

Investigation of psychosocial risks with creative drama practices based on picture storybooks in the preschool period

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the presence of psychosocial risks in the preschool period with creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks. For this purpose, a total of 9 creative drama sessions based on illustrated storybooks for 19 children aged 60-72 months attending a kindergarten in the Doğankent district of Giresun in the 2023-2024 academic year were examined with a retrospective case study method. Observation, researcher diary, student demographic information form, and teacher evaluation forms were used as data collection tools. The contents of all these data were reviewed by the researcher, the consultant teacher, and the preschool teacher using the data triangulation method. As a result, five psychosocial risks were identified in children through creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks. Accordingly, it was observed that the most common risk in children was experience or fear related to an earthquake. In addition, the risks of need for protection, separation anxiety, technology addiction, and violent responses were observed. It was seen that these psychosocial risks were predominantly expressed by children through self-disclosure in the Revitalization phase of creative drama. The Warm-up, Preparation, and Evaluation stages followed this. In all these stages, it was observed that children disclosed themselves during the interim evaluation activities according to the activity type. It was seen that the interim evaluation questions were prepared with the Scamper style open-ended question method. In this context, the creative drama process can be considered a tool that reveals the child's inner world and improves the teacher's pedagogical awareness and early intervention capacity.

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Introduction

The definition of psychosocial risk covers issues such as social skills, leadership, health, respect, and justice (Cooper & Savaf, 1997). It is emphasized that individuals' demographic characteristics, emotional and social competencies, migration, disaster, economic crises, and experiences with technology can cause different risks (Akalp & Erkasap, 2024). In this context, Barfield (2004) examines psychosocial risks under three subheadings:

Individual risk factors; Premature birth, chronic illnesses, gender, social and emotional disorders, personality structure, insecure attachment, etc.

Family risk factors; Chronic illnesses of parents, conflict between parents, divorce, death of parents, growing up with a single parent, conflict between parents and children, etc.

Environmental risk factors; Economic difficulties, war or natural disasters, sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, homelessness, living in rural areas, level of development of society, witnessing social violence.

It is known that studies on psychological resilience have been talking about psychosocial risks and preventive interventions for the last 30 years (Yoldaş & Demircioğlu, 2019). In this context, a study on psychosocial risks followed the process of 700 individuals who were exposed to severe situations such as neglect and abuse from birth to the age of 40. The results of the study emphasized that only one-third of the children became competent, self-confident, and caring adults in the future and did not show many problems during their developmental periods. In this study, it was stated that individuals could cope with risks and protect themselves thanks to the development of individual elements such as emotional skills and intelligence. However, it was reported that the other two-thirds of the participants in the study were negatively affected by risks because the same skills were not developed. In this context, it was seen that individual, familial and environmental protective elements were important in preventing psychosocial risks (Kandel et al., 1988).

The early childhood period, which includes the preschool period, is a critical period in which growth and development are very rapid and therefore the most open to the support of the environment (Türkoğlu & Uslu, 2016). This period is also seen as an important period for early detection and prevention of psychosocial risks. In addition, it is also necessary to standardize the quality of education provided in this period for children in all conditions, monitor risks, and support children's social-emotional and educational development (Demircioğlu & Gunindi, 2021). In this context, it is recommended to approach children with different methods and techniques that support social and emotional skills instead of rote memorization and classical methods in gaining psychosocial skills (Özözen Danacı et al., 2018).

It is known that using children's literature products such as picture storybooks from an early age in the preschool period supports several expressive language skills of the child, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing awareness. In addition, it is emphasized that the child has important gains in social and emotional areas, such as diversification of vocabulary, motivation, critical thinking, empathy, and social skills (Bağcı Ayrancı & Aytaş, 2017). According to research, children's interaction during such book activities yields more effective results than activities in which they are only listeners with straight narration (Whitehurst et al., 1994). It is recommended that teachers use drama and story together in order for children to understand stories in depth (Adomat, 2012). According to another view, using story types such as fairy tales and drama makes the student active and is recommended (Tanrikulu & Yoğurtçu, 2018). Accordingly, creative drama not only develops and discovers some skills in children, but also provides information about the psychological state of the child by entering his/her emotional world and seeing the child closely (Gezen, 2022).

