



## An Investigation of Pre-school Teachers' Views and Practices About Pre-school Outdoor Play<sup>1</sup>

### Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Dış Mekân Oyunları Hakkındaki Görüşleri ve Uygulamalarının İncelenmesi

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**Abstract.** In this case study, it has been aimed to reveal preschool teachers' views and practices about outdoor play at preschool. Data collected through semi-structured interview form, observation form and outdoor play time information form. Research group has been consisted of 15 preschool teachers, affiliated to Turkish Ministry of Education located in Ankara province, Çankaya and Yenimahalle districts. It has been discovered in the findings which have been done within the scope of research, the playground, game materials, genre of games and the duration of play of children alter in accordance with the curriculum of the institution and the variety and well-kept of game materials. It has been found that roles of the teachers working for different institutions in outdoor play resemble. The teachers think the elements that prevent children playing outdoor are weather conditions and points of views of parents on children's outdoor play.

**Keywords:** Outdoor play, teacher views, teacher practices

**Öz (Abstract in Turkish).** Bu çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması olarak gerçekleştirilmiş olup, çalışmada okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin dış mekânda oyun uygulamaları ve çocukların dış mekânda oyun oynamalarına ilişkin görüşlerini ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu, gözlem formu ve dış mekânda oyun zamanı bilgi formları kullanılarak elde edilmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubu, Ankara ili Çankaya ve Yenimahalle ilçelerinde bulunan Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı okullarda görev yapmakta olan 15 okul öncesi öğretmeninden oluşmaktadır. Araştırma sonucunda, çocukların dış mekânda oynadıkları oyun alanlarının, oyun materyallerinin, oyun türlerinin ve oyun oynama sürelerinin kurumdaki eğitim programına, dış mekân oyun materyallerinin çeşitliliğine ve bakımlı olmasına göre farklılık gösterdiği, öğretmenlerin dış mekândaki rollerinin uygulama yapılan üç farklı kurum türünde de benzerlik gösterdiği görülmüştür. Ayrıca araştırmaya katılan öğretmenler, hava şartlarının ve velilerin çocukların dış mekânda oyun oynamasına ilişkin bakış açılarının çocukların dış mekânda oyun oynamalarını engellediğini belirtmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler (Keywords in Turkish):** Dış mekânda oyun, öğretmen görüşleri, öğretmen uygulamaları

<sup>1</sup> This article was produced from the master thesis of the first author. Part of the paper was presented at the 7th International Conference on Research in Education, 2017.

## INTRODUCTION

Reading ‘...recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child...’, the 31st article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of play for the child’s life. Many studies have been carried out on play, which has a long history, and various opinions have been put forward about it. In this sense, different definitions of play have been provided. While some researchers have explained the contribution of play to social development, some have emphasized its cognitive contribution, and some others have stressed its importance for physical development. According to Çoban & Nacar (2006), play, in which individuals can express their emotions and thoughts, contributes to their physical and cognitive development, especially in childhood. Yavuzer (2000) states that play is effective in improving the child’s physical abilities, understanding his/her mood, and ensuring the positive development of his/her personality, and that play is a source of entertainment, learning, and development for the child.

Regardless of language, religion, race, and gender, every child plays a variety of plays depending on the conditions of the society and the time s/he is in. Some of them are played indoors and others are played outdoors. However, children’s plays are highly influenced by changing living conditions and today’s technology. Parents’ busy working lives, various changes in outdoor spaces (e.g. decrease in areas such as parks and gardens, safety concerns), children’s early acquaintance with electronic devices such as television, computer, telephone, tablet (Sandberg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2003) negatively influence children’s playing games, especially in outdoor spaces. Clements (2004) conducted a study on mothers with children at the age of 3 to 12 and found that today’s children play outside less and spend more time on television and computer games than the previous generation did. Tuğrul, Ertürk, Özen Altınkaynak, & Güneş (2014) conducted a research to examine the changes in playing tendencies through three generations and found that there has been a change from outdoor plays with friends based on physical activity to indoor plays with technological products, and the playing processes of especially the most recent generation differ from those of the previous ones.

Play, which is vital especially in the pre-school period, is indispensable for children’s healthy development. Children can play anywhere at any time. However, they need an environment with rich stimuli to use their full potential (Sanoff, 1995). For this reason, outdoor play environments are a great opportunity for children. Outdoor spaces play a major role in supporting the development of children as they provide a freer environment in which they can move more easily (Rivkin, 1997).

Outdoor plays support the child’s holistic development. They allow children to move, discover, engage in critical thinking, and get involved in unique activities with their peers (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). Playing outdoors gives children opportunities to actively use their bodies for a long time. Doing physical activities and being in touch with nature are important factors in the child’s spiritual and physical development (Charles, 2010). Allowing children to run outdoors contributes to the development of motor skills at all ages, enabling them to be healthier individuals (Galizio, Stoll, & Hutchins, 2009). Playing outdoors allows children to socialize, communicate with their environment, express their emotions, and discover the world with their peers as well as making them healthy individuals (Olsen, Thompson, & Hudson, 2011). It improves children’s imagination and offers them opportunities for problem solving (Pica, 2011). When natural outdoor environments are offered, children have the opportunity to collaborate and reconcile with their peers outside the classroom (Richardson, 2007). Playing outdoors is a natural part of the child’s life and positively influences his/her cognitive development, allows creative thinking, and enables him/her to move away from everyday stress.

