

## An Examination of Mothers' Self-efficacy and their Interaction with their Children Aged 60-72 Months<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The present study has the aim of examining the parental self-efficacy of mothers in terms of the education level and social support status of mothers and the gender of their children different variables, establishing the correlation between parenting and the general self-efficacy levels of mothers and identifying the characteristics of their interactions with their children in the context of their self-efficacy. Explanatory sequential design, a mixed method, was used in this study. For the quantitative part, 251 mothers with children who are 60-72 months were involved. The sample for the qualitative part was formed of volunteers out of the said sample and consisted of 20 mothers with 20 children in total; in this group of mothers, the self-efficacy levels were determined as low (n=10) or high (n=10). The data were collected through a set of forms, namely the "Demographic Information Form", "General Self-Efficacy Scale", "Berkeley Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale Revised", and "Mother-Child Interaction Games Video Records". Statistical analyses revealed that the total scores of mothers' self-efficacy did not differ according to their educational status and social support from their spouses, but showed a significant difference according to the gender of their children, in favor of mothers with girls. Additionally, it was found that mothers' general self-efficacy levels and parenting self-efficacy were positively related. Mothers having low parenting self-efficacy levels exhibit more behaviors gravitating towards a "focusing on success" first and foremost, followed by "sensitivity" and "play interaction". Mothers with high parenting self-efficacy, on the other hand, exhibited behaviors towards the theme of "sensitivity" the most, unlike mothers with low self-efficacy in games. However, the frequency of behavior for the themes of "achievement orientation" and "game interaction" was also found to be high.

**Keywords:** Mother-child interaction; parenting self-efficacy; general self-efficacy; early childhood.

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### Introduction

Children, who first encounter their family when they are born, try to make sense of life with their help and their first experiences are mostly in the family. Güler (2012) defined the family has an impact on the children's development since they are born. The behavior of parents towards their children can leave traces that will affect them. The relationship between a mother and their baby is a fundamental and usually lifelong relationship that builds a reference for subsequent relationships, and should ideally meet the physiological needs of the child such as hunger, thirst, sleep, cleanliness, and shelter, as well as their needs for love, warmth, and closeness, etc. (Çağdaş, 2012). The parent-child relationship can help parents provide social support to their children, show them affection, make sense of life experiences, and better problem-solving skills (Gordon, 2017; Horstman et al., 2016). Parents who make their children feel loved and aware of their positive behavior can help their children to think that they are valuable. Instead of helping their children develop feelings of love, respect, and courage, the children of parents who reject and constantly criticize them may feel worthless (Morgan, 1977). If children are approved only when strict rules are set and they follow these rules, they may have difficulty expressing themselves adequately. Similarly, if the abilities of the children are underestimated, expected to do much more, and overprotected, they may not express themselves adequately. Instead, they may begin to show obedience or defiance. Both of these negative situations can cause the children to develop feelings of anxiety and insecurity that can last for many years (Çağdaş & Seçer, 2011).

Play in the preschool period offers an important opportunity for mother-child interaction and for the child to learn through such interaction (Özyürek & Gürleyik, 2016). Mother-child play is powerful in that it covers physical contact, is mutual, and also has emotional content. Playing together helps create a unique interactional context to establish and develop a safe relationship between the mother and the child (Akgün & Yeşilyaprak, 2011). During the play process, the mother needs to accept the children as they are, allow the children to develop and detail the theme of the game without interfering with it, create a warm and caring environment, and make an effort to recognize the needs and potential of the child and to allow them to freely express their feelings and behaviors (Gander & Gardiner, 2010; Wood & Attfield, 2007). For this reason, mother-child play can provide an opportunity to observe some features that show the positive or negative nature of the mother-child relationship. One of these characteristics is the mother's warm and sensitive approach. Cebioğlu & Aksan (2012) found that maternal warmth predicted children's self-regulation skills. Adults who could not feel enough warmth in their childhood relationships with their mothers may prefer individuals who display a distant, critical, and pedantic attitude as their partners later in life. This, in turn, may negatively affect their adult relationships (Cloud & Townsend, 2000). Mothers with a high level of sensitivity can accurately recognize the behaviors exhibited by their children and address them with appropriate reactions. In addition, a mother-child interaction shaped by a high level of sensitivity from the mother may allow children's cognitive skills to develop further (Bee & Boyd, 2009). All kinds of touches, including physical closeness reflecting the warmth of the parent towards the child, are also very important for the emotional development of a child. In addition, a child whose needs for physical contact are met consistently may also enjoy a closer maternal attachment. Since girls and boys share similar needs for physical contact, parents should offer an equal level of physical contact to girls and boys (Chapman & Campbell, 2018; Güleşen & Yıldız, 2013). Another factor that can affect the quality of a mother-child interaction is the use of praise or criticism. Praise can be defined as the outcome that the child is provided with after exhibiting a desired behavior (Açıklalın et al., 2001). The use of such judgmental expressions as "You are great!" and "You are perfect!" that relate to a child's personality may cause the child to assume that they will never be deserving of this adjective once they have made a mistake. In addition, it may cause the child to withdraw just so that the praise wouldn't turn out to be undeserving or to try to lighten their responsibility by exhibiting an undesired behavior. On the other hand, descriptive praise given through the definition of the specific desired behavior can enable the child to draw positive conclusions from these praises and thus, to develop essential opinions about their world (Ginott, Ginott, & Goddard, 2016). Criticism, on the other hand, can be defined as a listener's judgment of a speaker, shaped in line with their point of view (Dökmen, 2008). The use of criticizing, judging, and accusatory expressions by mothers in their interaction with their children may cause the child to feel inadequate, worthless, and humiliated, and to avoid communicating in order not

to face their mother's negative judgments. In addition, frequent criticism of children can negatively affect their self-esteem (Çağdaş, 2012; Gordon, 2017).

A mother's parenting self-efficacy level can be effective in mother-child interaction. Bandura (1995) defined the perception of self-efficacy as the belief in one's capabilities to manage future situations and execute and organize the necessary actions. According to Hergenbahn and Olson (2005), self-efficacy is one's beliefs about what one can do. Personal successes and failures, seeing oneself close to others in terms of performance in various tasks, and verbal persuasion can be determinative in the formation of self-efficacy perception. Individuals' high perceptions of efficacy may be effective in determining whether they will strive to cope with difficult situations. People may avoid anxiety-provoking situations that they believe they will have difficulty overcoming and may have difficulty exhibiting the expected behavior. However, when they believe that they will be successful in controlling the situations that occur, they are more likely to exhibit the expected behavior (Bandura, 1977; Schunk, 2011). Self-efficacy can reduce future fears and constraints, as well as affect previous efforts to be successful by individuals. Efficacy expectations can determine how much effort individuals will exert and how long they will sustain that effort when faced with obstacles and disruptive experiences. Individuals with a high level of proficiency and high expectations to cope with difficulties may tend to be more diligent (Bandura, 1977). In addition to behaviors, self-efficacy can also determine emotional reactions, especially in anxious, stressful, unfamiliar, or avoided situations. According to Bandura, a feeling of inadequacy arises in the face of undesirable events that cause individuals to fear. As a result, experiences that increase coping efficacy can reduce fear, and encountering this previously feared and avoided situation may appear as a less disturbing situation (Bandura, 1982).

