of those who did not take a play course disagreed with the statement. Lastly, 11,2% of those who took a play course strongly agreed with the statement, this rate dropped to 5,4% for those who did not. Consequently, a chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the Q16 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 26,91, p= .000. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .33) (see Table 4.8.).

The next item *"the child needs special toys and technological materials to benefit from play at the highest level"* (Q17) showed a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. In other words, while 24% of the participants who took a play course strongly disagreed with the statement, this rate dropped to 14,5% of those who did not take a play course. On the contrary, 12,8% of those who took a play course disagreed to the statement, whereas this rate increased to 18,6% for those who did not take a play course. Also, 7% of them those who took a play course and 7% of those who did not take a play course were neutral for this statement. Besides, 5% of them who took a play course and 7,4% of them who did not take a play course agreed with the statement. Finally, 1,7% of who took a play course and 2,1% those who did not take a play course, strongly agreed with the statement. As a result, a chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the Q17 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 9,56, p= .048. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .19) (see Table 4.8.).

The last item *" play is a natural process in which children reflect their personal interests, needs and curiosities and develop it by using their own experiences"* (Q18) showed a statistically significant relationship in terms of taking a play course. To be

more precise, while 30,2% of the participants who took a play course strongly agreed with the statement, this rate dropped to 17,4% of those who did not take a play course. On the other hand, 17,8% of them who took a play course agreed with the statement, this rate surprisingly increased to 29,3% for those who did not take a play course. As a consequence, a chi-square test for independence indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between the Q18 and taking a play course, X^2 (4, n=242) = 15,95, p= .001. The effect size was calculated as medium effect (*Cramer's V*= .25) (see Table 4.8.).

Table 4.8.

Chi-Square Test of Independence Results Regarding Play Course Enrollment

Questions	Play Course	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		X^2	*p*
		N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*df*	4
Q1R	Yes	10	4,1	28	11,6	23	9,5	45	18,6	16	6,6	4,906	.297
	No	5	2,1	34	14	20	8,3	52	21,5	9	3,7		
Q2	Yes	1	0,4	4	1,7	11	4,5	44	18,2	62	25,6	1,075	.898
	No	3	1,2	4	1,7	10	4,1	43	17,8	60	24,8		
Q3R	Yes	2	0,8	3	1,2	3	1,2	23	9,5	91	37,6	3,926	.416
	No	0	0	1	0,4	2	0,8	29	12	88	36,7		
Q4	Yes	2	0,8	2	0,8	3	1,2	33	13,6	82	33,9	5,826	.212
	No	1	0,4	1	0,4	7	2,9	45	18,6	66	27,3		
Q5R	Yes	2	0,8	6	2,5	8	3,3	52	21,5	54	22,3	6,021	.198
	No	0	0	1	0,4	8	3,3	50	20,7	61	25,2		
Q6	Yes	1	0,4	1	0,4	1	0,4	17	7	102	42,1	**15,370**	**.004**
	No	1	0,4	1	0,4	3	1,2	41	16,9	74	30,6		
Q7R	Yes	7	2,9	27	11,2	52	21,5	25	10,3	11	4,5	3,566	.468
	No	4	1,7	19	7,9	52	21,5	34	14	11	4,5		

Note: "R" indicates the reverse items of the scale.

Table 4.8. (continued)

Questions	Play Course	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		X^2	*p*
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*df*	4
Q8R	Yes	21	8,7	42	17,4	21	8,7	30	12,4	8	3,3	8,366	.079
	No	8	3,3	40	16,5	32	13,2	30	12,4	10	4,1		
Q9	Yes	0	0	3	1,2	9	3,7	45	18,6	65	26,9	6,076	,108
	No	0	0	4	1,7	12	5	59	24,4	45	18,6		
Q10R	Yes	3	1,2	13	5,4	26	10,7	39	16,1	41	16,9	**9,604**	**.048**
	No	1	0,4	8	3,3	21	8,7	61	25,2	29	12		
Q11R	Yes	23	9,5	32	13,2	36	14,9	27	11,2	4	1,7	3,800	.434
	No	16	6,6	33	13,6	42	17,4	21	8,7	8	3,3		
Q12R	Yes	0	0	2	0,8	3	1,2	47	19,4	70	28,9	2,751	.432
	No	0	0	4	1,7	4	1,7	55	22,7	57	23,6		
Q13	Yes	0	0	8	3,3	25	10,3	52	21,5	37	15,3	2,793	.593
	No	1	0,4	9	3,7	32	13,2	48	19,8	30	12,4		
Q14R	Yes	8	3,3	24	9,9	30	12,4	39	16,1	21	8,7	**13,509**	**.009**
	No	1	0,4	15	6,2	20	8,3	55	22,7	29	12		

Note: "R" indicates the reverse items of the scale.

Table 4.8. (continued)

Questions	Play Course	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		X^2	*p*
		N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*df*	4
Q15	Yes	1	0,4	1	0,4	6	2,5	37	15,3	77	31,8	5,006	.287
	No	0	0	4	1,7	4	1,7	46	19	66	27,3		
Q16R	Yes	27	11,2	57	23,6	19	7,9	15	6,2	4	1,7	**26,591**	**.000**
	No	13	5,4	30	12,4	36	14,9	32	13,2	9	3,7		
Q17R	Yes	58	24	31	12,8	17	7	12	5	4	1,7	**9,562**	**.048**
	No	35	14,5	45	18,6	17	7	18	7,4	5	2,1		
Q18	Yes	0	0	2	0,8	4	1,7	43	17,8	73	30,2	**15,952**	**.001**
	No	0	0	1	0,4	6	2,5	71	29,3	42	17,4		
Q19	Yes	0	0	5	2,1	13	5,4	59	24,4	45	18,6	4,108	.392
	No	1	0,4	4	1,7	16	6,6	67	27,7	32	13,2		
Q20	Yes	15	6,2	23	9,5	38	15,7	32	13,2	14	5,8	6,028	.197
	No	6	2,5	32	13,2	38	15,7	27	11,2	17	7		

Note: "R" indicates the reverse items of the scale.

4.3. Results of the Qualitative Part

In this part, pre-service teachers' perceptions of play retrieved qualitatively will be presented. The main purpose of the study was to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of play and to what extent their play perceptions differ in terms of taking a play course. For this reason, in the qualitative part of the study, 11 open-ended interview questions were asked to understand pre-service teachers' play perceptions in depth, and two of the questions were about their play-course backgrounds. Also, there was an equal number of participants from each year to examine to what extent there is a difference between their play perceptions based on their study year. The findings from the semi-structured interviews with the pre-service teachers (n=24) will be presented in the following section as they were coded from P1 to P24. Also, the participants who were both juniors (P13 to P18) and seniors (P19 to P24) took a play course previously. Lastly, while sharing the exemplary quotes, each participant will be abbreviated based on their study year. For example, the participant number 1 from Freshman year will be presented as F1, and similarly the participant number 7 from Sophomore year will be presented as Sp7, number 13 from Junior year as J13, and number 19 from Senior year as Sn19. Below is a summary of the demographics of the participants in the qualitative part (see Table 4.9.).

Table 4.9.

The Demographics of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Grade	Play Course Background
F1	33	M	1	No
F2	20	F	1	No
F3	21	M	1	No
F4	24	F	1	Yes
F5	19	F	1	No
F6	20	F	1	No
Sp7	22	F	2	Yes

Table 4.9. *(continued)*

Participant	Age	Gender	Grade	Play Course Background
Sp7	22	F	2	Yes
Sp8	21	F	2	No
Sp9	21	F	2	No
Sp10	19	F	2	No
Sp11	27	F	2	No
Sp12	19	F	2	No
J13	21	M	3	Yes
J14	20	F	3	Yes
J15	20	F	3	Yes
J16	22	F	3	Yes
J17	21	F	3	Yes
J18	21	F	3	Yes
Sn19	22	F	4	Yes
Sn20	25	M	4	Yes
Sn21	22	F	4	Yes
Sn22	22	F	4	Yes
Sn23	21	F	4	Yes
Sn24	22	M	4	Yes

4.3.1. Definitions of Play

Pre-service teachers were asked to complete the missing sentence asking the definition of play: "Play……". 234 out of 242 participants completed the sentence. The majority of the participants indicated the developmental benefits of play in their definitions (see Table 4.10.). For this reason, participants' responses were coded under three categories namely intellectual, emotional, and physical benefits.

Some of the participants had difficulty in defining play and focused on its features rather than defining it. For instance, one of the participants responded as:

> I think play has a great contribution to the child in terms of learning by doing in the early childhood period. I think it supports cognitive skills… We have problems with concepts. I know, but I cannot explain. When I focused on the child, play helps children to earn life skills. I can define it like that (F3).

Additionally, other participant who took play course defined play as "the child's instinctive behavior. It is a social activity where the child behaves what s/he wants. It can emerge with the imagination in different ways and different places" (F4).

Besides, some of them indicated play as a teaching tool:

> I can define it as a teaching tool. When we try to teach something directly, children might not want to learn or get bored easily. However, when the teacher teaches through play, s/he learns without realizing it, making the information more permanent and enjoyable for the child (Sp10).

In addition, some of the participants focused on the emotional contributions of play while defining it. In this respect, one said "I think play is the life of the children. The children direct their whole life with play and express everything through play" (Sp8). Similarly, one participant explained as:

> Play is something that children release their energy. If there is no play, I think there is no healthy child because the child can express emotions and all the physical and psychological things through play (Sn21).

One of them also provided a more general definition:

> I think play is an activity that includes fun and educational activities with or without using materials. Children learn lots of things and social rules and have fun while playing. It is not necessary to use materials while playing (Sn19).

To sum up, most of the participants focused on the developmental contributions and features of play while defining it. In this regard, play definitions became more detailed when their grade level increased. Table 4.10. summarizes the findings regarding the definition of play.

Table 4.10.

Definitions of Play

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplary Quotes
Developmental Benefits	Intellectual	Joyful way to learn (n=25) The best way to learn (n=19) Educative (n=16) Discovery and curiosity (n=7) Imagination (n=5)	I can define it as a teaching tool. When we try to teach something directly, children might not want to learn or get bored easily. However, when the teacher teaches through play, s/he learns without realizing it, making the information more permanent and enjoyable for the child (Sp10). We can do it with a play best when we want to teach something. In general, the concepts are abstract, and children cannot understand them. When we teach it via play, they both have fun and learn something (Sn23).
	Emotional	Relaxation (n=22) Self-expression (n=18) Happiness (n=8) Stress relief (n=8) Wellbeing (n=5) Emotional expression (n=5) Socialization (n=3) Adaptation (n=1)	I think play is the children's way of self-expression. They reflect what they live in the inner world through play. I can say it is a communication tool. In addition to this, play is learning by experience and by having fun (Sp12). I believe play is an activity which children express themselves best and feel most comfortable. We can teach everything to children with play. It supports children's development in many ways and takes it to the upper level. Children can learn everything permanently with play (J15). Play is something that children release their energy. If there is no play, I think there is no healthy child because the child can express emotions and all physical and psychological things through play (Sn21). I can define it as a child's adaptation process to the environment. When the children come to the classroom, they start playing with their friends in their free play time. In other words, it is a child's way of adapting to the environment, getting used to it, and expressing him/herself (Sp7).
	Physical	Energy recreation (n=4) Physical development (n=3)	Children need to release their excessive energy. They learn something and release energy when playing two or three games daily (Sn23).

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

4.3.2. What is/is not Play?

Pre-service teachers were asked what play is not and the criteria for something to be considered as play. Firstly, most of them affirmed that *harmful things* (n=13) including violence, bullying and sexuality cannot be play. In addition, they stated that *digital things* (n=4) such as playing with PC, tablet games and watching TV, *boring things* (n=3), and *structured things* (n=3) were not considered as play. Participants also indicated that *gambling and chance games* (n=2), *competition* (n=1), *games without rules* (n=1), and *unsocial things* (n=1) were not a play (see Table 4.11.). Afterward, the participants indicated their criteria for something to be considered as play. Most of the participants asserted *fun* (n=16) as a criterion of play. The participants also indicated that play is *educational* (n=6), *age-appropriate* (n=3), *hands-on* (n=3), *happiness* (n=3), *spontaneous* (n=3), *active* (n=3), *individual* (n=2), *safe* (n=2), and *social* (n=2). Besides, *willingness* (n=2), *creative* (n=1), *relaxation* (n=1), *structured* (n=1) and *freedom* (n=1) are other factors something to be considered as play (see Table 4.11.). Some of the exemplary quotes were provided below.

Some of the participants affirmed that the educational and developmental contributions of play were one of the criteria to be considered a play. In this respect, one freshman said:

> For something to be considered as play, it must contribute to us both mentally and physically. Although we are having fun while playing, we need to learn something from play. Play needs to train our brains. We must learn something. I think that is the criteria of play. Also, I think it has to develop motor skills. For example, our grasping skills can be improved through play (F3).

Similarly, one of the participants focused on the educational aspect of play by explaining:

> I think play should teach children something. It should be ensured that the child can learn by practicing what he cannot learn from the outside theoretically during play. That's how it is in early childhood education (J13).
>
> Also, he continued with explaining what play is not for him.

> In my opinion, our traditional games such as hide and seek or blind man's bluff are not a play. They focus on entertainment more. I think play should be more educational in early childhood. For this reason, if we make the activities by using play, it becomes more effective (J13).

On the contrary, one of the participants pointed to the digital aspects of play and said digital things are not a play for her by saying:

> In my opinion, technological things such as mobile and computer games are not play. I mean it is not play for young children. I think they need to engage in hands-on activities and touch toys or materials (F6).

The majority of the participants indicated that play should be fun. Also, some participants asserted that boring things could not be play. One of the freshmen who took a play course explained as:

> It is essential to have fun and take pleasure from play, to have something that comes from within, or to want it. Being happy is the most important criterion for me. I do not think materials are necessary for play. It can happen without material, even if it is nothing. It does not have to be a group of people. Children can even create/set play by themselves. It can also be in both ways, with or without rules (F4).

Similarly, one of the sophomores who took a play course also stated the fun aspect of play by saying:

> First, I think play should contain fun. Fun should come first. Play is an adaptation process. Therefore, the child should feel comfortable and happy. Then, it may change. It may be educative, or it may be supportive. In other words, there may be content that will contribute to the child in many ways, but I think the priority should be entertainment (Sp7).

On the other hand, one participant reported “activities that children cannot have fun are not play for me. It is not necessary to learn something. Instead, it is necessary to have fun with friends or alone” (J15).

Furthermore, some of the participants identified their play criterion as safety. Regarding this issue, one explained as “safety is necessary. Play needs to be safe, funny, informative, and appropriate for children's age” (Sp12). Also, about half of the participants indicated that harmful things such as violence and bullying were not a play for them. In this respect, Sp10 asserted as:

> If there is violence or harm, it is not a play. I think play should not depend on hitting or hurting someone. This reduces the fun of play. The more powerful children are having fun while the weaker children are not (Sp10).

Some of the participants reported that active participation and being social are the criteria for play. In this regard, F6 said, "there must be more than one person for me. There is no point in being alone. Children have to be social with friends". Similarly, J17 also explained as:

> For something to be considered as play, everyone, without any exception, must genuinely participate, have fun, and be happy. Regarding children, when I go to the outside with my class, if the whole class is involved in play and they look at me with a big smile, it is a play for me. Regarding my peers, if I go out with a group to play and someone says s/he does not want to play, it is not a play for me (J17).

Only one participant reported play has no criteria and explained as "I think anything can be a play. It does not matter if it is with or without rules" (Sn22).

Briefly, participants articulated their play criteria and any behaviors that are not considered as play. The participants who focused on the educational aspect of play generally did not take a play course. Table 4.11. summarizes the findings regarding the criteria for something to be considered as a play or <u>not</u> a play.

Table 4.11.

What is Play? & What is not Play?

