

Play is often described as a natural tendency that occupies a central place in early childhood learning and development during early childhood (Elkind, 2007). Children often define play as a voluntary, free, spontaneous, and intrinsically motivated activity (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Tuğrul, 2018; Wiltz & Fein, 2006). Through processes such as exploration, trial and error, symbolic representation, and problem solving, play enables children to make sense of the world around them (Tuğrul, 2017; Weiler, 2020). In this sense, play activates cognitive and emotional processes intertwined with creative expression and problem solving (Russ, 2003, 2004). Vygotsky (1966) emphasized that play supports the development of thought and language through symbolic tools, while Sutton-Smith (1980) and Fein (1987; cited in Russ, 2004) conceptualized play as a natural expression of creativity. Therefore, play can be considered not only as an enjoyable activity but as a fundamental developmental context through which children's creative potential can emerge.

Creative thinking is considered a key competence in contemporary educational approaches and is commonly associated with flexibility, originality, and problem-solving capacity (Englebright Fox & Schirrmacher, 2015). Early childhood represents a critical period during which creativity has not yet diminished and can be strengthened through environmental support (Yıldız & Güney Karaman, 2017). Social and physical environments in which children feel safe and free are particularly influential in fostering creative thinking (Özërbaşı, 2011; Yeşilyurt, 2020). Among these environments, the family context constitutes the earliest and most influential setting. In early childhood, children's development is shaped not only by formal learning processes but also by diverse learning environments and interactions with adults (Çobanoğlu & Demir, 2023; Uludağ, 2021).

From this perspective, the nature of the relationship between parenting and play becomes particularly important. Parents have a key influence on supporting children's creative potential by providing play opportunities, offering diverse materials, and creating a safe atmosphere in which children can express their ideas freely (Kemple & Nissenberg, 2000; Koyuncuoğlu, 2017). When parents

support children's access to play, attribute value to play experiences, and actively participate in play activities, they contribute significantly to children's development (Elkind, 2007; Fisher et al., 2008; Gray et al., 2023; Holland, 2012; Petrova, 2022; PLAYBOARD, 2019; Zosh et al., 2017). Within this framework, a play-friendly approach refers to a holistic parenting perspective that recognizes children's right to play, allocates time and space for play, respects different forms of play, and involves parents as play partners when appropriate (Children's Access to Play in School, 2019; Niran, 2024).

Previous research on the play dimension of parenting has largely been framed around the concept of parental playfulness. Playfulness is generally defined as a multidimensional characteristic that includes joy, humor, imagination, and spontaneity (Barnett, 2007; Cohen, 2009; Lieberman, 1977). Parental playfulness manifests itself in daily interactions through flexible, creative, and enjoyable attitudes displayed by parents (Shorer et al., 2019). Empirical findings indicate that parental playfulness is associated with children's emotional regulation abilities (Cabrera et al., 2017; Shorer et al., 2019), problem-solving capacities (Léniz-Maturana et al., 2023), and coping with stress (Cohen et al., 2014; Shorer & Leibovich, 2020).

However, parental playfulness has mostly been examined as an individual personality trait or a temporary behavioral state (Menashe-Grinberg & Atzaba-Poria, 2017; Shen, 2020). In contrast, play-friendly parenting represents a broader framework. Rather than referring solely to humorous or spontaneous parental behavior, it encompasses a parenting approach that systematically supports children's access to play, consciously organizes play environments, and positions play as both a developmental need and a fundamental right of children. In this sense, play-friendly parenting includes parental playfulness but extends beyond it by offering a more normative and developmentally oriented framework.

Emotion socialization theories further suggest that parents' emotional responses shape children's emotional expressions and regulation skills (Eisenberg et al., 1998; England-Mason et al., 2023). Parents'

own emotion regulation (ER) capacities constitute a critical factor influencing children's emotional adjustment (Rutherford et al., 2015; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). Considering the Broaden-and-Build theory, which proposes that positive emotions enhance cognitive flexibility (Fredrickson, 2001), playful and positive interactions in parenting contexts may support the regulatory capacities of both parents and children. In this respect, play-friendly parenting can be conceptualized as an approach that not only involves participation in children's play but also transforms the emotional climate of parent-child interactions, strengthens positive engagement, and buffers developmental risks.

Research indicates that parental playfulness is associated with children's emotional regulation, stress management, and social adjustment (Cabrera et al., 2017; Shorer & Leibovich, 2020; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022). Nevertheless, play-friendly parenting extends beyond individual playfulness. The concept refers to a holistic parenting approach that recognizes children's right to play, provides time and space for play, attributes value to play experiences, supports access to play, and involves parents as play partners when necessary (Children's Access to Play in School, 2019; Niran, 2024).

Play is often described as a fundamental necessity for both growth and learning during early childhood (Ayan & Memiş, 2012; Gökşen, 2014). However, the increasing emphasis on academic achievement in early childhood education has gradually diminished the attention given to play as a learning process (Warash, Root, & Devito Doris, 2016). In this context, parents' beliefs and attitudes toward play emerge as important factors shaping children's developmental experiences (Devlet Memiş & Gürsoy, 2022). Studies show that mothers tend to provide more support for children's play experiences compared with fathers (Ginsburg, 2007), yet parental participation in play activities tends to decrease as children grow older (Pellegrini & Smith, 2005). Furthermore, parents' perceptions of play often change once children begin formal schooling, and the value attributed to play may decline (Weisberg et al., 2013).