It is generally emphasized that stories and fairy tales can be used and animated in creating drama activities. The aim of using story types in creative drama is not to process the story itself as it is, but to make these types suitable for animation. It is stated that there are many benefits for the development of children, especially in the processes of story creation and animation (Kara, 2013). In addition, drama enables children to reveal their intelligence and to act actively in cooperation with their peers (Kılınç et al., 2017).

In this context, self-disclosure behaviour is an important developmental role of creative drama for children. When we look at the definitions of self-disclosure behaviour refers to an individual in a drama context opening up to share psychological and emotional information about themselves with the audience or others. (Özşenler, 2013). Research in this context shows that creative drama is compelling for children's emotional behaviours (Ceylan & Ömeroğlu, 2012). It is also argued that it has an emotionally healing power on children through dramatic processes such as role-playing. It is also thought to direct children's academic and social success in their future lives by providing emotional control (Goldstein & Lerner, 2018). Children can freely express their positive and negative emotions thanks to creative drama. Additionally, creative drama helps children release inner tensions and supports their emotional development (Yazar et al., 2010).

It is known that activities in which picture storybooks are integrated with creative drama aim to increase social and emotional development in children to higher levels (Schmidt et al., 2023). In this context, creative drama is an important method for early recognition of possible emotional risks reflected in children's expressions, as it allows children to express their inner thoughts freely and open themselves up. In a study investigating the master's theses on creative drama, it is seen that most of the researches were conducted on children's groups and social skills (Koçak Tümer & Tanju Aslışen, 2022). In this sense, another study recommended conducting large-scale screening in Turkey to identify psychosocial risks in children (Kapisız et al., 2019). However, it has been observed that there are not many studies on the role of creative drama practices based on picture storybooks in identifying psychosocial risks in early childhood. This situation also constitutes both the research problem and the rationale of this study.

In this context, this study aims to examine psychosocial risks for preschool children by using creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks. The sub-problems for the research are as follows:

1. What psychosocial risks are in children's expressions during creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks?
2. At which stage of the creative drama practices were psychosocial risks most frequently encountered?

Theoretical framework

This study examines the usability of the creative drama method in identifying children's psychosocial risks and evaluates this process in the light of developmental and contextual theories. The research is structured based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Vygotsky's convergent field of development and sociocultural theory, Phillips and Shonkoff's framework of developmental support and risk in early childhood.

Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes that the child's development is shaped not only by the individual but also by the interaction of familial, social, and cultural systems. In this context, microsystem-level effects such as post-disaster environmental changes, socioeconomic deprivations, and parental anxiety come to the forefront of the study.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory argues that children's learning and self-expression processes develop through social interaction. In this respect, creative drama offers a safe and supportive space for children to express their experiences through symbols and role-playing.

In addition, the protective and risk factors identified by Phillips and Shonkoff for early childhood development were analysed in this study, and creative drama activities were evaluated as an observation area for children to reveal risk indicators and resilience resources.

Method

Research design

This research was designed as a retrospective case study. A case study is a qualitative research design that can be the product and object of research. By definition, it is "a qualitative approach in which the researcher collects detailed and in-depth information through multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual materials and documents, and reports) about real life, a current limited system (a situation), or multiple limited systems (situations) over some time, and presents a case description or case themes" (Creswell, 2021). It is emphasized that the role of the researcher is vital in case studies. In order to reveal the situation handled by the researcher in the best way, good questions should be asked, and the answers should be interpreted objectively (Subaşı & Okumuş, 2017). For this purpose, the role of the researcher is given below under a separate heading.

Role of the researcher

The researcher works as a preschool teacher in an independent kindergarten and has a master's degree with a thesis in preschool. In this context, the subject of this study was created based on a project that the researcher had previously prepared independently on creative drama during a research assignment carried out within the scope of the master's course titled Working with Children and Families at Risk.

During the reporting of this project, the researcher noticed that the children expressed some information that could pose some psychosocial risk by revealing themselves. This situation was shared with the advisor teacher of the master's course and also the other author of this study, Dr. Tuğba Konaş Azaklı, an academic in the field of early childhood education. Studies in the literature on this subject were reviewed. It was seen that picture storybooks and drama practices can be used to support children developmentally in the preschool period and to identify psychosocial risks. However, it was seen that there were not many specific studies in the literature in which psychosocial risks in children were identified by using both methods.

