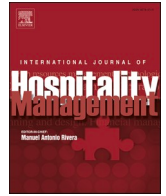




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Restaurant inclusivity: Parents' and children's perspectives

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ABSTRACT

As commercial spaces, restaurants should assure inclusivity for parents and children. This study examined the restaurant servicescape within diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, focusing on children and their parents. Accordingly, we identified inclusivity criteria for restaurants containing six categories of physical and managerial aspects: facility features, layout, ambiance, product and service quality, health and safety, and meaningful activities. We explored parents' and children's perceptions and priorities regarding restaurant inclusivity. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, we gathered data through online surveys (40 parents), video-conferencing interviews (67 children), and children's self-expressions through a visual storytelling tool. Results reveal differences in parent-child perceptions and offer insight into their perspectives, highlighting meaningful activities encouraging socialization and play for children. This study incorporates family inclusion in restaurants by offering an inclusive methodology and a multi-dimensional servicescape framework that can be used in design, hospitality, and management studies, providing design implications considering children's perspectives alongside parents.

1. Introduction

There are many physical environments where people get together and spend time outside the home within the commercial realm. Although these spaces should be accessible to everyone, regardless of people's diverse needs and abilities, this is not always the case in everyday experience. Thus, people who diverge from the 'standard adult,' such as pregnant women, children, parents with children, people with diverse abilities, and older adults, are observed to have difficulty in many areas of the commercial domain.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) embraces diversity where inclusive environments ensure individuals from all backgrounds have equal opportunities and feel valued (Rossi et al., 2022). In the design context, Accessibility is another dimension that should be considered with the DEI approach to allow everyone's access and use of the designed environment. Within this framework, a holistic approach should address designing the servicescape- comprising a space's physical and social dimensions- critical in creating an inclusive environment. A well-designed servicescape sustains the DEI objectives by adjusting diverse user needs and enabling equitable access to spaces. Scholars emphasize the need to adopt this extended approach, which is not yet mainstream (Zallio and Clarkson, 2021).

In the commercial domain, restaurants are essential for families, who

represent a large percentage of the visitor group (Lugosi et al., 2016). Beyond eating, restaurants satisfy an essential need for socialization and shared leisurely activities (Bardwell, 2013). The increasingly prominent role of children in family consumption (Kotler et al., 2012) has led to the growth of child-inclusive products and services, such as child-friendly menus and restaurant entertainment sections (Aşık, 2019). Children's facilities and services offer restaurants several advantages, including enhanced visitor experiences and satisfaction, higher revisit rates, enhanced brand recognition, and higher income (Buzlu and Balık, 2022; Liu and Filimonau, 2020). Therefore, inclusive servicescape in restaurants is crucial.

While there has been an increase in attention and studies in this field, research examining parent and child inclusivity in restaurant experiences remains limited (Bardwell, 2013). Moreover, research that embraces children's perspectives to understand their experiences, needs, expectations, and dreams is scant (Demirdelen et al., 2019). Although several studies are focusing on the effect of servicescape on consumers, there is a lack of understanding of how each servicescape dimension specifically influences consumer satisfaction (Wang et al., 2024), especially considering both children's and parents' viewpoints.

In this study, we first propose a framework for evaluating restaurant inclusivity by adopting the DEI approach, adding Accessibility (DEIA) that focuses on the physical environment, therefore integrating

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servicescape with child-centered design. Afterward, we explore children's and parents' priorities for a restaurant experience, focusing on the factors influencing their decision to visit or avoid restaurants. By investigating meaningful activities for children beyond dining, we seek to understand how restaurants can serve as inclusive social spaces that foster engagement and participation. We prioritize children's voices alongside parents, adopting a multigenerational approach to fill the gap in hospitality research and providing practical solutions for creating child-friendly, inclusive restaurants.

2. Literature review and framework development

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks, similar to their variations, such as Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA), share the similar goal of encouraging environments that respect the aforementioned values.

Diversity refers to people's differences, including ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and other characteristics. Although visible demographics often measure diversity, there should also be a sensitization toward social construction and history. *Equity* promotes fairness and objectivity within processes and environments, ensuring individuals have equal opportunities based on diverse needs. Equity is crucial for supporting disadvantaged groups. *Inclusion* confirms that all individuals feel welcomed, embraced, and valued sufficiently. An inclusive environment supports diverse users' well-being and promotes positive experiences (Fritz and Gresham, 2024; Rossi et al., 2022). *Accessibility* is providing the entire use of resources to the optimum users, providing equitable access to products, services, and environments regardless of any barriers (Iwarsson and Ståhl, 2003). Accessibility is sometimes overlooked in DEI practices. However, the DEI approach cannot be fully inclusive without considering Accessibility (Blaser and Ladner, 2023); expanding DEI's emphasis on cultural and managerial inclusivity, Accessibility foregrounds tangible features relevant to hospitality.

An inclusive design approach accepts and accommodates diverse abilities (Burton and Mitchell, 2006; Waller et al., 2015), meeting users' needs irrespective of age, gender, ability, body size, nationality, or mobility (Burton and Mitchell, 2006; Connell et al., 1997). Most research within the inclusive design field focuses on the needs of older adults and people with diverse abilities, prioritizing physical aspects (Lim et al., 2021). However, due to the influence of the built environment on children, their needs and preferences should be considered while designing spaces (Anbari and Soltanzadeh, 2015; Elshater, 2018). Unfortunately, children mostly live in *adult-constructed environments*, with design focus reduced to *children's spaces* where children are assumed to spend most of their time (Ennew, 1994). However, children are not only in schools, parks, and kindergartens but also active users of other public and commercial spaces. Extending the perspective of inclusive design for diverse needs is essential in children and family outings, especially in spaces such as restaurants, where varying needs and experiences occur.

2.1. Child inclusivity in restaurants

Restaurants, essential for socializing, go beyond satisfying the need to eat (Gregory and Kim, 2005), offering a comprehensive experience surrounding service, presentation, and ambiance (Pettersson and Fjellström, 2007) for various visitor motivations—quick meals, meetings, and celebrations. Accordingly, they must accommodate individuals' or groups' specific expectations and unique requirements, from family outings to business meals (Kim and Kim, 2021; Thompson, 2010).

Most studies spanning hospitality and management explored the factors influencing families' restaurant choices. Mesalic (2010) highlighted the importance of offering family-friendly restaurants appealing to children for revisit intention. He revealed that most children influence the visit decisions of families and suggested adding meaningful activities

and play opportunities to enhance the dining experience. Aşık (2019) and Güler et al. (2021) used online questionnaires and showed the reduced importance of children-focused services like play areas and gifts. Aşık (2019) emphasized food quality as critical, with noteworthy attention to facility features like green spaces. Güler et al. (2021) specified facility features such as 'breastfeeding and diaper changing room' and 'high chair/child table.' They recommended improving service quality through considerations like value for money, cleanliness, professionalism, and communication skills.