Play is...	Exemplary Quotes	....is not play	Exemplary Quotes
Fun (n=16)	It is essential to take pleasure from play, to have something that comes from within, or to want it.	Harmful things (n=13)	If there is violence or harm, it is not a play. I think play should not depend on hitting or hurting someone. This
Educational (n=6)	Being happy is the most important criterion for	Digital things (n=4)	reduces fun of play. The more powerful children are
Happiness (n=3)	me. I do not think materials are necessary for	Boring things (n=3)	having fun while the weaker children are not. (Sp10)
Age appropriate (n=3)	play. It can happen without material, even if it	Structured things	In my opinion, technological things such as mobile and
	is nothing. It does not have to be a group of	(n=3)	computer games are not play. I mean it is not play for
Active (n=3)	people. Children can even create/set play by	Gambling and chance	young children. I think they need to engage in hands
	themselves. It can also be in both ways, with or	games (n=2)	on activities and touch toys or materials. (F6)
Hands-on (n=3)	without rules. (F4)	Competition (n=1)	Activities that children cannot have fun are not play
Spontaneous (n=2)	For something to be considered as play, it must	Games without rules	for me. It is not necessarily to learn something in play.
	contribute to us both mentally and physically.	(Unstructured things)	Instead, it is necessary to have fun with friends or
	Although we are having fun while playing, we	(n=1)	alone. (J15)
Social (n=2)	need to learn something from play. Play needs	Unsocial things (n=1)	Something without any rule is not a play for me. For
Individual (n=2)	to train our brains. We must learn something. I		example, make-believe play or chance games are not
Willingness (n=2)	think that's the criteria of play. Also, I think it		play too. Rules are necessary. Rules make play is more
Safe (n=2)	has to develop motor skills. For example, our		exciting. (Sp11)
Relaxation (n=1)	grasping skills can improve through play. (F3)		In my opinion, our traditional games such as hide and
Structured (n=1)	Firstly, safety is necessary. Besides, play needs		seek or blind man's bluff are not play. They focus on
Freedom (n=1)	to be funny, informative, and appropriate for		entertainment more. I think play should be more
Creative (n=1)	children's age. It is not necessary to have toys		educational in early childhood. For this reason, if we
	because play can show up alone. (Sp12)		make the activities by using play, it becomes more
	There must be more than one person for me,		effective. (J13)
	there is no point in being alone. It has to be a		
	group of friends to play. (F6)		

4.3.3. The Importance of Play

Pre-service teachers were asked about play's contributions in terms of child development. The participants' responses were divided into three categories regarding developmental areas. The participants frequently stated that play contributes to *learning* (n=16), *gross and fine motor skills* (n=15), *social skills* (n=15) such as cooperation and empathy, and *language acquisition* (n=11). Moreover, they indicated that play supports *self-confidence* (n=4), *self-knowledge* (n=3), *creativity* (n=3), *emotional state* (n=3), *self-expression* (n=2), *school readiness* (n=2), and *imagination* (n=1).

Some of the participants reported that play contributed to physical development more. In this regard, one of them said, “play is important for the cognitive and physical development of children. However, I think play contributes to the children more physically” (F3). Similarly, F6 stated, “motor skills come first, then brain and emotions. Play contributes to the motor, cognitive and emotional development of children”. Additionally, one participant also pointed to the same thing by saying:

> I think it contributes to many developmental areas in terms of cognitive and social, and emotional development. However, its contribution is greatest in terms of physical development, fine motor, and gross motor skills (Sn21).

Some of the participants focused on the physical benefits of play. However, one of them indicated that play has social benefits more. About this issue, J14 stated as follows:

> Play can provide social benefits in group work, group games and communication. It can strengthen communication. It supports motor development, but I think it has more of a social impact. Most of the time, they do not play alone, I think this improves positively. Play may contribute to self-expression. Children can express their favorite or least favorite things in this way. Also, they can display it against people they do not like in play. Play may have a reflective feature (J14).

Similarly, one of the freshmen who took a play course indicated that play contributed to creativity and imagination by saying:

> It has so many positive effects. It supports them in many ways such as developing self-knowledge, promoting, and developing their creativity. Play is essential for

> imagination and creativity. Also, it has a lot of contributions in the social and emotional areas, such as waiting turns (F4).

Furthermore, most of the participants reported that social contributions of play. J18 exemplified it by saying “when children play playing house, for instance, they can understand how the other person feels and can develop empathy. Their emotional skills can develop” (J18).

The majority of the participants also indicated the importance of play regarding the educational aspect. One of them stated as:

> A child's life is already a play. S/he lives with play. S/he learns counting, colors, and many things in play. For example, while playing house, he learns the names of animals. s/he is just starting to learn about the life, so he learns many things too. Children do everything via play, so it affects everything (Sp8).

Some of the participants pointed to the contributions of play regarding language acquisitions while stating, “there are thousands of contributions, and we can teach most of the things via play. Therefore, we cannot limit its benefits with only motor, cognitive, and language development” (Sp7). Similarly, one of them said, “it contributes to cognitive and social development. Children memorize nursery rhymes, and it supports language skills” (J17).

Moreover, among the participants, two of them stated the school readiness issue as a developmental benefit of play. In this issue, Sn20 reported as:

> Since the purpose of early childhood education is to prepare children for primary school, it can be said that play is the most important part of child development; in fact, 85% of it. Also, it contributes to socialization in group activities, and they develop competencies toward complicated situations (Sn20).

To sum up, the participants generally stated the importance of play regarding the developmental areas. The majority of them said more than one benefit at the same time. This demonstrated that making a generalization is challenging in terms of grade levels and benefits that they expressed. However, we can say that they were aware of the developmental benefits of play. Table 4.12. summarizes the findings regarding the developmental benefits of play.

Table 4.12.

The Importance of Play

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplary Quotes
Developmental Contributions			
	Physical	Gross and fine motor skills (n=15)	Play is important for the cognitive and physical development of children. However, I think play contributes to the children more physically (F3). Motor skills comes first, then brain and emotions. Play contributes to motor, cognitive and emotional development of children. Also, they can get rid of loneliness while playing and it promotes social skills (F6). I think it contributes to many developmental areas in terms of cognitive development, and social and emotional development. However, its contribution is greatest in terms of physical development, fine motor and gross motor (Sn21).
	Social-Emotional	Social skills (n=15) Self-confidence (n=4) Self-knowledge (n=3) Emotional state (n=3) Self-expression (n=2)	It has so many positive effects. It supports them in many ways such as developing self-knowledge, promoting, and developing their creativity. For example, it has a lot of contributions in the social and emotional areas, such as waiting turns. Play is very important for imagination and creativity (F4). Play can provide social benefits in group work, group games and communication. It can strengthen communication. It supports motor development, but I think it has more of a social impact. Most of the time, they do not play alone, I think this improves positively. Play may contribute to self-expression. Children can express their favorite or least favorite things in this way. Also, they can display it against people they don't like in play. Play may have a reflective feature because it has a life-reflective feature too (J14). For example, when children play playing house, they can understand how the other person feels and can develop empathy. Their emotional skills can develop (J18).
	Cognitive	Learning (n=16) Language acquisition (n=11) Creativity (n=3) School readiness (n=2) Imagination (n=1)	There are thousands of contributions of play, and we can teach most of the things via play. Therefore, we cannot limit its contributions with only motor, cognitive and language development (Sp7). A child's life is already a play. S/he lives with play. S/he learns counting, colors, and many things in play. For example, while playing house, he learns the names of animals. s/he is just starting to learn about the life, so he learns many things too. Children do everything via play, so it affects everything (Sp8). Since the purpose of early childhood education is to prepare children for primary school, it can be said that play is the most important part of child development; in fact, 85% of it. Also, it contributes to socialization in group activities, and they develop competencies towards the complicated situations (Sn20).

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

4.3.4. Factors that Influence Children's Play

Pre-service teachers were asked the factors that may influence children's play. The participants' responses were divided into three categories: environment-related, child-related, and adult-related factors. The environment-related factors involved *the physical setting (indoor/outdoor)* (n=6), *the characteristics of materials* (n=5), *lack of materials* (n=3), *lack of play space* (n=2), *weather conditions* (n=1), and *safety issues* (n=1). The child-related factors were the *presence of peers* (n=9), the *emotional state of the child* (n=6), *interest and curiosity of the child* (n=6), *developmental level of the child* (n=3), *the culture of the child* (n=3) and *gender of the child* (n=2). Lastly, the adult-related factors were stated as *parental attitudes* (n=5), *teacher attitudes* (n=5), *socio-economic factors* (n=5), and *neighbors* (n=2) (see Table 4.13). Among these factors, participants frequently stated the presence of peers (n=9), the interest of the child (n=6), emotional state of the child (n=6), and physical settings (indoor/outdoor) (n=6). Some of the exemplary quotes about the factors influence play were given below.

Four freshmen participants reported they had difficulty in stating factors that influence children's play. While some of them did not even answer this question, one participant tried to explain as "it does not come to my mind… Play comes from family members. I learned how to play from my peers and brothers. If they engaged which play in, I engaged in it too" (F3). On the contrary, one of them explained parental attitude, teachers, and peers as influencing factors of play by saying:

> For example, one of the factors that affect play is family pressure. Friends are critical. Teachers are also very effective because teachers always make their favorite students start first in play. I think this attitude affects the child a lot. Not all teachers are like that, but mine was. I thought they prioritized hardworking students. This made me very withdrawn about play. I thought I was falling behind (F5).

Moreover, while two of the sophomores (Sp8, Sp10) did not state the influencing factors, other sophomores were commenting adult-related factors such as neighbors, parental attitudes, and socio-economic factors as follows:

> My neighbors influenced my play in Istanbul. My grandmother affected my play in our village. My parents were worried about me while playing outside too long. They were impressed with my play. Socio-economic opportunities… For example, we could not find a ball easily. We did not have enough play materials (Sp7).

Also, one participant stated the physical environment, the characteristics of the materials, safety, and socio-economic factors by saying:

> Children's play is affected by the times in which they live. For instance, before technological developments, children could create their own play and engaged in traditional games. However, with the technology, they started to play with tablet computers and mobile phones. Apart from that, all children's play settings are not the same. Children who live in a war environment cannot engage in the same play. They can create play with their own means. Similarly, children's plays from low-income families also are affected by socio-economic problems (Sp12).

In addition, one of the participants stated the factors by saying:

> Time factor... For example, if play is too long and there is a child with ADHD, you cannot play with this child for half an hour. You should also consider the developmental level of the class. If there is a child with special needs, for example, while 10 minutes of play satisfies the others, that child may not even be able to grasp a single stage of it. Time is significant (Sp11).

All junior and senior participants who took a play course provided more profound answers regarding factors influencing play. For instance, one of the juniors asserted the presence of peers, culture, developmental features of children, and parental attitudes as influencing factors of play by saying:

> Firstly, the environment affects play, such as family structure, culture, and developmental status of children. For instance, cultural features are seen in play. Also, child number of families and their attitudes toward children have also an impact on children's play. Some parents set children free too much and do not arrange an appropriate play environment. There needs to be a proper play environment. Besides, every child cannot engage in every play at every age. Age-appropriateness of play is necessary. Moreover, physical environment, such as natural environments, affects play (J15).

Similarly, one of the participants pointed to the weather conditions, children's emotional state and children's interests as follows:

> The environment is the first factor. Playspace, weather conditions, climate... If the weather is good, we can take children outside instead of playing in the classroom. If

> the weather is bad, it can be dressed and taken out according to the conditions. The children's characteristics, such as the child's emotional state, whether the child wants to play or not, or whether s/he wants to play individually or in a group, can also affect play (J17).

The senior participants also mentioned similar factors that affect play. For instance, one of them asserted that physical characteristics of the environment, number of children, and socio-economic factors influence play by saying: "Where children live, village or big cities affects play. The number of children has an impact on play too. For instance, an only child needs to play by herself/himself. However, socio-economic status is located at the top of these factors" (Sn22).

Briefly, the majority of the participants indicated that there were lots of influencing factors. However, juniors and seniors who took a play course explained the factors profoundly. Table 4.13. summarizes the findings regarding influencing factors of play.

Table 4.13.

Factors that Influence Play

Theme	Category	Codes
Influential Factors	Environment-related	Physical setting (indoor-outdoor) (n=6)
		The characteristics of materials (n=5)
		Lack of materials (n=3)
		Lack of play space (n=2)
		Weather conditions (n=1)
		Safety issues (n=1)
	Child-related	Presence of peers (n=9)
		The emotional state of the child (n=6)
		Interest and curiosity of the child (n=6)
		Developmental level of the child (n=3)
		The culture of the child (n=3)
		Gender of the child (n=2)
	Adult-related	Parental attitudes (n=5)
		Teacher attitudes (n=5)
		Socio-economic factors (n=5)
		Neighbors (n=2)

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

4.3.5. Teachers' Roles in Play

After considering the factors that influence play, pre-service teachers were asked what teachers' role is in play. The teachers' roles were divided into six categories based on the classification of Johnson et al. (1999). The participants frequently stated that teachers have supportive roles, including *onlooker* (n=13), *co-player* (n=10), *play-leader* (n=7), and *stage manager* (n=6) roles in play. In addition, a few indicated *director/instructor* (n=2) role, while nobody stated *uninvolved* role (n=0). Most of the participants provided more than one answer regarding teachers' roles. In this respect, some of the exemplary quotes about the teachers' roles in play were given below.

Some of the participants reported that teachers must actively participate in play as co-players. In this respect, F1 said, "the teacher needs to actively participate from the beginning of play to the end, considering play type. S/he also needs to have fun with children". On the other hand, F2 asserted the teacher's director role in play by saying, "the teachers have a leading role in play. Children are also their assistant players. Teachers are the forefront of play, and they direct it in terms of giving instructions" (F2). Moreover, one participant indicated that the teachers have an onlooker role in play:

> I think that the teacher should always supervise the children and keep their eyes on them even if the class is crowded. The teachers should observe the children from a distance. It does not mean that you can force them directly to do something, but you can observe what they are doing from a distance. S/he can intervene accordingly. For example, when two children fight, the teacher can involve, listen to the children and mediate (F6).

Additionally, one indicated the director/instructor role of the teachers in play and pointed to their roles were more in the structured play:

> The teacher has more roles in the structured play. S/he is mostly directing play and telling what children will do. For example, in free play time, the teacher is again directing them so that they can learn play. The teacher has to lead the class. The teacher is still on top of them in any case, but the effect of the teacher is more in the structured play (Sp8).

Additionally, some of the participants stated that teachers' roles could change by curricular needs and play type. In this issue, one of the sophomores, who took a play course, said:

> I think the role of the teacher can change often, and it should change. Teacher-directed play should not be played all the time. I think that children should also engage in play in which they can control themselves. Therefore, the teachers' role can change. It is sometimes a guiding role, while sometimes, it is a player (Sp7).

Furthermore, one participant stated her lack of information about planning playtime because of not taking a play course and inferred as follows:

> Firstly, teachers can be an observer. You can observe the behaviors of the children and their moods. Apart from that, they are the person who makes the environment safe. Moreover, in some cases, they become a leader. I think so; of course, I do not know how playtime is planned in early childhood classrooms and how it is set up. However, I think the teachers have observer and facilitator roles (Sp12).

Regarding juniors' and seniors' responses who took play course, they frequently stated co-player and play-leader roles of the teachers. For example, Sn23 explained the teachers' role by providing past experiences. Afterward, J15 reported the play-leader role of the teachers as follows:

> I think the teacher should not sit and watch children all the time. S/he should join the children and play with them. One of our practicum teachers was doing it last semester. S/he was playing with children during free play time. I think the teachers should have an interaction with children like this. The teacher can also be a playmate with them (Sn23).

> In structured play, if children play a game that they do not know, the teacher should be the leader for the children. I mean, while saying leadership, s/he should teach the child how to play first, then observe the child while playing (J15).

In brief, when participants' play course background were considered, most participants reported the onlooker/observer and co-player role of the teachers. The director/instructor roles were mentioned only by a freshman and sophomore participants who did not take a play course. Those who took a play course generally provided supportive roles of the teachers classified by Johnson et al. (1999). Besides, a small number of the participants indicated the teacher roles should change regarding play type, children's wishes (if they want teachers to participate in play), and curriculum. Table 4.14. summarizes the findings.

Table 4.14.

Teachers' roles in play

Teacher Roles	Exemplary Quotes
Onlooker (n=13)	I think that the teacher should always supervise the children and keep their eyes on them even if the class is crowded. The teachers should observe the children from a distance. It does not mean that you can force them directly to do something, but you can observe what they are doing from a distance. He can intervene accordingly (F6). I think the role of the teachers should be passive. The children should be active in playtime. The teachers should observe from the outside and identify the children's weaknesses and strengths. For example, I wanted to teach something in this play. The teachers need to observe to see if they learn (J13).
Co-player (n=10)	I think the teacher should not sit and watch children all the time. S/he should join the children and play with them. One of our practicum teachers was doing it last semester. S/he was playing with children during free play time. I think the teachers should have an interaction with children like this. The teacher can also be a playmate with them (Sn23). The teacher needs to actively participate from the beginning of play to the end, considering the play type. He also needs to have fun like children (F1).
Play-leader (n=7)	I will answer classically, but a teacher should be someone who guides, leads, directs positively, supports all areas, and attaches importance to holistic development, never staying in one area. Teachers need to act like a child with a child while playing. They are sitting from afar, watching the children and children play there. I think this means nothing (Sn22).
Stage manager (n=6)	In structured activities, teachers should be the narrator or informative to teach play. The early childhood education teacher should definitely have time, happiness, and energy to have fun with children in the free play time. Children have fun more when they see the teacher is having fun with them too (F4). I think the role of the teachers is to set up play. It is to set up play and guiding it. S/he can watch or be involved in depending on the type of play (Sp10).
Director/instructor (n=2)	Teachers have a leading role in play. Children are also their assistant players. Teachers are the forefront of play, and they direct it in terms of giving instructions (F2). The teacher has more roles in the structured play. S/he is mostly directing the game and telling what children will do. For example, in free play time, the teacher is again directing them so that they learn the game. The teacher has to lead the class. The teacher is still on top of them in any case, but the effect of the teacher is more in the structured play (Sp8).