Parental self-efficacy, on the other hand, belongs to the class of more general constructs related to general self-efficacy but consists of a potential cognitive construct related to child and family functions. Parental self-efficacy can also be defined as parents' expectations about whether they will be successful in raising children (Jones & Prinz, 2005). Parental self-efficacy includes the specific level of knowledge about the behaviors involved in both child development and child-rearing, and the ability of a parent to meet specified role behaviors without feelings of frustration or inadequacy (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). While raising their children, parents have to manage other relationships within the family system and non-family social affairs including education, entertainment, and health and care opportunities, as well as experiences related to the child. A mother's beliefs concerning parenting skills play an important role in their capability for caring their child and supporting their development. A mother's belief that she will fail in mothering may prevent them from demonstrating these skills. According to assessments undertaken among mothers before their first child is born, mothers with a high expected parenting self-efficacy have a stronger belief that they will be successful in their children's care (Bandura, 2000). It is also stated that parental self-efficacy may have been correlated with some important sides of parenting such as role satisfaction, control, parental warmth, and involvement (Junttila et al., 2007).

A low level of parenting self-efficacy may be considered an effective factor in a child's behavior problems by way of its implications for the mother's behaviors (Jackson & Huang, 2000). Parents who experience behavioral problems in their children may have difficulty maintaining a high parenting self-efficacy due to the negative consequences they have observed (Jones & Prinz, 2005). In addition, a low parental self-efficacy was found to be associated with the mother's depression level, controlling behaviors, high parenting stress, passive or negative style of coping with parenting, tendency to focus on relationship difficulties, irritability, and feelings of helplessness and disturbance (Coleman & Karraker, 1997). Mash et al., (1983), on the other hand, showed in their study that parents with low self-efficacy levels try to regulate their behavior by employing more authoritarian and stricter methods of discipline towards their children. Gözübüyük (2015) found that there was a positive and significant correlation between mothers' self-efficacy levels in teaching and daily tasks and their children's language and fine and gross motor skills. In another study, it was found that there was a positive and significant correlation between mothers' distinct strategies of mothering, what they can bring to the child, and their perception of total self-efficacy and their ability to establish close relationships with their children (Balat, 2015). In addition, a negative significant correlation was found between

children's levels of anger, aggression, anxiety, and introversion and mothers' levels of self-efficacy (Buluş & Samur, 2017). In another study conducted by Balat (2014) with mothers who have preschool children, a negative relationship was found between the mother's depression level and parenting self-efficacy level. Similarly, in another study conducted with mothers whose children attend a pre-school education institution, a negative relationship was found between the mother's anger level and parenting self-efficacy level (Balat, 2014; Balat, Sezer, & Tunçeli, 2014). Mash, Johnston, and Kovitz (1983) showed in their study that parents with low self-efficacy try to change their behavior by using more oppressive and strict discipline methods toward their children.

Mothers with high parenting self-efficacy levels may feel better emotionally, establish stronger bonds with their children, and adapt to the parenting role more easily in the postpartum period. It has been suggested that parents having high parental self-efficacy levels have a more favorable effect on their children's social competence than parents with low self-efficacy levels. Parents with high parental self-efficacy levels have also been suggested to create a more positive effect on their child's social competence level than parents with low parental self-efficacy levels (Swick, & Hassell, 1990). In addition, people having high parenting self-efficacy are more optimistic and display more coherent behaviors in parent-child interactions (Ozer, 1995). In a study conducted by Anthony et al. (2005), it was found that parents with high self-efficacy levels exhibit more positive, more consistent, and more competent behaviors toward their children. Other studies also found that high parenting self-efficacy levels exhibit more positive, more consistent, and more competent behaviors toward their children and engage in more verbal interaction and less conflict with their children (Anthony et al., 2005; Balat, 2015; Diken & Diken, 2008; Gözübüyük, 2015). Improved parental self-efficacy can reduce behavior problems observed in children or prevent the emergence of serious behavioral problems (Bandura, 2000). Relevant studies have emphasized that programs designed to improve mothers' levels of parenting self-efficacy or to strengthen parents' perceptions of self-efficacy may be instrumental in reducing children's behavioral problems and giving rise to more positive behaviors and more positive verbal expressions in mutual mother-child interactions (Coleman & Karraker, 2003; Diken, 2009; Mouton & Roskam, 2015).

When the literature is examined, it can be seen that parenting self-efficacy is linked with mostly some variables such as the mother's education level, social support, and child's gender (Brody, Flor, and Gibson, 1999; Coleman and Karraker, 2003; Davies & Lindsay, 2004; Dursun and Bıçakçı (2015) Holloway et al. 2005; Öztürk and Giren, 2015; Seven, 2007; Sevigny and Loutzenhiser, 2010; Teti and Gelfand, 1991). The socioeconomic status of the family, on which the education level of the mother is effective, has been associated with many aspects of parenting behavior (Fulgini & Yoshikawa, 2012). Higher parenting self-efficacy is observed in mothers with a higher education level, higher income, and having previous experiences with children other than their own (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Family and friends can provide support on issues that affect parenting, such as caring for children, financial assistance, promoting parenting performance, positive evaluations, and strategies for parenting skills (Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan, and Rodriguez-Brown, 2000). When adequate support is not provided, individuals' efforts to cope with stressful situations decrease. On the other hand, it is stated that individuals can feel more secure and emotionally better when adequate social support is provided (Bandura, 1995; Holloway, Suzuki, Yamamoto, & Behrens, 2005). The family's living conditions may play a role because raising a daughter or son may be more difficult under certain circumstances and therefore mother's self-efficacy can be different in terms of their child's gender (Gessulat, Oppermann, Cohen & Anders, 2023).

