## Analysis of Traditional Child Play Based on Child Culture and Child Development*

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**Abstract**

In this study, traditional child plays were examined in the scope of child culture and their impacts on the child development. The first part of the study includes the compilation of traditional children's plays which have different contents and are played in different regions of Turkey. The second part consists of examining the aspects of these plays related to child development. In order to reach traditional children's plays, research articles / books / proceedings and the reviews made by independent researchers and the Ministry of Education in Turkey were examined. A total of 51 plays were selected according to nine different criteria based on the socio-cultural approach. The criteria were geographical region of the play, number of players, gender of players, age of players, timing of the play (day, night, weekday, weekend, etc.), the play space, tools used in the play, the rules of the play and the way to play. Moreover, the impacts of the plays on child development were examined in six different fields of child development: physical, social, moral, emotional, cognitive, and sexual. The main concern in this part was to be able to describe behaviours related to a particular development objectively. In analyses, the first step was to create the first general categories and subcategories from the data. With these categories, an initial analysis form was compiled. Then the form was revised and evaluated by three experts in terms of content validity. By using the revised form, the analysis was made by three coders. Inter-coder reliability was calculated as 0.87. The results showed that plays were played outside the home, in mixed groups, and mostly by using objects such as stones and sticks found in nature. It also seemed that play was considered as a leisure activity which is more suitable for the early age children and used mostly for supporting the development or improvement of physical skills.

**Keywords:** Child culture, traditional child plays, child development, adult intervention and participation to child play.

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# 1. Introduction

Children plays stand out as one of the most important activities of children in all cultures. Hughes (2009; pp.43) defines this feature of such plays as a "true cultural universal" based on the culture. Despite the acceptance of this universal aspect of the play, there is no universal acceptance on how the play can be defined. However, Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg (1983) set some criteria about play behaviours. Accordingly, one of the most important and distinctive criteria about whether a behaviour is a play is that whether it is motivated internally or the child himself decides to play. In addition, the other distinctive criteria for play are: the spontaneous emergence of play behavior, the answer to the question of what can I do with this tool, the active participation of children, and the determination of the rules of the game by children rather than imposed by adults. Besides these, the last descriptive feature of the play defines its relationship with instrumental behaviour. Also, behaviours in the play can be different from in a real situation, for instance, a child does actually not fight but pretends to fight in a play. Moreover, the general instrumental meanings of objects may be changed during the play, and the child as an individual can express its potential new meanings by using the object as if it were something else.

Child culture is a very broad concept for children including all symbolic factors, features, structures, and institutions created by adults, adult-child partnership or children themselves. Within this scope, TV programs created by adults, computer games, situations where children and adults contribute to a joint project within their own talent framework, many traditional and contemporary games and toys, schools, special purpose courses and many other factors, institutions, applications are the components of child culture (Mouritsen, 1998). In this study, as is mentioned above, one of the sub-dimensions of child culture and the culture that children create through interactions with others within their communication networks (including both objects and subjects) are focused. Moreover, child culture provides important information about the value of the child and even child rearing values in the relevant culture because it contains all the features, facts, objects created for and by children. This aspect of culture can mean that children transfer everything that is offered to them in their own individual context. Mouritsen (1998) stated that this form of cultural creation is closely related to play culture. Play culture, which is a part of children's culture, includes both historical, cultural and even economic features of the plays, as well as where, with whom, when it is played, what is used in the play, what is the rules of the play or the roles of the players. Thus, play culture is important in terms of showing how childhood is experienced in a particular society through play, where and/or how children are situated and how they are represented emotionally and socially in the society. In addition, play culture as a form of cultural creation is the subject of human development, as it is created / developed in the context of the child's culture-specific objects and relations with others. In a sense, this cultural feature that the child creates in his/her daily life in the context of the object, object-subject and subject-subject relations in his own culture is also the result of the child's developmental features or has a direct relation with them.

Following Vygotsky and his sociocultural approach, Leontiev (as cited in Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999) stated that the play is an important symbolic tool which works as a mediator of transferring of culture-specific traits from one generation to next one, and hence, it is an important activity for the cultural development of children. As Rettig (2002, p.189) mentioned, people, spaces, objects, time and culture are indispensable factors when it is considered their impacts on play. On the other hand, Gaskins and Miller (2009) revealed that there is an unequal situation through play literature. Accordingly, Western thinking and Western European children are taken as standard in play studies even if literature supports the fact that children play based on their cultural acknowledgement, support, and time for play. It is considered that such an approach limits the scientific efforts aimed to

exhibit the possible effects of culture on children's play behaviour in a particular society. On the other hand, Gaskins and Miller (2009; pp.6) stated that there is a decentralisation of the study of play today and now the studies are conducted in two ways: to examine the variety of diverse cultures by gathering more empirical data and to acknowledge the fact that European-American play is one cultural case among many.

