

More Than Play: Pre-Service Primary School Teachers' Metaphorical Perceptions of Traditional Games as Cultural and Educational Tools

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Abstract

Traditional children's games constitute a vital component of cultural heritage, serving as effective tools for both cultural transmission and holistic child development. These games foster physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth while imparting essential life values such as cooperation, rule adherence, and problem-solving. However, the increasing influence of digital technologies and popular culture has contributed to the gradual disappearance of these traditional practices, underscoring the need to reassess their educational significance. This study investigates the metaphorical perceptions of primary school teacher candidates toward traditional children's games. A total of 113 pre-service teachers from various grade levels participated in the study, which was designed using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Participants completed the prompt "Traditional children's games are like ... because ...," and their metaphorical expressions were analysed through content analysis. The findings revealed a wide range of metaphors categorized under four main themes: historical and cultural connection, development and learning, emotional well-being and pleasure, and social dimension and diversity. Frequently cited metaphors such as life, bridge, history, tree, and teacher indicate that traditional games are perceived not merely as entertainment but as educational and emotionally meaningful experiences that connect past and present, convey cultural values, and support holistic development. The results highlight the positive and multidimensional perspectives of teacher candidates and suggest the importance of systematically integrating traditional children's games into teacher education programs as both pedagogical tools and cultural resources.

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Introduction

Traditional children's games, as a deep-rooted component of Turkish culture and education, contribute not only to children's individual development but also function as a fundamental mechanism for cultural transmission. Rhymes, songs, and riddles embedded in these games have been preserved through oral tradition for centuries—some in their original form, others transformed through the integration of new cultural elements. However, due to the widespread influence of digitalization and popular culture, traditional games are increasingly losing visibility and are at risk of being forgotten (Avontuur et al., 2014). These games, far beyond being mere entertainment, play a critical role in shaping social identity, internalizing cultural values, and transferring them across generations (Sümbüllü & Altınışik, 2016).

Given this context, it is of great importance to define the place of traditional games in the education system and to explore their pedagogical functions (Küçükibiş et al., 2022). Documenting and analysing these games within an academic framework—beyond oral transmission—carries significant value for ensuring their accurate transfer to future generations (Can et al., 2022). Understanding how teacher candidates perceive these games is especially vital, as they are key actors in preserving cultural heritage within school contexts. Exploring how individuals conceptualize specific objects, events, or phenomena provides valuable insights into how they make sense of the world and how these conceptualizations shape behaviour and social interaction (Schmitt, 2005).

Traditional Children's Games: Cultural and Developmental Dimensions

Tradition, in its most common form, refers to patterns of values, beliefs, and behaviors that ensure cultural continuity within a society. As Taşdelen (2022) notes, traditions are transmitted through oral communication,

rituals, and imitation, forming an integral part of individuals' socialization processes. Tradition not only reflects practices inherited from the past but also enables the preservation of collective memory and the construction of cultural identity. Traditionality, therefore, is characterized by continuity, reproduction, and renewal through intergenerational transfer (Şen, 2023).

Childhood is a critical period during which the foundations of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development are laid. Play plays a central role in supporting this process. Defined as an activity freely chosen and maintained with a sense of autonomy, play activates intrinsic motivation and serves as a natural learning environment (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024). For children to benefit from play in all developmental domains, active participation is essential (Witasari & Wiyani, 2020).

The literature highlights that play is not merely for fun, but a formative experience through which individuals develop social relationships, problem-solving skills, rule-based reasoning, and essential life competencies (Özyürek et al., 2018). Traditional children's games, in particular, reflect a society's cultural heritage, belief systems, and everyday practices. These games are shaped by local traditions, customs, values, and geographical characteristics and are often passed down orally across generations (Azhara & Sutapa, 2019). One of the most notable features of traditional games is their flexibility: they can be played without specific tools, times, or locations—thus encouraging imagination, creativity, and spontaneous social interaction. Far from being trivial pastimes, traditional games are rich learning environments where children experience values such as cooperation, respect, sharing, and rule-following (Firat, 2013; Madondo & Tsikira, 2022). Through play, children not only develop physical and cognitive skills but also internalize cultural norms and social roles. As such, traditional games serve as essential tools for both individual development and cultural continuity.

Literature Review

Traditional children's games are not only recreational tools but also serve as important means of cultural transmission, value education, and social-cognitive development. While scholarly attention to the educational role of traditional games remains limited, a few qualitative studies have examined how teachers and teacher candidates perceive these games within educational contexts.

One such study by Erol, Akbakla, and Karabıçak (2022) investigated the views of pre-service primary teachers who attended a course on traditional children's games. The findings indicated that teacher candidates associated these games with value transmission, skill development, educational utility, and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. The participants emphasized the pedagogical potential of integrating traditional games into classroom environments. Similarly, Temel and Kangalgil (2024) explored the perceptions of in-service teachers who participated in a values education project. Their study revealed that traditional games were seen as tools for promoting holistic development, building cultural bridges, and transferring values such as respect, honesty, and cooperation. Teachers also reported positive effects on student motivation, behavior, and academic success.

