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A Cross-Cultural Study on Outdoor Play: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices *

Fatma Yalçın [1], Feyza Tantekin Erden [2]

Abstract

The aim of this multi-case study was to explore Turkish and Finnish teachers' beliefs and practices of outdoor play. The participants consisted of seven Turkish and seven Finnish early childhood teachers. Data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with teachers and observation of teachers' outdoor play practices. The main differences between two cases concerned barriers to outdoor play and practices of outdoor play. Finnish teachers identified no such barriers, whereas Turkish teachers stated they encountered many barriers to applying outdoor play practices. Thus, Finnish teachers practiced outdoor play regularly in all seasons while Turkish teachers applied outdoor play only in good weather.

Keywords

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Introduction

The critical importance of outdoor play for children's well-being and learning is grounded in a strong body of research (Aasen, Grindheim, & Waters, 2009; Bento & Dias, 2017; Fjørtoft, 2000; Louv, 2005). In addition, asked about childhood, most adults will probably describe playing in outdoor environments, such as parks, streets and playgrounds (Kemple, Oh, Kenney, & Smith-Bonahue, 2016; Louv, 2005). However, studies from the past forty years have suggested that in many places around the world, both children and adults have limited access to the outdoors (Clements, 2004; Knight, 2009; Waller et al., 2017). Today, many children spend time indoors for many reasons. The barriers that decrease children's opportunities to be outdoors are grouped into four categories. Time (nature-starved curriculum, time-poor parents, lack of free-range play), fear (stranger danger, dangerous streets, risk-averse culture), technology (rise of screen time), and space (vanishing green space) are four aspects suggested by the Wild Network (The Wild Network, n.d, as cited in Waller et al., 2017).

Consequently, most children, especially those living in urban areas, do not have opportunities to experience and investigate dynamic outdoor environments (Louv, 2005; Waller et al., 2017). Karsten (2005) described a new type of childhood in which children rarely play outside and more frequently play indoors (mostly digital play) than previous generations. Children, therefore, perceive natural environments as abstract concepts rather than reality (Louv, 2005). Gill (2007) named today's children the *bubble-wrap generation* to emphasize their lack of first-hand experience with outdoor environments.

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[1] Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Turkey, fay@metu.edu.tr

[2] Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Turkey, tfeyza@metu.edu.tr

Similarly, Louv (2005) introduced the term *nature deficit disorder* in reference to deficiencies, such as attention disorders, depression and failure to appropriately use the senses, frequently observed in recent years. Waller, Sandseter, Wyver, Arlemalm-Hagser, and Maynard (2010), therefore, suggested that early childhood educators face a critical moment to re-evaluate their stance and attitudes toward outdoor play.

Early childhood institutions are perceived as having a key role in the provision of outdoor play for young children (Renick, 2009; Waller et al., 2010). The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale [ECERS-R] (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2014) accreditation criteria require that half-day programs include 30 minutes of outdoor play and full-day programs at least 60 minutes. However, in many countries, early childhood education (ECE) teaching and learning standards generally focus on cognitive-linguistic skills. To illustrate, national ECE policies in several Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are based on readiness for school. Accordingly, building interiors are designated as major learning environments (OECD, 2006), and children's access to outdoor settings in ECE institutions is limited to schools' focus on teaching and learning (Waite & Pratt, 2011; Waller & Davis, 2014). Similarly, Bae (2010) and Waller and Davis (2014) asserted that many countries in the world applied a curriculum based on school readiness and performativity, which result in less time spent outdoors. Herrington, Brunelle, and Brussoni (2017) supported this claim by proposing that free play, which was previously accepted as a major work for children, has lately been perceived as an activity that distracts children from focusing on academic-oriented activities. Dean (2019) claimed cultures of countries such as the U.K. and the U.S.A, where standardized schooling is internalized, might challenge play-centered practices. What Dean (2019) had intended to express is explicitly experienced by Fritz, Smyrni, and Roberst (2014). These researchers conducted a study to determine the major challenges that they encountered while managing a nature-based program (*Waldkindergarten* model of Germany) in the U.S.A. They suggested that a community's approach to ECE and how children should utilize from early education could differ from one culture to another, although both countries (German and the U.S.A) have the same goal for ECE—generate a place for play and support school readiness. Due to differences in the cultural understanding of and the expectation from ECE, they faced many challenges regarding different aspects such as play versus academics in early childhood, the definition of the role of a teacher, safety versus risky play, the concept of fun, and nature and childhood.

Regarding culture, Tovey (2007) and Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, and Sleet (2012) identified rising anxiety about children's safety as a common feature of modern society in the 20th century. Similarly, Malone (2007), Little (2006) and Waller et al. (2017) highlighted that overprotective parenting styles and different socialization practices may affect teaching and learning practices (e.g outdoor play and risky play) in ECE settings, which reflect the values of society and especially the parents whose children attend them. Studies investigating teachers' outdoor-play practices (Cevher-Kalburan & Yurt, 2011; Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik, 2018; Copeland et al., 2012; Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; Kos & Jerman, 2013; McClintic & Petty, 2015) supported the claims of Little (2006) and Tovey (2007) as most teachers identified parental concerns about weather and safety as barriers to applying outdoor play in preschool. In parallel with overprotective parenting, there is also a change in the conception of childhood. The image of a child that helps visualize a child as a resilient being has been replaced with a vulnerable child needing a continuous safeguard (Herrington et al., 2017). However, as Waller et al. (2017) and Garrick (2009) argued, this might not be right for all children around the world. Indeed, in Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway), there is an image of childhood that is subtly related to Nordic culture and thus considerably affects ECE practices in this culture. According to this image, happy young children are those who play outdoors most of the day, no matter what the season and/or the weather (Bennett, 2010; Borge, Nordhagen, & Lie, 2003). As a result, in Nordic pedagogy, play,

particularly outdoor play, is greatly emphasized, as it allows children to construct their own learning patterns (Bennett, 2010; Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015). That is why they pay equal attention to the provision of outdoor and indoor learning experiences, allocating funding for outdoor environments and recommending outdoor play at the ECE policy and practice levels (Lysklett, 2017; Marttila, 2013; Waller et al., 2017). By tradition and in policy, Nordic countries do not limit outdoor play to preschools' immediate outdoor environments: outdoor play sessions might be carried out in forests and other challenging environments to enrich children's relationship with nature (Amus, 2013; Lysklett, 2017). Martenson (2011, as cited in Lysklett, 2017) suggested that the Nordic countries have a long tradition of giving the children freedom to play actively in various natural outdoor settings. In these countries, many preschools conduct weekly outdoor-play sessions in forests, and others adopt the *Forest School* approach, which requires daily play sessions in forests regardless of weather conditions. In related sources, it is frequently emphasized that the Nordic philosophy of *"Friluftsliv*—free air life" for all Nordic citizens gave birth to the Forest School approach (Borge et al., 2003; Leather, 2018; Linde, 2010).

In contrast to the progress made in many European (e.g. England, Germany, Australia) and particularly Nordic countries, outdoor play needs improvement at both the policy and practice levels in Turkey. In addition to the country level, implementation of outdoor play differs from rural to urban areas, public to private preschools, even teacher to teacher (Ata Doğan & Boz, 2019; Tantekin-Erden & Güner-Alpaslan, 2017). In this respect, research investigating teachers' views and practices on outdoor play found that outdoor environments commonly are used for free play only in good weather due to factors such as high adult–child ratios, parental concern about illness and a lack of appropriate outdoor play equipment and materials (Aktaş-Arnas & Tepebağ, 2017; Cevher-Kalburan & Yurt, 2011; Çetken & Sevimli-Çelik, 2018). Similarly, Turkish parents, pre- and in-service teachers perceived outdoor play as dangerous and damaging and approached it with caution (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014, 2015; Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016; İpek-Güler & Ergül, 2016). As these studies indicate, outdoor play is a recent field but a developing one in Turkish ECE. Yet, there is a growing interest in outdoor education, particularly in forest schools and nature preschools; these institutions intend to help children reconnect with nature. In this respect, several programs for training teachers and other professionals interested in this venture have been conducted in recent years. Moreover, the number of forest/nature preschools has been increasing in different parts of the country. As a result, the number of empirical research focusing on this issue (Dilek & Atasoy, 2020; Eroğlu, 2018; Kahriman-Pamuk & Ahi, 2019; Koyuncu, 2019; Paslı, 2019) has been rising. Additionally, there has been a recent initiation by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey to encourage teachers to utilize outdoor learning environments, including museums, botanic parks, factories, libraries, etc. (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018). Compared to European countries, they are quite recent in Turkey and limited in numbers, but this is beneficial for Turkish early childhood education.