In this regard, traditional children's plays in Turkey were examined in terms of children's culture and developmental contributions in this study. However, the aim was not to exhibit similarities or differences between traditional children plays and today's technology-based games. Instead, it was aimed to gain insight about the values related to play and child development in Turkish culture through the examination of traditional children's plays from the perspective of child culture and developmental psychology. Although international literature has taken child play as a part of the culture for a long time, it is a relatively new field of study in Turkey; especially taking it as a part of child culture and examining it in that culture is a much more recent approach. There are a few compilation studies on the traditional child's plays in different regions by individual researchers (Çolak, 2011; Öksüz & Önal, 2011) and by the departments such as Folklore, Turkish Language and Literature in universities in Turkey. It is also possible to find some local publications prepared by mostly small municipalities or some cultural societies as a part of the efforts of protecting local cultural heritage. However, it seems that there are relatively less studies focused on traditional child play in scope of the fields of developmental psychology and child culture. In their studies in different geographic regions, Çok, Artar, Şener and Bağlı (1997), Artar, Onur and Çelen (2004) and Lindberg (2012) revealed that play culture in Turkey showed a change over time such as the studies based on American culture. Lindberg (2012) stated that today's children have more plays than their grandparents had; however, it can be claimed that in both generations there are child plays that the other generation did not play. In addition, it is understood that the play spaces of the two generations are particularly different as well. Regarding how children learn plays, Artar, Onur and Çelen (2004) found that children learn play mostly from their peers. Lindberg (2010), on the other hand, revealed that the third generation children learn the traditional plays from their parents or older relatives, but they also learn the current plays which are different from their grandparents learned from their peers. According to the literature (Artar, Onur, & Çelen, 2004; Ahioğlu, 2008; Onur, 2005; Lindberg, 2012), children prefer playmates of their own gender in their plays, and it seems that girls-boys mixed plays are not so common. In scope of parents' participation and support for children' play, Göncü and Mosier (1991) and Haight, Parke and Black (1997) stated that adults' beliefs about whether they consider play as a simple child activity or an important activity for children affect their participation in their children play. They stated that when the play is considered culturally appropriate, the participation and support of adults increase. Accordingly, Pirpir, Er and Koçak (2009), İvrendi and Işıkoğlu (2010) and Göncü and Mosier (1991) showed that middle-class Turkish parents participated in their children's plays and supported their plays or play behaviours. But these results were not supported in the studies by Artar, Onur, Çelen (2004) and Lindberg (2012). The possible reason for this may be explained by the differences in how and which type of behaviours defined as play behaviours and also the participants of studies. In Artar, Onur, Çelen (2004) and Lindberg (2012) studies, traditional child plays and play behaviours were examined in different generations.

In this study, traditional children's plays are considered as mediators of culture and playing is the activities in which these tools are used. In this sense, the goals are to examine the traditional child play in scope of child culture and their impacts on child development. As mentioned before, although there are studies focused on traditional child plays in Turkey, it was not encountered in any study which examined plays in scope of child culture and developmental psychology. Play contributes to childrens' physical, motor, cognitive, emotional, moral, social and sexual development, and these contributions

on child development are a very well-known fact in literature. As Vygotsky (as cited in Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner,& Souberman, 1978) stated with the term of *genetic analysis* in his theory, behaviour can only be explained truly if it is examined in its own social, cultural and historical context. In this regard, to examine traditional plays by using their own criteria of different developmental fields of child development provide a better perspective to understand child development in a particular society. Furthermore, it is also believed that this kind of analysis will support the studies which aim to understand the value of the child and childhood in Turkey. Also, examining traditional child plays in scope of child culture will contribute to the relevant literature in Turkey. Accordingly, the categories used in the analysis of the traditional plays helped to reach a more holistic and comprehensive perspective related to traditional children's plays as a part of child culture, since they include both the play itself and the player-related examinations. In literature, it was seen that there are studies aiming to understand the contributions and/or effects of child' plays on child development (spatial thinking, creativity, language development, sharing skills, empathy, etc.) and generally they obtained the results showing the value of the child's play (Bekmezci & Özkan 2015; Chen & Fleer, 2016; Daunhauer, Coster, Tickle-Degnen, & Cermak, 2010; Veiga, Neto, & Rieffe, 2016). However, it was also seen that the contributions/effects of play were examined in experimental or quasi-experimental conditions in these studies. In Turkish literature, it was seen that there is few research in which the contributions and/or effects of traditional children's plays regarding child development have been examined (Girmen, 2012; Ozyurek, Sahin, Gunduz, 2018). On the other hand, it is understood that the analysis of the developmental contributions of games was limited to certain areas of development in these studies. Besides, in some of the studies, it could not be encountered on detailed information about the features of the games and/or methodological issues such as the categories used in analysing developmental contributions of the games. From this point of view, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To compile the traditional Turkish children's plays from different parts of the country in terms of their characteristics regarding child culture.

2. To analyse traditional child plays in terms of their contribution to/effects on child development (physical, cognitive, emotional, social, sexual, language and moral).

## 2. Method

This is a qualitative study to describe in detail the aspects of traditional children's play related to child culture and human development. The study has two parts. The first one includes the compilation of traditional children's plays from different regions of Turkey. The second part consists of analysis of the plays related to child development. There is a detailed description for both sections below.

### 2.1. The compilation of traditional children's plays

In this part of the research, it was aimed to define and compile in detail the traditional children's plays from different regions of Turkey. For this, qualitative research methods and techniques were used. Qualitative research is a research method which includes doing detailed description and/or explanation of a case or features related to the research problem, in which the main interest is to reach an answer to "how" question rather than what and why questions (Flick, von Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004). In this study, play culture which is basically an element of child culture was discussed and ethnographic understanding based qualitative data gathering methodology was followed.