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

4.3.6. Roles of Play Materials

After gathering the roles of teachers in play, pre-service teachers were asked what the role of materials in children's play might be. Participants frequently reported play materials to *enrich play* (n=11) and *support development and learning* (n=9). Additionally, a few numbers of them indicated that materials were *providing hands-on experiences* (n=3), *preparing the future life* (n=2), *supporting creativity* (n=2), and *supporting teachers' practice* (n=1) in play.

Five freshmen out of six had difficulty in explaining the roles of play materials, and some of them provided the features instead of contributions to play. Apart from these, F5 pointed to play materials which support development and creativity by commenting:

> Children can develop skills in creating a play with materials. Let us think about a mobile phone. Children use this material in different ways by using their own imaginations. They can use as a plane, train, or different things. For this reason, play materials have significant roles (F5).

Similar to the freshmen, sophomores had difficulty in stating the contributions of play materials. Surprisingly, two of them indicated that play materials did not have roles in a play. In this respect, one of them explained as:

> I think play materials do not contribute to play. In other words, the child can play without toys. It depends a little bit on the child himself. If s/he can create a play, s/he does not need toys. However, I think s/he can create own toy too if s/he wants. I do not think the toys have any effects on play (Sp10).

Furthermore, Sp12 asserted the enriching role of play materials and explained as "toys provide a variety of play. However, how and where they are used in a play is critical" (Sp12).

In addition, some of the participants who took play course indicated that play materials support development and learning, and provide hands-on experiences for children. In this respect, J15 explained as:

> Play materials definitely support play and provide better learning. Children need concrete materials while playing in early childhood. For this reason, if we can embody it with materials and toys, children learn better through hands-on experiences (J15).

In addition, one of the seniors reported that play materials enrich play and help children to gain social skills. She explained it as follows:

> Play materials enrich play and increase its variety. Children can create various play via them. In addition, it enhances the positive relationship between children and encourages getting social skills such as sharing and helping: the more materials, the more sharing in the classroom (Sn21).

Some of the participants (n=3) who took a play course reported that play materials have no role. Two of the responses were provided below:

> Toys and play materials have roles in a play, but children's roles are more. This is because children's imaginary worlds are enormous. For example, this (beverage coaster) can be a hat or bag for them. For this reason, children have a more critical role than toys in play (Sp7).

> I don't think play materials have much effect. Once the children are social with each other, the toy does not matter much after they get together. All kinds of play can be played. Because their imaginary world is very different, they can play their own free will, even with the smallest thing, and create a new play among themselves. Therefore, I do not think it has more role (J16).

While some of the participants asserted that play materials has no role in a play, one of the participants stated its critical role in a play by saying:

> I think play materials have a critical role. Of course, I can be a teacher at a village school, and there may not be enough materials, but I think the materials are necessary. The child can feel happier and more motivated when there are materials. How far can they go on their own? I think the materials support their play (J18).

To sum up, the participants generally indicated that play materials support development and learning and enrich play. Regarding play course experience, most of the participants who took a play course pointed to these two roles of play materials. Interestingly, participants, who reported that play materials did not have much role in a play, also took a play course. Table 4.15. summarizes the findings.

Table 4.15.

Roles of Play Materials

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplary Quotes
Roles of Play Materials	Benefits	Enriching play (n=11)	Play materials enrich play and increase its variety. Children can create various play via them. In addition, it enhances the positive relationship between children and encourages getting social skills such as sharing and helping: the more materials, the more sharing in the classroom. (Sn21)
		Supporting development (n=9)	Play materials definitely support play and provide better learning. Children need concrete materials while playing in early childhood. For this reason, if we can embody it with materials and toys, children learn better through hands-on experiences. (J15)
		Providing hands-on experience (n=3)	Children can develop skills in creating a play with materials. Let us think about a mobile phone. Children use this material in different ways by using their own imaginations. They can use as a plane, train, or different things. For this reason, play materials have significant roles. (F5)
		Preparing the future life (n=2)	I think play materials have a critical role. Of course, I can be a teacher at a village school, and there may not be enough materials, but I think the materials are necessary. The child can feel happier and more motivated when there are materials. How far can they go on their own? I think the materials support their play. (J18)
		Supporting creativity (n=2)	
		Supporting teachers' practice (n=1)	

Note: Participants gave more than one answer; some did not.

4.3.7. Playtime Planning

Pre-service teachers were asked how playtime should be planned. Some of the participants focused on time, while some of them pointed to the structure of play. Regarding the time category, three play times emerged, and participants indicated play time should be planned in the *mornings* (n=3), *during the day* (n=2), and *between the activities* (n=2). Regarding the play structure category, some of the

participants stated that playtime for children should be *free* (n=5), *semi-structured* (n=4), and *structured* (n=2). Besides, some participants asserted that play structure should be *balanced* (n=8), while some of the participants indicated that playtime planning *depends on curriculum, children's needs,* and *play types* (n=8).

Three of the participants asserted that playtime should be planned in the mornings. To illustrate, F3 stated that "children should start the day with a play in the mornings. If they play when they come to school, they will be more active in the lessons and learn better". Similarly, about this issue, Sn23 explained as:

> When children come to school in the mornings, we start with free play. For example, I think children should not be guided there. They have to play whatever they want. I think they should just play at that hour. I cannot think of a day without play (Sn23).

One of the participants indicated that there should be play during the whole day in the classrooms by saying:

> I think there should be play the whole time in classrooms. Everything should be play-based when we conduct a science activity, or something related to the environment. Children can understand better by playing and having fun (J16).

In addition, two of the participants stated that play should be between the activities as a relaxation tool. In this respect, F2 explained it as:

> Firstly, I teach whatever course I need to teach. Then, if it is a very challenging course, I plan a play between the next course to blow off steam. This time zone for play is more suitable (F2).

Regarding the structure of play, five of the participants, who did not take a play course, stated that playtime should be free. About this issue, F5 clarified as:

> I think play should be free. Let children choose their play, improve self-confidence, and try to create a sense of freedom. For example, they can set their own rules. Also, I do not prefer the teachers to stick to the rules. In other words, I do not think children can understand all the rules. So, play should not be structured (F5).

Additionally, four participants asserted that play should be semi-structured. One of the sophomores explained the situation as follows:

> It should be semi-structured. Play should be explained at first, and then children should be left to their own devices. However, children must feel teachers' surveillance. When they are entirely free, they can tend to hurt each other (Sp10).

Besides, only two participants stated that play needs to be structured. One of them who took a play course asserted as:

> Play needs to be structured. If it is not structured and releases children free, it would be just for fun. If we release children, we cannot observe what children are doing and their development (J13).

Apart from the time-related and structure-related findings of the playtime planning, some of the participants indicated it should be balanced. In this regard, Sn21 stated:

> I think it should be balanced. In some cases, it should be structured, and sometimes it should be free. It is not right to release children in every time. They already have free play time, on average 1,5 - 2 hours per day. There should also be structured play so that the child can understand that there is a specific plan or program in the classroom. Let's say 50% 50% (Sn21).

Furthermore, one of the participants who took a play course stated that playtime planning depends on play type by saying:

> It changes from play to play. Sometimes, we need to structure it, and sometimes, we need to let children be free. Let us think of playing house. It should be free. If it is a game with rules, I think we need to structure it (Sp7).

Besides play type, one of the juniors asserted it depends on the curricular needs of children. In this respect, J14 commented:

> There are some concepts to be learned in play as well. We observe the children during play. If children lack a subject, the focus can be on that concept in the next play. We can determine the objectives in this way. In other words, we can plan play for their developmental needs or which subject they lack. Depending on the children's emotional situation, we may have a different plan accordingly and can change it during the day (J14).

In summary, the majority of the participants stated that playtime planning depends on curriculum or play type, and it should be balanced. Out of eight participants who said it depends, only one of them did not take a play course while others took it.

Regarding playtime structure, the participants who asserted free play did not take a play course either. Table 4.16. summarizes the responses.

Table 4.16.

Playtime Planning

Planning		Exemplary Quotes
TIME	Mornings (n=3)	When children come to school, we start with free play. For example, I do not think children should be guided there. They have to play whatever they want. I think they should just be engaging in play at that hour. I cannot think of a day without play. (Sn23)
	Whole day (n=2)	I think there should be play the whole time in classrooms. Everything should be play-based when we conduct a science activity, or something related to the environment. Children can understand better by playing and having fun. (J16)
	Between the activities (n=2)	Firstly, I teach whatever course I need to teach. Then, if it is a very challenging course, I plan a play between the next course to blow off steam. This time zone for play is more suitable. (F2)
STRUCTURE	Free (n=5)	I think play should be free. Let children choose their play, improve self-confidence, and try to create a sense of freedom. For example, they can set their own rules. Also, I do not prefer the teachers to stick to the rules. In other words, I do not think children can understand all the rules. So, play should not be structured. (F5)
	Semi-structured (n= 4)	It should be semi-structured. Play should be explained at first, and then children should be left to their own devices. However, children must feel teachers' surveillance. When they are entirely free, they can tend to hurt each other. (Sp10)
	Structured (n=2)	Play needs to be structured. If it is not structured and releases children free, it would be just for fun. If we release children, we cannot observe what children are doing and their development. (J13)

Note: Participants gave more than one answer.

4.3.8. Play as a Teaching Tool

Pre-service teachers were asked how they would use play as a teaching tool in their future classrooms. The majority of the participants indicated they would use play by *integrating* (n=14) concepts into play. A small number of them stated they would use

play while *reinforcing* (n=3) and *embodying* (n=2) learning. Only two of them asserted play as a *teaching method* (n=2).

Some of the participants stated that while teaching a concept, they use play in their future classroom by integrating. One of them who did not take play course indicated she would use play by integrating the concept into it by saying:

> Play is essential for children. While explaining a concept, if you include it in play, you can draw the child's attention there. Children become more willing to learn that concept. I guess I will try to explain the concept by integrating it with play (F5).

In addition, some participants said they do not know how to use play while teaching. While three sophomores had difficulty in answering the question, one of the participants stated her incompetency by saying, "I have just started to take a play course. I do not know much right now. I am learning" (Sp8).

Two participants also asserted that they would use play in teaching by integrating and one of them indicated play as a teaching method by saying:

> I use play as a teaching method. I teach directly through play because it is more fun and more permanent. Especially if play is interactive, it will be more permanent. I would like to use play that contains more excitement and movement (Sp12).

Regarding the juniors who took play course, except for one participant, all of them asserted that they would use play while teaching a concept by integrating into it. One of them pointed to curriculum-generated play and play-generated curriculum concepts stated by Johnson et al. (1999). In this respect, J14 explained as:

> I can support the concept in many ways, not just with play. However, this may change depending on the concept that I want to teach. Therefore, I can either integrate the concept into play, or create a new play entirely based on that concept (J14).

In addition, the seniors who took play course reported that while teaching a concept, they would use play by integrating into it or embodying the concept. One of them stated that she would use play by embodying abstract concepts such as numbers as follows:

> For example, it is necessary to embody the numbers with play as much as possible. Otherwise, you are talking and doing something for nothing. Explaining abstract things by embodying them through play is necessary because even I do not understand some things (Sn22).

Additionally, some of them (n=3) stated they would use play as a reinforcer in their future classrooms. One of them shared her practicum experiences and then reported as:

> … Actually, we are using play to reinforce it. I try to find a play related to the concept or subject that I will teach so that the children can understand better, and the subject can be reinforced. For this reason, I use play to reinforce the concept more (Sn19).

Similarly, one participant also indicated as:

> I use play as a reinforcer. Firstly, I teach the concept. Once children understand the concept, I use play as both entertainment and reinforcement so that they can better understand the current situation (Sn24).

Additionally, five of the participants stated that they do not have any idea about how to use play in their future classrooms. Of the five of them, four participants did not take a play course yet, and one said "... I use play. However, I do not know how to use play because I am only in the first grade. Actually, I did not think about how to use it at the moment" (F6). Moreover, one of the participants who took a play course during the pandemic explained the situation as follows:

> I do not know how to use play exactly. I lack in practice because our most important course (means play course) coincided with the pandemic. It was 50% theory and 50% practice. I lack in practice right now too (J17).

In brief, out of 20 participants, the majority of the participants stated that play can be used as a teaching tool by integrating a concept into it. Some of the seniors indicated play as a reinforcer. Besides, some participants did not answer the question of how to use play while teaching a concept. Of these participants, nearly all of them did not attend a play course before, as mentioned above. Additionally, two participants who took a play course pointed to curriculum-generated play and play-generated curriculum concepts. Similarly, two seniors who took a play course focused on embodying abstract concepts through play.

4.3.9. Play Course Enrollment

Regarding play course enrollment, firstly, pre-service teachers were asked whether they had attended a play course. Then, they were also asked how play course affected their opinions about play after taking the course. The participants who took a play course generally indicated that it affected them positively. Some of them said that taking a play course enhanced their *theoretical knowledge* (n=8) and provided *new perspectives* (n=4). Also, only one participant asserted that play course increased her *self-confidence* (n=1). Some of the exemplary quotes were provided below.

Some of the participants reported that play course provided them theoretical knowledge. In this respect, J13 said:

> Play course changed my views about play theoretically. We learned theoretical things such as play theories. Also, it changed my perspective. I did not think play is so necessary for early childhood education. Frankly, I thought that we could do activities and then pass. After taking a play course, I realized how necessary play was in the early years. I have noticed that children can learn more easily in this way (J13).

Similarly, one of the participants stated the theoretical contributions and changes in perspectives as well. However, she pointed to the incompetency of the play course in terms of practical implications.

> It was not a practical course, so distance education during the pandemic had significant disadvantages regarding play courses. We learned the types of play according to different theorists, and we learned more theoretically. However, it was ineffective because it was not practical (J18).

Additionally, one of the participants stated that her perspective changed when she took the play course. In this respect, she explained as:

> Play has its own definition, but I did not know it was that comprehensive. For instance, Montessori, Froebel, and Pestalozzi have thoughts about many plays. I didn't know that. I had a definition of my own, and I was advancing according to my own definition of play. My knowledge has expanded, so my perspective has changed. I am sure those who have not taken a play course think so (Sn19).

Among the participants, only one participant stated play course increased her self-confidence regarding implementing play activities in her practicum. She explained this situation as follows:

> For example, before attending play course, when I was going to my internship, I could not analyze the things the children did. I could not recognize the underlying reasons for what they were doing. However, play course is so practical at this semester. For example, I do not get excited in class. I can say that this course reduced my excitement. It increased my self-confidence in general as I gradually started to practice play (Sn22).

Surprisingly, only one participant indicated that play course enrollment did not change her perspectives. She explained this situation as follows:

> I do not think it has changed my perspective much. I am still doing pretty much the same thing. I am just knowledgeable now. I knew what children play at which age, but now I am more conscious (J14).

To sum up, most of the participants who took a play course asserted that the play course positively affected their thoughts and changed perspectives regarding play in early childhood education. However, the majority of them also specified that even though play course provided theoretical knowledge sufficiently, it was lacked in practice because of the distance education during the pandemic.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings obtained from mixed methods involving quantitative and qualitative data were discussed with the literature. Afterward, the implications of the study, recommendations for future studies, and limitations of the study were presented.

5.1. Discussion

The current study's primary purpose was to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' play perceptions. Also, it was investigated to what extent their perceptions differ in terms of taking play course. Since the study was a mixed method sequential explanatory design, the findings gathered from the qualitative and quantitative data were discussed holistically. The quantitative data were collected and analyzed in the first phase of the study. In this respect, six scale items demonstrated a statistically significant relationship regarding play course enrollment. In the study's second phase, the qualitative data was collected through the semi-structured interview protocol. The findings of them were discussed under three major themes emerging from the scale (PPS).

5.1.1. The Functions of Play

The first theme namely the function of play includes the definitions, functions, features, and the importance of play. In this respect, the definition of play was discussed firstly. The functions and features of play are also stated. Lastly, the importance of play was presented.