As the current state-of-the-art on outdoor play indicates, when the issues are outdoor play and outdoor learning, there is a sharp distinction among countries. It is a matter of interest as to what the underlying reasons that lead to this clear distinction are. On the one hand, there is the Nordic tradition of encouraging children to play outside regularly; on the other hand, there is another mentality that this may decrease children's opportunities, both in and out of preschool settings. Therefore, the ECE researchers, holding the belief that children should be independent active learners, enterprising and self-regulated, need to ask themselves whether the practices, particularly outdoor play practices, in ECE settings, match the postmodern image of a child. With this question in mind, the researchers in the current study focused on outdoor play practices in two different countries—Turkey and Finland. Yet, Clark and Peterson (1986) pointed out that a teaching process is better comprehended when every teacher's beliefs and practices are investigated under the same light in order to identify a connection between their beliefs and practices. As teachers are the decision-makers of their own classroom and

curriculum, it is important to investigate their beliefs regarding outdoor play, as it may influence their outdoor play practices.

As for another motive for the study, coming from Turkey, where children are allowed to play outdoors mostly in warmer weather, the present researchers wondered about differences in Nordic and Turkish viewpoints on this issue. It is an interesting question as to why Nordic countries, which are much colder than Turkey and many other countries, believe that outdoor play should be practiced in all weather conditions, whereas countries like Turkey practice outdoor play only in good weather conditions. Perhaps, the only difference among countries is not weather conditions. There might be several other underlying reasons that lead to this difference among cultures. That is why to respond to this question not only from a Nordic but also from a Turkish perspective seems significant to us. As the outdoor play practices in Turkey might be similar to those of many other countries, Turkish teachers' beliefs and practices might act as a guide for the stakeholders with a similar culture, parenting style, and early childhood pedagogy as Turkey. This study, therefore, investigates Turkish and Finnish teachers' beliefs and practices of outdoor-play. The choice of Finland has two justifications. First, similar to the other Nordic countries, Finland is the second-most forested area in the European Union, and Finnish legislation permits free access to natural environments (Ministry of the Environment, 2015), a right Finns eagerly utilize in their free time (Metsähallitus, 2018). Outdoor activities and life, therefore, are Finnish traditions (Karppinen, 2012), and to varying degrees, outdoor and nature activities are involved in teaching at almost all school levels (Marttila, 2013). In addition, compared to many OECD countries, Finland has strong, well-established education system, described as a good model (Kyrö, 2011; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012; OECD, 2012). For instance, Finnish students have had great success on Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests (OECD, 2016; OECD PISA, 2012), largely attributed to the Finnish ECE system (Kupiainen, Hautamaki, & Karjalainen, 2009; Valijarvi et al., 2007; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). For these reasons, including Finland in this study presented a good opportunity to learn about Finnish ECE and the integration of outdoor play into ECE daily practices. To this end, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are Turkish and Finnish teachers' beliefs on outdoor play?
2. What are Turkish and Finnish teachers' practices on outdoor play?
3. What are the similarities and differences across Turkish and Finnish teachers' beliefs and practices on outdoor play?

Method

The present qualitative study used a multi-case approach with two cases. The case is one group of ECE teachers at a preschool with an outdoor environment where outdoor play was practiced as much as possible. Merriam (2009) defined a case study as a detailed examination of one setting, subject, event or depository of documents. Similarly, Creswell (2007) described case studies as a qualitative research approach in which the inquirer investigates a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time by collecting in-depth data from various information sources, including observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports. Yin (2009) explained that the multiple-case study design is based on replication logic, using the same data collection and analysis procedures in each case. A multi-case approach was considered to be appropriate for the current study as it addressed an issue (belief and practices of outdoor-play in preschool settings) by examining two bounded settings (public preschools in Ankara, Turkey, and in Helsinki, Finland) over a specific timeframe (two months). Interviews and observations were used to approach the cases from two different perspectives (Turkish and Finnish ECE teachers).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the cases examined in this study. In this method, the researcher selects individuals and settings which can best help understand the issue investigated (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Typical case sampling, which aims to define and exemplify what is typical to the individuals unfamiliar with the setting, were used in the current study. In this strategy, the intent is not to make generalized statements about the experiences of all participants (Patton, 2002).As stated, the issue studied here was Turkish and Finnish ECE teachers' beliefs and practices of outdoor play. Considering the research question and the issue explored, two preschools with an outdoor environment and outdoor play were chosen as the study settings. The participants consisted of 14 ECE teachers employed at the target preschools. All the participants were interviewed and observed. Table 1 shows the detailed demographic characteristics of the Turkish and Finnish teachers.

Table 1. Participant Teachers' Demographic Characteristics

		Turkish	**Finnish**
Themes	**Codes**	**f (n=7)**	**f(n=7)**
Age of teacher	20-30	1	1
	31-40	4	1
	41-50	2	3
	51-65	-	2
Educational Background	BA- University	7	3
	BA-Polytechnic	-	1
	Vocational Upper Secondary	-	3
Professional experience	1-10	2	1
	11-20	4	5
	21-30	1	-
	31-40	-	1
Working age group	2.5-4	-	1
	3-4	2	
	3-5	-	2
	4-5	2	-
	5-6	2	4
Training related to play	Undergraduate course	5	3
	Seminar	3	5
	In-service training	2	4
	Workshop	-	5
Training related to outdoor play	Undergraduate course	3	1
	Seminar	-	2
	In-service training	-	3
	Workshop	-	4

As Table 1 indicates, most of the teachers were between 30 and 50-years-old. A bachelor's degree was the most common educational background among the participants. Most of the participants had been teaching for ten years or more. Almost all the teachers were working with a same-age group, yet three of the Finnish teachers were working with children in a mixed-age group. Both Turkish and Finnish teachers attended at least one training related to play (such as an undergraduate course, seminar, in-service training, or workshop). As for outdoor play, only three of the Turkish teachers stated they attended an undergraduate course of outdoor play, whereas all the Finnish teachers expressed that they joined at least one training, including an undergraduate course, seminar, in-service training, or workshop.

Preschool Settings in Ankara, Turkey, and in Helsinki, Finland

This study was conducted in two preschools—one in Ankara, Turkey, and one in Helsinki, Finland. Table 2 presents the characteristics of these preschools.

Table 2. Characteristics of School Settings in Ankara and Helsinki

	Preschool in Ankara, Turkey	**Preschool in Helsinki, Finland**
Year of establishment	2006	2002
Age group served	3-6 years old	1-6 years old
Number of students	150	110
Curriculum	National Early Childhood Education Program (MONE, 2013)	National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC (Finnish National Board of Education, 2003) National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010)
Additional applied projects and programs	Eco-school project of the Foundation for Environmental Education "TEMA Kids"	Metsamörri activities (nature and environmental-education program)
Characteristics of outdoor playground	2,900-metre-square areas Different surfaces such as • Soil-covered • Gravel-covered • Concrete-covered • Grass-covered Play equipment • Slides, • Swings, • Seesaws, • Climbing structures • Sandbox Other areas • Planting areas, • Pergolas • small zoo	5,500-metre-square areas Different surfaces such as • Soil-covered • Gravel-covered • Concrete-covered • Grass-covered Play equipment • Hill covered with artificial turf, • Slides, • Swings, • Wooden house, • Seesaws, • Benches, • Sandbox • Different-sized wooden logs Other areas • Planting areas

As Table 2 indicates, both schools were established after 2000. However, they differ in terms of the age group they serve. The Turkish preschool serves children in the age group of 3–6, whereas the other serves children belonging to the age group of 1–6. Further, the number of students attending these schools also differs, with the Turkish school serving more students than the other. In terms of similarities, both schools apply the national early childhood curriculum of their countries. Additionally, both schools have included nature and environmental education programs such as the Eco-School Project, an environmental education program conducted by the Turkish Foundation for Combating Soil Erosion, for Reforestation, and the Protection of Natural Habitats (TEMA Kids), and Metsämörri activities (Metsämörri is a fictional character living in forest and being used to teach children environmental awareness). With respect to the characteristics of their outdoor playground, both schools have a few similarities, as well as differences. To illustrate, the outdoor environment of the Turkish school occupies a smaller area. The grounds of both outdoor environments, however, have varying

surfaces, such as a soil-covered surface, gravel-covered surface, concrete-covered surface, and grass-covered surface. Having said that, the play equipment in the playgrounds differ in terms of variety. While both schools provide slides, swings, seesaws, and a sandbox, the Finnish one also has a hill, a wooden house, benches, and wooden logs in its outdoor environment. Further, while both schools have planting areas, the Turkish school also has pergolas and a small zoo.