Temeloğlu and Aksu (2021) and Bardwell (2013) focused on parents with younger children (below nine and seven, respectively). Features such as child-accessible restrooms and baby food preparation, service and staff quality, atmosphere, available activities, and the menu were among crucial considerations. Pettersson and Fjellström (2007) observed the functions of family restaurants in Sweden, suggesting services beyond dining, like shopping and spaces for children's activities. The study highlighted the importance of interior design, facilities, and menus in perceived family-friendliness, particularly breastfeeding rooms, comfortable spaces for strollers, furniture cleanliness, and hygiene indicators. Lugosi et al. (2020) investigated family-friendly pub experiences through interviews with parents, revealing how physical and symbolic features, services, social relations with customers, and food offerings shaped the family experience.

Gençer and Keşkekçi (2023) identified complaint subjects in online restaurant reviews for child-friendly establishments. Parents' main concerns included playground hygiene, accessibility issues, limited food alternatives, unhealthy food content, the lack of a children's menu, and inadequacies in child-friendly services. One study that included children's dining experience was conducted by Brembeck et al. (2013), who included 45 ten-year-old children as co-researchers, examining health-oriented food environments through drawings, interviews, food diaries, and sensory analysis. The study showed that children's experiences of foodscapes were affected by routines, social relations, branding, and societal norms.

2.2. Servicescape dimensions

While the aforementioned studies identified several factors specific to parents and children, servicescape dimensions in the field were often developed for general hospitality environments without targeting particular user groups. Servicescape includes the physical and social environment in which service interactions occur. The development of servicescape dimensions has evolved based on the context of time, space, and customer needs (Lee et al., 2018) since its introduction by Bitner in 1992. The concept has extended to include diverse dimensions and perspectives, reflecting the complexity of service environments.

Bitner (1992) first introduced the servicescape and categorized its key dimensions under three main categories: 'ambient conditions,' 'space/function,' and 'signs, symbols, and artifacts.' Building on Bitner's initial foundation, Wakefield, Blodgett, (1994), Wakefield, Blodgett, (1996), and 1999, redefined servicescape into three categories: 'building design and decor,' 'equipment,' and 'ambiance.' Afterward, Lucas (2003) focused on 'layout navigation,' 'cleanliness,' 'seating comfort,' 'interior decor,' and 'ambiance.' Ryu and Jang (2008) developed the scope by arranging servicescape dimensions as 'facility aesthetics,' 'lighting,' 'ambiance,' 'layout,' and 'dining equipment.' Later, Lee and Kim (2014) presented a different categorization: 'attractiveness,' 'cleanliness,' 'layout,' and 'comfort.' Recently, Lee et al. (2018) synthesized servicescape into five dimensions: 'aesthetics,' 'ambient conditions,' 'space/function,' 'seating comfort,' and 'cleanliness,' resulting in a detailed 22-item criteria framework.

Now, there is extensive physical servicescape literature (Park et al., 2019), and a review of them reveals similarities and an evolution in categorizing its elements over time and changing according to the specific function to which it is applied. Recurring dimensions such as 'ambiance,' 'layout,' and 'cleanliness' highlight the core physical factors

affecting user experience. Meanwhile, category variations, such as ‘facility aesthetics,’ ‘seating comfort,’ ‘signs, symbols, and artifacts,’ represent the increasing recognition of numerous functional features in various contexts. The frameworks have evolved from broad conceptual models to more nuanced and specific criteria within time by advancing in detail and practical applicability in assessing servicescape.

In addition to physical servicescape, scholars have also investigated social servicescape factors commonly through two dimensions: customer and personnel. Social servicescape influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement, with customer and employee interactions playing key roles (Kaminakis et al., 2019; Lee and Chuang, 2022). Positive servicescape can encourage revisiting intentions and recommendations (Lee and Chuang, 2022).

The literature shows that while some studies have concentrated on the physical dimensions (Lee et al., 2018; Shashikala and Suresh, 2017; Chang, 2016), others have primarily examined the social dimensions (Jang et al., 2015) of servicescape, with few focused on both comprehensively (Park et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2024; Yan and Felicen, 2021). For instance, Park et al. (2019) defined servicescape as substantive, focusing on the physical environment, and communicative servicescape, emphasizing social interactions. The study underscores their interplay and examines how brand and architectural familiarity impact these effects. Overall, servicescape dimensions are important in shaping restaurant consumer experiences. However, the provided research does not address the specific inclusivity of children and families. The servicescape dimensions and their related items need to be considered with the specific needs of these groups in mind to accommodate adequate space, layout, and personnel interactions.

To summarize, previous studies on restaurant inclusivity reveal notable gaps. The first is the lack of holistic exploration of child inclusivity in restaurants. Initially, we addressed this gap by establishing multi-dimensional restaurant inclusivity criteria based on servicescape theory focusing on parents’ and children’s physical and hospitality needs (Chua et al., 2020; Marković et al., 2010). Combining servicescape features with child-inclusive and accessibility criteria in spatial design allows professionals to prioritize these dimensions to maximize children’s and parents’ restaurant inclusion.

Second, most studies overlook direct engagement with children, relying only on parents’ perspectives. This approach limits insights into children’s preferences, which usually differ from adults. Our study fills this gap by embracing a multigenerational approach, comparing and contrasting both generations’ experiences to better inform inclusive practices.

2.3. A framework for parents’ and children’s restaurant inclusivity criteria

We revised and expanded existing frameworks based on servicescape theory. Adapting previous studies and aligning with DEIA principles, we divided the servicescape into physical and managerial criteria with six dimensions corresponding to parent and child needs.

In the physical servicescape, the three dimensions were identified as ‘facility features,’ with items predominantly related to accessibility, ‘layout,’ which included items related to signage, comfort, and furniture, and ‘ambiance,’ which included items related to comfort, interior decor, and lighting. In the managerial servicescape, two dimensions were identified. First, ‘product and service quality’ included artifacts and all food and personnel-related items. As such, the personnel dimension was integrated as an essential element of the social servicescape within the context of the management’s control. Second, ‘health and safety’ was a critical dimension for the hygiene and cleanliness of the restaurant environment and the safety of children in particular. Finally, we introduced ‘meaningful activities’ as a distinct category found in children’s inclusivity literature but not prioritized in servicescape literature. This allowed us to explore the importance of non-dining functions—such as play areas or educational and recreational

activities—that enhance the overall experience of families and contribute to social inclusion. The following section briefly elaborates on each dimension based on existing research.