The definition of play is ambiguous (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Thus, first of all, the participants were asked to define play. The study results concluded that most of the participants had difficulty in defining play and focused on its features and developmental benefits more. As discussed by Johnson et al. (1999), defining play is complicated, and there are some characteristics that helps to understand play definition. On the other hand, Eberle (2014) indicated that presenting features and functions of play does not truly define it and exemplifies the situation with a rose metaphor. According to him, how people perceive a rose by saying "rose smells sweet" is not a definition of it. In other words, how people perceive play does not explain what play is as well (Eberle, 2014). As a result, it can be understood that play is a very complex term to truly define. For this reason, most of the participants defined play by stating functions, features, and its importance. Zhulamanova and Raisor (2020) also examined the play perceptions of ECE pre-service teachers through two surveys and interviews. The results of the study indicated that the participants did not define play in the same way, and as a result play concept did not have a common definition. In the current study, the results showed that the participants provided various aspects of play while defining it. These findings were also consistent with the study of Zhulamanova and Raisor (2020). Regarding the play course enrollment, the results relatively indicated that play definitions became more detailed when their grade level increased because they took play course after second year of their study. This might be related to changing play perceptions of them. Jung and Jin (2014) carried out a study about pre-service teachers' play perceptions in ECE classrooms and investigated the effects of the year of study and play course enrollment on their play perceptions. Similar to the current study results, Jung and Jin (2014) also argued that play perceptions of the participants revealed a particularly different pattern during their education involving taking play courses. Consequently, different play perceptions of participants emerging from their grade level and play course enrollment might have an impact on the participants' responses regarding play definition.

Additionally, the functions of play were examined through quantitative and qualitative studies. Regarding the functions of play, the majority of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *"play is a child's means of discovering*

herself/himself and the world" (Q6). Also, it was found a significant relationship between the responses of the participants regarding the play course enrollment. Additionally, the statement *"play is a natural process in which children reflect their personal interests, needs, and curiosities and develop it by using their own experiences"* (Q18) revealed a significant relationship in terms of play course enrollment as well. To be more precise, the participants who took a play course generally thought play as a tool for discovering and self-reflections comparing to the participants who did not take a play course. Moreover, for the Q6, the rate of their responses increased from the freshmen to the seniors. Interestingly, while almost all the juniors agreed to the Q6, this rate relatively decreased for the seniors. Similarly, in the study of Jung and Jin (2014), the total play perceptions scores of the participants who took a play course and who did not take it were compared by considering the year of study. The play perceptions positively increased for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. However, the play perception scores of seniors did not show a significant increase (Jung & Jin, 2014). It showed that their play perceptions might change by the year of study. Also, it can be deduced that being close to the graduation might have affected their play perceptions in parallel with the current study findings. Briefly, it can be inferred that the participants generally perceived play as a tool for discovering and self-expressions either little or more. In parallel with the quantitative findings, the qualitative results also showed that participants generally stated play is a way of self-expression, discovery, curiosity, and emotional expression. Doğan-Altun (2018) also carried out a study with pre-service teachers to understand their perspectives on play and teacher roles where it was concluded that pre-service teachers got help from the functions and features of play while explaining it. The study results concluded that the participants saw play as a way of self-expression, learning, and entertainment (Doğan-Altun, 2018).

Play can be seen as a teaching strategy, and there might be numerous benefits to using it in that way (Aras & Merdin, 2020). In this respect, some of the participants defined play as a teaching and learning tool in the present study. In the quantitative data, the majority of the participants also strongly agreed with the statements "*play is a primarily effective teaching tool for children*" (Q3) and *"the most powerful aspect of playing is that children construct new learning while playing"* (Q12). Similarly, as

clarified in the study of Doğan-Altun (2018), the ECE pre-service teachers frequently identified play as a strategy for teaching pre-established objectives, goals, and skills. In contrast to Doğan-Altun's (2018) study, a qualitative phenomenological study carried out by Rodriguez-Meehan (2021) investigated a small number of pre-service teachers' perceptions of play in their senior year. The data was collected through interviews, field notes, artifacts, and document analysis. The study results showed that pre-service teachers had difficulty in making a connection between play and learning if the activities did not contain academic things obviously (Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). Unlike this, in the current study, most of the participants indicated play as a teaching tool or a joyful way to learn. Moreover, the current study results revealed that the participants would use play by integrating concepts into play, reinforcing and embodying learning. Interestingly, some of the freshmen and sophomores who did not take a play course struggled to explain how to use play in their future classrooms. Also, while one sophomore said she had just started to take a play course and currently learning, one freshman stated she was only a 1st grade and did not know how to use play. The reason for it might be the lack of experience or knowledge because they had not taken a play course yet. Jung and Jin (2015) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between taking play courses and the tendency to integrate play into their future classrooms. The participants took a play course before, and the data was collected quantitatively. The study results revealed that pre-service teachers who attended a play course during their education were more likely to have positive play perceptions. Also, they would have a strong tendency to integrate play into their future practices (Jung & Jin, 2015). On the other hand, the participants who took a play course provided more detailed responses. For instance, they focused on using play as a curriculum, reinforcing features of play and the play-generated curriculum/curriculum-generated play concepts clarified by Johnson et al. (1999). According to them, there might be two possible relationships between play and the curriculum. Firstly, play shapes the curriculum and helps teachers in identifying children's needs or interests during play. In this way, a play-generated curriculum occurs. Also, the opposite is possible. The teachers can use play while teaching a concept and planning the curriculum, and hereby the curriculum-generated play emerges (Johnson et al., 1999). In the current study, the participants who attended a play course might gain theoretical knowledge about how

to use play as a curriculum through play course, and their extensive statements may come from the play course contents. Along this line, play courses could be beneficial for using play as a teaching tool.

While describing a play, using its features provides a broad framework to understand it easily. Along this line, the participants discussed the question of what is not play first because it is just as crucial to know what play is not as to know what it is (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2006). In this respect, the majority of the participants gave negative statements such as bullying, violence, and sexual things as they are not seen as play. Also, they said digital things, boring activities, structured and competitive things, and lastly, gambling/chance games are not a play. Eberle (2014) indicated the elements of play and non-play from the evolutionary perspective. According to him, play should have six features involving anticipation, understanding, surprise, poise, strength, and pleasure to be considered a play. Besides, the activities that lack in these features and bullying are not seen as play (Eberle, 2014). Additionally, Armstrong (2015) as the advocate of developmentally appropriate practices in learning and development, compiled that digital things, competitive sports, board games such as Scrabble and purposeful play are not considered as play. The current study findings also showed a consensus with the "not play" elements and other criteria stated by studies (Armstrong, 2015; Eberle, 2014).

Afterward, the participants articulated the features of play to explain what it is. In the quantitative part, the majority of the participants in the current study also strongly agreed with the following statements "*children should participate in play voluntarily and play the way they want*" (Q2), "*play is a primarily fun activity for children*" (Q4), and "*children become master in their play, progressing from the simple to the complex*" (Q9). In this respect, it can be inferred that participants identified features of play as voluntarily, funny and progressive action. On the other hand, during the interview protocol, the participants frequently stated these features of play as well and expanded those findings by adding various other features such as educational, hands-on, social, happy, active, and safe. In the current study, the overwhelming consensus of the participants was the fun aspect of play; however, the participants who did not take a play course generally focused on the educational aspects of play

as well. Interestingly, a junior participant who took a play course stated play has to be educative rather than entertaining in early childhood years. Similarly, Doğan-Altun (2018) also examined what play is with ECE pre-service teachers. The study results indicated that senior pre-service teachers (the participants took a play course as well) identified play as a primarily funny and secondarily educational activity. Similar to current study results, play course enrollment might have an impact on their perceptions of play regarding its features because they prioritized the fun aspect of play rather than the educative aspect. Furthermore, as clarified by Rodriguez-Meehan (2021), who investigated what play is and its features, the pre-service teachers were knowledgeable about play characteristics and provided consistent responses with the other studies, and accepted definitions of play (Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). Moreover, McLane (2003) also conducted a project to investigate beliefs on play and interviewed with early childhood teachers. They also explained the qualities of play as joyful, independent, hands-on, unstructured, interactive, free, and exploratory (McLane, 2003). Thus, it can be concluded that the various studies revealed the features of play are common involving fun, joy, freedom, exploration, and educative (Doğan-Altun, 2018; McLane, 2003; Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). In the current study, the findings revealed consistency with those studies. It might be concluded that play needs to have specific features such as funny, free, educative, hands-on, and happy to be considered as play.

Play is an essential activity for children and their development (Ginsburg, 2007). For this reason, understanding how pre-service teachers perceive play and to what extent they put emphasis on play is also essential. In the current study, the participants also explained the importance of play. Regarding the importance of play, most participants strongly agreed with the statement, "*the most important aspect of playing is that it makes a positive contribution to children cognitively*" (Q5). In the qualitative data, cognitive contributions of play, including learning, language acquisition, and school readiness, were also frequently stated by the participants. In addition, most of the participants also marked strongly agree with the statements *"play where children can explore themselves and the world, are the most useful play for them"* (Q15) and *"the changings in the developmental areas of children (cognitive, affective, social, moral, language and sexual development) change the*

structure of play they will play" (Q19). In parallel with these results, in the current study, some of the participants also indicated the importance of play in self-knowledge and self-exploration during the interview. Thus, there was a consistency between the quantitative and qualitative findings in this sense. In the current study, the participants generally stated the importance of play in the developmental areas and provided more than one benefit at the same time. This revealed that making a generalization is challenging in terms of play course enrollment. However, it can be said that they were aware of the developmental benefits of play from starting to the ECE program. The only attention-grabbing thing is that they focused on the different benefits of play. For instance, some primarily stated the physical contributions are more, while some focused on the social benefits of play more. These priorities might change depending on their personal opinions, or the year of study and play course enrollment might have effects on participants' responses. However, Jung and Jin (2014) studied with pre-service teachers and examined how they think about play, including the importance of play, play in learning and play as a curriculum subdimensions. Interestingly, the study results showed that the pre-service teachers' perceptions on the value of play were not significantly different from those of freshmen and seniors. However, it was clear that the participants in that study, ranging from freshmen to seniors, valued play in early childhood education (Jung & Jin, 2014). The current study results also concluded similar findings. The participants provided comprehensive responses regarding the importance of play because they might have an awareness about the value of play. Recently, Aras and Merdin (2020) conducted a phenomenological study that examined how early childhood teachers perceive play-based practices. The study findings about the roles of play indicated that play is an essential activity for children's learning and development (Aras & Merdin, 2020). Moreover, similar to the current study findings, while some of the participants stated play contributed to all developmental areas of children, some of them focused on the benefits of play on a specific developmental area such as cognitive development (Aras & Merdin, 2020). The study of Aras and Merdin (2020) also concluded that although the teachers emphasized on various aspects of play, they usually considered play as a valuable tool for promoting young children's development. In the current study, the participants also had parallel views on the importance of play as similar with the various studies that supported this idea and

extrapolated that the teachers believe in the importance of play and play-based activities (Nicolopoulou, 2011; Lynch, 2015; Aras & Merdin, 2020). Briefly, in the current study, the participants' responses did not show a significant difference in the importance of play in terms of the play course enrollment. For this reason, making a generalization is challenging in this respect.

5.1.2. The Originality of Play

The second theme namely the originality of play includes the teachers' involvement in play, the importance of play materials, and playtime planning. In this respect, teacher involvement in play was discussed first. Afterward, the importance of play materials and playtime planning were discussed respectively.

Teacher involvement in children's play is crucial for their development and enriching play. For this reason, the participants' views about teacher involvement and their roles in play were taken in this study. In the quantitative part, there was a statistically significant relationship between participants' responses to the statement *"teacher involvement in play is important for children getting high benefit from play"* (Q10) in terms of play course enrollment. Similarly, the statement *"teachers need to be involved in play as well for play to be fun and exciting*" (Q14) showed a significant relationship as well. Also, during the interview, the participants generally articulated that teachers should involve in children's play because their involvement supports play and makes it more joyful. As stated in a study from a sociocultural viewpoint, the participation of teachers or other adults can positively affect children's play and learning (Doğan-Altun, 2018). Also, children's play skills may be improved, and their social, cognitive, and linguistic development can be enhanced through teacher involvement (Enz & Christie, 1993). At this point, the Vygotskian play perspective gains importance. Teachers' involvement and their interaction with children are necessary to construct the ZPD. If the teachers do not involve in play, the creation of this form would be challenging (Aras, 2016). As Jones and Reynolds (2011) claimed, when teachers participate in children's play as a co-player, they can scaffold children's development during play, and as a result, children get more benefits from play. The study results of Jones and Reynolds (2011) and the current study results

have consistency in that teachers' involvement in play has a critical role so that children could get more benefits. However, teachers' views on teacher participation in play and their actual practices might be different. Vu et al. (2015) stated that although teachers believe in the value of play for child development and learning, they have challenges in participating in and expanding children's play. According to Vu and colleagues (2015), there is a huge gap between teachers' beliefs about play and their actual classroom practices. In this respect, the current study results summarized that teacher involvement is critical, especially in necessary situations, similar to the findings of Doğan-Altun (2018). Regarding play course, the participants' views on teachers' roles changed in some situations. During the interviews, the participants who took a play course generally stated the supportive teacher roles involving onlooker, co-player, play leader, and stage manager as classified by Johnson et al. (1999). Also, some of the participants who took a play course stated that teachers' roles need to change by curricular needs and play types. On the other hand, only two participants who did not take a play course indicated precarious ones as director and instructor roles in play. In addition, during the interviews, most of the participants explained that the teachers should participate in children's play as a co-player or observer, while a few of them stated they should involve in play only in critical situations such as bullying. Doğan-Altun (2018) also investigated the perceptions of senior pre-service teachers about the roles of teachers in play. The roles of teachers were categorized under three categories, and the majority of the participants stated that teachers should be partially involved in children's play. For instance, the teacher can involve in play when children need an assistance or problematic situations occur in play (Doğan-Altun, 2018). These findings are also consistent with the current study results. Furthermore, Kandemir (2020) investigated the early childhood teachers' roles in outdoor play through semi-structured interviews. The study results showed teachers stated generally supportive roles involving co-player, stage manager, play leader, and onlooker roles and a precarious role involving director/ instructor role in a play (Kandemir, 2020). In parallel with those findings, the current study also concluded pre-service teachers generally believe in supportive roles during play, and play course enrollment might have an impact on their perceptions about the teacher roles in play.

Besides teacher involvement, play materials play a significant role in enriching and supporting children's play (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). In the current study, there were different views of the participants in terms of the roles of play materials. For instance, there were fluctuations in participants' responses to the statement *"the child needs special toys and technological materials to benefit from play at the highest level"* (Q17). In other words, while some participants agreed with the statement, some of them did not. Also, regarding play course enrollment, a statistically significant relationship was found between participants' responses. To be more precise, the participants who took a play course thought children do not need special toys and materials more than the participants who did not take it. In the qualitative study, the results concluded the participants believed that play materials are necessary to support children's development and enrich play, while some of the participants stated the materials had no role in play. Regarding the roles of play materials, the participants generally reported that play materials could enrich play and support development, learning, and creativity. However, the majority of the freshmen and sophomores struggled to explain the roles of play. Instead, they stated the characteristics of play materials. Most of the participants who took a play course pointed to supportive and enriching roles of play materials. Recently, Nilsen (2021) interviewed with the teachers to investigate their views about the accessibility of play materials in ECE classrooms. The majority of the participants concluded that if play materials are available in the classrooms, they enrich children's play and support their development and learning (Nilsen, 2021). The current study results have a consistency with the study results of Nilsen (2021). In addition, play materials, including toys, might influence the quality of children's play. In a study of Trawick-Smith et al. (2015), it was investigated the influences of nine toys on the quality of 60 children's play through 240 hours of video recordings. The findings were coded with the Play Quality with Toys (PQT) instrument developed by Trawick-Smith et al. (2011). The study results revealed that play materials had an impact on the quality of play by depending on play materials (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). However, it was also concluded that each toy enhanced play in a different way because the way of playing changed regarding the children's cultural background, gender, or socio-economic status (Trawick-Smith et al., 2015). In parallel with this study results, some of the participants also stated that the play materials enhance children's play in

different ways in the current study. Additionally, since the participants of the current study will be future teachers in the classrooms, the MoNE (2013) program will guide them. In this respect, the MoNE (2013) also pointed out it is important to offer children a variety of play materials with which they can create a new and original play.