Although developmental theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson have highlighted the

multifaceted effects of play on child development, how parents interpret the role of play in learning processes remains a subject of ongoing discussion (Duch et al., 2019). Recent studies indicate that parents' beliefs and attitudes directly influence their interaction patterns with children and play a decisive role in the effectiveness of play-based learning practices. At the same time, the value parents attribute to play may vary depending on individual experiences, cultural contexts, and socioeconomic conditions (Gülen & Barış, 2021; Wu, 2021).

Accordingly, the primary aim of this study is to examine mothers' and fathers' play-based parenting perspectives, their play interactions with their children, and the parent-child relationships shaped through these interactions using a qualitative research approach. Play in early childhood is widely acknowledged to have comprehensive effects on cognitive structuring, social adjustment, emotional regulation, and language development. Nevertheless, play should not be considered solely in terms of children's developmental outcomes but also as a relational context that strengthens the reciprocal interaction between parents and children. Through play, parents can reshape their communication with their children, better understand their children's needs, interests, and emotions, and reconstruct their parenting roles in a more conscious manner. Despite this importance, parents' perceptions of play experiences, how they structure these experiences, and how they integrate play into their daily lives have been addressed in a limited number of studies. Therefore, this research seeks to interpret the phenomenon of play-friendly parenting through parents' subjective narratives and lived experiences.

Within this framework, the present study aims to examine the play-friendly parenting experiences and perspectives of parents with preschool-aged children. Accordingly, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do parents define play and its importance for child development?
2. What types of games do parents play with their children?
3. What roles do parents assume while playing with their children?

4. According to parents, how does playing together influence the parent-child relationship?
5. In which developmental domains do parents believe play contributes to their children's development?
6. What challenges do parents experience regarding time and environment when playing with their children?
7. How do parents define the concept of play-friendly parenting, and how do they evaluate themselves in this regard?

METHOD

This study was designed as a qualitative research aiming to explore parents' views on play, their play-friendly parenting approaches, the play activities they engage in with their children, and the parent-child relationships that develop during these interactions in depth. Qualitative research aims to generate in-depth insights into individuals' lived experiences and meaning-making processes research focuses on obtaining rich and detailed insights into individuals' lived experiences and enables researchers to examine participants' perceptions, experiences, and processes of meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this framework, the study was conducted using a qualitative research approach in order to explore parents' experiences related to play with their children and the meanings they attribute to these experiences.

To gain a deeper understanding of parents' experiences related to play, data were gathered using a semi-structured interview format. This approach enables participants to describe their experiences in their own terms and supports a more detailed exploration of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants

The study group included parents of children in the preschool age range. A criterion-based purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify suitable participants. In this context, the main requirement for inclusion was having a child aged between 3 and 6. In total, 10 parents who met this condition took part in the study.

An examination of the demographic characteristics of the participants shows that the parents' ages

ranged between 30 and 42 years. The participants had diverse educational backgrounds and occupational statuses. The ages of their children also fell within the preschool age range. Detailed information regarding participant characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Data Collection Instrument

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form consisting of seven questions, developed by the researcher, and were subsequently analyzed through content analysis. The interview form consisted of two main sections: Demographic Information of the Parents and Semi-Structured Interview Questions. This structure enabled the collection of demographic data while also allowing for an in-depth exploration of parents' perspectives and experiences related to play.

The semi-structured interview form was finalized after receiving feedback from three early childhood education experts and one Turkish language expert. Each interview was recorded in audio format and subsequently transcribed to prepare the data for analysis. Before the interviews were conducted, all participants were informed about the study and gave their consent to take part.

During the interviews, parents were asked questions such as: *"What does play mean to you? What do you think is the importance of play for children?" "What types of games do you usually play with your child?" "What kind of parental role do you assume while playing with your child (e.g., guiding, participating, observing)?" "How does playing with your child affect your relationship? Do you think it strengthens your bond?" "Do you think that playing contributes to your child's development? If so, in what ways?" "Do you think you have sufficient time and space to play with your child? What kinds of challenges do you experience in this regard?" "In your opinion, what does it mean to be a play-friendly parent, and how would you evaluate yourself in this respect?"*

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted face-to-face on a voluntary basis. Data collection took place between May and August 2025, and each interview lasted