To form a strong bond between the baby and the mother, who is the person who cares for the baby in most cases, a positive interaction must be created between the mother and the baby. A situation that will negatively affect the interaction between mother and baby may prevent the baby from establishing unity with the mother and the mother from giving a healthy reaction to her baby (Bakkaloğlu, 2010). It is thought that one of the factors affecting mother-child interaction characteristics may be the mother's parenting self-efficacy level. The mother's beliefs about these skills are very important for her ability to care for her child and support his development, because the mother's belief that she will fail in various mothering skills may prevent her from displaying these skills. This situation, together with the variables that may determine the mother's self-efficacy skills, may negatively change the care that the

mother will provide to her child and the characteristics of her interaction with her child. However, when the early childhood education literature was examined, no study was found examining the relationship between mothers' parenting self-efficacy level and mother-child interaction characteristics during play. Therefore, it is thought that this study will contribute to the literature with these variables. In this context, the study aimed to examine the parental self-efficacy among mothers in terms of various variables (educational status of mothers, receiving social support, and gender of their children) and the correlation between parenting and general self-efficacy levels of mothers, and also the characteristics of their interaction with their children in the context of their parenting self-efficacy. To fulfill this general aim, the study seeks answers to the following questions: it was

1. Is there a significant difference between parenting self-efficacy levels of mothers with 60-72-month-old children and their educational status, receiving social support, and gender of their children?
2. Is there a significant correlation between general and parenting self-efficacy levels of mothers with 60-72-month-old children?
3. What are the characteristics of mother-child interaction among mothers with 60-72-month-old children in free and structured play concerning their parenting self-efficacy levels?

## Method

### Research Design

This study employed mixed methods research to achieve the aforementioned aims. Mixed methods research is a research approach bringing together or blending quantitative and qualitative data or methods in a study (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study, parents' general and parenting self-efficacy levels were identified through quantitative data, while the characteristics of mother-child interaction were determined with qualitative data. Consequently, this research study was designed as mixed-method research.

Explanatory sequential design, a form of mixed methods research, was considered appropriate for the present research study. According to Creswell and Clark (2010), quantitative data are to be collected first through studies conducted using explanatory sequential design, also called explanatory design. Quantitative data analysis results determined the subgroup where qualitative data will be collected as the final stage of the design.

### Research Sample

The sample of this study was determined through criterion sampling, a purposive sampling method. The criterion sampling method allows for an examination of units meeting a specific set of criteria designated for research (Büyükoztürk et al., 2008). The sample was identified in line with the criteria that the children are of normal development, attend a preschool, and are in the age range of 60-72 months in this study. Considering these criteria, 251 voluntary mothers and their children attending independent preschools in Altındağ, Keçiören, Mamak, Çankaya, and Yenimahalle districts of Ankara were included and they were asked to fill out the "Demographic Information Form", "General Self-Efficacy Scale-Turkish Form", and "Berkeley Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale Revised". Demographic information of the mothers participating in the study is given in Table 1.

Table 1.

Demographic Information of the Mothers

	Demografik Bilgi	n	%
Age	30 Years Old or Younger	102	40,6
	31-34 Years Old	87	34,7
	35 Years Old or Older	62	24,7
Educational Status	Primary School	39	15,5
	High School	127	50,6
	Associate Degree or Higher	85	33,9
Number of children	One Child	64	25,5
	Two Child	146	58,2
	Three or More Child	41	16,3
Working Status	Working	64	25,5

Table 1 continuing

	Not Working	187	74,5
Family Situation	Parents Together	241	96,0
	Parents Separated	10	4,0
Family Type	Extended Family	32	12,7
	Elementary Family	219	87,3
Child Gender	Girl	117	46,6
	Boy	134	53,4
Receiving Social Support (Husband)	Receiving	214	85,3
	Not Receiving	172	68,5
Total		251	100

Table 1 shows that 40.6% of the mothers participating in the research are “30 years old or younger”; 34.7% are “31-34 years old”; and 24.7% are “35 years old or older”. In terms of their educational status, 50.6% of the mothers are “high school” graduates; 33.9% have an “associate degree or higher”; and 15.5% are primary school graduates. 58.2% of the mothers have “two” children; 25.5% have “one” child; and 16.3% have “three or more” children. In the research, most of the mothers (74.5%) do not work. Most mothers are “parents together” (96%) and have an elementary family (87.3%). In response to a question on the spousal social support available to them, the majority of mothers (85.3%) indicate that they receive support from their spouses. The gender breakdown of the children participating in the study was balanced (53.4% were boys and 46.6% were girls). 60.2% of the children included in the study were the first child, 25.8% were the second child, 12% were the third child and 2% were the fourth child. When the duration of children's attendance at preschool was examined, it was seen that 39.8% had been attending preschool for "0-1 year", 29% had been attending preschool for "1-2 years" and 31.2% had been attending preschool for "2 years or more".

After the quantitative data was collected and analyzed, the study group which qualitative data were to be drawn from was determined in line with the criteria of high and low maternal self-efficacy. After mothers' scores of “Berkeley Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale Revised” were ranked from low to high the overall grouping of mothers having low and high parental self-efficacy was done. As a result, 10 mothers having low parenting self-efficacy and 10 mothers having high parenting self-efficacy and their children (12 boys and 8 girls) were included, in line with criterion sampling, in the subgroup for the subsequent organization of mother-child interaction games. Demographic information of the mothers and their children is included in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Demographic Information of the Mothers and Their Children

Demographic Information		n	%
Child Gender	Girl	8	40
	Boy	12	60
Child Birth Order	First Child	7	35
	Second Child	9	45
	Third Child or More	4	20
Number of children	One Child	1	5
	Two Child	15	75
	Three or More Child	4	20
Age	30 Years Old or Younger	6	30
	31-34 Years Old	8	40
	30 Years Old or Older	6	30
Educational Status	Primary School	5	25
	High School	9	45
	Associate Degree or Higher	6	30
Total		20	100

According to Table 2, 40% of mothers have girls and 60% have boys. When the birth order of their children is examined, it is seen that 35% of the children are the first child, 45% are the second child, and 20% are the third child or above. Additionally, 5% of mothers have only one child, 75% have 2

children, and 20% have 3 or more children. The ages of the mothers range between 24 and 45, and 30% of the mothers participating in the research are “30 years old or younger”; 40% are “31-34 years old”; and 30% are “35 years old or older”. 25% of the mothers are “high school” graduates; 45% have an “associate degree or higher”; and 30% are primary school graduates.

## **Data Collection Tools**

### **Demographic Information Form**

A demographic information sheet was prepared to address information about mothers and their children in the research. The information form includes two parts. The first part inquires into the child's gender, date of birth, birth order, and the duration of the child's time in preschool. The second part requests information about the mother's age, educational status, number of children, employment status, and spousal support with childcare, as well as the presence or absence of other individuals in the household and if present, their relationship with the family.