Despite these valuable contributions, research focusing specifically on metaphorical perceptions of traditional games is scarce. Gözel and Gündoğdu (2021) examined students' metaphorical conceptualizations of the term play and identified a wide range of metaphors representing play as fun, friendship, life, and learning. While their study involved students at various educational levels, it demonstrated the usefulness of metaphor analysis in uncovering mental representations of abstract concepts. In a more directly relevant context, Can (2020) analyzed pre-service teachers' metaphorical perceptions of math games. The study found that teacher candidates developed a variety of positive metaphors, indicating their perception of such games as engaging and educational. Although this research focused on a subject-specific type of game, it supports

the use of metaphors to reveal how teacher candidates make sense of pedagogical tools.

From a theoretical perspective, metaphor analysis offers a unique lens to investigate how individuals conceptualize unfamiliar or complex phenomena by mapping them onto more concrete, embodied experiences (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980). In educational research, metaphors are viewed as cognitive tools that reveal underlying beliefs, attitudes, and mental models (Cameron, 2003). Within teacher education, metaphor analysis has proven particularly valuable in understanding how pre-service teachers make sense of pedagogical concepts, classroom practices, and educational values (Saban, 2010; Oxford et al., 1998). While metaphor analysis has gained prominence in studies of teacher identity and instructional beliefs, it remains underutilized in the exploration of cultural and traditional content in education.

Although traditional games have been widely acknowledged for their developmental and cultural benefits, no study to date has directly examined the metaphorical perceptions of these games among pre-service primary school teachers. While previous studies have addressed either general views on traditional games or metaphorical understandings of educational content, they have not combined these perspectives. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative metaphor analysis approach to investigate how teacher candidates conceptualize traditional children's games, what meanings they assign to them, and how they envision their pedagogical functions in classroom settings.

The Present Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the metaphorical perceptions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding traditional children's games and to reveal the meanings they attribute to them. These metaphorical perceptions reflect how teacher candidates position traditional games within an educational context, what kinds of functions they assign to them, and how they envision integrating such cultural elements into classroom practices.

By identifying and analysing these metaphors, the study seeks to contribute to the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage through education. Furthermore, it offers insights into how future teachers conceptualize culturally embedded practices in pedagogical settings.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- Through which metaphors do pre-service primary school teachers conceptualize traditional children's games?
- Under which conceptual categories can the metaphors generated by teacher candidates be grouped?

Method

Research Design

This study investigated how students at different grade levels expressed their thoughts on the concept of play through metaphors. A qualitative research design, specifically the descriptive phenomenological approach, was employed to capture participants' lived experiences and meanings as reflected in their own expressions, minimizing researcher interpretation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This approach enabled an in-depth understanding of how students conceptualized

play based on their personal and educational experiences in a holistic and natural context. Accordingly, participants were asked to describe the concept of play in the simplest and most meaningful way using metaphors. As an effective tool for conceptualization, metaphors reveal how individuals interpret events, phenomena, and concepts through analogies, thereby contributing to meaning-making and cognitive structuring processes (Saban et al., 2007).

Participants

The study group consisted of 113 prospective classroom teachers enrolled in the Primary Education undergraduate program of a public university in Türkiye during the spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. The participants were selected based on their voluntary willingness to participate and the researcher's ease of access. Accordingly, the convenience sampling method was employed. This method was preferred not only because of the accessibility of participants within the same faculty but also due to the study's focus on exploring shared cultural perceptions and experiences among future teachers who had undergone similar educational processes. Additionally, attention was paid to ensuring representation from all grade levels. Figure 1 presents the distribution of participants by gender and academic year.

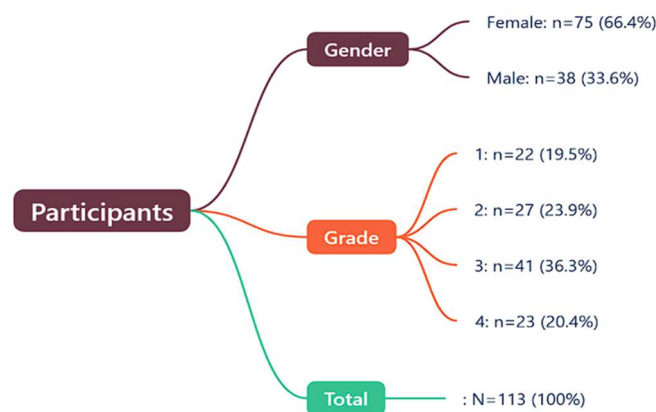


Figure 1. Distribution of participants by gender and grade level

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of participants were female ($n = 75$, 66.4%), while 38 participants (33.6%) were male. Regarding grade levels, 22 (19.5%) were first-year, 27 (23.9%) were second-year, 41

(36.3%) were third-year, and 23 (20.4%) were fourth-year students.

