

TURKISH EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT
FREE PLAY AND TEACHER ROLES IN FREE PLAY

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ABSTRACT

TURKISH EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT FREE PLAY AND TEACHER ROLES IN FREE PLAY

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The purpose of this study was to investigate Turkish early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play as well as the changes, if any, occur in these beliefs after taking teaching practice course. In this study, explanatory sequential mixed method was employed and qualitative data was used to support and enrich the quantitative data. The participants of the study were senior early childhood preservice teachers from public universities in Ankara, Denizli, Eskişehir, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Mersin, Uşak and Van. Firstly, *Free Play in Early Childhood Education and Teacher Roles in Free Play Questionnaires* were administered to participants ($N=467$, $N=425$) at the beginning and end of 2018-2019 fall term. Following that semi-structured one-on-one interviews were carried out with volunteer pre-service teachers ($N=24$). Descriptive statistics; means, percentages and frequencies was used to analyze quantitative data while descriptive analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. According to the results, preservice teachers believe that alongside the contributions of free play to learning and development, it may bring about such negative consequences for children as peer bullying, aggression towards others and materials, and negative peer learning, especially if it is not under adult supervision. However, the preservice teachers were found to be prone to redirecting, intervening in play for instructive purposes so they seem to need clarification about director and guide teacher roles. Moreover, the changes noted in preservice teachers' beliefs after teaching practice course were found to related to the practices of the mentor teachers which were disapproved by preservice teachers.

Keywords: Early childhood pre-service teachers, beliefs about free play, beliefs about teacher roles, teaching practice

ÖZ

OKUL ÖNCESİ ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ, SERBEST OYUN VE SERBEST OYUNDA ÖĞRETMEN ROLLERİ HAKKINDAKİ İNANIŞLARI

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Bu çalışmanın amacı okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının, serbest oyun ve serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışları ile varsa, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi sonrasında bu inanışlarda meydana gelen değişikliklerin incelenmesidir. Bu çalışmada sıralı açıklayıcı karma desen kullanılmış olup, nicel verilerin desteklenmesi ve zenginleştirilmesi amacıyla nitel verilerden yararlanılmıştır. Bu araştırmanın katılımcıları, Ankara, Denizli, Eskişehir, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Mersin, Uşak ve Van'da yer alan devlet üniversitelerinde öğrenim gören son sınıf okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarıdır. Öncelikle *Okul Öncesi Eğitimde Serbest Oyun ve Serbest Oyunda Öğretmen Rollerini Anketleri*, 2018-2019 güz döneminde, 8 farklı üniversiteden öğretmen adaylarına (N= 467, N=425) uygulanmıştır. Ardından gönüllü öğretmen adaylarıyla (N=24) bire bir, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nicel verilerin analizinde betimsel istatistiklerden ortalama, yüzde ve frekans kullanılırken, nitel verilerin analizinde betimsel analiz kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçlara göre, öğretmen adayları, serbest oyunun çocukların öğrenme ve gelişimine katkılarının yanı sıra, özellikle yetişkin gözetimi altında değilse çocuklar için akran zorbalığı, başkalarına ve materyallere karşı saldırganlık ve olumsuz akran öğrenmesi gibi olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabileceğine inanmaktadır. Fakat öğretmen adaylarının yönlendirme ve oyuna öğretim amacıyla müdahale etme eğiliminde oldukları ve bu nedenle yöneten ve rehber öğretmen rolleri ile ilgili açıklığa kavuşmaya ihtiyaç duydukları görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte öğretmen adaylarının öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi sonucunda inanışlarında fark edilen

değişikliklerin, onların mentor öğretmenlerinde gözlemledikleri fakat onaylamadıklarını ifade ettikleri uygulamalarıyla ilgili olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okul öncesi öğretmen adayları, serbest oyun hakkında inanışlar, öğretmen roller hakkında inanışlar, öğretmenlik uygulaması

In Memory of My Grandparents,
Şerife & Ali MERAN
Sultan & Bektaş ÖZEL

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The roots of play are quite old and its emergence is not associated with a specific time period (Pound, 2014). Likewise, investigation of play also has a long history as it has always been a part of children's and adults' life (Cohen, 2006). As stated by Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008, p.1) "From Plato to Kant, From Froebel to Piaget, philosophers, historians, biologists, psychologists, and educators have studied this ubiquitous behavior to understand how and why we play."

Play and the education of young children have been associated by many important thinkers and educators including Plato, Aristotle, Martin Luther and Comenius (Pound, 2014, Frost, 2010). Likewise, Jean-Jacques Rousseau pioneered a concept of free play for the education of young children (Frost, 2010). Inspired by Rousseau, Pestalozzi founded a school that favored playful and practical instruction instead of the didactic approach favoured by his contemporaries. Froebel, a student of Pestalozzi, (1782-1852), known as the father of the kindergarten contributed greatly to in depth understanding of play as an instructional tool and implementation of play as an integral part of the curriculum through his practices in his own kindergarten (Frost, 2010). Thus, the idea of active manipulation and exploration of concrete materials, introduced by Froebel was given further support and recognized as the most effective instructional method for teaching children by major educational theorists of 20th century including Montessori, Dewey and Piaget (Frost, 2010). Dewey, recognized the educational value of natural play activities of children, regarded them as an effective learning instrument that should be employed in the education of young children (Ilica, 2016). However, Dewey did not put a value on completely free play activities, arguing instead that play needs to take place in a nurturing environment created by the teacher so as to promote the cognitive and social development of children in a desirable manner.

While the theoretical existence of play, especially free play, has been discussed in the literature, there continues to be a lack of consensus on how to apply it in the classroom. The concept also requires an extensive operational definition. To define child-driven free play, aside from children being free to choose their activity, materials and playmates, when genuinely engaged in free play they are also free to develop, stop, or change their activity as they wish (Yang, 2000; Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007). Therefore, it is a naturally driven

enjoyable activity that focuses on the process itself rather than end product (Gray, 2008; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). In free play, rather than acting on the ideas and suggestions of adults, children as active participants can develop their play based on their own ideas or those of their play partners (Yang, 2000; Gray, 2008). On the other hand, Fler (2010) drew attention to the socially and culturally constructed nature of play in which children create imaginary situations and assign different meanings and roles to objects and actions in their imaginary world. Basically, the main purpose of unstructured play is the satisfaction of interests and social-emotional needs of children through self-chosen and voluntary activities (Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012). Within this framework, children can engage in object or constructive play, make-believe or pretend play, social play, locomotor play, rough-and-tumble play or anything that is not imposed and controlled by adults (Fisher et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, such definitions do not convey that adults should not be involved or intervene in children's play in any way. "Freedom" in free play time does not mean leaving children unattended and letting them aimlessly spend time, that was also made clear by Dewey (Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; MoNE, 2012, Ilica,2016). Rather, it refers to the freedom that children are free to choose from a variety of activities and materials according to their own needs and wishes. Likewise, they can also engage in individual, small group and/or large group activities during their free play time (Hanley, Cammilleri, Tiger & Ingvarsson, 2007). In supporting this process, it is important for teachers to undertake a range of facilitative roles such as onlooker, stage-manger, co-player and play leader to promote children's play (Enz & Christie, 1997). By recognizing the essence and value of these different roles and by adapting their roles in accordance with children's multiple play situations, teachers can make great contributions to the quality and meaning of children's experiences in play (Wu, 2016).

Leaving aside how play is presented and defined, previous research agrees that children's active engagement in a variety of play opportunities brings desirable physical, social, emotional, cognitive and language outcomes (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2012). Play opportunities provided for children enable them to develop physical competence, gain knowledge about the world around them, interact with others, acquire self-regulation skills, and improve their problem solving skills (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). For instance, active play supports children's fine and gross motor skills in addition to releasing their stress and boredom in an enjoyable way and raising their energy level and self-esteem (Brockman et al., 2011; Frost et al., 2012). Moreover, play also fosters development of cognitive abilities, creative thinking, inquiry and problem-solving abilities (Smith, 2009; Brock, Jarvis, Olusoga, 2014). It creates a context for children in which they

could learn to establish and maintain interaction with others and develop self-regulation, conflict resolution and cooperation skills (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In addition, pretend play provides children opportunity to use diverse symbols, express their thoughts and feelings, expand their vocabulary and enhance their language and literacy development (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Saracho & Spodek, 2006). Besides its facilitative role in learning and development of children, play provides teachers with better opportunities to scaffold learning and carry out authentic assessment of children's learning via observation as well (Fleer, 2006; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). Due to its important contributions to development, learning and assessment of children, play is acknowledged as the basis of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Fleer, 2013; Wood, 2013).

Nevertheless, there is disagreement over how to implement free play practices in the early childhood classroom and the teacher's role in free play. Over the last decades, diverse barriers gave rise to questioning and challenging the instructional value of play and integration of play into early childhood classrooms (Frost, 2012; Wood, 2013). According to the related literature, (a) play lacks a clear and certain definition, (b) there exist incompatible beliefs about the educational value of play and perceptions that play and learning are distinct activities, (c) there is uncertainty about the reliability and measurable consequences of play, (d) play is impacted by school administration, colleagues and parents, (e) play is influenced by contextual and sociocultural factors resulting from rapid alterations in the society, (f) play is subject to wide range of advances in technology, (g) and there exists an ongoing dispute over the role of teachers in children's play which remains a primary obstacle to implementation of free play in early childhood education classrooms (Fromberg, 2006; Elkind, 2007; Frost, 2010; Dockett, 2011; Fleer, 2013; Gray, 2013; Wood, 2013). As a consequence, all these factors are leading to a decrease in play time in school settings and elimination of play from early childhood curriculums (Miller & Almon, 2009; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Frost et al., 2012).

It is inferred that almost all of the obstacles to inclusion and integration of play in early childhood education are related to the dichotomy between play and learning. For instance, play is excluded from many school curricula and settings due to its acceptance as a trivial activity that only lets children get rid of their extra energy (Duarte & Morales-Flores, 2012). Rather than being utilized as an instructional tool, play is offered as a reward activity after completion of more academic activity such as literacy, math and science (Christie & Roskos, 2006). On the other hand, increasing stress on standardized test performance push teachers into the dilemma of choosing between play and prescribed curricular activities

(Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009) Since parents indicate no desire for their children to waste time on such activities as play that do not seemingly produce quantifiable outcomes, teachers are pressured to choose the latter. This decision is further reinforced through the growing social expectations of various stake holders who wish to see concrete evidence of children's learning on work sheets or performance tests (Miller & Almond, 2009). Therefore, teachers are forced to justify their use of play as an instructional tool in their classroom (Goldstein, 2007). In time, they comply with the expectations of parents, co-workers, administrators and abandon play. Unless teachers have knowledge about play and value play as a medium of instruction, they are more inclined to leave play out of their classroom so their beliefs about play are important to investigate (Howard, 2010).

On the other hand, as claimed by Hakkarainen (2006) contrary to the theoretical existence of free play, on official papers and reports, research findings reveal that it is not practiced prevalently as it is suggested and expected to be (as cited in Flear, 2013). For instance, it was revealed that despite the formal existence of free play in school settings, it lacks sustained dialogues, complexity, adult involvement, liveliness and motive to trigger creative and exciting explorations (Lillemyr, 2003). That leads us to investigate the roles of teachers in free play since they are determinants of quality of children's play through the opportunities they provide and the ones they do not (Flear, 2010). According to the Turkish early childhood education program and related literature, it is indicated that about an hour long time period is allocated for free play on a daily basis (Ersan, 2011; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; MoNE, 2013; Ogelman, 2014,). While early childhood teachers in Turkey believe in the necessity of using play as a medium for facilitating learning and development of young children in preschool classrooms, they are not proficient in using play as an instructional tool (Ersan, 2011; Aras 2016, Ivrendi 2017). Typically, it has been found that teachers consider free play merely as means of discharging children and preparing children for the following activity and for the day. During free play, they generally spend most of their time observing children and dealing with their other duties such as preparing activity plans, completing official documents and child observation forms. At this point, it could be said that they usually observe children from a distance while dealing with other tasks, without engaging actively with children (Aras, 2016). Moreover, even though they support the concept of teacher involvement in play to varying degrees, most of the teachers were nevertheless observed in the onlooker and uninvolved roles during free play and they usually intervene when there is a safety concern or a conflict between children (Aras, 2016; Ivrendi, 2017). Unfortunately, the practice of leaving the classroom during free play time, also an indicator of an uninvolved role, is not rare among pre-service teachers in Turkey (Ertürk, 2013). It

seems that the potential benefits of play in identifying the zone of proximal development and correspondingly supporting children's learning and development within their own capacity are refused by the practices of such teachers.

Hopefully, contemporary research concerning the gradual elimination of play from educational contexts and unqualified play experiences in the classroom, reveals that teachers can teach in a developmentally appropriate manner that does not distinguish play from learning (Goldstein, 2007; Jones & Reynolds, 2011). What they need is being intentional and knowledgeable about play and subsequently benefitting from it as a means of facilitating and relating children's learning with the existing standards of early childhood education (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Thomas, Warren & Vries, 2011). This implies that in addition to external pressures to satisfy the requirements of pre-defined curriculums, as argued by some researchers diverse cultural and social challenges including teachers' own ideas, values and beliefs about the importance of play could be another major reason behind teachers' hesitation to give sufficient place for play in their classrooms. (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Miller & Almond, 2009; Vera & Geneser, 2012). Likewise, Howard (2010) indicates that teacher confidence to implement play in the classroom is implicitly or explicitly affected by teachers' level of pedagogical knowledge and perception of play. Low level of confidence may reinforce teachers' inability to defend their beliefs about the significance of play, in face of challenges in the school context. This issue is validated by various research which demonstrates that beliefs are influential in shaping teaching beliefs and consequently affect the instructional practices of teachers in the classroom (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Ribeori & Carrillo, 2011). Thus, it seems essential to investigate prospective teachers' beliefs about free play as it may help to determine the current place of play in early childhood teacher education programs and predict the future of play in early childhood education settings, all of which would have implications for teacher education.

Given the fact that play is an important vehicle for enhancing learning and development of children and an inseparable part of early childhood education, it is essential for teachers to provide adequate time and materials to facilitate play so that children are sufficiently able to practice and internalize their existing knowledge, gain new experiences and to scaffold their learning (Fromberg, 2002; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Such play experiences are critical elements of early childhood teacher education programs (Lewis, 2013). As teachers' notion of play is a merger of their personal beliefs resulting from their life experiences and experiences they gained during their teacher education program, their ideas about play in early childhood classrooms should not be thought separate from their teacher education programs and their experiences in that program (Richardson, 2003;

Johnson et al., 2015). As argued by Ryan and Northey-Berg (2014) the appropriate training of pre-service teachers can assist them to acquire relevant knowledge and skills in relation to play and to instil in them the value of play and confidence to use it effectively in the classroom. Moreover, it is quite important to study preservice teachers' beliefs since how they perceive their roles as educators is considerably influenced by cultural, ideological and personal beliefs that are not deliberately expressed and thus, not rationalized (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson 1996). Such unconscious beliefs could lead to potential conflict between the internal belief system of individuals and the external truth of contemporary teaching, schooling and the school system in which they will be employed (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1996; Korthagen & Lagerwerf, 1996).

However, despite the acknowledged significance of play in child development and learning, as well as particular emphasis on integration of play into early childhood curriculums (Welsch, 2008), less is known about pre-service teachers' beliefs in relation to role of play in early childhood education curriculums and settings and their own role as future teachers in facilitating the play of children (Jung & Jin, 2014; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2014). It seems important to gain insight into beliefs of the seniors who will soon become professional in the area and how they make decisions about play opportunities provided in the classroom that are central to children's learning and development. Additionally, teacher candidates in their final year have opportunity, through practicum, to explore the connection between theory and practice. It is suggested by Richardson (2003) that teaching experience might lead to a change in teachers' beliefs by creating incongruity between pedagogy and practice. So how they perceive and evaluate their teaching experience with regard to play and role of play could help us to understand whether or not there is a change in pre-service teachers' beliefs about its implementation in the early childhood education classroom.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The current study is significant for various reasons. Firstly, beliefs about play are important to understand because play is one of children's rights and adults are responsible for providing opportunities and safe environments for children's play (UNICEF Turkey, 2004). Also, play is widely acknowledged to be a facilitative vehicle for whole development and better learning of children (Lester & Russell, 2010; Frost et al., 2012; Gray, 2013). On the other hand, the critical decrease in the amount of overall play time, especially free play time, in preschool classrooms for various reasons including structured teaching, advances in technology, emphasis on academic success and standardized assessment, academically-oriented parents and more importantly conflicting beliefs about the educational value of play

and teacher roles in play, should lead us to think about the future of free play in early childhood classrooms and the beliefs of future professionals who will make the decisions concerning the issue (Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007; Miller & Almond, 2009). Given the fact that spontaneous play is closely related to memory, imagination, creativity, problem solving, and synaptic formation, decline in play opportunities and replacement of free play with structured activities might have some negative consequences for learning and development such as impulsivity, immaturity in social and emotional behaviours, depression, violence, decline in the learning capacity as well as health problems particularly obesity. (Frost & Brown, 2008; Frost 2010). Thus, studying teacher candidates' beliefs about free play is important not only for early childhood education but also early childhood teacher education in order to better equip preservice teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge they need to plan and implement free play in their future classrooms.

Although the value of play and teacher influence on integration and quality of play have been acknowledged, only a few studies have specifically investigated future professionals' beliefs about play (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010) and there seems to be an even larger gap in their beliefs about teacher roles in free play. Given how important play is for children to foster their learning and development, and the influential role of teacher beliefs on their instructional decisions and practices in the classroom, studying future professionals' beliefs about free play and teacher roles during play appear to be a significant research subject (Nespor, 1986; Calderhead, 1996; Pellegrini, 2011). All teacher candidates need to face with how and how much to involve play in their classrooms as future teachers (Caudle & Moran, 2012; Jung & Jin, 2014). For these reasons, it is thought that gaining understanding about future professionals' beliefs regarding play and related issues could make contribution to the insufficient literature on pre-service teacher's beliefs (Sherwood, 2009; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, 2013; Cortez-Castro, 2015). Consequently, learning about their beliefs may bring about some practical implications for teacher education programs to regulate and improve pedagogical and curricular experiences provided for teacher candidates (Vera & Geneser, 2012; Sherwood & Riefel, 2013).

Secondly, since teacher candidates' beliefs about teacher roles in play establish their roles and practices in the classroom, which, in turn, affect the quality and outcomes of play for children, it is important to study the pre-service teachers' beliefs regarding the issue. (Fleer, 2010). The active engagement of teachers in play is supported by both early childhood theories and contemporary research because increased teacher involvement in play is found to be closely associated with the complexity of play and improved developmental outcomes for children (Smilansky 1968; Tarman & Tarman, 2011; Rice, 2014). Thus, it is critical for

pre-service teachers to be ready to make careful observation of abilities, interests, and needs of children during play and enable them to explore, learn and develop in high quality and highly interactive play contexts. Nevertheless, the limited research that examined free play, teacher-child interaction and teachers' roles during free play time in Turkey (Erürk, 2013; Aras, 2016; Ivrendi, 2017), revealed that early childhood teachers do not play an active role during children's play instead they only intervene when there is a safety issue and in fact, they may sometimes not even be in the classroom during that time period. Gaining insight into prospective teachers' beliefs about the issue might be helpful to prevent future professionals from such malpractices. In order to reach this goal, pre-service teachers need to reflect on and become aware of their beliefs about teacher roles in play and adapt them in a developmentally appropriate manner, prior to becoming a professional in the field. When it is considered that teachers have a great impact on children's play through the opportunities they provide and the ones they do not, the current study would be useful to gain understanding about teacher candidates' beliefs about teacher roles in play.

Moreover, as argued by Johnson (1994), there are three reasons behind disseminating studies on what pre-service teachers believe. First of all, perceptions and decisions of teachers that in turn impact their attitudes and actions in the classroom are substantially affected by what they believe. Secondly, beliefs serve as an important determinant of teachers' instructional practices in the classroom. Lastly, gaining insight into teacher beliefs contributes to improvement of teacher practices and quality of teacher preparation programs (as cited in Incecay, 2011). To summarize "...beliefs are the heart of teaching" (Vartulli, 2005, p.82) so addressing Turkish pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play could be of crucial importance in determining the state of play in teacher education programs and predict the future of play in early childhood education settings. Also, it would be quite useful for teacher educators to gain insight into beliefs of pre-service teachers, prior to their transition to the field, to be able to support them to reflect on and challenge their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge about the value of play and the role of teachers in play. Correspondingly, they can contribute to better implications of play in early childhood classrooms in future (Vera & Geneser, 2012; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2014).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate senior early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles during free play time. To that end, the current study focused on the following research questions;

1. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play?
 - 1.1. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about the nature of free play?
 - 1.2. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about forms of free play?
 - 1.3. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about planning for free play?
 - 1.4. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about process of free play activities?
 - 1.5. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about the relationship between free play, and learning and development?
 - 1.6. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about use of free play as an assessment tool?
2. What are early childhood pre-service teacher's beliefs about teacher roles in free play?
 - 2.1. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about stage-manager teacher role?
 - 2.2. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about co-player teacher role?
 - 2.3. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about play leader teacher role?
 - 2.4. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about onlooker/observer teacher role?
 - 2.5. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about director/redirector teacher role?
 - 2.6. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about uninvolved teacher role?
3. Is there any change in pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play after taking teaching practice course?

1.3 Definitions of Important Terms

Early childhood pre-service teachers: Senior university students who are majoring in an early childhood education program and who are currently undertaking a teaching practice course.

Free play in early childhood education: Free play is defined as a type of play in which children freely choose the activity, materials and individuals they will engage in (Yang, 2000). In addition to selection of activity, material, and playmate from the available options, children also act according to their wishes in developing, stopping or changing the play activity.

Belief: “Beliefs are propositions that are accepted as true by the individual holding the belief, but they do not require epistemic warrant” (Green, 1971 as cited in Richardson, 1996). In teaching, beliefs have been considered to be closely associated with teaching behaviors (Kagan, 1992).

Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about free play: Early childhood pre-service teachers’ opinions or perspectives about nature, content, planning and process of free play and role of free play for development and learning, and assessment of the both.

Teacher role: The teacher roles refer to preschool teachers’ roles they assume during free-play time. These roles include stage manager, co-player, play leader, director, uninvolved/safety monitor, onlooker and redirector (Enz & Christie, 1993; Johnson, Christie, and Wardle, 2005).

Pre-service teachers’ beliefs about teacher roles during free play: Early childhood pre-service teachers’ opinions or perspectives about teacher roles during children’s free play.

Free play time: It is about an hour long time period provided for children to engage in free play in the learning centres and it mostly take place early in the morning and/or afternoon (due to the double shift schooling system) after the circle time, before the activity time (MoNE, 2013)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature about free play in early childhood education and teacher roles during free play. In this regard, historical foundations of play and theoretical basis of the study; importance of free play for overall learning and development of children and as a tool for assessment; place and role of play and free play in Turkish early childhood education context, and teacher involvement and roles in free play are discussed. Moreover, the role of beliefs in teaching and influences shaping pre-service teachers' beliefs as well as previous studies in the literature in relation to the present study are also addressed in this chapter.

2.1 Historical and Theoretical Basis of Play in Early Childhood Education

Play have always been an inseparable component of early childhood and early childhood education programs (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Thus, throughout history various theories have been proposed to disclose the activities of children and they were basically classified into two categories as classical and modern theories of play (Mellou, 1994).

To start with classical theories, while surplus energy theory by Schiller, defended that play is disposal of the extra energy, relaxation theory suggested by Moritz-Lazarus argued that play allows individuals to regenerate the energy that exhausted during work (Brock, Jarvis & Olusoga, 2014). After studying extensively, the behaviours of animals and humans, Karl Groos proposed the pre-exercise theory, which is also called instinct-practice theory claiming that through play children naturally practice the skills that are necessary for adult life (Pramling –Samuelsson & Fler, 2009). Likewise, G. Stanley Hall also considered instinct as a critical aspect of children's play and suggested recapitulation theory which put forward that play provides opportunity for individuals to experience and get rid of primitive instincts and to become prepared for modern life (Pramling –Samuelsson & Fler, 2009).

In addition to classical theories, modern theories of play also intended to clarify the meaning of play and its value for children's healthy development. One of them is psychoanalytic theory that is built on the work of Freud and his associates. Freud as the pioneer of the psychoanalytic theory argued that play is a means of catharsis for children since it helps to diminish the effects of unpleasant feelings and discomforting experiences

and contribute to positive feelings and better interpersonal relations (Saracho & Spodek, 1995; Brock, et al., 2014).

Piaget, on the other hand, proposed that play is essential for children to construct their own knowledge about the world around them (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Brock, et al., 2014). He suggested three processes – assimilation, accommodation and equilibration – that play a crucial role in learning and development of children (Darragh, 2010; Wood, 2013). While assimilation accounts for the process in which children fit the newly acquired information from the external world into their available mental structures, accommodation elucidate the process whereby children modify or extend their present schemes to embody a new piece of information. Following the encounter of a new concept and experience, the state of disequilibrium is generated and stimulates learning until it turns into equilibrium where the existing schemas of children change or adapt to comprehend the novel information. For Piaget, children's play encourages assimilation rather than accommodation so play enables children to strengthen what they have learned rather than as a stimulus for new learning. Thus, he highlighted the crucial role of educators to provide environments where children learn actively, explore and experiment freely, and identify and solve problems in their self-selected and self-governed activities (Wood, 2013). During this process, rather than being instructor, the teacher is assumed to be a responsive enabler and facilitator who contributes to the diversity of children's experiences.

Unlike Piaget, Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky put great emphasis on the importance of social interactions in play as well as the historical and cultural context that play takes place, to promote learning and development (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2007). Also, he touched on the progress of children's symbolic thinking through play. Contrary to Piaget, Vygotsky viewed play as much more than an end product of cognitive development. In fact, Vygotsky (1977) believed that "Play is the source of development and creates the zone of proximal development" (p.96 as cited in Hakkarainen & Brödičky, 2014). The zone of proximal development refers to the difference between children's actual competence that they can achieve on their own and their potential competence that they can achieve with the assistance of an adult or more capable peers. For instance, while playing with Lego, if a child could not figure out how to make a wheel arch for a car model from the bricks in different shapes, division of the task into pieces or steps by a more competent adult or a peer, may assist the child to solve the problem.

In addition to zone of proximal development, Vygotsky also proposed that learning proceeds from interpersonal to intrapersonal. It means developmental operations respectively take place at the social level and then at the individual level. For instance, a child who plays

the water balloon game with her friend where they try to fill it using a funnel, at the water table, may then try to practice the new concept and skill she learned at school in the bathroom sink at home. Thus, it is essential for children to engage in social interactions and social play with others to gain new knowledge and skills (Van Hoorn, Nourrot, Scales & Alward, 2007).

Moving to the advocates of play as an integral part of early childhood education, the works of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a German educator, come to the fore (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Froebel established the first kindergarten in Germany in 1840 in which play was used as way of teaching children (Darragh, 2010). The curriculum of the Froebelian kindergarten included three central activities which are games and songs, construction activities, and gifts and occupations (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Gifts included wooden blocks and wooden and woollen balls which are particularly designed for manipulation while a child is involved in craft activities such as weaving, stringing and folding papers (Provenzo, 2009). Froebel benefited from observing the natural play of children to build up the basis of his kindergarten education. However, he also restricted the spontaneous play of children when giving instruction about how to play with gifts and how to engage in occupations. (Saracho & Spodek, 1995, Frost, 2010).

Similar to Froebel, Maria Montessori (1870-1952), also based the fundamentals of her education philosophy and methods on the spontaneous play of children, though she later reconstructed and arranged them systematically (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). While devising her method and materials, Montessori sought for children to play freely in the classroom. Following her observations of children's free play with the materials, she extracted the important elements of play and framed the use of it in her education methods. After deciding on the best use of materials, children were restrained from playing freely with Montessori materials (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Montessori education focused on offering reality based activities and dissuades any kind of fantasy play that is considered as non-educational and trivial. Montessori stood for giving freedom to children within restrictions, that is, allowing children to decide on what to work on among the available options rather than giving freedom in play (Lillard, 2013).

John Dewey (1859-1952), another pioneer of progressive kindergarten education, on the other hand, rejected the structured play concepts of Froebel and Montessori (Saracho & Spodek, 1995). Dewey suggested an early education that is complementary to young children's present experiences of life (Ilica, 2016). He believed in the effectiveness of play in helping children to rebuild their current experiences and to make sense out of them. Dewey, recognized the educational value of natural play activities, regarded them as an effective learning instrument for children and gave place to them in the education of young

children (Illica, 2016). The views of Dewey greatly contributed to modern instructional use of children's play in education.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Nespor's framework of beliefs constitutes the theoretical basis of this study. As clarified by Nespor (1985) in his own work, utilization of the term "belief" is not strict, its rather arbitrary. Since the term "belief" is not indispensable, view, opinion, perception or a similar term in line with these might be used to replace it. This is applicable for this study, too. Instead of pre-service teachers' beliefs about play, opinion, perspective or view could be used. The reason behind the preference for "belief" is that it is a bit more latent and involves more emotion than the other concepts (Richardson, 1996). As teacher candidates' opinions about play and teacher roles in play is not a frequently articulated issue, and it is shaped by early experiences, the researcher decided to use "belief" instead of other terms.

The main reason for using Nespor's framework is that his work contributed much to the development of "a theoretically-grounded model or 'belief system' that can serve as a framework for systematic and cooperative investigation" of beliefs (p.317). Nespor's framework has been prevalently used to form the theoretical basis of research that investigate beliefs. More importantly, it is revealed in the literature that his study was particularly employed to establish a theoretical framework for research and literature review on the beliefs of teachers and teacher candidates (Pajares, 1992; Calderhead, 1996; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Scott, 2005). Thus, it matches up with the intent of the current study to explore pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play. Besides, frequent citations of his work by many international researchers could be proof of quality and validity of Nespor's framework (Web of Science, 2018).

According to Nespor (1987), there are four forces that structure beliefs and he defined them as 'existential presumption', 'alternativity', 'affective and evaluative loading', and 'episodic structure'. Firstly, an existential presumption that simply implies commonly held assumptions refers to the perception of a situation or a notion as actual or true disregarding reality. For instance, a teacher who accuses failed students of being lazy despite the lack of tangible proof that they were, could be an example of someone exhibiting commonly held assumptions. Nespor (1987) asserted that "the reification of transitory, ambiguous, conditional or abstract characteristics into stable, well-defined, absolute and concrete entities" underlie the development of the existential presumption (p.318).

Secondly, to Nespor, we encounter alternativity when an individual's conceptual preference for an optimum situation is at odds with the reality of a situation. He added that

the conception of optimal situations is not completely a result of one's personal experiences. To clarify, in the case of a teacher who wants to create a fun and friendly classroom environment that looks like the one she had in her childhood, the possibility of failure is sufficiently high. This is because, not only the classroom she teaches, but also her school experiences from childhood may not reflect the optimal. According to Nespor, what she sought to create was "a sort of utopian alternative to the sort of classroom she was familiar with" (p.319).

Thirdly, affective and evaluative loading suggested by Nespor (1987) indicates feelings, moods and emotional evaluations that shape teachers' beliefs and lead them to have disposition towards a certain area. He also argued that there can be difference between knowledge of an area and feelings attached to it. For example, a person who is knowledgeable about the rules of chess, may dislike the game itself. From this instance, it may be inferred that knowing something does not necessarily coincide with positive emotions about that knowledge. For this reason Nespor suggested that how teachers actually treat their students is influenced by their unrecognized beliefs and feelings about them. If they believe that students learn in certain ways, then they adapt their teaching practices accordingly, despite a lack of empirical evidence.

The last force that shape people's beliefs, according to Nespor (1987), is episodic storage that he referred to experience. He asserted that specific episodes or events constitutes the source of power, authority, and legitimacy for underlying beliefs. He claimed that perception and understanding of following events will be filtered through the feelings of these particular episodes. To illustrate, a teacher who took more pleasure in art activities in elementary school compared to other highly instructive activities, may allocate more time to art activities while teaching. Nespor suggested that "such critical episodes are probably at the root of the fact that teachers learn a lot about teaching, through their experiences as students (p.320).

As stated by Nespor (1987), these four forces structuring people's beliefs contribute to formation of a belief system which is characterized as being 'non-consensual' and 'unbounded'. The non-consensual features of a belief system refers to subjectivity of beliefs because it is inconvenient for other people to evaluate them and hard for the person to examine themselves critically. Unboundedness, on the other hand, represents the unpredictable and sweeping extension of beliefs that stem from loosely-bounded and poorly-defined belief systems.

