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EXAMINATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING GAME [1]

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Abstract

In this study, it is aimed to examine the perceptions of preschool teachers about the game. Descriptive research method and scanning model were used in the research. The study group of the research consisted of 145 preschool teachers working in independent kindergartens and kindergartens affiliated to the Ministry of National Education. Research data were collected with "General Information Form" and "Game Perception Scale". Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis H test were used in the analysis of the data. As a result of the research, it was determined that female teachers' levels of freedom and purpose of the game and game perception levels were significantly higher than male teachers. It was determined that the function of the game and the level of interest/curiosity/exploration in the game were significantly higher than the teachers working in private schools. It was concluded that the teachers who received training on the game had higher the function of the game, their level of interest/curiosity/exploration and the perception of the game in the game. In this context, depending on the fact that the perception levels of the teachers who receive training about the game are significantly higher, trainings for the game that include large masses can be made.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Play, Perception of Play, Preschool Teacher.

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Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Oyuna İlişkin Algılarının İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışmada okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin oyuna ilişkin algılarının incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Araştırmada betimsel araştırma yöntemi ve tarama modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı bağımsız anasınıflarında ve anaokullarında görev yapan 145 okul öncesi öğretmeni oluşturmuştur. Araştırma verileri "Genel Bilgi Formu" ve "Oyun Algısı Ölçeği" ile toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizinde Mann Whitney U testi ve Kruskal Wallis H testi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda kadın öğretmenlerin erkek öğretmenlere göre oyunun özgürlüğü ve amacı ile oyun algısı düzeylerinin anlamlı olarak daha yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Kamuda çalışan öğretmenlerin özel okullarda çalışan öğretmenlere göre oyunun işlevi ve oyunda ilgi/merak/keşif düzeylerinin anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek olduğu saptanmıştır. Oyunla ilgili eğitim alan öğretmenlerin oyunun işlevi ve oyunda ilgi/merak/keşif düzeyleri ile oyun algısı düzeylerinin daha yüksek olduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu bağlamda oyunla ilgili eğitim alan öğretmenlerin oyuna ilişkin algı düzeylerinin anlamlı derecede yüksek çıkmasına bağlı olarak geniş kitleleri içine alan oyuna yönelik eğitimler yapılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Okul Öncesi Eğitim, Oyun, Oyun Algısı, Okul Öncesi Öğretmeni.

INTRODUCTION

The first six years of life are a critical period in which basic knowledge and skills are acquired as a preparation for life. Moreover, since brain development is largely completed in the first three years of age, exposing the child together with rich environmental stimuli in this process contributes to the development of the child's cognitive, language, social, emotional, and self-care skills (Aral & Sağlam, 2016; Marklund, 2022; Resnick, 2016). In this context, it is of great importance that all individuals who are interested in the care and education of children, especially families, know the developmental periods, individual differences, and needs of children. In this process, the most effective method to get to know children and take part in their world is the plays (Deleş &Aral, 2021, Lord & McFarland, 2010; Kahya Canli & Demirarslan, 2020).

Play, which is an effective method, has a history as long as human history. It is an important tool that allows children to explore their environment, to learn actively and naturally, to improve their social skills, creativity and ability to describe, and to contribute to their learning about daily life (Dietze & Kashin, 2019). Children mostly engage in plays, and in general, child plays are considered to be fun activities, without any purpose, which allow children to have a pleasant time (Keung & Cheung, 2019). However, plays are the most important learning tool that allows children to combine their inner world and the events around them

and prepares children for life in every aspect. As in all periods, plays are of critical importance in the preschool period (Bento & Dias, 2017, Durualp & Aral, 2018).