Planning of playtime might be a critical role in maintaining play in early childhood education. Accordingly, understanding the pre-service teachers' perceptions of the time and structure of play also gains importance. In the current study, the participants provided more profound responses and generally focused on two aspects of planning playtime: the structure of playtime and the time of play. However, the majority of the participants who took a play course stated that planning of playtime should depend on the curricular needs and play type, and it should be balanced. As clarified by MoNE (2013), playtime should be balanced so that children can get higher benefits from different types of play in terms of structure. In this respect, in the qualitative study, only a few numbers of participants mentioned about the structured play and rules. On the other hand, most participants agreed with the statement *"playing has a more important role than structured activities in children's learning processes"* (Q13), while a limited number of them disagreed with the statement in the quantitative part of the study. Also, another statement, *"children have to obey the rules of play while playing "*(Q1), had fluctuations in terms of participants' responses. In other words, some participants thought children need to obey the rules of play, while some of them stated they need to be free in play. Interestingly, one of the freshmen stated he did not think children could understand all the rules, so play should not be structured. There were various viewpoints of the participants from freshmen to seniors. Therefore, there was no common sense in terms of play course enrollment about the structure of play in the current study. Similarly, there are different views about the structure of play in the literature. For instance, Weisberg et al. (2013) concluded that guided play, which is located between direct instruction and free play, is more effective than direct instruction or free play because it involves adult scaffolding beside the child-directed activities (Weisberg et al., 2013). Similarly, Fisher et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine 4-5 years old children's shape knowledge which acquired through free play, guided play, and direct

instruction methods. The study results showed that children learned shapes, and their shape knowledge was more permanent when they learned with a scaffold in a guided play (Fisher et al., 2013). On the other hand, Meran (2019) conducted a study with ECE pre-service teachers to investigate their beliefs about free play and their roles during free playtime. The results showed that the pre-service teachers believed in the importance and necessity of free play (Meran, 2019). Apart from that, some studies showed that structured play is critical for child development, especially for their social development and learning rules and routines (Chatzipanteli & Adamakis, 2022). Also, Matson (2007) commented that direct instruction or structured activities might be the best way to teach something to individuals with special needs. By considering these studies, it could be inferred that structures of play need to be balanced and changed in terms of children's needs and curricular goals.

Additionally, the participants pointed out the time of playtime as in the mornings, during the whole day, and between activities. MoNE (2013) also determined that free play time is planned generally in the mornings after the greeting ceremony. Also, MoNE 2013 program also offers that all activities should be organized as play-based because play is the most suitable learning method for children in the early years. Aras and Merdin (2020) investigated the ECE teachers' play-based teaching practices through observations and interviews. Regarding the place of play in their daily programs, the participants of the study asserted that they started with free playtime in the mornings and always provided opportunities for children to engage in free play. Also, the participants noted they always integrate play into other activities in their daily program. In addition, the study revealed that teachers might use different strategies in play. For instance, while some of them used highly structured play, one stated play as a warm-up activity for the next one (Aras & Merdin, 2020).

Planning playtime is a controversial topic in the literature. The current study results also showed the various perspectives of the participants on playtime. The only attention-grabbing thing was the majority of the participants, especially those who took a play course, believed in the importance of playtime in the ECE classrooms and stated play structures should be balanced and planned by considering children's

needs and curriculum goals. These findings aligned with the current ECE program principles clarified by MoNE (2013).

5.1.3. The Nature of Play

The last theme namely the nature of play includes the information sources and past and present play memories to understand play perceptions. In this respect, the information sources of play were discussed firstly. Afterward, the past and present play memories which contributed to perceptions of play were discussed.

As future professionals, the pre-service teachers' information about play comes from various sources besides the previous knowledge that they bring from early childhood experiences. In order to understand the pedagogical value of play and develop their own play perceptions, the pre-service teachers use various information resources involving play-related courses, past and present play memories, and additional activities for professional development such as in-service training, certificate programs, or conferences. Additionally, Jung and Jin (2015) asserted that pre-service teachers' play perceptions are influenced by their education which they received in college, play-related courses, and childhood memories of play. Thus, in the current study, the quality and quantity of information sources were discussed, and the majority of the participants had limited ideas about the statement *"in order to understand the pedagogical value of play, the information resources about it are sufficient in terms of quality and quantity"* (Q7). Regarding the information resources about play, a few numbers of participants attended a seminar, certificate programs, or congress. Similarly, a limited number of participants followed the play-related media content. In this respect, the only information source of them was play courses in the ECE teacher education program. According to the Council of Higher Education (2018), to become an early childhood education teacher, it is required to complete 240 ECTS in Türkiye. However, there is only one compulsory play course in the program, and it consists of 3 ECTS, all of which are theoretical. In the program of 240 ECTS, a single play course with 3 ECTS represents a drop in the ocean. Moreover, the objectives of play course are to provide a conceptual framework for the definition and importance of play, play development, play theories, and planning

of play activities and applications of it. However, in the current study, most of the participants focused on the incompetency of play course in terms of practical implications. In parallel with these findings, Şahin et al. (2013) examined pre-service teachers' opinions about ECE teacher education programs to determine the current state of them in Türkiye. The study results also showed that there is only one play course, and it is evaluated as insufficient and lack in practice. Additionally, Bartan (2019) reached similar findings and concluded that the duration and content of play course need to be enriched. It was also suggested that at least one play course in the teacher education programs is necessary (Jung & Jin, 2014).

The results of the qualitative data demonstrated that play course enrollment had positive impact on the participants' theoretical knowledge, perspectives, and self-confidence. Similar to these findings, Clevenger (2016) conducted a study to investigate pre-service early childhood teachers' beliefs about play and the differences between their beliefs regarding class year. The study results indicated that the higher education experiences including play course enrollment shaped the participants' belief about play. Similarly, Clark and Newberry (2019) clarified that teacher education programs contribute to building teachers' self-efficacy. In the current study, one of the participants stated that play course increased her self-confidence while implementing play activities in practicum. In this respect, taking play course may affect the participants' self-efficacy and self-confidence. Also, the teachers' self-confidence (Walsh et al., 2010) and self-efficacy beliefs are associated with their classroom practices (Howard, 2010; Jung et al., 2017). Thus, it can be inferred that play course enrollment affected the participants' perceptions of play and implementations of it.

The current study results also pointed out a significant matter about the play course during distance education because of the pandemic. Most of the juniors and seniors stated that play course provided theoretical knowledge for them, new perspectives, and increased their self-confidence. However, they also asserted that play course content was lack in practice, and it was not very effective because of the pandemic. Thus, distance education may negatively affect the participants' educational processes, including play course. In a study carried out by Karakaya et al. (2021), the

positive and negative impacts of distance education in the pandemic on the educational process were investigated. As stated by the students, the ineffectiveness of education, adaptation problems to the process, and lack of technological substructure were the negative influences of the pandemic on education (Karakaya et al., 2021). Also, studies extrapolated that some of the students confronted technical and financial difficulties and could not attend in courses (Barburtlu, 2020; Kaya-Durna & Akın-Kösterelioğlu, 2021). In light of these studies, the participants may have encountered problems in attending play courses, and their absence might also affect their play perceptions.

Teachers' perceptions of play may also consist of past and present play memories. The studies showed that pre-service teachers' play perceptions are affected by childhood memories of play in addition to the education that they receive (Klugman, 1996; Jung & Jin, 2015). Clevenger (2016) also studied with early childhood freshmen and seniors to examine their beliefs about play and the differences between their beliefs regarding class year. The participants frequently exemplified their responses with their past experiences. For this reason, the study results concluded that pre-service teachers' past play memories might shape their play beliefs (Clevenger, 2016). Similarly, in the current study, some of the participants also stated their previous play experiences. Regarding their past play memories, the participants indicated that they mostly engaged in physical play, object play, pretend play, and social play, while a few of them played online games in the past. On the other hand, about half of them shared their current play memories, and some stated they do not play. The current play memories consist mostly of online games, table games, and board games, while the limited numbers of physical play. Tuğrul et al. (2014) studied the changings in play culture in three generations, from grandparents to grandchildren. Similar to the current study's findings, the results revealed that physical, social, and outdoor play left its place to the technological things and online games. As a result, participants' playing habits also changed (Tuğrul et al., 2014). In relation to that, about half of the participants disagreed with the statement *"instead of discovering a new play, children prefer play they have always had fun"* (Q8) in the quantitative study. By considering the participants' responses, there was partially consensus between their past-present play memories and responses to the statement.

Randall and Maeda (2010) investigated the effects of elementary education pre-service teachers' past experiences with the physical education (PE) on their current beliefs. The results showed that their past experiences affected their thoughts about PE and their intention to use it (Randall & Maeda, 2010). Similarly, it could be inferred that the past play experiences had an impact on pre-service teachers' play perceptions and intentions to use it. For instance, in the current study, a junior participant faced a traumatic experience while playing in his childhood. He stated he was bullied all the time, and his parent did not allow him to play outside. He thought play should be educative, highly structured, not free, and not always funny and articulated as "it should not be free. If they released free, they could face bad experiences like mine". Furthermore, some participants stated that children should play outside as they did in their childhood. Thus, it can be deduced that previous play experiences might be affected their play perceptions.

Regarding the summary of all findings related to play course enrollment, it can be inferred that they have an impact on the participants' play perceptions, either little or more. Similar studies also concluded that play perceptions changes in terms of the year of study and play course enrollment (Jung & Jin, 2014; Jung & Jin, 2015; Doğan-Altun, 2018). Additionally, previous play experiences may contribute to the participants' perception of play (Klugman, 1996; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010; Clevenger, 2016).

5.2. Conclusion

The current study demonstrated that play perceptions of pre-service teachers could be affected by their play course enrollment. As clarified above, the pre-service teacher struggled to define play concept and expressed its characteristics and developmental contributions of play. Furthermore, the characteristics which specified by the participants are parallel with the universal features of play. The study results also revealed that pre-service teachers believed in the importance of play which is necessary for the holistic development of children in terms of improving socio-emotional, intellectual, and physical skills.

Regarding the influencing factors of play, the study findings showed various factors: child-related, environment-related, or adult-related. In the current study, teacher roles during play were also examined. The current study concluded that teacher roles are changing and shaped by children's needs, play type, or curriculum in ECE. Moreover, the roles of play materials were investigated, and it was found that they had positive contributions to play. Surprisingly, the study also revealed that materials are not necessary all the time because children have their imagination and creativity.

In addition, the study results about playtime planning indicated there were two points: the time and structure of play. It can be concluded that playtime planning involves time and structure. Also, the MoNE (2013) program provides flexibility to the teachers while planning playtime in terms of time and type. The current study deduced that pre-service teachers' perceptions might change, and the ECE program allows it. Additionally, the study results showed that pre-service teachers are aware of the function of play as a teaching tool. Most of them thought that play was the funniest and best way to learn and teach. Moreover, play course have positive effects on pre-service teachers' play perceptions. However, the current study extrapolated the lack of play course content in terms of practical implications.

5.3. Implications

The main focus of this study is to provide research on early childhood pre-service teachers' perceptions of play and the effects of their involvement in play course on their play perceptions. Accordingly, a mixed-method approach has been used with questionnaire and interviews to provide a framework about pre-service teachers' play perceptions. The current study results might lead to significant implications for higher education.

The current study results provide implications for higher education. Since teachers' perception of play influences their future practices (Jung & Jin, 2015), higher education should be cognizant when it comes to providing play-based theories and implications through the well-prepared teacher education program. If the necessary importance is given during the training period, then pre-service teachers will be well

equipped to apply play in their future classroom practices. The study results indicated the importance of play course and play course enrollment significantly affected participants' play perceptions. For this reason, the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) might make some arrangements, and the course content for play and play-based learning can be developed and enriched to contribute to pre-service teachers' play perceptions. For instance, play course credits might be increased in higher education, especially in early childhood education. In addition, as concluded in the study results, play courses generally provide theoretical knowledge rather than practical applications. The CoHE can develop policies to enrich the course content in terms of practical applications of play.

In order to increase the value of play in classrooms, the investigation of play perceptions of in-service teachers is significant as well as pre-service teachers' play perceptions. Recently, Günay- Bilaloğlu et al. (2022) conducted a study that examined the early childhood teachers' views and practices about circle time and play time determined by the current early childhood education program. The study results showed that the teachers did not fully understand play time and circle time in terms of concept, purpose and practice. Also, the teachers were preparing to the next activities during play time instead of observing children and attending in play (Günay- Bilaloğlu et al., 2022). In this respect, in-service trainings and professional development activities can be provided for ECE teachers who did not take a play course or those who took before a long time ago to refresh their knowledge on play and its applications.

5.4. Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Studies

Like in all scientific studies, the current study had some limitations. The first one was the limitation originated from the sample. According to the sample size limitation stated by Fraenkel et al. (2012), although the sample size was adequate for the first and second parts of the study, the first part of the study required more participants to make a generalization. Thus, the first sample originated limitation was the limited number of participants who attended the first part of the study. In order to make a more accurate generalization, the number of participants can be increased in

future studies. Moreover, even though the pilot study was conducted before the data collection, some participants had difficulty in understanding some of the interview questions and sharing profound responses. In further studies, the researcher might use additional data collection tools to deepen and exemplify research questions such as short cases.

Furthermore, play course content was not examined in the current study. In future studies, play course content might be examined in order to analyze and discuss the study results in depth. Besides, teacher educators' perspectives might be useful about how the course distribution should be in higher education. For this reason, the interviews might be carried out with teacher educators in future studies.

Additionally, the study was conducted in a single school located in the western black sea region in Türkiye. This may have affected the results and generalizability of the study. For this reason, in order to increase the generalizability of the study, this study might be conducted with large samples from different regions of Türkiye and other countries in future studies. Moreover, some of the participants also pointed to the parent's attitudes toward children's play. The parents' play perception might have an impact on children's play behaviors and teachers' implications. In further studies, the effects of parent's play perceptions on teachers' implications and children's play also might be investigated.

Besides, this study was conducted right after the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, about half of the participants took play course through distance education. This might have influenced their perceptions of and obviously the results of the study. For this reason, the distance education during pandemic could be another limitation of the current study.

Finally, this study was conducted with early childhood pre-service teachers only. In future studies, in-service teachers also might be included to compare their play perceptions with pre-service teachers regarding professional experience in the field. Also, the observation method can be included in order to investigate how they

perceive play and what they actually do in the classrooms. This might be examined with a longitudinal study in the future.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

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29 EYLÜL 2021

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Serap SEVİMLİ ÇELİK

Danışmanlığının yürüttüğünüz Ezgi ÇİFTÇİ'nin "Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Öğretmen Adaylarının Oyun Algıları " başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **379-ODTU-2021** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Dr.Öğretim Üyesi Ali Emre TURGUT
İAEK Başkan Vekili

APPENDIX B: THE PLAY PERCEPTION SCALE

DEMOGRAFİK BİLGİ FORMU

Yaşınız: ……..

Cinsiyetiniz: [ ] Kadın [ ] Erkek

Mezun Olduğunuz Lise Türü

[ ] Meslek Lisesi-Çocuk Gelişimi Bölümü [ ] Çok Programlı Anadolu Lisesi

[ ] Anadolu lisesi [ ] İmam Hatip Lisesi

[ ] Anadolu Öğretmen Lisesi [ ] Açık Öğretim Lisesi

[ ] Sosyal Bilimler Lisesi [ ] Diğer: ……

Sınıfınız:

[ ] 1. Sınıf [ ] 3. Sınıf

[ ] 2. Sınıf [ ] 4. Sınıf

Çocukluğunuzun geçtiği yeri nasıl tanımlarsınız?

[ ] Köy [ ] İlçe

[ ] Kasaba [ ] İl

<u>Şu an</u> çocuklar ile iletişimde bulunmanızı gerektiren herhangi bir işte çalışıyor musunuz?

[ ] Oyun-ablalığı [ ] Yarı-zamanlı öğretmenlik

[ ] Diğer: ……

Lisans eğitiminiz (veya önlisans) süresince oyun ile ilgili ders veya dersler aldınız mı?

[ ] Evet [ ] Hayır

Cevabınız <u>evet</u> ise dersin / derslerin isimlerini yazar mısınız?

……

……

Oyun konusunda profesyonel gelişiminize dair aşağıdaki etkinliklerden herhangi birine katıldınız mı?

[ ] Seminer [ ] Sertifika Programı

[ ] Kongre [ ] Diğer: ……

Oyun konusunda takip ettiğiniz bir dergi, web sitesi, uzman veya eğitim yaklaşımı var mı?

[ ] Evet [ ] Hayır

Cevabınız <u>evet</u> ise lütfen adını ve ne kadar süredir takip ettiğinizi yazınız?

……

……..……..

Çocukken oynadığınız oyunlar nelerdir? Örnek verir misiniz?

……..……..……

……..…….

Günlük rutininizi düşündüğünüzde şu an hangi oyunları oynuyorsunuz?

……

……..……...

Oyun……..

Çalışmanın ilerleyen aşamalarında sizinle iletişime geçmemizi ister misiniz?

[ ] Evet [ ] Hayır

Yukarıdaki soruya cevabınız "<u>evet</u>" ise lütfen aşağıdaki iletişim bilgilerinden birini doldurunuz.

E-mail: …….