Moreover, Nespor (1987) proposed that these four forces which are influential on beliefs are employed by teachers in two interrelated ways; facilitation of memories and

definition of tasks. To explain, storage, retrieval, and reconstruction of memories of events could be affected by the emotional and evaluative components of beliefs. In this connection, an emotional response given to an event determines to what extent that experience informs a person's beliefs. Consequently, teachers' definition of tasks, and in turn their approach to their work is grounded in these four forces- commonly held assumptions, feelings, ideals and experiences.

Although the framework developed by Nespor (1987) emphasized the forces affecting people's beliefs, structure of belief system and its influence on teachers and teaching, it is not sufficiently comprehensive to explain why pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play matter. In addition to Nespor's belief framework which serves as a central theoretical basis for the present study, the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky is used to complement the deficiency of Nespor's work. Sociocultural theory is used to provide a reasonable ground for importance of play and teacher roles in play.

Similar to Nespor (1987), Vygotsky (1986) also highlighted the value of experiences and their impact on the way that children think. According to Vygotsky, childhood experiences bring about development of 'spontaneous' and 'scientific' conception. The spontaneous concepts refer to ones that are acquired informally (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Even though adults are implicit providers of these concepts, they neither systematically present them nor make an attempt to relate them with other notions, unlike the acquisition of scientific concepts. To Vygotsky, play provides a great context where children develop understanding about basic spontaneous concepts which later establish a base for scientific concepts.

Vygotsky had always been a strong proponent of play for learning and development of children. He believed that play enables adult and child to engage in a wide variety of social interactions and joint activities and that consequently leads to collaborative construction of knowledge (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2007). Vygotsky (1978) also argued that play is a vehicle for nurturing development and it creates room for zone of proximal development (Bodrova et al., 2013). He described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the difference between children's actual competence that they can achieve on their own and their potential competence that they can achieve with the assistance of an adult or more capable peers (Brock et al., 2014; Darragh, 2010). Bruner also developed a similar term that goes hand in hand with ZPD inspired by the work of Vygotsky, called "scaffolding". It refers to assisting children in their learning at first with the support they needed and then gradually decreasing the amount of assistance as children become more competent. Vygotsky perceived zone of proximal development as crucial area for actual development and learning to occur.

That is why he stated that adults have an essential role in not only providing time, space and materials for children to engage in play but also enhancing and scaffolding their play as it progresses (Bodrova et al., 2013). Without the facilitative and unobtrusive involvement of adults, play is more likely to result in immature activity with weak imaginary scenarios and poorly define rules and roles, and maybe chaos, violence and bullying, none of which contribute to development of new skills and knowledge (Bodrova et al., 2013).

Moreover, Vygotsky (1978, p.74) put forward that “In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (as cited in Resnick, 2016). Therefore, teachers, who could be considered as more capable others in a modern preschool classroom where children are classified by age, have responsibility to scaffold learning and development through the various facilitative roles they can take. (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; Yang & Shin, 1995 as cited in Yang, 2000). In that way, the assistance of more competent others supports children to progress and function within the zone of proximal development.

According to sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky, cultural contexts and social interactions are critical for promoting learning and development of individuals (Brock, et al., 2014; Darragh, 2010). He argued that biological processes are not adequate to lead to higher level of development and learning unless they are accompanied with interactions and activities with people, objects, and symbols in the social and cultural environment of individuals (Brock, et al, 2014). At this point, Vygotsky’s theory on children’s play could not be isolated from his extensive theoretical framework (Bordova & Leong, 2015). He greatly focused on role of play, particularly make-believe play which take place in a social and cultural context as well as includes great deal of social interaction that enhance learning and development (Bodrova et al.,, 2013).

Vygotsky characterized “real” play with three features; inclusion of imaginary situation created by children, assuming and acting out roles and pursuing the rules set by the particular roles assumed by children. Therefore, he argued that “in play child is free but this is an illusionary freedom” (Vygotsky, 1967, p.10 as cited in Bodrova et al., 2013, p.113). For instance, before initiating the “car shop” play, the talks about, what is repair and how it is done, what kinds of cars require repair, who will take on the role of car owner, who will play the receptionist, who will act out the mechanic might be held by children. Due to these three main characteristics of play, it promotes children’s self-regulation by requiring them to restrain their immediate urges and act accordingly with their roles so it encourages children to act intentionally. The planning the play and roles also promotes cognitive processes in addition to self-regulation (Bodrova et al., 2013).

That is why he stated that adults have an essential role in not only providing time, space and materials for children to engage in play but also enhancing and scaffolding the play of children as it progresses (Bodrova et al., 2013). It is especially important in free play when children frequently bring up questions and try to solve them through interacting with more capable peers or adults. For these reasons, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory also constituted the theoretical framework of the current study that investigates pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play.

2.3 Importance of Free Play in Early Childhood Education

Free play is considered as the solely genuine form of play (Slavin, and Rubin et al., as cited in Rowlands, 2007), and can be defined as

...children choosing what they want to do, how they want to do it and when to stop and try something else. Free play has no external goals set by adults and has no adult imposed curriculum. Although adults usually provide the space and resources for free play and might be involved, the child takes the lead and the adults respond to cues from the child (Santer, Griffiths, & Goodall, 2007, p.11).

Previous studies concerning play and importance of play continually reveal that play, particularly spontaneous play, is crucial for every aspect of child development; physical, intellectual, linguistic, and social-emotional (Hughes, 2003; Ginsburg, 2007; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). Findings of a quite recent study conducted with the participation of 238 adults also proved that free play opportunities in childhood is a significant predictor of children's later success in social life and their adaptability in life (Greve & Thomsen, 2016). The following categorisation of the elements of free play expands on the relationship between play and learning, and the development of children, as well as use of play as an assessment tool.

2.3.1 Physical Development and Free Play

Active engagement in play brings considerable benefits to physical development of children (Brockman et al., 2011). According to Carlson (2011), "big body play" play that cover rough and tumble play, running, chasing, jumping, climbing, rolling, falling, pushing and so on facilitates development of gross motor skills, body awareness and movement control. Along with its joy, highly dynamic free play activities that generally take place outdoors also contribute to increasing cardiovascular strength and reducing obesity rate among children (American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness and Council on School Health, 2006). Besides enhancing gross

motor development, play also encompass wide range of activities such as drawing, painting, cutting; dressing, buttoning, tying; Lego construction, woodworking, and sand and water play that foster fine motor skills (Henniger, 2008, Darragh, 2010). Repeated practice of different fine and gross motor skills on daily basis increases children's muscle strength. Moreover, constant movement of children in play is likely to increase appetite and regulate their sleep, which consequently stimulate their physical growth (Sevinç, 2004). On the other hand, research in the field of neuroscience drew attention to the link between preschoolers' engagement in physically active play and self-regulation of impulsivity in their brains. To clarify, it is asserted that deficiency of physically active play may lead to disruption in maturation of frontal lobe that is in charge of self-regulation of impulsivity. This might explain the relationship between lack of physically involved play and attention deficit and impulsivity in children (Brown, 2009). Thus, it would not be wrong to say that free play activities which encourage physically and mentally active participation of children have a crucial role in promoting physical growth and development of children.

2.3.2 Cognitive Development and Free Play

While Piaget advocated the role of play in construction of children's own knowledge about the world as a result of their interaction with the materials in the environment, Vygotsky emphasized that children's social interaction with adults and peers to grow cognitively in play (Zigler & Bishop Josef, 2006). In addition to physical gains, play brings important cognitive benefits to children, as well. Play allows children to develop cognitively through the opportunities provided in stimulating environments (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Brock, Jarvis, & Olusoga, 2014). In play, children satisfy their curiosity by exploring the environment and manipulating objects and then curiosity about different subjects arouses (Poyraz, 2003). Through interacting with various toys and objects and comparing them, children learn about such properties as size, shape, color, weight, length, function and so on, that differentiate objects from each other. Play also encourages practice of matching, classifying, ordering, analysis, synthesis and some other cognitive skills, too. Consequently, children learn to think, to reason, to establish cause-effect relationship, to recognize problems and create solutions for them (Smith, 2009). It is further supported by researchers that play facilitates acquisition of knowledge, creative thinking and problem solving skills due to its inclusion of both convergent and divergent thinking skills (Barnett, 1990; Klein et al., 2003). Another research also

indicated that complexity of preschoolers' block play was strong predictor of children's math achievement in secondary and high school (Wolfgang, Stannard & Jones, 2001).

2.3.3 Language Development and Free Play

Alongside improvement in cognitive processes, play also promotes language and literacy development of children. An experimental study conducted by Ahioğlu (1999) to investigate the influence of symbolic play on language acquisition of four years old children indicated that play considerably improves language acquisition in children. Play encouraged children's use of symbols as well as their expressive and receptive language skills by involving them in interactions with peers and adults (Rice, 2014). Especially socio-dramatic play provides an appropriate context for children to interact with each other and toys. It increases vocabulary knowledge of children and help them to learn how to express their thoughts, feelings and listen to others (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). Play that is free from adult direction and intervention allow children to express their ideas, negotiate on the roles or division of labour, selection and preparation of props, and verbal and physical act out of the roles and also make them negotiate with each other to resolve the conflicts in order to maintain their play (Hirsh-Pasek, et al., 2009; Reed, et al., 2012). Consequently, it enhances children's communication skills and language development. Moreover, play contributes to development of literacy concepts and skills (Hoorn, Nourrot, Scales & Alward, 2007). For example, it encourages children to read or view books for pleasure so that they learn how to handle books properly and respectfully such as moving from front to back, top to bottom and left to right. Play and play environments also foster print awareness, phonological awareness and awareness about letter-sound correspondence.

2.3.4 Social-Emotional Development and Free Play

Play is closely interrelated with social and emotional development of children (Van Hoorn, Nourrot, Scales & Alward, 2007). Especially free play in which children are in the driving seat and rule makers, is essential to foster self-control and self-management skills (Wood, 2013). Setting the boundaries of their own play, making their decisions, achieving a set goal encourage freedom and independence in children and contribute to development of their self-concept. On the other hand, socio-dramatic play initiated by children, with involvement of two or more children stimulates self-regulation skills and social development (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). By imitating adult roles in socio-dramatic play, they gain important real life experiences. Moreover, negotiation on play roles and rules, thinking about

feelings of others and ways to respond them, contribute to raising children's awareness of self and others (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006; Bronson, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). They learn that people may have different intentions and desires than that of their own so they begin to develop theory of mind (Reed et al., 2012; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008). The self-regulation boosted in play assist children in working in groups, sharing, discussing, expressing themselves, respecting others, resolving conflicts, and in turn, result in healthy relationships with others, social-emotional stability and better academic achievements (Ginsberg, 2007). Moreover, children benefit from play to overcome their stress, anxiety and tension (Hewes, 2014). For example, a child could release his/her negative feelings such as frustration and anxiety about having a new sibling through acting out those feelings in play, by reflecting such feelings on dolls or other play materials. The multiple roles children practice in their play enhance their social competence, self-confidence and resilience to overcome challenges in future, as well (Ginsberg, 2007). Yang (2000) also proposed that free play is highly beneficial for enhancing children's decision-making skills, their exploration of various activities and materials, recognition of personal preferences and disfavours and realization of consequences of their choices (Duncan & Lockwood, 2008).

As explained by Piaget, Vygotsky and many other theorists, there is a strong connection between play and learning. Play also serves as a medium for learning through the meaningful context it creates for children (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Play is likely to lead to positive learning experiences for young children since it is considered as a motivating force for children and allows them to practice activities that bring along particular learning outcomes (Wu, 2016). However, teachers should be careful about not putting overemphasis on learning objectives in play since it may result in them disregarding the authentic intention of play and incidental learning and end up with teacher directed activities.

2.3.5 Free Play as an Assessment Tool

Play is a natural part of assessing children's learning and development since it provides perspectives on progress of children in every facets of development (Van Hoorn, Nourrot, Scales & Alward, 2007). It provides teachers with better opportunities to carry out authentic assessment of children's learning (Fleer, 2006). With regard to assessment through play, Fleer (2010) suggested the term assessable moment which refers to observation and analysis of children's learning and development during the play activities in which they are fully engaged. In other words, an assessable moment indicates a suitable moment for educators to document children's knowledge and skills because in that moment, children are

actively involved in play and highly motivated to perform their best, or strain to solve problems and engage in social interactions with others.

Nevertheless, as assessable moments do not occur naturally, it rather necessitates careful planning and arrangement of play settings. Documentation of an assessable moment requires eager and close observation of children's play. Observation of and listening to children's play provides teachers with opportunity to gain understanding about perspectives of children and their way of learning. Children's preferences for play, playmates, play materials, settings, and their way of playing reveal a great deal about their patterns of learning, competencies, skills, interests and needs, and their relationships with others as well as the environment. Thus, making assessment through play allows the teacher to recognize both the actual and proximal zone of development of their students. That helps educators to create an authentic and inviting context for children to think and learn as well as provides them with clues about how, when and to what extent involve in children's play to scaffold their learning and promote their development. Therefore, adults have crucial roles in carrying out assessment of children's progress through play, so do their beliefs about teacher roles that determine their roles and practices in play (Fleer, 2010).

However, in spite of the significance of play in development, learning and assessment of children, time and opportunities provided for them to play freely have been reduced considerably over the last decades, in many of the developed and developing countries (Veiga, Neto, & Rieffe, 2016). Researchers also argued that despite the growing emphasis on connection between play and social and academic accomplishments of children in the literature, implementation of play as developmentally appropriate practice is under threat of disappearing from early childhood settings (Almon & Miller, 2011). Safety concerns of parents and teachers, academic-oriented school curriculums, and technology and media, are accepted as the major threats towards children's play. (Jambor, 1996; Miller & Almon, 2009). Additionally, there is also continuing controversy over the educational value of play and the role of teachers in children's play. The consequences of a substantial decrease in children's play, particularly in free play is not only hazardous to their physical growth and development but also cognitive functioning and self-regulatory skills (TRUCE, 2012). For these reasons, the limited time allocated for free play that supports the overall development of children becomes invaluable. Therefore, it is important to know about future teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles during play since they are the ones who could challenge and change the status quo of play related practices (Vera & Geneser, 2012).

2.4 Turkish Context

Preschool education as the first step of formal education, is a highly important process that underlies children's future learning, positive personality development and development of attitudes, habits, beliefs, and value judgements (Kandır, 2001; Akduman, 2012). Its aim is to support healthy development of children as a whole and prepare them to next level of education and life through age and developmentally appropriate practices in a richly stimulating environments (MoNE, 2013). To achieve this purpose, we need to know about the developmental characteristics and interests of children and meet their needs accordingly. Play through which they develop, learn and mature is one of the primary needs of preschool aged children (Kandır, 2001). Therefore, preschool education institutions offer children properly equipped environments that provide quality stimulants, rich interactions, and positive experiences, along with the simultaneous encouragement of independence. In fact, with the latest update of the early childhood education program in 2013, being play-based has become one of the primary features the Turkish early childhood education curriculum (MoNE, 2013).

In the current preschool education program, a variety of educational activities compatible with the curriculum are provided to meet the developmental needs of attending children. These activities include language, art, music, drama, play, movement, science, math, literacy activities and field trips (MoNE, 2013). Although implementation of all of these activities require integration of play due to developmental characteristics of preschoolers, "play activities" solely and directly focus on inclusion of different play types in preschool education. In the scope of early childhood education programs, preschoolers are provided three types of play activities in order to meet their needs for play and to help them reach developmental and learning objectives indicated in the curriculum. These activity types include structured play, semi-structured play and unstructured play. If it is initiated and ruled by teachers to support the progress of children, it represents structured play. If it is an open-ended and child-centred process initiated by children or teachers to enhance all aspects of development, then it reflects semi-structured play. On the other hand, if children freely choose the activity(ies), material(s), and player(s) based on self-interest, from a variety of available options, and engage in active and hands-on learning in an environment organized by teacher, yet free from teacher direction, then it indicates unstructured play. Unstructured play involves playing in learning centres that is also called free play (MoNE, 2012, 2013).

2.4.1 Free Play in Turkish Early Childhood Education

The centralized early childhood education program in Turkey prepared by Ministry of National Education (MoNE) was most recently renewed in 2013. Contrary to the previous program that regarded play as a separate activity to discharge and relax children, in the current version of the program, play is considered as integral part of the preschool curriculum and as an instructional tool. Thus, instead of letting children be completely free to play by themselves for some time during the day, the instructional value of play is highly emphasized and it is suggested for teachers to integrate play with other activities (MoNE, 2013). This new regulation required teachers to take more responsibility and assume different roles during play including organization of learning centres, selection of suitable materials, documentation of children's play through observations and engaging in the play as a play partner. (Ivrendi & Işıkoğlu Erdoğan, 2015).

According to the current education program, free play refers to children's free selection of what to play, which materials to use and with whom to play, from range of options that consider individual needs, developmental levels as well as number of children in the classroom (MoNE, 2016). Contrary to what is believed, it does not mean leaving children idle (MoNE, 2012; MoNE, 2013). It is an indispensable part of learning by experience in early childhood education programs. Free play activities take place as the first activity in the daily schedules of preschool classrooms because of its attribute to prepare children to the following activities and to the day (MoNE, 2013; Aras, 2016). Children spend at least one hour per day in free play activities and that generally take place early in the morning after circle time and sometimes at the end of the day before departure. (Ogelman, 2014; Aras, 2016). During free play time children can engage in play in a small group, large group or to play individually based on their interests and preferences (Hanley, Cammilleri, Tiger, & Ingvarsson, 2007).

In free play, children generally spend their time in learning centres that refer to organization of early childhood classroom into small areas separated by low lockers/shelves, carpets or tape on the floor. These are the areas where children generally spend their time during free play time by engaging in wide variety of materials selected and provided in accordance with learning objectives and indicators of activities in the daily schedule. (MoNE, 2013). While the number of learning centres in a classroom is determined by the physical conditions of the classroom and number of children, the suggested ones include block, book, music, art, science and dramatic play centres. In addition to these, temporary learning centres could be prepared if needed. All centres are prepared before children come to the classroom.

Children engage in play in the centres that they choose according to their interest and wish, and they can move on to another centre whenever they want. During this process, it is essential for teachers to provide guidance, and observe and take notes about children's play. (MoNE, 2013). Besides spending time in learning centres, engaging in different indoor activities, outdoor activities such as going for a walk on the nature can be also done within the context of free play (MoNE, 2013; MoNE, 2016).

However, limited studies in the literature demonstrated that Turkish preschool teachers are not skillful in offering play opportunities for children in practice (Ivrendi & Işıkoğlu Erdoğan, 2015; Aras, 2016). In contrast to what is suggested in the updated curriculum, traditional perception of free play is still prevalent so that teachers only provide time and materials for children to play but do not become actively involved and they take precarious roles rather than facilitative ones. This situation might have negative consequences for overall development and learning of children. Considering that in a play context, children find opportunity to practice and test their recently acquired knowledge and develop new perspectives about the world, it is not enough to only provide them with time and materials for play. In addition to that, being intentional and facilitative during play could contribute more to quality play and raise children's gains from it.

2.5 Teacher Involvement in Play

It is frequently validated by related literature that play is an effective and appropriate vehicle for promoting overall development and learning of children. Play has been recognized as a developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Even though there is a general consensus among researchers on the importance of play for child development, there has been a continuing controversy over teacher roles in play (Johnson et al., 2005; Ashiabi, 2007; Lillemyer, 2009).

On the one hand, it is argued that play should be free from teacher interference (Johnson et al., 2005; Lillemyer, 2009). The proponents of this view believed that teachers are responsible for preparing the environment for play and making observation about children's play. Susan Isaacs (1885-1948) might be considered as one of the advocates of this view, with her claim that "play has the greatest value for the young child when it is really free and his own" (Isaacs, 1971, p.133 as cited in Mickelburgh, 2018). Isaacs also argued that teachers should assume a largely passive role in play by setting the stage for play and then taking a step back to listen and observe children in the context. Similar to Isaacs, Piaget (1962) also defended passive teacher roles in children's play. Piaget put great emphasis on teachers' role to provide an environment which allows children to be active learners, and

encourages freedom to explore, experiment, unite different materials as well as pose and solve problems via self-selected and self-directed activities (Wood, 2013). He underlined the independent construction of knowledge by children in their self-initiated play (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Alward, 2007)

On the other hand, Smilansky (1968) opposed the commonly accepted classical view that children should be allowed to explore their environment and learn from their own experiences without intervention and guidance by teachers. As a result of working with culturally underprivileged children, Smilansky (1968) proposed that adults could provide assistance to children especially those from disadvantaged background to enable them to engage in frequent and higher quality sociodramatic play that facilitates the social, emotional and cognitive progress of children (Elkin Rosen, 1974; Johnson, 2014). Furthermore, during the 1970s, the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky triggered a change in teacher roles from passive stage manager and observer to active co-player and co-explorer in play and other child activities (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). According to Vygotsky (1978), “The teacher is resource to children. He designs situations and interventions to scaffold a child’s learning, structuring comfortable match what the child already knows and can do to encourage her to practice a challenging task with assistance” (Jones & Reynolds, 2011, p.4). Moreover, he claimed that including teacher involvement in play conveys to children that play is worthwhile, it helps teachers to develop bonds with children and contributes to lengthening attention span and increasing peer interactions, and extending and enriching play experiences, which led to further support of teacher involvement in play (Rengel, 2014).

Teacher roles in children’s play have been defined and categorized distinctly by several authors in the literature (Enz & Christie, 1993; Breen, 1996; Kontos, 1999; Howes, 2000; Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). In 2000, Howes grouped teacher roles under six different headings ranging from ignorance to intense responsiveness. Following their extensive work with and observation of early childhood teachers, Jones and Reynolds (1992), suggested relatively more constructive teacher roles to promote children’s learning in play. In the revised edition of their work, these roles were defined as stage manager, mediator, player, scribe, assessor and communicator, and planner (Jones and Reynolds, 2011). Enz and Christie (1993) also proposed teacher roles similar to Jones and Reynolds’. They classified preschool teachers into five according to the roles they assume during children’s free play; stage manager, co-player, play leader, director and uninvolved safety monitor. In addition to these roles, onlooker and redirector roles were also added by Johnson, Christie & Wardle (2005). Like Enz and Christie, Breen (1996) also categorized the role of educators during free play into five; observer, facilitator, instructor, supervisor and class manager. More

recently, Yang described eight teacher roles adopted by Chinese early preschool teachers in free play. These roles were “play planer, supporter, organizer, facilitator, monitor, co-player, mediator and uninvolved role” (Yang, 2013, p.1244).

As it is shown in the literature, teacher roles in play are still a matter of dispute in the field of early childhood education. According to research findings, preschool teachers are indecisive about their participation in children’s play and they generally take passive roles such as environment setter, observer and supervisor in children’s play (Davis, 1997; Einarsdottir, 2005). They also believe in interfering and redirecting children only if they behave improperly (Davis, 1997). On the other hand, some other studies also revealed that preschool teachers either get involved insufficiently in play or get involved with the purpose of regulation and correction of play (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Ginsberg, 2007). The contradiction between theory and practice, standards-based curricula that over emphasizes quantifiable outcomes, heavy program load, teachers’ inability to grasp the logic behind children’ play as well as their latent beliefs about play could be the possible reasons for teachers’ non-involvement and directly instructive involvement (Kagan, 1990; Ranz-Smith, 2012; Rengel, 2014). Ashiabi (2007) further supported that what teachers believe about play and its relation with learning might be preventing them from appropriately implementing play in the classroom. Despite the recognition of the crucial role of teachers in scaffolding children’s play, the literature on future professionals’ beliefs about the issue is quite limited (Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Van Hoorn et al., 2015). Considering the essential role of future professionals who will decide on length of time, type of materials provided for play as well as quality of play experiences, it seems important to learn about their beliefs with respect to these issues.

2.6 Teacher Roles in Free Play and Studies in the Literature

Teachers play a crucial role in promoting children’s play, particularly when their involvement is supportive and appropriate (Tarman & Tarman, 2011). Different teacher roles have been suggested by several researchers to foster children’s play and they were also classified variously (Christie& Enz, 1993; Roskos & Neuman, 1993). Johnson, Christie, and Wardle, (2005) divided them into two according to their impact on children’s play. The ones with positive effect on children’s play are called facilitative roles and the ones with negative effect on children’s play are called precarious roles. In the following part, facilitative and precarious roles will be described briefly.

2.6.1 Facilitative Teacher Roles

In **onlooker** role, the teacher shows his/her interest in children's play by watching and listening to it. It is vital for teachers to carefully observe it to be able to make appropriate decisions with respect to whether, when and how to involve in the play (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). Onlooker teacher stands nearby the play setting without being actively involved in the play. In addition, either verbally by making comments and asking about their play or non-verbally by nodding and smiling, teachers communicate to children that they value their play (Johnson, Christie, and Wardle, 2005)

Unlike onlooker, **stage managers** do not interrupt children's play with any verbal or non-verbal messages or signs, instead they stand outside of the play (Johnson, Christie, and Wardle, 2005). Nonetheless, they encourage children to suggest ideas about and help with the organization of the play setting, materials and props (Roskos & Neuman, 1993). "As stage manager, teachers can help to provide a theme for the play that organizes it around a set of common experiences or knowledge, and they can provide time, space, and props to enhance the play" (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p.163).

Teachers in the role of **co-player**, join in children's play either by invitation or by obtaining the permission of children. They take a small role and follow the lead of children as a play partner. As co-player, teacher demonstrate exemplary play skills such as how to act out, and communicate and cooperate with peers (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

In the **play leader** role, the teacher actively engages in children's play with the purpose of enriching and extending it, thus affecting the flow of play by suggesting a new dimension or material to play (Enz & Christie, 1993). "Adults often switch to this role when children have difficulty getting play started on their own or when an ongoing play episode is beginning to falter" (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005, p.273).

2.6.2 Precarious Teacher Roles

Uninvolved teachers are constantly occupied with works extraneous to children's play such as filling out forms, preparing activity plans, and talking with colleagues or parents (Enz & Christie, 1993). These teachers also supervise children and warn them when they misbehave, run around or disturb their peers (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). In addition to the tasks that need to be handled by teachers, their beliefs about value of play in child development and learning may also lead them perceive adult participation in play as unnecessary interruption and result in uninvolved.

When a teacher takes the **director** role, they take control of play by making all the decisions about play theme, roles to act out, dialogues and play materials. Domination of play by use of directions and questions enables the teacher to influence the course and nature of play (Enz & Christie, 1993). “When teachers take on the role of director, they remain on the sidelines and tell children what to do while playing, whereas instructors use questioning to redirect children’s attention toward academic content” (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999, p.214). As **redirector**, the teacher perceives and uses play as a tool to enhance academic skills of children and they might bring the end of play by posing questions about numbers, letters and geometric shapes and etc. (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005).

In the following part studies conducted into free play and teacher roles in the play are shared.

Rowlands (2007) investigated the attitudes of preschool teachers towards free play and free play opportunities provided for children as well as the relationship between the two. In accordance with the purpose of the study, six preschool teachers were, firstly, observed during free play activities in their classroom, on two different occasions for thirty minutes, and then they were also interviewed about their attitudes towards free play. Also, quality of the classroom environment was measured by Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (1998). The findings of the study revealed children’s participation in play and quality of their play increases when the teachers are present in the activity setting. A study by Hanley, Tiger, Ingvarsson, and Cammilleri (2009) also revealed a parallel finding that an effective way to attract children’s attention to and increase the time they spend in the less attended centres such as book and science centres, is the teacher’s interest in and presence in those centres.

Another study that further supports the results of the Rowlands’ (2007) and Hanley, Tiger, Ingvarsson, and Cammilleri’ study (2009) is the qualitative study by Singer and colleagues (2013). They examined the relationship between teacher’s roles and children’s participation in free play. Analysis of audio and video recordings of children’s free play drew attention to the strong influence of the teachers’ physical proximity and reciprocal interaction with children on their level of participation and revealed the negative impact of walking around the classroom and making short contacts with children on their level of involvement in play.

On the other hand, Tarman and Tarman (2011) focused on the active involvement of teachers and their roles in play rather than merely the presence of teachers in a play setting. They conducted a case study with a preschool teacher to explore the appropriate time and way for preschool teachers to involve themselves during play and to display personal experiences with respect to effective involvement. After analysis of data from in-depth

interview with the teacher, observation of her during play time, it is suggested that the focus of interest should be to what extent, and how and when to be involved rather than whether or not teachers should be involved in children's play. Results also proposed that teachers' involvement in play should be in the model and demonstrator roles instead of instructor who gives direct instructions.

Yang (2013) also investigated the active engagement of kindergarten teachers in free play. The study was conducted with participation of eighteen Chinese preschool teachers and the process data was collected through open-ended interviews about play and observations of teacher-child interaction and practices of teachers during play. The findings indicated that teachers' focus of attention in their interaction with children and roles in play is accomplishment of learning outcomes. Thus, underlying didactic characteristics of teacher roles in play lead to disaccord between concerns of teacher and needs of children in play.

Another qualitative study which is quite similar to that of Yang (2013) was carried out by Tsai (2015). The analysis of in-class free play observations, teacher interviews and on-site records and reports demonstrated teachers' active and frequent intervention in children's play. Teacher's intervention strategies differ based on various behaviours of children during free play time. And, teachers' decisions to participate or not in children's play is influenced interdependently of the educational philosophy of the teacher, their knowledge about children; how much and how well the teacher know the children, and play situations. It was also indicated that there are four intentions underlying participation of teachers in play including violation of classroom rules, conflict between children, milieu teaching opportunity, wish for gaining better understanding of children.

To focus on Turkish studies in the literature, in a quality study, Ersan (2011) investigated preschool teachers' perspectives and practices about play in learning centres which is also known as free play. For the study, 40 preschool teachers working in public schools in Ankara were interviewed and then, the classes of 2 teachers were observed on three different occasions for 40 minutes during free play involving the use of learning centres. Analysis of data from interviews and observations revealed both complementary and conflicting findings. According to the results, the teachers gave place to free play activities early in the morning as a first activity in the daily schedule for about an hour. However, it was found that free play was perceived as an aimless activity by participants. Findings also indicated that contrary to the suggested purpose of learning centres in the early childhood education curriculum, they are not used in an active and effective manner. Furthermore, it was demonstrated that children do not show interest in playing in the learning centres because of a deficiency of materials in most of them, inaccessibility of the available materials to

children and obtrusive interventions by teachers. Besides, during free play activities, teachers were neither providing guidance nor interacting with children or observing them in play.

Unlike Ersan (2011), Özyürek and Aydoğan (2011), examined the practices of 110 preschool teachers in relation to free-time activities quantitatively. The results of this survey research showed that teachers, generally allocate 45 to 60 minutes for free play in their classrooms. Inconsistent with the findings of Ersan (2011), it was found that objectives and indicators to be attained, desires of children and theme of the day are taken into consideration respectively while planning the play activities. Moreover, the primary source of reference that teachers use when planning play activities is their own experience, followed by internet resources. It was also found that during free play time, the most supported activity is free play followed by literacy and language activities. The results revealed that teachers give more importance to children's freedom to choose what to play and also to include art activities (this may be because the previous edition of the curriculum referred to play time as free time activities that involve play in centres and art activities). Accordingly, teachers believed that the play activities promote the social-emotional development of children most, and that teacher-child interaction is high when dramatic play is involved.

Ogelman (2014), also studied the same topic in a qualitative research study of 44 preschool teachers who were observed during free play time over a period of fourteen weeks. A "Leisure Time Activity Observation Form" was developed by researcher to obtain the necessary data. The findings show that the majority of the teachers regularly gave place to free play activities and almost half of them allocate 1 to 1,5 hour for these activities. Almost half of the teachers, expressed that children made their own decisions about what to do during free play time. The majority of teachers did not use any strategy to initiate free play activities and they moved directly to another activity without using any ending strategy or clean up to get ready to have breakfast. The results showed that during free play time, preschool teachers are occupied with different activities in the classroom such as preparing the activity plan, materials or doing paper work, more than observing, participating or guiding children.

A phenomenological study by Aras (2016) on the perceptions and practice of early childhood teachers in relation to free play and intervention in free play, is also in line with the study of Ogelman (2015). Following interviews with and observations of four early childhood teachers during free time, it was found that teachers perceive children's play as a valuable activity that contributes to the development of children, particularly their social development. They also consider free play as means of discharging children and preparing them for the following activity and for the day. Consistent with Ogelman, it was revealed that during free play teachers generally spend most of their time observing children and dealing

with their other duties such as preparing activity plans, completing official documents and child observation forms. Despite a lack of consensus on to what extent, participants in general supported teacher involvement in play. Nevertheless, most of the teachers observed in the onlooker and uninvolved roles during free play said they usually intervene only when there is a safety concern or a conflict between children.