Plays have an important role in pre-school education, which covers the period up to the beginning of basic education. However, it has a critical role in children's later life. It provides a systematic environment that shapes the social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language, moral and sexual development of children in the education and development process (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006). Preschool education contributes positively to the productive, creative, and compatible development of children. Therefore, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of preschool teachers, who support children in all aspects, are of great importance for the healthy development of children (Kang, Jun & Park, 2022; Marklund, 2022; Pistav Akmese & Kayhan, 2017). The game, which provides the opportunity for children to experience themselves and the worlds of others, plays an important role in the development of children in the pre-school period, as it does in every period. Parents and teachers, who are aware of the fact that play has an important place in the development of the child, offer different materials and playgrounds, contributing to the children's being happy, healthy and productive individuals (Goldstein, 2012). The presence of teachers who can offer new opportunities to children and design plays for different environments is considered important in terms of being able to take part in the children's world and support personality development (Marklund, 2022; Resnick, 2016; Gozum & Kandir, 2020).

Based on this idea, investigating the play-related perceptions of preschool teachers, who support children, in all aspects is of great importance for the development of children (Kang, Jun & Park, 2022; Marklund, 2022; Dong, 2018). The more positive the preschool teacher's perception of play is, the more opportunities it is expected to allow children to explore new opportunities. The study aims to investigate the relationship between the variables of gender, age, years of service, level of education, socioeconomic level of preschool teachers, and their perceptions of playing. In accordance with the purpose of the research, the answers to the following subproblems were sought:

In the perception levels of preschool teachers about the game,

- Gender
- Age
- Education level
- Type of school
- Year of service
- Is training about the game effective?

METHOD

In this section, the research model, study group, data collection tools, data collection process and statistical analysis used in data analysis are included.

Research Type

In this research, the survey method was used Among the descriptive research methods, which aims to reveal the play perceptions of preschool teachers. Screening models are types of research aimed at uncovering various features of a particular study population or sample group without any other intervention (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2018).

The Study Group

The study group of the research consists of 145 preschool teachers working in kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, and independent kindergartens, in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. The random sampling method was used, and the teachers who agreed to participate voluntarily were included in the study. Considering the distribution of the teachers participating in the study according to the variables, it was found that 84.8% of the teachers was female, 15.2% was male, 31.7% was 22-25 years old, 24.1% was 26-30 years old, 26.9% was 30-35 years old, and 17.2% was 36 years old and above. In terms of educational status, it was found that 4.8% of the teachers had an associate degree, 64.1% had a bachelor's degree and 31% had a postgraduate degree. Of the teachers, 81.4% was working in the public, 18.6% in private schools, 50.3% was working for 0-5 years, 23.4% was working for 6-10 years, 18.6% for 11-15 years, and 7.6% was working for 16 years and above. It was found that 73.8% of the teachers received training related to the plays, while 26.2% did not.

Data Collection Instruments

The *"General Information Form"* and the *"Play Perception Scale"* were used for the collection of the research data. The permissions were obtained from the authors of the scales.

General Information Form: The form includes questions about the gender, age, educational level of the teachers, the institution they worked in, working years, and the status of having received play-related training.

Play Perception Scale: The scale developed by Gunes, Tugrul, and Demir Ozturk (2020) consists of 20 items. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale. The scale consists of three sub-scales: "The function of the play and

interest/curiosity/discovery in the play, the originality and purpose of the play, and the nature and source of the play". The scale was developed to investigate the play perceptions of preschool teachers. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was .72. The first sub-scale, which is the function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play, gives insight into the discovery processes and outcomes of the participant's own plays; the second sub-scale, which is the originality and purpose of the play, gives insight about the play experiences, toys and memories of participant's own play history; and, the third sub-scale, the nature and source of the play, gives information about the favorite plays in the participant's memories of plays or the new plays they discovered with excitement.

Ethical Aspect of the Study

In order to conduct the research, permits were first obtained from preschool educational institutions. Moreover, the necessary permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Ardahan University dated 03.04.2021 and decision no:E-67796128-000-2100006225. The purpose of the study was explained to the teachers participating in the study and their consent was obtained.

