

Research Article

Investigation of The Relationship Between Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Gender Roles and In-Class Gender Roles¹

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of gender roles in the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and their perceptions of in-class gender roles. Grounded in the theoretical assumption that gender is a socially constructed and reinforced phenomenon during early childhood, teachers' beliefs and practices play a critical role in shaping children's gender-related attitudes and behaviors. The study employed a quantitative research design and included 332 preschool teachers working in the Tuzla and Pendik districts of Istanbul. Data were collected using the "Personal Information Form," the "Bem Gender Roles Inventory," and the "Preschool Teachers' Classroom Gender Perception Scale." The analyses were conducted through PROCESS Macro using a bootstrap approach. Findings revealed that the feminine gender role significantly mediated the relationship between teachers' sex and all four sub-dimensions of classroom gender role perceptions. In contrast, masculine and social desirability roles did not serve as significant mediators. These results indicate that teachers' internalized gender role characteristics may influence their discourse, expectations, and behaviors in the classroom. Limitations of the study include the regional sample and reliance on self-report data. The findings underscore the need for gender-sensitive teacher education programs and contribute to the understanding of gender dynamics in early childhood education.

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Arařtırma Makalesi

Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Cinsiyet Rollerine İlişkinin İncelenmesi

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Özet

Bu arařtırmada, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin cinsiyetleri ile sınıf içi toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin algıları arasındaki ilişkide cinsiyet rollerinin aracılık rolü incelenmiştir. Arařtırmanın kuramsal temeli, erken çocukluk döneminde toplumsal cinsiyetin öğrenilmiş ve pekiştirilmiş bir yapı olması; öğretmenlerin inanç ve tutumlarının ise çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet algılarını doğrudan etkileyebilmesi üzerine kurulmuştur. Nicel arařtırma deseninde yürütülen çalışmanın örneklemini İstanbul ili Tuzla ve Pendik ilçelerinde görev yapan 332 okul öncesi öğretmeni oluşturmaktadır. Veri toplama sürecinde "Kişisel Bilgi Formu", "Bem Cinsiyet Rollerine İlişkin Ölçeği" kullanılmıştır. Veriler, PROCESS Macro aracılığıyla bootstrap temelli aracılık analizi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, öğretmenlerin kadınsı cinsiyet rolü puanlarının, cinsiyet ile sınıf içi toplumsal cinsiyet algılarının dört alt boyutu arasındaki ilişkide anlamlı bir aracı değişken olduğunu göstermiştir. Erkeksi cinsiyet rolü ve sosyal beğenilirlik rollerinin ise aracılık etkisi anlamlı bulunmamıştır. Sonuçlar, öğretmenlerin sahip oldukları cinsiyet rolü özelliklerinin, sınıf içindeki söylem, tutum ve davranışlarını etkileyebileceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Arařtırmanın sınırlılıkları örneklemin tek bölge ile sınırlı olması ve verilerin öz-bildirim ölçeklerinden elde edilmesidir. Bulgular, erken çocukluk eğitiminde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği çalışmalarının gerekliliğini vurgulamakta ve öğretmen eğitim programlarının geliştirilmesine yönelik öneriler sunmaktadır.

Atıf için

Manici, İ. F., Korkmaz, T., ve Büyükkörsüz, E. (2025). Okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin cinsiyet rolleri ile sınıf içi toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine yönelik algıları arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi. *Ege Bilimsel Arařtırmalar Dergisi*, 8(1), 1-16. DOI: 10.58637/egebad.1684895

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INTRODUCTION

Although the concepts of sex and gender are mutually inclusive, they differ fundamentally in meaning (Johnson & Repta, 2012; Tüfekçioğlu, 2020). Sex refers to the biological characteristics that categorize individuals as male or female at birth (Yaşın-Dökmen, 2021). Gender, however, encompasses the socially constructed roles, expectations, and stereotypes that define how individuals should behave, feel, or express themselves according to cultural norms (Alptekin, 2019; Kavuncu, 1987). In this sense, biological sex is an innate status, whereas gender is learned and reinforced through social interactions (Can, 2013; Lindsey, 2015). Individuals often have little control over gendered expectations imposed by society, and these expectations shape their perceptions of gender from an early age (Haskan-Avcı, 2020; Korkmaz & Özbeşler, 2022).