(i) *Facility Features* refer to all the available functions a restaurant provides physically. The exterior environment provides the first impression to the customer (Pecotić et al., 2014), affecting the dining out experience (Omar et al., 2015). While accessible parking lots, routes, and building elements address the visitors’ needs, open-air and green spaces are essential for children to move around, free their internal energy, and play (Endicott et al., 2010). In the interior environment, accessible circulation and restrooms should be provided for families. Also, parents may prefer a one-story, easily observable small building to connect visually with their children. Facility features primarily provide for the inclusivity of the physical needs of parents and children.

(ii) *Layout* refers to the arrangements of all spatial elements in the physical environment (Yekaniabiglou, 2015). With appropriate signs and directions, the layout should suit families’ movement, use, and wayfinding. Moreover, seating arrangements and furniture and their comfort influence the dining out experience. Additionally, the overall layout impacts visitors’ sense of privacy and boundaries (Lugosi et al., 2016; Lin, 2004). Like facility features, layout criteria are essential to embrace the physical needs of parents and children and consider their cognitive needs with a sense of safety, comfort, and privacy.

(iii) *Ambiance* refers to the quality of a place as perceived by users and appeals to the user’s sensory experience (Liu and Jang, 2009). Ambiance influences the dining out experience in diverse aspects (Gregory and Kim, 2005; Liu and Jang, 2009; Omar et al., 2015), as provided by the interior design. Aesthetic quality is specified as the visually appealing atmosphere. Significant features of interior design are color (Ariffin et al., 2012; Omar et al., 2015) and lighting (Yekaniabiglou, 2015). For instance, bright environments and proper lighting affect children positively (Endicott et al., 2010). Crowding and density also influence the dining experience (Hanks et al., 2017).

(iv) *Product and service quality* refers to all the features that the user encounters during the visit, which include, most notably, the food, how it is served, and the service, including the personnel. Since family restaurant choices are affected by the offering of fresh and healthy food (Aşık, 2019), and food choices increase the revisit intention of families (Lee et al., 2016), the incorporation of healthy food options, particularly considering children, is essential (Wootan, 2012). A children’s menu that consists of small portions of easy-to-eat options (Bardwell, 2013) with wide food options (Hay, 2018) is similarly important. Service arrangement, quality (Brembeck et al., 2013; Nyberg, 2019), and personnel’s general attitude toward children (Lugosi et al., 2016) are also critical.

(v) *Health and safety* refer to all physical and managerial features that allow the customer to feel comfortable, safe, secure, and healthy, affecting family visit preferences (Aşık, 2019). First, a family-inclusive restaurant should provide a clean interior environment, dining tables, and a play area. Accordingly, managers should ensure appropriate measures sensitive to the changing requirements, like hygienic precautions (Özbek and Yıldırım, 2020); diverse characteristics affect the real and perceived safety of the public space (Mehta, 2014). Safe public transportation access and visual and physical connections between the interior and exterior should be provided in restaurants.

(vi) *Meaningful activities* refer to activities that support the dining experience and make it pleasurable (Mehta, 2014). Offering exciting activities (Bardwell, 2013) and providing accessible places may encourage families to revisit the restaurant. Moreover, family activities may enable socialization, where families and children can spend memorable time together (Mesalic, 2010) and strengthen family bonds (Hay, 2017). Play equipment and children’s entertainment tools are essential to consider (Lester and Russell, 2010), including toys for different ages and abilities (Endicott et al., 2010). Even though their existence is interdependent, children should be capable of moving independently of their parents in a restaurant for both the child’s and

parent’s ease and comfort.

Table 1 summarizes the multidimensional child-inclusive service-scape criteria with six categories and 44 items developed for this study.

Following the establishment of the framework, we investigated the parents’ and children’s perspectives and experiences concerning the criteria. While the criteria were used as a foundation for the survey of parents in the research phase, both the parent survey and child interviews included open-ended questions that provided a chance to expand the criteria. Accordingly, in our study, we explored the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the priorities of parents and children for a positive restaurant experience? Consequently, what features within a restaurant do parents and children see as negative and result in refraining from visiting?

RQ2: What are meaningful restaurant activities for children besides

Table 1
Restaurant inclusivity criteria.

Categories	No	Features
1 Facility Features	F1	Accessible parking lot
	F2	Accessible route from the parking lot to the restaurant entrance
	F3	Accessible building entrance
	F4	Accessible interior circulation
	F5	One-story building
	F6	Easily observable space from a standing/sitting point
	F7	Accessible green space/backyard
	F8	Accessible restrooms
	F9	Accessible interior play area
	F10	Accessible exterior play area
2 Layout	L1	Restaurant layout that allows easy movement
	L2	Transitions with adequate signs and directions
	L3	Seating arrangements provide enough space for users
	L4	Seating arrangements provide enough privacy to users
3 Ambiance	L5	Spacious furniture
	A1	Visually appealing atmosphere
	A2	Visually appealing color scheme
	A3	Visually appealing interiorscape (plants, flowers)
	A4	Visually appealing furniture
	A5	Adequate daylighting
	A6	Adequate artificial lighting
	A7	Suitable room temperature
	A8	Pleasing background music
	A9	Not crowded place
A10	Quiet place	
4 Product and Service Quality	P1	Visually appealing food service
	P2	Healthy food options
	P3	Children’s menu
	P4	Meal served exactly as ordered
	P5	Personnel who are willing to help
	P6	Personnel who are tolerant of children
5 Health and Safety	H1	Clean interior environment
	H2	Clean tables
	H3	Clean play area and toys
	H4	Taking hygienic precautions
	H5	Safe public transportation access
	H6	The visual and physical connection to the restaurant’s exterior
	H7	Guiding personnel in children’s play area
	H8	Making you feel safe
6 Meaningful Activities	M1	Having different activities for families
	M2	Children’s entertainment tools that can be used in the seating area
	M3	Different levels of toys for age groups
	M4	A place that allows children to move around independently
	M5	A place that allows children to spend time independently

eating?

RQ3: Which features do children wish to have in a ‘dream restaurant’? What is the potential for restaurant design and management to increase children’s inclusivity, engagement, and participation?

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data collection methods

We adopted a mixed methodology, combining qualitative, quantitative, and art-based methods. Initially planned for Ankara restaurants, the study shifted online due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Parent surveys were conducted through Google Forms, while children participated in interviews with the first author via Zoom meetings and by drawing pictures. Despite limitations, this approach concentrated on participant viewpoints without location distraction. Snowball sampling was used to reach parents with children via peer networks. Parents with children who had visited a restaurant within six months were reached with snowball sampling. Ethical approval was obtained from the University, and all participants provided consent.