In a recent study conducted with 141 early childhood teachers in public schools, Ivrendi (2017) investigated the roles taken by the teachers during free play. Data was collected using the “Teacher Role in Free Play” scale developed by the researcher. The results indicated that among the five distinct roles, onlooker-stage manager was most preferred which is in line with the findings of Aras (2016), and play leader was the least preferred teacher roles in free play. In addition, the findings demonstrated that roles of teachers in free play differ according to how old children are, how many years of experience teachers have, and how many children and learning centres are present in the classroom.

A parallel study was also conducted by Özgünlü and Veziroğlu Çelik (2018) to explore preschool teachers’ perspectives with regard to unstructured play in preschools. According to results, teachers describe unstructured play as a way of learning, a form of self-expression, a means of enjoyment, and a supporter of development. Besides, teachers involve themselves in free play respectively as play partner, observer, problem solver, and supporter. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between definition of play as a means of enjoyment and involvement in play as problem solver; definition of play as a form of self-expression and involvement in play as observer; giving importance to supporting language and problem solving skills of children and involvement in play as play partner.

Unlike the studies mentioned above that involved in-service teachers as participants, Vera and Geneser (2012) investigated 50 pre-service teachers’ views about implementation of playful activity in their field-based classrooms. All participants were seeking to obtain teaching certification for EC-6 Grade. After joining in playful activities in their own field-based course, participants were required to plan, carry out and reflect on a play integrated lesson during their field experience. The results revealed that classroom management was perceived as the primary concern during implementation of a playful lesson plan. Additionally, limited space, time restrictions, and curricular demands and pressures were also expressed as challenges confronted by pre-service teachers. On the other hand, more than half of the participants told of negative responses from their mentor teachers about integration of dramatic play and/or movement in lesson. They also stated that they did not have chance to observe dramatic play and/or movement during their field-based experience since many of the teachers do not give place to such activities in their classrooms.

Tatalovic Vorkapic and Katic (2015) on the other hand, studied early childhood pre-service teachers' play competence and involvement in play. Analysis of activity plans prepared by 36 junior early childhood pre-service teachers indicated that most of the student teachers implemented didactic play and play with rules. With regard to their roles in play, while the majority of pre-service teachers assumed suggested roles that have positive impact on play and welfare of children in general, some of the participants were indecisive.

Similar to the study by Vera and Geneser, Kaya, Yalçın, Kimzan and Avar (2017) examined early childhood pre-service teachers' perspectives about play-based learning and its reflection on implementation. The data was collected from nine early childhood pre-service teachers who were attending the senior year of the program and were enrolled on a teaching practice course. In the data collection process, teacher candidates first participated in a semi-structured interview about their views of play-based learning. Secondly, they were requested to prepare a play-based activity plan. After analysis of the plans, participants implemented their activity plans in their practicum classroom under the structured observation of the researcher. The results showed that pre-service teachers perceive play both as an entertaining and educational activity. They defended that play can be utilized as a teaching method but they don't have enough knowledge to explain how to use play as an instructional method. Results revealed that teacher candidates are good at planning and implementing play-based activity as well as organizing the learning environment and materials appropriately. With regard to the role of teachers in implementation of play, participants suggested non-authoritarian teachers and teacher direction and interference in play when needed, and they drew attention to teachers' roles to observe, ask questions and evaluate children's play. However, they performed poorly and needed support in effectively presenting options for materials selection, encouraging children in selection of activity and play partner, and promoting efficient use of available options, and interaction between children. Findings also demonstrated that teacher candidates are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the assessment of play-based activity and did not know how to effectively include children in the assessment process.

To conclude, despite their theoretical knowledge, preschool teachers do not seem competent to put that knowledge into practice. Even though, they say that they believe in the necessity of using play as a medium for facilitating learning and development of young children in preschool classrooms, studies conducted with in-service teachers suggest that early childhood teachers are not proficient in using play as an instructional tool. It also seems that they have difficulty in adopting a child-centered approach over teacher-centered approach. That lead us to think what pre-service teachers, future professionals, believe about

play, role of teachers in play and if and how they will implement play in their future classrooms. At this point, it is important to gain insight into the beliefs of pre-service teachers because that knowledge might suggest a path that could help to prevent play from being excluded from early childhood classrooms and to define a better place for play in early childhood education.

2.7 Role of Beliefs in Teaching

According to Linares (1991), belief refers to a type of immature and subjective knowledge that is basically built on emotions and experiences than on logic, which accounts for steady and long-lasting nature of beliefs (as cited in Rodriguez-Sosa & Solis-Manrique, 2017). In a similar way, Richardson (1996) set forth that “beliefs are often defined as psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 103). Like Linares and Richardson, Solis (2015) also supported that beliefs are ‘personal truths’ evolving out of judgement of experiences, therefore they embody affective and evaluative aspects along with their highly preconceived characters. Unlike the characteristics of beliefs stated by researchers above, Rodrigo and his colleagues (1993) drew attention to implicit nature of beliefs that people who hold them are generally not conscious about them and their impact. And, these latent theories usually manifest themselves in thoughts, attitudes and actions that are influential in the process of making decisions and choices (Pajares, 1992).

Teacher beliefs, on the other hand, may be regarded as a subcategory of an overall belief system. These beliefs function as a guide to teachers’ judgements and practices related to schooling, teaching and learning, and the learner (Pajares, 1992). In other words, teachers’ beliefs play an important role while making decisions such as assigning students’ roles, organizing classroom activities, emphasizing contents and procedures (Kagan, 1992). Moreover, Haney and his colleagues (2003) explained that beliefs refer to “one’s convictions, philosophy, tenets or opinions about teaching and learning” in educational context (p.367). As stated by Richardson (1996), these beliefs are constructed through personal life experiences, their experiences as students and also formal knowledge gained inside and outside of school. Importantly, it was asserted that formal knowledge is less influential on teacher’s beliefs compared to the other two contributors due to the teacher candidates’ construction of beliefs about teaching and learning prior to entering teacher preparation program (Lortie, 1975 as cited in Richardson, 1996; Richardson, 1996; Solis, 2015).

Despite the proved association between teacher’s beliefs and their judgements, planning and practices in the classroom, the lack of precise definition of belief makes it

difficult to carry out empirical research (Pajares, 1992). As proposed by Pajares (1992) belief is a “messy construct” to define since it is used to substitute for conceptions, perceptions, perspective, theories, values and attitudes. Besides, changing definition of teachers’ beliefs according to the purpose of the studies such as beliefs about teaching, instructional methods, assessment and so on, has complicated the examination of teacher beliefs, too (Shi, Zhang, & Lin, 2014). However, in spite of the hardships, teachers’ beliefs have become a matter of research since the 1970s. During the 1990s they began to be gradually incorporated in mainstream educational research (Clark-Goff, 2008). Studying teacher beliefs have become an important research subject because of its possible association with practice in the classroom (Pajares, 1992; Charlesworth et al., 1993). With respect to this relationship, Bowman (1992) stated that “Teachers filter formal theories and ideas regarding practices through their own values, beliefs, feelings, and habits, sometimes expanding and changing their own personal knowledge to accommodate new ideas, sometimes restructuring it to fit their current needs” (p.14). These subconsciously held constructs might explain the potential discrepancy between verbalised beliefs and practices in the classroom. In addition, it has been admitted that pre-service teachers’ adaptation to teacher education and teaching is strongly influenced by their beliefs and predispositions they brought to the teacher preparation program (Richardson, 1996). It was also stated in the literature that when the newly presented knowledge does not comply with pre-service teachers’ pre-held beliefs, they show great tendency to disregard them (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995). Thus, for any change to happen in pre-service teachers’ implicitly held assumptions and beliefs, and eventually their teaching practices, it is essential for teacher candidates to be conscious of their beliefs and recognise them during their professional preparation program (Richardson, 1996). This assertion is further supported by several progressive teacher educators including Dewey, that thinking about and reflecting on previously held beliefs is an effective practice to prepare future professionals (Fisher, Fox & Paille, 1996). As it is challenging to simply leave pre-held beliefs outside of the classroom, creating opportunities for teachers to question and reflect on their beliefs and practices is crucial if it is to lead to any changes in beliefs (Chamizo & Garcia-Franco, 2013).

To conclude, as previously mentioned, it is strongly recommended by researchers that knowing about the beliefs of pre-service teachers could provide practical implications for teacher education programs to be able to challenge the preconceptions of the candidates, and to assist them to notice and re-examine their beliefs (Calderhead 1996; Richardson 1996; Pajares 1992). Consequently, attending to beliefs might bring about changes in pre-service teachers’ play practices and the status quo of present play practices.

2.8 Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Play and Teacher Roles

Even though there is growing interest and literature on pre-service teachers' beliefs, studies which have specifically focused on early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about play are still limited (Clevenger, 2016). The following part describes related research in the field.

A study conducted by Klugman (1996) with 169 freshmen at Wheelock College who intended to work with children, appears to be one of the first empirical efforts to compile evidence on pre-service teachers' perceptions of play. The data was gathered through open-ended survey questions regarding participants' memories of play in home and school contexts as well as their perspectives about the function of play in learning. According to the findings, freshmen brought numerous meanings of play with them while entering into college. These meanings derive from individuals' play memories from childhood including toy play, outdoor play, pretend play, construction play or play activities that they engaged in during recess. Klugman proposed that these experiences from childhood are greatly influential on how these students currently perceive play. Consequently, despite the expression of some communal features to define play, description of play range widely among participants and that leads to multiple perception of and perspectives about play. Concerning the results, Klugman suggested that it is essential for teacher educators to know that each pre-service teacher has their own unique notion of play based on their own experiences. The opposite assumption could result in missing the potential opportunities for teaching and learning.

Using the study of Klugman as a base, Sherwood and Reifel (2009), explored what pre-service teachers believe about play and what contributed to construction of those beliefs, in a basic qualitative study. The participants of the study were seven teacher candidates who attended an early childhood practicum course offered for all students from first grade to fourth grade. The data was collected through individual interviews, class observations and document analysis. The results were compatible with that of Klugman. As concluded by Klugman, the findings presented that there is a clear consensus about multiple meaning of play. It was clearly indicated that despite the use of some shared features to define play, none of the paired attributes used by two different pre-service teachers to describe play could be matched. The differences in the combination of the features of and beliefs about play were explained by the theoretical framework of Nespor (1987) that 'experiences with, feelings about, idealized notion of and universal assumptions about play' inform the foundation and content of the teacher candidates' beliefs about play. (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p. 329). As a result, it was concluded that pre-service teachers' beliefs with regard to play differed from

one individual to other and across time and situations. Thus, it became hard to provide certain description of play from pre-service teachers' perspective.

Lewis (2013) conducted a somewhat extended version of Sherwood and Reifel's study in a mixed method research framework. Lewis (2013) investigated sixty-five pre-service teachers' beliefs about construct and content of play. Similar to that of Sherwood and Reifel (2010), the findings of the study suggested that even a group of people who share similar demographics and educational background are highly likely to have quite distinct perspectives on what describes play and what constitutes play in kindergarten classrooms. It is inferred from the findings that these widely ranging views are inevitable consequences of the pre-held beliefs of pre-service teachers that derive from their previous experience and knowledge. Thus, Lewis (2013) recommended the investigation and disclosure of the beliefs held by prospective teachers in order to stimulate any changes that may be required.

On the other hand, Jung and Jin (2014) examined the perception of 207 college students seen as future professionals, majoring in early childhood education and child and family studies from all educational levels from freshmen to senior. The participants were surveyed about how important play is for early childhood classrooms, the role of play in children's learning and its part in the early childhood curriculum. The results revealed that while first and second grade students in the programs had somewhat positive perceptions of play in the education of young children, their perceptions follow a different path starting from the third year of college. Even though, all participants believed that play is important for early childhood education, freshmen and sophomores differed in their perspectives with respect to the role of play in learning and play as part of the curriculum as they became juniors and seniors. In the upper grades they communicated less positive beliefs about them. It is suggested that the lower perception of upper graders could be related to their field experiences, during which they witness play practices in the classrooms. On the other hand, the findings also indicated that college students who took a play-related course expressed more positive perceptions of play throughout their education compared to the ones who did not take this course. It seems that relevant training and practicum experience influence the perception of pre-service teachers about play.

Another study that revealed compatible results with the findings of Jung and Jin (2014) was carried out by Clevenger (2016). She investigated teacher candidates' beliefs about play in kindergarten with the participation of beginning and senior students majoring in early childhood education. Analysis of data from surveys and interviews demonstrated that there is no notable difference between the groups with regard to the essential role of play in kindergarten, as suggested by Jung and Jin (2014). However, Clevenger's research (2016) also

revealed a difference between freshmen and senior students. While Jung and Jin (2014) found a difference in the role of play in children's learning and inclusion of play as part of curriculum, Clevenger obtained a slightly significant difference between the groups with respect to the evaluative role of play. Contrary to most of the seniors who placed more emphasis on using play as a way of evaluation in the children's learning and development, beginning teachers did not mention the evaluative role of play in kindergarten.

However, research by Cortez-Casto (2015) with the participation of ten Hispanic early childhood pre-service teachers who were in their junior and senior years of college showed the opposite. Data analysis from interviews, observations and document analysis revealed that Hispanic pre-service teachers believe that play is valuable for both daily life and education of children. The participants expressed that they are re-conceptualizing play, and experiences they gain from teacher education courses and participation in community play day are great contributors to alteration in their play notions. While taking a play-related course may have a similar impact on pre-service teachers' views on play in both studies, the influence of a field experience on the perception of participants' conflict with the findings of Jung and Jin (2014). Additionally, these results also demonstrated that with re-conceptualization of play, the pre-service teachers give more value to the role of play in learning and development of children and value the active role of teachers such as facilitator and safety provider, during children's play.

As it has been repeatedly stated in previous studies, the play related beliefs held by teacher candidates are influenced by various factors like childhood play memories and educational experiences before and during teacher training (Klugman, 1996; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010; Lewis, 2013; Cortez-Kastro, 2015). In a mixed method research design Resnick (2016) drew attention to the impact of educational experiences on pre-service teachers' perceptions of play in early childhood education. In the study, Resnick (2016) investigated teacher candidates' trust in themselves to integrate developmentally appropriate play opportunities in their classrooms, in addition to the effects of taking part in facilitated research analysis with discussion case application on future professionals' knowledge and perception of play in early childhood education. In the study "discussion-case analysis refers to the process of examining the provided discussion-case which was about elimination of play from early childhood classrooms, after reading a piece of research, answering the questions posed at the end of the case, discussing these responses with peers during class, and finally completing a graphic organizer independently with a proposed solution to the discussion-case dilemma" (Resnick, 2016, p.16). The results indicated that discussion-cases

served as a beneficial tool to assist pre-service teachers to gain the knowledge and confidence needed to prevent elimination of play from early childhood classrooms (Bredekamp, 2004).

In a more recent study, Taiwanese pre-service teachers' perceptions of play, the congruence of these perceptions with their practices during practicum teaching and their reflection on these implementations were qualitatively explored by Wu (2016). In depth data about beliefs and practices of seven future professionals related to play was gathered through open-ended survey, weekly observations, face to face thorough interviews, and collection of pre-service teachers' activity plans and other preparations done for internship practices. According to the findings, Taiwanese pre-service teachers attached great importance to play as an integral part of early childhood education. However, rather than authentic play, pre-service teachers regarded play as an instructional tool so they emphasized the significance of educative play to promote learning and development of children. In addition, the findings also pointed out the inconsistency between how pre-service teachers said they perceive play and what they practice during their practicum teaching related to play. Instead of encouraging natural inclination, imagination, creativity and free exploration of children as they articulated, they implemented a mechanical and conventional performance-oriented play. In a similar manner, despite their emphasis on value of teachers' different roles in play, their interaction with children were observed to be either inadequate or teacher-directed. Like most of the studies conducted with in-service teachers, the findings showed that pre-service teachers' perception of play and teacher roles in play do not comply with their practices, too.

Different from the rest of the studies mentioned above, a cross cultural study by Ito, Lin and Lee (2014) on Japanese, Taiwanese and American early childhood pre-service teachers' opinions about play of children and adults, showed that there are cultural differences in the notion of play. For instance, the number of American and Taiwanese attendants who agreed that play is in association with learning and development was more than that of Japanese. Moreover, play was perceived more than learning and development by participants from Japan and Taiwan but not the ones from America. In addition to facilitative role of play for learning and development, both Japanese and Taiwanese participants also drew attention to joy of play for its own sake. While most of participants from America and Taiwan referred to play as work of children, none of the Japanese participants did so. This study validated the impact of society and culture on shaping the beliefs of pre-service teachers about play which will be later reflected on their practices in the classroom.

Aldemir and Sezer (2009) also carried out another different study in which they examined teacher image and teaching beliefs of early childhood teacher candidates. In the study data was collected from fourteen preservice teachers thorough questionnaire, journal

entry for ECE teacher image and artifacts and analyzed descriptively. The results of the study pointed out that participants' memories of their own teachers, their work-related experiences with children and attitudes and practices of mentor teachers inform preservice teachers' images about early childhood education teacher and beliefs about teaching young children. It was found that both appropriate and inappropriate experiences and observations are influential on shaping preservice teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding the issues.

To sum up, it is essential for teacher educators and teacher education programs to enable future professionals to surface and become aware of their pre-hold beliefs which are likely to constitute the basis of their implementations in future. Also, given the role of teachers as agents of change, understanding the beliefs of pre-service teachers is necessary not only to enhance their decisions related to education of young children but also to promote welfare of children and society as well (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1992).

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter presents the methodology of the study covering purpose of the study and research questions, the study design, context of the study, sampling procedures and participants, instruments of the study, data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.1 Design of the Study

In this study, a mixed method research design that includes collection, analysis and synthesis of data from both quantitative and qualitative instruments in a study, was used (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2012). The reason for using a mixed methods design was that a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods compensate for the inadequacies of one another and provide better insight into the research problems (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In the scope of mixed method research design, first, a survey was administered to collect quantitative data from a large sample since as put forward by Creswell (2012), surveys are helpful in identification of participants' beliefs and attitudes which are significant. Then, as follow-up, an interview was carried out with a small subsample of the participants to obtain further information about the quantitative data (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This was thought necessary because the open-ended questions that are asked to participants in a semi-structured interview allow them to articulate their views without restraint in terms of the researcher's point of view or previous study findings (Creswell, 2012). As this study aimed to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play through a quantitative survey and subsequent qualitative interviews with a small sub-sample to support and somewhat expand the survey findings, the explanatory sequential mixed method design most closely matches the purpose of current study. As clarified by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), in explanatory sequential design quantitative and qualitative data is collected sequentially in two stages. In this design, firstly quantitative data is collected and then qualitative data follows up to better explain the primary quantitative results. This is because quantitative data that is collected and presented initially, constitutes the main aspect of data collection and subsequent qualitative data is

used to help the refine and elaborate on the quantitative results. Figure 3-1. Demonstrates the data collection procedures.



Figure 3-1 Data collection procedures

3.2 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore Turkish early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles during free play time. To that end, the current study focused on the following research questions;

1. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play?
 - 1.1. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about nature of free play?
 - 1.2. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about forms of free play?
 - 1.3. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about planning for free play?
 - 1.4. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about process of free play activities?
 - 1.5. What are early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about the relationship between free play, and learning and development?
 - 1.6. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about use of free play as an assessment tool?
2. What are early childhood pre-service teacher's beliefs about teacher roles in free play?
 - 2.1. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about stage-manager teacher role?
 - 2.2. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about co-player teacher role?

- 2.3. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about play leader teacher role?
 - 2.4. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about onlooker/observer teacher role?
 - 2.5. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about director/redirector teacher role?
 - 2.6. What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about uninvolved teacher role?
3. Is there any change in pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play before and after taking teaching practice course?

3.3 Sampling and Participants

This study was conducted in 8 different public universities located in eight cities which were accessible to the researcher. Participants were undergraduate students choosing early childhood as a major in one of the universities involved in the study. Even though, it was a convenience sampling, it was thought that the diverse participants attending the universities in four different regions of Turkey are highly likely to provide a wide array of information about the issues.

Participants for this study were selected from public universities which offer four-year teacher education in Ankara, Denizli, Eskişehir, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Mersin, Uşak and Van. The participants were senior teacher candidates studying early childhood education (N=467, N=425, N=24, number of participants who took part in first and second administration of the questionnaires and interviews respectively) The first reason for selecting senior students was that they had completed most of the theoretical courses, including play in early childhood education and physical education and play, during their program and constructed much of their knowledge about teaching and learning in early childhood settings. By selecting seniors, the researcher was able to investigate the beliefs of teacher candidates who are about to become professionals in the area and who will soon make decisions about play opportunities provided in the classroom that are central to children's learning and development. Another reason was that in the fourth year of the teacher education program, pre-service teachers undertake teaching practice through which they find chance to make exploration and connection between theory and practice. It is suggested by Richardson (2003) that teaching experience might lead to a change in teachers' beliefs by creating incongruity between

pedagogy and practice. So how they perceive and evaluate their teaching experience with regard to play and the role of play could help us to understand whether or not there is a relationship between pre-service teachers' beliefs about the issues and having teaching experience in early childhood education.

In this research, the selection of participants would depend on their availability and willingness to take part in the study, following a process that is also called convenience sampling. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2005) convenience sampling is considered as satisfactory when the sample share specific characteristics like demographics. After getting in touch accessible universities that could take part in the study, a criterion purposive sampling method was used to select the participants for the study. It is a sampling method in which all situations that meet a set of predefined criteria are studied and these criterion or criteria could be defined by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). For the current study participants would need to be enrolled on the “Teaching Practice in Early Childhood Education” course that is mainly provided to senior pre-service teachers. Early childhood pre-service teachers who met this criterion in the accessible universities constituted the participants of the study. In the first and quantitative step of the study, *Free Play in Early Childhood Education and Teacher Roles in Free Play Questionnaires* were administered to participants ($N=467$, $N=425$) from 8 different universities at the beginning and end of 2018-2019 fall term. In the second and qualitative step of the study, a semi-structured one-on-one interview protocol was carried out with volunteer pre-service teachers ($N=24$). The demographic characteristics of participants who took part in quantitative data collection and analysis are outlined in Table 3-1. and the demographic characteristics of participants who took part in the qualitative data collection and analysis are shown in Table 3-2.

Table 3-1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants Who Took Part in Quantitative Data Analysis

	Pre-survey		Post-survey	
Gender	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Female	397	85	356	83,8
Male	70	15	69	16,2
Age	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
19 - 22	312	67,2	267	63,7
23 - 26	93	20	106	25,3
27-30	41	8,8	32	7,6
Above 30	18	3,9	14	3,3
University	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Middle East Technical University	33	7,1	33	7,8
Ahi Evran University	45	9,6	48	11,3
Pamukkale University	85	18,2	73	17,2
Kırıkkale University	55	11,8	35	8,2
Uşak University	36	7,7	36	8,5
Mersin University	93	19,9	84	19,8
Anadolu University	62	13,3	53	12,5
Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	58	12,4	63	14,8
Graduated High School	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Anatolian Teacher High School	140	30	139	32,7
Anatolian High School	121	25,9	102	24
Vocational High School	123	26,3	118	27,8
Others	83	17,8	66	15,5
CGPA	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
3,60 - 4,00	37	8,1	41	9,8
3,10 - 3,59	217	47,5	189	45,2
2,60 - 3,09	155	33,9	152	36,4
2,59 and below	48	10,5	36	8,6
Taking Play Course	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	467	100	425	100
Previous Experience	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Observation (School Experience)	467	100	425	100
Internship	83	18,4	425	100
Paid Teacher	18	4,0	18	4,2

** Of the 467 participants who took part in pre-survey, 439 of them completed both the “Free Play in Early Childhood Education” and “Teacher Roles in Free Play Time” questionnaires, 28 of the participants did not complete the latter due to missing the final page of the surveys. Likewise, 425 participants out of 415 filled out both questionnaires

during post-survey for the same reason while 10 participants missed out the second questionnaire.

Table 3-2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants Who Took Part in Qualitative Data Analysis

Participant	Gender	Age	Graduated High School	Grade Level	CGPA	Previous Experience
A1	Female	22	ATHS*	4 th	3,27	2 terms
A2	Female	22	ATHS	4 th	2,9	2 terms
B1	Female	24	AHS**	4 th	3,2	2 terms
B2	Male	21	ATHS	4 th	2,5	2 terms
B3	Female	22	VHS***	4 th	3,11	4 terms
C1	Female	20	AHS	4 th	3,35	2 terms
C2	Female	20	AHS	4 th	3,5	2 terms
D1	Female	22	VHS	4 th	3,06	4 terms
D2	Male	22	ATHS	4 th	2,5	2 terms
D3	Female	21	VHS	4 th	3,23	4 terms
E1	Female	30	AHL	4 th	3,46	2 terms
E2	Female	24	VHS	4 th	3,43	4 terms
E3	Female	23	ATHS	4 th	3,3	2 terms
F1	Female	22	VHS	4 th	3	2 terms
F2	Female	22	ATHS	4 th	2,8	2 terms
F3	Female	20	VHS	4 th	3,54	4 terms
G1	Female	21	ATHS	4 th	3,62	2 terms
G2	Female	21	VHS	4 th	3,77	4 terms
G3	Female	21	AHS	4 th	3,22	2 terms
G4	Male	21	AHS	4 th	2,7	2 terms
H1	Female	22	ATHS	4 th	3,4	2 terms
H2	Male	27	RHS****	4 th	3,61	2 terms
H3	Female	22	VHS	4 th	3,31	4 terms
H4	Female	21	VHS	4 th	3,26	2 terms

*ATHS: Anatolian Teacher High School

***VHS: Vocational High School

**AHS: Anatolian High School

****RHS: Regular High School

3.4 Instruments

In order to gather information about pre-service teachers' beliefs in relation to free play in early childhood education and teacher roles during free play, both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools were used.

3.4.1 Quantitative Instrument

The quantitative data on the pre-service teachers' beliefs was collected via a Free Play in Early Childhood Education questionnaire developed by researcher. While developing the questionnaire, several instruments such as the Preservice Teachers' Beliefs Survey by Clevenger (2016), Future Professional Survey by Jung and Jin (2014), and the related literature were used (Sherwood, 2009; Özyürek & Aydoğan; 2011; MoNE, 2013; Ogelman, 2014; Ivrendi, & Isıkoğlu Erdoğan, 2015). As a result of combination of knowledge from literature and revised items from the instruments, a new questionnaire with 42 items out of 57-item pool, to evaluate the beliefs of pre-service teachers about free play was developed.

Similarly, the quantitative data on the pre-service teachers' beliefs about teacher roles during free play time was also obtained through Teacher Roles in Free Play Time questionnaire developed by the researcher. In order to form the questionnaire, mainly items from Teacher Roles in Free Play instrument developed by Ivrendi (2017) were revised and used as well as the related literature (Enz & Chritie, 1993; Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). Consequently, a 22-item questionnaire out of 32-item pool, was developed to learn about the pre-service teachers' beliefs with respect to teacher roles during free play time.

In total it takes about 15 minutes to fill out both questionnaires.

In order to ensure content-related evidence of validity, both questionnaires were submitted for the expert opinion of early childhood specialists studying play as a research interest to check the appropriateness of the content and format of the items on the questionnaires. For construct validity, the questionnaires were checked by another academic who has a PhD level qualification in the assessment and evaluation of education. After receiving feedback on the content and construct validity of items, the questionnaires were edited accordingly. The number of items on the free play survey was reduced from 57 to 42 and that of teacher roles from 32 to 22. Lastly, the revised form of the questionnaires was administered to 30 senior early childhood preservice teachers who were not included in the actual study, to check the clarity of the statements and reliability of the instruments.

The pilot study was carried out in order to verify the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaires and was conducted with 30 senior early childhood pre-service teachers. The

participants in the pilot study was chosen from among three universities included in the main study that also provide evening education. The one offering evening education and has more students was selected for the pilot study in order to reduce the gap between the universities with respect to number of students. After deciding on the university, the head of the early childhood education department was contacted by the researcher in person and was informed about the study. Then, the necessary arrangements were made by the head of the department and consequently, questionnaires were completed by senior students attending the evening group in the first meeting of one of the obligatory departmental courses in 2018-2019 fall term. The pilot study did not suggest any change in the questionnaires.

The quantitative instrument included three parts. In the first part, the participants replied to basic demographic questions and questions related to educational background such as gender, age, grade level, type of graduated high school, university attended, grade point average, taking the course related to play, and having field experience. In the second part of the instrument, the subjects responded to 42 items on the questionnaire about their free play beliefs. Each item on the questionnaire was rated on a 5-point Likert type scale from (1) not important at all, to (2) not important, (3) neutral (4) important, and (5) very important. In the last part of the instrument, participants responded to 22 items with regard to their beliefs about teacher roles during free play time also using a 5-point Likert scale from (1) totally disagree, to (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) totally agree. Table 3-3. presents the sub-categories of Free Play in Early Childhood Education questionnaire together with the items that represent them and sample items. Table 3-4. shows the sub-categories used in the Teacher Roles in Free Play questionnaire along with the items that represent them and exemplary items.

Table 3-3

Sub-categories of Free Play in Early Childhood Education Questionnaire

Sub-categories	Item Numbers	Sample Items
Nature of Free Play	2,8,15,16,26,31,32,38	<p>It is that free play activities focus on the product emerging at the end of the play.</p> <p>It is that involvement in free play activities is voluntary.</p>
Forms of Free Play	4,9,14,18,24,28,34,39,41	<p>It is that in free play time children engage in construction play.</p> <p>It is that in free play time children engage in physically active plays such as running, jumping, skipping, and ball games.</p>
Planning for Free Play	1,7,11,19,25,37	<p>It is to allocate a sufficient length of time for free play activities every day in preschool classrooms.</p> <p>It is that free play activities take place outdoor environments.</p>
Process of Free Play Activity	3,10,17,23,27,33	<p>It is that in free play time children engage in individual activities.</p> <p>It is that in free play time children plan their activity.</p>
Learning and Development	5,12,20,21,30,36	<p>It is that free play activities promote children's social skills such as helping, sharing, and waiting for one's turn.</p> <p>It is that free play activities support language development.</p>
Assessment	6,13,22,29,35,40,42	<p>It is that free play activities assess children's creativity.</p> <p>It is that free play activities assess children's math knowledge and skills.</p>

Table 3-4

Sub-categories of Teacher Roles in Free Play Questionnaire

Sub-categories	Item Numbers	Sample Items
Stage Manager	1,8,14	I offer variety of materials for free play activities.
		I prepare temporary learning centres for free play activities.
Co-player	4,11,18	I participate in the play as one of the players at the invitation of children.
		I follow the flow of the play when I participated in it at the invitation of children.
Play Leader	3,9,17	I make new suggestions about play when children lose their interest in it.
		I suggest new materials related to the play when I realize that play is about to fall apart.
Director/Redirector	2,7,10,15,19	I manage children's play by giving directions during free play time.
		I interfere in play to ask questions related to number, shape, and/or color of the materials used
Onlooker/Observer	5,6,13,16,21	I interfere in play when there is a safety-related situation during free play time.
		I keep anecdotal records of children's play during free play time
Uninvolved	12,20,22	I handle such works as filling official papers, preparing activity plans during free play time.
		I engage in social media when children are occupied with free play activities.

3.4.2 Qualitative Instrument

The qualitative instrument, on the other hand, was a semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researcher to obtain further supportive information related to the pre-service teachers' responses to the questionnaires. As stated by Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), the flexibility of semi-structured interviews helps to elicit the perspectives of participants. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that intended to address the beliefs of pre-service teachers in relation to free play in early childhood education and teacher roles in free play time. The research questions of the study and the related literature informed the design of the interview questions.

Similar to the validation of questionnaires, the interview procedure was presented to academics in the Early Childhood Education field to check the appropriateness of the content and format of the protocol, too. In line with their feedback, necessary modifications were carried out. Afterwards, a preliminary interview protocol was conducted with three participants who took part in a pilot study that was carried out to check the questionnaires, to ensure the clarity of questions and the validity of the interview protocol.