Data Collection

Various procedures, including semi-structured interviews and observations, were used to collect data. The first author developed interview protocols in both Turkish and English based on a review of the related literature and feedback from two professors in early childhood play and qualitative research in education. Before the final version of the Turkish interview protocols was constructed, four pilot interviews were conducted with Turkish teachers who did not participate in the main study, to evaluate the usability and clarity of the questions. A native English speaker, who also speaks in Turkish and was employed as an ECE teacher in Helsinki, revised both the English and Turkish interview questions to make them equivalent. After revision, the English interview protocol was also piloted with four Finnish teachers who did not participate in the main study. Piloting the interview questions in both contexts provided some advantages, allowing eliminating and revising questions for Turkish and Finnish participants. After the pilot tests, it was decided to change the order of some questions to prevent data loss. In addition, it was noticed that some words in the interview protocol did not have the same meaning in Finnish early childhood terminology. A commission consisting of the first author, a Finnish ECE teacher and a Turkish ECE teacher who spoke English and Finnish revised the questions for cultural appropriateness. Some words were exchanged with similar or different words due to differences in Turkish and Finnish ECE and culture. Listed below are some of the interview questions:

- What is the purpose of children's outdoor play? How does this purpose work for children ‘s imagination, social skills, and motor and cognitive development?
- What is your role in the playground when children are outside?
- How would you describe an ideal outdoor environment (playground) for children in preschools?

Observation was used as the second research tool to confirm teachers’ reports on their outdoor-play practices in the interviews. An observation form containing three parts was prepared by the first author depending on the related literature and the researcher’s informal field experience. Then, the second author revised and re-designed the prepared form. Subsequently, it was presented to academicians interested in outdoor play to attain expert opinion. In the pilot study, it was applied and some additional parts, such as reflective field note(s), were also included. As a result, an observation form with four parts was prepared to guide the observer. The first part recorded general information about the setting, such as the date, time, weather, number of teachers and children and names of the target teacher and preschool. The second part concerned the type of outdoor play activity, the role of the target teacher and the equipment, materials and loose parts used in the activity. In the third part, the observer descriptively noted activities, interactions and conversations without making any subjective interpretations. In addition, the observation form included a section for reflective field notes, which are important for both data collection and analysis because no instrument or machine capable of carefully codified procedures exists (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Before conducting the pilot and the main studies in two different settings, the required ethical measures were taken. To this end, an application was sent to the Human Subjects Review Board of the university in order to obtain the necessary permission to conduct this study. In addition, the participants in both settings were informed about the aim of the study and were asked whether they were willing to participate through the prepared consent form. Data collection was executed in Helsinki as follows. The first author, under the supervision of an ECE professor at Helsinki University, contacted the City of Helsinki’s Department of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to select preschools for

conducting the pilot study and collecting data for the main study. Through that department, the researcher contacted the principals of the suggested preschools via e-mail and obtained their permission. Next, the main study in Finland was conducted to obtain data on outdoor-play practices through interviews with Finnish teachers and observational field notes. The researcher met with the teachers individually to inform them about the study's aim and process. The researcher and the teachers who agreed to participate and signed consent forms scheduled convenient times for the 30–40-minute interviews.

Observational data were obtained from field notes taken during Finnish teachers' implementation of outdoor-play activities. The researcher scheduled the observations to coincide with the Finnish preschool's outdoor-play schedule. Spending the entire day in the preschool when observation sessions were conducted enabled documenting the frequency of outdoor play in the preschool schedule. Based on outdoor-play time and activity, the observations lasted approximately 1½–2 hours. Regarding the total amount of time collecting data, each observation experience has its own rhythm and flow, so there is no ideal amount for observations (Merriam, 2009). Depending on the study purpose, an extended period of observations or shorter, more periodic observations might be appropriate (Merriam, 2009). Following Merriam (2009), the researchers decided where to stop observation sessions for each teacher. At least three outdoor-play activities applied by each target teacher were observed to provide sufficient observational data to answer the research questions and achieve the study purpose.

Data collection for the main study in Turkey followed almost the same procedure as used in Finland. To obtain permission to conduct the study, the first author contacted the principal of the target Turkish preschool. The interview process was also largely the same, but the observation process differed slightly. The Turkish preschool had no set outdoor play schedule, so the observations were scheduled in conjunction with the Turkish teachers and researchers. The time and duration of observations were changed depending on the applied outdoor play activities and ranged from ten minutes and two hours. As in Finland, at least three outdoor play activities with each target teacher were observed to gather sufficient observational data.

Data Analysis

Based on the related literature and the study design, the data obtained from two different cases of the same phenomena were analyzed in two stages. Each case was first individually analyzed taking into account its unique features. Based on this analysis, contextual variables for each case were identified. Second, cross-case analysis was performed to draw comparisons and contrasts between the cases. In cross-case analysis, the researcher studies two or more cases to detect similarities and differences (Yin, 2009). Although the specific details of unique cases might differ, the researcher attempts to develop naturalistic generalizations that fit individual cases (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009).

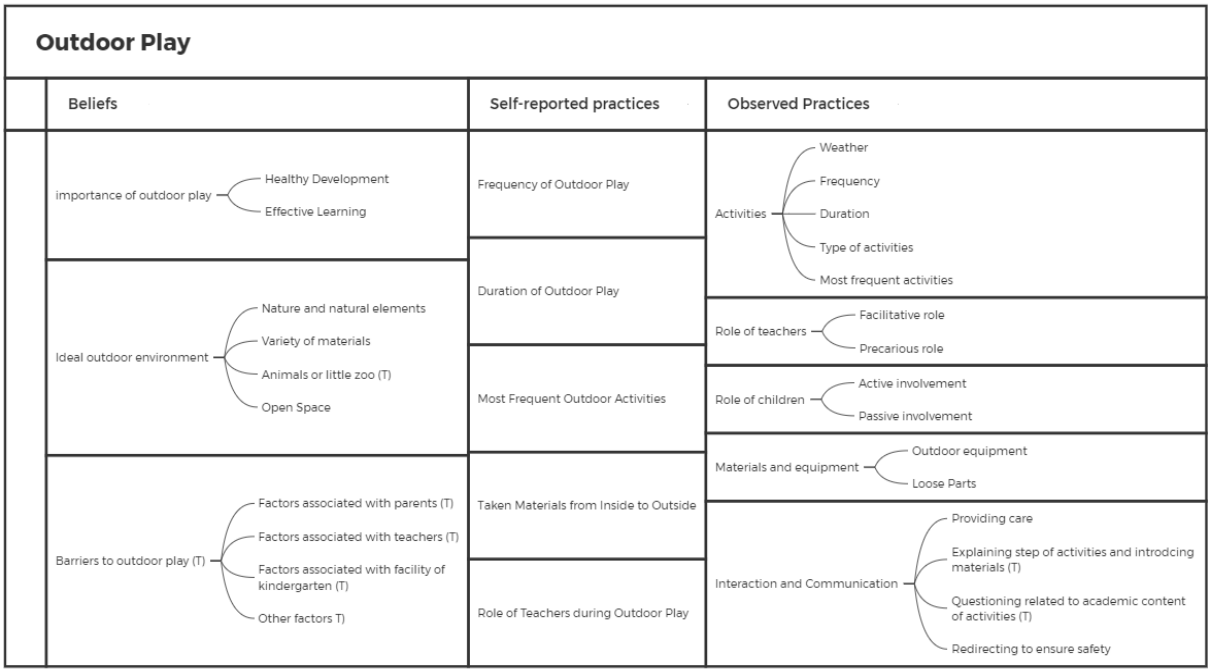
Data analysis began with the researcher typing the field notes, transcribing the audio records and organizing and preparing the obtained data. The second coder, a research assistant in the ECE field, assisted. First, the researcher and the second coder independently examined and coded the organized interview data to highlight the most significant sentences and words related to the study content. Second, the coders compared the codes to determine common themes and discussed possible themes that emerged in the independent coding process. Field notes were also coded by the second coder, who had a role in the observation process. The preliminary codes from the interviews and related literature were used to analyse the field notes. The codes from all the field notes were reviewed to check whether any themes emerged. The analysis involved independent examinations of both the field notes and interviews. The study's validation strategies included triangulation, prolonged engagement and thick description. Additionally, while analyzing transcript data, inter-coding agreement was achieved, and ethical issues were considered to increase the study's reliability.