In this context, it was decided to reveal the psychosocial risk situations by scanning the reflective diaries kept by the researcher throughout the process, all verbal or non-verbal expressions in the videos and pictures of the children taken during the activities, and all past data belonging to the teacher interview and observation forms. Since the researcher was in a practitioner position during the observation process, she had the chance to interact directly with the children and observe their natural behaviours. Detailed notes on these observations were included in the diaries kept. In the data analysis, the data triangulation method was used by taking the reflective diary notes of the researcher, the interview forms made with the classroom

teacher, and the consultant teacher's opinions. In this way, psychosocial risks were identified by objectively evaluating and discussing the views of three different people.

Study group

The study group of the research consisted of 9 girls and 10 boys between the ages of 60–79 months attending an independent kindergarten in the Doğan kent district of Giresun, which was determined by a convenient sampling method. When the ages of the children are analysed chronologically, it is seen that there are 10 children aged 5 and 10 children aged 6. Among these children, eight students were estimated to be in the risk group during the implementation process and included in the findings section. Accordingly, it was determined that all these students were 5 years old, three girls and five boys, born in 2018. Their pseudonyms are as follows: Asiye, Ayşe, Akın, Cemile, Cömert, Ege, Mehmet, Samet.

Ethics process

After obtaining permission from the Giresun Provincial Directorate of National Education, the researcher conducted nine sessions as of the 2023–2024 academic year. Each session was planned for 2 class hours (80 minutes), and 18 hours of activity implementation were completed. A creative drama session was conducted in each session based on a children's picture book. Whether the prepared plans were suitable for the children or not was checked by a consultant who is also an expert in the field, and after the arrangements were made according to the feedback, the final form was given and implemented.

Data collection tools

Within the scope of this study, data were collected from more than one source. Accordingly, to identify psychosocial risks, the researcher consulted the opinions of sources other than herself and proceeded with the data triangulation method. First, sub-problem questions appropriate to the purpose of the study were formulated. Then, all researcher diaries, activity videos, and pictures that might be suitable for the answers to the problems were collected together. The teacher of the classroom where the implementation was carried out also observed the children throughout the process, took videos and photographs, and made observations for each student before and after the implementation.

Each data collection tool used in the study contributed to understanding the research problem from different dimensions:

Researcher's Diary: Structured to answer questions such as “When does the child open up?” and “How does the child interact with whom?” It contains notes based on the researcher's observations and emotional analyses throughout the process. The researcher, who acted as the practitioner during the research process, used the natural and participatory observation method. The natural behaviours of children in creative drama sessions were observed, verbal and nonverbal responses were recorded, and reflected in the researcher's journal. Written information about these observations was also provided by filling out the Student Demographic Information Form.

Student Demographic Information Form: Information about the children's age, gender, developmental status, and previous experiences was provided. In this context, it was learned that within the scope of the children's previous experiences, two children were exposed to an earthquake and their houses were destroyed, they had economic difficulties, three children had problems with adaptation to school, and three children had difficulty attending school regularly because they had separation anxiety.

Teacher Interview Forms: Questions such as “What are the children's routine behaviours?” and “Do risk-inducing behaviours occur frequently?” were answered to contribute to the data triangulation.

Activity Videos and Photographs: These were used to understand children's nonverbal expressions, observe recurring attitudes, and validate analyses.

Data analysis

All activity videos and photos from the nine sessions included in the scope of the research were analysed along with the Researcher's Diary, Student Demographic Information Form, and Teacher Interview Forms. The researcher, the consultant teacher, and the classroom teacher who conducted the practices tabulated and analysed these data. Accordingly, creative drama sessions consisted of three stages: Warm-up, enactment phase, and evaluation, and the stage and activities in which the data occurred were determined. Then, verbal and nonverbal expressions were examined together in these stages. For example, the facial expressions of children while expressing themselves were observed. Additionally, children may repeat what others say due to their age and developmental characteristics. To evaluate the child's overall condition, including their family background and behaviour throughout the process, and to identify any psychosocial

risks, interviews with the classroom teacher and consultant teacher were conducted, and the researcher's diary was also considered.

Coding process and thematic structure

The data obtained in the study were examined using content analysis, and the statements obtained were coded both verbally and behaviourally. In the coding process, the data were first read repeatedly in line with the research questions, and similar contents were grouped to determine the following five thematic categories. Each category was defined based on the children's statements, behaviours, and observation notes and was verified through triple data triangulation with the contributions of the classroom teacher and the consultant teacher.