In order to reach the traditional child's plays, research articles / books / reports including reviews made by independent researchers and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Turkey were examined. In this sense, the published and visual sources used in the study were shown Table below.

Table 1. *The published and visual sources used in the study*

| Publication Type | Name | Reference |
|---|---|---|
| Article | The changes on children's play in three generations: A study in a rural area. | Artar, M., Onur, B., Çelen, N. (2004). Çocuk oyunlarında üç kuşakta görülen değişimler: Kırsal kesimde bir araştırma (The changes on children's play in three generations: A study in a rural area). In B.Onur, N. Güney (Eds), *Türkiye'de Çocuk Oyunları: Araştırmalar*, Ankara: Ankara Unv. Child Culture Research and Application Center Publications. |
| | Children' plays in open spaces in the cities: Ankara sample | Çok, F., Artar, M., Şener, T., Bağlı, M. (1997). Kentlerdeki açık alanlarda çocuk oyunları: Ankara Örneği (Children' plays in open spaces in the cities: Ankara sample). In B.Onur (Eds.) *Çocuk Kültürü: I.Ulusal Çocuk Kültürü Kongresi Bildirileri* (page.475-496). Ankara Unv. Child Culture Research and Application Center Publications |
| | Views of grandfathers a about games played by today's children and their childhood games | Demir, E. (2016). Views of grandfathers about games played by today's children and their childhood games, *International Journal of Innovative Research in Education*, 3(4),167-173 |
| | Children's games played by children in Turkey in the past. | Başal, H. A. (2007). Children's games played by children in Turkey in the past. *Uludağ Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2, 243-266 |
| Book | Living Traditional Children's Games in Turkey in 2004 | Oguz, O. & Ersoy, P. (2005). Living Turkish traditional child games in 2004. Ankara: Gazi University Turkish Folklore Research and Practice Centre. |
| | Researches on children's games in Turkey. | Onur, B & Güney, N. (2004). Research on children's games in Turkey. Ankara: KOK. |
| Proceedings | The Proceedings Book of I. International Congress of the Turkic World Children's Games and Toys | I. International Congress of the Turkic World Children's Games and Toys, May 14-17, 2015. Eskişehir/Turkey. URL: https://docplayer.biz.tr/15560110-I-turk-dunyasi-cocuk-oyun-ve-oyuncaklari-kurultayi.html |
| | The Proceedings Book of I. National Congress of Child Culture. | 1. Ulusal Çocuk Kültürü Kongresi Bildirileri (1997). (Eds. B. Onur). Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Çocuk Kültürü Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Yayınları no: 1. |
| | The Proceedings Book of Changes in Child Games and Toys Symposium | *Changes in Child Games and Toys Symposium,* December 9-10, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ankara, Turkey |
| Website | Children's games that are about to be forgotten | https://gelenekselcocukoyunlari.com Prepared and designed by Ministry of National Education |

The first and most important criteria that was taken into consideration during the examination of these publications was whether the plays contain sufficient and valid information for the analysis to be conducted within the scope of this research. The children's plays collected after this initial investigation were re-examined according to their geographical regions. In this review, similar and different content ones belonging to the same or different geographical regions were classified. When determining which one of them will be involved in the analysis, the plays which have more detailed information than the other has, or in some cases, that have more specific features (including nursery rhymes or tools, becoming more complex by adding 1-2 different rules) were preferred due to their potentials to enhance play diversity and regional representation. After this review, a total of 51 games (see Appendix 1) were involved in the analysis. Then these plays are grouped according to 9 different criteria. In accordance with the socio-cultural approach (Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999), the

criteria were; geographical region of the play, number of players, gender of players, age of players, timing of the play (day, night, weekday, weekend, etc.), the play space, tools used in the play, the rules of the play and the way to play.

## 2.2. Analysing the effects / contributions of traditional children's plays on child development

In this part, the traditional children's plays collected in the previous part were analysed in scope of the fields of child development. The analysis was done thematically. Accordingly, at first, the plays were examined by the researchers in order to create the initial categories. These initial categories were reviewed and then subcategories regarding the different fields of child development (cognitive, social, moral, emotional, physical, sexual) and set a base of the initial categories. In the creation of these subcategories, some reference books in Developmental Psychology were also used. With these categories, an initial analysis form was composed. The main concern in this part was to be able to describe behaviours objectively related to each field of child development. After the form was created, it was delivered to the three experts, two of whom had a PhD in Educational Psychology and one in Child Development and Education, to examine content validity together with content and definitions of the categories. The suggestions and corrections made by the experts were mostly related with the objectivity and observability of the categories in the fields of moral and cognitive development. Moreover, before the analysis of all plays, two groups of analysis were carried out by each of the researchers. Then the categories were re-discussed and edited. Finally, 32 categories which can be defined functionally and observed objectively and separately were decided to be used. Accordingly, there were four sub-categories (perception and attention, memory, language, reasoning and problem solving) in field of cognitive development, eight sub-categories (moral behaviour, selfishness, altruism, solidarity, prosocial behaviour, emulation, volition, aggression) in the field of moral development, four sub-categories (empathy, sympathy, emotional self-regulation, emotional awareness) in the field of emotional development, four sub-categories (communication skills, problem solving skills, politeness, flexibility of social communication) in the field of social development, ten sub-categories (muscle development, nimbleness, balance, strength, flexibility, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, the ability to use objects as tools, sensory development, coordination) in the field of physical development, two sub-categories (recognizing biological features, recognizing gender characteristics) in the field of sexual development.