### **General Self-Efficacy Scale-Turkish form (GSES-TF)**

The study employed the GSES-TF to identify the level of general self-efficacy among the mothers. The first Turkish adaptation of the scale, developed by Sherer et al. (1982), was by Gözümlü and Aksayan (1999). The Turkish adaptation of the revised version was carried out by Yıldırım and İlhan (2010). Accordingly, 17 points can be obtained from the minimum and a maximum of 85 points can be obtained from the 5-likert scale, which consists of 17 items (Yıldırım & İlhan, 2010). The test-retest correlation coefficient of the GSES-TF was found to be .69. The internal consistency coefficient of the GSES-TF was calculated as .80. The exploratory factor analysis conducted for validity resulted in a three-factor structure. These factors were named “Beginning”, “Not Giving Up”, and “Sustaining”. This three-factor structure explains 41.47% of the variance (Yıldırım & İlhan, 2010).

### **Berkeley Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale Revised (BPSE-R)**

BPSE-R was used to identify the parenting self-efficacy levels of mothers. BPSE-R was developed by Suzuki et al., (2009) as an edited version of the Berkeley Parenting Self-Efficacy Scale (BPSE). The Turkish adaptation of the scale was published by Güler Yıldız et al., (2021). BPSE-R is a 6-point Likert scale and consists of two subscales, namely “parental strategies” and “child outcomes”. The internal consistency values of the BPSE-R were found to be 0.83, 0.87, and 0.91 for the subscales of “parental strategies” and “child outcomes”, and for the overall scale, respectively (Güler Yıldız et al., 2021).

### **Mother-Child Interaction Games**

Free and structured play sessions were utilized to determine the characteristics of mother-child interaction. The features of the game used in the research are as follows:

*Free Play (FP) Session:* For free play, each mother and their child entered an environment prepared specifically for the game and equipped with one table, two chairs, one carpet, and a playset in advance. The playset included a train, a toy car, a doll, a toy airplane, a puppet, a set of animals, toy kitchen utensils, and a toy set for playing house. After the mother and child were introduced to the environment, the following instruction was given to the mother: “Be natural, I want you to play with your child the way you always do. Also, you are not expected to make any additional effort. I'll let you know when your time is up.”

Each game resulted in 15 minutes of video recording, the first 10 minutes of which were considered adaptation play between the mother and the child to get familiar with the environment and thus, not included in the analysis.

*Structured Play (SP) Session:* After the free play, each mother and their child were introduced to the structured play session and given an 18-piece playset consisting of three-dimensional blocks of different shapes, and five visuals created by the author in advance. Prior to the commencement of the play sessions, the materials and visuals were vetted by three experts, and a series of pilot plays were implemented to confirm their suitability to the age group. During the actual play, the mother and the child were given the following instructions: “Now, you can collect the toys with your child and move on to the game in the other box. I want you to create the structures in the images together using the pieces in this set in 10 minutes.”

After the instructions for the structured play were explained to the mother and the child, the author left the room, and a 10-minute video recording was taken of the mother and child playing. Some mother-child pairs in the study completed the structures in images in less than 10 minutes; therefore, the analysis only considered the first 5 minutes of their video recording.

### **Data Collection and Ethics Committee Approval**

Before the commencement of the study, due permission was granted to the study by the Ethics Committee for its ethical compliance. Then, a group of mothers volunteered to be involved in the research and all of them signed consent forms. The mothers first filled in the “Demographic Information Form”, “Berkeley Parental Self-Efficacy Scale Revised”, and “General Self-Efficacy Scale”. After that, the quantitative data was analyzed and the grouping of the mothers with low and high parenting self-efficacy scores according to “Berkeley Parental Self-Efficacy Scale Revised” was done. Finally, the volunteering mothers and their children grouped in line with their levels of self-efficacy played mother-child interaction games in pairs in suitable preschool environments. For this purpose, environments used in preschool during activities carried out outside the classroom, such as drama and various active games, were used for the games. While choosing these environments, care was taken to ensure that there were no materials that could distract the attention of the child and mother. A table and two chairs were placed in the environment, and the mother and child were asked to sit facing the wall. The toys that the mother and child would play with were placed in the middle of the table, allowing easy access to the materials.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step in investigating the qualitative variables was the study of the normal distribution. For this purpose, the mean, mode, and median values, kurtosis and skewness coefficients, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, histogram, and scattering and box-line graphs are examined. For this reason, the Kruskal Wallis H-Test, one of the non-parametric tests, was used to examine the parenting self-efficacy levels of mothers according to the mother's education level. Mann Whitney U-Test, a non-parametric test, was used to examine mothers' parenting self-efficacy levels according to their social support status and the gender of their child. To examine the relationship between mothers' general and parenting self-efficacy levels, normal distribution was first examined. For this purpose, mean, mode, and median values, kurtosis and skewness coefficients, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, histogram, scatter, and box-plot plots were examined. These examinations resulted in the conclusion that the data did not distribute normally, and the Spearman Correlation Coefficient Test was used to test whether there was a relationship between the mothers' general and parenting self-efficacy levels.

The qualitative data collected for the research study including the characteristics of mother-child interaction and relevant video recordings was analyzed by the content analysis. With content analysis, identifying the concepts (codes) and determining the correlations (themes) in between to account for the data is targeted (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016).

The steps taken to encode the qualitative data firstly entailed the author watching all video recordings twice followed by the decoding and transcription of the video recordings. Once all video recordings had been transcribed, the transcripts were studied to identify certain codes in line with the literature on mother-child interaction (Mash et al., 1983; Cielinski et al., 1995; Bakkaloğlu & Sucuoğlu, 2000; Diken et al., 2009; Akgün & Yeşilyaprak, 2011; Ceyhun et al., 2015). The codes thus identified were taken as a reference for a second reading of the records (reinforced with a second viewing of the video recordings as necessary), whereby a list of codes was created with the addition of new codes identified. Then, all the records were watched once again and re-examined in line with the code list. Once the final code lists were organized, the codes were grouped around respective themes.

To ensure reliability in the coding of the qualitative data, the expectation is that the coding is undertaken by multiple authors independently and the numerical values of the similarities and differences observed are compared with a resulting value of over 70% (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2016). In the present study, independent coding was undertaken by a researcher attending their post-graduate program on preschool education for coding reliability, resulting in a reliability value of 71.3%

## Findings

### Findings of Mothers' Parenting Self-Efficacy Levels According to Mothers' Educational Status, Children's Gender and Social Support

The findings regarding whether the BPSE-R scores of the mothers differ significantly according to the educational status of the mothers, the gender of their children, and the status of receiving social support from their husbands are given in Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5 respectively.