Early childhood, typically defined as ages 3–6, is a critical period for personality development and for the internalization of social norms, including gender roles (Kaynak, 2017). During this period, children rapidly acquire learning experiences that influence their well-being, productivity, and socioemotional development in later life. Early interventions during this period have long-term implications for children's cognitive, social, and emotional capacities (Bredenkamp, 2015).

The formation of gender roles is shaped by multiple factors, including family, culture, peers, teachers, the social environment, and mass media. Families are the first social institutions where gender roles are learned, reinforced, and sometimes reproduced through gender-based discrimination (Haskan-Avcı, 2019). As children begin school, preschool teachers become key agents who influence gender-related attitudes and behaviors. Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and discipline strategies can shape children's understanding of gender roles, even in cases where teachers do not explicitly differentiate between girls and boys (Aslan, 2015; Esen, 2013). Classroom materials, toy choices, activities, language use, and the distribution of roles also contribute to children's construction of gender. As significant role models, teachers may consciously or unconsciously transmit gendered messages through their behavior and personal traits (Öztürk & Doğan, 2023; Rogošic, Maskalan & Krznar, 2020). Teachers' egalitarian perspectives are therefore essential for supporting gender-equitable classrooms (Koyuncu-Şahin et al., 2018).

Domestic studies highlight that gender stereotypes are still prevalent in early childhood settings. Silman, Bozcan, and Koran (2019) found that preschool teachers in two different countries held stereotypical views, describing men as strong and independent and women as fragile and emotional. Kantekin (2020) reported that both children and parents displayed gendered stereotypes in toy, occupation, and clothing preferences, and that girls were notably influenced by popular culture in their clothing choices. Furthermore, domestic responsibilities were found to be predominantly assigned to women. Yurtkulu et al. (2023) emphasized that both parents and teachers reflected gendered expectations through children's songs. Similarly, Öztürk and Doğan (2023)

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observed that preschool teachers reported higher levels of gender awareness than parents.

International studies also reveal that preschool teachers may unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes. Lynch (2015) found that teachers projected their own gender biases into children's play. Chapman (2016) observed significant gender differences in children's play activities that aligned with teachers' beliefs and practices. Pardhan and Pelletier (2017) reported that although teachers attempted to move beyond traditional views, many still held patriarchal beliefs (e.g., girls being passive and boys being assertive). Morrisette, Jesme, and Hunter (2018) further demonstrated discrepancies between teachers' and administrators' gender perceptions and the feedback they expected boys and girls to receive.

Despite growing interest, research examining preschool teachers' gender role orientations and how these roles shape classroom gender perceptions remains limited, especially within the Turkish context. Although studies have explored gender perceptions, none have investigated the mediating role of teachers' gender role orientations (feminine, masculine, social desirability) in the relationship between their sex and their perceptions of in-class gender roles.

This gap is particularly relevant in Turkey, where the preschool teaching profession is overwhelmingly female (MoNE, 2021). In such a context, understanding whether feminine, masculine, or socially desirable gender roles influence teachers' classroom perceptions is crucial for designing gender-sensitive teacher training and developing more equitable early learning environments.

The limitations of the present study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. Primarily, the research is temporally limited to the 2021–2022 academic year. Geographically, the scope is confined to early childhood education institutions located on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, with the sample selected through a convenience sampling method. Furthermore, the data collection is restricted to the specific scales utilized within the framework of this research. Lastly, due to the high concentration of women in the field of preschool education, the study group consists predominantly of female participants, which may limit the generalizability of the results regarding gender-based comparisons among educators.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following problem:

Do gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and their perceptions of in-class gender roles?

Based on this aim, the study investigates the following research questions:

- Do gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and their general gender discourses?

- Do gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and gender role characteristics?
- Do gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and gender-specific behavioral reactions?
- Do gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and gender representations in fairy tales and stories?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to the literature by clarifying the mechanisms through which teachers' gender role orientations shape classroom gender dynamics and by offering insights for promoting gender equity in early childhood education.