All the different features specific to each field of child development in a play were included in the analysis separately. For example, in the play of hide and seek; coding can be done both for physical development due to the task of catching a friend in the play and for social development due to its feature that emphasizes the necessity to obey the rules. Therefore, as can be seen in the results section, the sum of the frequencies for developmental characteristics determined for each play is more than the total number of the plays.

The analysis was made by three coders concurrently. It means scheduled meetings for analysis were organized and the analysis was carried out together by the coders. During the analysis, each of the coders made the coding with their own judgements separately and then all of the codes for a given play were discussed by the coders. As it is expected, there were differences on the coding made for the subcategories of a specific field of child development. However, it did not interfere with these differences regarding the subcategories. On the other hand, if there was a disagreement between coders about the fields of child development (cognitive, social, moral etc.) to which the play being examined belongs to, then the coders re-examined this play and made the final decision. At the end, inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.87 by using the formula of Miles and Huberman (1994; pp64).

## 3. Results and Discussion

In total, 51 traditional child plays were involved in the study. They were analysed and presented in two areas: child culture and their contributions to child development. Before proceeding to the results of the above-mentioned areas related to the aims of the study, some information on the regional distribution of plays is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Regional Distribution of the Plays*

| Region | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Marmara | 4 | 7,84 |
| Aegean | 1 | 1,96 |
| Mediterranean | 2 | 3,92 |
| Southeastern Anatolia | 1 | 1,96 |
| Eastern Anatolian | 1 | 1,96 |
| Black Sea | 3 | 5,88 |
| Central Anatolia | 10 | 19,61 |
| Anonymous | 29 | 56,86 |
| **Total** | **51** | **100** |

As it is seen in Table 2, the majority of the plays were grouped in the anonymous category. This is due to the fact that the same plays were encountered with very few changes in different regions. Thus, such plays were not included in a particular region and were categorized as anonymous. Compared to other regions, Central Anatolia is a region that while the number of migrants in this region is low, the number of people who migrate to other regions from it is high. In addition, when the population density and characteristics of the cities in the region are examined, it is seen that the population of Central Anatolia is less than the Southern, Aegean and Western regions (TSI, 2018). Considering the rate and direction of migration as well as the population characteristics in the region together, it is thought that the cultural characteristics of the region may have been less affected by direct human-induced effects. This can be interpreted as, in addition to the local culture, traditional children's plays specific to children's culture may have been better preserved in the region. In addition, the intensity of internal migration, especially to the South, Aegean and Northwest regions, as well as international migration, might have had an impact on its cultural history.

### 3.1. Child Culture

The plays were specified according to their potential to reflect regional diversity; but no gender or other characteristics were used in this initial specification process. However, the plays were mostly outdoor group plays and they included mixed-gender playmates. On the other hand, it was found that there are some differences according to plays for girls and boys. Accordingly, while jump rope plays and playing house are preferred mainly by girls, almost in all plays, except rough and tumble plays and other plays based on physical strength, boys and girls are playing together.

It is a well-known fact that women and men in traditional and patriarchal societies in general are placed apart from each other in social and physical environments including children's play. This is explained by differences in gender roles defined for men and women in a particular society. In this study, it was seen that girls and boys choose same-sex playmates for the plays such as jump rope, playing house and for the ones that needed physical strength. This is a case in support of gender-appropriate play preferences as reported by Sutton Smith and Rosenberg (1961) and Van Rehenen (2012). Although they argued that boys' and girls' play preferences were quite different, Van Rheenen (2012) suggested that the difference in play preference has largely been eroded in the past century. On the other hand, as mentioned before, in this study it is found that opposite sex children are allowed to play together. However, this is a fact for children in early ages. More than half of all traditional plays are played by children aged between 6-7 years old. Besides, while only one play was grouped for 3 years old, nine plays for 5 years old and six plays for 10 years old were defined. Accordingly, it seems that boys and girls play together till 6-7 years old. Then they become

distant from each other possibly because of the differences in their socialization process including the development of gender oriented stereotyped behaviours as well. The results were partly supported by some previous studies in Turkish literature (Ahioğlu, 2008; Artar, Onur, & Çelen, 2004; Lindberg, 2012; Onur, 2005). In the literature the studies were conducted with school aged children and the results showed that children prefer same sex playmates. On the other hand, in this study it was found that most of the play was played with children in early ages and mixed sex groups. Second possible reason for the difference in the results may be due to the cities where the previous studies are conducted and the cultural characteristics of these cities. Anatolia has been home to many different cultures and civilizations throughout history. This historical situation provides an appropriate basis for explaining the differences in some cultural practices, including children's play, although some cultural elements are shared from west to east part of the country. In this study, all traditional children's plays accessed from all regions of Turkey were examined in a different way from previous research.