Table 3.

BPSE-R Kruskal Wallis H-Test Analysis Results by Mothers' Educational Status

Educational Status	n	Mean Rank	df	X <sup>2</sup>	p
Elementary School	39	127,46	2	0,266	.876
High School	127	123,70			
Associate Degree and Above	85	128,76			

\* p>.05

According to Table 3, it was found that the total scores of mothers' parenting self-efficacy did not differ significantly according to their educational status.

Table 4.

BPSE-R Kruskal Wallis H-Test Analysis Results by Mothers' Educational Status BPSE-R Mann

Whitney U-Test Analysis Results by Gender of Children

Gender of Children	n	Mean Rank	Sum Rank	X <sup>2</sup>	p
Girl	117	140,35	16421,50	6159,50	.003*
Boy	134	113,47	15204,50		

\* p<.05

When Table 4 is examined, it was found that the total parenting self-efficacy scores of the mothers differed significantly according to the genders of their children, U=6159.50, p<.05. Considering the mean rank, it was observed that mothers with girls had higher parenting self-efficacy levels than mothers with boys.

Table 5.

BPSE-R Mann Whitney U-Test Analysis Results According to Mothers' Social Support from Their Husband

The Source of Social Support	Status of Receiving Social Support	n	Mean Rank	Sum Rank	X <sup>2</sup>	p
Husband	Receiving	214	126,78	27130,00	3793,00	.684
	Not Receiving	37	121,51	4496,00		

\* p>.05

Table 5 shows that the total scores of mothers' parenting self-efficacy did not differ significantly according to the status of receiving social support from the husband, U=3793.00, p>.05.

### Findings from The Evaluation of the Correlation Between General and Parenting Self-Efficacy of Mothers

This part describes the findings regarding the parenting self-efficacy levels and the general self-efficacy levels of the mothers and the characteristics of their interaction with their children according to the parenting self-efficacy. Table 6 shows the findings regarding the correlation between the general and parenting self-efficacy of the mothers.

Table 6.  
The Results of the Correlation Between Mothers' General and Parenting Self-Efficacy Levels

Variables	Beginning Subscale	Do not Give Up Subscale	Sustaining Subscale	General Self-Efficacy Total Score
Parental Strategies	.245*	.169*	.143*	.241*
	.000	.007	.024	.000
Child Outcomes	.233*	.124	.123	.206*
	.000	.050	.052	.001
BPSE-R Total Score	.242*	.139*	.134*	.222*
	.000	.028	.034	.000

\*  $p > .05$

Table 6 demonstrates that there is a weak positive correlation between the BPSE-R “Parental Strategies” subscale and the GSES-TF “Beginning” subscale,  $r = .245$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the GSES-TF “Do not give up” subscale,  $r = .169$ ,  $p < .05$ , the GSES-TF “Sustaining Effort-Insistence” subscale  $r = .143$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the total score of the GSES-TF  $r = .241$ ,  $p < .05$ .

It is found that there is a weak positive correlation between the BPSE-R “Child Outcomes” subscale and the GSES-TF “Beginning” subscale,  $r = .233$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and the total score of GSES-TF,  $r = .206$ ,  $p < .05$ . In addition, no significant relationship was identified between the BPSE-R “Child Outcomes” subscale and the GSES-TF “Do not give up” subscale,  $p = .05$ , and the GSES-TF “Sustaining Effort-Insistence” subscale,  $p > .05$ .

A positive and weak correlation is seen between the BPSE-R and the GSES-TF “Beginning” subscale,  $r = .242$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the GSES-TF “Do not give up” subscale,  $r = .139$ ,  $p < .05$ ; the GSES-TF “Sustaining Effort-Insistence” subscale,  $r = .134$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and the total score of the GSES-TF,  $r = .222$ ,  $p < .05$ . Cohen (1988) construes the correlation as weak if the correlation coefficient is in the range of  $r = .10$  -  $.29$ ; as moderate if  $r = .30$  -  $.49$ ; or as strong if  $r = .50$  -  $1.0$  (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Pallant, 2017).

### Findings from The Evaluation of the Characteristics of Mother-Child Interaction in Free and Structured Play According to Mothers' Parenting Self-Efficacy Levels

The characteristics of mother-child interaction and behavioral themes observed during free and structured play are described in Table 7.

Table 7.  
Behavior Themes Identified During Free and Structured Play

Behavior Themes Identified During Free and Structured Play					
Focusing on success	Sensitivity	Enjoyment	Being judgmental	Being out of play	Play interaction

A close look at Table 7 shows that the characteristics of mother-child interaction of mothers in free and structured play center around the themes of “focusing on success”, “sensitivity”, “enjoyment”, “being judgmental”, “being out of play”, and “play interaction”.

Table 8 shows the number of times mothers used expressions falling under the predetermined themes for the mother-child interaction characteristics and the analysis in line with the respective parenting self-efficacy levels.

Table 8.  
Behavior Themes Identified During Free and Structured Play

Parenting Self-Efficacy Level		Mother-Child Interaction Characteristics and Frequency of Expressions Used in Free and Structured Play											
		Focusing on Success		Sensitivity		Enjoyment		Being Judgmental		Play Interaction		Being Out of Play	
		FP	SP	FP	SP	FP	SP	FP	SP	FP	SP	FP	SP
Low	Participant No												
	M41	14	34	8	19	-	-	-	1	13	-	-	1
	M90	12	25	11	41	1	1	12	4	13	-	3	4
	M111	33	25	22	19	2	-	1	4	24	-	2	3
	M121	8	28	14	11	-	1	3	-	-	-	-	2
	M134	3	25	23	18	3	-	4	1	6	-	-	2
	M180	20	39	30	26	4	-	8	1	33	-	-	2
	M201	16	32	5	30	3	-	-	1	32	-	-	2
	M207	19	35	25	18	-	-	1	5	-	-	1	-
	M218	24	15	4	17	1	2	3	7	12	-	3	1
M251	27	39	29	20	2	-	2	2	3	-	2	-	
Total		176	297	171	219	16	4	34	26	136	0	11	17
High	M8	8	38	13	24	2	-	-	1	18	-	-	-
	M36	4	14	20	30	1	-	1	1	2	-	4	-
	M37	13	28	8	22	-	-	1	2	17	-	8	-
	M75	13	15	16	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	M81	10	27	12	30	2	-	2	2	3	-	1	-
	M89	9	21	9	5	-	-	2	1	6	-	1	-
	M118	9	27	14	42	2	-	1	4	10	-	4	-
	M137	19	15	19	24	-	-	6	10	7	-	-	-
	M185	21	30	37	53	6	4	1	-	29	-	-	-
	M200	15	15	9	19	3	2	-	3	19	-	-	-
Total		121	230	157	262	16	6	14	24	111	0	18	0

An analysis of Table 8 in line with the self-efficacy levels of the mothers indicates that the mothers with low parenting self-efficacy levels exhibit behaviors primarily the theme of “focusing on success” in the first place, followed by the themes of “sensitivity” and “play interaction”. The mothers having high parenting self-efficacy, otherwise, exhibited behaviors primarily around the theme of “sensitivity” during the games, followed by the themes of “focusing on success” and “play interaction”. The mothers having low parenting self-efficacy displayed more behaviors consistent with the theme of “being judgmental” and “being out of play” than mothers having high parenting self-efficacy.