Limitations

This study, like most case studies, has some limitations. First, due to the nature of the multi-case study, each case still had unique characteristics, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other settings. However, as mentioned, rich, thick descriptions were made to mitigate this limitation. Second, conducting the study in two cultural contexts required limiting data collection to two months. This prevented the researcher from conducting observations in the same season. Teachers' outdoor-play practices were not observed in each season, so the findings on this issue were limited to the results from interviews with teachers. Further research could involve observing teachers' outdoor-play practices during different seasons.

Results

Data obtained from the interviews were analyzed and presented in three main categories (beliefs, self-reported practices, and observed practices), which included several themes and subthemes. Figure 1 summarizes these categories, themes, and some of the subthemes. The codes were presented in the following tables, which also show the frequencies of each code.



Note. T= Case 1 "Turkey"; F=Case 2 "Finland"; Theme and Subthemes that identified at only one case is noted in parentheses by the letter name of the cases

Figure 1. Categories, Themes, and Subthemes Related to Beliefs Concerning Outdoor Play and Self-Reported and Observed Outdoor Play Practices

Early Childhood Teacher's Beliefs of Outdoor Play

Based on the analyses of the interviews and comparison of themes across the two cases, two themes concerning teachers' beliefs of outdoor play emerged. However, the subthemes varied in the two cases. In addition to the same themes, one unique theme with several subthemes from the first case (Turkish teacher) was identified. Table 3 outlines the distinct and shared themes and subthemes of these two cases.

Table 3. Themes and Subthemes of Teachers' Beliefs Related to Outdoor Play Across the Two Cases

Importance of outdoor Play	**Ideal outdoor environment**	**Barriers to outdoor play (T)**
Healthy development • Freedom to move • Run and release energy • Health benefit • Close relation with nature (T) • Socialization (F) • Imagination (F) • Motor skills (F)	Nature and natural elements	Factors associated with parents (T) • Adverse parental attitudes(T) • Parental concerns about safety and health(T) • Negative effects of recent news and media(T)
Effective Learning • Learning by doing • Natural motivation (T) • Long lasting learning (T)	Variety of materials	Factors associated with teachers (T) • Teachers' reluctance regarding(T) proper clothing and inactivity(T) • Teachers' concerns about provision of safety (T) • Lack of practical information about outdoor play (T)
	Open space	Factors associated with facility of preschool • Lack of additional staff (T) • Lack of appropriate playground and equipment (T)
	Animals or little zoo (T)	Other factors (T) • Inclement weather (T)

Note. T= Case 1 "Turkey"; F=Case 2 "Finland"; Theme and Subthemes that identified at only one case is noted in parentheses by the letter name of the cases.

As Table 3 indicates, the importance of outdoor play and an ideal outdoor environment are basically considered identical themes that emerged from both cases, whereas barriers to outdoor play was the unique theme that emerged from case 1. Details about each theme and subthemes, including frequencies across participants, are presented in the following tables.

Theme 1: Importance of Outdoor Play

Table 4. Teachers' Beliefs of Importance of Outdoor Play

		Turkish	**Finnish**
Themes	**Codes**	**f(n=7)**	**f(n=7)**
Healthy development	Freedom to move	5	5
	Run and release energy	4	4
	Health benefit	4	3
	Close relation with nature	4	-
	Socialization	-	4
	Imagination	-	4
	Motor skills	-	4
Effective learning	Learning by doing	6	3
	Natural Motivation	4	-
	Long lasting learning	4	-

Based on Table 4, participating teachers in both cases acknowledged that outdoor play is important for children's healthy development and learning. In this respect, they have distinct and shared beliefs about the reasons why outdoor play is important for children. Five Turkish and five

Finnish teachers stated that outdoor play is important because the outdoor environment, when compared with an indoor environment, provides children with freedom to move. For instance, Turkish Teacher 1 (TT1) stated: "In classroom, you have limited space, so all your movements are restricted. However, outdoor environment provides open space where children move freely." In a similar way, four Turkish and four Finnish teachers also agreed that children run and release energy when they are outdoors. One Turkish teacher supported this view by stating that releasing energy is also important to prepare children's minds for learning:

> *When children go out, they free themselves from any pressure. They feel relaxed because they release negative energy… If you do not allow children to play outdoors, they do not want to get involved in any activities in class, or they get bored easily (TT4).*

In addition, the importance of outdoor play for children's health has been outlined by four Turkish and three Finnish teachers. One of the Finnish teachers explained their culture sees fresh air as important: "We believe in Finland that fresh air is good for children's health" (FT4). Raising a different point, the Turkish teachers focused on the importance of outdoor play in bringing children into contact with nature, with one of them saying "I believe that outdoor play and nature are important for children as it gets them away from digital devices such as iPads, computers, their parents' phones and television. They are growing up attached to such devices" (TT1). As distinct from the Turkish teachers, those from Finland referred to socialization, imagination and motor skills while explaining the importance of outdoor play. For instance, FT6 made these observations about the outdoor environment:

> *Children learn that they can use their imagination. For instance, you see we have a tree. Sometimes they pretend they are in a forest and play imaginatively. They create a play about having a barbecue in a forest. Children can use their imagination when outside.*

In addition to the use of imagination, four Finnish teachers viewed outdoor play as a tool for socialization for several reasons. FT1 gave the following example of this:

> *First, it allows children to play in large groups. When outside, children play in different groups than when they are inside. Children that do not play together inside may play together outside because on the outside the groups are bigger (FT1).*

Last, five Finnish teachers remarked that playing outdoor and outdoor play equipment improve children's motor skills. FT1 described how open space and equipment allow children to better practice gross motor skills, when compared to indoor play:

> *Motor skills improve, of course, when you are able to run outside, and jump and climb… The terrain is not flat. There are hills and rocks that you need to negotiate.*

In addition to the developmental benefits of outdoor play, participant teachers pointed out outdoor play is crucial for effective learning. In this respect, six Turkish and four Finnish teachers shared the belief that outdoor play enables children to learn by doing. A Turkish teacher described this as follows:

> *In an outdoor environment, you can teach some concepts using real natural materials rather than pen and paper. For instance, when collecting stones, you can count them, or when collecting leaves you can sort them by colour from dark to light (TT1).*

Similarly, FT1 exemplified the relation between learning and outdoor play by saying:

> *I think the learning is more like learning by doing things… Inside it is more like you listen to the teacher and make some different kind of stuff. But outside you learn from the nature.*

Different from Finnish teachers, several Turkish teachers used the term of long lasting learning, as a consequence of learning by doing, while describing the importance of outdoor play for effective learning. To illustrate, TT2 stated:

> *I can clearly tell that outdoor play is more effective on learning because children learn by doing. They learn the truth by observing rather than looking pictures or listening verbal expressions. They build the knowledge on their own. That is why; I believe it ensures long lasting learning.*

Turkish teachers also believed that outdoor play enables children effectively to learn as children have natural motivation to be in outdoors. TT4 specified this issue by telling:

> *….. Before the activity, I asked children whether they want to do activity indoor or outdoor. They all wanted to be outdoors by offering me to freely play after completed activity. In outdoor environment, they are more willing to involve activities.*

Theme 2: Ideal Outdoor Environment

Table 5. Teachers' Beliefs of Ideal Outdoor Environment

		Turkish	**Finnish**
Themes	**Codes**	**f(n=7)**	**f(n=7)**
Ideal Outdoor Environment	Nature and natural elements	7	6
	Variety of materials	5	4
	Animals	3	-
	Open Space	3	3

As Table 5 indicates the teacher from both cases have several shared beliefs on ideal outdoor environment although they have a few distinct beliefs. For instance, seven Turkish and six Finnish teachers stated that ideal outdoor environment should be natural and include natural elements as much as possible. A Finnish teacher explained that "I think it would be a place which have a lot of trees and bushes and flowers and that kind of things" (FT1). Additionally, five Turkish and four Finnish teachers described ideal outdoor environment as a place which includes various materials and equipment that enrich children's play. In addition, they agreed that outdoor play environment should include an open space for different types of play and activities. Different from Finnish teachers, three Turkish teachers mentioned about animals while describing their ideal outdoor environment. To illustrate, "… A place which includes some animals, and where children make observation." (TT2). TT4 agreed by saying "…. Additionally, it might include little animals or various plants. Children are given the responsibilities of those animals and plants."

Theme 3: Barriers to Outdoor Play

One of the main differences between two cases was related to barriers to outdoor play. While Finnish teachers believed that there is no barrier that prevents them to apply more outdoor play practices, Turkish teachers believed that they have many obstacles which prevents them from dedicating more time to outdoor play.