3.1.1. Participants

Children aged 8–11 and their families are the participants, considering children’s varying capabilities and needs at different developmental stages. This approach acknowledges that children’s needs differ significantly from those of adults, particularly in restaurant settings. Forty parents and 67 children participated in the study. While 37 children participated only in online interviews, 23 participated in interviews and picture drawing, and seven children only drew pictures. The demographic characteristics of the participants are as follows (Table 2):

3.1.2. Instruments

We used different instruments for each group of participants sensitive to their particular characteristics (Johnson et al., 2014). Instruments were developed in English and translated into Turkish by an expert.

The survey questions were finalized after conducting a pilot study with ten parents and making adjustments concerning clarity. The survey had three main questions. The first two open-ended questions explored families’ top three priorities —besides food quality—when visiting restaurants and the three features that would refrain them or cause

Table 2
Demographic characteristics.

Characteristics	Parents (N:40)		Children (N:67)			
	Variables	n	%	Variables	n	%
Gender	Female	38	95	Girls	33	55
	Male	2	5	Boys	27	45
Age	30 and below	1	2	Eight – Nine	30	50
	31–44	29	73	Ten – Eleven	30	50
	45–54	10	25			
Education	Up to Secondary School	8	20			
	Bachelor’s Degree	25	62.5			
	Masters Degree	7	17.5			
Hometown	Ankara	29	76	Ankara	47	78
	Istanbul	6	16	Istanbul	9	15
	Other cities in Turkey	3	8	Other cities in Turkey	3	5
Job Status	Full-time & Part-time	24	60			
	Unemployed	14	35			
	Retired	2	5			
Number of Children	1	6	15			
	2	27	67.5			
	3–4	7	17.5			

discomfort during a visit. The last question considered priorities around the six restaurant inclusivity criteria (see Table 1) along a five-point Likert scale. Parents responded to the survey offline and individually with no time limit.

Researchers suggest mixed methods when conducting research with children (Bushin, 2007). Accordingly, with children, we supported the verbal data obtained from one-on-one interviews with nonverbal expressions via drawings, a visual storytelling tool (Johnson et al., 2014; Morrow and Richards, 1996). Online meetings, which took approximately 15–20 minutes, were conducted with sensitivity regarding concentration time, comfort, and environmental distractions (Bushin, 2007; Lahman, 2008).

Initially, we conducted a pilot study containing 10 participants aged 8–12 to explore the instrument's applicability. We adapted and finalized the interview questions based on language simplification and clarity, participant willingness to use verbal and nonverbal expressions, concentration time, and age-related differences. The interview content was formed considering the children's age and abilities, avoiding closed-ended questions (Waterman et al., 2001), and providing visual explanations for meaningful activities to guide the children. Moreover, the age range was considered 8–11 years for the final study.

During children's interviews, a parent initially joined but was asked to leave later to minimize parent bias and ensure one-on-one interaction. The researcher informed the children about the study and asked warm-up questions. Then, three open-ended questions were asked: naming their favorite restaurants and the reasons for their choices, identifying three important factors for restaurant visits, and explaining three reasons for refraining from a restaurant. Afterward, the children verbally described their dream restaurant, with the option of drawing it on A4 paper. We adopted the visual method since children symbolize the environment as they perceive it in their minds, which is then reflected in their drawings (Anbari and Soltanzadeh, 2015; Farokhi and Hashemi, 2011), adding a new dimension to the verbal data (Nyberg, 2019). Furthermore, visual methods offer the potential to study food and eating by evoking multi-sensory, nonrational, and material aspects (O'Connell, 2013). Interviews lasted 20–30 minutes, with children finishing their drawings at their own pace and sending them to the researcher afterward.

3.2. Data analysis methods

3.2.1. Verbal data analysis

The qualitative data gathered from all the parent's and children's responses to open-ended questions from the survey and interviews were analyzed via content analysis, a widely used tool in qualitative research to analyze the message, patterns, and themes in text or visual materials such as journals, interviews, and drawings (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, the first author followed these steps: taking initial notes, transferring raw data to list codes, and categorizing data with simplification (Mayring, 2004). Responses were grouped based on the six restaurant inclusivity features determined by the study's theoretical framework. Lastly, categories were double-checked, revised, and visualized with the second author.

The following quote from children asked to define the three essential factors for them in a restaurant visit illustrates how the content analysis was carried out:

The presentation of the food (*product and service quality*) and the toys (*meaningful activities*) are important. Also, I would not go to restaurants without a park (*facility features and layout*).

This statement includes food, especially the presentation of the food. Toys are coded as playing with toys as a *meaningful activity*. The child remarked on the importance of the play area, specifically the exterior play area as a park, likewise referred to as a facility feature and layout.

After coding, we calculated the frequency of each response to define

the percentage corresponding to the six established categories, allowing a comparison of their prioritization. Finally, parents' responses to Likert scale questions were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) descriptive statistics. The results provided an overview of the parents' priorities concerning inclusivity features when visiting a restaurant. The pre-formed categories enabled comparison with the open-ended questions.

3.2.2. Visual data analysis

Children have different perception levels and motor skills at different ages. Hence, their reflection also changes relative to age and cognitive development stages. The stages for these age groups are the scribble (2–4 years), pre-schema (4–7 years), schema (7–9 years), reality/grouping (9–12 years), and visible naturalism period (12–14 years) (Çakırer, 2013; Göltaş, 2021). The study participants were in the schema and reality phases, which directed the drawing analysis regarding these developmental stages.

To minimize subjectivity in analyzing children's drawings, we utilized Duncan's (2013) 4-SASA tool guide, which has four steps: (i) identifying and annotating signs in the drawings to ensure the meaning; (ii) isolating and reporting the individual signs within children's social context; (iii) organizing and categorizing the signs to find the child's motivations and interests; and (iv) synthesizing understandings from the earlier steps to summarize their viewpoints. This systematic approach lets children's concepts and experiences be interpreted clearly and in detail via drawings.

Before data analysis, the first author received certificated training to ensure reliability in interpreting children's drawings. Afterward, the author and an academic trained in child development and child picture analysis analyzed the pictures separately as two experts in the field. Subsequently, the analyses and coding were checked, and the analyses were finalized. Below is a brief example of a drawing analysis, referring to Fig. 1.