Instruments and Data Collection

This study employed a semi-structured form designed to explore the metaphorical perceptions of pre-service primary school teachers regarding traditional children's games. To ensure clarity and appropriateness of the items, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of 10 pre-service teachers prior to the main data collection. Feedback from this group was used to refine the wording and structure of the form.

To gather rich and meaningful data, participants were asked to complete the following open-ended prompt: "Traditional children's games are like...because..." This metaphor completion task allowed participants to express their conceptualizations freely and creatively by associating traditional games with other phenomena from their personal, emotional, or educational experiences. The data collection form included a brief explanation of what metaphors are and provided an example to clarify the task. In addition to the metaphor prompt, demographic questions related to participants' gender and grade level were also included. Data were collected during the 2024–2025 spring semester. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain anonymous and be used solely for research purposes. The forms were administered in-person in classroom settings, and participation was entirely voluntary. A total of 113 completed forms were collected and included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

In this study, the collected data were analysed using content analysis, a qualitative technique aimed at identifying recurring patterns and conceptual structures within textual data. The analysis process was carried out in four stages: (1) coding and elimination, (2) category development, (3) ensuring validity and reliability, and (4) interpretation of findings (Saban, 2008). In the first stage, all metaphors produced by the pre-service primary school teachers regarding traditional children's games were systematically examined. Redundant or unrelated responses were

excluded, and meaningful metaphor statements were coded based on shared linguistic or conceptual features. During the second stage, similar metaphors were grouped under common conceptual themes. These themes were generated by identifying shared characteristics and symbolic meanings attributed to traditional children's games. Each theme represented a distinct metaphorical perspective derived from the participants' responses. The third stage focused on establishing validity and reliability. To ensure that each metaphor was accurately classified within its respective category, expert validation was sought. A researcher experienced in metaphor analysis reviewed the list of codes and categories created by the author. The expert was asked to match metaphors to the proposed conceptual themes without omitting any metaphor. The classifications made by the researcher and the expert were then compared. Following the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) inter-rater reliability was calculated as $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Number of agreements} + \text{Number of disagreements}} \times 100$. As a result, a 94% agreement rate was achieved, which exceeds the 90% threshold commonly accepted in qualitative research (Saban, 2008). In the final stage, the metaphorical expressions were quantified by calculating the frequency of each metaphor and its distribution across conceptual categories. This allowed for the identification of dominant metaphorical patterns in participants' perceptions of traditional children's games. The visualization of the study findings was supported by Monica AI, which assisted in generating and organizing graphical representations of the results presented in this manuscript.

FINDINGS

To reveal participants' perceptions of traditional children's games, all metaphorical expressions they used are listed alphabetically below. These metaphors reflect various mental representations of the individual and social functions of games.

Table 1. List of metaphors used by participants

No	Metaphor	No	Metaphor	No	Metaphor
1	A Long Road	25	Gold	49	River
2	Amusement Park	26	Heritage of the Past	50	Rug
3	Architect	27	Hide and Seek	51	Sincerity
4	Ashura	28	Hippie Caravan	52	Sky
5	Book	29	History	53	Stone
6	Bridge	30	Home	54	Storybook
7	Candy	31	Identity of the Society	55	Street
8	Chest	32	Law	56	Teacher
9	Circulatory System	33	Library	57	Theater
10	Clock	34	Life	58	Three in One
11	Culture	35	Life Education	59	Time Machine
12	Cultural Heritage	36	Light	60	Time Travel
13	Cultural Value	37	Marble	61	Timeless Objects
14	Diary	38	Meeting Place of Souls	62	Tradition
15	Dream	39	Meditation	63	Train Tracks
16	Education	40	Mother	64	Treasure
17	Educational Games	41	Museum	65	Tree
18	Entertainment	42	My Neighborhood	66	Values
19	Fairy Tale	43	Nature	67	Village
20	Family	44	Natural Life	68	Walnut Tree
21	Five Stones	45	Nutrition	69	Water
22	Flowers	46	Origami	70	Water Cycle
23	Friend	47	Puzzle		
24	Future Generations	48	Respiration		

As seen in Table 1, participants described traditional children's games through multidimensional metaphors ranging from life to education, from cultural heritage to personal development. This diversity indicates that games are perceived not merely as a means of entertainment but also as significant tools for socio-cultural transmission, values education, and the construction of social identity. The metaphors highlight the deep meanings attributed to games and how they are mentally conceptualized by the participants.

The metaphors generated by participants regarding traditional children's games are presented in the word cloud graphic in Figure 2. The word cloud was created to provide a visual representation of the diversity and frequency of metaphors, allowing readers to easily identify the most salient concepts expressed by participants (e.g., Life, Bridge, Tree). Such visualizations are commonly used in qualitative research to summarize textual data and highlight patterns in metaphor use (e.g., McEnery & Hardie, 2012). The larger font sizes indicate metaphors that appeared more frequently, making them more prominent in the visualization.