The Turkish ECE teachers defined what they believed as barriers to applying outdoor play in their preschools. Only one teacher did not mention many barriers, and the other teachers eagerly discussed this issue and spent much time defining the barriers. These covered a broad spectrum of obstacles arising from parents, teachers, preschools and other factors. Table 6 shows the barriers to outdoor play identified by Turkish teachers.

Table 6. Barriers to Outdoor Play Stated by Turkish Teachers

		Turkish
Themes	**Codes**	**f (n=7)**
Factors associated with parents	Adverse parental attitudes	6
	Parental concerns about safety and health	3
	Negative effects of recent news and media	1
Factors associated with teachers	Teachers' reluctance regarding proper clothing and inactivity	3
	Teachers' concerns about provision of safety	1
	Lack of practical information about outdoor play	3
Factors associated with facility of preschool	Lack of additional staff	1
	Lack of appropriate playground and equipment	3
Other factors	Inclement weather	7

The main barriers mentioned by almost all the teachers were inclement weather and parental factors. The teachers reported that they preferred to use the gym rather than go outdoors or used the outdoor playground for only a short time during extremely cold and hot weather. The teachers associated inclement weather with parents' concern about children's health. The teachers stated that parents worried about children's health due to sweat and sunstroke during the summer and a lack of appropriate clothing in the winter. One teacher explained:

> *My group includes eighteen children, but during the winter, eight, ten or twelve children can attend school because of sickness. Parents are so worried about children's health. They always tell us, "Oh, my child should not sweat or feel cold". That is why we cannot use the playground during the winter. (TT1)*

The teachers also referred to parents' concern about children's safety and accidents on playgrounds. TT7 stated, 'The children face more accidents when we go out; in fact, they also get responses from parents'. In addition, a teacher mentioned negative effects from recent news on parents.

> *In Turkey, recently there have been a few incidents at preschools that had serious results. These affected parents' views on this issue, so they are worried about their children's safety. (TT2)*

All the teachers mentioned that parents' concern lead them to have adverse attitudes and that hostile parental attitudes influenced the teachers' outdoor play practices. TT2 described this influence: "Parents' concerns and pressure in this issue make us much more worried. That is why we have problems regarding going outside'. TT1 added, 'the more we take these kinds of responses from parents, the less we become willing to go out'.

Three teachers viewed some factors related to them as barriers to outdoor play. The teachers, especially those working with younger children, stated that putting on proper clothing to go outside was an obstacle as children needed so much help. TT3 described this barrier: 'To be honest, we have more than twenty students. You would go out with twenty children. Some of them are not able to wear their coat or boots on their own. … This constitutes an obstacle. Then we prefer to stay at class'.

Three teachers considered the lack of additional staff working with them to be a barrier as the high teacher–child ratio made them worried about safety on the outdoor playground. TT2 voiced her concerns:

> *If there is a staff member to help us in an outdoor environment, I feel safer for the children. Otherwise, I have difficulty observing and controlling children in outdoor environments. So I prefer not to go outside with children if there is not a trainee student or assistant.*

Some teachers referred their own passivity as a barrier as they prepared plans that did not include any outdoor activity, a situation they accepted due to lethargy. They stated that they had no

practical information on how to conduct outdoor play and learning activities, even though they realized the importance of outdoor play in theory. TT1 pointed out this barrier:

> *… Every day, I do not have a written plan. We can make minor changes to the prepared plan. You can also examine a few plans. There is no playground activity. I think we're actually a little bit lazy. I suppose this is true for all of us.*

All the teachers raised the need to improve some components of their preschool's outdoor environment. Three teachers pointed to the lack of equipment and materials as a barrier. For example, TT3 stated:

> *We do not keep the children on the soil during the day. We request the parents for shovels and pails. But these are not enough. Material is important, and our outdoor environment must include some loose parts that the children can manipulate. For instance, we can plant some plants with children. However, in this case, we face the problem of lack of a proper water source.*

TT3 added:

> *We could plan outdoor activities but only if we had various materials for the outdoor environment. When I say materials, I do not mean everything should be perfect, but at least the outdoor environment should include some loose parts that the children can manipulate.*

TT1 stated:

> *I do not think playground is well equipped with appropriate materials. There is a theme park, but how safe is it? When children play on the playground for a half an hour, I feel so tired. They are hanging, jumping and so on. The ground is gravel. There is no soft ground. Children may fall and be injured, so obviously, I do not think it is safe.*

Early Childhood Teachers' Self-Reported Outdoor-Play Practices

Analysis of the interviews and comparison of themes across the two cases identified five major themes with several sub-themes related to ECE teachers' self-reported outdoor-play practices. Table 7 outlines these themes and subthemes across the two cases.

Table 7. Themes and Subthemes of Teachers' Self-Reported Outdoor-Play Practices Across the Two Cases

Themes	**Codes (Case 1)**	**Codes (Case 2)**
Frequency of outdoor play	When the weather was good outside	Every day
Duration of outdoor play	15-60 min.	2-3 hours
Most frequent outdoor activities	Free Play	Free Play
	Activities for environmental education	Going forest once a week
	Explorations	Field trips
	Games with rules	
Taken materials from inside to outside	Magnifiers	Painting materials
	Painting materials	Pen and papers
	Pail and shovel	Fabrics
	Balls	Balls
	Discovery box (for insect collection)	Chalks
		Jumping ropes
		Hula Hop
		Magnifiers
Role of teachers during outdoor play	Supervision	Supervision
	Co-player	Co-player
		Play leader

Note. T= Case 1 "Turkey"; F=Case 2 "Finland"

Theme 1: Frequency of Outdoor Play

Table 7 shows the differences and similarities in Turkish and Finnish teachers' self-reported practices. While Turkish teachers reported they included outdoor play in their plans during good weathers, Finnish teachers stated they made outdoor play a part of their daily schedules. In this respect, TT1 said, 'We try to include outdoor activities in our plans, but I cannot say that I frequently apply outdoor activities. It is because of reasons such as parental concerns and the structure of the playground'. Yet, a Finnish teacher (FT1) stated:

> *Usually we spend from two to four hours during one day. Our preschoolers are outside from 12 o'clock to 2 o'clock in the afternoon. And then they usually go back outside at 4 o'clock in the afternoon….*

Theme 2: Duration of Outdoor Play

Turkish teachers reported they spent 15–60 minutes' outdoor environment during good weather, whereas Finnish teachers spent 2–3 hours outside daily during the winter and almost the whole day during the other seasons. For instance, FT3 expressed:

> *Everyday, we try to be out there for a minimum of two hours per day, and often we are out for almost three hours. When it is Summer and Spring, it is so much easier to go out. Then we spend about two to four hours per day.*

Theme 3: Most Frequent Outdoor Activities

The teachers in both cases identified free play as their most common outdoor activity. To illustrate TT2 told that 'We usually explorations or free-play activities.' Yet, the Finnish teachers reported that, in addition to free play, they arranged outdoor play in the forest weekly. In this respect a Finnish teacher described a typical outdoor play session like following:

> *If it is a normal day, they know what they do. Some of them just want to go and hide or climb. In wintertime they make balls with snow or snow cakes and these kinds of things. But, in summertime they play with sand. Also, each season, every Wednesday we go forest. Of course, in summertime we can go to the playground over there. There is a play park (FT6).*

Turkish teachers stated they also frequently conducted environmental education activities:

> *We apply Minik TEMA and Eco School projects in our school. We effectively use this playground as a part of this project because all their activities are required to use playground. So, we plan our activities to implement outdoors (TT5).*

Some teachers also reported implementing rules-based games: 'As my group consists of five-year-old children, we can play all kind of games with rules, such as dodgeball and basketball' (TT4).

Theme 4: Taken Materials from Inside to Outside

The teachers in both cases stated they rarely brought indoor materials outdoors. Finnish teachers reported they did not rotate materials due to hygiene considerations. In addition, they stored specific outdoor-play materials. However, they stated that sometimes in the summer, they took materials such as pens, paper, paint and balls outside:

> *We never take materials from indoors to outdoors as it is not hygienic. The sand gets in here, and it is no good, so we have an outside play system and an inside play system. We only take small balls and big balls outside. But, in the summer, sometimes we take big paper and put it on the wall or somewhere, so they can paint or draw (FT6).*

Turkish teachers also reported on rare occasions, they took materials such as paint, magnifying glass, and sand toys outside.