Data Collection

Permission to use was obtained from the authors who developed the scale for the research. Then, the consent form and data collection tools were submitted to teachers via Google Forms due to COVID-19. In the study, the collection of data online and therefore the inability to reach a vast number of teachers constitutes the limitation of the study. The data collected from teachers online were checked, and the incomplete data were not included in the study.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the research data, the SPSS data analysis program was used. The normal distribution of the data was analyzed by the Kolmogorov Smirnov test and as a result of the analysis, it was determined that the data did not show normal distribution ($p<.05$). In this regard, non-parametric statistical techniques were used in the analysis of the data. In this regard, the Kruskal Wallis H test, and the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare the research variables with scale scores. For determining the significant difference in the analyses, the confidence interval was selected as 95% ($p<.05$).

FINDINGS

The tables present the findings of the study, which was carried out to investigate whether the perceptions of preschool teachers towards plays change

in terms of gender, age, level of education, type of school served, working years, and status of having received/not received a play-related training.

Table 1
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers According to Gender

	Gender	n	R.A.	R.T.	u	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	Female	123	70.50	8672.50	1046.50	0.08
	Male	22	86.93	1912.50		
The originality and purpose of the play	Female	123	79.07	9726.00	606.00	0.00
	Male	22	39.04	859.00		
The nature and source of the play	Female	123	75.35	9269.00	1063.00	0.10
	Male	22	59.81	1316.00		
Scale Total	Female	123	76.97	9468.50	863.50	0.00
	Male	22	50.75	1116.50		

R.A.: Row Average, R.T.: Row Total

The scores obtained by the teachers in the play perception scale were compared using the Mann-Whitney U test according to gender. Accordingly, it was found that there was no significant difference in the scores obtained in the sub-scales of "The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play", and "The nature and source of the play", in terms of gender ($p>.05$). Yet, it was found that the "Originality and purpose of the play" sub-scale and scale total score averages of the teachers were found to significantly differ in favor of females (Originality and purpose of the play: $U=606$, $p<.05$, scale total: $U=863$, $p<.05$). When the average scores of the order of the significant difference were examined, it was found that the levels of the originality and purpose of the play and the play perception were significantly higher in female teachers than in male teachers.

The scores obtained by the teachers on the play perception scale were compared using the Kruskal Wallis-H test according to their age. Accordingly, there was no significant difference in the scores obtained by teachers on the play perception scale according to age ($p>.05$).

Table 2
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers According to Age

	Age	n	R.A.	sd	x^2	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	22-25 age group	46	71.88	3	4.816	0.18
	26-30 age group	35	81.21			
	30-35 age group	39	76.41			
	36 years and above age group	25	58.24			
The originality and purpose of the play	22-25 age group	46	76.85	3	5.418	0.14
	26-30 age group	35	59.54			
	30-35 age group	39	80.90			
	36 years and above age group	25	72.44			
The nature and source of the play	22-25 age group	46	67.21	3	2.609	0.45
	26-30 age group	35	70.43			
	30-35 age group	39	81.32			
	36 years and above age group	25	74.28			
Scale Total	22-25 age group	46	72.36	3	5.355	0.14
	26-30 age group	35	66.74			
	30-35 age group	39	85.28			
	36 years and above age group	25	63.78			

R.A.: Row Average

Table 3.
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers According to Their Level of Education

	Education	n	R.A.	sd	x^2	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	Associate degree	7	41.71	2	4.601	0.10
	Bachelor's degree	93	72.97			
	Graduate education	45	77.93			
The originality and purpose of the play	Associate degree	7	86.86	2	2.669	0.26
	Bachelor's degree	93	75.67			
	Graduate education	45	65.32			
The nature and source of the play	Associate degree	7	68.50	2	.125	0.93
	Bachelor's degree	93	72.74			
	Graduate education	45	74.23			
Scale Total	Associate degree	7	68.71	2	.295	0.86
	Bachelor's degree	93	74.38			
	Graduate education	45	70.82			

R.A.: Row Average

Kruskal Wallis-H test was used to compare the scores of the teachers on the play perception scale according to their level of education. As a result of the analysis, no significant difference was found in the scores taken by teachers on the play perception scale in terms of their educational status (p>.05).