Tel: .....

Oyun Algısı Ölçeği

Sevgili katılımcılar, oyunun felsefesine ilişkin görüşlerinizi incelemeyi amaçladığımız bu ölçekte 20 madde bulunmaktadır ve **her bir maddeyi** <u>*sadece tek bir seçenek*</u> şeklinde "içtenlikle" yanıtlamanız araştırmamızın geçerliliği ve güvenirliği açısından son derece önemlidir. Yardımlarınız için teşekkür ederiz.

	Oyun Algısı Ölçeği (OAÖ)	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum	Katılmıyorum	Kararsızım	Katılıyorum	Kesinlikle Katılıyorum
1	Çocuklar oyun oynarken oyunun kurallarına uymak zorundadır.					
2	Çocukların oyunlara gönüllü olarak katılması ve istediği şekilde oynaması gerekir.					
3	Oyun çocuklar için öncelikli olarak etkili bir öğretim aracıdır.					
4	Oyun çocuklar için öncelikli olarak eğlenceli bir uğraştır.					
5	Oyun oynamanın en önemli yanı, çocuklara bilişsel açıdan olumlu katkı sağlamasıdır.					
6	Oyun, çocuğun kendini ve dünyayı keşfetme aracıdır.					
7	Oyunla ilgili bilgi kaynakları oyunun pedagojik değerini anlayabilmemiz açısından nitelik ve nicelik olarak yeterlidir.					
8	Çocuklar yeni bir oyun keşfetmek yerine her zaman eğlenerek oynadıkları oyunları oynamayı tercih ederler.					
9	Çocuklar oyunlarında, basitten karmaşığa doğru ilerleyen bir süreçte ustalaşırlar.					
10	Öğretmenin oyuna katılımı çocuğun oyundan yüksek yarar sağlamasında önemlidir.					
11	Çocukların oyunlarda eğlenmesi için oyuna kendiliğinden dâhil olması gerekmez.					
12	Oyun oynamanın en güçlü yanı, oyun oynarken çocukların yeni öğrenmeleri yapılandırmasıdır.					
13	Çocukların öğrenme süreçlerinde, oyun oynamak, yapılandırılmış etkinliklerden daha önemli bir rol oynar.					
14	Oyunların eğlenceli ve heyecan verici olması için öğretmenlerinde oyunlara katılması gerekir.					
15	Çocuklar için en faydalı oyunlar, kendilerini ve dünyayı keşfedebildikleri oyunlardır.					
16	Oyun oynama sürecinde çocuklarda oyunun beklenen olumlu kazanımlarının gözlenmemesi, oyunun çocuk için yararlı olmadığını gösterir.					
17	Çocuğun oyundan en üst seviyede yararlanabilmesi için özel oyuncaklara ve teknolojik materyallere gereksinimi vardır.					
18	Oyun çocukların kişisel ilgi, gereksinim ve meraklarını yansıttıkları ve kendi tecrübelerini kullanarak geliştirdikleri doğal bir süreçtir.					

19	Çocukların gelişim alanlarındaki (bilişsel, duyuşsal, sosyal, ahlak, dil ve cinsel gelişimlerinin) değişimleri oynayacakları oyunların yapısını değiştirir.					
20	Çocuğun kendiliğinden dâhil olmadığı, gönüllü olarak katılmadığı eylem oyun değildir.					

APPENDIX C: THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Merhaba ben Ezgi ÇİFTÇİ, Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi'nde yüksek lisans yapıyorum. "Okul Öncesi Öğretmen Adaylarının Oyun Algıları" üzerine bir araştırma yapıyorum.

Çalışmanın amacı: Bu çalışma ile okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını ve bu algılarının üzerinde etkili olan değişkenler saptanmaktır.

Bu mülakatın sonuçları yukarıda belirtilen amaç doğrultusunda yüksek lisans tezinde Ezgi ÇİFTÇİ tarafından kullanılacaktır. Toplanan verilen hiçbir kimse ile paylaşılmayacak ve herhangi bir notlandırma yapılmayacaktır.

DEMOGRAFİK SORULAR

Bana kısaca kendinden bahseder misin?

1. Çocukluğun çoğunlukla nerede geçmişti? (Köy, kasaba, ilçe, il?)
2. Peki, büyüdüğün yerin oyunlarını etkilediğini düşünüyor musun?
3. Oyun ile ilgili sevdiğin bir anın varsa anlatabilir misin? Bu anıyı senin için unutulmaz (ya da özel ya da değerli) yapan nedir? Veya Çocukken keyif alarak oynadığın, aklında kalan bir oyun var mı? Bu kadar aklında kalmasının sebebi nedir? (ısınma sorusu, rahatlatma ve samimiyet kurma için)
4. Daha önceden okul öncesi dönemindeki çocukların oyun zamanını gözlemleme şansın oldu mu? Evet ise;
   Nerede? Ne kadar süre? Senin rolün neydi?
   Çocukların oyunları ile ilgili dikkatini neler çekti?

MÜLAKAT SORULARI

1. Oyun dersiniz ile ilgili başlayalım. (Dersi alan grup için). Bu dersi almanız oyun ile ilgili düşüncelerinizi nasıl etkiledi?
2. Dönem başını ve dönem sonunu karşılaştırdığınızda bu dersi almak oyunla ilgili bakış açınızda herhangi bir değişim yarattı mı?

Bu ilk 2 soru ile ders deneyiminizi öğrendik. Şimdi de oyun ile ilgili bilgilerinizi ve düşüncelerinizi merak ediyorum oyun tanımı sorusuyla başlayalım.

3. Okul öncesi dönemde oyunu nasıl tanımlarsın?
4. Oyun her zaman eğlenceli midir? Neden?
5. Oyun ne değildir? Neler oyun sayılmaz? (Prob Q: Bir şeyin oyun sayılması için kriterleriniz nelerdir?)
6. Okul öncesi dönemde oyunun gelişimsel açıdan ne gibi katkıları olabilir? (Prob Q: Başka hangi açılardan katkıları vardır?)
7. Çocukların oynadıkları oyunları etkileyen faktörler nelerdir? (Prob Q: peki bu faktörlerin oyuna nasıl bir ektisi vardır?)
8. Okul öncesi dönemde oyun zamanı nasıl planlanmalıdır? **(**Prob Q: Yapılandırılmalı mı? Serbest mi olmalı?)
9. Okul öncesi dönemde oyun zamanında öğretmenin rolü nedir? (Prob Q: Öğretmenin katılımı nasıl olmalıdır?)
10. Okul öncesi dönemde oyun zamanında oyun materyallerinin/oyuncakların rolü nedir?
11. Okul öncesinde bir kavram ya da başka bir şey öğretirken oyunu nasıl kullanırsın?

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Araştırmaya Gönüllü Katılım Formu

Bu çalışma ODTÜ Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Bölümü yüksek lisans öğrencisi Ezgi ÇİFTÇİ tarafından yürütülmektedir. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir?

Çalışmanın asıl amacı, okul öncesi eğitimi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını araştırmaktır. Ayrıca bu çalışmada oyunun fonksiyonu, kaynağı, amacı gibi görüşlere de yer verilecektir. Bunlara ek olarak, diğer değişkenlerin (sınıf düzeyi, cinsiyet, yaş, oyun dersi alıp almama vb.) okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını ne derecede etkilediği de araştırılacaktır.

Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz?

Bu çalışma için yapmanız gereken size verilen anketi eksiksiz doldurmanızdır. Ardından çalışmanın ikinci kısmı için size mülakat soruları sorulacak ve cevaplamanız istenecektir. Bu kısım yine gönüllülük esasına dayalı olacaktır.

Katılımınızla ilgili bilmeniz gerekenler:

Bu çalışmaya katılmak tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Herhangi bir yaptırıma veya cezaya maruz kalmadan çalışmaya katılmayı reddedebilir veya çalışmayı bırakabilirsiniz. Çalışmaya katılmanız sonucunda verilerin toplandığı derse yönelik bir not veya ödev durumu kesinlikle olmayacaktır. Araştırmaya katılanlardan toplanan veriler tamamen gizli tutulacak, veriler ve kimlik bilgileri herhangi bir şekilde eşleştirilmeyecektir. Katılımcıların isimleri bağımsız bir listede toplanacaktır. Ayrıca toplanan verilere sadece araştırmacı ulaşabilecektir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları bilimsel ve profesyonel yayınlarda veya eğitim amaçlı kullanılabilir, fakat katılımcıların kimliği gizli tutulacaktır. Sizden elde edilen veriler araştırmacı

tarafından etik ilkeler doğrultusunda 3 yıl saklanacaktır. Süre dolduktan sonra araştırmacı verileri imha edecektir.

Riskler:

Çalışma herhangi bir risk içermemektedir.

Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz:

Çalışmayla ilgili soru ve yorumlarınızı araştırmacıya ciftci.ezgi@metu.edu.tr adresinden iletebilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

(Formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra uygulayıcıya geri veriniz).

OKUDUM. ANLADIM.

Ad- Soyad Tarih İmza

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APPENDIX E: TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Giriş

Çocukların temel haklarından biri olan oyun, tanımlanması karmaşık bir kavramdır (Johnson vd., 1999). Genel olarak oyun, çocukların ihtiyaçları, içsel motivasyonları, eğlence istekleri ve özgür seçimleri doğrultusunda şekillenen herhangi bir davranış olarak tanımlanır (Johnson vd., 1999) ve çocuk gelişimi için çok önemlidir. Anderson-McNamee ve Bailey (2010), oyunun çocuklar için birçok faydası olduğunu belirtmiş ancak oyunun çocukların öğrenme ve gelişimlerine sayısız faydası olmasına rağmen oyuna gereken önem verilmemektedir (Frost, 2012). Benzer şekilde Türkiye'de de oyun okul öncesi eğitim programlarının merkezinde yer almasına rağmen, değeri bilinmemektedir. MEB 2013 Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Programına göre oyun, çocukların çevrelerini anlamalarını ve birçok şeyi öğrenmelerini sağlayan bir araçtır. Ayrıca bu programda oyun, çocukların en önemli işi olarak görülmektedir (Işıkoğlu-Erdoğan, 2015). Ancak Varol (2013) geçiş etkinlikleri, bekleme, öğle yemeği, sanat/müzik vb. diğer etkinlikler nedeniyle öğretmenlerin, çocuklara oyun oynamaları için yeterince fırsat sağlanmadığını belirtmiştir. Benzer şekilde, Tuğrul ve diğerleri (2019) ise öğretmenlerin çocukların oyun için ayrılan süreyi yeterli bulmadığını belirtmiştir.

Öğretmenlerin oyunu nasıl algıladıkları, onların gelecekteki sınıf uygulamalarını ve çocukların oyun deneyimlerini etkilemektedir (Jung ve Jin, 2015). Bu nedenle, gelecekteki sınıf içi uygulamalarında bir farklılık yaratmak için öğretmen adaylarının mevcut oyun algılarının anlaşılması önemlidir. Bu nedenle, oyun algılarının temellerini araştırmak gerekmektedir. Jung ve Jin'e (2015) göre öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları üniversitede aldıkları eğitim, oyun dersleri ve geçmişteki oyun anılarından etkilenmektedir. Araştırmalar, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının öğretmenlerin oyun algılarını şekillendirdiğini göstermektedir (Sherwood ve Reifel, 2010; Jung ve Jin, 2015). Öğretmen adayları eğitimleri süresince oyun dersi

aldıklarında oyunla ilgili olumlu düşünceler geliştirme eğilimindedirler (Jung ve Jin, 2015). Ayrıca bu olumlu düşünceler, gelecekteki sınıf uygulamalarına oyunu dahil etme olasılıklarını artırmaktadır (Ashiabi, 2007; Sherwood ve Reifel, 2010; Jung ve Jin, 2014). Ancak, öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları araştırılmadığında, oyun dersleri ile oyunu pratiğe dahil etme yönelimi arasındaki bağlantı yanıltıcı olabilir (Jung ve Jin, 2015).

Araştırmalara göre (Klugman, 1996; Jung ve Jing, 2014; Jung vd., 2016), öğretmen adaylarının oyunu nasıl algıladıklarını anlamak oyun ve müfredat arasında bir köprü oluşturmada kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Ayrıca öğretmen adaylarının oyuna yönelik tutumları, oyunun erken çocukluk ortamlarındaki yerini geri kazanması açısından değerlidir (Doğan-Altun, 2018). Araştırmalara göre (Sherwood ve Reifel, 2010; Jung ve Jin, 2014), oyunla ilgili algılar, inançlar ve fikirler alınan eğitim, önceki oyun deneyimleri ve anıları gibi çeşitli faktörlerden etkilenmektedir. Bu noktada öğretmen yetiştirme programları, öğretmen adaylarına oyun algılarını şekillendirmeleri ve oyun hakkındaki bilgilerini geliştirmeleri için fırsatlar sunmalıdır. Öğretmenler mesleğe başladıklarında edindiği fikirleri sınıflarında uygulama eğilimindedirler (Doğan-Altun, 2018). Bu nedenle öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarına katkı sağlamak için öğretmen hazırlık programlarının oyunla ilgili ders içeriklerinin oyun ve oyun temelli öğrenmeye yönelik olarak iyileştirilmesi ve zenginleştirilmesi gerekmektedir (McArdle vd., 2019).

Bu çalışmada, katılımcıların oyun dersi geçmişleri araştırılmıştır ve oyun dersi ile oyun algıları arasındaki ilişki analiz edilmiştir. Bu bulgular ışığında öğretmen eğitimcileri, öğretmenlik eğitimi sırasında verilen oyun derslerinin önemi konusunda farkındalık sahibi olabilirler. Özetle, erken çocukluk dönemi öğretmen adaylarının oyunla ilgili mevcut algılarının incelenmesi, mevcut öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının kalitesi ve verimliliği, oyun algılarının doğası ve kaynağı ile oyunun işlevi, amacı ve kökeni ile ilgili fikirler açısından geniş bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları aynı zamanda öğretmen adaylarının gelecekteki uygulamaları ile ilgili mevcut oyun algılarının daha derinden anlaşılmasını sağlamaktadır.

Oyun, uzun yıllardır araştırmacıların odak noktası olmuştur. Oyunun işlevlerini ve faydalarını araştıran birçok çalışma varken, öğretmenlerin oyun algıları daha az çalışılmıştır (Sherwood ve Reifel, 2010). Öğretmenlerin değer, algı ve tutumları sınıf uygulamalarını şekillendirdiğinden ve bu doğrudan çocukları etkilediği için öğretmenlerin algıları üzerine bir araştırma yapmak gerekmektedir (McMullen vd., 2006). Öğretmen adaylarının oyunun amacına, kaynağına ve işlevine ilişkin oyun algıları üzerine özellikle ulusal literatürde sınırlı sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışma okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları ile ilgili olarak hem literatüre katkı sağlamakta hem de ulusal ve uluslararası düzeyde oyun algılarına yönelik yeni bakış açıları getirmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, okul öncesi eğitimi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını araştırmaktır. Ayrıca bu algıları oyun dersine katılım ile ilişkilendirerek araştırmaktır. Ayrıca çalışmada oyunun işlevi, özgünlüğü ve amacı ile doğası/kaynağı aşağıdaki araştırma soruları ışığında incelenmiştir.

1. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları nelerdir?
2. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun dersine katılımlarına ilişkin oyun algıları nelerdir?
3. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları oyun dersine katılım durumlarına göre farklılaşmakta mıdır?
    3.1. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyunun işlevine ilişkin oyun algıları, oyun dersine katılım durumlarına göre farklılaşmakta mıdır?
    3.2. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyunun özgünlüğüne ilişkin oyun algıları, oyun dersine katılım durumlarına göre farklılaşmakta mıdır?
    3.3. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyunun doğasına ilişkin oyun algıları, oyun dersine katılım durumlarına göre farklılaşmakta mıdır?