The drawing is by a nine-year-old girl (9, G) in a schematic period with regular cognitive development, reflecting a positive impression. The drawing focuses on food preparation, dining and playing areas, and exterior visuals as *facility features*. The child emphasizes meal preparation, values *service* (as observed by the servings on tables), and cares about the restaurant's *ambiance* and decoration (as observed by the lighting features, colored chairs, curtains, rug, and plants). She wants to connect with the place and feel at home in the restaurant. Notably, an indoor playground displays an interest in playing as a *meaningful activity*.

After analysis, all items were coded into categories similar to the parent questionnaire, enabling comparative data analysis between the two groups. In that respect, verbal and visual data were explored with similar themes.



Fig. 1. Example of children's drawings.

4. Results

4.1. Important criteria for restaurant visits: parents' perspectives

Parents answered open-ended questions investigating the three most important factors influencing their decision to visit restaurants when dining with children. Results showed different parental priorities. *Product and service quality* topped the list, emphasizing service speed, personnel attention, and friendliness. *Health and safety*, particularly cleanliness and hygiene, emerged as essential, while physical safety was mentioned less frequently. Parents prioritized spacious, quiet, uncrowded environments for *ambiance*, followed by visually appealing interiors and adequate lighting. Parents less emphasized *meaningful activities* and *Facility features* and *layout*. Several parents pointed to customer profiles as an essential factor, remarking that the behavior of other customers can impact the family dining experience. These conclusions indicate that parents prioritize traditional factors like cleanliness and service, engagement, and comfort, highlighting a broader expectation for inclusive, family-friendly spaces. Below are two parent comments:

A restaurant's customer profile (*profile*) affects my choice of restaurant when I visit with my child. Having an outdoor space (*facility features and layout*) is important since I smoke. There should also be a backyard (*facility features and layout*) for my child to run around (*meaningful activities*) and feed a pet (*meaningful activities*) after eating so that he can spend time. Otherwise, he wants to leave the place quickly.

First of all, cleanliness (*health and safety*) is important. Then, I care about the fast service (*product and service quality*) and the respectfulness of the employees (*product and service quality*).

When asked about factors preventing them from visiting restaurants, parents prioritized *health and safety* as the most powerful feature, with hygiene concerns and unclean environments highlighted as key negative features. *Ambiance* followed, especially noisy, crowded, or narrow spaces. *Product and service quality* followed with rude or non-child-friendly personnel noted as the primary concern. *Facility features, layout, and meaningful activities* were mentioned less frequently. These results underscore families prioritizing functional features and service quality, mainly cleanliness and respectful, child-friendly service, as one parent indicates:

If the restaurant staff is indifferent (*product and service*), the tables are dirty (*health and safety*), the environment is disturbingly loud (*ambiance*), the food is terrible (*product and service*), or the toilets are not clean (*health and safety*), I would not want to go to that restaurant again.

Fig. 2 below shows frequencies and comparisons of parents' responses to these two open-ended questions, the three most important

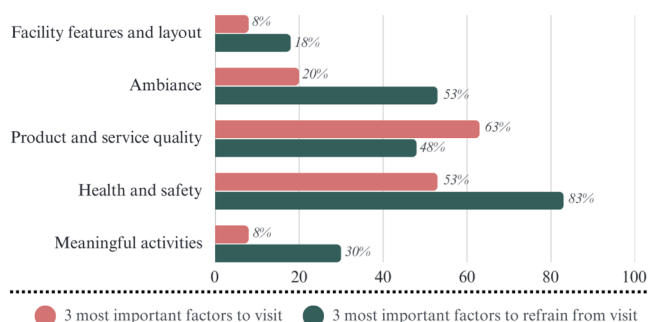


Fig. 2. Parents' responses to two open-ended questions.

factors influencing their visiting preferences, and the three important features that prevent them from visiting a restaurant when dining with children.

Following the open-ended questions, the survey included the structured itemized inclusivity criteria (see Table 1) through Likert scale questions. Descriptive statistical analysis (via means) was conducted to understand parents' priorities in restaurants. *Health and safety* and *product and service quality* were top priorities among the six categories. *Facility features* and *layout* followed these, whereas *ambiance* was less critical for families. Furthermore, *meaningful activities*, although mentioned in the open-ended questions, appeared the least noteworthy, indicating that the restaurant's primary function for parents is focused on dining. Table 3 presents the mean importance given to each main category and the top three ranked items under each category.

Likert-scale responses show similarities with the open-ended findings, supporting the prioritization of *health and safety, product and service quality, and facility features*. While *ambiance* was frequently mentioned in open-ended responses, it ranked lower in Likert-scale results, suggesting that although ambient factors are valued, they are not as essential as practical considerations. *Meaningful activities* were seen as less important for parents in both findings.

4.2. Important criteria for restaurant visits: children's perspectives

Interviews with children demonstrated key factors affecting their restaurant experiences. When asked about the three essential aspects of a satisfying restaurant experience, *ambiance* was the most often mentioned, with a preference for visually appealing spaces. Children underlined hygiene for *health and safety*, including food and environmental hygiene. *Facility features* and *layout* were also noted, such as green spaces and well-organized seating.

Similar to parents, *customer profile* was a noteworthy feature.

Table 3
Parents' responses regarding priorities of restaurant inclusivity criteria.

Item	Mean	Std.	The top three items with the highest means	Mean	Std.
1. Facility Features	4.05	0.6	Accessible restrooms	4.63	0.62
			Accessible green space/backyard	4.36	0.62
			Accessible interior children's play area	4.25	0.77
2. Layout	4.21	0.63	Seating arrangements provide enough space for users	4.41	0.67
			Restaurant layout that allows easy movement	4.23	1
			Seating arrangements provide enough privacy to users	4.23	1
3. Ambiance	3.98	0.62	Quiet place	4.55	0.71
			Suitable room temperature	4.45	0.74
			Not crowded place	4.38	0.77
4. Product and Service Quality	4.35	0.7	Personnel who are willing to help	4.53	0.75
			Personnel who are tolerant of children	4.48	0.78
			Meal served exactly as ordered	4.48	0.75
5. Health and Safety	4.42	0.6	Clean tables	4.75	0.58
			Clean play area and toys	4.75	0.58
			General hygienic precautions	4.75	0.58
6. Meaningful Activities	3.71	0.69	The place that allows children to move around independently	4.35	0.7
			The place that allows children to spend time independently	4.08	0.91
			Children's entertainment tools in the seating area	3.65	1.02

Regarding *product and service quality*, children focused on friendly and respectful personnel, while some highlighted the importance of play opportunities as *meaningful activities*. These findings emphasize children’s distinct sensory engagement and play preferences while supporting shared priorities like cleanliness and service quality. Below are the children’s comments:

The restaurant should be clean (*health and safety*). Chairs and tables should be neat in order, not messy (*facility features and layout*). Also, the restaurant should have beautiful, simple decorations without exaggeration (*ambiance*).