Table 4.
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers According to School Type

	Type of School	n	R.A.	R.T.	u	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	Public	118	76.10	8979.50	1227.50	0.02
	Private	27	56.30	1605.50		
The originality and purpose of the play	Public	118	74.82	8829.00	1378.00	0.06
	Private	27	65.04	1756.00		
The nature and source of the play	Public	118	75.24	8878.50	1328.50	0.27
	Private	27	63.20	1706.50		
Scale Total	Public	118	76.82	9065.00	1142.00	0.17
	Private	27	56.30	1520.00		

R.A.: Row Average, R.T.: Row Total

The scores obtained by the teachers in the play perception scale were compared according to the type of school. As a result of the Mann Whitney U test, no difference was found in the "Originality and purpose of the play" and "Nature and source of the play" sub-scale scores and the total scores of the teachers in terms of school type (p>.05), but, there was a significant difference in the "Function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play" sub-scale scores in favor of the teachers working in the public schools (U=1227.5, p<.05).

Table 5.
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers According to Working Years

	Working Years	n	R.A.	sd	x^2	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	0-5 years	73	76.42	3	1.319	.72
	6-10 years	34	72.34			
	11-15 years	27	67.70			
	16 years and above	11	65.32			
The originality and purpose of the play	0-5 years	73	71.24	3	1.583	.66
	6-10 years	34	69.16			
	11-15 years	27	78.11			
	16 years and above	11	84.00			
The nature and source of the play	0-5 years	73	71.05	3	.705	.87
	6-10 years	34	76.68			
	11-15 years	27	71.19			
	16 years and above	11	79.00			
Play Perception Scale Total	0-5 years	73	73.34	3	.116	.99
	6-10 years	34	72.60			
	11-15 years	27	71.30			
	16 years and above	11	76.10			

R.A.: Row Average

The scores obtained by the teachers in the play perception scale were compared using the Kruskal Wallis-H test according to the year of service. As a result of the analyses, no significant difference was found on the play perception scale scores of the teachers in terms of the working years (p>.05).

Table 6.
Comparison of the Play Perception Scale Scores of the Teachers according to their Status of Training Received related to Plays

	Status of Training Received	n	R.A.	R.T.	u	p
The function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play	Yes	107	78.07	8353.50	1490.50	0.01
	No	38	58.72	2231.50		
The originality and purpose of the play	Yes	107	75.93	8125.00	1719.00	0.15
	No	38	64.74	2460.00		
The nature and source of the play	Yes	107	71.16	7614.50	1836.50	0.37
	No	38	78.17	2970.50		
Scale Total	Yes	107	76.92	8230.00	1614.00	0.05
	No	38	61.97	2355.00		

R.A.: Row Average, R.T.: Row Total

The Mann-Whitney U-test was used in the comparison of the play

perception scale scores of the teachers according to their status of training received related to plays. Accordingly, it was found that there was no significant difference in the scores obtained by the teachers from the "Originality and purpose of the play" and "Nature and source of the play" sub-scales in terms of the type of school ($p>.05$). In contrast, it was found that the "Function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play" sub-scale and total scale score averages of the teachers were found.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of preschool education is to contribute to the support of the children's development from an early age. In this context, it is considered important for preschool teachers to be able to offer new opportunities to children, design new plays for different environments, to be able to participate in the children's world, and support learning (Garzon Artacho et al, 2020). Based on this idea, the study aims to investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers about the plays according to some variables.