The last variables analysed in the context of child culture are the spaces of plays and the play materials. In the analysis, it was revealed that school yards and/or empty lands close to the home or neighbourhood were used by the children as a playground. Allin, West, Curry (2014) mentioned that parents support their children to play near to the house / neighbourhood in order to check them when they need to or to be sure of their safety. On the other hand, it is considered that parents may also want their children to play near the home because they can reach them in case of sudden situations that require children to take care of their younger siblings or help with chores.

In traditional children's plays, play materials can be stones and wooden pieces directly taken from children's environment and/or fabric products such as rope and ball taken from home as Sutton Smith and Rosenberg (1961), Vandermaas-Peeler (2002), Artar, Onur, Çelen (2004), Onur (2005), Oguz and Ersoy (2005), Ahioğlu (2008), Lindberg (2012) and Van Rheenen (2012) also stated. In this study, although there were not many play materials, it was found that the materials were easily accessible and manipulated such as stones, metal sticks, wood pieces and so on.

Vygotsky (as cited in Wertch, 1997) stated that all societies have different value systems for raising a child mostly because of differences in their cultural, social and economic history which influence what they can offer to their children. Likewise, Leontev stated that play is a life unit, and to understand it with all aspects, one needs to understand economic structure of a given society because economy influences the cultural diversity in leading activities including child plays (Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999). Göncü, Tuermer, Jain and, Johnson (1999) explain this cultural diversity in the plays with different factors. The first is the economic structure of the society in which the plays are played. The authors stated that the economic structure of the society affects how the play is represented as an activity. A case about this claim was obtained from the analysis of the players' age. According to this study, it was determined that the plays were generally played by young children and the plays played by older children were limited. This may be due to the fact that young children were not able to support the family's economic activities and parents allowed young children to play with their peers instead of wandering around, unless they prevented them from doing their own work. Also, older children are asked to support family income instead of playing. Another factor mentioned by the researchers is that children's plays can be best understood through the beliefs of the society in which the child lives about the value of the play. In this study, it was not aimed to analyse the beliefs about the value of the play. However, it is important that there is no evidence of adult intervention or participation in the plays that were analysed. Accordingly, it is understood that adult participation or intervention is limited and traditional children's plays are mostly recreational activities conducted by and for children.

### 3.2. Developmental Contributions of Traditional Children' Plays

As a result of the analysis on the developmental characteristics of 51 traditional plays included in the study, a total of 297 codes regarding developmental characteristics of the plays were created.

As mentioned before, all features related to each field of development in the plays were coded. This explains why the frequencies for developmental characteristics are greater than the number of plays included in the study.

Table 3. *Developmental Contributions of Traditional Children' Plays*

| Field of Child Development | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Moral development | 51 | 17,17 |
| Emotional development | 3 | 1,02 |
| Social development | 24 | 8,08 |
| Sexual development | 3 | 1,02 |
| Cognitive development | 82 | 27,60 |
| Physical development | 134 | 45,11 |
| **Total** | **297** | **100** |

It can be claimed that the traditional child plays contribute mostly in the field of physical development (45.11%). In addition, the cognitive and moral contributions of the plays on development are also important. However, according to the results, the traditional plays have limited contribution to emotional and sexual development. Regarding emotional development, it was coded in functional aspects of the plays such as empathy, sympathy, emotional self-regulation and awareness. Also, it ıs important to identify these aspects of the plays functionally as a rule or features of the games. Generally, children express their feelings such as happiness, anger or disappointment in a play but these kinds of expressions were not coded as a developmental contribution because they were situations based on feelings not the expressions regarding to play's rules or features. When it comes to the contributions of the plays on sexual development, it is considered that there are several reasons explaining these limitations on the results. The first one is about the analysis category. In the study, the recognition of biological sex features and gender characteristics were only categories being taken into account as functional analysis categories of sexual development. The other reason for the limitation can be related with the features of the games. Accordingly, although there are not any special regulations except region and descriptive features of child games in deciding which traditional plays would be involved, most of the plays are mixed-sex group plays and also based on physical strength or activity as mentioned before. Thus, these features of the plays in general might be the reason for the limitations. Finally, it is known that stereotyped gender roles specific to women and men are effective in traditional Turkish society for both cultural and religious reasons. This may have limited the representation and thus the observation of the characteristics associated with sexual development, even in plays.

Similarly, the contribution on social development is quite limited compared to other developmental fields although the literature revealed that Turkish society is a collectivistic society (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005) in which people are concerned with the social relations, making more situational attributions and they tend to be self-effacing (Triandis, 2001). In this research, the features examined for analysis of the contributions of the plays on social development were verbal / non-verbal communication skills, problem solving skills, courtesy expressions and flexibility in social communication. As it is a known fact that children learn the social codes by interacting and/or observing the adults in daily lives. The limitation of the social characteristics of traditional plays can be explained by another variable related to the socio-cultural foundations of children's plays: adult participation in plays. In Turkish literature, it is seen that adult participation and support in child plays is limited both in learning and playing the traditional child plays (Ahioğlu, 2008; Artar, Onur, & Çelen, 2004; Lindberg, 2012). In a sense, the traditional understanding of plays shows that plays are defined as an entertainment activity that children can do in their leisure time.