Chatting with my family (*meaningful activities*), discovering new things (*meaningful activities*), and meeting with new people (*meaningful activities*).

Responding to factors that would cause discomfort during a restaurant visit, children specified *product and service quality* problems as the primary source, especially noting unfriendly personnel and service issues. *Hygiene* problems were a key concern regarding *health and safety*. Aspects like noise, crowdedness, poor lighting, and unattractive environments were mentioned for *ambiance*. Additionally, the *customer profile* again emerged, and specifically rude customers, appeared to be a notable negative factor. Fewer children noted *facility features*, such as a lack of green spaces or uncomfortable seating, while only a few mentioned *meaningful activities*, expressing dissatisfaction when play options were unavailable. These responses highlight the significant role of social and physical interactions in shaping children’s negative dining experiences. Below is a child’s comment:

If someone smokes in a restaurant or speaks rudely (*customer profile*) or if that restaurant is dirty (*health and safety*), I will be very disturbed, and I will not want to go there again.

Fig. 3 compares children’s responses to these two open-ended questions.

To learn children’s preferences for *meaningful activities* beyond dining, a multiple-choice question was asked with twelve visually accompanied options and an invitation to suggest additional activities. A total of 323 valid responses were collected, indicating that moving around was the most favored activity, followed by playing in a designated area and socializing. Approximately half of the children enjoyed watching their surroundings, pet feeding, and drawing or painting. Responding to the open-ended question, a few children suggested unique activities such as taking pictures, riding a bike, conducting research, and listening to music (Fig. 4). These findings highlight children’s preference for dynamic, creative, exploratory, and meaningful activities, meaning that engaging environments should offer movement, imagination, and interaction options.

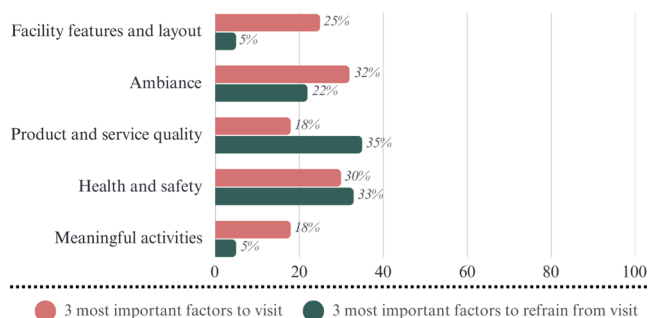


Fig. 3. Children’s responses to two open-ended questions.

4.3. Children’s ‘dream restaurants’

To support restaurants by including children’s rich experiential potentials, we asked them to describe their ‘dream restaurants’ qualities and draw them. While 37 only answered the question verbally, seven only drew, and 23 children participated in both the interviews and the drawings.

The analysis of children’s verbal and visual responses regarding physical features showed overlapping and distinctive cues. Children often concentrated on *facility features* and *layout* features in their dream restaurants. As foreseen, dining areas were most common, though considerable children also drew other functions beyond eating, like spaces for play or interaction, showing a desire for diverse and multi-functional facilities. Children strongly emphasized *ambiance* with explicit verbal and visual cues, visually appealing design, color decisions, interiorscape elements like paintings and posters, lighting, signboards, carpets and floor tiles, and curtains. Their responses indicate a desire for environments unique to child and family needs, with careful attention to interior design and atmosphere. These findings underscore the importance of designing spaces that meet children’s experiential needs beyond the dining function. As one child stated,

I want an open space (*facility features and layout*) where the children can breathe. I think blue is pleasing; I want my dream restaurant to be blue (*ambiance*). Also, I want paintings to be on the walls. The children’s drawings may be hung on the walls (*ambiance*) of the restaurant.

Children’s verbal responses were more detailed for managerial servicescape features, providing worthwhile insights into their priorities. Regarding *product and service quality*, children emphasized taste, content, and food presentation, while service elements, such as speed and delivery. Additionally, the attitude of personnel was essential for them. For *health and safety*, hygiene was frequently mentioned both verbally and visually. However, safety measures were interestingly missing in their responses, implying that this feature may require more distinguished emphasis from adults in design and management. Regarding *meaningful activities*, children described a clear physical need for play areas, toys, and entertainment tools, alongside a social need for play and interaction. Beyond play needs, children suggested activities that encouraged participation and fun and enhanced their experience, such as cooking, feeding pets, and chatting with friends. These responses highlight the extent of offering a balanced mix of sensory engagement, interactive opportunities, and supportive service in creating child-inclusive environments.

I want to make my dream restaurant look magical but modern and stylish from the outside (*ambiance*). I want their meals to be exciting and wildly different, such as dishes we cannot imagine (*food*). I would like to have activities unavailable in a traditional restaurant, such as cooking (*meaningful activities*). I also wish the pets had a table to eat (*meaningful activities, facility features, and layout*).

Children’s visual responses mainly detailed physical servicescape features like environmental and structural elements of the space, such as the dining area, green area, or play area, and *ambiance* features, such as interior decoration, furniture, and lighting (Drawing 3 in Fig. 5), and *meaningful activities* such as playing in the play area, playing with peers, socialization (Drawing 4 in Fig. 5).

The comparison of verbal and visual responses (in Fig. 6) highlighted notable differences in how children expressed their priorities. Physical servicescape features emerged invariably in both methods. On the other hand, managerial servicescape features, such as *hygiene* and *product or service quality*, were frequently mentioned in verbal explanations but were represented visually only through details like food items, staff, or hygiene signs. Children needed meaningful verbal and visual activities emphasizing movement, play, exploration, and socialization. Spending

When you visit a restaurant, which of the following do you want to do other than eat?

