Chapter 4
Preschool Teachers' Views on Digital Games:
Turkish Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The use of digital technology is very important to support children's learning and development in the preschool period. With the rapidly developing technology, the types of games played by children have also changed. Digital games have gradually replaced traditional games. According to the relevant literature, there are studies highlighting teachers' perceptions about the benefits and obstacles of the use of digital games. These studies mostly focused on primary, secondary, and high school education, and there are a limited number of studies covering preschool teachers. This study aims to investigate the opinions of preschool teachers regarding the integration of digital games into the educational process. The opinions of 20 preschool teachers were collected with a semi-structured interview form. The interview form consisted of two parts. While the first section includes demographic information about teachers, the second section includes questions about how preschool teachers perceive the opportunities and challenges related to digital games. Data was collected via Google Forms. The findings show that the teacher's role is critical in incorporating digital games into the educational process. In addition, it points out that teachers are an important guide in integrating the education process into the digital platform. Recommendations and implications for the use of digital games in classroom applications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Games are considered the building block of early childhood. At the same time, play is seen as an action that helps children express themselves and learn. The child uses all his senses through games and internalizes his learning by doing and experiencing (Uskan & Bozkuş, 2019). Today, while words form the language of adults, games form the language of children. Games have always had a very important place in children's daily lives. The game is not seen as an activity that only includes entertainment. At the same time, play encompasses a philosophical pedagogy that makes use of the tendency of the sense of curiosity along with the discovery of the events and objects that develop around children (Teo, 2017). In this context, children's daily lives are built on games. Games are seen as an element that encourages learning. Preschool education is associated with games when viewed from the eyes of children (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008).

When we look at the developments in the 21st century, it is stated that games and game tools are also diverse and are rapidly gaining a place in our daily lives. Children grow up in societies with widespread access to digital technologies integrated into their daily lives (Arnott & Yelland, 2020; Undheim, 2022). Technologies are always seen as catalysts in the teaching and learning process (Kalogiannakis et al., 2018). Rapidly advancing communication technologies are raising brand new "digital children" in the "digital age" we live in (Li et al., 2021).

Children tend to use computers, mobile devices, and the internet that they interact with as powerful learning tools. In particular, internet usage was determined as 50.8% for children aged 6-15 in 2013, and 82.7% in 2021 Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK, 2021). These digital tools serve the purpose of exchanging information and communicating as well as entertainment. Today's children's useful and qualified use of digital game tools enables them to acquire technological skills. In addition, it is stated that these games are effective in changing children's behavior.(Behnamnia et al., 2023; Konok et al., 2021).

Digital games are defined as digital simulations that require a virtual environment, are generally created with animated graphics, and in which individuals interact (Denizel, 2012). In addition, digital games are screen-based activities that children interact with for fun (Fidan et al., 2021).

Today, 1 billion people in the world and 20 million people in Turkey play digital games. The size of the digital game market in Turkey is 150-200 million US dollars (Karahisar, 2013).

According to the report prepared by PWC, it is estimated that the gaming industry in Turkey will grow by an average of 24.1% per year between 2021 and 2026, becoming the fastest-growing country compared to other countries (Samur, 2022). While 36.0% of children play digital games, this rate is 32.7% for children in the 6-10 age

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