To Davies (2011), children need to be active for at least 180 minutes a day. According to the Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies (2011) developed by the Institute of Medicine, children should be active for at least 15 minutes per hour. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2009) also states that pre-school children should engage in structured or unstructured physical activities for at least 120 minutes a day (quoted in Marino, Fletcher, Whitaker, & Anderson, 2012). The American Academy of Pediatrics says that children need to play

outdoors often for a healthy and active life. Also, according to the Academy, participating in physical activities such as playing outdoors is beneficial for mental health, motor development, vitamin D level, and cognitive and affective development (McBride, 2012).

Children in the early childhood period need to play outdoors. When they are given the chance to choose, children in this period favor outdoor spaces and outdoor plays. According to a study conducted in the UK, outdoor spaces are the first choice among children's priorities, and the most preferred activities at pre-school institutions are outdoor activities (White, 2014).

Playing outdoors offers children some opportunities. These opportunities, according to White (2014), include being in the natural environment, aroused curiosity, discovering, gaining new experiences, development of structures required for brain and nervous system through acting, development of emotional and mental health, development of social interactions, findings ways to protect oneself from troubles, and expressing emotions, thoughts, and ideas in the best way. Unlike indoor spaces, outdoor spaces offer a unique environment.

Outdoor spaces provide area and freedom to try and discover new things and do experiments (Katz, 1995). Indoor spaces are under the control of adults, but outdoor spaces are controlled less, and children in outdoor spaces avoid being observed and inspected by adults (Stephenson, 2002). Outdoor spaces are seen as areas where the body and the mind are fully free. Indoor spaces are restrictive. There are obstacles and artificial lights and voices in indoor spaces. Outdoor spaces, on the other hand, present natural heat and light and offer distinctive spiritual and emotional opportunities for the child (Richardson, 2007). In outdoor spaces, children have the opportunity to do activities such as running, bouncing, and cycling, which they cannot do easily in indoor spaces (Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner, 2010). The free environments in outdoor spaces allow children to discover, to go through rich experience for learning with their full body, and to engage in different types of play. They also help to get to know the natural environment and to gain learning experiences and conflict resolution skills for all areas.

Due to the decrease of safe, free, and easily accessible play areas, the provision of outdoor play areas by pre-school education institutions has become more important (Tovey, 2007). Children who receive pre-school education can play outdoors at the school from time to time as long as the physical conditions of the school allow it. The use of outdoor spaces is important for the development of children, especially in early childhood.

The development of pre-school children should be taken holistically. Curricula to be implemented in this period should also serve such holistic development. In pre-school education institutions, outdoor spaces should be organized as part of the educational process. By this means, the quality of education should be moved to higher levels.

Although there is very little research (Bruce 1997) on the role of adults in outdoor plays, Hutt (1989; 81) states that there seems to be an implicit agreement between children and employees about what should be done in indoor spaces and outdoor spaces (quoted in Tovey, 2007). Research reports that adult role in indoor spaces is usually interactive, while it mostly involves observation in outdoor spaces.

The time children spend playing outdoors in their social life has decreased due to various reasons. It has become even more important for children, who spend most of their day at pre-school institutions, to play outdoors at school. Hence, pre-school teachers and pre-school education institutions have a big responsibility to overcome the deficiencies that arise from children's inability to participate in outdoor plays in their social life. In preschool, children gain knowledge by doing and experiencing; touches, sees, tracks, plays and wonders. In this sense, it is important to organize outdoor spaces as child-focused in preschool education institutions (Talay, Aslan, & Belkayali, 2010). The one of the most important areas of the pre-school building is the garden. Article 90 of the Regulation on Pre-School Education and Primary Education of the Ministry of National Education states that in order to be able to perform education in a healthy and suitable environment in pre-school education institutions, the playground and the garden should be arranged in accordance with its purpose (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Mevzuat Bankası, 2014). If the physical conditions of a preschool educational institution are appropriate for children and the education program is well-prepared, children learn to build friendships, share partnerships, cooperate and take responsibilities in the community and fulfill the requirements

of these responsibilities. For this reason, schools' physical conditions are important factor for children's holistic development. In this period, since success and failure are not important, children use their abilities easily and develop their skills (Demiriz, Ulutaş, & Karadağ, 2011).

In Turkey, there are few studies (Alat, Akgümüş, & Çavali, 2012; Ay Yalçın, 2015; Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik, 2018; Güner Alpaslan & Tantekin Erden (2014); Yıldırım, 2017) which discuss the views or practices of preschool teachers who work for independent kindergartens, private kindergartens and primary school nursery classes on children's outdoor playing, however in those studies only one sort of educational institution is put forward and there is no study which considers both views and practices of teachers working in different types of institutions in a holistic manner. As a result of the literature review, it is thought that this research will contribute to the field.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative case study which is an empirical research method that uses a current phenomenon in its life frame and is used when there is more than one evidence or data source (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This study was planned as a case study in order to reveal the views and practices of pre-school teachers working in different types of institutions. For this purpose, observation and interview techniques, which are employed as qualitative research designs, were used to find answers to the questions appropriate to the purpose of the study. In order to reveal the demonstrate the views and practices of preschool teachers working in different types of institutions, maximum variation sampling, which is a purposeful sampling method, was utilized for determining the study group. The sample of the study was chosen from three different types of institutions: private kindergarten, independent kindergarten, and nursery class within the body of a primary school. The teachers were chosen from these types of institutions for the study. A private kindergarten is a school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of Turkey opened for the education of 36- to 66-month children. An independent kindergarten is a school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of Turkey opened for the education of 36- to 66-month old children. A nursery class, on the other hand, is a class opened within the body of a primary school for the education of 48- to 66-month children.