In addition to the general analysis of the developmental contributions of the plays, detailed analyses were conducted in each field of development. The results are presented below.

*3.2.1. The Contributions on Moral Development*

Moral development was analysed under eight categories. Although some behaviours related to moral development were determined in the play, some were excluded from the scope of analysis because they were not directly related to the play's own purpose or rules. Adding to the categories in Table 3, there are three more categories: prosocial behaviour, selfishness and aggression. However, it was not encountered to any of these three categories as main features or rules of the plays as mentioned above. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Moral Contributions of the Traditional Child Plays*

| Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Moral behaviour | 30 | 59 |
| Altruism | 1 | 1.9 |
| Solidarity | 10 | 19,6 |
| Emulation | 1 | 1,9 |
| Volition | 9 | 17,6 |

Moral behaviour (59%) was the most common category of moral development in the analysis. The moral behaviour is defined as behaving in accordance with the rules defined by the general morality, beliefs, traditions and customs of the social environment in child lives (Talwar, 2011). Thus, other categories such as altruism, solidarity, emulation and volition as more compatible with individualistic values under the moral contributions theme are seemed not to be covered in the traditional child plays. In traditional Turkish society, respect and obedience to authority and a tendency to see duty to the community over individual rights are all regarded as the main characteristics of parents' child rearing practices (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). As it is considered that moral behaviours like other behaviours leading our relations in a given society are taught in interactions with parents, other adults and peers. According to results it seems that the traditional child plays serve as a tool to teach or practice common more collectivistic moral values mentioned above.

*3.2.2. The Contributions on Emotional Development*

Emotional development category consists of categories of empathy, sympathy, emotional self-regulation, and emotional awareness. The literature shows that different kinds of play such as pretend play, rough-and-tumble play and peer play interaction in general contributes to children's development of emotional regulation (Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen 2004; Kuczaj & Horback 2012; LaFreniere, 2011). During the analysis, only one case was coded in each sub-category except emotional self-regulation. Onur (2005), Secer and Karabulut (2016), Kaya-Bican and Sarıtas-Atalar (2017) stated that there are limited interactions between parents and children that involve direct sharing of emotion or expression in child raising practices in Turkey. Accordingly, for example, parents may be avoiding hugging and kissing their children because they are afraid to spoil their children. Similarly, in some Asian countries such as Japan, China and Korea, there are conclusions that the expression of emotions in child rearing is also limited. The main reason for this, as in Turkey, are described as to prevent children from becoming spoiled and/or to protect parental authority on children in Asian cultures (Kojima, 1996). On the other hand, specifically the parents and children interacting in a play session can provide an emotional zone of proximal development (Chen & Fleer, 2016). Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that these traditional values of child rearing might be negatively influencing the representation or presence of emotions in traditional children's plays as well.

*3.2.3. The Contributions on Social Development*

Analysis related to this field of development include communication skills (verbal / non-verbal), problem solving skills, courtesy expressions, and flexibility in social communication. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Social Contributions of the Traditional Child Plays*

| Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Communication Skills (verbal / non-verbal) | 4 | 16,6 |
| Problem Solving Skills | 17 | 70,8 |
| Politeness | 2 | 8,4 |
| Flexibility in Social Communication | 1 | 4,2 |
| **Total** | **24** | **100** |

The most common category for social development encountered among traditional children's plays was problem solving skills (70.8 %). This category includes functional definitions such as asking for help from peers and adults in social relations, identifying problems encountered during relationships, setting goals, producing and applying solutions to problems. The characteristics defined by this category seem to be highly related to the communication skills of the individual and the level of flexibility in their social communication. In a sense, in order to solve the problems encountered in social relations, it is expected that the individual's communication skills and perspectives (flexibility) on communication problems will be at a certain level or preferential. Bodrova, Germeroth and Leong (2013) and Lindsey and Colwell (2013) mentioned the effects of play on children's social skills and knowledge. However, the fact that problem solving skills were a more common category than others in the analysis can be explained as the categories of social development have strong links with each other.

*3.2.4. The Contributions on Sexual Development*

The field of sexual development includes the behaviours such as recognizing biological features and recognizing gender characteristics. As a matter of fact, only two of the 51 traditional children's plays analysed within the scope of this study have reached findings related to the field of sexual development. One of them is about recognizing biological characteristics and two of them are about recognizing gender characteristics.

There can be a few possible explanations for the result. The first one is that gender characteristics and developmental characteristics specific to each gender might not be important or might be ignored in plays. Also, it can be interpreted that gender may not be an important factor in children's plays because it was found that five out of 51 plays were played only by girls and ten plays only by boys and 36 plays were played in mixed groups. Another possible explanation is related to the process of sexual socialization, including the acquisition of sexual and gender characteristics. As the studies conducted by Tugrul and Artan (2001), Cok, Ahioğlu and Aypay (2003), Incesu, Acar and Kazmirci (2006) exhibited, Turkish parents, teachers and children believed that children should be informed about both biological and gender characteristics and sexual development, but it was seemed that parents and teachers were reluctant to take action for it. In this respect, it is considered that the nature of sexuality, which is defined as a difficult and even taboo subject to talk about in Turkish society, may have limited or caused to ignored the issue in traditional children's plays as well.