In the study, the perceptions of female teachers about the originality and purpose of the play were found to be higher than male teachers. Similarly, in the studies conducted by Cheung (2008), Koc (2015), and Uygur Celep (2020), it was found that female teachers have high levels of play-related self-efficacy. It has been stated in some studies that the attitudes of teachers toward the play do not significantly differ according to gender, despite higher perceptions of female teachers towards plays (Deleş & Aral, 2021, Kadim, 2013). In this context, the different results in the studies carried out can be explained by the different working levels of the teachers included in these studies, and their status of having received play-related training (Kang, Jun & Park, 2022). In the research conducted by Marklund (2018), Swedish preschool teachers' perceptions of digital play in the context of workplace learning were examined. In the research, it was concluded that the participants identified opportunities related to social, content, workplace practice and digital game at the social-cultural level in the context of workplace-learning.

In the study, it was found that teachers who work in the public sector and who received play-related training have higher scores in the function of the play and interest/curiosity/discovery in the play. Considering the literature related to the type of school, it is seen that the results differ from our findings. In this context, it has been concluded that teachers working in private schools have positively improved their attitudes toward plays (Keung & Cheung, 2019; Uygur Celep, 2020), art activities (Celik & Tugluk, 2020) and that their self-efficacy

regarding the teaching of plays has not been affected (Pistav Akmese & Kayhan, 2017). Looking at the different results obtained, this can be explained by the physical conditions of the working environment and the play-related training received by the teachers in the past. Looking at the literature on the field of game-related education, the studies by Leuszler (2015) and Pistav Akmese & Kayhan (2017) concluded that the attitudes of teachers, who received play-related training, towards the plays were positively affected. Thanks to the training received by a play, it may be easier for teachers to plan and implement the play process. Moreover, along with the training received, the teachers' skills in applying different plays in the classroom environment can be improved. In this context, this situation can be explained by the increase in awareness and applicability thanks to the training received.

As a result of the research, there was no significant difference in teachers' play perceptions according to their age, level of education, and working years. In the studies, no significant difference was found in the teachers' perceptions of plays according to their age (Dietze & Kashin, 2018; Akmese & Kayhan, 2017, Arikan, 2020, Gomleksiz & Serhatoglu, 2013, Turak & Demir, 2019) and educational level (Kadim, 2012, Uygur Celep, 2020, Turak & Demir, 2019). In this context, the fact that the perspective toward the plays among teachers does not differ according to age groups and educational level can be explained by the fact that the plays exist in all periods of life and have different importance. There are various results in the literature regarding the working years. Aslan (2019), Koc (2015), Trawick Smith, & Dziurgot (2010) concluded that teachers' adequacy in teaching plays increased as professional seniority increased, whereas Dickey (2017), Leuszler (2015), Semerci & Uyanik Balat (2008), Tschannen Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2007) concluded in their research that professional seniority does not affect teachers' self-efficacy. In this context, these differences revealed in the studies can be explained by the fact that teachers who work at different levels, received or did not receive play-related training in the past. Moreover, the increase in self-efficacy in plays in line with the increase in the working years can be explained by the fact that teachers have a better understanding of the developmental characteristics of children in direct proportion to the time they spend with children and their understanding regarding the types of plays that can produce more efficient results for each age group.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study, it was concluded that women had higher perceptions of the function and purpose of the game than male teachers. It has been observed that

the age, education level and professional seniority of the teachers do not affect the perception of the game. On the other hand, it was determined that the educational status of the game and the perceptions of the teachers working in public schools about the function of the game were higher.

Based on the research findings and the literature, the following recommendations are included;

In order for teacher candidates to start the system with improved game teaching skills, it is important to add pre-school activities and educational lessons through games to the education program of universities.

It may be beneficial to provide in-service theoretical and practical trainings about the game to improve the self-efficacy levels of teachers.

It can be ensured that teacher candidates' university internship periods are included in activities for planning and implementing teaching activities through games.

In addition, activity books prepared using game-based teaching can be given to teachers as additional resources.