### Participants

The study group consists of pre-school teachers working in an independent kindergarten, a primary school, and a private kindergarten affiliated with the Ministry of National Education of Turkey and located in the central districts of Yenimahalle and Çankaya of Ankara in the 2015-2016 academic year. The study was conducted with a total of 15 teachers working in these schools. The teachers working in three classes of the private kindergarten work in partnership. Therefore, 12 different classes were involved in total.

The teachers participating in the study were interviewed in January and February 2016. Though it had been planned to observe the teachers' outdoor play practices in March and April 2016, the observations were completed in May due to weather conditions and the teachers' busy schedules. The teachers filled in the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' developed by the researcher in March and April.

**Table 1.** *The teachers' demographic characteristics*

Teacher code	Age	Professional experience	Graduated school	Education status	Working age group
IKT1	48	29	Pre-school teaching	College	3
IKT2	34	10	Pre-school teaching	Undergraduate	4
IKT3	43	21	Child development	Undergraduate	4
IKT4	45	22	Child development	Undergraduate	5
IKT5	52	26	Child development	Undergraduate	5
NCT1	49	18	Child development	Undergraduate	4-5
NCT2	47	24	Pre-school teaching	Undergraduate	5-6

Degree Completion

<b>NCT3</b>	45	25	Child development	Undergraduate	4-5
<b>NCT4</b>	50	30	Child development	Undergraduate	5-6
				Degree Completion	
<b>PKT1</b>	26	3	Pre-school teaching	Undergraduate	3
<b>PKT2</b>	24	6	Child development	High school	3
<b>PKT3</b>	33	10	Pre-school teaching	Undergraduate	4
<b>PKT4</b>	22	5	Child development	High school	4
<b>PKT5</b>	27	3	Child development	Undergraduate	5
<b>PKT6</b>	26	4	Pre-school teaching	Undergraduate	5

**IKT: Independent kindergarten teacher**  
**NCT: Primary school nursery class teacher**  
**PKT: Private kindergarten teacher**

## Instruments

As there are just a limited number of studies about pre-school children's playing outdoors in Turkey, qualitative research method was employed in this study to make a relatively deeper analysis. In this context, data has been collected via three different methods. Firstly, interviews were conducted with the teachers in order to reveal their views about the outdoor play, secondly the outdoor playtimes were observed and finally the information forms which are filled by teachers and focus on children's outdoor playtime except for observation time of researcher are assessed. For this purpose, interview form, observation form and outdoor playtime information form were prepared in order to reveal the views and practices of teachers.

A 12-question semi-structured interview form was prepared by the researchers to determine pre-school teachers' views about children's playing outdoors. Individual interviews lasting approximately 25 minutes were conducted with the teachers.

Non-participant observation method, which involves observing events or phenomena without intervening in them, was employed in the study. The observations were made through video-recording after the required permits were obtained. The 'Outdoor Play Observation Form for Researcher' developed by the researchers. After each observation, the video recording was viewed and the form was filled out. This form is about how long they stay at outdoors; what they do; what kinds of play they do; where they go for outdoor play, what the teacher role is; what are the elements that limit playground area.

The researcher intended to make document analysis to support the observations and teacher views. In this regard, she made an attempt to examine whether or not the teachers include outdoor plays in their daily and monthly plans. All the teachers participating in the study stated that they try to cover outdoor plays from time to time during their daily activities, but they do not write them in their daily and monthly plans. Thus, the researcher developed the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' for the pre-school teachers participating in the study to fill in. The form asks what time they go outdoors and what time they return indoors during outdoor practices; what they do outdoors; where they go for outdoor activities; and what other points they would like to add. Teachers have filled this form every day during March and April of 2016.

## Data Processing and Analysis

All data were analyzed inductively. Face-to-face individual interviews with the teachers took approximately 25 minutes per person and 366 minutes in total. Interviews are recorded on voice recorder and all of them were transcribed. The data obtained from the interview transcripts were read and coded by the researcher and another person specialized in pre-school education. The codes displaying similarity were gathered under themes. Also, their outdoor playtime had been observed during three months.

All classes' outdoor playtime were observed four times during this period. Observations in independent kindergarten took 520 minutes, observations in private kindergarten took 200 minutes and primary school nursery classes' observations took 405 minutes. Observations recorded via video tape recorder in private kindergarten and primary school nursery classes.

However, due to the fact that permission couldn't be obtained in independent kindergarten, observations were made in the form of field notes. The 'Outdoor Play Observation Form for Researcher' was marked appropriately through detailed examination of the observation records and field notes.