Earthquake-related experience or fear

Under this theme, children's direct statements about the earthquake (e.g., “there was an earthquake,” “we hid under the table”) or indirect statements about post-earthquake experiences (e.g., “ladybugs went to jail, they entered houses”) were evaluated. Additionally, observation notes related to post-earthquake migration, loss, and home changes were included in this theme.

Need for protection

Sentences expressing the desire for protection (e.g., “I wish I were a lion because lions protect people”), frequent hugging behaviour, seeking physical closeness to the teacher or researcher, and behaviours indicating a need for security were included in this theme.

Separation anxiety

Difficulties experienced during separation from the mother or parents, difficulty adjusting to school, unwillingness to participate in activities, constant crying, and the teacher's observations on this subject were evaluated under this theme.

Technology addiction

Statements indicating that children spend long periods in front of screens at home (e.g., “I play on my phone until evening”), teacher reports in this regard, and observed attention deficits, signs of addiction, or the effects of content are coded under this theme.

Violent responses

Statements made by children during role-playing, such as violent roles (e.g., “we attacked the old woman”), hitting, or causing harm; reactions to frightening creatures or aggressive behaviour were evaluated under this theme. However, only repeated statements that went beyond the context of the game were considered for this theme.

Coding process

In coding the data, verbal expressions, children's behaviours, and teacher observations from each session were tabulated, and then the data pieces in these tables were placed under the above themes. It was considered a stronger finding if verbal and behavioural evidence supported an expression. In addition, children's regular participation in activities was considered a factor that increased the reliability of the themes.

Limitations

This study is based solely on data from creative drama sessions attended by 19 children aged 5–6 enrolled in an independent kindergarten in a district of Giresun during the 2023–2024 academic year.

Findings

In this section, data obtained from children are classified thematically, and a comprehensive picture is presented of how psychosocial risk factors are reflected in children's statements, behaviours, and observation notes. Before presenting the findings, a thematic map created according to how risk themes emerged is presented below.

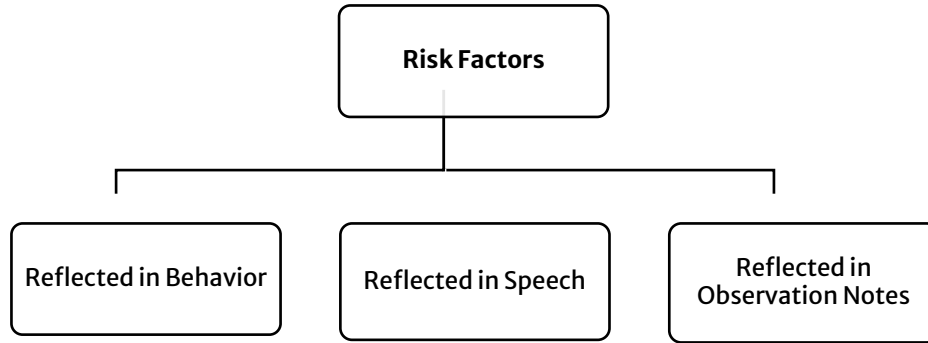


Figure 1. Thematic map

Table 1. Classification of psychosocial risks identified in children according to their manifestation forms

Risk factor	Reflected in behavior	Reflected in words	Reflected in observation notes
An experience or fear related to an earthquake	-	✓	✓
Separation anxiety	✓	-	✓
Need for protection	✓	✓	✓
Responding with violence	✓	✓	-
Technology addiction	✓	✓	✓

Within the scope of the first problem of our study, all videos and images of children participating in creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks were scanned. The psychosocial risks identified in the children's statements are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Psychosocial risks in children's expressions during creative drama practices developed based on picture storybooks