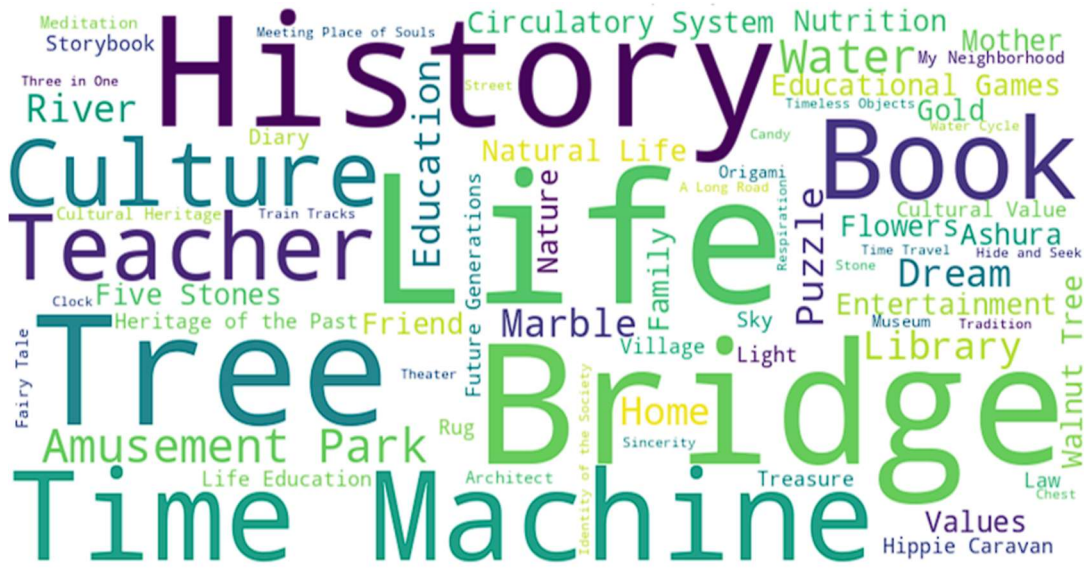


Figure 2. Word Cloud of Participants' Metaphorical Perceptions

Metaphors offer valuable insights into how individuals symbolically express their emotions, thoughts, and experiences. In this study, the metaphors were analysed in depth to better understand the meanings attributed to traditional children's games. Accordingly,

metaphors that were repeated by at least two participants were identified and examined based on their frequency. Figure 3 presents a visual distribution of these recurring metaphors that were articulated by multiple participants.

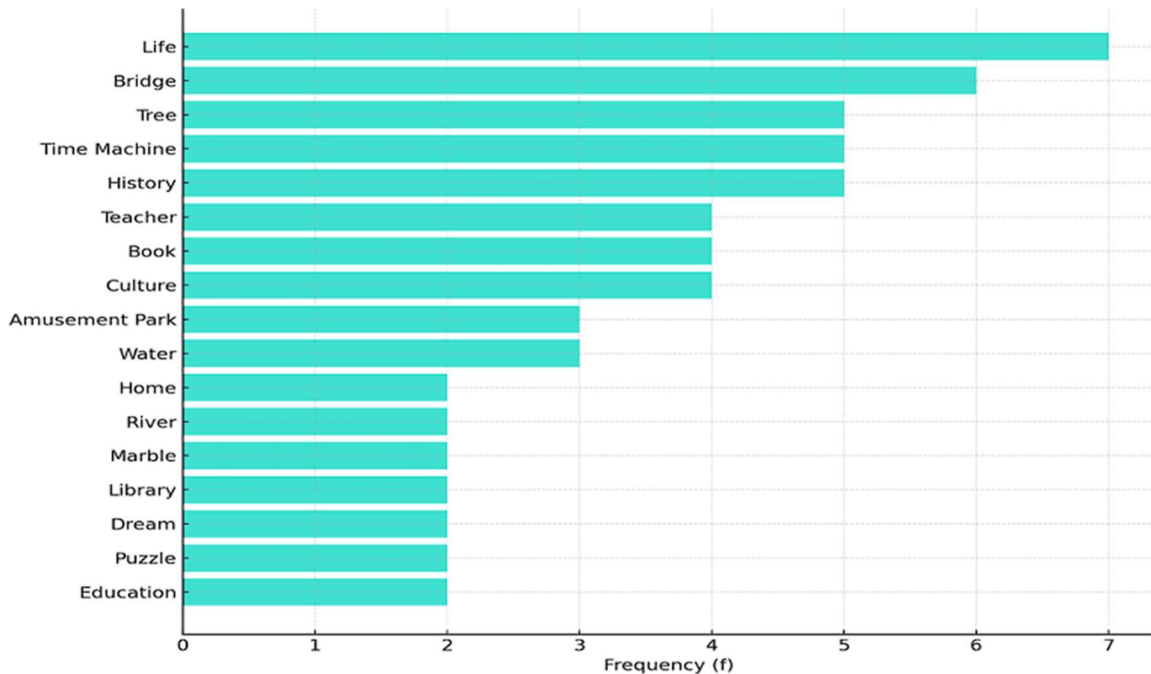


Figure 3. Distribution of Recurring Metaphors

Figure 3 presents the distribution of metaphors that were mentioned by at least two participants. Among these, the metaphor "Life" (f=7) emerged as the most frequently cited, suggesting that participants perceive