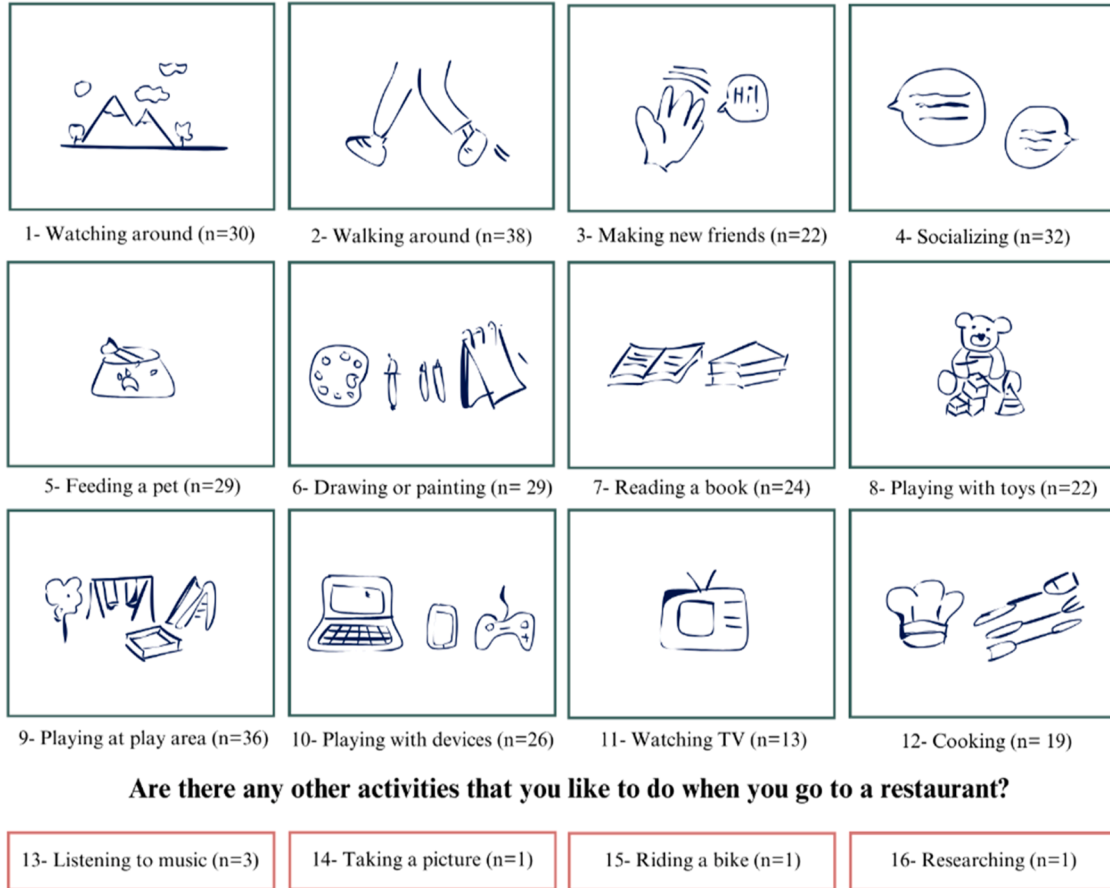


Fig. 4. Meaningful activity preferences of children (n = 60).



Fig. 5. Examples of children's drawings.

quality time with family, playing with peers, and making new friends became key priorities. Some children even expected a restaurant only for children, reflecting their growing sense of independence and distinct needs from adults. This emphasizes a more profound social need for peer relations and spaces designed to encourage these connections. Results demonstrate the complementary value of verbal and visual methods in capturing the range of children's preferences.

5. Discussion

This study extends the understanding of servicescape since it offers a family-friendly viewpoint by combining both parent and child perspectives. It presents a child-inclusive framework integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) principles into hospitality settings. Previous research in the field of family-friendly hospitality has examined physical features, such as facility characteristics (e.g., breastfeeding rooms, play areas, green spaces) and service quality (e.g.,

	Dream Restaurant Verbal Statement	Common Statement	Dream Restaurant Drawing
Facility Features and Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cottages ● Having a good view ● Library ● Multi-story building ● Sport area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accessible walk path ● Gree space/backyard ● Kitchen ● Parking lot ● Seating arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Environmental elements (tree, flower, animal) ● Counter ● Indoor/outdoor dining area ● Restrooms ● Structural elements
Ambiance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Background music ● Being (spacious, comfortable, tiny) place ● Not crowded place ● Quiet place ● Suitable temperature ● Visually appealing (atmosphere, furniture, color) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adequate lighting ● Visually appealing interiorscapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balloons ● Carpets/floor tiles ● Curtains ● Musical instruments ● Paintings and posters ● Plants ● Sculptures ● Signboards
Product and Service Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children’s menu ● Food (taste, content, presentation) ● Personnel ● Service (speed, quality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Food in general ● Service in general 	
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hygiene (environment, food) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hygiene in general 	
Meaningful Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children entertainment tools ● Cooking food ● Different activities for families ● Moving around ● Running around 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chatting ● Playing (with toys, mobile devices) ● Playing in play area ● Socializing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drawing ● Playing equipments (swing, slide, teeter totter, ballpit, sandpit) ● Reading a book

Fig. 6. Content analysis of children’s dream restaurant’s responses.

attentive personnel and hygiene) (Aşık, 2019; Güler et al., 2021). Unlike these studies, our results spotlight children’s further priorities, including ambiance, sensory engagement, play options, and meaningful activities. This study also indicates that these features are not secondary but essential to designing inclusive servicescapes, especially for child-friendly environments. Furthermore, these determinations vary from previous studies that suggest that play and social interaction have reduced importance (Aşık, 2019; Güler et al., 2021). Rather than that, our results highlight the permanent relevance of these features in designing child-inclusive environments.

Furthermore, while several studies (Bardwell, 2013; Brembeck et al., 2013) investigated children’s restaurant experiences, they mainly embrace an adult or child perspective. In this manner, this study serves that gap by combining parents’ and children’s viewpoints, proposing a thorough understanding of their unique but interrelated priorities. This approach shows differences in how each group experiences and considers restaurant inclusivity features. By incorporating both perspectives, our study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of family-friendly hospitality environments.

The key difference in this study is that it identifies parents’ and children’s divergent priorities. Parents mainly prioritize concerns such

as product and service quality, and hygiene (Gençer and Keşkekcı, 2023; Pecotić et al., 2014), aligning with their parental caregiving responsibilities and need for a stress-free dining experience. On the other hand, children underline sensory engagement, opportunities for play, and socializing options that go beyond the primary dining activity. This study also shows that children consider restaurant spaces for eating and exploration, highlighting their preference for dynamic, interactive, and visually pleasing environments. Their ‘dream restaurant’ drawings reflect these preferences, showcasing their desire to play and other meaningful activities such as moving around, playing with peers, feeding pets, and exploring the environment. Other than that, for example, while parents appreciate effective crowd and noise management (Line and Hanks, 2020), children’s focus on stimulating, colorful, and activity-rich settings introduces unique design challenges. The contrast between their perspectives emphasizes the need for a balanced design and management approach that adjusts the functional priorities of parents while incorporating the experiential features valued by children.