	Verbal expressions	Psychosocial risks
1st session	3rd activity Asiye: "...there was an earthquake." Mehmet: "...there was an earthquake, he must be hiding under the table." Cömert: "...the teacher left the classroom." 7th activity Asiye: "...this is a ladybug, and it is in jail because it kept flying into other people's houses."	3rd activity 1. An experience or fear related to an earthquake 2. Separation anxiety 3. Need for protection 7. Activity 1. An experience or fear related to an earthquake
3rd session	3rd activity Ayşe: "the tree has fallen to the ground; there has been an earthquake." Mehmet: 'there has been an earthquake, the tree is shaking.' Asiye: 'there has been an earthquake.'	1. An experience or fear related to an earthquake
4th session	1. Activity Cemile: "...I watch tv until evening." Akın: "...I play games on my tablet at home." Ege: "...I watch tv until evening." Mehmet: "...I play on my phone. Then I go to sleep." Samet: "...I watch tv and go to sleep." 3. Activity Mehmet: "I would like to go to Hatay."	1. Activity 1. Technology addiction 3. Activity 1. An experience or fear related to an earthquake
6th session	2. Activity Interim assessment Samet: "I would like to be a lion because lions protect people."	1. Need for protection
7th session	2. Activity Interim assessment Asiye: "earthquake." Ayşe: "shaking during an earthquake."	1. An experience and fear related to an earthquake
8th session	3. Activity Asiye: "We had a dog attack an old lady and a child (laughing)." Ayşe: "We were dogs and attacked the old lady."	1. Responding with violence

According to the findings in the table, five psychosocial risks were identified in children through creative drama practices developed based on picture story books. The most common risk in children was an experience or fear related to an earthquake. In addition, the risks of “Need for Protection,” “Separation Anxiety,” “Technology Addiction,” and “Violent Responses” were identified. These headings were created based on interviews with the classroom teacher where the practices were carried out, reflective journals kept by the researcher, and the opinions of the consultant teacher.

Regarding the “Experience or Fear Related to Earthquakes,” heading when the observations and interviews of the teacher of the class where the practices were carried out were examined, it was seen that there were two female and one male students who were seriously affected by two earthquakes, and in this context, it was seen that the statements in the research findings were based on real experiences. It was noted that these students had come to the district where the school is located for the first time due to the disaster and had lost many close relatives in the earthquake in their hometown. In this context, the statement “...this is a ladybug, and it has been imprisoned because it kept flying into other people's houses” was initially interpreted by the researcher and consultant as a story related to theft, but after discussions with the teacher, it was included under this heading. This is because it was determined that the child's home was severely damaged after the earthquake and then burglars broke into the house and looted it, and that this sentence was based on a real experience related to the earthquake and fear. It was also observed during home visits by the teacher that the girl's family was more emotionally affected by the earthquake. The researcher also observed that Ayşe, who was sitting at the same table as the female student during the exercise, gave answers related to the earthquake during the role-play, took on roles related to the earthquake, and was affected by the situation, even though she had not actually experienced the earthquake. The consultant teacher assessed this situation as children who had not experienced the earthquake being affected by reflecting those feelings through their peers. In addition, it was observed that the same child continued this behaviour in different ways throughout the process. For example, in the eighth session, the instructor asked the children, “Imagine that you are pandas living in a big forest and you are very lonely. Who would you most want to be with you at that moment?” Then, the children were asked to draw a picture of that moment on the craft paper. When the videos of the children drawing pictures for this activity were reviewed, it was observed that Ayşe drew something next to the picture of another friend next to her and described it, but did not express her own idea. It was determined that this student generally gave answers influenced by the people around her and had difficulty giving original answers.

Regarding the “Need for Protection” heading, when the observations and interviews of the teacher of the class where the practices were carried out were examined, the teacher noted that this need was particularly intense among the students affected by the earthquake and in one child with low socioeconomic status and many siblings. In particular, it was stated that the female student affected by the earthquake constantly came to the teacher to hug her and that she felt a need for attention. In addition, it was learned that this student's father works in another city during the week, so he lives away from home, and they are going through a difficult financial period, so they will move to the city where his father works after the school year ends. In the researcher's daily notes, it was noted that outside of the drama sessions, when the child encountered the researcher, she said that she missed her father on weekends and that when he came, he would take her out a lot, even until their feet hurt, and that they would move to a new house with her father. It was observed that the girl student wanted to hug the researcher tightly for a long time every time she saw them, talked and opened up, and that this behaviour was only intensely exhibited by her in the classroom. It was even heard that her classmates were bothered by this, saying, “She's always hugging him... we're tired of it.” The consultant teacher noted that this situation should be addressed separately as an indication of the child's need for protection. Ayşe, who witnessed this situation in the classroom, was also influenced by Asiye and tried to hug the researcher, imitating her. No findings indicating a need for protection were observed in the other boy affected by the earthquake. It was determined that this child lives in a crowded family with his relatives in the district, including his brother and cousins, while the girl student came to the district with only her mother and brother, and her father lives outside the city. In addition, the teacher stated that the economic situation of the other child, who answered, “I want to be a lion because lions protect people,” was very poor and that he had five siblings. In this sense, it was observed that he constantly tried to attract attention during the activity process in his behaviour in the classroom. He was also physically weak and neglected compared to his peers.