traditional games as experiences deeply intertwined with various dimensions of life. This was followed by "Bridge" (f=6), "Tree," "Time Machine," and "History" (f=5), indicating strong associations with notions of

continuity, intergenerational connection, and cultural transmission. Metaphors such as “Teacher,” “Book,” and “Culture” ($f=4$) reflect the perception of traditional games as tools for education and value formation. Other metaphors like “Amusement Park” and “Water” ($f=3$) emphasize the emotional and entertaining aspects of games. Although less frequently repeated, metaphors such as “Library,” “Home,” “Marble,” and “River” ($f=2$) contribute to the thematic depth by highlighting ideas of knowledge, belonging, tradition, and fluidity. Overall, this distribution reveals a metaphorical framework in which traditional games are understood as holistic, multi-layered experiences encompassing learning, emotion, memory, and cultural identity.

The findings of the content analysis presented below are visualized in the form of

thematic mind maps that display participants’ metaphors related to traditional games. Each branch represents a specific metaphor, while the accompanying quotations illustrate how these metaphors are interpreted and the thematic contexts in which they are situated.

Metaphorical Perceptions Related to Category of Historical and Cultural Connection

One of the most prominent categories is that traditional games are perceived as carriers of historical and cultural connection. Participants view games as bridges extending from the past to the present, as historical legacies, and as values transmitted across generations. In this sense, they emphasize the lasting significance and enduring nature of traditional games, as illustrated in Figure 4.



Figure 4. *Metaphorical Perceptions Related to Category of Historical and Cultural Connection*

The metaphors presented in Figure 4 reflect participants' perceptions of traditional children's games as significant carriers of historical and cultural continuity. Through metaphors such as Tree, Bridge, Time Machine, and Cultural Heritage, participants emphasized that these games serve as bridges between the past and present, preserving collective memory and transmitting cultural values across generations. The frequent use of symbols like Museum, Diary, and Village suggests that traditional games are seen as living archives of societal customs, norms, and experiences. These expressions indicate that traditional games are not only playful acts but also deeply embedded in the cultural

identity and historical consciousness of communities.

Metaphorical Perceptions Related to Category of Development and Learning

Figure 5 presents metaphorical expressions indicating that the pre-service teachers perceive traditional children's games as tools that support cognitive, affective, physical, and cultural development. The metaphors are accompanied by illustrative participant excerpts emphasizing the educational aspects of these games and their contributions to the holistic development of children.