Some changes were made in interview protocol as a result of the aforementioned pilot study. For instance, the first interview question asking "How much time, do you think, should be allocated daily for free play activities in early childhood classrooms?" was replaced with "How do you define free play in early childhood education? (characteristics of free play that differentiate it from structured and semi-structured play)". The former was taken as a sub-question for the latter. In that way, it was intended to understand pre-service teachers' perception of free play as well as to compare their answers with the items on the questionnaire related to the nature of free play and then look at the relationship between the two. In addition, a question related to the factors that might positively and negatively affect free play and the play process was added before the question asking about the role of preschool teachers in free play. Also, the sub-question "How do you decide on your role in free play?" under "What do you think about role of preschool teachers in free play?" question was removed from the interview protocol since it did not bring specific, meaningful answers. Thus, the pilot study contributed to the fluency and coherence of the questions. It helped in organizing the interview protocol by providing integrity among the questions, the researcher gaining experience of conducting interviews, and analyzing the such quantitative data.

As a result of the pilot study, 8-open-ended questions to be asked in the semi-structured interview protocol took its final form (see Appendix C). In the protocol, participants were initially asked to share some personal information. Then, they were asked about their beliefs

related to free play, teacher roles in free play and followed by possible change in their beliefs about free play and role of teacher in free play after taking teaching practice course.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Prior to collecting data, approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Committee of Middle East Technical University. Then, the chosen universities were visited and administrators, and instructors were informed about the study. In cooperation with the instructors, appropriate times for data collection in the classrooms was scheduled for the first two and the last two weeks of the 2018-2019 fall semester to administer the questionnaires to pre-service teachers who were taking the teaching practice course.

On the determined dates for administration of questionnaires, the pre-service teachers were firstly informed about the purpose of the study and how they could help, and then they were invited to participate in the study. The participants who gave informed consent for participating in the study, completed the surveys without sharing any personal information. In addition, participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to take part in the study at the onset of the study or they could withdraw from the study at any point. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires. The surveys were collected from participants once they had been filled out by. All the information provided by the participants was kept confidential and anonymous. During the last two weeks of the semester, the surveys were re-administered and at the end of the survey, participants were asked to tick a box if they were interested in participating in a follow-up face-to-face interview at a later date. The pre-service teachers who ticked the 'yes' box, and shared their nickname and contact information was contacted by the researcher after the data collection at the end of the semester. Then, the interview procedure was scheduled with willing participants according to appropriate times for both parties. The interview took place in the university environment, within a short time interval. During the interview, with the verbal informed consent of participants, audio recording was taken. Then, the collected data from both quantitative measures and qualitative measure was tabulated and coded accurately and prepared for descriptive analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

In this mixed method research design, the beliefs of early childhood pre-service teachers in relation to free play in early childhood education and teacher roles during free play time was investigated. For the study, an embedded mixed method design was employed in which quantitative data collection was followed by a qualitative data collection procedure

to support the quantitative data with further information. The demographic information of pre-service teachers was analyzed by using frequencies and percentages. In addition, the beliefs of participants were analyzed through descriptive statistics as well. Changes, if any, in preservice teacher beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play after completing the teaching practice course was viewed through comparison of descriptive statistics such as mean values and percentages.

On the other hand, for the analysis of interview data, firstly voice recordings made during the interview were transcribed. Then, all transcripts were reviewed for coding. Creswell (2012) explains the coding process as “to make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image segments, label the segments with codes, examine codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapse these codes into broad themes” (p.243). Finally, categories and themes were generated by sorting the codes. The coding process was independently carried out by the researcher and a second coder and then the inter-coder reliability was checked for reliability.

3.7 Trustworthiness

With regard to the trustworthiness of the study, the methods used in the present study that help to confirm and contribute to the validity and reliability of the instruments and data are shared in the following part.

3.7.1 Validity

Mainly, validity deals with whether our instruments or ways of collecting data evaluate what it is presumed to be being evaluated in the first place, in other words whether our research is trustworthy (Frankel, Wallen, & Huyn, 2012). As highlighted by Burns “validity is an essential criterion for evaluating the quality and acceptability of research” (1999, p.160). Therefore, the quality of different instruments used by the researcher during the data collection process is crucial. Moreover, since the research results are obtained from information gathered through these instruments, validation of the instruments and thereby the data is essential (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). In the current study, the following procedures were applied to confirm the validity of instruments and research findings.

Content validity: In order to ensure content-related evidence of validity, both questionnaires and the interview procedure were submitted for the expert opinion of academics studying play as a research interest to check the appropriateness of the content and format of the items on the questionnaires and questions in the interview protocol. For

construct validity, the questionnaires and interview protocol were checked by another academic who has a PhD in assessment and evaluation in education. After receiving feedback on the content and construct validity of items, the instruments were edited accordingly. Lastly, the revised form of the questionnaires and the protocol were administered to a small sample of participants different from the actual participants to check the clarity of the statements and interview questions.

Internal validity: methodological triangulation, as one of the ways of enhancing internal validity suggested by Creswell (2012) was used in the present study by employing both a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews for the collection of data and to look at the consistency between findings. Member checking, another method of proving validity proposed by Creswell (2012) was also applied to contribute to the validity of the research findings. In this regard, four of the volunteer participants were sent the transcripts of their interviews and asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and help to eliminate possible misunderstandings. Also, direct quotations as indicators of accuracy of data were included while presenting findings.

3.7.2 Reliability

“The consistency, dependability and replicability” of research findings are the main concerns of reliability (Zohrabi, 2013). Thus, reliability of results is one of the primary requirements for any kind of research. In the current study, along with the researcher, another researcher who was a PhD candidate in early childhood education carried out the coding process separately. Consequently, inter-coder agreement was used to contribute to the reliability of the data. In the coding process, control coding that is suggested as a supportive practice for reliability was carried out within and between coders (Miles and Huberman, 2015). At the onset of the coding process, the two researchers individually coded the same cluster of data and then reviewed the emerging codes and difficulties, together. Later on, a control coding was carried out between coders after they had coded a few transcripts at the beginning of the study and the same process was repeated when half of the transcripts were coded. Finally, a reliability coefficient was calculated through the simple formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (2015) in which the total number of agreed codes is divided by the sum of the codes which were agreed and disagreed. On application of the formula, the inter-rater reliability coefficient was found as .90. As explained for the validity of the research, methodological triangulation also confirmed the reliability of the data.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter consists of two sections demonstrating the quantitative results and qualitative findings of the study. The first section presents the quantitative results obtained from *Free Play in Early Childhood Education Questionnaire* and *Teacher Roles in Free Play Questionnaire* through descriptive statistics. In the second section, qualitative findings from interview protocols are presented through descriptive analysis of the data.

4.1 Quantitative Results of the Study

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze pre and post questionnaires. After separately analyzing pre and post surveys, the results of the two were compared in order to examine the possible change in preservice teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play before and after taking teaching practice course.

Before filling out the surveys, participants were asked about which groups of children they think free play is a suitable activity. In both pre and post survey, more than half of the participants stated that free play activities are appropriate for zero to eight years old children. While over 70% of participants supported that it is more suitable for 3 to 4 years old children, over 90% of them thought free play more appropriate for nursery class, 5 to 6 years old, children.

4.1.1 Research Question 1: What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play?

The first research question of the current study concerns preservice teacher' beliefs about free play in early childhood education. Related to this question, participants were asked to complete a 42-item questionnaire about the topic to express their beliefs about issue. With the help of this survey, participants communicated their beliefs in relation to (a) nature of free play, (b) forms of free play, (c) planning for free play, (d) process of free play activities, (e) association between free play, and learning and development of children as well as (f) use of free play as an assessment tool.

4.1.1.1 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about nature of free play?

The majority of teacher candidates believe that free play is a spontaneous activity without a pre-determined goal ($M_1=4,06$, 81,1%; $M_2=4,12$, 83,5%), that involves free exploration of the environment ($M_1=4,15$, 82,3%; $M_2=4,14$, 82,8%) and pretending ($M_1=4,07$, 80,9%; $M_2=4,18$, 85,7%). Volunteering ($M_1=4,29$, 86,9%; $M_2=4,34$, 91,2%) and active involvement in free play ($M_1=4,53$, 94,7%; $M_2=4,55$, 96,3%) as well as spending time in desired learning centre(s) ($M_1=4,48$, 93,2%; $M_2=4,52$, 95,3%) were the prominent characteristics of free play expressed by preservice teachers. On the other hand, while more than half of the participants (61,8% and 68,9%) believe in the importance of establishment of all the play rules by children in free play ($M_1=3,76$, $M_2=3,84$), more than one fifth of the participants (27,8%, 23,5%) seemed undecided about it. Likewise, more than half of the participants (55,6%) expressed that it is not important to focus on end product during free play ($M_1=2,61$, $M_2=2,60$) while more than quarter of the participants (29 %) believe the opposite, as can be seen in table 4-1.

Table 4-1

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Nature of Free Play

Nature of free play	M	Not important at all		Not important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that free play activities focus on the product emerging at the end of the play.	2,61	113	24,2	146	31,3	68	14,6	87	18,6	53	11,3	Pre
	2,60	102	24	134	31,5	65	15,3	77	18,1	47	11,1	Post
It is that in free play activities all the rules related to play are established by children.	3,76	13	2,8	35	7,5	130	27,8	159	34	130	27,8	Pre
	3,84	11	2,6	21	4,9	100	23,5	184	43,3	109	25,6	Post
It is that in free play time children are actively involved in play.	4,53	1	,2	4	,9	20	4,3	162	34,7	280	60	Pre
	4,55	2	,5	3	,7	11	2,6	149	35,1	260	61,2	Post

4.1.1.2 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about forms of free play?

Regarding the form of free play activities, preservice teachers believe that the most important activities for children to engage in during free play are math activities that involve relating, classifying, ordering and forming patterns ($M_1=4,18$, 84,8%; $M_2=4,10$, 83,3%) as indicated in table 4-2. It is followed by physically active plays involving running, jumping, skipping and ball games ($M_1=4,13$, 83,1%; $M_2=4,14$, 85,7) as well as rhythm activities with objects or body ($M_1=4,07$, 82%; $M_2=4,04$, 82,2%). In addition, more than 70% of participants also believe that it is important for children to engage in symbolic play ($M_1=3,85$, 71,6%; $M_2=3,91$, 79,1%), construction play ($M_1=3,87$, 74,5%; $M_2=3,93$, 79,7%), water and sand play ($M_1=3,91$, 76,3%; $M_2=3,98$, 79,1%), and art activities including collage, cutting, tearing, colouring ($M_1=3,83$, 69,1%; $M_2=3,90$, 73,8%) during free play time. On the other hand, although more than half of the participants believe that reading picture books ($M_1=3,60$, 61%; $M_2=3,78$, 71,3%) and scribbling, drawing and imitating writing ($M_1=3,57$, 58,7%; $M_2=3,70$,

63,6%) during free play are important activities to engage in, almost one fourth of the participants (23,6%, 23,8%) seem uncertain about importance of children's engagement in such activities.

Table 4-2

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Forms of Free Play

Forms of free play	M	Not important at al.		Not important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that in free play time children scribble, draw and imitate writing.	3,57	27	5,8	56	12	110	23,6	169	36,2	105	22,5	Pre
	3,70	13	3,1	41	9,6	101	23,8	175	41,2	95	22,4	Post
It is that in free play time children engage in physically active plays such as running, jumping, skipping, and ball games.	4,18	4	,9	13	2,8	54	11,6	216	46,3	180	38,5	Pre
	4,10	5	1,2	14	3,3	52	12,2	214	50,4	140	32,9	Post

4.1.1.3 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about planning for free play?

Teacher candidates believe that it is quite important to provide children with a sufficient amount of time for free play on a daily basis ($M_1=4,61$, 97,2%; $M_2=4,63$, 97,9%), variety of materials for free play ($M_1=4,57$, 94%; $M_2=4,58$, 94,3%) and they especially emphasized the importance of accessibility of materials to children ($M_1=4,65$, 95,9%; $M_2=4,67$, 97,2%). Moreover, while more than half of the participants ($M_1=2,52$, 55%; $M_2=2,68$, 50,5%) believe that it is not important for free play activities to take place indoors, about one fourth of them are undecided about it. Corresponding with this, more than half of the preservice teachers ($M_1=3,73$, 67%; $M_2=3,80$, 68,7%) believe that it is important that free play activities take place in outdoor environments, which is actually in line with their preference for physical play activities such as running, jumping, and ball games. Table 4-3., presents preservice teachers' salient beliefs about planning for free play activities.

Table 4-3

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Planning for Free Play

Planning for free play	M	Not important at all		Not important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that free play activities take place in the indoor classroom environments.	2,52	87	18,6	170	36,4	114	24,4	69	14,8	27	5,8	Pre
	2,68	58	13,6	157	36,9	100	23,5	81	19,1	29	6,8	Post
It is that materials to be used in free play activities are accessible to children.	4,65	3	,6	3	,6	13	2,8	115	24,6	333	71,3	Pre
	4,67	1	,2	5	1,2	6	1,4	107	25,2	306	72	Post

4.1.1.4 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about process of free play activities?

Process of free play activities is a category about which pre-service teachers are mostly undecided. The majority of participants agreed on the importance of children's planning ($M_1=3,73$, 66,6%; $M_2=3,86$, 73%) and evaluation ($M_1=4,11$, 84,1%; $M_2=4,11$, 82,1%) of their play during free play time. Moreover, more than half of the participants ($M_1=3,71$, 63,2%; $M_2=3,68$, 62,6%) considered teacher interaction as important during free play time while a considerable number of participants (20,1%, 22,6%) are uncertain about teacher-child interaction in free play. Similarly, more than half of the participants believe that all individual activities ($M_1=3,64$, 58,9%; $M_2=3,52$, 58,4%), small group activities ($M_1=3,69$, 65,3%; $M_2=3,76$, 71,8%) and large group activities ($M_1=3,53$, 54,6%; $M_2=3,70$, 64,7%) are important for children to engage in during free play time but a substantial number of preservice teachers are undecided about children's engagement in individual (30,6%, 28,5%), small group (21,6%, 16,7%), and large group (30,4%, 23,8%) activities in free play. Table 4-4. indicates preservice teachers' notable beliefs in relation to process of free play activities.

Table 4-4

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play Activity Process

Process of free play activities	M	Not important at all.		Not important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that at the end of free play time children evaluate their play	4,11	10	2,1	25	5,4	39	8,4	221	47,3	172	36,8	Pre
	4,11	5	1,2	21	4,9	50	11,8	193	45,4	156	36,7	Post
It is that in free play time children engage in large group activities.	3,53	14	3	56	12	142	30,5	174	37,3	81	17,3	Pre
	3,70	5	1,2	44	10,4	101	23,8	196	46,1	79	18,6	Post

4.1.1.5 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about the relationship between free play and learning and development?

With respect to the relationship between play, and learning and development, the responses of teacher candidates revealed that play contributes to children's overall learning and development ($M_1=4,25$, $M_2=4,26$) except that approximately twenty-five percent of participants ($M_1=3,17$, 24,4%; $M_2=3,30$, 22,6%) are uncertain about the role of free play in promoting literacy skills and development in children. In general, teacher candidates believe that free play activities are especially important to support pro-social skills ($M_1=4,58$, 97%; $M_2=4,60$, 97,9%) such as helping, sharing, waiting for turn, and language skills ($M_1=4,56$, 96,1%; $M_2=4,49$, 95,3%). Table 4-5. demonstrates preservice teachers' prominent beliefs about the relationship between free play, and learning and development of children.

Table 4-5

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about the Relationship between Free Play and Learning and Development of Children

Learning and Development	M	Not importat at al.		Not Important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that free play activities prepare children for reading and writing.	3,17	54	11,6	87	18,6	114	24,4	148	31,7	64	13,7	Pre
	3,30	33	7,8	84	19,8	96	22,6	145	34,1	67	15,8	Post
It is that free play activities promote children's social skills such as helping, sharing, and waiting for one's turn.	4,58	3	,6	3	,6	8	1,7	155	33,2	298	63,8	Pre
	4,60	0	0	3	,7	6	1,4	148	34,8	268	63,1	Post

4.1.1.6 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play as an assessment tool?

Although it was found that teacher candidates believe that free play is important to assess children's learning and development in all areas ($M_1=4,32$; $M_2=4,24$), the primarily stated areas are motor development ($M_1=4,58$, 97,7%; $M_2=4,48$, 95,1%) and creativity ($M_1=4,58$, 93,5%; $M_2=4,47$, 91,6%) of children. Assessment of social-emotional development ($M_1=4,38$; $M_2=4,36$), cognitive development ($M_1=4,32$; $M_2=4,23$) and language development ($M_1=4,23$; $M_2=4,17$) follow subsequently. However, as shown in Table 4-6, participants believe that free play is relatively less important to assess science ($M_1=4,11$; $M_2=4,03$) and math ($M_1=4,04$; $M_2=3,95$) knowledge and skills of children compared to its role in assessment of other areas of learning and development. That seems to contradict with participants' beliefs about forms of play where it is highly important for children to engage in math related activities during free play time.

Table 4-6

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about the Relationship between Free Play and Assessment of Learning and Development of Children

Assessment	M	Not important at all.		Not important		Undecided		Important		Very important		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
It is that free play activities assess children's math knowledge and skills.	4,58	1	,2	3	,6	7	1,5	168	36	288	61,7	Pre
	4,48	1	,2	6	1,4	14	3,3	170	40	243	55,1	Post

4.1.2 Research Question 2: What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about teacher roles in free play?

The second research question of the present study focuses on preservice teacher's beliefs about preschool teachers' roles in free play. With regard to this question, participants were asked to complete a 22-item questionnaire about the topic to express their beliefs about the issue. Through this questionnaire they expressed their beliefs in relation to facilitative and precarious teacher roles in free play (a) play manager, (b) co-player, (c) play leader, (d) onlooker/observer, (e) director/redirector and (f) uninvolved.

4.1.2.1 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about stage manager teacher role?

Participants almost all strongly support stage manager ($M_1=4,36$; $M_2=4,40$) teacher roles in free play. As indicated in table 4-7., they agree that they will daily provide enough time ($M_1=4,46$, 92%; $M_2=4,53$, 94,5%) variety of materials ($M_1=4,42$, 92,5%; $M_2=4,42$, 94,2), and preparing transient learning centres ($M_1=4,21$, 87,2%; $M_2=4,27$, 90,3%) for free play activities when they become a teacher. This result complies with participants' responses regarding importance of planning for free play activities in "Free play in early childhood education" questionnaire.

Table 4-7

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teacher's Beliefs about Stage Manager Teacher Role

Stage-Manager	Strongly Disagree			Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
	M	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
I give place to free play activities at least once during the day.	4,46	5	1,1	15	3,4	15	3,4	142	32,3	262	59,7	Pre
	4,53	7	1,7	7	1,7	9	2,2	127	30,6	265	63,9	Post

4.1.2.2 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about co-player teacher role?

Similar to stage manager role, preservice teachers also believe that teacher participation in play as a co-player ($M_1=4,18$; $M_2=4,24$) is highly important. More than 80 % of participants agreed that they will participate in children's play with their permission in case of player shortage ($M_1=4,04$, 82,3%; $M_2=4,16$, 88,9%) and follow the children's lead ($M_1=4,17$, 88,6%; $M_2=4,24$, 91,6%) when they participate. Moreover, over 90% of participants believed that it is important for teachers to participate in play when invited by children ($M_1=4,34$, 90,9%; $M_2=4,33$, 93,1%), as it can be seen in table 4-8.

Table 4-8

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Co-player Teacher Role

Co-Player	Strongly Disagree			Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
	M	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	
I follow the flow of the play when I participated in it at the invitation of children.	4,17	5	1,1	12	2,7	33	7,5	239	54,4	150	34,2	Pre
	4,24	4	1	10	2,4	21	5,1	224	54	156	37,6	Post

4.1.2.3 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about play leader teacher role?

While the great majority of participants support the play leader role by agreeing with suggesting ideas ($M_1=4,02$, 84,5%; $M_2=3,99$, 83,2%) and materials ($M_1=4,01$, 78,1%; $M_2=4,08$, 81,5%) for children's play to help them maintain their play, more than one fourth of the participants ($M_1=3,33$, 30,1%; $M_2=3,26$, 26%) as seen in table 4-9., tend to be undecided about affecting the flow of play when children lose their interest in it. This relatively low rate of agreement could be related to wording. 'Affecting the flow of play' might give a negative connotation to preservice teachers such as intervening in or directing children's play.

Table 4-9

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Play Leader Teacher Role

Play Leader	Strongly Disagree			Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
	M	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
I affect the flow of play when children lose their interest in it.	3,33	32	7,3	78	17,8	132	30,1	147	33,5	50	11,4	Pre
	3,26	36	8,7	66	15,9	108	26	160	38,6	45	10,8	Post

4.1.2.4 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about onlooker/observer teacher role?

With respect to onlooker/observer role, findings show that participants almost strongly agree that they will make observations ($M_1=4,58$, 95,9%; $M_2=4,48$, 95%) and keep anecdotal records ($M_1=4,09$, 83,8%; $M_2=4,09$, 85,7%) during free play time and intervene when there is a safety concern ($M_1=4,48$, 93,2%; $M_2=4,50$, 92,8%). However, as seen in Table 4-10., preservice teachers expressed less agreement on talking to children about their play ($M_1=3,89$, 76,3%; $M_2=3,95$, 80,8%), and especially making comments on their play during free play time ($M_1=3,20$, 31,7% undecided; $M_2=3,25$, 27,2% undecided). This might be the result of a perception of 'talk' more positively and 'comment' as more critically and negatively by participants.

Table 4-10

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Onlooker/Observer Teacher Role

Onlooker/ Observer	M	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
I talk to children about their play during free play time.	3,89	7	1,6	37	8,4	60	13,7	228	51,9	107	24,4	Pre
	3,95	7	1,7	28	6,7	45	10,8	231	55,7	104	25,1	Post
I make verbal and non-verbal comments about children's play.	3,20	32	7,3	82	18,7	139	31,7	134	30,5	52	11,8	Pre
	3,25	33	8	71	17,1	113	27,2	152	36,6	46	11,1	Post

4.1.2.5 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about director/redirector teacher role?

In relation to director/redirector role, it looks like teacher candidates do not agree to take a director role in free play ($M_1=2,46$; $M_2=2,52$). The majority of participants disagree with directing children's play ($M_1=2,30$, 65,8%; $M_2=2,43$, 60,2%) by determining where ($M_1=2,27$, 65,4%; $M_2=2,28$, 63,3%) and how ($M_1=2,28$, 68,1%; $M_2=2,28$, 65,3%) children play during free play time. However, it seems that they do not disagree with redirecting, interfering in play to ask questions related to numbers, shapes, colours and so on to teach children. As also presented in table 4-11, only one fifth of the participants and less (20,1%; 13,7%) disagree with redirecting while almost one fourth of preservice teachers (24,1%; 23,1%) are undecided and more than half of the preservice teachers (55,8%; 63,1%) agreed with it.

Table 4-11

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Director/Redirector Teacher Role

Director/ Redirector	M	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
I manage children's play by giving directions during free play time.	2,30	108	24,6	181	41,2	78	17,8	50	11,4	22	5	Pre
	2,43	96	23,1	154	37,1	78	18,8	63	15,2	24	5,8	Post
I interfere in play to ask questions related to number, shape, and/or color of the materials used	3,52	21	4,8	67	15,3	106	24,1	152	34,6	93	21,2	Pre
	3,67	13	3,1	44	10,6	96	23,1	172	41,4	90	21,7	Post

4.1.2.6 What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about uninvolved teacher role?

According to the findings, teacher candidates disagree with teacher uninvolved during free play time in general ($M_1=1,85$; $M_2=1,86$). Although they disagree more with social media engagement ($M_1=1,62$, 85,8%; $M_2=1,55$, 88,5%) and being outside the classroom ($M_1=1,76$, 80,8%; $M_2=1,85$, 78,1%) during free play time, they disagree relatively less with handling paper work ($M_1=2,19$; $M_2=2,20$) during free play time. While majority of the participants (65,6%; 65,3%) disagree with handling paper work during free play time, about one fifth of them (20,5%; 19,8%) are undecided about the issue as it is seen in table 4-12.

Table 4-12

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Uninvolved Teacher Role

Uninvolved	M	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
I handle such works as filling official papers, preparing activity plans during free play time.	2,19	140	31,9	148	33,7	90	20,5	46	10,5	15	3,4	Pre
	2,20	138	33,3	133	32	82	19,8	47	11,3	15	3,6	Post
I handle the work that need to be done outside the classroom during free play time.	1,76	253	57,6	102	23,2	38	8,7	25	5,7	21	4,8	Pre
	1,85	221	53,3	103	24,8	42	10,1	30	7,2	19	4,6	Post

4.1.3 Research Question 3: Is there any change in early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in free play before and after taking the teaching practice course?

Based on comparison of the findings from pre and post questionnaires, there seems to be no much change in preservice teachers' beliefs in relation to both free play and teacher roles in the play. As previously disclosed in detail, preservice teachers believe that it is highly important to provide children with sufficient amount of time for free play in which children are actively engage in activities according to their own interests, wishes and rules without worrying much about the product. In addition, they also emphasized the accessibility of a wide range of materials for free play of children not only indoors but also outdoors. With respect to this, the post questionnaire results revealed a 5% increase in the number of participants who believe that planning free play activities in indoor environments is important.

Likewise, in the post questionnaire there is an increase in the number of participants who believe that literacy activities are important for children to engage in. To clarify, there is a 5% increase in the number of participants who consider such activities as scribbling, drawing and imitating writing as important during free play time. Also, there is a 10% decrease in the number of participants who are undecided and who believe that reading is not an important activity for children during free play time, and correspondingly there is 10%

increase in the number of participants who believe that reading activities during free play are important.

Related to social interaction in free play, there is an approximate 10% decrease in the number of participants who were undecided about children's engagement in large group activities, and thereby there is about a 10% increase in the number of participants who believe in the importance of large group activities. Similarly, there is also approximately a 6,5% decrease in the number of participants who are undecided about the importance of small group activities, and accordingly the same amount of increase in the number of participants who believe that it is important. Moreover, 6% increase was noted in number of participants who believe that it is important for children to plan their activities during free play.

On the other hand, there seems to be no much change in teacher candidates' beliefs about the relationship between free play and learning, development and assessment of children. Likewise, no prominent change was observed in preservice teachers' beliefs about the importance of providing children with enough time and a stimulant rich learning environment as well as taking minor roles in children's play as playmate and following their rules and lead, and suggesting new ideas or materials or taking the lead to help children maintain their play. Moreover, in both pre and post questionnaires participants highly emphasized the preschool teachers' role to make observation, keep anecdotal records of children's play and intervene when there is a safety concern during free play time. Despite the substantial number of participants who were undecided about making verbal and non-verbal comments about children's play in both administration of the questionnaires, there is a 5% decrease in undecided participants and thereby a 5% increase in the number of participants who agree with it. Related to the director/redirector role, while preservice teachers' beliefs about the importance of not directing children play remains the same in both pre and post questionnaires, there is an approximately 7% decrease in the number of participants who disagreed with asking questions to teach children and 7% increase in the number of participants who agreed with asking redirecting questions during free play. Moreover, there is no notable change in preservice teachers' beliefs about the uninvolved teacher role, except the 5% decrease in number of participants who disagreed with giving directions to children during free play to manage it. On the other hand, about a 5% decrease in number of participants who disagree with the teachers' absence from the classroom during free play time in the post questionnaire was noticed. Although these changes in participant's beliefs seem to be associated with the teaching practice course, the decrease in the number of participants in the second administration of the questionnaire should not be disregarded.

The perceived changes between pre- and post-questionnaire results are demonstrated in table 4-13.

Table 4-13

Perceived Changes in Preservice Teachers' Beliefs About Free Play and Teacher Roles in Play Before and After Teaching Practice

The item	Change
It is important for free play activities to take place indoors	5% Increase
It is important for children to engage in literacy related activities such as scribbling, drawing and imitating writing during free play	5% Increase
It is important for children to engage in reading during free play	10% Increase
It is important for children to plan their activities during free play	6% Increase
It is important for children to engage in large group activities during free play	10% Increase
It is important for children to engage in small group activities during free play	6,5% Increase
When I become a teacher, I will make verbal or non-verbal comments about children's play during free play	5% Increase
When I become I teacher I will direct children's free play by giving directions	4,5% Increase
When I become I teacher, I will ask questions about children's play such as number, color shape of materials played	7% Increase
When I become I teacher I will handle my works outside of the Classroom	4% Decrease

4.2 Qualitative Results of the Study

As qualitative data from one-to-one semi-structured interviews was analysed, trends in preservice teachers' beliefs about free play, teacher roles in free play and changes in their beliefs related to having attended the teaching practice course emerged.

4.2.1 Research Question 1: What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play?

With regard to the first research question that examines early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play, participants were asked about (a) definition of free play and its importance, (b) sufficient amount of time for free play and the rationale behind it, (c) impact of free play on learning and development (d) factors that positively and negatively affect free play, and (e) challenges of implementing free play activities in the classroom.

4.2.1.1 Interview question 1: How do you define free play in early childhood education?

- **Do you think it is important? Why/Why not?**

The first interview question along with a sub-question was intended to elicit senior preservice teachers' beliefs in relation to defining characteristics of free play as well as its importance for preschool education. It was seen that preservice teachers approached free play both from the perspective of children and perspective of teachers. Therefore, their beliefs about distinctive features of free play was classified under five themes from a child's point of view and two themes from the point of a teacher, as presented in table 4-14.

Table 4-14

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Definition of Free Play

Definition of Free Play	f
From the perspective of a child	
• Self-chosen and self-directed	18
• Enjoyable and comfortable	8
• Creative and imaginative	8
• Socially interactive	6
• Self-expressive	5
• Lack of rules	7
From the perspective of a teacher	
• Teacher-supervised	5
• Minimal or lack of adult intervention	12

From the perspective of a child: A great majority of the preservice teachers described free play as an activity in which a child determines whether to play or not as well as what, how and where to play based on his/her competencies, interests and needs, and controls the flow of his/her own play. Following the self-chosen and self-directed characteristics of free play, preservice teachers put emphasis on the joy and comfort that come with free play. Moreover, they stated that free play requires children to use their imagination and creativity to establish and engage in play. Social interaction is also identified as a characteristic of free play by some of the participants. They stated that free play creates room for social interaction between children. Also, a considerable number of participants considered free play as a process where children can express their thoughts, feelings and experiences with ease. It was also asserted that children act and play as they like without worrying about any rule in free play. For instance, participant G2 defined free play as follows:

Free play, for me, engaging in a play which is chosen according to child's own interests and current needs and it is structured by a child through self-established rules...use of available materials as he/she wants and in a distinctive way. It is a process of having enjoyable time alone or with peers without getting any direction or directive.

Participant F5 commented that

In free play, children are not conditioned to play with certain materials, they can creatively play with anything. For instance, it could be even a piece of grocery sack. They envision it such as a horse or they could say that it is a dog, or maybe consider it as his/her mother and hugs it...shortly it is what children play in their minds. Or in a constructive play, they bring together two blocks and say that we build a skyscraper. Thus, for me, free play refers to creative plays constructed in children's minds... You can consider a table as a horse, or a country in your mind, it is up to you. It is like opening your mind to different worlds.

From the perspective of a teacher: In addition to what it means to children, participants also approached free play from the view point of a teacher, and how it involves teachers. In this regard, participants asserted that free play does not mean leaving children unattended, teacher supervision is important for safety and positive play outcomes. Moreover, in accordance with preservice teacher's emphasis on the self-chosen and self-directed characteristics of free play, half of the participants asserted that teachers should not intervene and interfere in play of children during free play time. They expressed that teacher intervention in free play is approved of generally when there is a safety related situation, threat to physical and/or psychological health of children or a problematic situation that children could not handle by themselves.

With regard to teacher intervention in free play, participant G3 expressed that

...free play is lack of adult intervention during the process and children's engagement in mature play. Unless frame and boundaries of children's play disturb their friends and involve aggressive play behaviours, I do not interfere in free play. When I intervene in the play I positively guide children rather than warning or threatening them to stop negative behaviours.

After defining free play, preservice teachers were also asked about the role/importance of free play in the education of preschool children. All of the participants expressed that free play is highly important for preschool education mainly for five reasons. Similar to the definition of free play, preservice teachers also viewed the role of free play both from the perspective of children and teachers. Table 4-15 presents responses of participants in relation to the importance of free play.