Regarding the “Separation Anxiety,” heading when the observations and interviews of the teacher of the class where the practices were carried out were examined the teacher reported two children who enrolled late after transferring from another school and one child who had difficulty separating from his mother since the beginning of the year (due to adaptation problems), and that these children cried constantly. Looking at the researcher's daily notes, it was seen that two of these children did not want to participate in any activities

and cried constantly during the first weeks of the practices, and the researcher did not insist. In the last activities, however, it was seen that these children started to actively participate in the activities and their crying behaviour stopped. It was observed that even when seen in an environment outside of school where they had established an emotional connection with the researcher, they attempted to communicate and show affection without crying.

In teacher interviews conducted under the heading “Technology Addiction,” it was stated that due to the socio-economic conditions of the district, there were no social-cultural environments where children in the classroom could spend time outside of school, and that parents were unable to spend quality time with their children at home, leading some of the children in the classroom to spend excessive time with technology and be exposed to violent images. It was determined that the responses received during the sessions were generally provided by these children. It was noted that the school had conducted educational programs for parents and home visits regarding this issue.

Regarding the heading “Giving Violent Responses” when the observations and interviews of the teacher of the class. Looking at the researcher's daily notes, it was seen that two of these children did not want to participate in any activities and cried constantly during the first weeks of the practices, was carried out were examined, it was seen that this situation was related to the heading “Technology Addiction.” It was stated that children had tablets at home and that they were affected by such violent images and reflected them during other activities. According to the researcher's notes, it was observed that children began to express themselves more freely, especially at the end of the drama, and actively took on roles during the role-playing. In this context, during the interview with the consultant teacher, it was emphasized that children should be observed without intervention while expressing all kinds of positive and negative emotions in the drama and that this could be a natural part of the drama process. Therefore, children's fears about invisible beings (monsters, etc.) and any expressions of violence (dying, hitting, etc.) were not considered risky. In this context, only the role-playing process carried out by the children during the eighth session, titled “Lonely Panda,” was evaluated. During this session, it was observed that Asiye, a female student affected by the earthquake, said, “We attacked an old woman and a child with a dog (laughing),” and Ayşe, who shared the same role with her, was influenced by her and attacked an old woman in the role play.

Accordingly, the data related to the second research question, “At which stage of creative drama practices based on picture storybooks were psychosocial risks most frequently observed?” are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Creative drama stages and activities in which psychosocial risks most frequently appear in children's statements

	Events	Stage
1st session: “The dot” 9 girls and 10 boys A total of 20 children participated.	Activity 3: Vashti and the paper “...the art class was over, but Vashti couldn't seem to get up from where she was sitting. The paper in front of her was blank.” The instructor asks the children, “why couldn't Vashti get up from the table? What do you think was happening at that moment?” Activity 7: art exhibition The instructor tells all the children, “imagine that you are the child who was given the paper in the previous activity. What would you draw?” The children then explain their drawings.	3. Activity Enactment phase 7. Activity Evaluation
3rd session: “Nut time” 9 girls and 8 boys A total of 17 children participated.	Activity 3: a walnut left on the branch Just then, he heard his grandfather's voice from afar. He was very worried. He ran over, out of breath. “What are you doing?” He asked. “Grandpa, there's a big walnut left on this branch, and I'm trying to get it,” said Toprak. His grandfather said, ‘I left that walnut on the branch on purpose. I was going to pick it up when it fell to the ground. ‘ but how will my grandfather stay there alone, separated from his friends? Look how sad he is. His grandfather looked at him and...’ The instructor stops the story. He divides the children into groups of six and asks them to think about what happens next and act it out.	3. Activity Enactment phase
4th session: “An ordinary day” 9 girls and 8 boys A total of 17 children participated.	1. Activity Interim assessment The instructor asks the children, “on a very ordinary day at home, I do this...” And the children complete the sentence. 3. Activity The instructor reads the last sentence of the storybook again: “I have an idea,” said Nik. “Shall we meet tomorrow? Just the two of us?” “that's a great idea, Nik! It's a deal!” Maybe something will happen then. Maybe, maya. Think about it! Good night, Nik!” The instructor then divides the children into pairs and says, ‘let's think about where Nik and maya might meet tomorrow and what they might do	1. Activity Warm-up preparation phase 3. Activity Enactment phase