The 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' was filled by the teachers during two months. All of the teachers' answers were also examined and put into charts. The codes obtained from the examination of the responses given by the teachers to the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' and the observations about the research questions were combined under categories.

### Validity-Reliability

First, a pilot study was carried out with two pre-school teachers. To ensure credibility and provide an environment of confidence, the researcher always remained in contact with the participants. The related literature was reviewed, and a conceptual framework was created about the subject while the interview form was being developed, thereby increasing the internal validity (credibility) of the study. Expert opinions were received whenever needed (e.g. while creating the interview questions, evaluating the responses to the questions). The interviews were personally conducted with the teachers face to face at the times they found appropriate. When required, drilling questions were asked for elaboration. Also, the researcher tried not to be leading during the interviews and observations. Member checking was performed by having some teachers read the interview transcripts and receiving their views and confirmations. With all this, an attempt was made to avoid passing subjective judgments. To improve the external validity (transferability) of the study, the research process and the steps taken in this process were explained in detail as much as possible. To assure consistency, attention was paid to collecting the data in the same manner. For this, standardized open-ended interview questions were formed. These questions were asked to the participants in the same order, and the interviews were recorded. The coding of the collected data was structured in a consistent way.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings concerning the observations of the pre-school teachers' outdoor play practices and their views about children's playing outdoors are presented below.

**Table 2.** *The teachers' views about the contributions of playing outdoors to the child's development (N=15)*

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K. (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Physical Development</b>				
	Developing basic physical skills	3	3	6
	Gross and fine motor skills	4	1	4
	Sports	0	1	0
	Appetizing	1	0	0
<b>Social Development</b>				
	Communication with friends	5	4	5
	Playing with peers	5	3	3
	Learning to share	4	1	0
	Self-confidence	1	0	0
<b>Emotional Development</b>				
	Expressing feelings easily	4	2	1
	Sympathizing with others	0	1	1
	Being discharged, blowing off steam	1	1	0
<b>Language Development</b>				
	Communication	3	3	4
	Generating ideas	1	1	3
	Using kind words	1	0	0

<b>Cognitive Development</b>			
Reasoning	2	1	5
Examining nature, getting to know environment	3	2	1
Learning by experiencing and seeing	1	2	1
Having increased awareness	0	0	1
Being capable of keeping up	0	0	1

**IKT: Independent kindergarten teacher**  
**NCT: Primary school nursery class teacher**  
**PKT: Private kindergarten teacher**

The teachers were asked the question ‘What are the contributions of playing outdoors to the child’s development?’. The answers imply that they consider outdoor plays more important for social development and physical development. Three teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and six teachers working in the private kindergarten stated that playing outdoors develops the child’s basic motor skill. Five teachers working in the independent kindergarten, four teachers working in the nursery classes, and five teachers working in the private kindergarten said that playing outdoors enhances communication with friends.

Three teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and four teachers working in the private kindergarten denoted that playing outdoors improves communication for language development. Two teachers working in the independent kindergarten, one teacher working in a nursery class, and five teachers working in the private kindergarten noted that playing outdoors better reasoning skills.

The view of NCT2, working in a nursery class in a primary school, is as follows: ‘... *It definitely contributes to the children’s physical development. They are doing exercises, running, bouncing when we are outdoors. Sometimes, they also climb, go down, slide. They cannot do most of these activities in the classroom. They cannot do them in indoor spaces. A variety of activities from going up and down stairs to climbing... Bouncing, walking in balance along a line... All these activities influence children’s psychomotor development and physical development...*’

PKT1, working in the private kindergarten, stated, ‘... *I think it also improves their creativity. In my opinion, children learn to keep up in one way or another when they are outdoors. They learn how to stand up after they fall. They learn how to solve the problem when something pricks on their hand...*’

IKT2, working in the independent kindergarten, said, ‘... *They communicate and share some things with one another. Actually, they use kind words more when they are outdoors...*’

The teachers participating in the study indicated that playing outdoors contributes to all areas of development of the child. Consistently with this view, Ramstetter, Murray, & Garner (2010) report that outdoor plays enable children to move, discover, engage in critical thinking, and get involved in unique activities with their peers. Likewise, Charles (2010) points out that doing physical activities and being in touch with nature are important factors influencing the child’s spiritual and physical development. Galizio, Stoll, & Hutchins (2009) state that allowing children to play outdoors contributes to motor development at all ages and makes them healthier individuals. In a similar vein, Olsen, Thompson, & Hudson (2011) highlight that playing outdoors enables the child to socialize, communicate with his/her environment, express his/her feelings, and discover the world with his/her peers, as well as making him/her a healthy individual. Also, Güner Alpaslan & Tantekin Erden (2014) found that private kindergarten teachers think that outdoor play contributes to children’s all developmental areas. The above-mentioned findings of the present study and the studies in the literature demonstrate that children’s playing outdoors contributes to their areas of development.

**Table 3.** *The teachers' views about the frequency of the children's playing outdoors at school (N=15)*

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Weekly</b>	Once to three times a week	3	1	0
	Definitely 10-20 minutes a day	1	0	0
<b>Other</b>	Not very frequently	0	0	1

In response to the question 'How often do the children play outdoors at school?', four of the teachers (n=14) stated that they go outdoors once to three times a week. However, only the one of the teachers working in the private school answer the question.