Table 4-15

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about the Importance of Free Play

Importance of free play	f
From the perspective of a child	
• Allow expression of self	12
• Provide unobtrusive teaching	9
• Enhance creativity	6
• Provide joy	3
From the perspective of a teacher	
• Create opportunity to get to know children and follow their development	12

From the perspective of a child: In response to the role of free play in early childhood education, half of the participants, said that free play lets children express themselves, their ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences both directly and indirectly. Preservice teachers also voiced that free play provides subtle learning experience for children. They said that in a free play process children learn things in different ways such as interacting with peers or self-exploration of the materials and environment. In addition to the educational and social-emotional benefits of free play activities, the participants also touched on the aspect of free play that enhances creativity of children. Contrary to focusing on educational and developmental aspects, few participants talked about the amusing nature of free play. They argued that children engage in free play since they like to do so for its own sake. According to participant G1 free play is reflection of children's inner world. She explained this as follows

It is the time in which children express their thoughts freely so it is important with this regard, we observe that children reflect their emotions that they are unable to articulate, in free play. We see that child reflects the thing that she/he never mentioned before into their free play. So in free play, we kind of bear witness to imagination, to subconscious of children. Thus, it is reflection of what they hold inside them.

Moreover, participants A1 reflected that

Free play is important in many ways including expression of self, reflection of what they have learned and interaction between children. In play, child could learn a new vocabulary while talking to his/her friends, maybe learn how to jump, or maybe she will explore something by herself. I perceive free play as endless learning opportunity so it should be definitely given place in early childhood program.

From the perspective of a teacher: Besides importance of free play for self-expression, developmental progress, and amusement of children, senior teacher candidates also looked at the situation from the viewpoint of a teacher. They generally focused on teacher observation during free play. They argued that observation during free play time enables teachers to learn a great deal about children including their interests, needs as well as their level of learning and development. Regarding the issue, participant A2 stated that

In free play, you could get the assessment of the day. Children integrate what they learned during the day into their free play activities, if the thing was really influential on the child. For instance, during last week's internship, we did activities related to color 'green'. After that one of the children played only with green Legos and then when he was out of green Legos, he said "Teacher, I am out of green Legos.", but the thing he is trying to construct was not complete and he continued that "I think we could mix blue and yellow Legos and consider it as green".

4.2.1.2 Interview question 2: How much time do you think should be allocated to free play on a daily basis in preschool classrooms? Why?

Early childhood preservice teachers replied differently to the second interview question concerning sufficient amount of time needed for free play in a preschool classroom on a daily basis. Their responses were organized into five categories based on thirty-minute time intervals, as can be seen in table 4-16.

Table 4-16

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Adequate Time for Free Play on A Daily Basis

Adequate time for free play	f
• Up to 30 minutes	3
• 30 – 60 minutes	9
• 1 – 1,5 hour(s)	4
• 1,5 – 2 hours	6
• Could not give specific time period	2

While three of the participants expressed that up to 30 minutes is enough for free play, a great majority of preservice teachers stated that it should be more than 30 minutes. The participants who believe that 30 minutes to one hour is enough for free play and the ones who believe that one to two hour(s) is sufficient for free play almost equally contributed to that majority. On the other hand, the remaining two participants did not give a certain time period for free play, rather they explained that the important thing is the quality of free play

not the quantity. They defended that as long as free play satisfies children's interests and needs then it does not matter how much time they spend in free play. Related to this, participant D1 argued that

I think, quality is more important than the quantity. For instance, now we go to internship, they (preschool teachers) say that free play but it is just a frame. In that time children are given literacy activities or told that we will play this today. Actually, it turns into structured, semi-structured play. While deciding free play time, I look at the children's out of school activities, if they play at home. Then I determined the length of free play because I want children to live their childhood.

As for the considerations which are influential on preservice teachers' determination of free play time, the answers of participants were viewed under two headings. These are the reasons not to extend free play time and reasons not to lessen it. In the following part, they are explained respectively. Firstly, preservice teachers mainly mentioned three factors which are related to children, program and previous experiences, to keep free play short enough. Table 4-17 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for preservice teachers' considerations for not extending free play time.

Table 4-17

Preservice Teachers' Considerations for Not Extending Free Play Time

Not to Extend Time for Free Play	f
Child related	
• Developmental characteristics of children	6
• Number of children	3
Program related	
• Program requirements	8
Experience related	
• Previous internship experiences	8

Developmental features of children were found to be influential on preservice teachers' thoughts about not extending free play time. Some participants defended that age group and attention span of children are important to pay attention to while giving time for free play. Crowdedness of children was also taken into account by preservice teachers while deciding on the amount of free play time. They said that the fewer the children, the less time is needed for free play activities. In addition to child related considerations, preservice teachers also point to the curriculum requirements. They argued that free play time should

not be extended too much in a way that can negatively affect the flow of the daily schedule and restrict the time needed for accomplishing structured activities and reaching the planned learning objectives. Alongside these, preservice teachers mentioned the influences of their observations and experiences during previous internships. For example, participant B1 stated that

When I think of a day in a preschool classroom, I don't want to allocate too much or too little time since it is not enough for a child. I don't want to give it too much time because then it affects the daily schedule. In that case, there might be no time left for the things that I want to give children, to teach them. After all, we act according to a pre-determined plan.

On the other hand, participant F1 commented that

Actually it depends on the play, I don't think that free play activities take a long time. In fact, 30 minutes is enough because during the internship, for instance, about 30 minutes is sufficient for free play activities.... According to my observations, I think 30 minutes is enough for free play.

Secondly, preservice teachers generally expressed four factors related to children, and the play itself to keep free play long enough. Table 4-18 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for preservice teachers' considerations for not lessening free play time.

Table 4-18

Preservice Teachers' Considerations for Not Lessening Free Play Time

Not to Lessen Time for Free Play	f
Child related	
• Children' desire and need for free play	12
Play related	
• Time needed for complete and mature free play	7
• Adapting role of free play	5
• Developmental and educational benefits of free play	7

Half of the participants expressed that free play time should be long enough to meet the children's desire and need for play. In addition to this, preservice teachers also mentioned three play related influences. Firstly, they asserted that free play time should be long enough that children can start playing and carry it out from beginning to end and experience mature play. Secondly, they drew attention to the role of free play in helping children to warm up, release their excessive energy, and prepare and motivate them for the activities during the

rest of the day. Thirdly and more frequently they mentioned developmental and educational benefits of free play. Participants stated that it is important to give children long enough free play time because they learn much and practice different skills in the process. Regarding the issue, participant G3 stated that

More the time provided for free play, better the play itself. I believe 1,5 to 2 hours is really needed. I know from my own childhood, observation of my brother's play and observation of play of some other children that it takes long time for a play to mature, especially if children do not express readiness for mature play...In half an hour, they are just starting to play. For example, the child just wears the doctor jacket, decides that he/she will be a doctor, after a short while we say that "play time is over!". Therefore, more time is needed for children to decide on their roles in play, and for play to mature

4.2.1.3 Interview question 3: Do you think free play has any impact on learning and development of children? If yes, how, please give some examples? If no, please explain your answer.

- **Do you think there are any negative consequence of free play for children? Please explain your answer.**

In the third interview question, interviewers were asked about the relationship between free play and areas of children's learning and development including the possible negative consequences of free play for children, if any. Participants' responses to this question was viewed under two subtitles as contributions of free play to learning and development, and its negative consequences. First of all, under the development theme, preservice teachers touched all developmental domains and creativity and imagination. Besides the contributions of free play to children's learning, they mainly emphasized how free play promotes peer learning, exploratory learning and hands-on/experiential learning. Table 4-19 provides descriptive statistics about preservice teachers' views on the contribution of free play to child development and learning.

Table 4-19

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about the Relationship between Free Play, and Development and Learning of Children

Relationship between free play, and learning and development	f
Development	
• Social-emotional development	19
• Cognitive development	15
• Language development	10
• Motor development	13
• Creativity and imagination	8
• Whole development	6
Learning	
• Peer learning	8
• Exploratory learning	5
• Hands-on learning	4

A great majority of the participants said that free play is especially beneficial for the social-emotional development of children. They explained that through free play children learn sharing, helping, working in cooperation, taking responsibility and fulfilling them, socializing and developing self-esteem, empathy and positive relationships with others, gaining self-awareness, awareness of others, and developing theory of mind. Following that, preservice teachers attracted more attention to the benefits of free play for promoting cognitive development. They asserted that it has important role in development of intellectual abilities such as advance thinking skills, reasoning, problem solving skill and so on. Moreover, a considerable number of participants mentioned that free play enhances the communication skills and literacy awareness of children. Along with these, preservice teachers frequently mentioned that free play fosters gross and fine motor skills of children, and manual dexterity. Compared to basic developmental domains, fewer participants made comment on the effect of free play on creativity and imagination of children.

With regard to the issue, participant A2 explained that

While playing with Legos during free play time, for example, some of the children make some calculations. I heard that they were telling each other that ‘my tower is taller than yours, I built my tower larger’...it supports cognitive development... they are mixing blue and yellow blocks and consider that mixture of blocks as green blocks. In addition, after they learned the concept of “square”, while playing with

hexagon shaped Legos, they firstly constructed a shape with two edges, then they suggested each other to complete the shape into a square. They integrate what they have learned into free play.

Along with the benefits of free play to various areas of children's development, participants also commented that free play activities facilitate peer learning among children and contributes to exploratory and hands-on learning opportunities. In relation to this, participant B1 related that

Free play process is completely natural. In there, children learn interaction and self-exploration. For instance, a child can go to science center and he can see or observe natural materials in the center. He sees something that he never seen before, he sees a new equipment, then he observes, asks and learn about it. If one of his friends know about it he/she helps to him to understand the new thing.

On the other hand, preservice teachers also raised concerns about three main negative consequences of free play for children as presented in table 4-20.

Table 4-20

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Negative Consequences of Free Play for Children

Negative consequences of free play	f
• Peer bullying	10
• Aggressive acts towards peers and materials	7
• Negative peer learning	3
• No negative consequence as long as teacher-supervised	9

In response to negative effects of free play for children, participants drew attention to power inequality between socially active, dominant children and introverted, passive children. It was also pointed out by participants that free play may lead to aggressive acts resulting in giving harm to peers and play materials. In addition to these, preservice teachers also felt that free play may cause negative peer influence. Aside from these, some participants explained that free play may negatively affect children if it is not observed by teachers, or under teacher supervision. In relation to the negative impacts of free play, participant G4 explained that

There might be peer violence that we are unaware of it. It could be direct physical or it could be psychological. ...it occurs more during free play because children are more free and they push the boundaries, so it may be harmful with this respect. In face of bullying, some children give response, and the event get bigger. But others

could not give a response to the incidence and stay at the background. As a result, rather than what they will gain from free play, they develop anxiety.

4.2.1.4 Interview question 4: What factors do you think can affect free play and the play process positively and negatively?

The fourth interview question attracted notice to the factors that can affect the play process and the quality of free play. In response to this question, participants primarily expressed six factors which are related to children, teacher, and learning environment. Table 4-21 presents the themes and subthemes drawn from the participants answers to the question.

Table 4-21

Descriptive Statistics for Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Factors Affecting Free Play Positively and/or Negatively

Factors affecting free play	Positive	Negative
Child related	f	f
• Experiences and emotional states of children	10	13
• Number of children	4	4
Teacher related		
• Attitude of teacher	14	15
Environment related		
• Organization of learning centres	7	7
• Quality and quantity of materials	13	13
• Physical space	1	5

Preservice teachers expressed that daily experiences and emotional states of children depending on their behaviour can positively and/or negatively influence free play. They also argued that the number of children in the classroom or in other words, crowdedness of classroom can affect free play process and children's play either positively or negatively. Besides child related influences, more than half of the preservice teachers also argued that the attitude of preschool teachers can affect free play activities positively if it is caring and responsive or negatively when it is disinterested and uninvolved. Concerning the environmental influences, early childhood preservice teachers stated that well organized and attractive learning centres can affect the free play activities of children positively, unlike disorganized and unattractive learning environments which can have negative impact on the activities of children during free play time. Moreover, it was explained by participants that

sufficient, diverse and developmentally appropriate play materials affect free play positively while insufficient and developmentally inappropriate play materials have negative influence on children's free play. Furthermore, while some participants mentioned the negative impact of limited play spaces on children's free play, one of them point to the positive effect of use of outdoor environments during free play time.

In response to this question, participant B3 replied that

Behaviors of teacher can affect free play positively or negatively. Teacher can intervene in and guide children when they become distracted in play. She/he may ask guiding questions like how could it be if you try this/that and she can participate in their play. On the other hand, if the teacher does not show any interest in children's play and they are occupied with other things, other than free play such as filling out reports, deal with phone or computer during free play time, it negatively affects free play and activity process.

On the other hand, participant B1 expressed that

For example, we say that there should be science center, book center but in our classrooms in internship there is no order in these centres. When I look at my internship classroom, there are names of the learning centres but there are no proper and adequate play materials in the centres. When there is no rich enough and stimulating environment for free play activities, it is affected negatively by this situation. Free play is affected positively in the opposite situations. If there are enough materials, natural materials, and the ones used for daily life skills and when they are safe then it is positive for free play activities.

4.2.1.5 Interview question 6: What do you think about the challenges of implementing free play activities in preschool classrooms?

- **What kind of solutions can be produced in the face of these challenges?**

The sixth interview question concerned the perceived challenges by preservice teachers for implementation of free play activities in the classroom as well as the solutions to those difficulties. In general, participants articulated challenges related to all components of early childhood education including child, teacher, parents and administrators and learning environment. On the other hand, a few of the participants expressed that there is no difficulty in implementing free play activities. The table 4-22 presents the classification of the challenges and related subthemes for free play activities perceived and articulated by preservice teachers.

Table 4-22

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about the Challenges of Implementing Free Play Activities

Challenges of implementing free play activities	f
Child related	
• Developmental and personal characteristics	2
Teacher related	
• Misperception and misuse of free play	
- Using free play time for structured activities	4
- Using free play time for handling works	4
- Perceiving free play as trivial	10
• Personal and professional characteristics	6
• Lack of theoretical and practical knowledge	1
Environment related	
• Inadequate and disorganized learning centres and materials	13
• Limited space	13
Parent and administrator related	
• Interferences in free play	4
No difficulty	3

With regard to difficulties in implementing free play, the participants pointed to personal traits or developmental characteristics of children such as nonadoptive children or ratio of inclusive children in the classroom. In addition, a majority of the participants raised concern over giving place to structured activities, perceiving free play time as a break for teachers to rest or handle tasks such as paper work, or activity preparation, and treating free play unimportantly. In addition, one preservice teacher attracted attention to the lack of theoretical and practical teacher knowledge to turn parallel, individual free play of children into associative peer play as a difficulty in implementing free play. In addition to child and teacher associated difficulties, preservice teachers also mentioned two environment related factors that can challenge free play; lack of learning centres and materials as well as limited space. Participants were also concerned about parental and administrative influences. They expressed that parents and administrators focus on activities with measurable consequence contrary to free play, so they interfere in the free play activity process to keep it in line with

their expectations. A few participants, on the other hand, argued that there is no difficulty for implementing free play activities as they can serve the needs of teachers to handle their tasks.

With respect to child-related difficulties, participant G4 expressed that

Free play is not implemented in the preschool classrooms as it is described in the curriculum due to varying physical conditions of the classrooms, differences in number of children in the classrooms and changing profiles of children. For instance, in my current internship school, there are twelve children in total and three of them are inclusive and another child with physical handicap. It is a very mixed group of students... In this case, it is really hard to practice free play properly.

With regard to parental criticism, participant G4 stated that

...to add, parents can be a hardship for implementing free play. When parents come and observe us during free play time, they made us feel that we are not doing our job. They perceive that we give children toys to occupy themselves and we sit on the corner and earn money. They criticize that as if our job is all about this. They want their children to bring products to home, some art works every day. Our supervising preschool teachers expect us to do so. Everything is done for parents.

As for the solutions, preservice teachers' responses to teacher, environment, and parent and administration related difficulties for free play are presented in table 4-23.

Table 4-23

Preservice Teachers' Solutions to Challenges of Implementing Free Play

Solutions	f
Misperception and misuse of free play	
• Teacher willingness	3
• Assistant teachers	1
• Educational activities	2
Inadequate learning centres and materials	
• Teacher creativity and effort	10
Limited space	
• Wise use of space and outdoor environment	4
Parental and administrative interferences	
• Seminars, courses and conferences and teacher professionalism	3

A few participants suggested eagerness of teachers to do their job and one of them suggested teacher partnership as a solution to teacher related challenges for effective implementation of free play activities. In addition, some participants recommended that teachers should be informed, educated about the importance of free play while some others emphasized the importance of effort and creativity of teachers to provide organized learning centres and adequate materials as a solution. In order to overcome the difficulties related to interference, participants suggested providing parents and administrators with more educative activities such as additional courses, seminars, conferences and teacher professionalism.

In relation to the issue, participant C1 stated that

I think that there is no difficulty for free play... but teachers find it difficult to do things, they don't want to deal with things...they can do everything if they want to do... so it is up to teachers' preferences.

As a solution to parental and administrative interference, participant D2 recommended that

For instance, recently, one of the parents come to classroom and said that I was passing by so I want to look at you." About this, at the beginning of the term teachers should inform parents that children have the right for education so between certain hours parents are not allowed to come into the classroom. As for the administrative interference, it is a mutual thing. Both principle and teacher should think about it. If teachers say that now we are seizing children from their rights. Instead of providing them with education, we are talking here or looking to the files. It is wrong, we should not do that.

4.2.2 Research Question 2: What are early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about teacher roles in free play?

With regard to second research question, participants were asked about their beliefs regarding (a) teachers' roles in free play (b) challenges of fulfilling these roles.

4.2.2.1 Interview question 5: What do you think about the role of preschool teacher in free play?

- **What might be the positive and negative consequences of teacher interaction during free play?**

The fifth interview question mainly deals with roles of preschool teachers and teacher interaction in free play activities. The responses of preservice teachers to the teacher roles question is set out in table 4-24. As it can be seen in the table, preservice teachers reported six teacher roles in free play. These were observer, co-player, stage-manager, guide, director and play leader. On the other hand, participants particularly complained about uninterested, and uninvolved attitudes.

Table 4-24

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Roles in Free Play

Role of teachers	f
• Observer	24
• Co-player	14
• Stage manager	14
• Guide	9
• Director	6
• Play leader	4
• Not to be Uninvolved	7

All of participants were in consensus about the importance of teacher observation in free play time. They expressed that observation is not only important for preventing harmful situations it is also essential for getting to know children better and plan accordingly as well as helping integration of isolated children into the play. Also, most of the participants argued that the teacher should participate in free play activities of children as one of the players and follow the lead of children. They also commented that it is important for preschool teachers to provide a well-organized and equipped environment for free play activities including providing learning centres and variety of materials and rotating and updating the materials in the centres in an appealing way to attract and maintain children's attention. Additionally, a considerable number of participants, pointed out the importance of teacher guidance in free play activities in order to contribute to the quality of children's free play and development of their skills and abilities. Compared to the facilitative teacher roles explained above, fewer participants, gave importance to the director teacher role in free play. They expressed that a teacher can lead the process in order to help children to initiate and sustain play and to enrich it. Also, some of the participants were concerns about the uninvolved teacher role in which teachers deal with paperwork, prepare activity and surf on the internet rather than observing and participating in children's play.

Within the context of teacher roles, participant E3 replied that

The most important role of teacher in free play is being a good observer. Teachers should observe children at their best so that they can see inner world of the children in free play. They can observe their friendships, children's attitudes, behaviors in face of an event or to which centers children show interest, their areas of interest. Thus, the most important thing is being an observer.

In addition, participant G2 stated that

The teachers who know their students are wise to know what materials should be given place in the centres and what shouldn't. For instance, Hasan likes inventing things so the teacher can give place to the new materials that will attract his attention and broaden his perspective, within two weeks' interval. What we also call them transitory learning centres, is good for children and free play activities... if there are inclusive children in the classroom, teachers should do some adaptations for them, provide additional materials or remove some of the available for safety of children with special needs.

Preservice teacher F1 also expressed her view as follows

When the teacher feels the necessity, for instance when there is a disagreement between children or if the play digresses from its purpose, children are distracted and there is a disorder in the classroom, then teacher should intervene and direct the process by herself. She should do that without much authoritativeness, like a guide. Honestly, since we focus much on structured activities, it is hard to think of unstructured.

Associated with the role of teachers in free play, preservice teachers also asked to share their beliefs about positive and negative impacts of teacher interaction during free play activities. While they expressed both positive and negative consequences of teacher interaction from the perspective of children, they reported only positive outcomes from the perspective of teachers. Table 4-25 reveals the themes focused on by preservice teachers in relation to impact of teachers' interaction with children during free play time. In general, preservice teachers highlighted that teacher interaction is mainly positive but the type of the interaction or its extent determines whether it will be positive or negative for children.

Table 4-25

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Consequences of Teacher Interaction in Free Play

Consequences of teacher interaction in free play	Positive	Negative
From the point of a child	f	f
• Teacher-child relationship	5	5
• Comfort and motivation	8	12
From the point of a teacher		
• Supervision	6	N/A
• Guidance	12	N/A
• Observation	6	N/A

From the point of view of a child: Preservice teachers argued that teacher-child relationship can be affected positively and/or negatively by teacher interaction during free

play time. While half of them expressed that inappropriate and frequent teacher interaction can lead to development of potentially harmful relationship between teacher and children, the remaining half commented appropriate and timely interaction by the teacher can lead to potentially beneficial teacher-child relationship. Similarly, while some participants considered teacher interaction in free play as comforting and motivating, some others regarded it as discomfoting and discouraging. In relation to the issue, participant F5 expressed that

There are four classrooms at the preschool that I attend for my internship. In one of those classrooms, I had chance to observe that children are too dependent on the teacher. They even ask her that can I play with this toy? Even during the free play time, children ask their every step to the teacher. It seems that the teacher made children completely dependent on her through her constant intervention and interacting with children.

From the view point of a teacher: Preservice teachers expressed that teacher interaction with children during free play time is important for the supervision of the children. Half of participants, responded that it can be beneficial for guiding children and contributing to quality of their play. Preservice teachers also supported that teacher interaction in free play allow teacher to get to know children more closely.

In relation to this issue, participant F4 reflected that

Although I don't want to intervene in free play, I do it when there is a physical disturbance between children. I want give them opportunity to solve their problems among themselves, but when one bit another's ear, I need to intervene. There are some children who hit their head, they push one another, in cases like these, we try to intervene.

In addition, participant B2 expressed that

It could be positive based on the behavior of the teacher. As I said earlier, if teacher gives directions like play this, play over there, then it can be negative. However, if teacher provides new materials when children are distracted or tries to add a new dimension to the play then it can be positive. She can provide suggestions for children to improve their play.

4.2.2.2 Interview question 7: Is there any difficulty in fulfilling the teacher roles in free play? Please explain your answer.

- **What can be done to avoid these difficulties?**

The interview questioned seven was concerned about the obstacles perceived by early childhood preservice teachers in relation to performing the expected teacher roles in free play. Participants evaluated these difficulties in terms of their sources. As demonstrated in table 4-26, they mentioned that obstacles to fulfilling teacher roles in free play can be related to the children, teachers, materials and third parties including parents, school

administrators and colleagues. Besides the participants who touched on the difficulties of performing teacher roles properly, there were also some preservice teachers who reflected that there is no difficulty for teachers to assume their roles as long as they want to do it.

Table 4-26

Preservice Teachers' Believes about Difficulties in Fulfilling the Teacher Roles in Free Play

Difficulties in fulfilling the teacher roles in free play	f
Teacher related	
• Unprofessional and misuse of free play	
Unwilling teacher attitude	5
Handling paperwork during free play	5
• Lack of experience and theoretical knowledge	2
Child related	
• High number of children and inclusive children	2
• Sense of discomfort in presence of teacher	2
• Desire for not sharing the teacher as play partner	1
Difficulties related to third parties (colleagues, administrators, parents)	
• Expectations, judgements and interferences in free play	6
Environment related	
• Lack of materials	3
No difficulty	4

With respect to teacher related obstacles for performing different teacher roles in free play, some participants drew attention to unwillingness of teachers to organize the environment, participate in play and observe children during free play. Closely associated with this, preservice teachers argued that teachers' occupation with other works rather than play prevents them from fulfilling their roles in free play. Another difficulty expressed by preservice teachers is lack of both theoretical and experiential knowledge. On the other hand, few participants pointed out crowded classrooms and high number of children with special needs in the classroom as an obstacle to performing teacher roles during free play. Another child related difficulty expressed by participants was that children may not want teachers in their play due to feeling uncomfortable in their presence or contrarily they may all want to

play with the teacher, not want to share her/him. Participants also stated that expectations, interferences and judgements of colleagues, administrators and parents can make difficulties for teachers to perform their roles in free play. Besides, inadequacy of play materials was also considered as a hardship for teachers to provide a rich, stimulating learning environment for free play. Other than these, some participants expressed that there is no difficulty for teachers to fulfil their roles in free play unless they don't want to do it.

Participant G3 explained her ideas in relation to the matter, as follows

For example, let's say I am graduated and appointed as a teacher. I am sure that I don't know how to organize and arrange the physical environment. I know that it will improve with experience. I only think about lack of experience and academic knowledge and I could not think of any different obstacles for teachers to fulfil their roles...

In relation to judgements from third parties, participant G4 raised his concern about being a male preschool teacher. He commented that

For instance, as a male teacher I concerned about gender bias. Because of physical contact issue while playing with children, I don't want to feel uncomfortable, and worried about it. For example, I seen a foreign movie which was about the story of a male preschool teacher. There was a similar thing happening there. The teacher was misunderstood and he was punished without interrogation. So I think that male teachers are experiencing this difficulty until they become known by other teachers and employees in the school.

As for the solutions to these difficulties for fulfilling teacher roles in free play, preservice teachers generally suggested that these can be overcome or reduced if teachers want to do so. In relation to this participant E2 stated that

It depends on the teacher. I want to say that teachers can be supervised but you can supervise the teacher once a week not four days a week. It is up to conscience of the teacher. On the other hand, compulsory conferences can be organized in schools. It is totally up to teacher and his/her conscience when they go into their classroom and close the doors.

Besides, some of the participants suggested a few ideas for solving these difficulties as shown in the table 4-27.

Table 4-27

Preservice Teachers' Solutions to Difficulties for Fulfilling Teacher Roles in Free Play

Solutions	f
Handling paperwork in free play	
• Simultaneously observing children	2
High number of children and inclusive children	
• Teacher assistant/interns	1
Difficulties related to third parties (colleagues, administrators, parents)	
• Teacher professionalism	1

A few participants suggested that observing children and doing paperwork simultaneously can be solution to the difficulty caused by dealing with paperwork during free play time. Moreover, one participant suggested assistant teachers and interns as a solution to high numbers of children and inclusive children in the classroom. Another participant suggested that teacher professionalism can be a solution to difficulties related to third parties. In relation to the matter, H1 stated that

Teachers want to have a rest or make preparations for their activity during free play time. About this, I don't want to be optimist about it or I can't say I never do it... from time to time, I will probably to it. However, I think that the point here is if I really aware of what children are doing, if all the children are engage their play in a center and if everything is fine, then, I can deal with some preparations or paperwork but it shouldn't become a habit.

4.2.3 Research Question 3: Is there any change in early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play before and after taking teaching practice course?

Related to the third research question, participants directly asked about the changes, if any, in their beliefs about the issues as a result of the teaching practice course.

4.2.3.1 Interview Question 8: Did any change occur in your beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play after taking teaching practice course? Please explain your answer.

The last interview question was concerned about how preservice teachers evaluate their beliefs in relation to free play and teacher roles in free play after taking teaching practice course and thereby internship in preschools. In response to this question participant expressed their gains rather than change in their belief related to free play and teacher roles in free play.

The responses of the participants were classified under eight subthemes as presented in table 4-28.

Table 4-28

Preservice Teachers' Views on What They Have Learned from Teaching Practice in Relation to Free Play and Teacher Roles in the Play

Gains from teaching practice in relation to free play and teacher roles in the play	f
• Experiencing classroom management	3
• Practicing theory in relation free play and teacher roles	6
• Recognizing importance of observation	7
• Taking lessons from observation of different teacher practices	8
• Shaping ideas about time for free play	3
• Learning about how to interact with children	2
• Experiencing conflict between practice and theory	5

Some participants reflected that by attending the teaching practice course they experienced how to manage children during free play time and improved their classroom management skills as a result. In addition, considerable number of participants stated that the teaching practice course helped them to experience theory, and the field. They reflected that they actively engaged in observer and co-player teacher roles during free play. In addition, participants conveyed that they profited from both positive and negative experiences during their internship. They made their own inferences about good and bad practices and consequently what to do and what not to do as future teachers in their classrooms. It seemed that the practicum experience assisted preservice teachers to learn about how much time to provide for free play activities. Moreover, participants raised their concerns about the contradiction between what they have learned about free play and what they have observed with respect to the importance and implementation of free play in preschools. They mentioned the misuse of free play in preschools and their incompetence to put their theoretical knowledge into practice as well. On the other hand, a few participants stated that there is no change in their views, beliefs about free play after completing the teaching practice course because these had already been shaped through their previous training and experience. In relation to the issue, participant G1 shared that

In my previous internship classroom, there was too much teacher direction in free play. There were materials but not accessible to children. Teacher was overly concerned that the toys will be broken or lost by children. The materials were put on the top of the shelves except the ones that do not attract children's attention anymore such as hand puppets. This makes children to wonder about the materials they cannot see and reach and it was affecting their play. But in my present internship classroom, there is no such a problem, materials are open and accessible to children and there is no restriction on them. And I think it makes children's play more effective and productive. The opposite is limiting children's imagination. Because I observed two classrooms, I realized the importance of this. There should not be any restrain on materials during free play.

Moreover, participant E2 said that

...our instructors value about that process in free play time. For instance, we make our transitions and play time storify to make them good and effective but mentor teachers in our internship schools do not care about it. They interfere in our practices by saying that "let's keep it short today, let's move on to the activities, they are not going to finished otherwise... let's do this or that, play a movie for children before departure time." So we couldn't apply our schedule and activities.

On the other hand, participant G3 reflected on inability to put theory into practice. She touched on the issue as follows

I realized that I could not put my academic knowledge about what children should do in play into my practices in internship. I still don't know what should I learn from children's play, how should I get to know them. I need experience to learn these. But it changed one thing that children can learn much better in play compared to what we want to teach them directly.

4.3 Synthesis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

4.3.1 Early Childhood Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play

One of the main concerns of this study was senior early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about free play. With respect to this, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected respectively. In the data collection process, participants firstly quantitatively communicated their beliefs in relation to (a) nature of free play, (b) forms of free play, (c) planning for free play, (d) process of free play activities, (e) association between free play, and learning and development as well as (f) use of free play as an assessment tool. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were administered to confirm and comprehend participants' beliefs about (a) definition of free play and its importance, (b) sufficient amount of time for free play and the rationale behind it, (c) impact of free play on learning and development, including potential negative consequences, (d) factors that positively and negatively affecting free play, and (e) challenges for implementing free play.

To start with nature and definition of free play, preservice teachers' beliefs about the defining characteristics of free play expressed via quantitative and qualitative instruments were found to be complementary. In the questionnaire, they stated that free play is a spontaneous activity without pre-determined objectives and rules, that involves exploration of the environment and pretending. They also mentioned volunteering and active involvement as well as autonomy of children in free play. These characteristics of free play were also confirmed through the definitions of free play made by the participants during the interviews. They defined free play as a self-chosen and self-directed activity based on competencies, interests and needs of children. In addition, they also put emphasis on the joy and comfort that comes with free play as well as the creative and imaginative process involved. Moreover, lack of definite rules or existence of child-determined rules in free play was highlighted by preservice teachers, too.

In addition to what it means for children, participants also approached free play from view point of view of a teacher. They argued that free play does not mean leaving children unattended, teacher supervision is essential during free play such times to ensure safety and positive play outcomes. However, they also clarified that teachers should not intervene and interfere in the play unless there is a safety related situation, threat to physical and/or psychological healthy of children or a problematic situation that children could not handle by themselves. However, none of them mentioned teacher intervention to scaffold learning.

Along with the definition, preservice teachers also explained their beliefs in relation to the importance of free play. They all expressed that free play is highly important for preschool education mainly for two reasons; to let children express themselves, their ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences either directly or indirectly, and to provide children with subtle but effective learning experiences through the opportunities created for peer interaction and/or self-exploration of the environment. According to preservice teachers, the former has particular importance since it enables teachers to learn great deal about children including their interests, needs as well as their level of learning and development. Contrary to focus on educational and developmental aspects, only three of the participants talked about the amusing nature of free play that makes it important for education of young children.