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Parent 5		Parent 4		Parent 3		Parent 2		Parent 1		Participants	
Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Gender	
40-49	30-39	40-49	40-49	40-49	40-49	20-29				Age	
Married	Single	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married				Marital Status	
High School	Bachelor's degree	High School	High School	High School	High School	Bachelor's degree				Educational Status	
Not working	Civil servant	Not working	Not working	Not working	Not working	Not working				Educational Status	
3	1	3	3	3	3	1				Number of Children	
6	5	6	5	5	5	5				Age of the child concerned in the meeting	
0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	3-5 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	3-5 Hours				Average daily time spent playing with the child	
Other Children	Herself	Other Children - Parents	Other Children	Other Children	Other Children	Herself				The person who usually plays with the child	
Parent 10		Parent 9		Parent 8		Parent 7		Parent 6		Participants	
Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Gender	
30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	40-49	30-39	30-39	30-39	30-39	Age	
Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married	Marital Status	
High School	High School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Educational Status	
Not working	Not working	Not working	Not working	Not working	Medical Secretary	Medical Secretary	Tradesman	Tradesman	Tradesman	Educational Status	
2	2	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	Number of Children	
6	2	3	3	3	5	5	4	4	4	Age of the child concerned in the meeting	
0-2 Hours	3-5 Hours	3-5 Hours	3-5 Hours	3-5 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	0-2 Hours	Average daily time spent playing with the child	
Spouse - Other Children	Other Children	Other Children - Friends	Other Children - Friends	Other Children - Friends	Spouse - Himself	Spouse - Himself	Spouse	Spouse	Spouse	The person who usually plays with the child	

approximately 30-45 minutes. A flexible interview environment was provided in order to allow parents to express their views comfortably, and probing questions were asked when necessary to obtain richer and more detailed data (Patton, 2002).

The data were analyzed using a content analysis approach, a commonly used approach in qualitative research. Content analysis allows researchers to examine a particular phenomenon in depth by

generating meaningful themes, codes, and categories from participants' statements (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

During the data analysis process, codes were first derived from the raw data. Subsequently, the relationships among these codes were examined and similar codes were grouped together to generate broader interpretations. Through this process, subcategories and categories were developed, and

pattern codes were identified for each category. To ensure a clearer understanding of the relationships between the codes and the data, direct quotations from participants were included when presenting the findings.

In order to enhance the credibility of the study, inter-coder agreement was established among four coders, feedback from three experts was obtained, and member checking was conducted by asking participants to verify their responses.

FINDINGS

In the findings section, the results are organized based on the sequence of the research questions. Each question is followed by a detailed presentation of the related findings to make the data easier to interpret. In addition, participants' responses are included after each question to support consistency and enhance the credibility of the analysis.

Parents were first asked the question, "What does play mean to you? What do you think is the importance of play for children?" The responses obtained were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Parents' definitions of play and its importance

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Creativity	Imagination Creativity	5	50
Socialization	Sharing Patience Friendship Communication	4	40
Learning	Learning	4	40
Enjoyment	Enjoyment Happiness Having Fun	3	30
Need	Basic Need Real-Life Practice Essentiality	2	20

The majority of parents (n = 5) defined play as an activity that nurtures children's imagination and creativity. Parent 1 emphasized the relationship between play and children's cognitive and emotional development by stating that "playing develops a child's imagination and creativity." Similarly, Parents 2 and 3 supported this perspective by describing play as "a reflection of children's imaginative worlds."

A number of participants (n = 4) drew attention to the contribution of play to children's social and emotional development. For instance, Parent 8 described play as a context in which their child develops "a sense of sharing and socialization," while Parent 1 referred to the acquisition of "skills such as sharing and patience" through play. Similarly, Parent 9 expressed the view that "games played during childhood influence personality development later in life." In line with these views, Parent 6 pointed out that children who frequently engage in play may become "more successful and outgoing in their social lives."

Another theme that emerged from the data was the perception of play as a tool for learning (n = 4). Parent 5 described play as "a child's way of learning and communicating," emphasizing that children "express their emotions and build relationships with their environment through play." Similarly, Parent 7 characterized play as an activity that is "both entertaining and educational."

Finally, some parents (n = 2) perceived play as a basic need. According to Parent 4, "play is a fundamental need that helps children make sense of their emotions." Parent 8 similarly emphasized the indispensability of play by stating that "play is something children simply cannot do without."

Parents were then asked the question, "What types of games do you play with your child?" The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 3.

A considerable number of parents (n = 4) reported that they mostly play educational games with their children. Parent 9 stated that "we prefer games that attract the child's attention and are educational," while Parent 10 emphasized the importance of following the child's lead by saying "we play educational games whenever my child wants to."

Table 3: Types of games played by parents with their children

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Educational	Educational Games Mind Games Attention Development Activities	4	40
Creative	Drawing Painting Stones/ Pinecones Talking Plush Toys Pretend Play (Playing House)	3	30
Active / Physical	Football (Soccer) Cycling Running Dancing	3	30
Cultural	Traditional Games	2	20
Therapeutic	Play Therapy	1	10

Some participants (n = 3) described the games they played with their children within the theme of creativity. Parent 1 noted that their child “enjoys activities such as painting pinecones and stones,” whereas Parent 7 mentioned that they play games such as “moving and giving voices to plush toys and playing pretend games.”

Several parents (n = 3) also indicated that they engage in active or physical games with their children. Parent 5 stated that they play games such as “football, cycling, and various games when peers come over,” while Parent 6 explained that they often play “running and chasing games inside the house.”

A smaller number of participants referred to cultural (n = 2) and therapeutic (n = 1) types of games. Parent 8 emphasized cultural elements by stating that “we play games that reflect our traditions.” In addition, Parent 4 reported that “we attend play therapy twice a week,” indicating that play may also function as a form of emotional support and therapeutic intervention.