The view of PKT6 stated, '... *We don't go outdoors very frequently. This is because we are implementing a heavy schedule, and expectations change when there is a private school...*'

During the observations, it was seen that the teachers in the private school did not go out very frequently. The teachers' responses to the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' demonstrated that the teachers working in the independent kindergarten go outdoors more often.

Contrary to these results, Burçak (2018) found that frequency of private kindergarten teachers' going outside for playing are higher than teachers in public schools.

**Table 4.** *The teachers' views about the reasons affecting the frequency of children's playing outdoors at school (N=15)*

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Weather Conditions</b>	Changing depending on weather conditions	4	4	6
	According to weather conditions parents do not allow	1	3	2
<b>Lack of Area</b>	Lack of area	0	2	0

In response to the question 'What is the reason which effects frequency of the children play outdoors at school?', a great majority of the teachers (n=14) stated that frequency of playing outdoors changes depending on weather conditions. Also, six teachers stated that parents don't allow children's playing outdoors in cold or rainy weather. Two of the teachers working in primary school nursery classes pointed out that they don't enough area for playing outdoor.

The view of IKT3 is as follows: '... *Weather conditions are surely a very important factor in our country... We should do it whether it is cold or hot in summer or winter. However, we cannot do it in our country because the concern of parents is their children's being ill... We do it more frequently when the weather is good...*'

During the observations, it was seen that the teachers did not have the children go out when it was cold and rainy. Teachers working in the independent kindergarten and in the private kindergarten responded to the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' when it was rainy or cold on the days they could not go outdoors.

Though the teachers mentioned weather conditions as the most obvious factor preventing them from going outdoors, parents' perspectives on outdoor plays were also seen to be influential on the frequency of playing outdoors. Consistently with this finding of the study, Ay Yalçın (2015) concluded that Turkish pre-school teachers and parents are worried about children's playing outdoors in winter while Finnish families and teachers think that seasons and weather conditions are not an obstacle to children's playing outdoors. Moreover, it is revealed in another study which is done in Turkey (Yıldırım, 2017) that weather conditions and parental pressure prevent children from outdoor playtime. To the contrary of our findings, Kod & Jerman (2013) found out that Slovenian children spend 23% of their time outdoors at school in warm weather conditions and

13% of their time outdoors at school in cold weather conditions and that they usually spend three hours a week in natural environment when it is warm and spend 1.5 hours a week in natural environment when it is cold. Sevimli Çelik & Johnson (2013) determined that weather conditions prevent children's outdoor activities, whereas Jayasuriya (2014) detected that the people participating in that study supported playing outdoors at school and there were only few people considering weather condition as an obstacle. The difference between the findings of the present study and the findings reported in the literature shows that the frequency of children's playing outdoors may differ from culture to culture. Such difference may be due to parental attitudes, family structure, and play perceptions. In addition to weather conditions and parental pressure, teachers' of nursery classes mentioned about lack of outdoor play areas. Consistently with this finding of the study, Burçak (2018) concluded that outdoor place quality affects the teachers' usage of outdoor areas.

**Table 5.** The teachers' views about the time the children spend playing outdoors (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Duration</b>				
	20- 30 minutes	2	3	6
	Maximum 40 minutes	2	1	0
	10-15 minutes in cool weather	1	1	0

In response to the question 'How long can the children play outdoors?', all of the six teachers working in the private kindergarten said '20-30 minutes'. The teachers working in the independent kindergarten and in nursery classes also gave the answers 'maximum 40 minutes' and '10-15 minutes in cool weather'.

The response of IKT5 is as follows: '*... It is around half an hour. But, sometimes they insist a lot. They beg for another five minutes... So, we add a little. 5-10 minutes more. It becomes half an hour more or less. It is not less than thirty minutes...*'

The teachers participating in the study noted that the children's playing outdoors changes depending on weather conditions and they mostly stay for 20-30 minutes outdoors when weather conditions are favorable. During the observations, it was noticed that the teachers did not take the children outdoors when it was cold and rainy. In their responses to the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form', some teachers stated that they did not go outdoors as it was cold or rainy.

**Table 6.** The teachers' views about the areas where the children play outdoors at school (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Structured Play Area</b>				
	Park	5	4	6
	Play lines	0	2	0
<b>Unstructured Play Area</b>				
	School garden	4	3	5
	Grass	1	0	5
	School terrace	0	0	2
	Woodland	0	1	0

The teachers were asked the question 'Where do the children usually play outdoors?'. All of the fifteen teachers participating in the study stated that the children play in the park. Four teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and five teachers working in the private kindergarten also gave the answer 'school garden'.

The teachers' responses show that the areas where the children play outdoors differ depending on the facilities of the institution where they are educated. The observations also support this finding. During the observations, it was seen that the children attending the independent kindergarten mostly played in the park and on the tartan ground while the children attending the private kindergarten played in the park and on the grass area in the school garden.

Though two teachers working in the private kindergarten said that the children play on the school terrace, no children playing on the school terrace were detected during the observations.