The number of behaviors exhibited by mothers with both low and high parenting self-efficacy around the theme of “enjoyment” is close to each other and is in the lowest order.

When examined according to the types of free and structured play, the mothers are seen to have exhibited behaviors primarily around the theme of “sensitivity” during the free games, followed by the themes of “focusing on success” and “play interaction”. In structured plays, on the other hand, the behaviors of mothers gravitated more towards the theme of “focusing on success”, followed by the themes of “sensitivity” and “being judgmental”. None of the mothers were observed to display any behavior around the theme of “play interaction” in structured play. The number of behaviors exhibited by mothers for the theme of “enjoyment” is higher in free play.

The behavioral codes related to the characteristics of mother-child interaction observed during free and structured play are given in Table 9.

Table 9.  
Behavioral Themes and Codes Observed During Free and Structured Play

		Themes				
Codes	Focusing on Success	Sensitivity	Enjoyment	Being Judgmental	Being out of the Game	Play Interaction
		Directing	Feedback (reflecting, responding)	Humor, Laughing, Singing	Criticism	Conversations with no Relevance to the Game
	Teaching	Reinforcement (praise, applause, clap, encouragement)	Physical Contact			
	Interference	Asking Questions				
	Focusing on the Task	Complying with the Child's Wishes				
		Asking the Child for their Opinion				
		Assistance				

Examples of expressions grouped around the themes and relevant codes as specified in Table 9 are given below.

The mothers' expressions on the theme of “focusing on success” were accounted for with the codes of “directing”, “teaching”, “interference” and “focusing on the task”.

During the free play, M-C180 (Low PSE) used the following expressions as an example for the “teaching” code.

Mother: “Mr. Waiter!”

Child: “What!”

Mother: “Not what, Ma’am.”

Child: “Here...”

Mother: “You will say “Ma’am”.”

M-C89 (High PSE) used the following statements during the structured play as examples for the “Focusing on the Task” code:

Child: “Mom, I want to play a different game.”

Mom: “But look, you have to play with these. Come on, mommy. Come sit here.”

Child: “Mom, these are hard.”

The mothers' expressions around the theme of “sensitivity” accounted for the codes of “feedback (reflecting, responding)”, “reinforcement (praise, applause, clapping, encouragement)”, “asking questions”, “complying with the child's wishes”, “asking the child's opinion”, and “assistance”.

In the free play, M-C36 (High PSE) used the following expressions as examples for the code “Reinforcement (praise, applause, clapping, encouragement)”:

Child: “You put it in.”

Mom: “You did it all, you can put this in too.”

Child: “I don't think I can.”

Mother: “I think you do. How do you need to put it in so that it is round?”

Boy: “Ugh, I don't know.”

Mom: "You can do it."

During the structured play, M-C90 (Low PSE) used the following expressions as examples for the code "complying with the child's wishes".

Child: "Mom, I want to do this (pointing to one of the images)."

Mom: "Okay, let's do it, whatever you want, bring it here, but let's not forget our pieces."

The mothers' expressions around the theme of "enjoyment" were accounted for with the codes of "humor, laughing, singing" and "physical contact".

During the structured play, M-C41 (Low PSE) used the following sample expressions for the "physical contact" code:

Child: "Mom, I will find a place to sit, too."

Mom: "Okay, come on. We put it in like this. Right-o! (She sits the child on her lap.) Stop, this one should go here."

M200 (High PSE) used the following expressions during the free play as examples for the "humor, laughing, singing" code:

Mother: "Let her friend the donkey come (Mother and child sing the song "My Friend the Donkey"). Very nice."

Expressions of mothers on the theme of "being judgmental" were accounted for with the "criticism" code.

During the structured play, M-C90 (Low PSE) used the following statements around the "criticism" code:

Child: "Shall I break it apart? (He wants to break the shape to make the new shape.)"

Mother: (while the child is taking the shape apart) "Don't do that, don't let the pieces fall apart. Make your mind up, what do you want to do"

Child: (Selects an image and starts to do it.)

Mom: Be careful, that's not how it should be. But I've already told you that's not how it should be done. That's not the way. Come on, do it. Do its legs first. You will put it at the top. Yeah. Let's bring it a little closer to the edge.

Although the "play talk" code was included in the theme of "play interaction" during free play, mothers were found not to have exhibited any behaviors around the theme of "play interaction" during structured play.

M-C180 (Low PSE) used the following expressions during the free play as examples for the "play talk" code:

Mother: "Where is my tea and cake, waiter?"

Child: "Tea?"

Mom: "Yes, I want one tea and one cake. That's with sugar, Mommy, I take it without sugar."

Child: "Here you go"

Mom: "Yes, I'm drinking my tea. Thanks. Is this mine?" (They point to one of the two cups on the table.)

For the free and structured plays, the codes of "out of the game conversation", "not fulfilling the child's requests" and "opting out of the game" were included under the theme of "being out of play"

M-C89 (High PSE) used the following expressions during the free play as examples for the code "opting out of the game":

Boy: "I'm going to fly this plane."

Mom: "Never put it in your mouth."

Child: (The child plays alone with the plane for a while.)

Mother: (Mother also seems to be interested in the other toys.)

During the structured play, M-C180 (Low PSE) used the following statements for the code of "not doing the child's requests":

Child: "Done, can it stay up like this?" (He wants the piece to stand upright on the table.)

Mom: "It can't."