Parents were then asked the question, “What kind of parental role do you assume while playing with your child (e.g., guiding, participating, observing)?” The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Parental roles during the play process

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Guiding	Guidance Setting Rules Providing Support	7	70
Participatory	Playing Together Acting Together Cooperation	5	50
Observer	Observation	5	50
Flexible	Changing Roles According to the Situation	4	40
Friend-like Role	Being Childlike with the Child Having Fun Together	1	10

Most parents (n = 7) reported that they tend to assume a guiding parental role during play. Parent 6 described themselves as “generally guiding,” while Parent 5 stated that “I am usually guiding, but I take on different roles when necessary.” Similarly, Parent 10 explained that they adopt “a patient and guiding parental role.”

Some parents (n = 5) indicated that they take on a participatory role during play. Parent 7 emphasized their active involvement by stating that “I usually take a participatory role when playing with my child.” Likewise, Parent 8 described their role as flexible, explaining that they are “sometimes guiding and sometimes participating.”

A number of parents (n = 5) also highlighted the observer role. Parent 1 stated that “a parent should be both a friend and a guide for the child; sometimes I take on an observer role that allows my child to construct their own game.”

The findings further suggest that some parents adopt flexible and multifaceted roles during play. Parent 4 explained that their role may change

depending on the nature of the game, stating that they are “sometimes guiding, sometimes participating, and sometimes observing.”

Parents were then asked the question, “How does playing with your child affect your relationship? Do you think it strengthens your bond?” The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Effects of play on the parent-child relationship

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Bonding	Attachment Closeness	7	70
Trust	Sense of Trust	6	60
Happiness	Joy Peace Positive Emotion	5	50
Social Skills	Empathy Communication Mutual Understanding	3	30

Most parents (n = 7) stated that playing together positively influences the parent-child relationship and strengthens the emotional bond between them. Parent 1 expressed this view by stating, “It definitely strengthens the relationship. I believe that playing together is one of the activities that contributes most to reinforcing a child’s sense of trust.” Similarly, Parent 2 emphasized the increase in emotional closeness, stating that “our intimacy and sense of trust increase.”

Some participants (n = 4) highlighted that the happiness and warmth experienced during play facilitate the formation of stronger bonds. Parent 4 noted that “yes, it definitely creates a sense of happiness and connection for both of us,” indicating that play enhances emotional interaction. Likewise, Parent 5 stated that “our relationship becomes warmer and more sincere. Yes, it definitely strengthens our

bond.” Parent 9 also suggested that play strengthens attachment, explaining that “I think it strengthens the bond. I feel that my child becomes more attached to their mother.”

A number of parents (n = 3) emphasized that play also contributes to the development of social skills. Parent 8 explained that “of course it affects our relationship. It becomes stronger, and we understand each other better.” Similarly, Parent 10 stated that “yes, it strengthens our bond, and I get along with my child better.” These findings suggest that shared play experiences may enhance communication and mutual understanding within the parent-child relationship.

Parents were then asked the question, “Do you think that playing contributes to your child’s development? If so, in what ways?” The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Perceived contributions of play to children’s development

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Cognitive	Intelligence Attention Problem Solving	6	60
Physical	Balance Coordination Muscle Development	4	40
Emotional	Happiness Self-confidence Sensitivity	4	40
Social	Environmental Awareness Sharing Interaction	3	30
Creativity	Imagination Exploration Creative Expression	3	30

Most participants (n = 6) particularly emphasized the role of play in cognitive development. Parent 4 explained that “for example, puzzles help strengthen attention. Water-based activities support the sense of

touch, and obstacle-course games improve attention, balance, coordination, and awareness. Riding a bicycle helps develop a sense of balance.” Similarly, Parent 5 noted that “manual skills and mental abilities improve through play.”

Some parents (n = 4) also stated that play supports physical development. Parent 7 explained that “while playing, both the muscles and the brain develop, and visual intelligence improves.”

Participants (n = 4) further emphasized that play is important for emotional development. Parent 1 stated that “yes, I believe it also helps children become more sensitive and aware.” Likewise, Parent 2 expressed that “their imagination expands and they feel happy.”

Parents were then asked the question, “Do you think you have sufficient time and space to play with your child? What kinds of challenges do you experience in this regard?” The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Parents’ perceptions of time and environmental constraints on play

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Lack of Time	Household Chores Caring for Siblings Schoolwork	7	70
Workload	Professional Responsibilities	5	50
Limited Environment	Home Environment Lack of Space	3	30
Adequate Conditions	Ability to Engage in Various Activities Not Experiencing Time Constraints	1	10

Most participants (n = 7) indicated that they struggle to find enough time to play with their children. In particular, lack of time and work-related responsibilities were the most frequently mentioned

challenges. Parent 2 clearly expressed this situation by stating that “I cannot allocate enough time. I also need to deal with household chores and take care of the other siblings.” Similarly, Parent 3 emphasized the same issue, explaining that “I cannot always spare time because I have to manage household chores and take care of the other children.” Parent 4 also highlighted time constraints, noting that “our time is limited because we are working, and my child has recently started the second grade and needs to focus on schoolwork.”