The observations in the primary school nursery classes conflicted with the teachers' views about the areas where the children played outdoors. During the observations, it was noticed that the teachers preferred the park less and mostly chose the front school garden. This may be because the materials in the park were maintenance-free and broken.

IKT5, working in the independent kindergarten, stated, '... As I have twenty children here, they are everywhere. You can see them on hills, on grasslands all of a sudden. I impose no bans about places of playing as long as there is no danger. The only exception is the back garden. We do not send them there...'

NCT4 said, '... We have a garden at school, but it is not adequate. It is covered with stones and pebbles. We sometimes play in the front garden, but I try not to go out much because I do not find it healthy. I prefer to go out for a nature excursion or, for example, for making a snowman or painting the snow when it snows, which students really love. Apart from these, I do not prefer it much...'

These findings demonstrate that the time the children spend outdoors differs depending on the quality of the outdoor areas of the pre-school education institutions.

**Table 7.** The teachers' views about the materials the children use while playing outdoors (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Natural Materials</b>				
	Nature, soil, mud	3	0	3
	Stone	2	2	0
	Tree branches	2	1	0
	Leaves	1	1	0
<b>Toys</b>				
	Garden apparatuses	5	3	1
	Toys for motor skills (ball, rope)	0	2	3
	Park toys	1	1	2
	Classroom toys not used in the classroom	0	0	1
<b>Without Materials</b>				
	Without materials	2	0	3
	Playing with each other	2	0	1
	Using their bodies	0	0	2
<b>Space</b>				
	Playground	0	0	2
	Play lines	0	1	0
	Painting with chalks	0	1	0
	Closed, hidden small areas	1	0	0

The teachers were asked the question 'What do the children play outdoors with?'. Three teachers working in the independent kindergarten and three teachers working in the private kindergarten said that the children play with natural materials such as nature, soil, and mud, and five teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and one teacher working in the private kindergarten stated that they play with garden apparatuses when they are outdoors. There were also two teachers working in the independent kindergarten and three teachers working in the private kindergarten who stated that the children play without any materials.

The table shows that the teachers working in the nursery classes did provide any views about the children playing with natural materials such as nature, soil, and mud in outdoor spaces. However, during the observations, it was noticed that the children sometimes played with the pebbles on the ground of the park and with the soil contained in the broken sandpit.

IKT1 stated, ‘... As they mostly like closed, hidden, small areas, we have a plastic tomato house, a small house. In this house, especially the girls play dramas... They also love playing tag, running games...’

PKT3 said, ‘... Well, if we go to the park, they play with the swing, slide, climbing lanes, etc. there. They start with them, but as I said before, they make a new game themselves after the 10<sup>th</sup> minute. They go on playing without using the materials much...’

**Table 8.** The teachers’ views about the plays the children are engaged in outdoors (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Games in Circle</b>				
	Traditional games	0	1	4
	Competitive games	1	0	0
<b>Running Games</b>				
	Running-tagging games	3	1	3
	Hide and seek	1	0	1
	Puss-in-the corner	0	1	0
<b>Mimicry Plays</b>				
	Dramas	1	0	0
	Imaginative play on a wooden ship	0	0	1
<b>Building Games</b>				
	Sandpit	0	2	0
	Playing with mud	0	1	0
<b>Playing With Park Toys</b>				
	The toys in the park	1	3	3
<b>Games Played with an Apparatus</b>				
	The games played with a ball	1	1	2
	Playing on the track	0	0	2
	Twirling a hula hoop	0	0	1
<b>Sports Related Games</b>				
	Balance games	1	2	0
	Gymnastics	0	0	2
<b>Other</b>				
	Free play	4	0	0
	Playing in group	1	0	1

The teachers were asked the question ‘Which games do the children play outdoors?’ One teacher working in a nursery class and four teachers working in the private kindergarten said that the children play traditional games in outdoor spaces, while four teachers working in the independent kindergarten stated that the children engage in free play. Most teachers (n=7) were of the opinion that the children mostly play running-tagging games outdoors. Also, one teacher working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and three teachers working in the private kindergarten denoted that the children play with the park toys when they are outdoors.

The view of NCT4 is as follows: ‘... If we go to the park as an outdoor space, they first take the slide. After they slide a couple of times, they go to the sandpit, which is a broken one. They like playing with the sandpit more...’

Sevimli Çelik & Johnson (2013) found out that pre-school children engage in physical activities such as jumping, bouncing, running, climbing, cycling, playing games with balls, taking nature walks, and playing games with rules when they are outdoors. The observations and the teachers’ responses to the ‘Outdoor Playtime Information Form’ indicated that the types of games the children play outdoors at school depend on the conditions of the school and the teachers’ practices.

**Table 9.** The teachers' responses to the question 'what is your role while the children are playing outdoors?' (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Participant</b>				
	Playmaker	0	2	2
	Sometimes participant	0	1	1
	Player	0	0	2
	Conductor	2	1	1
<b>Observer</b>				
	Observer	4	4	3
<b>Guide</b>				
	Guiding, directive	3	2	4
	Intervening when help is needed	3	2	1
	Not guiding much	0	1	0

The responses to the question 'What is your role while the children are playing outdoors?' concentrated in the 'observer' category in all types of schools (n=11). In addition, five teachers working in the independent kindergarten, two teachers working in the nursery classes, and four teachers working in the private kindergarten noted that they have 'guiding, directive' roles. The teachers working in the independent kindergarten were seen to be not having a 'participant' role in the children's outdoor games.