Recognizing such characteristics and roles of free play, teacher candidates believe that it is quite important to daily provide children with sufficient amount of time, and variety of materials for free play. They also put particular emphasis on the significance of accessibility of materials to children while planning free play activities. Despite the differences in participants' responses to adequate amount of free play time, the majority of them, supported more than 30 minutes daily. While some of them considered 30 minutes to

one hour as sufficient, some other participants argued that one to two hour(s) are adequate for free play. On the one hand, as rationales for their decisions not to extend the length of free play time, preservice teachers point at developmental features of children such as age group and attention span, requirements of early childhood education curriculum to accomplish structured activities and learning objectives, and observations and experiences during previous internships. On the other hand, as rationales not to shorten free play time, participants mainly touched on importance of meeting all children's desire and need for play and consequently enabling them to have complete and mature play experience as well as developmental and educational benefits of free play that allow children to learn about things, and to practice and strengthen their different skills in the process.

Associated with place or setting of free play activities, quantitative results revealed that preservice teachers believe that indoor environments are not the only place for free play, it is important for free play to take place outdoors, too. On the contrary, during the interviews only one participants mentioned outdoor spaces, and its positive impact on free play activities. Likewise, only three participants touched on the use of outdoor spaces for free play as a solution to the constraints brought by limited space in the classrooms.

In relation to process of free play time, it was expressed by participants that the most important activities for children to engage in during free play are math related activities that involve relating, classifying, ordering and forming patterns, physically active plays including running, jumping, skipping and ball games, and rhythm activities with objects or body. They did not consider literacy related activities as important as other forms of free play activities. On the other hand, qualitative data indicated that, despite the lack of explicit statements about forms of free play, participants frequently gave examples from block centre and block play in their explanations and examples during interview. Thus, it seems parallel to participants' responses that emphasize math related activities as an important form of free play.

On the other hand, planning and evaluation of children's own play during free play time which was agreed on by majority of the participants in the questionnaire, was not given sufficient attention during interviews. There was also need for explanation concerning the considerable number of participants who were uncertain about teacher-child interaction in free play. Even though they almost strongly agreed with making observations and keeping anecdotal records during free play time and intervening when necessary, they expressed less agreement on talking to children about their play and especially making comments on their play during free play time. These findings were partially clarified by qualitative data in which participants expressed both positive and negative consequences of teacher interaction in the play. They considered teacher interaction both intrusive and supportive based on the type and

time of the interaction. They stated that teacher interaction during free play can positively and/or negatively affect the teacher-child relationship, comfort and motivation of children, and can contribute to supervision, guidance and observation by teachers.

Besides the positive and negative influences of teacher interaction on children and play, preservice teachers primarily expressed that the number of children, experiences and emotional states of children; attitude of teachers; and organization of learning centres, quality and quantity of play materials are likely to have positive and negative impact on free play activity process and thereby the quality of free play. Together with the influences, participants also reflected on challenges they perceived, of implementing free play activities in the classrooms and suggested some solutions to them. They articulated challenges related to all components of early childhood education including child, teacher, parents and administrators, and learning environment. Among these challenges, they mainly complained about teacher related issues: misperception and/or misuse of free play, unwilling, uncaring teacher attitude, and some negative characteristics of teachers. They raised concern over giving place to structured activities during free play time, perceiving free play time as a break to rest or handle such works as filling out paperwork, preparing activity, and considering and treating free play as unimportant as well as leaving the classroom during that time period. Other than teacher related difficulties, inadequate and disorganized learning centres and materials were also regarded as a major challenge for practicing free play activities properly. Along with these, a few participants mentioned the parental and administrative expectations and interference as obstacles to free play. Of course, not all participants agreed with these challenges, a few of them expressed that there is no difficulty in implementing free play activities. They even argued that teachers take advantage of it when they want to deal with other works or start to implement their more time consuming duties.

While the majority of the participants had difficulty producing solutions to teacher related challenges, some suggested teacher willingness and additional educational activities but they did not elaborate on their answers. As for the solutions to environmental challenges, participants put emphasis on the importance of effort and creativity of teachers to provide organized learning centres and adequate materials and their willingness to do so. Also, some participants supported that preschool teachers can use the physical space or outdoor environments effectively in order to diminish the negative effect of limited space. Moreover, participants suggested more educative activities such as additional courses, seminars and conferences for administrators and parents, as well as professionalism of teacher as a solution to inferences of parents and administrators.

With pros and cons, influences and challenges and its different forms, it was pointed out by participants that free play can affect learning and development of children either positively or negatively. With respect to the positive relationship between play, and learning & development, the quantitative responses of teacher candidates revealed that play contributes to children's overall learning and development. However, they seemed relatively uncertain about the role of free play in promoting literacy skills. Participants attached particular importance to its contribution to pro-social skills such as helping, sharing, waiting for turn, and language skills. Similar to quantitative data, qualitative findings also revealed that social-emotional development is the first and most frequently articulated area of development that is believed to be enhanced by free play activities. It was defended that through free play children learn sharing, helping, working in cooperation, taking responsibility and fulfilling themselves, in addition to learning how to socialize and develop self-esteem, empathy and positive relationships with other children. At this point, it seems interesting that despite the participants' specific emphasis on benefits of free play to social emotional development of children, they expressed that math related activities and physical activities are more important forms of activities for children to engage in during free play time. Following social-emotional gains, cognitive development including such skills as advance thinking, reasoning, and problem solving, and development of fine and gross motor skills were also considered to be greatly supported by free play. Nevertheless, compared to questionnaires, fewer participants, pointed to promotion of communication skills, literacy awareness, and creativity and imagination of children through free play, in the interviews.

In addition to development, preservice teachers commented on contribution of free play to children's learning, including peer learning, exploratory learning and hands-on/experiential learning. As it might be guessed this learning can be negative as well. In the qualitative data, alongside benefits of free play, preservice teachers raised their concerns about three main negative consequences of free play for children, including peer bullying, aggression towards others and materials, and negative peer learning. They drew attention to power inequality between socially active, dominant children and introverted, passive children and being negatively affected from peer interaction such as learning physical violence or violent computer games from each other's and being exposed to physical violence during play. Apart from these, a considerable number of participants indicated that there is no negative outcome to free play as long as it is supervised by a teacher.

In relation to the evaluative role of free play, the quantitative findings showed that teacher candidates believe that free play is important to assess children's learning and development in all areas, especially, motor development and creativity. Assessment of social-

emotional development, cognitive development and language development follow subsequently and lastly, assessment of science and math knowledge and skills. There seems to be an incompatibility in participants' responses. Although they stated that it is more important for children to engage in math related activities in free play time, they reported that free play activities are relatively less effective to assess children's science and math knowledge and skills. Results of quantitative data, on the other hand, indicated that less than half of the participants, touched on the evaluative role of free play activities. They asserted that free play is where children express their feelings, thoughts, interests, needs and reflect their skills, abilities and knowledge well.

4.3.2 Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Roles in Free Play

The second concern of the current study was senior early childhood preservice teachers' beliefs about teacher roles in free play. With respect to this, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected respectively. In the data collection process, participants first quantitatively shared their beliefs in relation to (a) stage-manager, (b) co-player, (c) play leader (d) onlooker/observer, (e) director/redirector and (f) uninvolved teacher roles. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were carried out to confirm and comprehend participants' beliefs about (a) teachers' roles in free play (b) obstacles for them to fulfil these roles.

Participants expressed their beliefs in relation to facilitative and precarious teacher roles in free play both quantitatively and qualitatively. Stage-manager, observer and co-player teacher roles were most prominent teacher roles in free play that were strongly agreed on and emphasized by preservice teachers. However, while quantitative data revealed that the great majority of participants were in favour of assuming play leader teacher role, it was the least mentioned and supported teacher role expressed by preservice teachers during the interviews. In relation to the precarious teacher roles, most of the teacher candidates disagreed and disapproved to take director role in free play despite the five percent increase in number of participants who believe that they will manage children's play by giving directions during free play when they become a teacher, in the post questionnaire. On the other hand, it seemed that they are prone to redirecting, intervening in play for instructive purposes. Similar to director role, uninvolved teacher role during free play time did not received support from preservice teachers in general, too. In the interview, participants paid special attention to and complained about uninterested, uninvolved teachers who deal with paperwork, make preparations for activity, surf on the internet and/or even go outside of the

classroom, rather than observing and participating in children's play. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings correspondingly indicated that preservice teachers disagreed more with social media engagement and leaving the classroom, and disagree relatively less with handling paper work during free play time. This coincides with their solutions to misuse of free play by teachers to handle paperwork, in which they suggested doing observation and paperwork simultaneously. Furthermore, different from teacher roles included in the questionnaires, considerable number of participants who took part in the interviews defended that it is also important for teachers to be a guide during free play activities. Although it was called guidance, it sounded close to the director role.

Similar to the challenges of implementing free play activities, participants also made comments about obstacles they anticipate in relation to performing the expected teacher roles in the play. They stated that obstacles for fulfilling teacher roles in free play can be related to the children, teachers, materials and third parties including parents, school administrators and colleagues. With respect to teacher related challenges participants drew attention to unwillingness of teachers to organize the environment, participate in play and observe children during free play; lack of theoretical and experiential knowledge of teachers. They argued that teachers' occupation with other tasks rather than play prevents them from fulfilling their roles in free play properly. The number of inclusive children who demand a great deal of teacher attention and not being wanted or oppositely not being shared by children in play were stated as child related obstacles. On the other hand, they considered interferences and judgements of colleagues, administrators and parents as another sources of challenge. They also touched on the constraining effects of environmental limitations as a source of difficulty for fulfilling teacher roles in free play.

As a general solution to all of these difficulties, preservice teachers suggested that these can be overcome or reduced if teachers want to do so. They stated that observing children and doing paperwork simultaneously can be a solution to the difficulty caused by handling paperwork during free play time. Moreover, one participant recommended employing a teacher assistant or intern in each classroom to enable teachers to allocate time to inclusive children and the play of mainstream children. Another participant suggested that teachers should behave professionally to prevent interventions and interference from third parties.

4.3.3 Changes in Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play and Teacher Roles in the Play After Taking Teaching Practice Course

In the quantitative data, no great change was observed in participants' beliefs about relationship between free play, and learning, development and assessment of children. Nevertheless, a few slight changes were perceived in other aspects of free play. For example, five percent increase was found in the number of participants who considered planning free play activities indoors as important. Moreover, five percent increase in the number of participants who supported engagement in literacy activities, and ten percent increase in the number of participants who defended children's engagement in reading activities during free play was noted. Also, respectively a ten percent and six percent increase was found in the number of participants who agreed with importance of children's engagement in large group and small group activities during free play time. Moreover, six percent increase was observed in number of participants who believe that it is important for children to plan their activities during free play. On the other hand, in relation to teacher roles, about five percent decrease was recognized in the number of participants who supported the teacher's absence in the class during free play time. Besides, a five percent and seven percent increase was noticed in the number of participants who supported making verbal or non-verbal comments on the play of children and who agreed with intervening in play to ask redirecting questions. Although, it looks like teaching practice led to small changes in preservice teacher's beliefs about free play and teacher roles in the play, the decline in the number of participants in the second administration of the questionnaire should not be disregarded.

On the other hand, when participants were directly asked to evaluate their beliefs in relation to free play and teacher roles in the play after taking teaching practice course and thereby internship in preschools, they generally expressed their gains rather than changes in their beliefs and a few participants stated that there is no change in their views or beliefs. They said that they already held those beliefs before teaching practice. These participants stated that their beliefs about the issues were shaped by theoretical courses and school experience they obtained before teaching practice. The remaining participants expressed what they have learned from teaching practice in relation to free play and teacher roles in play rather than any change in their beliefs about those issues. Preservice teachers explained that as a result of teaching practice they had chance to experience theory in the field. It helped them to learn about and improve their classroom managements skills during free play time. Also, they reflected that they actively engaged in observer and co-player teacher roles during

free play. As a result, they asserted that they recognized the importance of free play time to make observation of children and get to know them better and more closely.

They conveyed that they profited from both positive and negative experiences they had during internship. They made their own inferences about good and bad practices and consequently what to do and what not to do as future teachers in their classrooms. Besides, some participants raised their concerns about the contradiction between what they have learned about free play at school and what they have observed with respect to the importance and implementation of free play in preschools. They pointed out the misuse of free play in preschools, perception of free play as unimportant by teachers and administrators. They reflected on their incompetence and difficulty to put their theoretical knowledge about free play and teacher roles into practice as well.

4.4 Key Findings from the Interviews with Preservice Teachers

Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play

- Preservice teachers believe that free play is a spontaneous activity determined and ruled by children and involves exploration of the environment and pretending.
- They considered free play is as an enjoyable, creative and imaginative activity.
- They believe that it is important for teachers to supervise but not direct or interfere in free play activity unless necessary.
- Participants expressed that free play is highly important mainly for two reasons; to let children express themselves, their ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences either directly or indirectly, and to provide children with subtle but effective learning experiences
- Preservice teachers believe that play contributes to children's overall learning and development, progress of and pro-social skills and communication skills in particular.
- Participants stated that free play may bring about such negative consequences for children as peer bullying, aggression towards others and materials, and negative peer learning.
- They considered free play as important to assess children's learning and development in all areas. However, assessment of science and math knowledge and skills in free play is regarded as less important compared to assessment of skills and abilities in other areas.

- According to preservice teachers, the time allocated for free play can range between 30 minutes to two hours based on age group and interests of children, requirements of curriculum and daily schedule and complexity and content of play, and previous knowledge and experiences of the teacher.
 - Preservice teachers expressed that they support the outdoors free play activities besides indoor free play but they seem to need more practical experience to internalize and practice it.
 - Math related activities, such as block play are found to more important by preservice teachers for children to engage in during free play while literacy related activities are found to be relatively less important
 - Although free play is considered as a self-choice and self-directed activity, preservice teachers did not pay enough attention to planning and evaluation of children's own play during free play
 - They considered teacher interaction both negative, intrusive and/or positive, supportive based on the type and time of the interaction.
 - Preservice teachers expressed that number of children, experiences and emotional states of children; attitude of teachers; and organization of learning centres, quality and quantity of play materials are likely to have positive and negative impact on free play activity process and thereby the quality of free play.
 - Preservice teachers are concerned about misperception and/or misuse of free play such as giving place to structured activities, perceiving it as a break to rest or handle paperwork, or preparing activity, and considering it as unimportant and leaving the classroom during that time period
 - They believe that teacher willingness, effort and creativity are important to overcome difficulties in implementing free play activities effectively.
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Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Roles in Free Play

- Stage-manager, observer and co-player teacher roles were most prominent teacher roles in free play that were strongly agreed on and emphasized by preservice teachers.
- Play leader was the less frequently addressed teacher role expressed by preservice teachers.
- Director and uninvolved teacher roles were most disagreed and disapproved role by participants in free play but they are prone to redirecting, intervening in play for instructive purposes.

- With regard to the uninvolved teacher role, preservice teachers disagreed more with social media engagement and leaving the classroom, and disagree relatively less with handling paper work during free play time.
 - In some cases, the teacher role which was called as guidance by participants, sounded more close to the director role, there seems to be need for clarification about teacher roles.
 - Preservice teachers suggested teacher willingness to overcome the difficulties in assuming different teacher roles in play.
 - Observing children and doing paperwork simultaneously is suggested by participants as a solution for the difficulties caused by handling paperwork during free play time.
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Changes in Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play and Teacher Roles in the Play

- Slight changes were noted in beliefs or views of preservice teacher with regard to free play and teacher roles in free play
 - Increase in the number of items that preservice teachers raised their concern about such as planning free play activities indoors, children's engagement in literacy activities, and reading activities, children's own planning for their free play activities, engagement in large group and small group activities during free play time was noted.
 - Decrease in the number of participants who supported teacher's absence in the class during free play and who disagree with directing children's play, and increase in the number of participants who support making verbal or non-verbal comments on play of children and who agreed with intervening in play to ask redirecting questions were realized.
 - In response to question that concerned changes in preservice teachers' beliefs after taking teaching practice course, participants generally expressed their gains rather than change in their beliefs.
 - Preservice teachers expressed that they had chance to experience the theory, and the field through teaching practice course.
 - They made their own inferences about good and bad practices and consequently what to do and what not to do as future teachers in their classrooms.
 - Besides, some participants raised their concerns about the contradiction between what they have learned about free play at school and what they have observed in preschools and their incompetence to put the theoretical knowledge about free play and teacher roles into practice.
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods research design was to explore Turkish early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about free play and teacher roles in play. Also, changes if any, between pre-service teachers' beliefs regarding the issues before and after taking the teaching practice course were examined. An explanatory sequential mixed method design was employed whereby quantitative data collection was followed by a qualitative inquiry to support the quantitative data with further information. The data was collected from senior early childhood teacher candidates who took teaching practice courses in 2018-2019 fall semester. Early childhood pre-service teachers who met the criterion in the accessible universities constituted the participants of the study. In the first step of the study, *Free Play in Early Childhood Education and Teacher Roles in Free Play Questionnaires* were administered to participants ($N_1=467$, $N_2=425$) from 8 different universities at the beginning and end of 2018-2019 fall term. In the second step of the study, a semi-structured one-on-one interview protocol was carried out with volunteer pre-service teachers from the same eight universities ($N=24$). Descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages were used to analyse quantitative findings and descriptive analysis was carried out on qualitative data following the coding process.

5.2 Discussion of the Findings

5.2.1 Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play

Alongside the differences among definition of free play, there was a considerable overlap between characteristics of free play expressed by preservice teachers similar to the studies in the literature (Lewis,2013; Sherwood,2009; Klugman,1996) For instance, almost all of the participants drew attention to the unstructured nature of free play activity that is chosen, determined and directed by children themselves so that it requires active involvement. Moreover, participants also greatly supported that free play is a spontaneous activity without pre-determined objectives and rules, that involves exploration of the environment and pretending. These features attributed to free play by preservice teachers are completely aligned with the definition of free play made by researchers in the field (Hewes,

2014; Gray, 2013; Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007; Young, 2000, Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg, 1983). Thus, it can be inferred that preservice teachers know free play by definition. They seem to be aware of the distinctive characteristics of free play.

In addition, compatible with the main characteristics of play expressed by preservice teacher and practitioners in the field, joy and comfort accompany free play as well as creativity and imagination involved in the process of free play activities were also emphasized by participants (Lewis, 2013; Sherwood, 2009; Moon & Reifel, 2008). It was supported that the unstructured nature of free play allows and encourages children to think out of the box and produce original ideas and works rather than ordinary ones (Sherwood, 2009). It appears that early childhood preservice teachers give importance to creative expression of children. As expressed, most of the participants in the interviews hold that children need a space to be themselves, make their own decisions and rules other than complying with the rules and instructions of the teacher or adults all the time. For these reasons, it seems probable that preservice teachers consider free play as the only chance for children to express themselves freely and creatively in the highly structured success-oriented early childhood education programs of today.

Even though preservice teachers defined free play as it is supposed to be, it does not guarantee that they will or can implement it effectively in their future classrooms. For instance, a study by Wu (2016) demonstrated inconsistency between how preservice teachers explained that they perceive free play and their practices during internship with regard to free play. It was found that instead of encouraging imagination, creativity, free exploration of children as they reflected, they implemented mechanical and conventional, performance oriented play. This is quite similar to findings of the studies conducted with in-service preschool teachers that their views about free play and teacher roles in play does not comply with their practices (Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; Ersan, 2011; Ogelman, 2014; Aras, 2016). As explained by the participants, such inconsistency between theory and practice may be associated with the challenges related to environmental constraints such as limited space and lack of materials, parental and administrative expectations and interferences. These challenges are in line with the literature (Ulutaş Avcu, 2015; Demirci & Şıvgın, 2017). More importantly, as pointed out by participants these can be overcome by the teachers but the main drawback to free play is unwilling and uncaring teacher attitude, and misuse of free play by the teachers to implement structured activities such as literacy activities or to undertake tasks such as filling out paperwork, preparing activity, and even leaving the classroom during that time period. Therefore, more studies are needed to understand the underlying reasons or motives behind such conflicting practices of the teachers in the field

and intervention programs can be developed to promote practices of teachers and diminish differences between theory and practice. And importantly, preservice teachers need opportunity and encouragement to question, challenge and reflect on their beliefs about play and teacher roles during teaching education program in order to prevent the inappropriate practices of today (Aldemir & Sezer, 2009).

Actually, some indicators of the possible inconsistency between beliefs of participants expressed in the survey and in the interview and their implementation of free play were addressed. It appeared that preservice teachers have both ideal and factual definitions of play in their minds. To explain, although almost all of the participants described free play as a self-selected and self-directed activity based on interests, abilities and needs of children, when they elaborate on their definitions, they talked about restricting children's control and freedom by supposedly maintaining order in class and contributing to children's gains from free play. For instance, participant F1 defended that children should decide on where to play, in which learning centre to play by themselves but then, they are not allowed to change their centres throughout free play time for the day in order not to cause chaos in the classroom. Or another participant, G3, honestly stated that during her internship she directed children to structured play activities since they generally engage in immature play activities such as gun and war plays that involve violence when they are let free so she prefers to lead children in that direction rather than guiding children to non-violent free play activities. These examples suggest that preservice teachers seem to need clarification about structured and unstructured play and guidance and direction about play. Basically, as suggested in the literature, they need to gain awareness and understanding about their beliefs related to play and address them directly through comprehensive experiences and opportunities throughout teacher education in order to achieve improved integration of play into their future classrooms (Richardson, 2003; Pajares, 1992).

Moreover, parallel to the curriculum and research, participants emphasized the importance of teacher supervision during free play time and they also clarified that teachers should not intervene and interfere in play but they should provide guidance when necessary (Ogelman, 2014; MoNE, 2013). They defended and approved teacher intervention and interference in play when there is a safety related situation, threat to physical and/or psychological healthy of children or a problematic situation that children could not handle by children themselves. This result of the current study coincides with the responses of participants about teacher intervention in play in a study by Tsai (2015) which revealed that there are four intentions underlying participation of preschool teachers in play. These are violation of classroom rules, conflict between children, opportunities for milieu teaching and

getting to know children. An interesting point here is that none of the participants in the current study mentioned the necessity of teacher intervention to scaffold learning. Based on the inferences from the qualitative data, this might be associated with not being exposed to this kind of practice during their internships, not encountering a role model. It seems possible that for early childhood preservice teachers, the concept of scaffolding is unable to go beyond being a topic discussed in theory. This suggestion complied with the idea that teaching experience and attitudes and practices of mentor teachers might lead to a change in teachers' beliefs by creating incongruity between pedagogy and practice (Aldemir & Sezer, 2009; Richardson, 2003).

In alignment with the literature (Özgünlü & Veziroğlu Çelik, 2018; Kimzan and Avar, 2017; Engel, 2015; Ersan, 2011; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Kernan, 2007; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978), the majority of the participants expressed that free play is highly important for preschool education mainly for two reasons; to let children express themselves, their ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences either directly or indirectly, and to provide subtle but effective learning experience for children through the opportunities for peer interaction and/or self-exploration in the environment. According to preservice teachers, the former has particular importance since it enables teachers to learn a great deal about children including their interests, needs as well as their level of learning and development. It seems that preservice teachers value the instructional and evaluative role of free play.

Concerning the length of free play time, teacher candidates believe that it is quite important to provide children with sufficient amounts of time for free play on a daily basis. According to the results, the optimal time allocated for free play can range between 30 minutes to two hours based on age group and interests of children, requirements of curriculum and daily schedule and complexity and content of play, and previous knowledge and experiences of the teacher. The time range suggested by participants correspond with the range of free play time provided in preschool classrooms (Aras, 2016; Ogelman, 2014; Ersan, 2011; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011). At this point, it seems probable that internship experiences are influential in shaping preservice teachers' views about how much time to provide for free play. This claim is also supported by participants' response given to the last interview question that they learn and make inferences about the adequate amount of time for free play activities and managing that time as a result of attending a teaching practice course. Thus, it appears that practices of a mentor teachers can positively or negatively affect the views of teacher candidates based on their quality, effectiveness and similarity to the unconsciously held beliefs of preservice teachers. This confirms the suggestion of Tatalovic

Vorkapic, Vujicic, and Cepic (2014) that students gradually develop competence and gain professional identity in teaching as they actively learn through courses and internship.

Regarding the forms of free play activities, it was expressed by participants that the most important activities for children to engage in during free play are math related activities, such as construction activities with blocks. Despite the existence of the literature on positive relationship between free play and children's improved math achievements (Ginsburg, Lee & Boyd, 2008; Ginsburg, Pappas & Leo, 2001; Wolfgang, Stannard and Jones, 2001), no empirical evidence was found in the literature explaining or supporting why math related activities are more important for children to engage in during free play. This result might be related to theoretical emphasis on appropriateness and effectiveness of play as a means of teaching abstract subjects such as science and mathematics in preschool. Or, it might be the result of increasing focus on academically oriented preschool education and its reflection on free play (Frost, 2012, Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 2010; Miller & Almond, 2009).

Nevertheless, despite their emphasis on the importance of math related activities as predominant forms of free play, preservice teachers particularly stated that free play activities contributed more to social emotional development of children, alongside all domains of development. Although this conclusion points out an inconsistency in preservice teachers' beliefs, it is consistent with views of in-service teachers (Aras 2016; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; Ersan, 2011). On the one hand, it seems probable that this finding is associated with easily observable nature of social-emotional status and abilities of children in free play context as they interact with each other. On the other hand, it might be indicator of the difference and incompatibility between ideals, beliefs, and reality and practices. To explain, preservice teachers are taught about the importance of play as a means of instruction but when they go into the preschool classrooms they don't see practice of play as it was originally intended. Thus, teacher candidates who don't have their own classroom yet, seemed to consider the ideal when answering questions about forms of free play that are important for children to engage in, but when answering questions about the contribution of free play to development of children they seemed to think about their observations and experiences during internships; it is mainly how children interact and play with each other.

Contrary to the findings of other studies conducted with participation of Turkish preschool teachers, literacy related activities were not considered as important as the other forms of free play activities by preservice teachers (Ersan, 2011; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011). In fact, preservice teachers greatly complained about misuse of free play time by their mentor preschool teachers to do literacy activities, to make children complete handouts or booklets related to literacy. However, despite the complaints, respectively a five and nine percent

increase was noted in the number of participants who believe that it is important for children to engage in literacy activities and reading in free play time. It seems possible that this increase results from preservice teachers' exposure to mentor preschool teachers' misuse of free play to handle literacy activities during free play time, during their internships. This can be interpreted as a potential impact of their teaching practice course, actual experiences and observation in the field, on views and thereby the future practices of preservice teachers. This view is also compatible with the findings of Aldemir and Sezer (2009)' study which revealed that mentor teachers have impact on preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching.

Moreover, in the pre-questionnaire, a majority of participants reported that it is not important for free play activities to take place indoors, and correspondingly more than half of the preservice teachers stated that it is important that free play activities take place in outdoor environments, too. However, post questionnaire results revealed a five percent increase in the number of participants who believed that it is important for free play activities to take place indoors. Aligned with this, participants did not touch on the use of the outdoors for free play in the interviews. This is parallel to the views of in-service teachers as revealed by Yalçın (2015). It seems likely that this finding is associated with attitudes of parents who are overly concerned about the safety of their children and thereby the preservice teachers' own worries about the issue (Kos & Jerman,2013; Rennie, 2009). Responses of the participants that focused on parental interference about outdoor play also support this claim. Thus, it appears that similar to the practitioners, preservice teachers need more practical or experiential knowledge about how to effectively include and integrate outdoor free play in their practices.

Although free play is considered a self-choice and self-directed activity, preservice teachers did not pay enough attention to planning and evaluation of children's own play during free play, despite the high agreement rate on importance of planning and evaluation of children's own play, in the questionnaire. This finding complies with results obtained by Ogelman (2014), who revealed that preschool teachers move on to another activity without allowing or encouraging children to make evaluation of their play. Therefore, the incompatibility in preservice teachers' views on the issue may be related to being unaware of or underestimating the value of children's planning and evaluation in free play due to a lack theoretical knowledge and field experience and observation of a role model who can guide children to plan and encourage them to reflect on it. This finding suggests that preservice teachers may benefit from further support to extend their knowledge about the issue and preschool teachers can benefit from in-service training to improve their practices and to become good role models for teacher candidates in the future.

Compatible with the literature, preservice teachers seemed to believe that teacher interaction is mainly positive but the type of the interaction or its extent determines whether it will be positive or negative for children (Tsai, 2015; Rengel, 2014; Tarman & Tarman, 2011; Driscoll, Wang, Mashburn & Pianta, 2011; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2005; Trawic-Smith, 1994). However, their understanding of teacher interaction appears to be limited to intervention in misbehaviors of children or participating in their play as co-player. It does not involve importance of teacher interaction to provide timely scaffolding for children. On the other hand, explanation of the participants who namely touched on the opportunity for scaffolding children's learning through free play activities, did not involve the components of scaffolding stated by Wood and Attfield (2005 as cited in Yang, 2013). They stated that teacher interactions "should simultaneously support and respond to children's needs and potential; support children's skills as player and learner; enrich the context of children's play; support children's own ideas and provide additional ideas and stimuli; enable children to elaborate and develop their own themes; be responsive to the level of play development; and remain sensitive to the ideas that children are trying to express (Wood and Attfield, 2005, p.46 as cited in Yang, 2013). Thus, it seems possible that early childhood preservice teachers are unclear and need more knowledge about how to interact with children in a way that can promote the quality of their play experiences and contribute to learning. Similar to the practitioners who intervene inappropriately and engage in low quality and intellectually non-challenging interactions with children (Rogers & Evans, 2008; Bennet, Wood, & Rogers, 1997), preservice teachers seem to need support on this issue in order to improve their competence to provide timely scaffolding for children during free play.

Besides the influence on play mentioned above, preservice teachers also shared some challenges they perceived for implementation of free play activities. They articulated challenges related to all components of early childhood education including child, teacher, parents and administrators and learning environment. Among these, they put great emphasis on teacher related difficulties: uncaring teacher attitude, and teachers' misuse of free play. They raised concern over giving place to structured activities during free play time, perceiving free play time as a break to rest or handle such works as filling out paperwork, preparing activity plans, and considering free play as unimportant and leaving the classroom during that time period. It is expressed that teachers take advantage of play when they want to deal with other tasks or start doing their more time-consuming activities. Those teachers related challenges perceived by preservice teachers are in line with the literature (Aras, 2016; Tuğrul, Aslan, Ertürk, Altınkaynak, 2014; Ogelman, 2014; Ertürk, 2013, Ersan, 2011). At

this point, it can be inferred that early childhood preservice teachers who expressed that a main solution to teacher related difficulties is teachers themselves, their willingness, effort and creativity, seems to have conscious knowledge about the importance of teacher willingness, care and responsiveness for effective free play of children.

In the qualitative data, alongside the benefits of free play, preservice teachers raised their concerns about three main negative consequences of free play for children, including peer bullying, aggression towards others and materials, and negative peer learning such as physical violence and/ or violent computer games. This finding coincides with research results in the literature (Metin Aslan & Tuğrul, 2014; Ostrov and Keating, 2004) that revealed that physical, verbal, and relational aggression was observed among both same sex and opposite sex children during free play activities. This could be explained by the context of free play that involves a high level of peer interaction and children's potential to show bullying behaviors in response to negative situations occur during these interactions (Metin Aslan, 2013).

Children' preferences for play, playmates, play materials, settings, and their way of playing reveal a great deal about their patterns of learning, competencies, skills, interests and needs, and their relationships with others as well as the environment. Thus, making assessment through play allows a teacher to recognize their students actual and proximal zone of development (Fleer, 2010). According to the results, preservice teachers believe that free play is important to assess children's learning and development in all areas of development. However, although preservice teachers stated that it is more important for children to engage in math related activities in free play time, they reported that free play activities are relatively less effective to assess children's science and math knowledge and skills, which is parallel to the results of Clevenger's study (2016). As clarified earlier, this could be associated with mismatch between the theoretical knowledge they were taught about free play and their observations and experiences in preschool classrooms.