Some parents (n = 5) stated that their work life directly affects the time they can devote to play. Parent 6 explained, “No, I do not have enough time. Since I am a shopkeeper, I am usually at the store. When social life and work responsibilities overlap, it becomes difficult to find enough time for play.” Similarly, Parent 7 noted that “we do not have enough time to play during the week because my child attends daycare. We try to fit many things into three or four hours. However, our weekends are usually more enjoyable and of better quality.”

Only Parent 1 reported not experiencing any significant difficulties and presented a more positive situation: “Yes, we can do all kinds of activities together, and I do not experience any difficulties.”

Parents were finally asked the question, “In your opinion, what does it mean to be a play-friendly parent, and how would you evaluate yourself in this respect?” The responses were analyzed and organized into codes and themes, and the results are presented in Table 8.

Most participants (n = 5) defined a play-friendly parent as someone who understands the child, provides support, and remains emotionally present. Parent 1 described play-friendly parenting by stating that “it ensures that the child never feels alone. I think the child feels that they have a parent who understands them.”

Some participants also described play-friendly parenting as a form of conscious or intentional parenting. Parent 4 expressed this view by stating that “a play-friendly parent equals a conscious parent,” thereby associating the concept with pedagogical awareness.

Several parents (n = 3) evaluated play as a process that strengthens social skills. Parent 5 explained that

Table 8: Parents’ perceptions of play-friendly parenting

Theme	Code	f (Frequency)	% (Percentage)
Supportive	Understanding the Child Not Making the Child Feel Alone Sense of Trust	4	40
Participatory	Initiating Play Playing Together Allocating Time	5	50
Intentional Parenting Approach	Pedagogical Approach Importance of Play in Learning	3	30
Social Skills	Emotional Sharing Empathy Positive Attitude	3	30
Flexible	Balancing the Child’s Wishes and Parental Guidance	2	20%

“a good parent and a good family model is someone who spends time with their child and shares emotions with them. “When I spend time playing with my child, I observe that they become calmer and generally happier.”

A smaller number of parents (n = 2) perceived play-friendly parenting as a flexible process based on mutual adaptation. Parent 9 stated that “a play-friendly parent is someone who tries to play games with their child without upsetting them—sometimes following the child’s wishes and sometimes guiding the activity according to their own preferences. Although I usually fit this model, sometimes there can be difficulties.”

Parent 10 similarly defined a play-friendly parent as “a parent who makes time for the child and tries to play the games the child wants. Although not always, I believe that I am mostly a play-friendly parent.” In addition, Parent 8 described play-friendly parenting by stating that “in my opinion, play-friendly parents are those who do not dislike games and help their

children enjoy them as well. I think I am such a parent.”

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine how parents of preschool-aged children conceptualize play-friendly parenting and revealed that parents’ experiences related to play processes are shaped around five main dimensions. These dimensions can be understood as supporting children’s access to play, making time and space available for play, recognizing its importance, engaging actively in play processes, and viewing play as a fundamental aspect of children’s development. The findings suggest that parents evaluate their children’s play experiences not merely as recreational activities but also as a developmental necessity and an interaction process that strengthens the parent-child relationship.

One of the main findings highlights the important role parents play in supporting children’s opportunities to engage in play. Most participants emphasized that preparing suitable environments for play is not incidental but rather part of their responsibilities as caregivers. This view is consistent with prior research, which describes play as a key activity supporting children’s physical, social, and cognitive development during early childhood (Ginsburg, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2013). In addition, research suggests that when parents intentionally structure both physical and social contexts to support play, children’s ability to explore and learn is enhanced (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012). From this point of view, parental attitudes toward providing access to play appear to have a direct influence on the nature and quality of children’s play experiences.

Another theme emerging from the findings relates to how parents manage time and space for play within daily life. Participants frequently noted that demanding work schedules and everyday responsibilities can reduce the time available for shared play. This finding corresponds with earlier research showing a strong relationship between how parents allocate their time and children’s involvement in play activities (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Pellegrini & Smith, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that contemporary lifestyle patterns

may limit children's opportunities for unstructured play while also constraining parental involvement (Gray, 2013). Despite these constraints, the findings reveal intentionally setting aside time for play can strengthen parent-child interactions and contribute to children's emotional security (Milteer et al., 2012).

The findings further indicate that the value parents attribute to play reflects their perceptions of children's developmental processes. Parents who participated in the study described play not only as a form of recreation but also as a meaningful process that supports children's learning, problem-solving abilities, and social interaction. This view is consistent with previous studies that identify play-based learning as a significant pedagogical approach in early childhood education (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Tuğrul et al., 2014). Studies suggest that play supports the development of creativity, imagination, and social interaction skills while also enhancing children's learning motivation (Wood, 2014). Therefore, parents' perceptions of the value of play may play a critical role in shaping the quality of children's play experiences.