*3.2.5. The Contributions on Cognitive Development*

When compared with other fields of child development, the field of cognitive development was the second most common field of development which was encountered in the analysis after the field of physical development. The contributions on cognitive development were analysed under four categories. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Cognitive Contributions of the Traditional Child Plays*

| Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Perception and attention | 41 | 50 |
| Memory | 7 | 8,5 |
| Language | 14 | 17,1 |
| Reasoning and problem solving | 20 | 24,4 |
| **Total** | **82** | **100** |

As can be seen in Table 6, the most common category in the field of cognitive development is the perception and attention category (50%), which is described as the situations that will enable the meaning of the information and the efforts related to these situations to be continued and focused on the stimulus. It is believed that perception and attention are important for an entire play session including to decide place, tools, rules, players and then to play the play. And all these interactions support the development of reasoning and problem solving skills. In this case, it was not a coincidence that the second category actually encountered in the analysis was the problem solving category. Blair and Razza (2007) and Pellegrini (2009) emphasized that play has a considerable impact on cognitive functions such as memory, attention, flexibility in thinking. In a sense, in traditional plays, interactions between children create a favourable condition for the development of what Vygotsky (as cited in Wertch, 1997) defines as the zone of proximal development. This concept is described as the distance between children's potential development characteristics and actual developmental characteristics. Vygotsky (as cited in Wertch, 1997) emphasized that in order for the individual to reach the potential development area, the interactions that support the individual to focus on the problem and to work on it are important.

### 3.2.6. The Contributions on Physical Development

It is a well-known fact that physical development occurs primarily through play, as both gross and fine motor skills are practiced. In support of this common fact, in this study, it was determined that the most common field of development was the field of physical development (45,11%). Within the scope of the field of this development, muscle development, agility, balance, strength, flexibility, using objects as tools, coordination, gross and fine motor skills and sensory development characteristics were analysed. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. *Physical Contributions of the Traditional Child Plays*

| Categories | f | % |
|---|---|---|
| Muscle development | 5 | 3,7 |
| Nimbleness | 18 | 13,4 |
| Balance | 15 | 11,2 |
| Strength | 7 | 5,2 |
| Flexibility | 7 | 5,2 |
| Fine motor skills | 8 | 6 |
| Gross motor skills | 21 | 15,7 |
| Using objects as tool | 8 | 6 |
| Sensory development | 23 | 17,2 |
| Coordination | 22 | 16,4 |
| **Total** | **134** | **100** |

The results of the analysis show that the characteristics of sensory development, coordination, gross motor, nimbleness and balance categories were found more frequently in plays. Unlike the sensory development and coordination categories, when the nimbleness and balance categories are evaluated together with the gross motor development characteristics, it can be said that traditional children's plays contain more elements that support the development of movement skills requiring gross muscle movements. Pellegrini (2009) revealed that approximately 20% of children's play behaviours can be classified as vigorous physical activity. In fact, children naturally gravitate to physical play if they can find opportunity for it. In addition, Burdette and Whitaker (2005) stated that giving children the

opportunity to play encourages them to be more physically active and thus supports their physical development.

Pellegrini (2009) stated that physical action-based rough and tumbles plays are important not only for the physical development of the child but also for the development of cognitive and social skills. For this reason, in this study which was aimed to examine traditional children's plays, it is found that the results regarding physical development should be considered together with its contribution to other areas of development. In addition, these results may be addressed together with the benefits of children's plays on gaining physical strength and the fact that the skills for using this strength is necessary and important in an agricultural society in the past.

## 4. Conclusion

Aside from the fact that children's play behaviour is universal, it shows tremendous variability in intercultural level and even in the same culture. Also, children's plays differ in terms of some properties such as time, space, play materials etc. (Lillard, 2015). Hofferth (2010) stated that children today have less free, and unstructured time in which they might play. Instead, they have to work harder to get high grades at school, to attend a good university and therefore to have a good job. In addition, children do not always play in parks or empty places near to their homes or in their own yards. Instead, preschools seem to serve as new playgrounds; thus children appear to play and socialize between walls rather than the outside. With regard to the play materials and media influence, Clements (2004) stated that active play among youngsters has plummeted by 50% over the last forty years and children spend more time with technology directly or related products indirectly then before. On the other hand, today children's play supported by electronic devices are not totally wrong or worthless but it seems that they do not support Vygotsky's (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner,& Souberman, 1978) opinion that children's play "contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development" (1978, pp. 102). As Hofferth (2010) found that there are some positive relations regarding child development and electronic, online games. For instance, although there was some race, ethnicity, gender and age differences, the study showed that computer games have significant effects on high grades on achievement tests based on problem solving, having more knowledge of general culture and less internalizing behaviour problems for girls. Lindberg (2012) stated that the free market economy facilitates the production of toys or play materials, making it easy and cheap to own toys even in rural areas. Furthermore, not only the market economy, but also Yoffie (1947), Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1961) and Artar, Onur and Çelen (2004) pointed out, the increase in schooling may have led to changes, decreases and even destruction of traditional games, play materials and toys. However, all these changes support Leontev's views that play is a living unit and is influenced by the social, cultural and economic environment where the child lives in (Göncü, Tuermer, Jain, & Johnson, 1999).