Theme 5: Role of Teachers during Outdoor Play

In both cases, the teachers stated that they performed the roles of supervision and co-player during outdoor-play sessions. In addition, Finnish teachers reported they acted as play leaders. In this respect, a Turkish teacher said:

> *In outdoor environment, if we play a game with rules, I play with them or I am a guide. But, if it is free play, I am an observer during free play (TT3).*

Similarly, a Finnish teacher (FT1) told:

> *I usually just watch children's play and make sure that they are safe and everything is fine. And if everything is good and children 's games and plays are going well then I can go with them, and do some stuff like winter sports, do some sand cakes or some little things*

Some Finnish teachers stated that they performed different roles depending on the children's age group. To illustrate, FT4 explained:

> *It depends. The first thing I'm watching out for is safety. Second, if there is a child who does not know what to do, I support them, tell them what to do, give examples—you can play with the horses, make a sand cake, or ask them whether they would like to play some catching or hiding. Depending on the child's age, my role changes because as a play leader, I say, 'take it and run' when they don 't understand the game. So, I have to tell them how to do that (FT6).*

Early Childhood Teachers' Actual Outdoor-Play Practices Cross Cases

The following sections present the findings on the teachers' applied outdoor-play practices, including the children's and teachers' roles, materials, equipment, interactions and communication. Table 8 presents the themes and subthemes related to the Finnish teachers' observed outdoor-play practices.

Table 8. Observed Outdoor Play Practices Cross Cases

Themes	**Codes (Case 1)**	**Codes (Case 2)**
Weather	8 º-18 º centigrade	-4 º - +3 º centigrade
Frequency of outdoor play	No specific schedule	Every day
Duration of outdoor play	15-90 min.	2-3 hours
Most frequent outdoor activities	Free play, Games with rules, Activities for environmental education	Free play Field trips to the forest once a week
Role of teachers during outdoor play	Facilitative role: onlooker Precarious role: uninvolved, director Direct intervention strategy	Facilitative role: onlooker Facilitative role: co-player
Role of children	Active involvement Passive involvement	Active involvement Passive involvement
Materials and equipment	Stationary outdoor equipment • slides • climbing structures • swings • seesaws • car tires	Stationary outdoor equipment • slides • swings, • seesaws • wooden houses • amphitheater

Table 8. Continued

Themes	Codes (Case 1)	Codes (Case 2)
Materials and equipment	Loose parts • balls, • basketball hoops, • specific materials for activities • sand in sandbox, • little pieces of wood • recyclable objects	Loose parts • sleds, • ski equipment, • ice-hockey sticks, • pretend-play materials • sand toys • sand in sandbox, • wooden logs
Interaction and communication	Providing care Explaining the steps in activities and introducing materials Questioning related to academic content of activities Redirecting to ensure safety	Providing care Redirecting to ensure safety

Note. T= Case 1 "Turkey"; F=Case 2 "Finland"

As Table 8 indicates, observations of teachers' outdoor-play practices were conducted when the temperature was 8–21ºC in Turkey and -4–+3ºC in Finland. After the observations, some teachers (FT1, FT5 and FT7) stated they did not go outdoors when the temperature was -15ºC or below. In the Finnish preschool, outdoor play was observed to be part of the daily schedule, whereas the Turkish preschool had no specific schedule, so the time and duration varied depending on the teachers' individual daily plans. Similarly, the Turkish preschool children's outdoor-play times changed according to the activity type, and the duration ranged from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. Nonetheless, the Finnish children spent fixed periods of 2–3 hours' outdoors.

Regarding outdoor-activity content, the Turkish teachers generally started outdoor time with a planned activity and continued with free play. Similarly, in Finland, free play was the most frequent activity during outdoor-play sessions. In Finland, other preschool routines consisted of weekly forest trips for outdoor-play sessions using nature-related materials. The preschool also went ice skating, which the teachers (FT4, FT5, and FT5) stated was a non-routine outdoor activity during the winter.

The roles of both Turkish and Finnish teachers changed by activity type. During the Finnish observations, more than one teacher was often present during outdoor play to maintain an appropriate teacher–child ratio.

FT7 played ice hockey with a group of children. While playing, some of the other children played freely in other parts of the play yard. There was another adult who monitored the freely playing children. FT7 was a member of the ice hockey team. When he left the game, the game lost focus and the children finished playing. Then, a group of children started to make snowballs and throw them on the wall of the kindergarten. FT7 joined the children's play as a co-player.

Regarding materials and equipment, the children used stationary equipment, movable materials and *loose parts* in the outdoor-play sessions in both cases. However, the equipment types and materials differed. The Finnish children were not provided any materials during the outdoor-play sessions conducted in forests.

FT2 and FT3 prepared the children for play; they planned to go to the forest, provide a natural environment for the play, but they did not participate in the free play of the children. However, when

they noticed some safety issues, they verbally warned the children. When the children needed help while climbing, they helped them physically.

As for the role of the children in both cases, in all free-play activities, children were observed as they actively engaged in self-motivated play. Some children were observed individually, while others played in small groups, mostly including boys or girls. In Turkey, on the other hand, when the teachers conducted academic-oriented learning activities, the children were observed through passive involvement.

In Turkey, interactions and communication between teachers and children were observed mostly during planned activities. The teachers generally assumed roles as uninvolved observers and onlookers during free play, so interactions and communication were very limited

Caring For Children

At the entrance of the kindergarten, while the children were dressing in their coats to go out, TT1, who worked with 36-month-old children, helped the children zip up their coats.

Explaining the Step of Activities and Introducing Materials

Showing the flowers that she removed from the pot, TT7 said, "Children, let's assume this flower is a tree." She then asked, "What do trees have under the soil?" However, the children failed to respond. At that point, the teacher directed the children to say" roots" by suggesting, "They have roots, haven't they?" She approached the children one by one to allow them to examine the roots of the flower. Taking a water bottle in her hand, the teacher poured its contents all over the flowers.

Redirecting to Ensure Safety and Stating Rules

In the outdoor environment, the children ate popcorn at the time of tiffin. After they finished eating their popcorn, they filled small gravels into the popcorn cup and started to throw them at each other. The teacher who was sitting on the bench and looking at the children from afar stood up and directly intervened by saying, "No. No. No. I do not allow you to play this way." (TT5)

Communications between the Finnish teachers and children were generally not recorded as they spoke Finnish. The teachers sometimes explained their conversations to the researcher. In the observations, the teachers interacted with the children by caring for and redirecting them.

Caring for Children

Children were wearing their outdoor clothes to go out; some of them had difficulty in dressing themselves. FT6 helped the children who needed assistance.

After the outdoor play session finished, FT1 gave the children dry socks so that they could change out of their wet socks.

…After the outdoor play session, the children were required to hang their wet gloves and berets. FT3 dusted the wet and sandy gloves before the children hung them.

…One of the children came to FT1 to inform that she had a stomach ache. The teacher held her hand, and took her inside.

Redirecting Children

… The children were freely playing in the forest while the teachers monitored them. Two of the children went a little bit away from the place where the other children played. FT2 warned them to not go away from the common place.

…Some of the children were sliding down the hill by standing. FT1 told them, 'If you slide while bending your knees, it will be much easier.

Discussion

Clark and Peterson (1986) mentioned that the teaching process might be better understood when teachers' beliefs and practices are examined under the same light, searching for the relation between their beliefs and practices. With this in mind, this study aimed to investigate early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices of outdoor play in Turkey and Finland. The findings show that all the participant teachers in both culture believed outdoor play is important. Even if they approach this importance mostly common yet some different perspectives, while explaining this importance, they generally referred their observations when they allowed children to play outside. Although, their expressions have a rationale in related literature, (see e.g Aasen et al., 2009; Bento & Dias, 2017; Louv, 2005; Fjørtoft, 2000), they did not connect their expressions to any scientific evidence. When it comes to relation between health benefit and outdoor play issue, the Finnish teachers touch to their cultural understating of outdoor life. As further sections indicate, there is a close relation between outdoor education and outdoor life in Finnish culture. That could be the reason why Finnish teachers connected to healthy development and their culture (Karppinen, 2012; Marttila, 2013).