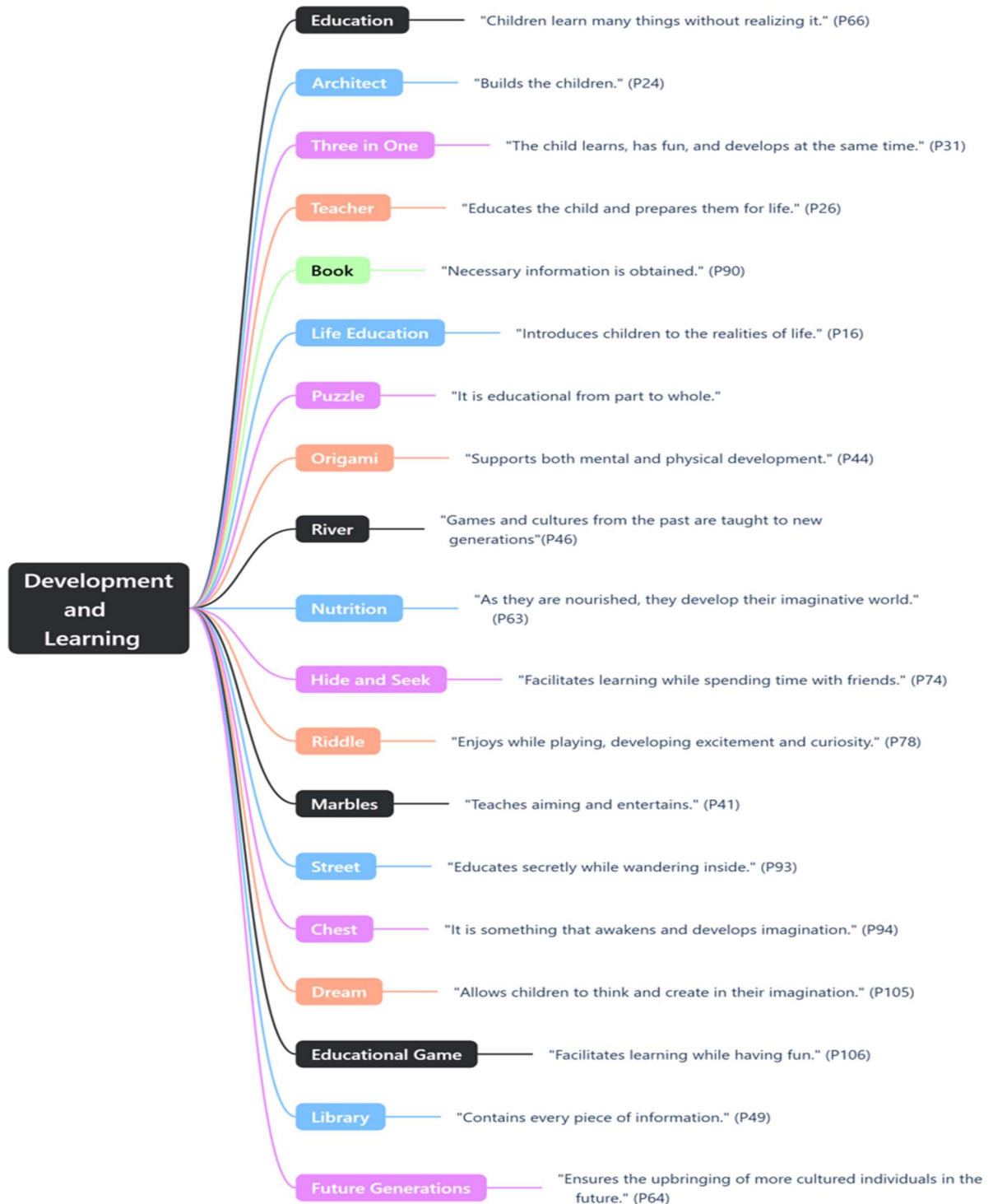


Figure 5. *Metaphorical Perceptions Related to Category of Development and Learning*

Participants' metaphorical perceptions of traditional children's games reveal that these games are not merely sources of entertainment but are also perceived as powerful learning environments that support holistic development. Metaphors such as education, teacher, book, library, life education, and architect emphasize the instructional value of

games, underlining their role in fostering knowledge acquisition, preparing children for life, and shaping their character. Metaphors like origami, puzzle, three in one, and dream illustrate how games nurture children's cognitive, physical, and imaginative capacities simultaneously. Furthermore, metaphors such as river, future generations,

and nutrition reflect the intergenerational and cultural transmission embedded in games, while others like hide and seek, riddle, marbles, and street reveal the ways in which games facilitate experiential and social learning. Through these diverse representations, participants frame traditional games as multidimensional educational spaces that contribute meaningfully to children's intellectual, emotional, social, and cultural development.

Metaphorical Perceptions Related to Category of Emotional Well-being and Pleasure

Participants perceived traditional children's games as significant contributors to emotional well-being. Figure 6 presents metaphorical expressions that associate these games with feelings of happiness, relaxation, and pleasure.



Figure 6. *Metaphors Related to the Category of Emotional Well-being and Pleasure*

The metaphorical expressions provided by the participants under the theme of Emotional Well-being and Pleasure suggest that traditional children's games are seen not only as recreational activities but also as powerful sources of emotional comfort, happiness, and

psychological relief. Metaphors such as sky, meditation, water, and breathing emphasize the relaxing, calming, and refreshing effects of games, likening them to elements that bring peace and vitality. Expressions like candy, my neighbourhood, amusement park, and fairy

tales highlight the emotional joy, excitement, and sense of wonder games elicit in children. Meanwhile, metaphors such as storybook, friend, mother, hippie van, and fun reflect the sincere, entertaining, and socially engaging dimensions of gameplay. Collectively, these metaphors portray traditional games as emotionally meaningful experiences that support children's mental well-being and contribute to their joy and inner balance.

Metaphorical Perceptions Related to the Category of Social Dimension and Diversity

Participants evaluated traditional children's games also as experiences that structure social relationships and reflect societal diversity. Figure 7 presents metaphorical expressions that associate these games with social roles, rules, a sense of belonging, and cultural plurality.



Figure 7. *Metaphorical Perceptions Related to the Category of Social Dimension and Diversity*

The participants' metaphorical expressions reveal that traditional children's games are perceived as meaningful social experiences that shape interpersonal relationships, promote diversity, and foster a shared sense of community. Metaphors such as theatre, family, and law underscore the social structuring functions of games, highlighting how they assign roles, in still responsibility, and promote adherence to rules. Expressions like natural life, rug, Ashura, and circulatory system reflect the inclusive and pluralistic

nature of traditional games, emphasizing richness in cultural and personal diversity. Furthermore, metaphors such as home, sincerity, light, meeting place of souls, and clock emphasize the emotional and connective dimensions of play, suggesting that games build environments of warmth, trust, collective experience, and dynamic interaction. These interpretations suggest that participants view traditional games as socially integrative tools that go beyond individual play, functioning as arenas for cultural

transmission, emotional bonding, and social adaptation.

Metaphorical Perceptions Related to the Category of Value and Permanence

Participants frequently described traditional children’s games as experiences

that hold enduring meaning and lasting value. Figure 8 presents metaphorical expressions that associate these games with permanence, cultural continuity, and timeless worth.