	when they meet and then act it out for us.' each group takes turns acting out their scene.	
6th session: "Karamel's tree" 9 girls and 10 boys A total of 19 children participated.	2. Activity Mid-term evaluation The instructor has the children lie down on their backs on the floor and asks, "if you were on the cover of this book, which character (beaver, tree, bear, or bird) would you want to be?" The children are told to close their eyes, and they are given some time to imagine. Then, the instructor listens to the ideas of the children who want to share their imagination.	2. Activity Warm-up preparation phase
7th session: "Petra" 9 girls and 10 boys A total of 19 children participated.	2. Activity Interim assessment "Who do you think Petra is, the one I whispered to you?" The children's answers are listened to in order. 5. Activity The instructor asks the children, "if you were a stone, where would you want to roll?" The instructor tells the children to freeze in the position that represents their thoughts. The instructor pretends to take a photo of the children in these positions.	2. Activity Warm-up preparation phase 5. Activity Enactment phase
8th session: "Lonely panda" 9 girls and 10 boys A total of 19 children participated.	3. Activity Interim assessment Consider the answer to the question, "what do you do when a friend does not want to play with you?"	3. Activity Enactment phase

It was observed that children opened up the most during the 6 sessions in the following order: Enactment phase (5), Warm-up Preparation (4), and Evaluation (1), revealing their psychosocial risks. In the interim evaluation activities included in these sessions, it was observed that they shared their feelings more. In the interim evaluations, it was observed that the children generally answered the questions based on their own experiences or by putting themselves in someone else's shoes and answering from that person's perspective. The interim evaluation questions were prepared using open-ended questions in the "scamper" style, and during the project preparation process, the project consultant was asked to remove closed-ended questions and replace them with these types of questions. For example, "Who do you think Petra is, who whispered in your ear? On a normal day, I would do this at home..." Finally, no data indicating psychosocial risk was found in the second, fifth, and ninth sessions. It was observed that children missed a maximum of two sessions due to illness. In this context, it was determined that children expressing psychosocial risks regularly attended most of the sessions. Only one child, who had recently started school as a transfer student, did not want to participate in the activities during the first two sessions of the process due to adjustment issues, and no pressure was exerted on the child in this regard. It was observed that the child voluntarily participated in the activities when he/she felt ready after a while. When looking at the sessions in order, it was observed that the frequency of children opening up increased in the last sessions. In particular, it was observed that the children were more willing to talk towards the end of the sessions. This can be attributed to the children's increased creative drama experience and the support they received for their language development. This view is supported by the data from the interviews conducted with the classroom teacher after the practices. The classroom teacher stated that the children received the most support in the social and emotional areas, along with their language development.

Experiences related to the earthquake were frequently reflected in both the verbal expressions and behaviours of the children. In particular, during the first half of the sessions, it was noticeable that the children hid under the table while engaging in dramatic play and created disaster scenarios in their stories. This was reflected in the researcher's observation log as follows:

Mehmet kept going under the table during the activity. He said, "I always do this after the earthquake." In the story reenactment, he said that the characters' houses were destroyed. (Researcher's Diary, Session 2)

Within this theme, earthquake-related expressions were directly or indirectly mentioned 12 times in total across 5 different sessions, emerging as the most prominent risk factor in the study. In this context, the frequency of all risk factors is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Psychosocial risks identified through creative drama activities

Psychosocial Risk	Number of sessions detected	Coding Frequency	Appearance
Earthquake experience/fear	5	12	Verbal expression, hiding behaviour
Need for protection	3	7	Hugging, seeking reassurance, symbolic play
Separation anxiety	2	4	Missing mom, crying, staying away

Technology addiction	2	6	Phone/tablet emphasis, distraction
Violent responses	1	3	Aggressive role selection, striking expressions