As for the beliefs of outdoor environment, the findings indicate that teachers in both cases share almost the same beliefs related to ideal outdoor environment. Outdoor environments having natural elements, open space and various equipment and materials were acknowledged as ideal outdoor environments. Although teachers did not extend their beliefs by connecting empirical evidence, the studies show that the design of outdoor environment determines the play value of this space. To illustrate this, Olsen (2013) defined quality and ideal outdoor environments as places with various equipment and materials that encourage different types of play, such as nature and discovery, dramatic, and construction play. In a similar respect, Herrington, Brunelle, Mountain, and Brussoni (2015) forwarded a guideline for children's play spaces. According to this guideline, a play space should have seven characteristics—character, context, connectivity, clarity, change, and challenge—to support children's holistic development in their early years. In addition, Woolley and Lowe (2013) found that compare to KFC (Kite, Fence and Carpet) sites, the outdoor environments including natural elements and loose parts have higher play value. Several other recent studies have suggested that natural environments with natural loose parts help develop positive social interaction among children (Flaningen & Dietze, 2017; Maxwell, Mitchell, & Evans, 2008), creativity (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016), and divergent thinking (Houser, Roach, Stone, Turner, & Kirk, 2016). In addition, the researchers stated that outdoor environments having various loose parts increase the possibility of engaging in constructive, dramatic, and discovery types of play, whereas they decrease the stereotypical gender- or age-exclusion behaviors (Flaningen & Dietze, 2017; Houser et al., 2016). From this point of view, it could be stated that the characteristics of an ideal outdoor environment presented by the teachers of both cultures are quite similar to the characteristics of the ideal outdoor environment determined by empirical research. Both Turkish and Finnish teachers' self-reported practices were consistent with their actual practices. Despite some similarities, differences were also found in the Turkish and Finnish teachers' outdoor-play practices, for instance in the amount of time dedicated to outdoor play. The Finnish teachers stated that no obstacles prevented them from dedicating more time to outdoor play, whilst Turkish teachers believed they faced many barriers to outdoor play, including parental concerns, inclement weather, teachers' inactivity, a lack of practical information and shortages of staff and appropriate playground equipment. These results are consistent with the findings of other studies (Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; Kos & Jerman, 2013; McClintic & Petty, 2015), identifying barriers to teachers allocating more time for outdoor-play activities. Similar to this study's results, researchers have cited poor weather, teachers' passivity and a lack of appropriate materials and equipment as major barriers to outdoor play (Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; McClintic & Petty, 2015). However, the present study did not highlight other

barriers, such as a lack of community space, teachers' desire to avoid the outdoors (e.g. don't like hot/cold weather, getting dirty or the chaos of the playground) and teachers' own personal attitudes (e.g. low self-efficacy) (Copeland et al., 2012; McClintic & Petty, 2015).

As in the current study, researchers have found that parental concerns about children being outside in inclement weather can be a barrier to outdoor play (Copeland et al., 2012; Kos & Jerman, 2013; McClintic & Petty, 2015). This finding could be explained from different perspectives. Firstly, this finding appears to be consistent with the relevant literature (see e.g., Brussoni et al., 2012; Malone, 2007; Waller et al., 2017), showing that over-protective parenting is on the rise, and social and environmental changes affect children's opportunities for outdoor play even in early childhood intuitions. In many countries, including Turkey, educational professionals might have the post-modern image of childhood—the happy, active, and independent child enjoying play without being restricted by school rules. On the other hand, recently in many societies, there has been a change in the conception of childhood. Herrington et al. (2017) claimed that independent and resilient childhood conception has been replaced with the conception of a vulnerable child needing constant protection. Their claim might be valid for Turkish people, particularly the ones living in urbanized settings. In the urbanized regions of Turkey, the entry of more women into the labor force has decreased the fertility rate (Koç, 2013; Ünalan, 2005). As a result, parents have started having one or two children, which may lead to parents having overprotective parenting styles. The change in the social structure of Turkish society and its negative effects on the free outdoor play of children have also been emphasized by different studies (Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi 2016; Erbay & Saltalı, 2012). To illustrate this,) The researchers, referring to overprotective parenting as a common practice in Turkish society (Yavuzer, 1993, as cited in Cevher-Kalburan & Ivrendi, 2016), found that overprotective parenting is negatively correlated with the benefits and practices of risky outdoor play. Secondly, Turkish parents' concerns might also be related to their economic backgrounds. A child's illness required a parent to stay home and miss work, so they may have viewed children's illness as an economic burden. In addition to the cost of medicines to treat sickness and injuries, limited income for buying appropriate clothing may have prompted Turkish parents to believe that outdoor play should not be allowed in the winter. According to the OECD (2020), the GDP per head of population is $28,455 in Turkey but $50,712 in Finland. Illness and appropriate clothing-related expenses, therefore, might create problems for Turkish parents. This finding regarding the economic burden of buying winter clothing is consistent with a study conducted in the U.S.A (Copeland, Sherman, Kendeigh, Saelens, & Kalkwarf, 2009).

Surprisingly, cold weather and related parental concerns were not seen as barriers by Finnish teachers, who experienced inclement weather for almost half the year. This lack of concern might be due to Nordic culture. For instance, an old but common in Nordic adage holds: 'There is no such thing as bad weather, only wrong clothes'. In other words, Finnish teachers might believe that cold weather can be adequately addressed with appropriate clothing. In addition, the researchers from Nordic countries (Borge et al., 2003) claimed that spending time by engaging in active outdoor activities in different seasons in preschools, besides being fun and healthy, enables children to learn to live in the extreme weather conditions of Nordic countries. They claimed that without this learning, living in Nordic countries could be quite difficult and troublesome for children throughout their lives. From this point of view, it might be stated that cultural and geographical conditions could be two important components, which influence what we expect from ECE and how we practice ECE in pre-schools. Dean (2019) claimed to support this assumption. He asserted that the geographical context, wherein the culture and history of countries are different, could influence the consideration of education and outdoor learning. About this point, he highlighted that the Nordic philosophy of "*Friluftsliv* –free air life" has a significant effect on outdoor education, particularly forest school pedagogy. *Friluftsliv* refers

to a lifestyle philosophy depending on a being's spiritual relationship with nature and free experience in the landscape (Gelter, 2000, as cited in Leather, 2018). As Nordic countries have a similar culture, there is a close relationship between education and outdoor life in Finnish culture (Karppinen, 2012; Marttila, 2013). For instance, Karppinen (2012), related outdoor education to Finnish culture, told that:

> *Every culture has its own words and meanings to express health, well-being and relationship with nature. This applies to Finns, too. I deal with the meaning for the word 'Era', which is a traditional concept of life in wilderness in Finland. However, today, Era has been exchanged for the modern word referring to outdoor education— 'Seikkailukasvatus'. (p. 1)*

Karppinen (2012) highlighted that outdoor education is not a new concept to the Finnish but part of the culture. In terms of wilderness, Finland is a European superpower, with 77% forest cover and 188,000 lakes, and these geographical conditions influence Finnish mentality and practice (Karppinen, 2012). Moreover, Finnish legislation provides free public access to nature, an opportunity the Finnish people willingly utilise (Marttila, 2013). These findings might explain why the Finnish teachers practiced outdoor play in all seasons and in different setting like forest. In addition to geographical conditions, it could be revealing to refer to Nordics for the image of childhood, which has a considerable influence on the practices in Nordic ECE. Borge et al. (2003) asserted that most Nordics believe that happy young children are the ones playing outdoors most of the days, no matter what the season and weather. As highlighted by geographical conditions and cultural practices, ECE carried out in the outdoors is a greatly acknowledged practice in Nordic countries (Leather, 2018).

Regarding the other barriers suggested by the Turkish teachers, McClintic and Petty (2015) also found that teachers' inactivity and a lack of appropriate playground equipment and materials can be barriers to outdoor play. In contrast to previous studies, this study found that preparation time was considered to be a barrier to outdoor play. The Turkish teachers stated they were reluctant to go outside during winter as it took too much time to assist children with appropriate clothing. Finnish children, too, needed more help to put on appropriate clothing in the winter, with various coats, boots, and shoes for different weather conditions, but the preparation time was not considered to be a barrier. This difference between the Turkish and Finnish teachers might be related to the teacher–child ratio: Finland has a ratio of one trained adult for every four children younger than age 3 years and one trained adult for every seven children older than age 3 (Karila & Kinos, 2012). However, in a Turkish preschool classroom, one trained teacher may teach 10–25 children (MoNE, 2014).