IKT 2 stated, '*... We generally observe, but we do not want to intervene much... We function as a guide and either include the child in the game or strengthen the communication among them...*'

NCT2 said, '*... I play a role as an observer, as a guide. I observe and guide them to ensure that they play without harming themselves and one another...*'

PKT3 denoted, '*... I only deal with their safety. Apart from that, I do not intervene at all. However, if there is any left-out child staying out of the game and I notice him/her, I surely go to him/her and start a game with him/her. Of course, others also come later on. I do something just to include him/her in the game. However, mostly I just observe in other cases...*'

During the observations, it was detected that the teachers were mostly observers when there were structured materials such as a park and warned and intervened in the children in dangerous situations. However, when there were no structured materials or games with rules and games in circle were to be played, they mostly took the 'playmaker' and 'leader' roles. Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey (1998) gathered the roles of teachers during playtime under five headings: observer, security-provider, guide, environment-provider and participant. Consistently with our findings, Alat, Akgümüş, & Cavali (2012) determined that teachers are generally active and observing during outdoor activities. Also, Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik (2018) found that in outdoor playtime, preschool teachers are environment-providers mostly. In addition, in Davies (1997) dealing with pre-school teachers' outdoor practices and beliefs, the teachers stated that their roles during outdoor activities were observation and monitoring and they only intervened in or directed the children when they engaged in inappropriate or unsafe behaviors. The findings concerning the teachers' roles indicate that their roles in outdoor spaces mostly involve observation as outdoor spaces are freer than indoor spaces.

**Table 10.** The teachers' views about the factors preventing the children's playing outdoors (N=15)

Themes	Codes	f		
		I.K (n=5)	N.C. (n=4)	P.K. (n=6)
<b>Health</b>				
	Weather conditions	3	3	5
	Children's health problems	0	1	0
<b>Parents</b>				
	Parents' perspective	4	2	1

### **Lack of facilities**

Safety of places	1	1	1
Materials are no obstacles	1	0	1
Lack of materials	2	2	1

### **Curriculum**

Lack of time	1	0	0
Curriculum not a problem	1	0	0

The teachers were asked the question 'What are the factor preventing the children's playing outdoors?' The responses concentrated in weather conditions (n=11), parents' perspective (n=7), and lack of materials (n=5). Four teachers working in the independent kindergarten, two teachers working in the nursery classes, and one teacher working in the private kindergarten said that the parents' perspective prevents playing outdoors. In addition, three teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and five teachers working in the private kindergarten denoted that weather conditions prevent playing outdoors. Also they stated that weather conditions effects children's health.

PKT1, working in the private kindergarten, said, '*... Unfortunately weather conditions. Well, we can go outdoors when it is cold, but we cannot go when it is raining or snowing...*'

Sevimli Çelik & Johnson (2013) determined that weather conditions prevent children's outdoor activities, whereas Jayasuriya (2014) detected that the people participating in that study supported playing outdoors at school and there were only few people considering weather condition as an obstacle. Ay Yalçın (2015) concluded that Turkish parents are worried about children's playing outdoors in winter while Finnish families are not worried about seasons and weather conditions.

**Table 11.** *The things the teachers worry about while the children are playing outdoors (N=15)*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>I.K (n=5)</b>	<b>N.C. (n=4)</b>	<b>P.K. (n=6)</b>
<b>Parents</b>	Parents not supporting teachers	0	1	0
<b>Safety of Place</b>	Safety problems	1	1	3
	Projections, pointed areas in the play ground	0	0	2
	Injuries due to ill-conditioned park	0	2	0
	Ill-conditioned physical environment (weeds grown too much)	0	1	0
	No worry as long as conditions are under control	1	0	0
<b>Safety of Children</b>	Accidents (falling, hitting one's head)	3	3	4
	Reverse-sliding, swinging on foot	1	1	2
	Going to places not visible to teachers	1	1	1

In response to the question 'In what situations are you worried while the children are playing outdoors?', three teachers working in the independent kindergarten, three teachers working in the nursery classes, and four teachers working in the private kindergarten stated accidents such as falling and hitting one's head.

NCT1, working in a nursery class, said, '*... When there is a danger. That is, when they are physically in danger. In situations endangering their life safety. They just set themselves free and try to slide...*'

As shown in table, the teachers often worry about the children's having accidents such as falling and hitting their heads. This finding indicates that the teachers have worries about the children's safety. This also supports the finding that the time the children spend outdoors differs depending on the quality of the outdoor spaces.