Figure 8. *Metaphorical Perceptions Related to the Category of Value and Permanence*

As illustrated in Figure 8, participants employed metaphors such as treasure, gold, values, and timeless objects to emphasize the unchanging and ever-increasing value of traditional games. These metaphors highlight the perception of games as symbolic assets that preserve cultural identity and personal enrichment over time. Other metaphors like flowers and stone reflect both the aesthetic and durable qualities of traditional play, suggesting its resistance to the passage of time. Additionally, expressions such as Beştaş and long road underscore the transmission of these games across generations, portraying them as unforgettable memories rooted in cultural heritage. Overall, these metaphors indicate that participants regard traditional games not as temporary amusements, but as lasting and meaningful elements of collective memory and cultural value.

Discussion and Conclusion

It can be argued that societies transmit their history, traditions, customs, beliefs, ways of life, and oral literature to future generations through traditional games. Pre-service classroom teachers predominantly associate traditional children's games with cultural heritage and consider them essential tools for instilling core values and 21st-century skills in students. In this study, metaphors such as “Tree,” “Bridge,” “Time Machine,” and “Cultural Heritage” produced by participants reveal that traditional games are perceived as bridges connecting the past with the present, preserving collective memory, and facilitating the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. Furthermore, the frequent use of symbols like “Museum,” “Diary,” and “Village” suggests that traditional games are viewed as living archives of societal customs, norms, and experiences. These expressions

indicate that traditional games are not merely recreational activities but are deeply intertwined with a community's cultural identity and historical consciousness. The participants' perception of traditional games as vital carriers of cultural and historical continuity is consistent with findings in the existing literature. For instance, Temel and Kangalgil (2024) found that teachers regard traditional games as "cultural bridges" that reflect cultural richness and transmit social values across generations. Similarly, Erol et al. (2022) highlighted that pre-service teachers consider traditional children's games as elements of intangible cultural heritage. Küçükibiş et al. (2022) emphasized that such games contribute to the transmission of traditions and customs, foster children's cultural awareness, and support their physical, mental, and emotional development. Likewise, Girmen (2012) noted that traditional games help children acquire social habits and internalize cultural norms. By engaging in these games, children gain knowledge about their cultural roots and establish a shared foundation with their heritage, thereby helping to prevent cultural disconnection.

The metaphorical perceptions of pre-service classroom teachers regarding traditional children's games reveal that these games are viewed as powerful tools that support cognitive, affective, physical, and cultural development. Metaphors such as "education," "teacher," "book," and "life education" highlight the educational value of traditional games in terms of fostering knowledge acquisition, preparing children for life, and shaping their character. Metaphors like "origami," "puzzle," "three-in-one," and "dream" reflect the belief that these games simultaneously nurture children's cognitive, physical, and imaginative capacities. Similarly, metaphors such as "hide and seek," "riddle," "marbles," and "street" illustrate how traditional games facilitate experiential and social learning. Metaphors like "river," "future generations," and "nourishment" emphasize the role of traditional games in intergenerational and cultural transmission of knowledge. Overall, these findings suggest that pre-service teachers perceive traditional children's games not merely as recreational

activities, but as rich educational environments that contribute to holistic child development and cultural continuity. These results are consistent with previous research. For example, Erol et al. (2022) state that traditional games equip children with values and skills such as love, respect, cooperation, helping, sharing, and rule adherence, thereby fulfilling an educational function by preparing them for life. Similarly, Çelik and Şahin (2013) argue that games help children gain experience, actively participate in activities, learn by doing, and develop skills in exploration and discovery. Sari et al. (2018) emphasize that traditional games provide a conducive learning environment while revealing students' potential. Likewise, Sevinç (2004) observed that children develop interest and positive attitudes toward learning through play.

Participants' metaphorical perceptions of traditional children's games indicate that these games are seen as contributing significantly to children's emotional well-being and psychological welfare. The findings are consistent with existing literature suggesting that traditional games are perceived as sources of enjoyment, relaxation, happiness, and emotional support (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024). Studies examining pre-service teachers' perceptions of the concept of play (Can, 2020; Tok, 2018), have similarly emphasized its "relaxing" and "joyful" qualities, often associating it with metaphors such as "therapy" or "chocolate/candy." Ulutaş (2011) also reported that children who engage in physical play release energy and, as a result, experience both physical and psychological relief, leading to enhanced well-being alongside physical development. In this context, the metaphors identified in the present study—such as sky, meditation, water, and breath—align with the calming and revitalizing effects of play, while metaphors like candy, amusement park, and fairy tale reflect the joyful and exciting dimensions emphasized by participants.