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada karma yöntem araştırma deseni kullanılmıştır. Creswell ve Plano Clark'a (2011) göre karma yöntem araştırması, araştırma problemlerinin ve araştırma sorularının daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlamak için yapılan, nitel ve nicel yöntemlerin

bir arada kullanıldığı bir metodolojidir. Creswell'in (2015) de açıkladığı gibi, karma yöntem araştırması, araştırmacının hem nitel hem de nicel verilerin güçlü yönlerinden faydalanmasını sağlar. Nitel ve nicel araştırma yöntemlerinin birleşimi çalışmayı güçlü kılar (Creswell, 2015). Creswell'e (2015) göre karma yöntem araştırmaları, araştırma desenine göre farklılık gösterir. Basit ve karmaşık araştırma deseni türleri olmak üzere iki ayrı başlıkta, toplam altı alt boyutu vardır (Creswell, 2015). Bu çalışmada ise, basit araştırma deseni türlerinden biri olan açıklayıcı sıralı desen kullanılmıştır. Creswell ve Plano Clark'a (2011) göre, açıklayıcı sıralı desen araştırmacıya nitel verileri kullanarak nicel araştırma sonuçlarını detaylıca açıklama ve çalışmayı genişletme fırsatı sunmaktadır. Bu araştırma deseninde, ilk olarak nicel veriler toplanmıştır. Nicel verilerin toplanmasının ardından, çalışma sonuçlarını netleştirmek ve bulguları derinleştirmek için nitel veriler toplanmıştır. Bu araştırmanın nicel kısmı anket, nitel kısmı ise fenomenolojik bir çalışmadır. Fraenkel ve diğerlerine (2012) göre, anket araştırması temel olarak çalışma evreninin yetenekleri, görüşleri, inançları ve tutumları gibi özelliklerini tanımlamak için bilgi toplamayı amaçlamaktadır. Öte yandan fenomenolojik araştırma, bir olaya ilişkin çeşitli algıları incelemeyi ve katılımcıların algı ve tepkilerine ilişkin öngörü sağlamayı amaçlar (Fraenkel vd., 2012). Bu araştırmada, öncelikli olarak katılımcıların oyun algıları Oyun Algısı Ölçeği aracılığıyla araştırılmıştır. Daha sonra, nicel araştırma sonuçlarının derinlemesine araştırılması için katılımcılar ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır.

Fraenkel ve diğerleri (2012), araştırmacının çalışmanın amacına ve evren ile ilgili ön bilgilere dayanarak katılımcıları seçmek için kendi kişisel kararlarını kullanabileceğini belirtmiştir. Ayrıca, çalışmanın amacına yönelik olarak katılımcılara ulaşılabilirlik de göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır (Punch, 2009). Çalışmanın uygulanabilirliği zaman, masraf ve çaba açısından önemli bir konudur (Fraenkel vd., 2012). Bu nedenle karma yöntem deseninin nicel kısmında amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın ilk kısmında, Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesinde okul öncesi eğitimi programında öğrenim görmekte olan lisans öğrencilerine (N=242) anket uygulanmıştır. Araştırmanın ikinci kısmında ise kolay ulaşılabilir durum örneklemesi kullanılmıştır. Kolay ulaşılabilir durum örneklemesi, araştırma için uygun ve erişilebilir olan katılımcıların seçilmesini gerektirir (Fraenkel

vd., 2012). Araştırmanın nitel bölümünde, katılımcılar araştırmanın ilk bölümüne katılanların arasından seçilmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler her sınıf düzeyinden eşit sayıdaki gönüllü katılımcılarla, toplam 24 kişi ile gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Bu çalışmada, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları hakkında kapsamlı bir bilgi edinmek için Oyun Algısı Ölçeği (OAÖ) ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın nicel kısmında katılımcıların oyuna ilişkin genel algılarını öğrenmek amacıyla OAÖ uygulanmıştır. Katılımcıların yaş, cinsiyet, sınıf düzeyi, lise türlerine ilişkin eğitim durumu, oyun dersine ve mesleki gelişimlerine katkı sağlayan etkinliklere katılımları ölçeğin demografik bölümünde sorulmuştur. Ayrıca katılımcılara "Çocukluğunuzda hangi oyunları oynardınız? Örnek verebilir misiniz?" veya "Günlük rutininizi düşündüğünüzde şu an hangi oyunlara/oyunlara dahil oluyorsunuz?" gibi açık uçlu sorular da sorulmuştur. Katılımcılardan eksik olan "Oyun……." cümlesini tamamlamaları istenmiştir. Güneş ve çalışma arkadaşları tarafından geliştirilen Oyun Algısı Ölçeği (2020), öğretmen adayları, hizmet içi öğretmenler, veliler ve pedagogların oyun algılarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. OAÖ beşli Likert tipi bir ölçektir (1=kesinlikle katılmıyorum, 5=kesinlikle katılıyorum) ve üç alt boyutlu yapıya sahip 20 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Bu üç alt boyut oyunun işlevi, oyunun özgünlüğü ve oyunun doğasıdır (Güneş vd., 2020). Araştırmanın ikinci bölümünde, araştırmacı tarafından yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme protokolü geliştirilmiştir. Görüşme soruları hazırlandıktan sonra dört alan uzmanından görüş alınmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme protokolünün son versiyonu, birkaç sondaj soru ve dört ısınma sorusu devamındaki 11 sorudan oluşmaktadır. Görüşme sorularının ikisi katılımcıların oyun dersi katılımı ile ilgiliyken, diğer dokuz soru öğretmen adaylarının oyun tanımı, oyunun gelişimsel katkıları, etkileyen faktörleri, oyun zamanını planlama ve öğretmenlerin ve oyun malzemelerinin oyundaki rollerine ilişkin görüşleri hakkındadır.

Öncelikli olarak, veriler toplamaya başlamadan önce gerekli izinler alınmıştır. İlk olarak, 2021-2022 güz döneminin beşinci ve altıncı haftasında bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim gören okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarına Oyun Algısı Ölçeği uygulanmıştır. Ardından, 2021-2022 bahar döneminde araştırmanın ikinci kısmı için

gönüllü katılımcılar ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere başlanmıştır. İlk olarak, üç katılımcı ile birlikte pilot çalışma yapılmıştır. Ardından, katılımcıların geri kalanı da önceden planlanan zamanlarda görüşmeye katılmıştır. Görüşmeler, katılımcıların bilgisi dahilinde kayıt altına alınmıştır ve yaklaşık 15-20 dakika sürmüştür. Görüşmelerin hemen ardından ses kayıtları yazıya dökülmüştür. Nicel veri analizi sırasında araştırmacı, Creswell ve Plano-Clark (2015) tarafından belirtilen birbiriyle ilişkili adımları takip etmiştir. İlk olarak, veriler analiz için düzenlenmiştir. Bu süreç, bir kod kitabı hazırlamayı, puan türlerini belirtmeyi, verileri puanlamayı, bir program seçmeyi ve verilerin girilmesini ve temizlenmesini içerir (Creswell ve Plano Clark, 2015). Nicel verilerin analizi sırasında uygun bir istatistiksel analiz programı kullanılmıştır. Ön çalışma sonuçlarına göre Oyun Algısı Ölçeği maddeleri görüş ifadesi olarak kabul edilmiştir. Bağımlı ve bağımsız değişkenlerin tamamı en az iki kategorik değişken içerdiğinden ve normallik varsayımları karşılandığından (Pallant, 2015) ki-kare bağımsızlık testinin uygulanmasına karar verilmiştir. Creswell ve Plano-Clark'a (2015) göre, analiz için nitel verilerin analizinde ve yorumlanmasında birbiriyle ilişkili altı adım izlenmelidir. Öncelikle ses kayıtları yazıya dökülmüştür ve kodlama işlemi için metinler gözden geçirilmiştir. Creswell (2015), kodlamanın bir etiketleme süreci olduğunu açıklamıştır. Metin bölümleri, hepsinin tek bir kodla ilişkilendirildiği cümleler veya paragraflar içerir (Creswell, 2015). Kodlama sürecinde metinler, araştırmacı tarafından cümle, paragraf, kelime öbeği gibi küçük parçalara ayrılarak etiketlenir. Temaları katmanlar halinde kodladıktan sonraki adım, bulguların temsili ve raporlanmasıdır. Creswell ve Plano Clark (2015), karşılaştırma tabloları, haritalar, şekiller, demografik tablolar vb. gibi verileri göstermenin çeşitli yolları olduğunu ileri sürmüştür. Mevcut çalışmada, nitel bulgular uygun tablolarda gösterilmiştir ve verilerin yorumlanması sağlanmıştır.

Güvenilirlik, nicel ve nitel çalışmaların en kritik parçalarındandır. Merriam (2009) ve Yin'e (2009) göre çalışmanın geçerlik güvenilirliği ve genellenebilirliği güvenilirliğini etkiler. Bu nedenle geçerliğin, güvenirliğin ve genellenebilirliğin artırılması çalışmanın güvenirliğini artıracaktır. OAÖ önceden hazırlanmış ve geçerliliği, güvenilirliği ve iç tutarlılığı test edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre (Güneş vd., 2020) madde-toplam korelasyon katsayıları değerleri $.157 \leq r \leq .656$ arasında, Cronbach alfa değeri ise .728 olarak bulunmuştur. Bu değerler ölçeğin

geçerli ve güvenilir olduğunu göstermektedir (Güneş vd., 2020). Çeşitli veri toplama tekniklerinin kullanılması, çalışmanın güvenirliğini artırmaktadır (Fraenkel vd., 2012). Bu çalışmada, çalışmanın güvenilirliğini ve geçerliliğini artırmak için yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve anket çalışması bir arada kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca çalışmanın güvenilirliğini artırmak için yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları okul öncesi eğitimi alanından dört uzmanın yardımıyla hazırlanmıştır. Ayrıca pilot çalışma üç katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Dış denetim, güvenilirliği artırmanın başka bir yoludur (Creswell, 2015). Bu çalışmada araştırmacı, nitel verileri analiz ederken çalışma bulgularını kontrol etmek için çalışma dışından bir okul öncesi eğitimi uzmanından yardım almıştır.

Bulgular ve Tartışma

Bu çalışmanın birincil amacı, erken çocukluk dönemi öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını mesleki demografik özellikleri açısından araştırmaktır: oyun dersine katılım ve eğitim düzeyi. Araştırma sıralı açıklayıcı karma desen olduğundan, nitel ve nicel verilerden elde edilen bulgular bütüncül olarak tartışılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular ölçekten ortaya çıkan üç ana tema altında tartışılmıştır. Bu temalar oyunun işlevi, oyunun özgünlüğü ve oyunun doğasıdır.

İlk olarak oyunun işlevi teması, oyunun tanımlarını, işlevlerini, özelliklerini ve önemini içerir. Öncelikle katılımcılardan oyunu tanımlamaları istenmiştir. Bulgular, katılımcıların çoğunun oyunu tanımlamakta zorlandıkları ve oyunun özelliklerine ve gelişimsel faydalarına daha fazla odaklandıkları sonucuna varmıştır. Johnson ve diğerleri (1999), oyunun tanımlanmasının karmaşık olduğunu ve tanımını anlamaya yardımcı olan bazı özellikler olduğunu belirtmiştir. Eberle (2014) ise oyunun özelliklerini ve işlevlerini sunmanın oyunu tam olarak tanımlamadığını belirtmiş ve durumu bir gül metaforuyla örneklemiştir. Ona göre, insanların "gül güzel kokar" diyerek gülü nasıl algıladıkları onun tanımı değildir. Başka bir deyişle, insanların oyunu nasıl algıladıkları, oyunun ne olduğunu da açıklamaz (Eberle, 2014). Sonuç olarak, oyunu gerçekten tanımlamanın güç olduğu anlaşılabilir. Bu nedenle katılımcıların çoğu oyunu işlevlerini, özelliklerini ve önemini belirterek tanımlamıştır. Zhulamanova ve Raisor (2020), öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını

da iki anket ve görüşme yoluyla incelemiştir. Bulgular, katılımcıların oyunu aynı şekilde tanımlamadıklarını ve sonuç olarak oyun kavramının ortak bir tanımının olmadığını göstermiştir. Mevcut çalışmada, sonuçlar katılımcıların oyunu tanımlarken oyunun çeşitli yönlerini sunduklarını göstermiştir ve bu bulgular, Zhulamanova ve Raisor'un (2020) çalışmasıyla tutarlılık göstermiştir. Oyun dersine katılım bağlamında sonuçlar, sınıf düzeyleri arttıkça oyun tanımlarının daha ayrıntılı hale geldiğini göstermiştir. Jung ve Jin (2014), mevcut araştırma sonuçlarına benzer şekilde, katılımcıların oyun algılarının eğitimleri sırasında özellikle farklı bir örüntü ortaya koyduğunu ileri sürmüşlerdir. Sonuç olarak, birinci sınıftan son sınıfa kadar katılımcıların farklı oyun algıları, katılımcıların oyun tanımına ilişkin tanımları üzerinde etkili olabilir.

Oyunun işlevlerine ilişkin, oyun dersi alan katılımcılar, oyun dersi almayan katılımcılara göre genel olarak oyunu keşfetme ve kendini yansıtma aracı olarak düşünmüşlerdir. Özetle, eğitim düzeyi ve oyun dersine katılım dışında, katılımcıların genel olarak oyunu keşfetme ve kendini ifade etme aracı olarak algıladıkları ya da az ya da çok olduğu söylenebilir. Nicel bulgulara paralel olarak nitel sonuçlar da katılımcıların genel olarak oyunun bir kendini ifade etme, keşfetme, merak ve duygu ifade biçimi olduğunu belirttiklerini göstermiştir. Doğan-Altun'un (2018) öğretmen adaylarının oyuna ve öğretmen rollerine bakış açılarını anlamak için yaptığı çalışmasında, öğretmen adaylarının oyunu açıklarken oyunun işlev ve özelliklerinden yararlandıkları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, katılımcıların oyunu bir kendini ifade etme, öğrenme ve eğlenme yöntemi olarak gördükleri sonucuna varmıştır (Doğan-Altun, 2018). Ayrıca, bu çalışmada bazı katılımcılar oyunu bir öğretme ve öğrenme aracı olarak tanımlamışlardır. Benzer şekilde, Doğan-Altun'un (2018) çalışmasında, öğretmen adayları sıklıkla oyunu önceden belirlenmiş amaç, amaç ve becerileri öğretmek için bir strateji olarak tanımlamışlardır. Doğan-Altun'un (2018) çalışmasının aksine, Rodriguez-Meehan (2021) tarafından yürütülen nitel bir fenomenolojik araştırma, az sayıda öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarını araştırmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, etkinliklerin açıkça akademik şeyler içermemesi durumunda öğretmen adaylarının oyun ve öğrenme arasında bağlantı kurmakta zorlandıklarını göstermiştir (Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). Bu çalışmada ise, katılımcıların çoğu oyunu bir öğretim aracı veya eğlenceli bir öğrenme yolu olarak belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca, bu

çalışmanın sonuçları, katılımcıların kavramları oyuna entegre ederek, öğrenmeyi pekiştirerek ve somutlaştırarak oyunu kullanacaklarını ortaya koymuştur. İlginç bir şekilde, oyun dersi almayan birinci ve ikinci sınıf öğrencilerinden bazıları gelecekteki sınıflarında oyunu nasıl kullanacaklarını açıklamakta zorlanmışlardır. Henüz oyun dersi almamış olmaları nedeniyle deneyim veya bilgi eksikliği bu durumu etkilemiş olabilir. Oyun dersine katılan katılımcılar, bu derste oyunun müfredat olarak nasıl kullanılacağına dair teorik bilgiler edinmiş olabilir ve katılımcıların kapsamlı açıklamaları buradan geliyor olabilir.

Oyunun ne olmadığını bilmek ne olduğunu bilmek kadar önemlidir (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2006). Bu nedenle, katılımcılara oyunun ne olmadığı sorulmuştur ve büyük çoğunluğu zorbalık, şiddet, cinsellik gibi şeyleri oyun olarak görmediğini ifade etmiştir. Ayrıca dijital şeyler, sıkıcı aktiviteler, yapılandırılmış, rekabetçi etkinlikler ve kumar/şans oyunlarının oyun olmadığını eklemişlerdir. Eberle'ye (2014) göre oyunun oyun olarak kabul edilebilmesi için beklenti, anlama, sürpriz, denge, güç ve haz gibi altı özelliğin olması gerekir. Bu özelliklerden yoksun etkinlikler ve zorbalık barındıran şeyler oyun olarak görülmemektedir. Ayrıca, Armstrong (2015), dijital şeylerin, rekabetçi sporların ve Scrabble gibi endüstriyel masa oyunlarının oyun olarak kabul edilmediğini belirtmiştir. Çalışma bulguları aynı zamanda oyun sayılmayan kriterler ile bir fikir birliğini göstermiştir (Eberle, 2014; Armstrong, 2015).