Another point emerging from the findings concerns how parental involvement in play shapes the parent-child relationship. Many participants mentioned that spending time playing together strengthens communication and helps them gain a deeper understanding of their children's feelings and perspectives. Similar patterns have been reported in the literature, where parent-child interaction is shown to play a key role in children's social and emotional development (Rogoff, 2003; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). In addition, research indicates that when parents are actively involved in play, children's social interaction skills tend to develop further and relational bonds may become stronger (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). In this sense, parental engagement in play can be seen as a meaningful contributor to children's developmental experiences.

The final dimension emerging from the findings concerns parents' perception of play as a developmental right of the child. A considerable number of participants emphasized that play is an indispensable element of children's development and that children's right to play should be supported. This finding parallels studies emphasizing that children's

right to play is recognized internationally as a fundamental child right (Lester & Russell, 2010). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also emphasizes that play is an essential component of children's developmental needs and that the right to play should be protected. Accordingly, parents' perception of play as a right may contribute to greater awareness regarding the importance of supporting children's play experiences.

Overall, the findings show that play-friendly parenting is experienced as a multidimensional process. Parents not only participate in play activities with their children but also engage in various parenting practices such as facilitating access to play, allocating time for play, attributing value to play, and recognizing play as an essential component of child development. In this regard, play-friendly parenting can be considered an important parenting approach that strengthens parent-child interaction and supports children's developmental experiences during early childhood.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to examine the play-friendly parenting perspectives of parents with preschool-aged children and the play processes they experience with their children. The findings point to parents experience play-friendly parenting as a multidimensional parenting approach. While supporting their children's play experiences, parents not only participate in play activities but also engage in practices such as facilitating children's access to play, allocating time and space for play, attributing value to play, and recognizing play as an important component of child development.

The findings also show that playing together strengthens the parent-child relationship, supports children's social and emotional development, and enhances family communication. From this perspective, play-friendly parenting can be considered an important parenting approach that strengthens parent-child interaction in early childhood.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical implications can be drawn for the field of early childhood education. First, considering the importance of parental support for children's play

experiences, parent education programs may place greater emphasis on play-based parenting approaches. Family education programs and workshops organized in early childhood education institutions could increase parents' awareness of the importance of playing with their children.

In addition, incorporating more play-based activities into family involvement practices in preschool institutions may encourage parents to experience play with their children. Such practices may contribute to the development of positive parental attitudes toward play and promote more active parental participation in children's play processes.

This study also has several limitations. The research was conducted with a relatively small number of participants, and the findings reflect the experiences of a specific sample group. Therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited. Future studies involving larger samples and parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds may provide deeper insights into how play-friendly parenting is experienced across different contexts.

Furthermore, future research may include quantitative studies examining the effects of parental participation in play on different developmental domains of children. Such studies may provide additional evidence regarding the role of play-friendly parenting in supporting children's development.

Ethics Statements:

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the ... University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee. The research was reviewed and approved in accordance with the ethical principles of the committee (Decision No: 91/117, dated 13 February 2026; Application No: 2026-YÖNP-0097).

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any individual or institution within the scope of this study.

REFERENCES

1. Ayan, S., & Memiş, A. U. (2012). Erken çocukluk döneminde oyun. Selçuk Üniversitesi Beden Eğitimi ve Spor Bilim Dergisi , 14(2), 143 - 149.
2. Barnett, L. A. (2007). The nature of playfulness in young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43(4), 949-958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2007.02.018>
3. Cabrera, N. J., Karberg, E., Malin, J. L., & Aldoney, D. (2017). The magic of play: Low-income mothers' and fathers' playfulness and children's emotion regulation and vocabulary skills. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 38(6), 757-771. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21682>
4. Children's Access to Play in School (2019). Children's access to play in school quality criteria the play-friendly school label. https://playworkfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Play-friendly-Schools_ME-Gloucestershire-5DEC18_Flyer_FINAL.pdf
5. Cohen, D. (2009). Playing with fire: Promoting play and playfulness in toddlers and families exposed to recurrent rocket fire. In R. Pat-Horenczyk, D. Brom, & J. M. Vogel (Eds.), *Helping children cope with trauma: Individual, family and community perspectives* (pp. 101-116). Routledge.
6. Cohen, E., Pat-Horenczyk, R., & Haar-Shamir, D. (2014). Making room for play: An innovative intervention for toddlers and families under rocket fire. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 42(4), 336-345. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-013-0439-0>
7. Cole, P. M., & Jacobs, A. E. (2018). From children's expressive control to emotion regulation: Looking back, looking ahead. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 15(6), 658-677. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2018.1438888>
8. Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches*. 4th Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks
9. Çobanoğlu, N., & Demir, S. (2023). Investigation of preschool teachers' approaches towards inclusion, inclusion competencies and classroom management skills. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 10(3), 1868-1885.
10. Denham, S. A., Blair, K. A., DeMulder, E., Levitas, J., Sawyer, K., Auerbach-Major, S., & Queenan, P. (2003). Preschool emotional competence: Pathway to social competence? *Child Development*, 74(1), 238-256. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00533>