5.2.2 Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Teacher Roles in Free Play

Teachers play a crucial role in promoting children's play, particularly when their involvement is supportive and appropriate (Tarman & Tarman, 2011). Different teacher roles have been suggested by several researchers to foster children's play and they were also classified variously (Christie& Enz, 1993; Roskos& Neuman, 1993). In line with the literature (Özgünlü & Veziroğlu Çelik, 2018; Ivrendi, 2017; Aras, 2016; Tsai, 2015; Yang, 2013; Kontos, 1999), the results of the current study showed that stage-manager, observer

and co-player teacher roles were most prominent roles that were strongly agreed on and emphasized by preservice teachers while the leader teacher role was found to be least mentioned and supported. These result might be explained by preservice teachers' insufficient knowledge about teacher roles in free play, play leader role in particular. Therefore, teacher education programs might consider providing preservice teachers with more extensive experiences, both theoretical and practical, to help teacher candidates to learn about and gain insight to teacher roles in free play and how to implement them in their future classrooms.

In relation to the precarious teacher roles, similar to the study of Yalçın, Kimzan and Avar (2017), a majority of the participants disagreed with the notion and disapproved of taking a director role in free play. However, preservice teachers seemed to be prone to redirecting, intervening in play for instructive purposes. This might be related with success and the product oriented education system that preservice teachers came from. And, this may help to explain the increase seen in the post questionnaire in the number of participants who agreed that they would interfere in play to ask children questions about numbers, shapes, colours, etc. of the materials they use. Another explanation for the rise could be the impact of internship experiences on views of preservice teachers as most of the participants mentioned teacher interference in play to ask children re-directive questions such as how to behave towards others, or in certain situations or evaluative questions about the colour, shape or number of materials used by children in play.

Similar to the director role, participants do not seem to support teacher uninvolved during free play. They particularly complained about uninterested, uninvolved teachers who deal with paperwork, activity preparations, surf on the internet and even leave the class during free play time, rather than observing and participating in children's play. Contrary to social media engagement and leaving the classroom, participants expressed that they may deal with paper work during free play time when it is urgent. As it was found by Aras (2016) dealing with other tasks while observing children is among the practices of preschool teachers during free play activities. This coincides with their solutions to misuse of free play for handling paperwork that the teacher can observe children and handle paperwork simultaneously. It might be considered as another indicator of the influential role of teaching practice and the practices of mentor teachers on teacher candidates' views about free play and teacher roles.

On the other hand, it seems that teacher candidates are having difficulty to differentiate director and guide teacher roles in the play. Although they mentioned directive teacher attitudes they called it as guidance. For instance, participant F1 commented that *the*

teacher should be a guide rather than director. She should intervene when there is a conflict between children. she should intervene and direct play if the play deviates from its purpose and children become distracted. It seems that preservice teachers need clarification about teacher roles in play.

5.2.3 Changes in Preservice Teachers' Beliefs about Free Play and Teacher Roles in the Play After Taking Teaching Practice Course

A few slight changes were observed in the quantitative data collected through administration of questionnaires before and after participants had completed their teaching practice course. For example, five percent increase was found in the number of participants who considered planning free play activities indoors as important. Moreover, there was a five percent increase in the number of participants who supported engagement in literacy activities, and a ten percent increase in the number of participants who defended children's engagement in reading activities during free play. Also, respectively a ten percent and a six percent increase was found in number of participants who agreed with the importance of children's engagement in large group and small group activities during free play time. Moreover, six percent increase in number of participants who depend importance of children's planning of their own activities. On the other hand, in relation to teacher roles, about five percent decrease was seen in the number of participants who supported teacher's absence from the class during free play time and five percent decrease in participants who disagree with teacher direction in free play. Besides, a five percent and seven percent increase was noticed in the number of participants who supported making verbal or non-verbal comments on play of children and who agreed with intervening in play to ask redirecting questions.

Interestingly, most of these changes in preservice teachers' beliefs seems to be related with the practices of the mentor teachers that they observed during their internships, and were generally the ones they were most concerned about. This might be explained through the influence of internship that provides opportunity to observe and participate in practices in the field and to shape and change preservice teacher's beliefs (Richardson, 2003). The changes in preservice teachers' beliefs that are in line with the practitioners also proves the theory and assumptions of Zeichner & Tabacknick (1981), that underlined the ineffectiveness of teacher education in altering pre-service teachers' incoming beliefs related to teaching and learning. They proposed three assumptions that account for the inadequacy. According to the first assumption, supposedly "progressive" teacher training programs do not correspond with conventional presentation of content and materials that maintain

traditional concept of teaching and learning. Secondly, there is no changes in pre-service teachers' ideas during teacher preparation instead their incoming beliefs about teaching and learning that were kept latent during teacher preparation reemerge when they become professionals in the field. Lastly, potential progressive thinking promoted during teacher education can be sidelined when pre-service teachers become socialized into the field.

On the other hand, the qualitative findings of the present study indicated the perceived gains of the preservice teachers rather than changes in their beliefs. Also, a few participants stated that no change in their views or beliefs had occurred as a result of teaching practice. The remaining participants expressed what they have learned from teaching practice in relation to free play and teacher roles in play rather than changes in their beliefs about those issues. It is expressed by participants that they had chance to actively experience the theory, and the field for the first time. Participants conveyed that as a result of their positive and negative experiences during internship, they made their own inferences about good and bad practices and what to do and what not to do as future teachers in their classrooms. On the other hand, some participants raised their concerns about the contradiction between what they have learned about free play at school and what they have observed with respect to the importance and implementation of free play in preschools. They pointed to the incompetence they feel about putting their theoretical knowledge into practice. While participants reflected that teaching practice has positively contributed to their knowledge and beliefs in general, whether or not they will be able to reflect these gains in their future practices is questionable and it requires longitudinal and more in-depth research.

5.3 Conclusion and Implications

According to the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data, three main conclusions are drawn from this study.

The first conclusion is that preservice teachers seem to need more academic and experiential knowledge about free play, how to plan and practice free play activities in a way that corresponds with the success-oriented standardized education of today. It is important for them to become aware of their existing beliefs about play and reflect on and challenge them for positive change in their beliefs.

The second conclusion is that preservice teachers appear to require support in extending their knowledge about teacher roles in free play. They seemed unclear and confused about different teacher roles, particularly director and guide roles which can affect the play quite differently. It seemed that preservice teachers need detailed information about and support in truly understanding the concepts of scaffolding and zone of proximal

development as well as how to practice them to promote children's development and level of learning.

The third conclusion is that it was found that teaching practice might have direct and indirect influence on beliefs and views of preservice teachers regarding free play and teacher roles in such play. This influence assumed to be even greater if teacher candidates are not aware of the beliefs they brought into their teacher education program and if these beliefs are not compatible with the theories and information provided during teacher education.

Despite the presence of studies on the beliefs of preservice teachers, only a small number are specifically concerned with their beliefs about free play in early childhood education. Thus, further research is needed to comprehend teacher candidates' beliefs and how to foster their beliefs in a way that aligns with developmentally appropriate practice and pedagogy throughout their teacher education program. In this respect, some important implications for teacher educators arose from the results of the current study. First of all, it is crucial to address preservice teachers' beliefs about free play at the beginning of the teacher education program to be able to equip them effectively with a pedagogy of play. At this point teacher educators have an important role in assisting and guiding teacher candidates to examine and realise their beliefs about free play. As explained by Kennedy (1997) becoming aware of their beliefs about play is important for preservice teachers to comprehend and internalize the new information that is provided during teacher education, otherwise, that information will be ineffective. Practical assignments and in-class discussions about free play and teacher roles in the play can be helpful for reflection of teacher candidates' current beliefs about play and when embracing new theories and practices regarding it.

Secondly, play should be the centre of each course provided in teacher education program, especially the play course, teaching methods course, and the others in order to encourage mindful and deliberate use of it as a means of instruction and learning. Preservice teachers can be provided more academic knowledge and practice that indicates the relationships between free play, development of literacy and academic achievement. Teacher candidates should be plainly taught how to use play to accomplish academic standards in their teaching methods course. In the scope of the course, they can make observations and have discussions about their experiences in the classroom. Moreover, observation assignment in preschool classrooms can promote preservice teachers to question what kind of academic standards free play can address and how to reach them through play. It may also be helpful in encouraging them to think critically and challenge their beliefs about how to integrate play into the classrooms they observed and their future classrooms.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Studies

Findings of the current study put forward important recommendations for development and improvement of further studies. These recommendations mainly concern the research design and instruments as well as sample group.

Firstly, some recommendations about the design and instruments of the study are offered. Despite the use of both quantitative and qualitative design in the current study, both questionnaire and interview were self-reported measures, thus, adding observation as a measure would enrich the data and contribute to validity and reliability of the findings. In addition, the questionnaires developed by the researcher can be administered to groups of in-service and preservice teachers to conduct exploratory and explanatory factor analysis in order to increase the validity of the measure. Later on, it can be employed in correlational or experimental studies regarding the issues. On the other hand, rather than a cross-sectional design, taking time and financial means into consideration, carrying out a longitudinal study on how preservice teachers' views or beliefs about free play and teacher roles are shaped throughout out teacher training education can provide important implications for teacher education programs and early childhood education.

Secondly, a few recommendations related to the sampling and sample group are shared. Using a random sampling method instead of non-random sampling to reach the participants will contribute to the credibility of the study. Moreover, inclusion of different levels of preservice and in-service teachers as participants is likely to enrich the data and support the significance of the study.

5.5 Limitations

One of the limitations of the present study is the non-generalizability of the results. Even though a large number of participants were reached, especially for quantitative data ($N_1=467$, $N_2=425$), the findings of the study are not generalisable to the whole cadre of early childhood preservice teachers in Turkey. Use of measures with greater statistical validity and reliability and more representative sampling methods could significantly enhance the generalisability and substantiality of the results. Although questionnaires accompanied with semi-structured interviews were used to confirm and enrich the data, they are both self-reported measures, therefore inclusion of in-class observations of teaching practice would contribute to the validity and reliability of the findings, too. Another limitation of the study is keeping participation limited to preservice teachers. Inclusion of practitioner preschool teachers and comparison of their perspectives with the views of teacher candidates may help

us to understand the basis of the difference in their ideas about implementation of free play and fulfilling teacher roles in play.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: APPROVAL OF METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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08 ŞUBAT 2018

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu


Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgili: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu


Sayın Doç. Dr. Feyza ERDEN ;

Danışmanlığını yaptığınız yüksek lisans öğrencisi Sevil MERAN' ın "*Okul Öncesi çocuklarının sosyal becerileri ve serbest oyun zamanındaki öğretmen rolleri arasındaki olası ilişkinin incelenmesi*" başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay 2018-EGT-018 protokol numarası ile 08.02.2018 - 30.03.2019 tarihleri arasında geçerli olmak üzere verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.



Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan V


Prof. Dr. Ayhan SOL
Üye


Prof. Dr. Ayhan GÜRBÜZ DEMİR
Üye


Doç. Dr. Neşat KONDAKÇI
Üye


Doç. Dr. Zana ÇITAK
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Pinar KAYGAN
Üye


Yrd. Doç. Dr. Emre SELÇUK
Üye

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FREE PLAY AND TEACHER ROLES

Değerli Katılımcı,

Bu form Okul Öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun ve serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarını belirlemeyi amaçlayan ifadeleri içermektedir. Bu kapsamda aşağıda yer alan ifadelerin **size ne derece uygun olduğunu düşünerek** cevaplamanızı rica ediyoruz. İfadelerin doğru ya da yanlış olarak tanımlanabilecek cevapları yoktur. Araştırmanın daha sağlıklı sonuç vermesi açısından hiçbir maddeyi **boş bırakmadan**, içten ve dürüst bir şekilde cevaplamanız önemlidir. Çalışmada kimlik belirleyici bilgiler istenmemektedir. İfadelere ilişkin vereceğiniz cevaplar saklı tutulup, yalnızca bilimsel araştırma amacıyla kullanılacaktır.

Gösterdiğiniz ilgi ve yardım için teşekkür ederiz.

Kişisel Bilgi Formu

1. Cinsiyetiniz: ☐ Kadın ☐ Erkek
 2. Sınıfınız: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
 3. Yaşınız:
 4. Mezun Olduğunuz Lise Türü:
 5. Okuduğunuz Üniversite:
 6. Üniversite Genel Not Ortalamanız:
 7. Okul öncesi eğitimde oyun ile ilgili ders aldınız mı? ☐ Evet ☐ Hayır
- Cevabınız evet ise lütfen aldığınız ders(ler)i belirtiniz
.....
8. Okul Öncesi Eğitim kurumlarında bulunma ve çalışma deneyimi ve süresi
 - ☐ Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında ücretli öğretmenlik
 - ☐ Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında stajyerlik
 - ☐ Diğer (lütfen açıklayınız)

9. Serbest oyun, çocuklara nerede oynamak istedikleri, neyle ve nasıl oynamak istedikleri ve kiminle oynamak istediklerini seçme fırsatı sunma olarak tanımlanır.

Bu tanım dikkate alındığında, serbest oyun hangi sınıf düzeyleri ve yaş grupları için uygun bir etkinliktir?

- ☐ Doğum – 1 Yaş ☐ 1 ve 2 Yaş ☐ 3 ve 4 Yaş ☐ Anasınıfı
- ☐ 1. Sınıf ☐ 2. Sınıf ☐ Tüm yaş grupları

Aşağıda, okul öncesi eğitimde serbest oyunla ilgili yer alan ifadeleri ne derece önemli bulduğunuzu “(1) Hiç önemli değil”, “(2) Önemli değil”, “(3) Kararsızım”, “(4) Önemli”, “(5) Oldukça önemli” seçeneklerinden birini ve serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri ile ilgili ifadelere ne derece katıldığınızı “(1) Kesinlikle katılmıyorum”, “(2) Katılmıyorum”, “(3) Kararsızım”, “(4) Katılıyorum”, “(5) Kesinlikle katılıyorum”, seçeneklerinden birine (x) işareti koyarak belirtiniz.

Serbest Oyun ile İlgili İfadeler	Hiç Önemli Değil (1)	Önemli Değil (2)	Kararsızım (3)	Önemli (4)	Çok Önemli (5)
1. Okul öncesi sınıflarında, her gün yeterli uzunlukta bir sürenin serbest oyun etkinliklerine ayrılması					
2. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin kendiliğinden, bir amaç gütmekten ortaya çıkması					
3. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların bireysel etkinliklerle meşgul olması					
4. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların sembolik oyunla meşgul olması					
5. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların dil gelişimini desteklemesi					
6. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların motor gelişimlerini değerlendirmesi					
7. Serbest oyun etkinlikleri için çocuklara çeşitli materyaller sunulması					
8. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde, oyun sonunda ortaya çıkacak ürüne odaklanılması					
9. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların yapı-inşa oyunları ile meşgul olması					
10. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların öğretmenle etkileşim içerisinde olması					
11. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin sınıf içerisinde gerçekleşmesi					
12. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların kaba ve ince motor becerilerini desteklemesi					
13. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların yaratıcılıklarını Değerlendirmesi					
14. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların karalama, çizme ve yazmayı taklit etmesi					
15. Serbest oyun etkinliklerine katılımın isteğe bağlı olması					
16. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde çevredeki nesnelerin sorgulanması					
17. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların küçük grup etkinliklerinde yer alması					
18. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların koşma, atlama, zıplama, top oyunları gibi hareketli oyunlar oynaması					
19. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin açık havada gerçekleşmesi					
20. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukları okuma-yazmaya hazırlaması					
21. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların sorumluluk alma becerilerini desteklemesi					
22. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların bilişsel gelişimlerini değerlendirmesi					

23. Serbest oyun zamanında çocuğun etkinliğini planlaması					
24. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların nesnelerle veya vücutlarıyla ritim çalışması yapması					
25. Serbest oyun için öğrenme merkezlerinin çocukların ilgilerine göre düzenlenmesi					
26. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde oyuna dair her türlü kuralın çocuklar tarafından belirlenmesi					
27. Serbest oyun zamanı sonunda çocuğun oyununu değerlendirmesi					
28. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların resimli kitap okuması					
29. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların dil gelişimlerini Değerlendirmesi					
30. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların yardımlaşma, paylaşma, sırasını bekleme vb. sosyal becerilerini desteklemesi					
31. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların istedikleri öğrenme merkezinde vakit geçirmesi					
32. Serbest oyun etkinliklerine çocukların aktif olarak katılması					
33. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların büyük grup etkinlikleriyle meşgul olması					
34. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların su ve kumla oynaması					
35. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların sosyal-duygusal gelişimlerini değerlendirmesi					
36. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların, sorgulama, problem çözme, eleştirel düşünme vb. üst düzey bilişsel becerilerini desteklemesi					
37. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde kullanılacak materyallerin çocuklar tarafından ulaşılabilir olması					
38. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde çocukların –mış gibi yapması					
39. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların ilişki kurma, gruplama, sıralama, örüntü oluşturma gibi etkinliklerle meşgul olması					
40. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların fen bilgi ve becerilerini değerlendirmesi					
41. Serbest oyun zamanında çocukların üç boyutlu kolaj, kesme, yırtma-yapıştırma, boyama gibi faaliyetlerde bulunması					
42. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinin çocukların matematik bilgi ve becerilerini değerlendirmesi					

Öğretmen Rollerine İlgili İfadeler Öğretmen olduğumda...	Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum (1)	Katılmıyorum (2)	Kararsızım (3)	Katılıyorum (4)	Kesinlikle Katılıyorum (5)
1. Serbest oyun etkinliklerine gün içerisinde en az bir defa yer veririm.					
2. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde yönergeler vererek çocukların oyunlarını yönetirim.					
3. Çocuklar oyuna ilgilerini kaybettiklerinde, oyunlarıyla ilgili yeni önerilerde bulunurum.					
4. Çocuklar tarafından davet edilmem üzerine oyunculardan biri gibi oyuna katılırım.					
5. Serbest oyun sırasında güvenlikle ilgili bir durumda müdahalede bulunurum.					
6. Serbest oyun sırasında çocukların oyununu belli bir mesafeden gözlemlerim.					
7. Serbest oyun sırasında araya girerek kullanılan materyallerin sayısına, şekline, rengine ilişkin sorular sorarım.					
8. Serbest oyun etkinlikleri için çeşitli materyaller sunarım.					
9. Oyunun dağılmak üzere olduğunu fark ettiğimde oyunla ilgili yeni materyaller öneririm.					
10. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde çocukların nerede oynayacaklarını belirlerim.					
11. Çocukların daveti üzerine oyuna katıldığında, oyunun akışını takip ederim.					
12. Serbest oyun sırasında sınıftaki diğer işlerle ilgilenirim (evrak işi, etkinlik planı vb. gibi).					
13. Serbest oyun sırasında çocuklarla oyunları hakkında konuşurum.					
14. Serbest oyun etkinlikleri için geçici öğrenme merkezleri hazırlarım.					
15. Serbest oyun sırasında çocukların materyallerle nasıl oynayacaklarını belirlerim.					
16. Çocukların oyunlarıyla ilgili sözel ve sözel olmayan yorumlar yaparım.					
17. Çocuklar oyuna ilgilerini kaybettiklerinde, oyunun akışını etkilerim.					
18. Oyuncu eksikliği olan durumlarda, çocukların izniyle oyuna katılırım.					
19. Serbest oyun etkinliklerinde, çocukların oyundaki rollerini belirlerim.					
20. Çocuklar oyun oynarken sosyal medya ile ilgilenirim.					
21. Serbest oyun esnasında çocukların oyunlarıyla ilgili anekdot kayıtları tutarım.					
22. Serbest oyun sırasında, sınıf dışında halledilmesi gereken işlerle ilgilenirim.					

Bu anketi tamamlayarak alıřmamıza saėladıėınız katkı iin teőekkr ederiz.

Bu konular hakkındaki grřlerinizi daha derinlemesine tartıřmak ister misiniz?

☐

Evet

☐

Hayır

Konu hakkında, yaklaşık 30 dakika srebilecek birebir grřmeye katılmak isterseniz kendi belirleyeceėiniz bir rumuzu ve e-posta adresinizi ařaėıda belirtmeniz yeterlidir. Grřme iin gnll olmanız durumunda arařtırmacı sizinle iletiřime geecektir.

Rumuz: _____

E-posta adresi: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A. Kişisel Bilgiler

1. Öğrenim görülen üniversite:
2. Cinsiyet:
3. Yaş:
4. Sınıf düzeyi:
5. Mezun olunan lisenin türü:
6. Staj deneyimi (dönem):
7. Genel not ortalaması

B. Katılımcıların Serbest Oyun ve Oyunda Öğretmen Rollerindeki İnanışları

1. Okul öncesi eğitimde serbest oyunu nasıl tanımlarsın? (onu yarı yapılandırılmış ve yapılandırılmış oyundan ayıran özellikleri ve önemi hakkında neler düşünüyorsunuz?)
2. Okul öncesi eğitim sınıflarında, gün içerisinde serbest oyuna ne kadar zaman ayrılması gerektiğini düşünüyorsunuz? Neden?
3. Serbest oyunun çocukların gelişim ve öğrenmesine herhangi bir etkisi var mıdır? Varsa neler olabilir, örnekler verebilir misiniz?
 - Serbest oyunun çocuklar için olumsuz sonuçları olabilir mi? Neler olabilir?
4. Serbest oyunu ve oyun sürecini olumlu ve olumsuz etkileyen faktörler neler olabilir?
5. Serbest oyunda öğretmenin rolü hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
 - Oyunda öğretmenin çocuklarla etkileşim içerisinde olmasının olumlu ve olumsuz sonuçları neler olabilir?
6. Serbest oyunun, okul öncesi sınıflarında uygulanmasına ilişkin zorluklar neler olabilir?
 - Bu zorluklarla karşılaştığınızda nasıl çözümler üretilebilir?
7. Serbest oyunda öğretmenlerin rollerini yerine getirmesinde karşılaşılan zorluklar var mıdır? Lütfen cevabınızı açıklayınız.
 - Bu zorlukların önlenmesi için neler yapılabilir?
8. Öğretmenlik uygulaması dersini aldıktan sonra, serbest oyun ve öğretmenin oyundaki rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarınız ile ilgili bir değişiklik oldu mu? Lütfen cevabınızı açıklayınız.
 - Evet, ise nasıl bir değişiklik oldu?
 - Hayır, ise neden böyle düşünüyorsunuz?

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Araştırmaya Gönüllü Katılım Formu

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Bölümü öğretim elemanlarından Doç. Dr. Feyza ERDEN tarafından yürütülen bir çalışmadır. Bu form sizi araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgilendirmek için hazırlanmıştır.

Bu araştırmanın amacı, okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programına devam eden, son sınıf öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi eğitimde serbest oyun ve serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarının karma araştırma yöntemi kullanılarak incelenmesidir.

Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz, 2018-2019 eğitim-öğretim yılı güz dönemi başında ve sonunda Okul Öncesi Eğitimde Serbest Oyun ve Serbest Oyunda Öğretmen Rollerini anketlerini doldurmanız beklenecektir. Bu anketleri doldurmak toplamda yaklaşık 15 dakikanızı alacaktır. Anketlerden elde edilen bilgilerin desteklenmesi amacıyla, dönem sonu anketlerinin doldurulmasının ardından, anketlerin en sonunda yer alan bilgilendirmede görüşmeye katılmak istiyorum diyen katılımcılarla ortalama 30 dakika sürecek görüşme yapılacaktır. Görüşme soruları açık uçlu olup, rahatça kendinizi ifade edebileceğiniz niteliktedir. Görüşmelerde, herhangi bir veri kaybının önüne geçmek amacıyla, ses kaydı alınacaktır. Görüşme programı, sizin de (katılımcı) iş birliğiniz ile eğitimi öğretimi aksatmayacak şekilde planlanacaktır.

Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Anketlerde ya da görüşme sırasında, sizden kimlik belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak, sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayınlarda kullanılacaktır. Sağladığınız veriler gönüllü katılım formlarında toplanan kimlik bilgileri ile eşleştirilmeyecektir.

Anketler ya da bireysel olarak yapılacak olan görüşmeler, genel olarak kişisel rahatsızlık verecek sorular ve durumlar içermemektedir. Ancak, katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz cevaplama işini yarıda bırakıp çıkmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda sorumlu kişiye, çalışmayı ya da görüşmeyi tamamlamak istemediğinizi söylemek yeterli olacaktır.

Görüşme sonunda, bu çalışmayla ilgili sorularınız cevaplanacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz. Çalışma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Okul Öncesi Eğitimi Bölümü öğretim üyelerinden Doç. Dr. Feyza ERDEN (E-posta: tfeyza@metu.edu.tr) ya da araştırma görevlisi Sevil MERAN (E-posta: meran.sevil@metu.edu.tr) ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki bilgileri okudum ve bu çalışmaya tamamen gönüllü olarak katılıyorum.

(Formu doldurup imzaladıktan sonra uygulayıcıya geri veriniz).

Ad Soyad

Tarih

İmza

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APPENDIX E: TURKISH SUMMARY/TÜRKÇE ÖZET

GİRİŞ

Oyunun temelleri oldukça eskiye dayanır ve ortaya çıkışı ile ilgili olarak da belirli bir zaman aralığı vermek mümkün değildir (Pound, 2014). Benzer bir şekilde, oyunun, çocuk ve yetişkinlerin hayatlarının her zaman bir parçası olması, onun oldukça uzun bir zamandır araştırma konusu olarak incelenmesini de beraberinde getirir. (Cohen, 2006). Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff ‘un da belirttiği gibi “Plato’dan Kant’a, Froebel’den Piaget’e, filozoflar, tarihçiler, biyologlar, psikologlar ve eğitimciler, her alanda kendine yer bulan bu davranışı araştırmış, onu nasıl ve neden oynadığımızı anlamaya çalışmışlardır” (2008, p.1). Anaokulu kavramının ve eğitiminin öncülerinden olan Froebel (1782-1852), oyunun bir öğretim aracı olarak kullanımının etraflıca anlaşılması ve onun müfredatla bütünleştirilmiş bir şekilde uygulanması konusunda önemli katkılarda bulunmuştur (Frost, 2010). Ona ilham kaynağı olan Rousseau and Pestalozzi gibi, Froebel de gelişimde ve öğrenmede bireysel farklılıkların önemine inanmış ve zamanının katı ve pasif öğretim yönteminin aksine, çocukların zihinsel, sosyal ve duygusal gelişimlerine olanak sağlayan oyunu, eğitici ve eğlendirici bir eğitim aracı olarak görmüştür. Froebel tarafından öne sürülen materyallerin aktif manipülasyonu ve keşfi Montessori, Piaget and Dewey gibi 20. yüzyılın önde gelen eğitimcileri tarafından da desteklenmiş ve oyun, çocuklar için en etkili öğretim yöntemi olarak tanınmıştır (Frost, 2010). Dewey’in öncülük ettiği yapılandırmacı anaokulu hareketi, çocukların, doğal oyun etkinliklerinin eğitsel değerini fark etmiş ve küçük çocukların eğitiminde bu etkinliklere yer vermiştir (Ilıca, 2016). Böylece doğal oyun etkinlikleri okul çevresinde teşvik edilmiş ve desteklenmiştir. Fakat Dewey, oyunun tümüyle serbest bir etkinlik olması yerine, çocukların bilişsel ve sosyal gelişimlerini istenen yönde teşvik edebilmek amacıyla, oyun oynanacak ortamın, öğretmenler tarafından, besleyici ve geliştirici biçimde düzenlenmesi gerektiğini savunmuştur.

Buna paralel olarak, araştırma bulguları da, çocukların çeşitli oyun fırsatlarından aktif olarak yararlanmasının, fiziksel, sosyal, duygusal, bilişsel ve dil gelişimleri açısından istendik sonuçlar doğuracağını ileri sürmektedir (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2012). Çocuklara sağlanan oyun fırsatları, onların fiziksel becerilerini geliştirmelerine, çevrelerindeki dünya hakkında bilgi edinmelerine, başkalarıyla sosyal-duygusal etkileşime girmelerine, öz-düzenleme becerileri edinmelerine ve problem çözme

becerilerinin gelişmesine önemli katkılar sağlar (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Oyun, çocukların öğrenimindeki ve gelişimindeki kolaylaştırıcı rolünün yanı sıra, öğretmenlere, öğrenmeyi daha iyi bir hale getirme ve gözlem yaparak çocukların öğrenmelerini değerlendirme fırsatı sunar (Duncan & Lockwood 2008; Flear, 2006). Böylelikle oyun, çocukların gelişim, öğrenme ve değerlendirilmesine olan önemli katkılarından dolayı, erken çocukluk eğitiminde gelişimsel olarak uygun uygulamaların temeli olarak kabul edilmiştir (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Flear, 2013; Wood, 2013).

Fakat son on yılda, süregelen çeşitli değişimler ve tartışmalar, oyunun eğitici değerinin ve okul öncesi eğitimle bütünleştirilmesinin sorgulanmasına neden olmuştur (Frost, 2012; Wood, 2013). Alanyazına bakıldığında, özellikle oyunun eğitici değeri konusundaki çelişkili görüşler, oyun ve öğrenmenin bir birinden ayrı şeyler olarak algılanması, yapılandırılmış ve akademik başarı odaklı eğitim anlayışı, buna paralel olarak okul idaresi, meslektaşlar ve ebeveynlerin görüş ve beklentileri, toplumsal ve teknolojik değişimler ve öğretmenlerin serbest oyundaki rolü konusunda devam eden tartışmalar gibi nedenlerin, okul öncesi sınıflarında serbest oyun süresinin azalmasına ve hatta bazen programlardan çıkarılmasına yol açtığı ortaya konmuştur (Fromberg, 2006; Elkind, 2007; Miller & Almon, 2009; Frost, 2010; Jones & Reynolds, 2011; Frost et al., 2012; Flear, 2013; Gray, 2013; Wood, 2013).

Öte yandan, oyunun, özellikle serbest oyunun, resmi evrak ve raporlardaki teorik varlığı, onun sınıflarda etkili bir şekilde uygulanması için yeterli değildir (Hakkarainen, 2006, Akt., Flear, 2013). Örneğin, yapılan çalışmalar, serbest oyun etkinliklerinin anaokullarında yer bulduğunu fakat yaratıcı ve heyecan verici keşifleri teşvik edici diyaloglar, yetişkin katılımı, zorluk, canlılık ve motivasyondan yoksun olduğunu ortaya koymuştur (Lillemyr, 2003). Bu sonuç, serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleriyle ilgili sorunları işaret etmektedir; çünkü öğretmenler, sağladıkları ve sağlamadıkları fırsatlarla çocukların oyunlarının kalitesini belirleyen etmenlerin başında gelmektedir (Flear, 2010).

Türkiye'deki okul öncesi eğitim programına ve ilgili alanyazına bakıldığında, okul öncesi eğitimde günlük olarak serbest oyuna, yaklaşık bir saat uzunluğunda bir süre ayrıldığı görülmektedir (Ersan, 2011; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; MoNE, 2013; Ogelman, 2014). Bununla birlikte, yapılan araştırmalar, öğretmenlerin, serbest oyunun, çocukların gelişim ve öğrenmesini kolaylaştıran bir araç olarak kullanılması gerektiğine inandıklarını ve öğretmen katılımını önemli bulduklarını ifade etmelerine rağmen, onu bir öğretim aracı olarak kullanma konusunda yeterli olmadıklarına dikkat çekmiştir (Ersan, 2011; Aras 2016, Ivrendi 2017). Öğretmenlerin, serbest oyunu, çocukların fazla enerjilerini atmaları, rahatlamaları ve böylece bir sonraki aktiviteye ve güne hazırlanmaları için bir araç olarak gördüğü ortaya

çıkıştır. Bu oyun sırasında, öğretmenlerin ise genellikle çocukları gözlemlemek, etkinlik planı hazırlamak, evrak işleri yapmak, gözlem formları doldurmak gibi işlerle zamanlarını geçirdikleri görülmüştür. Dolayısıyla, yakınsak gelişim alanını belirleme ve buna bağlı olarak çocukların kendi kapasiteleri dahilinde öğrenme ve gelişmelerini destekleme konularında oyunun potansiyel yararının, bu tür öğretmen uygulamaları sonucunda göz ardı edildiği görülmektedir.

Howard (2010)' a göre öğretmenler, oyun ve oyunun bir öğrenme ve öğretim aracı olduğu konusunda ne kadar az bilgi sahibi olurlarsa, oyunu sınıflarının dışında bırakma eğilimleri de o kadar fazla olmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, öğretmenlerin, sınıflarında oyuna yeterli alan ve süre vermekte tereddüt etmelerinin ardındaki bir başka önemli sebebin, onların fikirlerini, değerlerini ve oyunun önemi hakkındaki inanışlarını da içeren çeşitli kültürel ve sosyal kalıplardan kaynaklı olabileceği ileri sürülmüştür (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Miller & Almond, 2009; Vera; Geneser, 2012). Bu noktada, oyunun gelişim ve öğrenmedeki öneminin kabul edilmesine, okul öncesi eğitim programlarıyla bütünleştirilmesine özen gösterilmesine rağmen, yakın zamanda bu konu ile ilgili kararlar alacak olan öğretmen adaylarının okul öncesi eğitim programlarında oyunun rolü ve öğretmenin oyundaki rolü ile ilgili inançları hakkında oldukça az şey bilinmektedir (Jung & Jin, 2014; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2014).