As a result, it can be ensured that teachers' game perceptions and educational competency levels about the game are further developed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Plays have an important role in preschool education, which covers the period up to the start of basic education, and have a critical role in the children's later life, enabling their social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language, moral, and sexual development in a systematic environment that shapes their personality in a process of education and development (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca and Malone, 2006). Preschool education contributes positively to the productive, creative, and compatible development of children. Therefore, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of preschool teachers, who support children in all aspects, are of great importance for the healthy development of children (Pistav Akmese and Kayhan, 2017). The more positive the preschool teacher's play perception, the more opportunities he/she will give children to explore new opportunities. The presence of teachers who can offer new opportunities to children and design plays for different environments is considered important in terms of being able to take part in the children's world and support personality development (Gozum and Kandir, 2020). In this way, it is believed that children will be protected against digital game addiction and supported to act collaboratively and socialize. Based on this idea, investigating the play-related perceptions of preschool teachers, who support children, in all aspects is of great importance for the development of children. The study aims to investigate the relationship between the variables of gender, age, years of service, level of education, socioeconomic level of preschool teachers, and their perceptions of playing. Among the descriptive research methods, the screening method was used in this study, which aims to reveal the play perceptions of preschool teachers. Screening models are types of research aimed at uncovering various features of a particular study population or sample group without any other intervention (Faulkner and Faulkner, 2018).

In this research, the survey method was used Among the descriptive research methods, which aims to reveal the play perceptions of preschool teachers. Screening models are types of research aimed at uncovering various features of a

particular study population or sample group without any other intervention. The study group of the research consists of 145 preschool teachers working in kindergartens affiliated with the Ministry of National Education, and independent kindergartens, in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. The random sampling method was used, and the teachers who agreed to participate voluntarily were included in the study. Research data were collected with "General Information Form" and "Game Perception Scale". Mann Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis H test were used in the analysis of the data. As a result of the research, it was determined that female teachers' levels of freedom and purpose of the game and game perception levels were significantly higher than male teachers. It was determined that the function of the game and the level of interest/curiosity/exploration in the game were significantly higher than the teachers working in private schools. It was concluded that the teachers who received training on the game had higher the function of the game, their level of interest/curiosity/exploration and the perception of the game in the game. Kruskal Wallis-H test was used to compare the scores of the teachers on the play perception scale according to their level of education. As a result of the analysis, no significant difference was found in the scores taken by teachers on the play perception scale in terms of their educational status. The scores obtained by the teachers in the play perception scale were compared using the Kruskal Wallis-H test according to the year of service. As a result of the analyses, no significant difference was found on the play perception scale scores of the teachers in terms of the working years. The Mann-Whitney U-test was used in the comparison of the play perception scale scores of the teachers according to their status of training received related to plays. Accordingly, it was found that there was no significant difference in the scores obtained by the teachers from the "Originality and purpose of the play" and "Nature and source of the play" sub-scales in terms of the type of school.

In the study, the perceptions of female teachers about the originality and purpose of the play were found to be higher than male teachers. Similarly, in the studies conducted by Cheung (2008), Koc (2015), and Uygur Celep (2020), it was found that female teachers have high levels of play-related self-efficacy. It has been stated in some studies that the attitudes of teachers toward the play do not significantly differ according to gender, despite higher perceptions of female teachers towards plays (Deles & Aral, 2021, Kadim, 2013). In this context, the different results in the studies carried out can be explained by the different working levels of the teachers included in these studies, and their status of having received play-related training (Kang, Jun & Park, 2022).

In this context, depending on the fact that the perception levels of the teachers who receive training about the game are significantly higher, trainings for the

game that include large masses can be made. In order for teacher candidates to start the system with improved game teaching skills, it is important to add pre-school activities and educational lessons through games to the education program of universities. It may be beneficial to provide in-service theoretical and practical trainings about the game to improve the self-efficacy levels of teachers. It can be ensured that teacher candidates' university internship periods are included in activities for planning and implementing teaching activities through games.