Table 4 summarizes the psychosocial risks identified during the creative drama sessions, including the number of sessions where each risk emerged, the coding frequency, and the specific forms of expression observed in children's verbal responses, behaviours, or symbolic enactments.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that creative drama practices can be an effective tool in identifying psychosocial risks in preschool children. Five main psychosocial risk themes were identified in children through creative drama-based activities: experiences or fears related to earthquakes, need for protection, separation anxiety, technology addiction, and violent responses. These risks were found to emerge through children's self-expression, particularly during the "enactment" phase of creative drama. The open-ended scamper-style questions used in the interim evaluation allowed children to express their feelings more openly, which facilitated teachers' observations.

One of the striking findings of the study is that creative drama not only supports language development but also children's social and emotional development and contributes to their self-disclosure over time. This demonstrates how powerful a tool creative drama can be in identifying the psychosocial needs of children in early childhood. Similarly, Schnyder, Wico, and Huber (2021) stated that creative drama-based activities support children's emotional and social development and enable teachers to identify risk factors in this process. Similarly, Korošec and Zorec's (2020) study found that puppet-supported creative drama practices led to a significant reduction in aggressive behaviour and that teacher observations reinforced this process.

Creative drama is important not only for individual expression but also for revealing children's interactions with their developmental environment. When evaluated within the context of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, creative drama activities reveal the stress factors experienced by children in their microsystem (school, family) and provide teachers with a natural observation environment to understand their interactions with these systems. Erten-Sarikaya's (2020) study revealed that the teacher's communication skills are decisive in children's social-emotional adjustment.

Considering the ages of the study group, they are in the "Initiative vs. Guilt" stage of Erikson's psychosocial development stages. During this period, children are expected to explore their environment using their cognitive skills and, if they experience excessive pressure and punishment from their environment, they may develop feelings of guilt. It is emphasized that this sense of guilt can negatively affect the child's creativity and self-confidence skills (Bee & Boyd, 2009). Research has shown that creative drama activities increase children's self-expression skills and develop their social skills and interpersonal problem-solving skills (Akalın & Boz, 2024).

According to Vygotsky (1978), children develop their thoughts through language; in this sense, creative drama allows children to structure their inner world by using language. The language children use during creative drama is developmentally supportive in terms of understanding their emotions and interacting with their environment. In addition, children learn to speak in order to communicate and interact with their environment. From the age of three, their internal speech increases and this speech shapes their thoughts. It is stated that the concepts of language and thought are shaped by the society and culture into which the child is born and that they need the support of their environment within their zone of proximal development (Yazgan İnanç et al. 2020).

In conclusion, this study suggests that creative drama should be considered not only as an art education method in early childhood but also as a tool for observing and understanding children's psychosocial needs. The forms of expression of children who have experienced major traumas such as earthquakes can be carefully observed by teachers during the creative drama process and turned into an opportunity for early intervention. At this point, the trust relationship that teachers establish with children during creative drama practices and the language of communication they use are of critical importance.

When evaluated within the ecological theory framework, most of the psychosocial risks experienced by children are directly related to the sociocultural environment in which they live. In line with Phillips and Shonkoff's (2000) framework, the findings indicate that the psychosocial risks identified through creative drama activities are influenced by both environmental risk factors and protective factors present in the children's developmental context. Earthquake-related experiences or fear themes can also be addressed within this framework. The fact that children who have witnessed an earthquake express their fears directly or indirectly during creative drama activities indicates that the trauma they experienced is still effective.

Within the framework of ecological systems theory, supportive interventions at the microsystem (family, school), mesosystem (family–school interaction), and macrosystem (cultural values) levels that influence a child's development can play a role in reducing these risks.

In this context, the creative drama process can be evaluated as a tool that not only reveals the child's inner world but also develops the teacher's pedagogical awareness and early intervention capacity.

In line with the findings of this study, it is recommended that creative drama practices be widely used as an effective tool in determining the psychosocial needs of children in early childhood. In particular, in-service training programs can be organized to improve teachers' creative drama-based observation and assessment skills in risk areas that affect children's emotional world. Additionally, teachers' ability to establish a trust-based relationship with children and use effective communication techniques in creative drama practices will increase the effectiveness of this process. Future research should examine the impact of creative drama-based practices in different age groups and in the context of various risk factors.

Declarations

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of research, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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