- 11.Devlet Memiş K. & Gürsoy F. (2022). Annelerin oyun ve oyun materyallerine ilişkin düşünceleri ile çocuğuyla etkileşimli oyun oynama davranışlarının incelenmesi. *IGUSABDER*, 17, 540-557.
- 12.Duch, H., Marti, M., Wu, W., Snow, R., & Garcia, V. (2019). CARING: The impact of a parent-child, play-based intervention to promote latino head start children's social-emotional development. *The journal of primary prevention*, 40(2), 171-188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-019-00542-7>
- 13.Eisenberg, N., Cumberland, A., & Spinrad, T. L. (1998). Parental socialization of emotion. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9(4), 241-273.
- 14.Elkind, D. (2007). *The power of play: Learning what comes naturally*. Da Capo Press Lifelong Books.
- 15.England-Mason, G., Andrews, K., Atkinson, L., & Gonzalez, A. (2023). Emotion socialization parenting interventions targeting emotional competence in young children: A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 100, 102252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2023.102252>
- 16.Englebright Fox, J., & Schirrmacher, R. (2015). *Art and creative development for young children (8th ed.)*. Cengage Learning.
- 17.Fisher, R. K., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., & Glick Gryfe, S. (2008). Conceptual split? Parents' and experts' perceptions of play in the 21st century. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29(4), 305-316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.04.006>
- 18.Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218-226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218>
- 19.Ginsburg, K.R. (2007) The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119, 182-191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>
- 20.Gökşen, C. (2014). Oyunların çocukların gelişimine katkıları ve Gaziantep çocuk oyunları. *Journal of Turkish Research Institute*, 52, 229-259. <https://doi.org/10.14222/Turkiyat1241>
- 21.Gratz, K. L., & Roemer, L. (2004). Multidimensional assessment of emotion regulation and dysregulation: Development, factor structure, and initial validation of the difficulties in emotion regulation scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 26(1), 41-54. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOBA.0000007455.08539.94>
- 22.Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463.
- 23.Gray, P., Lancy, D., & Bjorklund, D. (2023). Decline in independent activity as a cause of decline in children's mental well-being: Summary of the evidence. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 260, 113352. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2023.02.004>
- 24.Gross, J. J. (2002). Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences. *Psychophysiology*, 39(3), 281-291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0048577201393198>
- 25.Gülen, S., & Barış, S. (2021). Ebeveynlerin çocuklarıyla oyun oynamama nedenlerinin incelenmesi. *Gazi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 7(1), 20-38.
- 26.Hofferth, S. L., & Sandberg, J. F. (2001). Changes in American children's time, 1981-1997. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 6, 193-229.
- 27.Holland, S. K. (2012). Parental perceptions about the importance of play in the first three years [Unpublished master's thesis]. Victoria University of Wellington.
- 28.Kemple, K. M., & Nissenberg, S. A. (2000). Nurturing creativity in early childhood education: Families are part of it. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(1), 67-71. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009555805909>
- 29.Koslinski, M. C., Gomes, R. C., Rodrigues, B. L. C., Andrade, F. M., & Bartholo, T. L. (2022). Home learning environment and cognitive development during early childhood education. *Educação & Sociedade*, 43, 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1590/es.249592_in
- 30.Koyuncuoğlu, B. (2017). Anasınıfına devam eden dört-beş yaş çocukların yaratıcı düşünme becerilerine duyu eğitim programının etkililiğinin incelenmesi [Yayımlanmamış doktora tezi]. Hacettepe Üniversitesi.
- 31.Kwaśniewska, J. M., Gralewski, J., Witkowska, E. M., Kostrzewska, M., & Lebuda, I. (2018). Mothers'

- personality traits and the climate for creativity they build with their children. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 27, 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2017.11.002>
32. Léniz-Maturana, L., Vilaseca, R., & Leiva, D. (2023). Non-intrusive maternal style as a mediator between playfulness and children's development for low-income Chilean adolescent mothers. *Children*, 10(4), 609. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children10040609>
33. Lester, S., & Russell, W. (2010). Children's right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide. Bernard van Leer Foundation.
34. Lieberman, J. N. (1977). *Playfulness: Its relationship to imagination and creativity*. Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-449450-3.50011-4>
35. Menashe-Grinberg, A., & Atzaba-Poria, N. (2017). Mother-child and father-child play interaction: The importance of parental playfulness as a moderator of the links between parental behavior and child negativity. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 38(6), 772-784. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21678>
36. Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage. London.
37. Milteer, R. M., Ginsburg, K. R., & Mulligan, D. A. (2012). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bond: Focus on children in poverty. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), e204-e213.
38. Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications.
39. Niran, Ş. (2024). Oyun dostu ebeveyn ölçeğinin geliştirilmesi ve oyun dostu yaratıcı ebeveyn programının çocuk ve ebeveyn üzerindeki etkisinin incelenmesi [Yayımlanmamış doktora tezi]. İstanbul Aydın Üniversitesi.
40. Özerbaş, M. A. (2011). Yaratıcı düşünme öğrenme ortamının akademik başarı ve bilgilerin kalıcılığına etkisi. *Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 31(3), 675-705.
41. Patton M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, Ca., Sage.
42. Pellegrini, A. D., & Smith, P. K. (2005). *The nature of play: Great apes and humans*. Guilford Press.
43. Petrova, A. (2022). Çocukluk döneminde çocuğu olan Özbek ve Türk annelerin oyuna yönelik görüşlerinin incelenmesi [Yayımlanmamış yüksek lisans tezi]. Eskişehir Anadolu Üniversitesi.
44. PLAYBOARD. (2019). *Play for parents guide: Play matters for ages 0-18*. www.playboard.org
45. Pyle, A., & Danniel, E. (2017). A continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. *Early Education and Development*, 28(3), 274-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771>
46. Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.
47. Russ, S. W. (2003). Play and creativity: Developmental issues. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 47(3), 291-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830308594>
48. Russ, S. W. (2004). Pretend play in childhood: Foundation of adult creativity. *American Psychological Association*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14282-000>
49. Rutherford, H. J., Wallace, N. S., Laurent, H. K., & Mayes, L. C. (2015). Emotion regulation in parenthood. *Developmental Review*, 36, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2014.12.008>
50. Samuelsson, I. P., & Carlsson, M. A. (2008). The playing learning child: Towards a pedagogy of early childhood. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(6), 623-641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830802497265>
51. Shen, X. (2020). Constructing an interactionist framework for playfulness research: Adding psychological situations and playful states. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 51(5), 536-558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2020.1748551>
52. Shorer, M., & Leibovich, L. (2020). Young children's emotional stress reactions during the COVID-19 outbreak and their associations with parental emotion regulation and parental playfulness. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(6), 861-871. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1806830>
53. Shorer, M., Swissa, O., Levavi, P., & Swissa, A. (2019). Parental playfulness and children's emotional regulation: The mediating role of parents'