Participants' metaphorical perceptions within the category of "social dimension and diversity" reveal that traditional children's games are viewed not merely as forms of entertainment, but as deeply meaningful experiences that structure

social relationships, reflect societal diversity, and reinforce a shared sense of belonging. This finding strongly aligns with the literature that emphasizes the critical role of play in children's social and emotional development (Erol et al., 2022; Küçükbiş et al., 2022; Temel & Kangalgil, 2024). Metaphors such as theatre, family, and law underscore the role of games in assigning social roles, fostering responsibility, and reinforcing rule-based behaviour. This is supported by Erol et al. (2022) who found that traditional games provide children with lived experiences that promote values such as fairness, respect for rights, learning to lose, honesty, friendship, and teamwork. Similarly, in his study on preschool teachers' perceptions of play, Tok (2018) noted that play resembles life itself, encompassing rules and social dynamics. In the present study, metaphors such as natural life, kilim, Ashura, and circulatory system emphasize the inclusive and pluralistic nature of traditional games, as well as their richness in cultural and individual diversity. Additionally, metaphors like home, sincerity, light, meeting place of souls, and clock highlight the emotional and connective dimensions of play, suggesting that it creates environments of warmth, trust, shared experience, and dynamic interaction. The frequent association of play with "friend" by students from various educational levels (Gözel & Gundogdu, 2021) and descriptions of it as a source of "joyful togetherness" (Hassani & Afazeli, 2024) further reinforce its role in cultivating emotional attachment and a sense of belonging. Considering these findings, it can be concluded that pre-service classroom teachers perceive traditional children's games as powerful, integrative tools for fostering social cohesion and supporting pluralistic social adaptation.

Participants' metaphorical perceptions within the theme of "value and permanence" indicate that traditional children's games are regarded as experiences that carry enduring meaning and lasting significance. Metaphors such as treasure, gold, values, and timeless objects suggest that these games are seen as symbolic entities that preserve cultural identity and foster personal enrichment over time. Similarly, Temel and Kangalgil (2024) emphasize that teachers

perceive traditional games as effective tools for transmitting cultural values, highlighting their role in fostering not only behavioural development but also a strong sense of cultural belonging among students. Metaphors such as flowers and stone evoke the aesthetic and resilient qualities of traditional games, symbolizing their resistance to the passage of time. Likewise, metaphors like Beştaş and long road emphasize the intergenerational transmission of games, and their function as deeply rooted, unforgettable elements of cultural heritage. In line with these findings, the study by Gözel and Gundogdu (2021) also highlights the enduring and value-laden nature of play, demonstrating its role as a carrier of both individual and collective memory. Overall, these findings suggest that pre-service teachers do not view traditional games as fleeting forms of entertainment, but rather as meaningful, lasting components of social memory and cultural value.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are classified into three categories according to their target groups: researchers, teachers and policy makers.

Recommendations for Researchers:

- Future studies may involve broader and more diverse participant groups from different universities and academic departments, which could provide a deeper understanding of how metaphorical perceptions of traditional games vary across socio-cultural and institutional contexts.
- Researchers could also employ other qualitative methods—such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions—in addition to the metaphor completion technique, to gain more comprehensive insights into participants' conceptualizations.
- Applied research might explore how metaphorical perceptions are reflected in instructional practices, for instance by examining how pre-service teachers integrate traditional

games into classroom activities through observations.

Recommendations for Teachers:

- The findings suggest that traditional games serve as both educational tools and carriers of cultural continuity. Therefore, teacher education programs may benefit from incorporating modules on their pedagogical use, while in-service training could emphasize designing classroom practices rooted in local traditions.
- Given that traditional games are perceived as sources of relaxation and emotional comfort, they may be integrated into school routines to help students feel more comfortable, motivated, and emotionally balanced during the school day.
- As traditional games are seen as spaces that nurture cooperation, empathy, and social adaptation, schools may consider embedding them into classroom and extracurricular activities to enhance social-emotional learning, collaboration, and inclusivity.

Recommendations for Policymakers:

- Since pre-service teachers perceive traditional games as effective tools for holistic child development, curriculum developers could explore ways to integrate these games systematically into primary education, especially within life sciences, physical education, and values education.
- Recognizing their cultural significance, educational and cultural institutions might initiate projects aimed at collecting, documenting, and preserving traditional children's games for future generations.
- As traditional games promote intergenerational connection and

community identity, policymakers may encourage schools to organize community play festivals or traditional game days that engage students, families, and elders in shared cultural experiences.

Limitations

- The sample consisted solely of 113 volunteer students enrolled in the primary education program of a single public university. This limits the generalizability of the findings, as metaphorical perceptions may vary across individuals from different universities, academic programs, or socio-cultural backgrounds.
 - Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method. While this approach allows researchers to easily access participants, it reduces the representativeness of the sample.
 - The data collection tool was limited to a single open-ended metaphor completion prompt. Participants were only asked to complete the sentence "Traditional children's games are like ... because ...," which restricted the depth and complexity of responses and did not allow for more elaborate or multifaceted explanations.
 - The study relied exclusively on self-reported data. Participants' responses were based on their personal experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, without incorporating cognitive, behavioural, or observational data.
 - The analysis focused solely on metaphorical perceptions. No other cognitive, pedagogical, or practical assessment methods were employed to evaluate participants' understanding of traditional games.

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