Çalışmanın Amacı

Bu açıklayıcı sırası desen çalışmanın amacı, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının, okul öncesi eğitimde serbest oyun ve serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarının incelenmesidir. Bu amaçla, dört yıllık eğitim veren devlet üniversitelerinin okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programlarına devam etmekte olan son sınıf öğretmen adaylarından veri toplanmıştır.

Çalışmanın Önemi

Oyun, çocukların temel haklarından biridir ve yetişkinler onlar için oyun fırsatları ve güvenli oyun ortamları hazırlamaktan sorumludur (UNICEF Türkiye, 2004). Ayrıca, oyun, çocukların gelişimlerini bir bütün olarak destekleyen ve onların öğrenmelerini kolaylaştıran bir araçtır (Lester & Russell, 2010; Frost et al., 2012; Gray, 2013). Alanyazına bakıldığında, serbest oyunun, sinaptik bağlantı oluşumunu desteklediği; bellek, hayal gücü, yaratıcılık, problem çözme becerileri ile yakından ilişkili olduğu bulunmuştur. Dolayısıyla, oyun fırsatlarının azaltılmasının ve serbest oyunun yapılandırılmış faaliyetlerle değiştirilmesinin, dürtüsellik, olgunlaşmamış sosyal ve duygusal davranışlar, depresyon, şiddet, öğrenme kapasitesinde düşüş ve hatta obezite gibi sağlıklı gelişim ve öğrenme açısından bazı olumsuz sonuçlar doğurabileceği de ortaya konmuştur (Frost (2010; Frost &

Brown,2008). Fakat yapılandırılmış öğretim ve değerlendirme, toplumsal ve teknolojik gelişmeler ve daha önemlisi, oyunun eğitsel değeri ve öğretmenin oyundaki rolleriyle ilgili çelişkili inanışlar gibi çeşitli nedenlerden ötürü, okul öncesi sınıflarında oyun zamanında, özellikle serbest oyun zamanında kritik bir azalma olduğu gözlenmektedir (Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007; Miller & Almond, 2009). Bu da, bizlere, okul öncesi eğitiminde serbest oyunun geleceği hakkında düşünülmesinin ve bununla ilişkili olarak, yakın gelecekte bu konuya dair kararları verecek olan öğretmen adaylarının konu hakkındaki inanışlarının incelenmesinin önemini göstermektedir.

Johnson (1994)'ın da belirttiği gibi, öğretmen adaylarının inanışlarıyla ilgili çalışmaların yaygınlaşmasının altında yatan üç sebep vardır. Bunlardan ilki, öğretmenlerin sınıftaki tutum ve davranışlarını etkileyen algı ve kararları, onların neye inandıklarından büyük ölçüde etkilenmektedir. İkincisi, inanışlar, öğretmenlerin sınıf içi öğretim uygulamalarının önemli bir belirleyicisidir. Son olarak, öğretmen inanışlarının anlaşılması, öğretmenlerin uygulamalarının ve öğretmenlik eğitim programlarının kalitesinin iyileştirilmesine katkı sağlar (Akt. Incecay, 2011). Bu nedenlerle öğretmen yetiştiren eğitimcilerin, alana geçmeden önce, öğretmen adaylarını, oyunun değeri ve öğretmenin rolleriyle ilgili teorik ve pedagojik bilgilerini yansıtmaya ve sorgulamaya teşvik edebilmeleri için, öğretmen adaylarının bu konudaki inanışlarını kavramaları oldukça yararlı olacaktır. Sonuç olarak, onların inanışlarını öğrenmek, öğretmen adaylarına sağlanan pedagojik bilgileri ve müfredatla ilgili deneyimlerini düzenlemek ve geliştirmek için öğretmen eğitimi programlarına bazı pratik uygulamalar kazandırabilir (Vera & Geneser, 2012; Sherwood & Reifel, 2013; Ryan & Northey-Berg, 2014).

YÖNTEM

Araştırma Soruları

1. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 1.1. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyunun doğası hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 1.2. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun türleri hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 1.3. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyunun planlanması hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 1.4. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun süreci hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 1.5. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun ve gelişim ve öğrenme arasındaki ilişki hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?

- 1.6. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyunun bir değerlendirme aracı olarak kullanılması hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
2. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.1. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının ortam hazırlayan öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.2. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun arkadaşı öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.3. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının oyun lideri öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.4. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının izleyici/gözlemci öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.5. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının yöneten/yönlendiren öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
 - 2.6. Okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının dahil olmayan öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışları nelerdir?
3. Öğretmen adaylarının, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersini aldıktan sonra, serbest oyun ve oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarında bir değişim var mıdır?

Araştırma Yöntemi

Karma araştırma yöntemleri kapsamında yürütülen bu çalışma, bir açıklayıcı sıralı desen araştırmasıdır. Bu çerçevede, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun ve oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkındaki inanışlarını ortaya çıkarmak amacıyla, öncelikle nicel veri toplama aracı olarak anket uygulanmış, ardından, bulguların desteklemesi ve zenginleştirilmesi amacıyla, sınırlı sayıda katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Katılımcılar

Bu çalışmada örneklem seçim yöntemi olarak, ulaşılabilir örneklem yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını Ankara, Denizli, Eskişehir, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Mersin, Uşak ve Van’ da yer alan sekiz devlet üniversitesinin okul öncesi öğretmenliği lisans programlarında okuyan son sınıf öğretmen adayları oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmanın nicel veri toplama sürecine, dönem başında 467 öğretmen adayı ve dönem sonunda 425 öğretmen adayı katılırken, nitel veri toplama süreci 24 öğretmen adayının katılımı ile gerçekleşmiştir. Katılımcıların son sınıfta olmalarının bir ölçüt olarak alınmasının nedeni, o aşamaya

gelinceye kadar adayların alan ile ilgili teorik derslerin birçoğunu almış ve okul öncesi eğitimde öğrenme ve öğretme ile ilgili bilgi birikimlerini büyük oranda oluşturmuş olmalarıdır. Diğer bir nedeni ise, öğretmen adaylarının teori ve pratik arasında bağlantı kurmalarına olanak sağlayan öğretmenlik uygulaması dersinin öğretmen eğitimi programının son yılında sunuluyor olmasıdır. Çalışmanın nitel veri toplama kısmında yer alan katılımcıların demografik bilgileri Tablo 1’ de özetlenmiştir.

Tablo 1: Nitel Veri Analizinde Yer Alan Katılımcıların Demografik Özellikleri

	Ön anket		Son anket	
Cinsiyet	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Kadın	397	85	356	83,8
Erkek	70	15	69	16,2
Yaş	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
19 - 22	312	67,2	267	63,7
23 - 26	93	20	106	25,3
27-30	41	8,8	32	7,6
Above 30	18	3,9	14	3,3
Üniversite	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi	33	7,1	33	7,8
Ahi Evran Üniversitesi	45	9,6	48	11,3
Pamukkale Üniversitesi	85	18,2	73	17,2
Kırıkkale Üniversitesi	55	11,8	35	8,2
Uşak Üniversitesi	36	7,7	36	8,5
Mersin Üniversitesi	93	19,9	84	19,8
Anadolu Üniversitesi	62	13,3	53	12,5
Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi	58	12,4	63	14,8
Ağırlıklı Not Ortalaması	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
3,60 - 4,00	37	8,1	41	9,8
3,10 - 3,59	217	47,5	189	45,2
2,60 - 3,09	155	33,9	152	36,4
2,59 ve altı	48	10,5	36	8,6
Oyun Dersini Alma Durumu	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Evet	467	100	425	100
Alan Deneyimi	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Gözlem (Okul Deneyimi dersi)	467	100	425	100
Staj	83	18,4	425	100
Ücretli Öğretmenlik	18	4,0	18	4,2

Nitel verinin toplanmasının ardından, çalışmada yer alan tüm üniversitelerden, yaş ortalaması 21 olan ve 4’ü erkek toplam 24 öğretmen adayının gönüllü katılımları ile derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla nitel veriler toplanmıştır.

Veri Toplama Araçları ve Süreci

Bu çalışmada nicel veri toplama aracı olarak *Okul Öncesi Eğitimde Serbest Oyun ve Serbest Oyunda Öğretmen Rollerini Anketleri* ve nitel veri aracı olarak görüşme protokolü kullanılmıştır. Çalışmada kullanılan anketler ve görüşme soruları, araştırmacı tarafından, alanyazının ve alanyazında yer alan ilişkili ölçek ve anketlerin derinlemesine incelenmesi sonucu geliştirilmiştir. Daha sonra, oluşturulan anket maddeleri ve görüşme soruları ile ilgili okul öncesi alanında çalışmalar yapan iki uzman ve eğitimde ölçme alanında çalışan başka bir uzman tarafından incelenmiş ve uzman görüşleri alınmıştır. Ardından, pilot çalışma kapsamında anketler 30 katılımcıya uygulanmış ve bu grup içerisinde 3 kişi ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Uzman görüşleri ve pilot çalışma doğrultusunda gerekli düzenlemeler yapıldıktan sonra, 42 maddeden oluşan okul öncesi eğitimde serbest oyun anketi, 22 maddeden oluşan serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri anketi ve 8 sorudan oluşan görüşme protokolü son halini almıştır. Toplamda 15 dakika süren anketlerde öğretmen adayları, başta demografik bilgileri, ardından hem serbest oyunun doğası, serbest oyun türleri, serbest oyunun planlanması, oyun süreci, serbest oyun ve gelişim ve öğrenme arasındaki ilişki ve serbest oyunun ölçme aracı olarak kullanılması ile ilgili, hem de serbest oyunda, çevre düzenleyici, oyun arkadaşı, oyun lideri, gözlemci, yönetici/yönlendirici ve dahil olmayan öğretmen rolleri ile ilgili inanışlarını paylaşmışlardır. Benzer bir şekilde, görüşme soruları da, demografik bilgiler, serbest oyun hakkındaki ve oyunda öğretmen rolü hakkındaki inanışlarla ilgili sorular olmak üzere üç bölümden oluşmuştur.

Gerekli etik kurul izinleri alındıktan sonra, üniversitelerdeki öğretim üyeleri ile iletişime geçilmiş ve dönem başı ve dönem sonunda anketin uygulanabileceği zamanlar planlanmıştır. Ardından, planlanan bu zamanlarda öğrenciler ile bir araya gelmiş, öğrenciler, çalışma hakkında bilgilendirildikten sonra, çalışmaya katılıma davet edilmişlerdir. Böylece *Okul Öncesi Eğitimde Serbest Oyun ve Serbest Oyunda Öğretmen Rollerini Anketlerinin* 2018-2019 eğitim öğretim yılı güz döneminde, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi başında ve sonunda 8 farklı üniversiteden gönüllü katılım sağlayan öğretmen adaylarına uygulanmasıyla nicel veriler toplanmıştır. Nicel verilerin toplanmasının ardından, gönüllü olan sınırlı sayıdaki öğretmen adayı ile ortalama 30 dakika süren bire bir görüşme yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla, nitel veri toplama süreci de tamamlanmıştır.

Veri Analizi

Bu çalışmada, katılımcıların demografik bilgileri yüzde ve frekanslarına bakılarak analiz edilmiştir. Benzer bir şekilde, anket yoluyla elde edilen nicel veriler de betimleyici istatistikler yoluyla analiz edilmiştir. Öğretmen adayların, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi

öncesi ve sonrası inanışları arasında bir farklılık olup olmadığı da, yine her iki anket sonucunda elde edilen ortalama değerler ve yüzdelere gibi betimleyici istatistiklerin karşılaştırılmasıyla incelenmiştir.

Öte yandan, görüşmelerden elde edilen nitel verilerin analizi için, öncelikle, görüşmeler sırasında katılımcıların onayları ile alınan ses kayıtlarının deşifresi yapılmıştır. Ardından, tüm deşifreler kodlama için gözden geçirilmiştir. Creswell (2012) kodlama sürecini “metin halindeki verilerden anlam çıkarmak, verileri metinlere veya görsel bölümlere ayırmak, bu bölümleri kodlarla etiketlemek, kodları benzerlik ve fazlalık açısından incelemek ve onları daha geniş temalar altında daraltmak” olarak açıklamıştır. Creswell’in açıklamasına uygun olarak, deşifreler iki farklı araştırmacı tarafından birkaç kez okunmuş, kodlanmış ve böylece elde edilen kodların sınıflandırılması sonucu kategoriler ve temalar belirlenmiştir. İki araştırmacı tarafından bağımsız olarak yürütülen kodlama süreci sonucunda, kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik katsayısı .90 olarak hesaplanmıştır.

BULGULAR VE TARTIŞMA

Öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyun tanımlarındaki farklılıklara karşın, serbest oyunun katılımcılar tarafından ifade edilen özellikleri ile alanyazındaki bulgular arasında önemli benzerlikler bulunmuştur (Lewis,2013; Sherwood,2009; Klugman,1996). Örneğin, katılımcıların neredeyse tamamı, serbest oyunu, çocukların kendilerinin seçtiği, belirlediği ve yönlendirdiği bu nedenle onların aktif katılımını gerektiren bir etkinlik olduğuna dikkat çekmiştir. Aynı zamanda serbest oyunun, önceden belirlenmiş amaç ve kurallardan bağımsız olarak kendiliğinden ortaya çıkan bir etkinlik olduğu ve çevreyi keşfetme ve rol yapmanın serbest oyunun önemli bir parçası olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Öğretmen adayları tarafından serbest oyuna atfedilen bu özellikler, alandaki araştırmacılar tarafından yapılan serbest oyun tanımlarıyla uyumludur (Hewes, 2014; Gray, 2013; Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007; Young, 2000, Rubin, Fein and Vandenber,1983). Ayrıca, alandaki öğretmen adayları ve öğretmenlerle yapılan araştırmalara benzer olarak katılımcılar, serbest oyunla birlikte gelen eğlenme ve rahatlama duygularının ve serbest oyun etkinlik sürecinin bir parçası olan yaratıcılık ve hayal gücünün önemine de dikkat çekmişlerdir (Lewis, 2013; Sherwood, 2009; Moon & Reifel, 2008). Bu bulgular doğrultusunda öğretmen adaylarının, serbest oyunu, onun ayırt edici özelliklerinin farkında olarak tanımladıkları söylenebilir.

Katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu, serbest oyunu, çocuklar tarafından seçilen ve yönetilen, onların ihtiyaçları, ilgileri ve becerilerine dayanan bir etkinlik olarak tanımlamış fakat sıra tanımları üzerine konuşmaya geldiğinde, sınıf düzenini korumak ve çocukların

serbest oyundan elde edecekleri kazanımlara katkıda bulunmak amacıyla onları kontrol etmenin ve özgürlüklerini kısıtlamanın önemine dikkat çekmişlerdir. Örneğin, öğretmen adayı F1, bir taraftan serbest oyunda çocukların hangi öğrenme merkezinde oynayacaklarına kendilerinin karar vermesi gerektiğini belirtirken, diğer taraftan da sınıfta kargaşa ortamının oluşmaması için merkezler arası geçişe izin verilmemesi gerektiğini savunmuştur. Öğretmen adayı G3 de, çocukların genellikle serbest oyunda şiddet içeren silah ve savaş oyunları oynamaları üzerine, onları yapılandırılmış oyun etkinliklerine yönlendirdiğini ifade etmiştir. Bu ve buna benzer diğer örnekler üzerinden, öğretmen adaylarının yapılandırılmış ve yapılandırılmamış oyun ve oyunda rehberlik ve yönlendirme konularında daha detaylı bilgiye ihtiyaç duydukları söylenebilir.

Ayrıca müfredat ve alan yazındaki araştırmalara paralel olarak, katılımcılar serbest oyun süresi boyunca öğretmen gözetiminin önemini vurgulamış ve öğretmenlerin oyuna müdahale etmeyip, gerektiğinde rehberlik etmesinin önemi üzerinde durmuşlardır (Ogelman, 2014; MoNE, 2013). Güvenlikle ilgili bir durumla, çocukların fiziksel veya psikolojik sağlığına yönelik bir tehditle ya da onların kendi başlarına çözemeyecekleri bir problemle karşı karşıya kalmaları durumlarında öğretmen müdahalesinin gerekliliği savunulmuştur. Mevcut çalışmadan elde edilen bu sonuç, Tsai (2015) nin çalışmasına katılan okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin, öğretmenin oyuna müdahalesi konusundaki cevaplarıyla örtüşmektedir. Tsai'nin (2015) bulguları, öğretmenlerin oyuna katılımının altında yatan dört niyet olduğunu ortaya koymuştur; sınıf kurallarının ihlali, çocuklar arasında kavga, fırsat öğretimi ve çocukları tanımadır. Diğer üç neden üzerinde durmalarına rağmen, öğretmen adaylarının hiçbirisi fırsat öğretimi ile ilgili öğretmen müdahalesinin gerekliliğine değinmemiştir. Nitel verilerden elde edilen çıkarımlara dayanarak, bu sonucun, stajlarında bu tarz uygulamaları görmemiş ve bir rol model ile karşılaşmamış olmalarıyla ilişkili olduğu söylenebilir. Sonuç olarak bu durum yapı iskelesi ve yakınsak gelişim alanı kavramlarının teoride tartışılan bir konu olmanın ötesine geçemediği şeklinde yorumlanabilir.

Yine alanyazına paralel olarak (Özgünlü & Veziroğlu Çelik, 2018; Kimzan and Avar, 2017; Engel, 2015; Ersan, 2011; Duncan & Lockwood, 2008; Kernan, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1962), katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu, serbest oyunun, çocukların kendilerini; duygu, düşünce ve deneyimlerini doğrudan ya da dolaylı olarak ifade etmelerine izin vermesi ve akran etkileşimi ve keşifler/manipülasyonlar yoluyla çocuklar için üstü kapalı ama etkili bir öğrenme deneyimi sağlamasından dolayı oldukça önemli olduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Öte yandan, katılımcılar, serbest oyunun çocuklar açısından akran zorbalığı, başkalarına ve/veya materyallere karşı saldırganlık ve olumsuz akran öğrenmesi gibi olumsuz sonuçları olabileceği hakkındaki endişelerini de dile getirmişlerdir.

Elde edilen verilere göre, öğretmen adaylarının, serbest oyun için her gün yeterli uzunlukta bir süre sağlamanın önemine inandıkları görülmüştür. Bu sürenin, çocukların yaş grubu ve ilgi alanlarına, müfredatın ve günlük programın gereklerine, oyunun karmaşıklığı ve içeriğine ve öğretmenin önceki bilgileri ve deneyimlerine bağlı olarak 30 dakika ile iki saat arasında değişebileceği ifade edilmiştir. Katılımcılar tarafından önerilen bu zaman aralığı ve gerekçeleri, mevcut durumda okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin sınıflarında serbest oyuna ayırdıkları süre ve açıklamalarıyla benzerlik göstermektedir (Aras, 2016; Ogelman, 2014; Ersan, 2011; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; Demir, 2004). Buna paralel olarak, görüşmeler sırasında katılımcılar, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi sonucunda serbest oyun etkinlikleri için verilmesi gereken yeterli süre ve bu sürenin nasıl yönetilmesi gerektiği hakkında bilgi edindiklerini ifade etmişlerdir.

Bu çalışmanın sonucunda, çocukların serbest oyun sırasında blok inşa etme gibi matematikle ilgili etkinliklerle meşgul olmasının, öğretmen adaylarınca daha önemli görüldüğü bulunmuştur. Serbest oyun ile matematik başarısı arasında pozitif ilişkiyi oraya koyan alanyazına karşın (Ginsburg, Lee ve Boyd, 2008; Wolfgang, Stannard ve Jones, 2001), matematikle ilgili etkinliklerin, serbest oyunda çocukların meşgul olması açısından neden daha önemli olduğunu açıklayan veya destekleyen bir çalışma bulunamamıştır. Fakat bu sonucun, okul öncesinde fen ve matematik ile ilgili soyut konuların öğretiminde, oyunun en uygun ve etkili araç olduğu teorik vurgusu ile ilişkili olabileceği düşünülebilir. Bu, okul öncesi eğitimde giderek artan akademik başarı vurgusunun serbest oyuna yansımalarının bir sonucu da olabilir (Carlsson-Paige, Bywater McLaughlin, & Wolfsheimer Almon, 2015; Frost, 2012; Miller & Almond, 2009).

Matematik ile ilgili etkinliklerin daha önemli bir serbest oyun türü olduğuna inanıyor görünmelerine rağmen, öğretmen adayları, serbest oyunun çocukların tüm gelişim alanlarını desteklemekle birlikte, sosyal-duygusal gelişime daha fazla katkıda bulunduğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Bu sonuç her ne kadar, öğretmen adaylarının inanışlarındaki tutarsızlığı gösterse de, okul öncesi öğretmenlerin görüşleri ile tutarlılık göstermektedir (Aras 2016; Özyürek & Aydoğan, 2011; Ersan, 2011). Bir taraftan, bu bulgunun çocukların birbirleriyle etkileşim içinde oldukları serbest oyunda sosyal-duygusal durumlarının ve becerilerinin kolayca gözlemlenebilir olması ile ilgili olabileceği düşünülebilir. Fakat diğer taraftan, bu durum, idealler, inançlar ile gerçeklik ve uygulama arasındaki farkın ve uyumsuzluğun bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Öte yandan, Türkiye'deki okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin katılımıyla yapılan çalışmaların aksine, okuma-yazmaya hazırlık ile ilgili etkinlikler, diğer serbest oyun etkinlik türlerine kıyasla öğretmen adayları tarafından daha önemsiz görülmüştür (Ersan,2011;

Özyürek & Aydoğan,2011). Nitekim öğretmen adayları, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin serbest oyunu okuma-yazmaya hazırlık çalışmaları yaptırmak, okuma-yazmaya hazırlıkla ilgili çalışma sayfaları ya da dergi çalışmalarını tamamlamak için kötüye kullanmasından büyük ölçüde şikâyet etmişlerdir. Bu konudaki şikâyetlere rağmen, dönem sonunda, serbest oyunda çocukların okuma-yazmaya hazırlıkla ilgili etkinliklerle meşgul olmasının ve kitap okumalarının önemli olduğunu düşünen katılımcı sayısında sırasıyla yüzde beş ve yüzde on oranında artış olduğu gözlemlenmiştir.

Ayrıca, dönem başında uygulanan anket sonuçlarına göre katılımcıların çoğu, serbest oyun etkinliklerinin iç mekânlarda gerçekleştirilmesinin önemli olmadığını ve dolayısıyla dış ortamlarda da gerçekleşmesinin önemli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Ancak dönem sonunda elde edilen sonuçlar, serbest oyun etkinliklerinin içeride yapılmasının önemli olduğuna inanan katılımcı sayısında, yüzde beş artış olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, görüşmeler sırasında serbest oyun etkinlikleri için dış mekan kullanımına değinmedikleri fark edilmiştir. Benzer bir şekilde serbest oyunun, çocukların kendi seçtiği ve yönettiği bir etkinlik olarak ifade edilmesi ve serbest oyunda çocukların kendi oyunlarını planlaması ve değerlendirmesi anketlerde oldukça yüksek bir oranda önemli bulunmasına rağmen, görüşmeler sırasında bu konu üzerinde yeterince durulmaması dikkat çekmektedir. Elde edilen her iki sonuç, okul öncesi öğretmenleri ile yapılan çalışmaların sonuçları ile de benzerlik göstermektedir (Yalçın, 2015; Ogelman, 2014). Bu sonuç, öğretmen adaylarının konu hakkındaki bilgilerini genişletmek için daha fazla desteğe ihtiyaç duyduğu anlamına gelirken okul öncesi öğretmenleri de uygulamalarını geliştirmek ve öğretmen adayları için iyi bir rol modeli olmak için konu ile ilgili hizmet içi eğitimlerden yararlanabilirler.

Diğer önemli bir bulgu ise katılımcıların, öğretmen etkileşimi konusundaki anlayışlarının, çocukların hatalı davranışlarına müdahale etmek veya oyuncu olarak onların oyunlarına katılmakla sınırlı olduğunun, doğru zamanlarda çocuklara iskele sağlamanın bu etkileşim kapsamında yeterince kendine yer bulmadığının görülmesidir. Öte yandan, serbest oyun etkinlikleri sırasında çocukların öğrenmelerine iskele sağlama fırsatına değinen katılımcıların açıklamalarının, Wood ve Attfield (2005) tarafından belirtilen iskele bileşenlerini içermediği görülmüştür. Wood ve Attfield (2005) öğretmenin çocukla etkileşiminin “eşzamanlı olarak çocukların ihtiyaçlarına ve potansiyellerine duyarlı olması ve onları desteklemesi; çocukların oyuncu ve öğrenici olarak becerilerini desteklemesi; onların oyun bağlamını zenginleştirilmesi; çocukların fikirlerini desteklemesi ve onlara başka fikirler ve uyarılar sağlama; çocukların kendi temalarını derinleştirmesini ve geliştirmesini sağlama; oyunun gelişim seviyesine duyarlı olması ve çocukların ifade etmeye çalıştığı fikirlere karşı hassas olması gerektiğini savunmuştur (p.46 Akt. Yang, 2013).

Bu nedenle, okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının, çocukların oyun deneyimlerinin kalitesini yükseltecek ve öğrenmelerine katkıda bulunacak şekilde onlarla nasıl etkileşim kurmaları gerektiği konusunda belirsizlik yaşıyor olabilecekleri ve bu konuda daha fazla bilgiye ve desteğe ihtiyaç duydukları söylenebilir.

Tüm bunlara ek olarak, çalışma kapsamında, öğretmen adayları tarafından serbest oyun etkinliklerinin uygulanmasına ilişkin, çocuk, öğretmen, veli, idareciler ve öğrenme ortamı dahil olmak üzere okul öncesi eğitimin tüm bileşenleriyle ilgili bazı zorluklar dile getirilmiştir. Bu zorluklar arasında, öğretmenin tutumu ve serbest oyunu kötüye kullanılması başta olmak üzere öğretmenle ilgili zorluklara özellikle vurgu yaptıkları görülmüştür. Öğretmen adayları, serbest oyun sırasında öğretmenlerin yapılandırılmış faaliyetlere yer vermeleri, serbest oyun zamanını bir mola olarak algılamaları, evrak işleri ve etkinlik planı hazırlama gibi işlerle meşgul olmaları ve zaman zaman sınıftan ayrılmaları konularındaki endişelerini dile getirmişlerdir. Öğretmen adayları tarafından ifade edilen, öğretmenlerden kaynaklı bu zorluklar alanyazındaki çalışmaların bulguları ile uyumludur (Aras, 2016; Tuğrul, Aslan, Ertürk, Altınkaynak, 2014; Ogelman, 2014; Ertürk, 2013, Ersan, 2011). Bu noktada, öğretmenlere ilişkin zorlukların temel çözümünün yine öğretmenlerin kendileri olduğunu, onların, isteklilik, çaba ve yaratıcılıklarının tüm bu zorlukların üstesinden gelebileceğini ifade eden öğretmen adaylarının, serbest oyun etkinliklerinin etkili ve verimli bir şekilde gerçekleşebilmesi için öğretmenin istekliliği, ilgisi ve duyarlılığının önemi konusunda bilinçli oldukları söylenebilir.

Diğer taraftan, mevcut çalışmanın sonuçları alanyazınla uyumlu olarak, oyun lideri öğretmen rolünün diğer rollere kıyasla öğretmen adaylarınca nispeten daha az desteklendiğini ortaya koyarken, çevre düzenleyici, oyun arkadaşı ve gözlemci öğretmen rollerinin öne çıkan öğretmen rolleri olduğunu göstermiştir (Özgünlü & Veziroğlu Çelik, 2018; Ivrendi, 2017; Aras, 2016; Tsai, 2015; Yang, 2013; Kontos, 1999). Bu sonuç, öğretmen adaylarının serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri hakkında, özellikle de oyun lideri rolü ilgili daha fazla bilgiye ihtiyaç duymalarından kaynaklanıyor olabilir. Bu nedenle, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının, serbest oyunda öğretmenin rolleri konusunda hem teorik hem de pratik anlamda daha geniş deneyimler sunması yararlı olabilir.

Güvencesiz öğretmen rolleriyle ilgili olarak, Yalçın, Kimzan ve Avar (2017)' ın çalışmasına benzer şekilde, katılımcıların çoğu serbest oyunda yöneten öğretmen rolünü onaylamadıklarını belirtmiştir. Bununla birlikte, öğretmen adaylarının yönlendirici, öğretici amaçlarla oyuna müdahale eden öğretmen rolüne daha yatkın oldukları söylenebilir. Bu açıklama aynı zamanda, dönem sonunda, çocuklara kullandıkları malzemelerin sayıları, şekilleri, renkleri vb. hakkında sorular sormak için oyuna müdahale edebileceğini kabul eden

katılımcı sayısındaki artışı anlamaya yardımcı olabilir. Ve bu sonucun, öğretmen adaylarının geldiği başarı ve ürün odaklı eğitim sisteminin bir yansıması olabileceği gibi, staj deneyimlerinin öğretmen adaylarının görüşleri üzerindeki etkisinden kaynaklı olabileceği de düşünülebilir.

Yöneten öğretmen rolüne benzer şekilde, katılımcılar dahil olmayan öğretmen rolünü de desteklemediklerini belirtmiş ve serbest oyun sırasında, evrak işleri, etkinlik hazırlıkları yapan, internette gezinen ve ara ara sınıftan dışına çıkan öğretmenlerle ilgili şikayetlerini dile getirmişlerdir. Sosyal medyayla meşgul olma ve sınıftan ayrılmanın aksine, öğretmen adayları acil ve önemli olması durumunda serbest oyun sırasında evrak işleri ile ilgilenebileceklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Aras (2016) tarafından da ortaya konulduğu gibi, bir yandan çocukları gözlemlerken diğer taraftan başka işlerle uğraşılması, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin serbest oyun etkinlikleri sırasındaki uygulamaları arasındadır.

Öte yandan, öğretmen adaylarının oyunda yöneten öğretmen rolü ile rehber rolünü ayırt etmede zorluk çektikleri görülmüştür. Bazı katılımcıların yöneten öğretmen rolünden bahsederken, bu rolü rehber olarak adlandırdıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Örneğin, katılımcı F1, *“öğretmenler yönlendirici olmak yerine rehber olmalıdır. Çocuklar arasında bir anlaşmazlık olduğunda müdahale etmelidir. Oyun amacının dışına saptmaya başladığında ve çocuklar dağılmaya başladığında öğretmen müdahale etmeli ve oyunu yönlendirmelidir.”* yorumunda bulunmuştur. Bu ve bunun gibi örnekler, öğretmen adaylarının, serbest oyunda öğretmen rolleri konusunda daha detaylı bilgiye gereksinim duyduklarının bir sonucu olarak yorumlanabilir.

İlginçtir ki, öğretmenlik uygulaması dersi sonrasında öğretmen adaylarının inanışlarında gözlemlenen küçük değişikliklerin, onların staj sırasında gözlemledikleri, genellikle endişelerini dile getirdikleri uygulamalarla bağlantılı olduğu görülmektedir. Bu durum, sınıf içi uygulamaları gözlemlene ve bunlara katılma fırsatını sağlayan staj faaliyetlerinin, öğretmen adaylarının inançlarını şekillendirme ve değiştirme konusundaki etkisiyle ilişkili olabilir. (Richardson, 2003; Aldemir & Sezer, 2009).

Alanyazında da önerildiği gibi, öğretmen adaylarının oyunla ilgili inanışlarına dair farkındalık ve anlayış kazanmaları ve gelecekte, oyunu etkili şekilde uygulayabilmeleri için öğretmen eğitimi boyunca bu inanışların kapsamlı deneyimler ve fırsatlar aracılığıyla doğrudan ele alınması önem arz etmektedir (Richardson, 2003; Pajares, 1992). Bu süreçlerin verimliliğinin ortaya konması, konu ile ilgili boylamsal ve derinlemesine araştırmaların gerekliliğine işaret etmektedir

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

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