- emotional regulation and the parent-child relationship. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(2), 210-220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1612385>
54. Shorer, M., Zilker, N., Salomon, A., & Spiegelman, N. (2023). Parental playfulness as a mediator of the association between parents' emotional difficulties and children's psychosocial adjustment. *Early Child Development and Care*, 193(9-10), 1173-1187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2023.2243395>
55. Sutton-Smith, B. (1980). Children's play: Some sources of play theorizing. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 1980(9), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.23219800903>
56. Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shannon, J. D., Cabrera, N. J., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). Fathers and mothers at play with their 2- and 3-year-olds: Contributions to language and cognitive development. *Child Development*, 75(6), 1806-1820. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2004.00818.x>
57. Tuğrul, B. (2017). Dünya oyunun gücünde uzlaştı şimdi bu gücü çocukların yararına kullanma zamanı: Hadi Türkiye... Erken Çocukluk Çalışmaları Dergisi, 1(2), 259-266. <https://doi.org/10.24130/eccd-jecs.196720171228>
58. Tuğrul, B. (2018). Oyunun gücü. In A. B. Aksoy (Ed.), *Çocuk ve oyun* (pp. 10-29). Hedef CS Basın Yayın.
59. Tuğrul, B., Metin Aslan, Ö., Ertürk, H. G., & Altınkaynak, Ş. Ö. (2014). Anaokuluna devam eden altı yaşındaki çocuklar ile annelerinin oyuna ilişkin görüşlerinin incelenmesi. *İnönü Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 15(1), 97-116.
60. Uludağ, G. (2021). Views of preschool teachers on using out-of-school learning environments in preschool education. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 8(2), 1225-1249.
61. Vygotsky, L. S. (1966). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology*, 5(3), 6-18. <https://doi.org/10.2753/RPO1061-040505036>
62. Warash, B. G., Root, A. E., & Devito Doris, M. (2016). Parents' perceptions of play: a comparative study of spousal perspectives. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(5-6), 958-966. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1237511>
63. Weiler, S. O. (2020). Joint pretend play at home: Parents and children as play partners. <https://www.popatplay.org/post/parents-and-children-as-play-partners>
64. Weisberg, D. S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2013). Guided play: Where curricular goals meet a playful pedagogy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 7(2), 104-112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12015>
65. Wiltz, N. W., & Fein, G. G. (2006). Play as children see it. In D. P. Fromberg & D. Bergen (Eds.), *Play from birth to twelve: Contexts, perspectives, and meanings* (2nd ed., pp. 127-139). Routledge.
66. Wood, E. A. (2014). Free choice and free play in early childhood education: Troubling the discourse. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 22(1), 4-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2013.830562>
67. Wu, S. (2021). A co-constructed picture of learning in play by teachers and parents. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(1), 84-97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X20971316>
68. Yeşilyurt, E. (2020). Yaratıcılık ve yaratıcı düşünme: Tüm boyut ve paydaşlarıyla kapsayıcı bir derleme çalışması. *OPUS-Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 15(25), 3874-3915. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opus.662721>
69. Yıldız, C., & Güney Karaman, N. (2017). Creativity and perspective taking in early childhood period. *Ankara University, Journal of Faculty of Educational Sciences*, 50(2), 33-58.
70. Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., Rudolph, J., Kerin, J., & Bohadana-Brown, G. (2022). Parent emotional regulation: A meta-analytic review of its association with parenting and child adjustment. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 46(1), 63-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01650254211051086>
71. Zosh, J. M., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: A review of the evidence (White paper). The LEGO Foundation.