This divergence displays an opportunity for restaurants to reconsider their role as multifunctional spaces where families can not only dine but also rest, interact, and engage in meaningful shared activities, fostering

stronger family connections. By addressing these differing priorities, designers and managers of restaurants can improve inclusivity and create spaces that meet the diverse needs of families, eventually setting restaurants as environments that go beyond their mere dining function. These findings differ from those of earlier studies (Bitner, 1992; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999) that primarily emphasized the functional aspects of servicescapes without fully integrating social dimensions and meaningful activities.

This research extends servicescape literature by redefining and expanding its dimensions. Earlier studies often concentrated on physical aspects (e.g., layout, ambiance) and social dynamics, especially interactions between customers and personnel (Bitner, 1992; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999; Kaminakis et al., 2019). While we included personnel interactions in our analysis, we excluded customer behavior from the framework, as it cannot be directly controlled through design or management interventions. However, our results align with previous studies (Kaminakis et al., 2019; Lugosi et al. 2020; Park et al., 2019), displaying that social interactions with other customers influence dining experiences. Parents often underlined the importance of tolerant and child-friendly customers, while children prioritized opportunities to socialize and connect with peers as other customers. These results show the need for future research investigating how customer-related social dynamics influence family inclusivity.

Furthermore, while in previous studies, safety is seen as a fundamental element of inclusive environments (Mehta, 2014; Temeloğlu and Aksu, 2021), this study shows that safety was not a central concern for either parents or children. Parents might expect and assume a certain amount of safety in restaurants they visit, while children may rely on parents to keep them safe. These findings indicate that, while safety is critical, it is frequently taken for granted in perceived family-friendly settings.

Few studies have involved both children and parents in restaurant inclusivity research, usually relying on adults to express and interpret children's needs and experiences. Our study closes this gap by directly engaging children using mixed methods, such as interviews and drawings, to gain their unique perspectives and insights. This child-inclusive methodology ensures that their voices are prominent in evaluating inclusivity while presenting a more precise understanding of their needs. This methodology strengthens the validity of our results and presents a replicable model for future studies to investigate children's experiences in meaningful and participatory ways.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This study merges Accessibility as a distinct principle to the DEI approach, handling physical barriers that often limit participation, especially for children. By combining Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility principles with child-inclusivity criteria, this research provides a holistic approach to evaluating and enhancing inclusivity in restaurant environments. This expanded framework enabled us to develop comprehensive criteria beyond managerial concerns to include actionable physical design solutions.

This study advances the servicescape framework by introducing a multi-dimensional structured categorization of six inclusivity criteria containing physical and managerial aspects of restaurants. This multi-dimensional approach handles a critical gap in hospitality literature, where physical and managerial features have rarely been unified to create inclusive restaurant environments for families. Hence, this study bridges hospitality management and child-centered design literature, proposing a multidisciplinary contribution to the field. Furthermore, while previous literature in Servicescape often focuses on adult consumers, this study uniquely emphasizes multigenerational inclusivity, directly integrating children's perspectives into evaluating restaurant environments. Overall, professionals can assess restaurants' child-

friendliness using six latent categories: facility features, layout, ambiance, product and service quality, health and safety, and meaningful activities, with 44 observable indicators.

Furthermore, besides being inclusive regarding the research scope, this study also aimed to be methodologically inclusive. Consequently, a vital contribution of this study is to add to a research stream that shifts attention to insights gained directly from children. Bringing together the child and the parent in the same study allows us to obtain valuable insights into both perspectives. Children are considered part of the study to listen directly to their voices (Hay, 2018) instead of having others express their needs and preferences. Therefore, the integrated mixed-methods, verbal and visual tools, provide a holistic approach to studying inclusivity, setting a precedent for future child-inclusive studies in the hospitality field. In this manner, this study extends new research routes in family-inclusive commercial environments and participatory design methodologies.

6.2. Practical implications

This study displays the importance of inclusivity and proposes criteria for evaluating child and parent inclusivity in a restaurant. Furthermore, it enhances the awareness of children participating in children's and adults' spaces. Therefore, it would be an essential guide for practitioners.

Designers should prioritize family-inclusive functions and facilities, accessibility-driven layouts, child-friendly wayfinding, and sensory features that increase comfort and engagement. Restaurant managers can promote inclusivity by training employees in effective communication, providing diverse and healthy food options, a safe and clean environment, and including play areas and activities encouraging children to socialize. Decision makers are encouraged to implement inclusion guidelines for commercial spaces, ensuring that restaurants provide equitable and welcoming surroundings to all visitors.

Beyond dining, this study underscores the crucial role of non-dining functions and meaningful activities, such as play, learning, and social interaction, in shaping the general experience for families, providing a fresh perspective on the role of restaurants as a commercial space. By handling physical and managerial features, inclusive design improves customer satisfaction increase and revisits intentions. The findings of this study reinforce these recommendations, with data displaying that independent play areas enhance the child experience, while clean, accessible facilities are top priorities for parents. These insights provide a practical framework for professionals creating family-friendly, inclusive restaurant environments.

6.3. Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants could not provide services, preventing opportunities for observation. Future studies should complement restaurant studies with case studies. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic could have distorted the perceived importance of hygiene in the current study due to the global focus on hygiene precautions. Also, excluding customer profiles is another limitation, as it is necessary in the study's results.

Moreover, concerning children, the data of this research was limited to those aged 8–11, which can be expanded in further studies to include younger and older age groups. With the acknowledgment that participants were within Türkiye's socio-economic and local context, priorities may change across different contexts. The authors recognize that the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population; however, they are meaningful enough to be a valuable indication for designers and managers who wish to incorporate family inclusion in their restaurants.

6.4. Future studies

This study highlights several suggestions for future study in child-

inclusive servicescapes.

First, future studies should incorporate data collection methods within real-life contexts where the participants can be present in the restaurant spaces. The current methods allowed for an expansion of valuable insights into the viewpoints of parents and children based on their prior experiences, where the children's 'dream restaurants' are particularly insightful for potential future considerations. However, participant observation in real settings concerning their interaction within spaces and comparative studies amongst restaurants with different characteristics would yield tangible results for an inclusive design.

A second suggestion would be to expand the existing methodology by incorporating in-person drawing sessions or comparing visualizations across age groups to capture a wider children participant group. Similarly, applying the drawing analysis method to parents and comparing their perceptions with children's could offer deeper insights into generational differences in servicescape preferences. Even a family co-design process can provide valuable insights to the professionals.

Future studies could further investigate the role of customer behavior- mainly how customer dynamics interact with design and management- in social servicescape, which was noteworthy for parents and children but was not a focus within our framework. Finally, testing the framework we provided in diverse environments and adapting it to various cultural and socio-economic contexts, age groups, and abilities would ensure its validity and applicability.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Altay Burçak: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Altuntepe Büşra:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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