In this study, traditional children's plays in Turkey are examined in terms of children's culture and developmental contributions but no analysis has been conducted to exhibit similarities or differences between traditional children plays and today's technology-based plays and not to denigrate traditional plays or to show their limitations. However, the study showed that traditional children's plays were played outside the home, in mixed sex groups, and mostly using objects such as stones and sticks found in nature. In addition, plays seem to support physical development more than other fields of child development. Therefore, it seems that traditional children's plays were considered as a leisure activity which was more suitable for the children with early ages and mostly aimed at supporting the development or improvement of physical skills.

Although not examined in this study, it is considered that the results might be related to the limited adult participation and intervention at children's plays in the past. In fact, some studies in the Turkish literature (Artar, Onur, & Çelen, 2004; Lindberg, 2012; Onur, 2005) have also shown that adult participation and intervention in traditional children's plays is limited. This might be related to the fact

that children's plays were considered as an activity performed by children and being suitable only for children. Although there is some view that adult participation may disrupt the natural flow of play (Tizard & Hughes, 2002), there are studies showing that adult participation and intervention in general is important for the child's development within the play (Fisher, Hirsch-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer, & Berk, 2010; Hakkarainen, Bredikyte, Jakkula, & Munter, 2013). However, adult participation and intervention refers to a process that starts with the direct participation of the adult as a player. Vygotsky described the situation including adult-child interaction as a dialectical process (Lee, 1989). Accordingly, in order to overcome some conflicts peculiar to their development, children turn to some concrete tasks or social interactions specific to these situations. Interactions with more competent peers or adults, in particular, help children to acquire more original and higher levels of function. Thus, adult participation in the play will mediate both the initiation of the dialectical process that will lead to the creation of activities leading to high-level development, and the acquisition of skills to enable the use of new forms of function through this process. However, in order to reach clearer conclusions and to make more definite judgments, more ethnographical based phenomenological studies on the participation and intervention of adults in children's plays are needed.

Within the framework of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, the findings obtained from this study revealed that adult participation and intervention are important for both the sustainability of traditional child plays and to enhance their developmental benefits. Accordingly, it is considered that teachers can contribute to the sustainability of some traditional children's games by organizing game tournaments throughout the classroom or school, where families can also be involved as audiences or players. Moreover, it is believed that such activities in which parents can be involved directly will contribute to the activities for school-based parental involvement, especially in primary and secondary schools, and then to the academic development of students as well (Jeynes, 2007). In addition, especially in today's world, where technology has transformed leisure activities into sedentary ones to a great extent, it is considered that it is important to create play environments and forms which will support the development of children and attract their attention despite technological based games. However, due to this technological situation, it is not reasonable and also possible to preserve traditional children's games as they are. For this reason, re-organizing the plays in a way that is supported by technology, though not completely, and that enables the participation of adults in the children's games, will make important contributions to both child culture and child development.

This study has two main limitations. The first one was about the difficulty to reach traditional children's plays where detailed information can be obtained at a compatible level for the purpose of study. Although it has been found that Turkish children's plays are studied and examined in the Folklore and Turkish Language and Literature departments of universities, it has been understood that the analyses made in these departments generally do not go beyond a certain framework. A second limitation is that there is no chance to observe the games included in the research, directly and in real environments. For this reason, analyses were carried out on secondary sources.

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**Appendix.**

*Traditional Turkish Child Plays Examined in the study (In Turkısh)*

| 1.Kuyu Kazmanı | 18.Dokuz Kiremit | 35.Makas |
|---|---|---|
| 2.Toplu Sinsin | 19.Hot | 36. İlkbahar Yaz Sonbahar |
| 3.Gıynız | 20.Mangala | 37. Kış |
| 4.Yağmur Gelini | 21.Tornet | 38. Doktor Aspirin |
| 5.Üçgen Peynir Dilimleri | 22.Hamam Kubbe | 39. Ayakkabı Saklama |
| 6.Çotra | 23.Harmanbiş | 40. Meyve Sepeti |
| 7.Eski Minder | 24.Topal Karga | 41. Tintini |
| 8.Cüz | 25.Çat Pat Kaynana | 42. Çekirge |
| 9. Sıçratan Top | 26.Çemberbaz | 43. Yakan top |
| 10.Alaylar | 27.Tuz Buz | 44. Tribom |
| 11.41 Çubuk | 28.Kurt Baba | 45. Yağ Satarım |
| 12.Bezirganbaşı | 29.Çelik Çomak | 46. Farfarafilli |
| 13.Çubuk Oyunu | 30.Kobalak | 47. İstop |
| 14.Uçan Halka | 31.Beni Tanı | 48. Kulaktan Kulağa |
| 15.Mendil Kapmaca | 32.Sarı Kırmızı | 49. Dönmece |
| 16.Çarşıya Gittim | 33. Gazoz Kapağı (Çekirdek) | 50. Beş taş |
| 17.Evcilik | 34. Kabakçı Amca | 51. Peçiç |