Another difference between the cases relates to outdoor-play materials. Some of Finnish teachers referred their current outdoor environment to describe their ideal ones. In addition, the findings obtained through observation show that in Finland, some materials were allocated specifically for use on outdoor playgrounds, whereas in Turkey, some indoor materials were brought outdoors. In Finland, however, outdoor-play materials had specific storage areas. These difference between the countries might be based on differences in early childhood policies. In several OECD (2006) countries, including France and English-speaking countries, national ECE policy centers on school readiness, so indoor areas are designated as major learning environments. On the other hand, Nordic countries, including Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway, pay equal attention to the provision of outdoor and indoor learning experiences, allocating funds to outdoor play areas and emphasizing Likewise, it at the ECE policy and practice levels (Lysklett, 2017; Marttila, 2013; OECD, 2006; Waller et al., 2017). Bennett (2010), explaining the Nordic tradition of ECE, stated that play is at the core of Nordic early childhood pedagogy and equal pedagogical importance was given to the indoors as well as the outdoors to encourage play. The researcher went on to state that even the organization and the use of the outdoors were thought about and invested in more by the stakeholders. From this point of view, it could be

reasonable to expect Finnish preschools to have an outdoor environment and outdoor play materials, which are defined by teachers as the ideal environment since Nordic countries give equal pedagogical importance to both indoor and outdoor play, although they invested more on outdoors (Bennett, 2010; Waite & Goodenough, 2018). Nonetheless, the community's approach to ECE and how children utilize ECE could differ from one culture to another. The recent research by Fritz et al. (2014) presented empirical evidence for this assumption. By comparing German and American perspectives on ECE, the researchers asserted that American parents believe that play is one of the many components of ECE, whereas Germans think it is the most important part of ECE. Likewise, they proposed that Germans believe that preschool prepares children for formal schooling by supporting their all-round development, while Americans give importance to preparing children for primary school by teaching them academic skills and concepts. These kinds of concerns regarding play versus academic achievement might be valid for other countries as well. To illustrate this, Canadian researchers Herrington et al. (2017) claimed that free play was previously acknowledged as the major work of childhood, yet academic-oriented indoor activities have recently been perceived as critical to children's future achievements.

In Turkey, despite growing interest in outdoor play in ECE curricula, relevant policies and standards are limited (Tantekin-Erden & Güner-Alpaslan, 2017). The most recent Turkish National Early Childhood Curriculum (MoNE, 2013) is described as a play-based curriculum and suggests that teachers practice play and learning activities in outdoor environments as much as possible. In addition, under the National Regulation for Preschool Education (MoNE, 2014), preschools should have outdoor environments that enable teachers to conduct healthy, safe, appropriate activities. Despite these regulations and curricula to guide practitioners, implementation of outdoor play differs throughout the country, from rural to urban areas, from public to private schools, even from teacher to teacher (Ata Doğan & Boz, 2019; Tantekin-Erden & Güner-Alpaslan, 2017). However, there is also a growing interest in nature/forest preschools within a group of Turkish parents and ECE practitioners. To expand on this, some recent studies conducted in Turkish nature/forest preschools have shown that nature preschools are preferred by principals, teachers, and parents since they implement a more child-centered curriculum (Eroğlu, 2018; Koyuncu, 2019). In addition, the Ministry of National Education in Turkey initiated an educational practice to encourage teachers at all levels of education to use outdoor learning environments such as museums, botanic parks, factories, libraries, and so on (MoNE, 2018). Although these kinds of trends and developments are promising for Turkish ECE, it could be claimed that there are so many other things for stakeholders to do, including policymakers, practitioners, and academicians.

Regarding the teachers' self-reported and actual roles and practices during outdoor play, some discrepancies were observed. The Finnish teachers stated that their primary role during outdoor play was supervision of children, a finding consistent with previous studies on teachers' outdoor-play practices (Chakravarthi, 2009; Davies, 1997; McClintic & Petty, 2015). For instance, Davies (1997) found that teachers believed they needed to set the play for children, monitor them and direct them by showing appropriate, safe behavior. Chakravarthi (2009) and McClintic and Petty (2015) found that teachers believed their role was to supervise children, help them find direction and set up materials during outdoor play. The observations revealed that the Finnish teachers took on the role of onlooker during free outdoor-play sessions and redirected children when they engaged in inappropriate or unsafe behaviors. Although the Finnish teachers stated they were sometimes play leaders outdoors, they were not observed as such. This finding might be related cultural understanding about play and learning and the role of teachers. In Nordic pedagogy, children are seen as agents who learn the best when they are allowed to organize their play by themselves. That is the reason why great respect for

children—the agents of their own learnings—has been shown. Thus, Nordic teachers are less proactive and do not intervene in children's play. However, appropriate scaffolding by teachers is provided whenever necessary (Bennett, 2010; Lohmander & Samuelsson, 2015). This Nordic perspective on play, learning, and the role of the teacher could explain the underlying reason regarding Finnish teachers' role as an onlooker in outdoor playgrounds. Turkish teachers stated that their roles in outdoor play were primarily as guides and, secondly, as co-players. However, they were frequently observed to be uninvolved during free play and took on the role of director in planned activities. Interestingly, nearly the same findings have come from studies (Chakravarthi, 2009; Davies, 1997; Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; McClintic & Petty, 2015) investigating teachers' beliefs about and roles in outdoor-play practices in different times and cultures. In all the studies, including the current one, teachers were rarely observed facilitating, extending play or participating as co-players (Chakravarthi, 2009; Davies, 1997; Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; McClintic & Petty, 2015). Besides, a researcher from South Korea (Nah, 2017) claimed that teachers give priority to safety over the role of scaffolding or participating in children's play. This case can be interpreted through different perspectives. First, this result might relate to teachers' perceptions of outdoor environments. The teachers might have thought of the indoors as the primary learning environment, and the outdoors as a place for fun and expending energy. Accordingly, Maynard and Waters (2007) found that teachers associated the outdoors primarily with the potential for fun, fresh air and freedom and opportunities for children to act like children. Based on this finding, Maynard and Waters (2007) suggested that teachers missed many opportunities afforded by the outdoor environment to enhance children's learning. The related literature suggested that teachers' active, facilitative involvement in planning or doing outdoor play was needed to enrich children's play and prevent repetitive behaviors during play (Garrick, 2009; Olsen, Thompson & Hudson, 2014). Likewise, Kiewra and Veselack (2016) found that the role of teachers as a facilitator in the outdoors is one of the four significant factors that affects children's creativity and its sub-dimensions, such as ingenuity and problem-solving. Regarding the second perspective, teachers, as they believe that their primary responsibility is to ensure safety, might tend to take the role of a director or be uninvolved. A possible injury, even if it is due to small accidents, might not be considered as acceptable by parents due to the presence of overprotective parenting in some cultures (Nah, 2017). In addition, Cevher-Kalburan (2015) proposed that "entrusting children to teachers" is a phenomenon in countries like Turkey. Thus, a teacher may consciously or unconsciously prefer such roles to prevent any negative reaction toward themselves.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study's main conclusion is that culture and geography are some of the important factors affecting beliefs and actions. A person from one culture might perceive a situation as good and appropriate, while a person from another culture sees it as unacceptable. From this point of view, while interpreting any practice in ECE, it might be reasonable to look at its pedagogical roots that may have been shaped by culture and geography. In the current study, the Finnish teachers saw outdoor play in all seasons as good, whereas the Turkish teachers stated that Turkish parents thought it was good to practice outdoor play only in good weather. However, these beliefs and practices were clearly understood when they were examined under the light of culture and geography and their effects on ECE pedagogy. Yet, as it is clearly understood by the researchers, there is no need to discuss which belief is better—outdoor play in only good weather or all seasons, including various play and learning opportunities.

Here and now, it is meaningful to refer to the postmodern view of childhood that perceives a child as an independent active learner—enterprising and self-regulated. At this point, it could be reasonable to ask how consistent the postmodern view of childhood is with the current ECE practices across countries in the world. For many years, in many countries, it is expected that children learn a lot of concepts and acquire various skills indoors under the watchful eye of an adult. They are expected to learn the same things at the same rate and with the same rhyme. Yet, the traditional understandings about teaching and learning have become questionable on the basis of empirical evidence from research works on how children grow and develop (Ashmann, 2018). Free outdoor play, outdoor education, and nature pedagogies are seen as practices that somewhat match the post-modern image of childhood. That is why there is a need to put much more effort into Turkey and many other countries, where overprotective parenting is on the rise. Considering culture and geography, some improvements should be made by stakeholders. Under the light of the current study, the following suggestions have been presented.

Communication and collaboration between parents and teachers are necessary to conduct outdoor-play activities regularly during all seasons. Accordingly, parental concerns should be eliminated through seminars and individual meetings. To conduct these meetings or seminars, teachers might first need to be informed about the benefits of outdoor play by ECE academicians or experts. Parental concerns about inclement weather might also be eliminated by ensuring the use of appropriate clothing and facilities.

The positive experiences of Nordic countries, therefore, might serve as motivation for Turkish teachers to prioritize outdoor play and learning. Additionally, preschool facilities in Finland and other Nordic countries might provide a suitable model for improving outdoor-play facilities of Turkish preschools. Appropriate clothing, dedicated outdoor-play materials and storage and automatic dryers for wet clothes are examples of necessary facilities in Finnish preschools. Proper teacher–child ratios also might help eliminate parental concerns and enable Turkish teachers to overcome the barriers mentioned, including preparation time, teachers' passivity and concerns about children's safety.

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