**Table 12.** *The results of outdoor play observations*

<b>Themes</b>	<b><i>I.K.</i> (<i>n=5</i>)</b>	<b><i>N.C.</i> (<i>n=4</i>)</b>	<b><i>P.K.</i> (<i>n=6</i>)</b>
<b><i>Average outdoor playtime</i></b>	30 minutes	20-25 minutes	15 minutes
<b><i>Teachers' role</i></b>	Observer Intervening in dangerous situation	Observer Participant observer Responsible for security Playmaker Leader	Observer Participant observer Responsible for security Playmaker Leader
<b><i>Types of play</i></b>	Playing With Park Toys Free play Ball games Running games Mimicry Plays	Games in Circle (traditional and competitive games) Running games Games Played with an Apparatus (ball, hulohop) Balance games	Games in Circle (traditional and competitive games) Running games Mimicry Plays Games with rules
<b><i>Used materials</i></b>	Park toys (slide, swing, seesaw), ball, soil area in the garden	Play without materials, rope, ball, natural materials (mud, soil, stone)	Park toys; wooden ship, swing, climbing poles, climbing rope, rocking horse, slide

Table 12 shows the results of outdoor play observations according to the school types. Children spent 30 minutes for outdoor play in independent kindergarten, 20-25 minutes in primary school nursery classes and 15 minutes in private kindergarten. During the observations, teachers' roles in independent kindergarten were determined as observer and intervener in probable dangerous situation while nursery classes and private kindergarten teachers' roles were detected as observer, participant observer and playmaker. According to outdoor play observation results, all children in different school types played running games. Moreover children in the private kindergarten and independent kindergarten were generally play with park toys while children in the nursery classes couldn't. This situation might be as a result of the materials in the park were maintenance-free and broken.

**Table 13.** *The teachers' average responses to 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form'*

<b>Themes</b>	<b><i>I.K.</i> (<i>n=5</i>)</b>	<b><i>N.C.</i> (<i>n=4</i>)</b>	<b><i>P.K.</i> (<i>n=6</i>)</b>
<b><i>Number of outdoor playtime</i></b>	21	9	15
<b><i>Duration of outdoor playtime</i></b>	38 minutes	25 minutes	15 minutes
<b><i>Types of play</i></b>	Playing With Park Toys Free play Games in Circle (traditional games)	Playing With Park Toys Games in Circle (traditional games) Games Played with an Apparatus (ball, rope)	Playing With Park Toys Free play Games in Circle (traditional games) Games Played with an Apparatus (ball, hula hoop)

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***The areas where children played in***

Park, school garden

Park, wool land, school garden

Park, school terrace, school garden

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Teachers filled 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' during two months. Teachers stated that, in this period of time, children in independent kindergarten went outside for play 21 times, nursery classes went for nine times and private kindergarten went for 15 times in average. This information is inconsistent with the answers of nursery classes' teachers' in the interview in which it was stated as more frequent. Teachers' answers about the duration of outdoor playtime were consistent with both the answers obtained in interviews and observations made by researcher. It is concluded that children in independent kindergarten spent more time on outdoor play in compare to their peers in different types of early childhood education institutions. Also, teachers' answers about the types of play and play area were parallel with the answers obtained from interviews and observations made by researcher.

### CONCLUSION

The teachers think that playing outdoors contributes to the children's physical, socio-emotional, language, and cognitive development. In all types of institutions, the frequency of playing outdoors differs by weather conditions. The interviews with the teachers, the outdoor play observations, and the teachers' responses to the 'Outdoor Playtime Information Form' indicated that the play areas where the children play outdoors, the play materials they play with, the types of games they play, and the time they spend playing outdoors differ depending on the curriculum implemented in the institution, the diversity of outdoor play materials, and whether these materials are well-maintained or badly-maintained.

The observations and the interviews showed that the teachers working in different types of institutions take similar roles during outdoor play activities. The teachers are mostly observers when there are structured materials such as a park and warn and intervene in the children in dangerous situations. However, when there are no structured materials or games with rules and games in circle are to be played, they mostly take the 'playmaker' and 'leader' roles.

According to the teachers, the factors preventing the children from playing outdoors are weather conditions and parents' perspective on their children's playing outdoors. Safety, lack of facilities, and lack of materials are the factors the teachers working in the nursery classes and the teachers working in the private kindergarten indicate most. The teachers working in the independent kindergarten touch upon lack of time.

The teachers also mention obstacles related to parents resulting from weather conditions in different seasons.

The teachers from three different types of institutions are worried about the children's having accidents such as falling and hitting their heads while playing outdoors.

To conclude, big responsibilities fall to pre-school education institutions to eliminate the deficiencies that arise from children's not adequately participating in outdoor play activities in their social lives. Playing outdoors contributes to children's physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and language development. Children feel freer, can express themselves better, and develop distinctive relationships with their friends in outdoor spaces. The teachers working in different types of institutions participating in this study support the children's playing outdoors, think that playing outdoors contributes to their development, but encounter some obstacles and problems during outdoor play practices. According to our findings, weather conditions and parents' perspectives on playing outdoors negatively influence the teachers' outdoor play practices. The outdoor play areas and the play materials available at schools affect the teachers' outdoor play practices.

To increase outdoor play practices among the pre-school teachers in Turkey, it is recommended that school administrators and policy implementers make efforts to enhance the quality of outdoor play areas; parents be informed about the contributions of playing outdoors to their children's development; the grounds of outdoor play areas at schools be arranged in accordance with seasonal weather conditions; the curricula of relevant departments of

universities be re-arranged to allow pre-service pre-school teachers to understand the importance of outdoor play activities; pre-service pre-school teachers be given pre-service training; and pre-school teachers be given in-service training about the importance of outdoor play practices.

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