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

As a result of the study, it was found that the parenting self-efficacy of the mothers did not differ significantly according to their educational status. It is thought that one of the factors determining this finding of the study may be the critical evaluation of their skills by being more aware of the knowledge and skill deficiencies of the mothers who received more education. The result of the research conducted by Coleman and Karraker (2003) supports this finding that the level of parenting self-efficacy of the mother does not change according to educational status. Similarly, in the study of Brody, Flor, and Gibson (1999), it was concluded that the educational status of the mother did not affect parental self-efficacy. On the other hand, there are also studies in the literature showing that the parenting self-efficacy of mothers increases with education. In the study carried out by Dursun and Bıçakçı (2015), it was found that mothers with bachelor's degrees had higher parenting self-efficacy than mothers who graduated from primary school, and as a result of the research conducted by Öztürk and Giren (2015), the parenting self-efficacy level of high school graduate mothers was compared to the parenting self-efficacy level of primary school graduate mothers found to be higher. The results of these studies may differ due to the occupation and working status of the mother because some mothers can have more education about the child growing related to the occupation and this can result in higher parenting self-efficacy. In addition, the reason for this result may be the content of the education they receive. In addition, Holloway et al.'s (2005) research also shows that parents' parenting self-efficacy level is not related to the skills and resources obtained through higher education. In this study, most of the mothers were also primary and high school graduates and they didn't take a course directly related to parenting self-efficacy.

It was observed that mothers with daughters had higher parenting self-efficacy levels than mothers with sons. According to the literature, boys exhibit more externalized behavior problems (Davies & Lindsay, 2004; Seven, 2007). For this reason, it is thought that mothers with boys may have difficulty in managing these behaviors and may perceive their parenting self-efficacy as lower. In the study conducted by Sevigny and Loutzenhiser (2010), it was concluded that mothers with daughters had higher parenting self-efficacy levels. Similarly, Kılıçgün (2017) concluded that mothers with daughters have higher parenting self-efficacy levels. Unlike this result, Kotil's (2010) study found that the parenting self-efficacy of mothers did not change according to the gender of their children. The study of Holloway et al. (2005) on mothers with preschool children also shows that the parenting self-efficacy of mothers does not change according to the gender of the child. In addition, in the study conducted by Coleman and Karraker (2003), no relationship was found between the parenting self-efficacy of mothers and the gender of the child.

It was found that the parenting self-efficacy of the mothers did not differ significantly according to the status of receiving social support from the husband. The mother's dissatisfaction with the level of support despite receiving support from her spouse may cause no significant difference in parenting self-efficacy. Mothers who receive support from their husbands may not share the responsibilities related to the child equally so even if the mother receives support from their husbands, this may not be enough and satisfying. Unlike the findings of this study, studies in the literature have generally concluded that parenting self-efficacy levels of mothers increase with social support. In the study conducted by Holloway et al. (2005), it was concluded that mothers who received support from their spouses and other relatives had higher parenting self-efficacy. Similarly, in the study conducted by Kılıçgün (2017), it was concluded that mothers who received support from their spouses had higher

parenting self-efficacy. In the study conducted by Teti and Gelfand (1991), it was found that mothers who received more social support had higher parenting self-efficacy.

In the research, a significant positive correlation between the mothers' general self-efficacy and total scores in parenting self-efficacy and also their parental strategy subscale scores were concluded. Parenting self-efficacy is considered to develop proportionately with general self-efficacy, as the skills required to carry out various parenting tasks may be derived from a feeling of competence in skills developed and utilized in other parts of life. In other words, it may be that a mother's past experiences of success relating to their general self-efficacy may also indicate that they may exhibit appropriate parenting behaviors. There are similar studies in the literature indicating that the general self-efficacy of mothers predicts parenting self-efficacy (Coleman & Karraker, 2000; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2010). It was stated that as the level of parenting self-efficacy increases, it increases in direct proportion to the general self-efficacy level of the parents (Murdock, 2013). Unlike these studies, however, Porter and Hsu (2003) imply that mothers' general self-efficacy does not predict parenting self-efficacy.

In the present study, mothers having low parental self-efficacy were found to display more behaviors primarily closer to “focusing on success” followed by the themes of “sensitivity” and “play interaction”. One of the factors determining the behaviors of focusing on success among mothers having low parenting self-efficacy might be their disbelief in their capabilities to bring forward the skills necessary to achieve the expected goal with their child, especially in a structured play environment. Similarly, the literature establishes that parents' self-efficacy levels and their levels of stress while accompanying their children during play were negatively related (Sugiana et al., 2020). In addition, during the mother-child interaction games, some of the mothers stated that they did not know how to play with their children and had not been playing with them. It is considered that this may have something to do with the negative behaviors of mothers with low self-efficacy levels such as focusing on success.

Mothers having high parenting self-efficacy were concluded that they exhibit more behaviors around the themes of “sensitivity”, “focusing on success”, and “play interaction” during the games. In this regard, the positive beliefs of mothers with high parenting self-efficacy concerning their parenting skills are thought to improve their ability to interact positively with their children, and thus, such mothers exhibit more sensitive behaviors such as complying with the child's wishes, asking them for their opinion, assistance, and giving feedback. The literature indicates high parenting self-efficacy levels and positive parenting behaviors were positively related (Benedetto & Ingrassia, 2018). These behaviors are illustrated by inductive and non-rigid punishment discipline strategies, high parent involvement, and sensitivity and warmth towards children. Similarly, Fewell and Deutscher (2004) accounted for positive characteristics in mother-child interaction with the factors of sensitivity to the child's emotional state and interests. Certain studies account for positive characteristics in mother-child interaction with the themes of assistance (Bakkaloğlu and Sucuoğlu, 2000), sensitivity-responsivity (Ceyhun et al., 2015), sensitivity to the emotional state of the child, sensitivity to the child's interests (Mahoney et al., 1986), and asking descriptive questions, praise, and verbal reflection (Akgün and Yeşilyaprak, 2011). Similar to this conclusion of the present study, Leerkes and Crockenberg (2002) identified a positive and significant correlation between the mothers' parenting self-efficacy and sensitivity.

Mothers having low parenting self-efficacy levels exhibit more behaviors around the theme of “being judgmental” and “being out of the game” than mothers with high parenting self-efficacy levels. A factor that determines parents' judgmental behavior may be their children's inability to manage the problem behaviors of their mothers with low self-efficacy levels. This, in turn, predisposes parents to use more judgmental expressions in their interactions with their children. In Anicama (2018), parental self-efficacy is negatively associated with harsh/punitive parenting. In parallel, Maglica et al., (2020) concluded that any replacement in parenting self-efficacy level corresponds to an increase in their children's extroverted problem behaviors. There are also studies in the literature suggesting that there may be a cyclical relationship between a child's behavior and the mother-child interaction. In addition, Crowell and Feldman (1988) concluded that the children of calm and self-confident mothers who are interested and enthusiastic in participating in activities with their children have fewer behavioral

problems. Ferreira et al. (2016) found a positive correlation between the prosocial behavior of children and mother-child interaction quality. On the other side, it is considered that mothers having low parenting self-efficacy can exhibit more out-of-play behavior because of their self-perceived incapacity to demonstrate the skills necessary to achieve the goal set for the structured game with their child and their resulting inability to manage the process. Similarly, Büyüктаşkapu (2012) found mothers to hold perceptions of low efficacy in playing with their children.