Katılımcılar oyunun özelliklerini gönüllü, eğlenceli ve ilerici eylem olarak tanımlamışlardır. Öte yandan, görüşme sırasında katılımcılar oyunun bu özelliklerini de sıklıkla belirtmişler ve bu bulgulara eğitici, uygulamalı, sosyal, mutlu, aktif ve güvenli gibi çeşitli özellikler ekleyerek genişletmişlerdir. Mevcut çalışmada, katılımcılar oyunun eğlenceli yönünde fikir birliğinde olmalarına rağmen oyun dersi almayan katılımcılar genellikle oyunun eğitici yönlerine odaklanmışlardır. İlginç bir şekilde, oyun kursuna katılan genç bir katılımcı, erken çocukluk yıllarında oyunun eğlendirici olmaktan çok eğitici olması gerektiğini belirtmiştir. Benzer şekilde Doğan- Altun (2018) da kıdemli öğretmen adaylarının (katılımcılar oyun dersi almıştır) oyunu öncelikle eğlenceli ve ikincil olarak da eğitici bir aktivite olarak tanımladıklarını göstermiştir. Ayrıca, oyunun ne olduğunu ve özelliklerini araştıran

Rodriguez-Meehan (2021) tarafından da açıklandığı üzere, öğretmen adayları oyunun özellikleri hakkında bilgi sahibidirler ve diğer çalışmalarla tutarlı şekilde cevaplar vermişlerdir (Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). Ayrıca McLane (2003) oyunla ilgili inanışlarını araştırmak için okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile birlikte proje yürütmüş ve görüşmeler yapmıştır. Bulgular, oyunun özelliklerini neşeli, bağımsız, uygulamalı, yapılandırılmamış, etkileşimli, özgür ve keşfedici olarak açıklamışlardır (McLane, 2003). Bu nedenle, oyunun eğlence, neşe, özgürlük, keşif ve eğitici gibi özelliklerinin ortak olduğunu ortaya koyan çeşitli araştırmaların olduğu sonucuna varılabilir (McLane, 2003; Doğan-Altun, 2018; Rodriguez-Meehan, 2021). Mevcut çalışmada, bulgular bu çalışmalarla tutarlılık göstermektedir. Oyunun oyun olarak kabul edilebilmesi için eğlenceli, özgür, eğitici, uygulamalı ve mutlu gibi belirli özelliklere sahip olması gerektiği sonucuna varılabilir.

Bu çalışmada katılımcılar genel olarak oyunun gelişim alanlarındaki önemini belirtmiş ve aynı anda birden fazla faydasından bahsetmiştir. Bu durum, oyunun önemi ile ilgili genelleme yapmanın oyun derslerine katılım açısından zor olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Katılımcıların genel olarak oyunun gelişimsel yararlarının farkında oldukları söylenebilir. Dikkat çeken tek şey, oyunun farklı faydalarına odaklanmış olmalarıdır. Örneğin, bazıları fiziksel katkılarının daha fazla olduğunu belirtirken, bazıları oyunun sosyal faydalarına daha fazla odaklanmıştır. Bu öncelikler, kişisel görüşlerine bağlı olarak değişebilir veya eğitim düzeyi ve oyun dersi, katılımcıların yanıtlarını etkilemiş olabilir. Bununla birlikte Jung ve Jin (2014) öğretmen adayları ile çalışmış oyun hakkında nasıl düşündüklerini incelemişlerdir. İlginç bir şekilde, araştırma sonuçları birinci sınıf ve son sınıf öğretmen adaylarının oyunun değerine ilişkin algılarında önemli bir ölçüde fark olmadığını ancak, bu çalışmaya katılanların erken çocukluk eğitiminde oyuna değer verdikleri açıktı (Jung & Jin, 2014). Mevcut çalışma sonuçları da benzer bulgulara varmıştır. Katılımcılar, oyunun değeri hakkında bir farkındalığa sahip olabilecekleri için oyunun önemine ilişkin kapsamlı yanıtlar vermişlerdir.

Oyunun özgünlüğü teması, öğretmenlerin oyuna katılımını, oyun materyallerinin önemini ve oyun zamanının planlanmasını içermektedir. Katılımcıların öğretmenin oyuna katılımı ve oyundaki rolleri hakkındaki görüşleri alınmıştır. Nicel kısımda

katılımcıların öğretmen katılımı hakkındaki ifadelere verdikleri yanıtlar arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir ilişki çıkmıştır. Ayrıca görüşme sırasında katılımcılar, öğretmen katılımının oyunu desteklediği ve daha eğlenceli hale getirdiği için öğretmenlerin çocukların oyununa dahil edilmesi gerektiğini dile getirmişlerdir. Sosyokültürel açıdan yapılan bir araştırmada belirtildiği gibi öğretmenlerin veya diğer yetişkinlerin katılımı çocukların oyun ve öğrenmelerini olumlu yönde etkileyebilir (Doğan-Altun, 2018). Bu noktada Vygotsky'nin oyun perspektifi önem kazanmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin katılımı ve çocuklarla etkileşimleri yakınsal gelişim alanı oluşturmak için gereklidir. Öğretmenler oyuna dahil olmazsa bu formun oluşturulması zor olacaktır (Aras, 2016). Jones ve Reynolds'a (2011) göre, öğretmenler çocukların oyunlarına yardımcı oyuncu olarak katıldıklarında, oyun sırasında çocukların gelişimini destekleyebilirler ve bunun sonucunda çocuklar oyundan daha fazla fayda sağlarlar. Jones ve Reynolds'un (2011) araştırma sonuçları ve mevcut araştırma sonuçları, çocukların daha fazla kazanım elde edebilmeleri için öğretmenlerin oyuna katılımının kritik bir rolü olduğu konusunda tutarlılık göstermektedir. Görüşmeler sırasında oyun dersine katılanlar genellikle Johnson ve diğerleri tarafından sınıflandırılan izleyici, yardımcı oyuncu, oyun lideri ve sahne yöneticisi gibi destekleyici öğretmen rollerini belirtmişlerdir (1999). Ayrıca oyun dersi alan katılımcıların bir kısmı öğretmenlerin rollerinin müfredat ihtiyaçlarına ve oyun türlerine göre değişmesi gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir. Ayrıca Kandemir (2020), erken çocukluk öğretmenlerinin açık hava oyunundaki rollerini yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla araştırmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, öğretmenlerin bir oyunda genel olarak yardımcı oyuncu, sahne yöneticisi, oyun lideri ve izleyici rollerini içeren destekleyici rolleri ve yönetmen/eğitmen rolünü içeren güvencesiz bir rol belirttiklerini göstermiştir (Kandemir, 2020). Bu bulgulara paralel olarak, mevcut araştırma da öğretmen adaylarının genellikle oyun sırasında destekleyici rollere inandıkları ve oyun kursuna katılımın oyundaki öğretmen rollerine ilişkin algıları üzerinde etkili olabileceği sonucuna varmıştır.

Bu araştırmada oyun materyallerinin oyundaki rolleri hakkında katılımcıların farklı görüşleri olmuştur. Ayrıca, oyun dersine katılımla ilgili olarak, katılımcıların yanıtları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Diğer bir deyişle, oyun dersine katılanlar, dersi almayanlara göre çocukların özel oyuncaklara ve

malzemelere ihtiyaç duymadıklarını düşünmüşlerdir. Nitel araştırmada, katılımcıların oyun materyallerinin çocukların gelişimini desteklemek ve oyunu zenginleştirmek için gerekli olduğuna inandıkları, bazı katılımcıların ise materyallerin oyunda hiçbir rolü olmadığını belirttikleri sonucuna varılmıştır. Oyun materyallerini ile ilgili olarak, katılımcılar genel olarak oyun materyallerinin oyunu zenginleştirebileceğini ve gelişimi, öğrenmeyi ve yaratıcılığı destekleyebileceğini bildirmiştir. Nilsen (2021), okul öncesi sınıflarında oyun materyallerinin erişilebilirliğine ilişkin görüşlerini araştırmak için öğretmenlerle görüşmüştür. Katılımcıların çoğunluğu, sınıflarda oyun materyallerinin bulunması halinde çocukların oyunlarının zenginleştiği, gelişimlerinin ve öğrenmelerinin desteklendiği sonucuna varmıştır. Mevcut çalışma sonuçları, Nilsen'in (2021) çalışma sonuçları ile tutarlılık göstermektedir.

Oyun zamanının planlaması açısından, katılımcılar derin yanıtlar verdiler ve genellikle oyun zamanını planlamanın iki yönüne odaklandılar: oyun yapısı ve oyun zamanı. Ancak oyun dersine katılanların büyük çoğunluğu oyun zamanının planlanmasının müfredatın ihtiyaçlarına ve oyun türüne bağlı olması ve dengeli olması gerektiğini belirtmiştir. MEB (2013) tarafından da açıklandığı gibi, çocukların yapı olarak farklı oyun türlerinden daha fazla yararlanabilmeleri için oyun zamanlarının dengelenmesi gerekmektedir. Birinci sınıftan son sınıfa kadar katılımcıların farklı görüşleri vardı. Bu nedenle, mevcut çalışmada oyunun yapısı hakkında eğitim yılı ve oyun kursuna katılım açısından bir genelleme yapılamamıştır. Benzer şekilde literatürde oyunun yapısı hakkında da farklı görüşler bulunmaktadır. Örneğin, Weisberg ve arkadaşları (2013) doğrudan öğretim ile serbest oyun arasında yer alan yarı yapılandırılmış oyunun, çocuklara yönelik etkinliklerin yanında yetişkin desteği içermesi nedeniyle doğrudan öğretim veya serbest oyundan daha etkili olduğu sonucuna varmıştır. Bazı araştırmalar, yapılandırılmış oyunun çocuk gelişimi, özellikle sosyal gelişimleri ve öğrenme kuralları ve rutinleri için kritik olduğunu göstermiştir (Chatzipanteli & Adamakis, 2022). Ayrıca Matson (2007) özel gereksinimli bireylere bir şeyler öğretmenin en iyi yolunun doğrudan öğretim veya yapılandırılmış etkinlikler olabileceği yorumunu yapmıştır. Bu çalışmalar dikkate alındığında, oyun yapılarının çocukların ihtiyaçları

ve müfredat hedefleri açısından dengelenmesi ve değiştirilmesi gerektiği sonucuna varılabilir.

Oyun zamanının planlanması literatürde tartışmalı bir konudur. Mevcut çalışma sonuçları aynı zamanda katılımcıların oyun süresine ilişkin çeşitli bakış açılarını da göstermiştir. Dikkat çeken tek şey, katılımcıların çoğunluğunun, özellikle oyun dersi alanların oyun zamanının önemine inanması ve oyun yapılarının çocukların ihtiyaçları ve müfredat hedefleri göz önünde bulundurularak dengelenmesi ve planlanması gerektiğini ifade etmeleriydi. Bu bulgular, MEB (2013) tarafından açıklanan mevcut okul öncesi eğitimi programının ilkeleri ile uyumludur.

Son olarak oyunun doğası, oyun algılarını anlamak için bilgi kaynakları ve geçmiş/ şimdiki oyun anılarını içermektedir. Bilgi kaynakları ile ilgili olarak, katılımcılar sadece bir kısmı oyun hakkında seminer, sertifika programın veya kongreye katılmıştır. Ayrıca sınırlı sayıda katılımcı oyunla ilgili herhangi bir medya içeriği takip etmektedir. Bu nedenle, onların tek bilgi kaynağı öğretmen yetiştirme programında yer alan oyun dersleri olabilir. Oyun dersinin amacı, oyunun tanımı ve önemi, oyunun gelişimi, oyun teorileri, oyun etkinliklerinin planlanması ve uygulamaları için kavramsal bir çerçeve sağlamaktır. Ancak, mevcut çalışmada, katılımcıların çoğu, oyun dersinin uygulama açısından yetersizliğine odaklanmıştır. Bu bulgulara paralel olarak Şahin ve ark. (2013) Türkiye'deki mevcut durumlarını belirlemek için öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi öğretmen yetiştirme programlarına ilişkin görüşlerini incelemiştir ve sadece bir oyun dersi olduğunu ve onun da uygulamada yetersiz ve eksik olarak değerlendirildiğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca Bartan (2019) da benzer bulgulara ulaşmış ve oyun dersi süresinin ve içeriğinin zenginleştirilmesi gerektiği sonucuna varmıştır. Nitel verilerin sonuçları, oyun dersine katılımın katılımcıların teorik bilgileri, bakış açıları ve özgüvenleri üzerinde olumlu bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir.

Mevcut çalışma sonuçları pandemi nedeniyle uzaktan eğitimde yürütülen oyun dersiyle ilgili önemli bir hususa işaret etti. Katılımcıların çoğu oyun dersinin kendilerine teorik bilgiler ve yeni bakış açıları sağladığını ve özgüvenlerini artırdığını belirtmişlerdir. Ancak oyun dersi içeriğinin uygulamada eksik olduğunu

ve pandemi nedeniyle çok etkili olmadığını da belirtmişlerdir. Karakaya ve diğerleri (2021), pandemide uzaktan eğitimin eğitim sürecine olumlu ve olumsuz etkilerini araştırmıştır. Öğrenciler eğitimin etkisizliği, sürece uyum sorunları ve teknolojik altyapı eksikliğini pandeminin eğitim üzerindeki olumsuz etkileri olarak belirtmişlerdir (Karakaya vd., 2021). Ayrıca bazı öğrencilerin teknik ve finansal zorluklarla karşılaştıklarını ve derslere devam edemedikleri yapılan araştırmalarda ortaya koymuştur (Barburtlu, 2020; Kaya-Durna ve Akın-Köstereliođlu, 2021). Bu çalışmalar ışığında, katılımcıların oyun derslerine katılımda sorunlar yaşamış olabileceği gibi, derse devamsızlıkları da oyun algılarını etkilemiş olabilir.

Öğretmenlerin oyun algıları, geçmiş ve şimdiki oyun anılarından da etkilenebilir. Araştırmalar, öğretmen adaylarının oyun algılarının aldıkları eğitimin yanı sıra çocukluk oyun anılarından da etkilendiğini göstermiştir (Klugman, 1996; Jung ve Jin, 2015). Örneğin, Randall ve Maeda (2010) ilköğretim öğretmen adaylarının beden eğitimi (BE) ile ilgili geçmiş deneyimlerinin mevcut inançları üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmışlardır. Sonuçlar, geçmiş deneyimlerinin PE hakkındaki düşüncelerini ve onu kullanma niyetlerini etkilediğini göstermiştir (Randall ve Maeda, 2010). Benzer şekilde, geçmiş oyun deneyimlerinin öğretmen adaylarının oyun algıları ve oyunu kullanma niyetleri üzerinde etkili olduğu söylenebilir. Böylece önceki oyun deneyimlerinin oyun algılarını etkilemiş olabileceği sonucuna varılabilir. Tüm bulgulara bakıldığında, oyun dersine katılımın katılımcıların oyun algıları üzerinde az ya da çok etkisi olduğu söylenebilir.

Çalışma sonuçları ayrıca yüksek öğretim ve hizmet içi öğretmenler için önemli önerilerde bulunmuştur. Yüksek öğretimde, özellikle erken çocukluk eğitiminde oyun dersi kredileri artırılabilir. Ayrıca çalışma sonuçlarında da belirtildiği gibi oyun dersleri genellikle pratik uygulamalardan ziyade teorik bilgiler vermektedir. YÖK, oyun dersi içeriğini pratik uygulamalar açısından zenginleştirmek için politikalar geliştirebilir.

Tüm bilimsel çalışmalarda olduğu gibi, bu çalışmanın da bazı sınırlılıkları vardı. Bunlardan ilki, araştırmanın ilk bölümüne katılan katılımcı sayısının sınırlı olmasıdır. Daha doğru bir genelleme yapabilmek için ileriki çalışmalarda katılımcı

sayısı arttırılabilir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmada oyun dersi içeriği incelenmemiştir. İleriki çalışmalarda, çalışmanın sonuçlarını derinlemesine analiz etmek ve tartışmak için oyun dersi içeriği incelenebilir. Ayrıca çalışma Türkiye'de Batı Karadeniz bölgesinde yer alan tek bir okulda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu durum çalışmanın sonuçlarını ve genellenebilirliğini etkilemiş olabilir. Bu nedenle çalışmanın genellenebilirliğini artırmak için ileride yapılacak çalışmalarda Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerinden ve diğer ülkelerden geniş örneklemlerle bu çalışma yapılabilir. Ayrıca, katılımcıların eğitimlerinin pandemiye denk gelmesi çalışma sonuçlarını etkilemiş olabilir. Son olarak, bu çalışma sadece okul öncesi öğretmen adayları ile yapılmıştır. Gelecekteki araştırmalarda, alandaki mesleki deneyime ilişkin oyun algılarını karşılaştırmak için hizmet içi öğretmenler de dahil edilebilir. Ayrıca, oyunu nasıl algıladıklarını ve gerçekte sınıfta nasıl uyguladıklarını araştırmak için gözlem yöntemine yer verilebilir. Bu ileride yapılacak boylamsal bir çalışma ile incelenebilir.

APPENDIX F: THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU

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TEZİN ADI / TITLE OF THE THESIS (**İngilizce** / English): Early Childhood Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Play

TEZİN TÜRÜ / DEGREE**:** **Yüksek Lisans** / Master ☒ **Doktora** / PhD ☐

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