The values of the behaviors of mothers having either low or high parenting self-efficacy around the theme of “enjoyment” are close to each other, albeit at the lowest rank among all themes and only slightly higher in free play. Mothers with either low or high self-efficacy levels can, similarly, participate more actively in a game with their children by taking on more roles in free play, and can adapt to the game more easily owing to the variety of materials. They are thus considered to be more capable of developing richer game content and enjoying the game more during free play. Similarly, Ginsburg (2007) considers the participation of parents in their children's free play as an opportunity for them to see the world from their child's perspective and as a suitable environment for communicating more effectively with their children and offering gentle and nurturing guidance. Free play situations often see children being more enthusiastic and more persistent in their problem-solving situations, finding it easier to elicit and accept their mother's help and offer them more room for exploration. Özyürek and Gürleyik (2016) revealed that mothers reportedly playing dramatic games such as playing house thought that the game gave them happiness through stress relief and relaxation. Fewell and Deutscher (2004) and Bakkaloğlu and Sucuoğlu (2000) accounted for the mother-child interaction behaviors observed during free play with the factor of enjoyment and the theme of positive emotion. Moreover, Kwon et al., (2013) observed that parents established more cognitive scaffolding and exhibited less negative behavior towards their children during free play compared to structured play.

In the study, it was concluded that mothers mostly exhibited behaviors around the theme of “sensitivity” in free play, followed by the themes of “focusing on success” and “play interaction”. Free play is considered to make it easier for mothers to exhibit more sensitive behaviors such as giving feedback or encouragement, fulfilling the child’s wishes, and asking questions since free play does not dictate a predetermined goal to be achieved with the play emerging spontaneously roles being assumed in an imaginary world, and the mother and the child taking an active role in the play. In this process, children's strengths and independence can be supported through encouragement that focuses on the process and effort instead of focusing on the result (Açıklım et al., 2001). Thus, words of encouragement can help the child feel better by allowing them to express their feelings more easily (Chapman & Campbell, 2012). Similarly, asking a child for their opinions encourages the child to make an effort to control their behavior. A parent offering constant guidance and not allowing the child to make their own choice may cause frustration, persistence in inappropriate behaviors, and resistance. A child who is allowed to make choices and produce solutions can regulate their behavior more easily (Faber & Mazlish, 2012). In addition, open-ended materials made available to a mother and their child during free play are also thought to support mothers in exhibiting sensitive behaviors. Thus, any restrictions on mother-child interaction may be avoided effectively through open-ended questions inquiring into the child’s feelings rather than questions that make the child feel bad such as those of a judgmental or accusatory nature (Gordon, 2017).

In the structured play, the mothers were found to display more behaviors around the theme of “sensitivity” and “being judgmental” with the most common theme being “focusing on success”, and they did not exhibit any behaviors related to the theme of “play interaction”. One of the factors that determine the success-oriented behaviors of parents may be that mothers focus on the goal that needs to be achieved at the end of the game rather than on playing with their children in structured games. Thus, in structured play, it is thought that mothers use directing expressions that require less interaction instead of expressions aimed at improving their interaction during the game such as talking to their children. In addition, the mothers’ disbelief in their arsenal of cognitive abilities sufficient for their children to achieve the result in the game is thought to have a role to play in their gravitation to interfering in their child’s play more and thus, in their focus on success. Piaget emphasizes the importance of pretend games, which allow children aged two to seven to develop and use skills such

as role-playing, animating, and replacing one object with another. In addition, Piaget argues that games with rules, which can be very beneficial for a child in terms of skills such as learning the importance of following the rules, cooperation, and social development, require higher cognitive abilities and their functionality starts around the age of seven and remains relevant into adulthood (Kadan, 2018; Özdoğan, 2014). When evaluated in this context, free play in preschool is considered to have a very important role in mother-child interaction. In addition, John et al., (2013) concluded that mothers, while playing a game with their child, tended to display behaviors of trying to structure the game and teaching their child how to play it. The fact that the behaviors around the theme of sensitivity were exhibited more in structured play than in free play may be associated with the mothers' belief that they could offer better reinforcement and support to their children by giving them clues to achieve the goal during the play. The literature states that parents' efforts to reinforce the positive requests of their children often result in the regulation of their negative requests (Root & Rubin, 2010). In addition, it is argued that parents can help reinforce correct behaviors by using affirmative feedback, and with corrective feedback, they can send a message to the child about which behavior should be corrected and how this can be achieved (Açıklım et al., 2001). Behaviors of assistance are also very crucial as regards helping the child in structured play. However, if parents try to solve the problems before the child has the opportunity to do so, the child may not develop sufficient problem-solving skills. For this reason, parents need to support their children by assuming a facilitating role instead of taking on the child's problem completely (Gordon, 2017).

In conclusion, mothers with low self-efficacy levels were found in general to exhibit more behaviors around the themes of focusing on success, being judgmental, play interaction, and being out of games. Mothers with high parenting self-efficacy levels were concluded to display more behaviors around the theme of sensitivity during the games. In the study, a suitable play environment was prepared for the mother and child to play, and they were allowed to stay alone in the room so that they felt more comfortable during the game. Video recording was taken to fully evaluate mother and child expressions during mother-child games. The fact that the data obtained regarding the expressions and behaviors during mother-child interaction are based on the records obtained during the video recording process can be considered a limitation of the study. A comparison between free and structured play sessions indicated that mothers enjoyed free play more and did not exhibit play interaction behavior in structured play. Moreover, the mothers participating in the study were observed to have used certain expressions indicating that they had not played with their children and did not know how to play with them, and to have enjoyed the game more during free play. In this regard, it is recommended that parents be given training on the importance of playing games and on the types of games they can play at home with their children. It is also recommended to plan training for mothers having preschool children to improve their parenting self-efficacy levels and the characteristics of their mother-child interaction. The study examined mother-child interactions by qualitative methods in line with the mothers' respective parenting self-efficacy levels. For future research, the use of quantitative measurement tools is recommended for the determination of the correlation between mothers' parenting self-efficacy and the characteristics of their interaction with their children using quantitative measurement tools.

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