Method

Research Design

In this study, which was designed to examine the relationship between preschool teachers' gender roles and their perceptions of gender roles in the classroom, quantitative research relational survey model was used. The research model that aims to determine the change or the degree of change between two or more variables is called relational survey model (Karasar, 2012). In this study, the mediating role of gender roles sub-dimension scores in predicting preschool teachers' gender and in-class gender perceptions sub-dimension scores was examined.

Study group

Due to Covid-19, easy and accessible sampling method was used. Since the number of preschool teachers to cover the population was not clearly known, it was decided to work with the study group. The study group consisted of a total of 332 (295 female; 37 male) preschool teachers (295 female; 37 male) working as 5-year-old teachers in Tuzla and Pendik districts on the Anatolian side of Istanbul province. According to MEB (2021), there are 95,049 preschool teachers in Turkey. Of these, 6,082 are male and 88,967 are female teachers. Therefore, the majority of the research group consists of female teachers. The demographic profile of the participants reveals that 295 (88.9%) are female and 37 (11.1%) are male. This gender imbalance in the sample aligns with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2021) statistics, which indicate a substantial female predominance within the teaching profession. In terms of age distribution, the largest group consists of 106 participants (31.9%) within the 24–29 age bracket. The remaining distribution includes 68 (20.5%) aged 18–23, 62 (18.7%) aged 30–35, 45 (13.6%) aged 36–41, 45 (13.6%) aged 42–47, and 6 (1.8%) aged 48 and above. Notably, 52.4% of the participants fall between the ages of 18 and 29, suggesting that the preschool teaching workforce is primarily composed of young adults. The educational background of the participants shows a high concentration of undergraduate degree holders ($n = 248$, 74.7%). Other educational levels include high school graduates ($n = 8$, 2.5%), associate degree holders ($n = 39$, 11.7%), and those with postgraduate degrees ($n =$

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37, 11.1%). The high prevalence of undergraduate degrees is attributable to the data collection being conducted in public schools. While individuals with high school or associate degrees could be appointed as teachers in previous periods, contemporary regulations require a degree from a Faculty of Education for appointment. Regarding professional seniority, 162 participants (48.8%) have between 0 and 5 years of experience, representing the largest portion of the sample. This is followed by 75 (22.6%) with 6–11 years, 48 (14.5%) with 12–17 years, 36 (10.8%) with 18–23 years, 10 (3.0%) with 24–29 years, and 1 (0.3%) with 30 or more years of service. Regarding professional development on gender issues, 233 participants (70.2%) reported that they had not attended any courses or seminars, while 99 (29.8%) responded affirmatively. Although most participants are graduates of Education Faculties, the Preschool Teacher Education program—updated by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in 2018—does not include a mandatory course on gender roles. Nevertheless, it is observed that universities have increasingly begun to incorporate independent seminars on gender-related themes within their institutional frameworks.

Data Collection Tools

In the study, the personal information form prepared by the researcher, the BEM gender roles scale (60 adjectives) developed by Bem and Turkish adaptation, validity and reliability analysis by Kavuncu (1987), and the 4-dimensional Preschool Teachers' Gender Perception Scale in the Classroom developed by Yıldız (2019) were used.

Personal Information Form: It was created by the researcher to obtain demographic information such as gender, age, education level, seniority, and the status of taking courses/seminars on gender.

Bem Gender Roles Scale

The Bem Gender Roles Inventory was developed by Sandra L. Bem in 1974 to measure the characteristics of individuals' gender roles. The Turkish adaptation, validity and reliability analysis of the scale developed by Bem was conducted by Kavuncu (1987). The scale, which was developed according to a seven-point Likert scale (1 "Absolutely not true for me"; 7 "Always true for me"), consists of 60 adjectives. Out of these 60 adjectives, 20 of them are "Masculine" (Masculine), 20 of them are "Feminine" (Feminine) and 20 of them constitute the "Social Liking" sub-dimension.

Gender roles are determined by median scores across three sub-dimensions: femininity, masculinity, and social appreciation. High masculinity and low femininity scores indicate a masculine role, while the reverse indicates a feminine role. Scoring consistently above or below the median in both areas is defined as the social appreciation role. The scale demonstrates high reliability, with coefficients ranging from .89 to .90 (Kavuncu, 1987).

Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Gender in the Classroom

The "Preschool Teachers' Classroom Gender Perception Scale" (Yıldız, 2019) was utilized to measure gender perceptions. This 5-point Likert scale comprises 42 items across four sub-dimensions: General Gender Discourses (17 items), Gender Role Characteristics (12 items), Gender Specific Behavioral Reactions (7 items), and Gender in Tales and Stories (6 items). Items assess perceptions ranging from behavioral expectations (e.g., aggression, organization) to traditional role assignments and narrative depictions. The scale demonstrates strong internal consistency, with sub-dimension Cronbach Alpha values between .747 and .859, and an overall scale reliability of .877 (Yıldız, 2019).

Collection and Analysis of Data: In the data collection process, first of all, the necessary permissions were obtained for the application of the scales. Data were collected by the preschool teachers who voluntarily participated in the study by filling out the scales online via Google Forms and face-to-face in the institutions where they work. Before analyzing the quantitative data obtained as a result of the research, the data that were not filled out in accordance with the instructions, missing or the same ones were removed. The appropriate data of the "Personal Information Form", "Preschool Teachers' Gender Perceptions in the Classroom" and "Bem Gender Roles" scales used in the research were entered into the SPSS program for analysis.

Data Analysis

Total scores and sub-dimensions of "Preschool Teachers' Gender Perceptions in the Classroom" and "Bem Gender Roles" scales were calculated. Frequency-percentage calculations were made for the information in the "Personal Information Form". Data below 10% were grouped and analyzed (Figure 1). The mediation method (Hayes, 2015) was used to analyze the data. The data were analyzed with PROCESS macro in SPSS 22.00 program. In the mediation model analysis, it is aimed to determine whether there is a mediating variable or variables in the prediction effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

The study examined whether gender roles mediate the sub-dimensions of preschool teachers' perceptions of gender roles in the classroom. "Bootstrap" method was used in the mediating variable analysis. Bootstrap renovation was selected as 5000 (Hayes, 2015).

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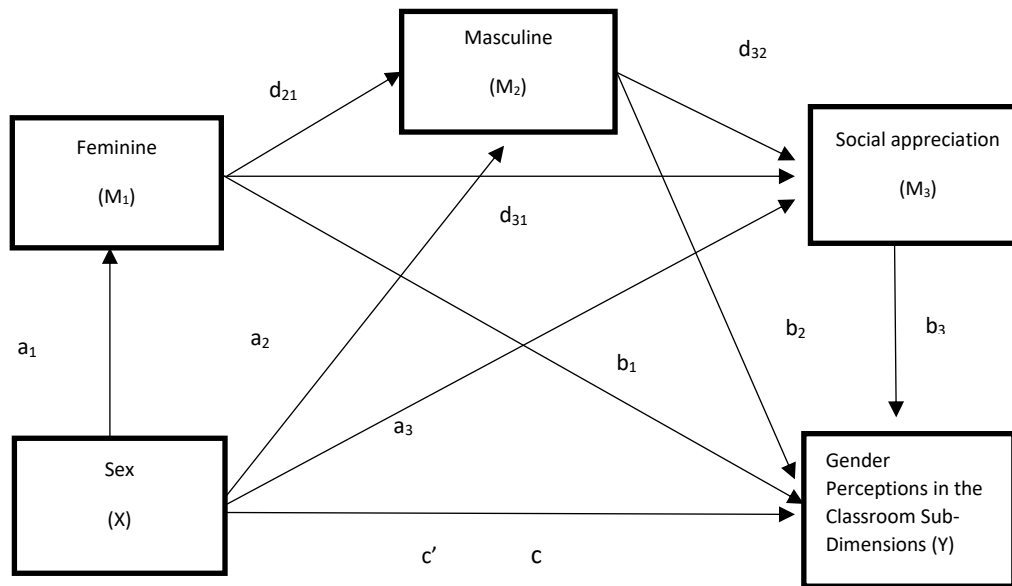


Figure 1. Model of the Mediating Role of Gender Roles in the Relationship between Gender and Gender Roles in the Classroom Scale Subscales

Result

This section presents the analysis of the data obtained in line with the purpose of the study.

Do Gender Roles Mediate the Relationship between Preschool Teachers' Sex and General Gender Discourses?

The first hypothesis of the study proposed that "Gender roles do not mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' gender and general gender discourses." The mediating role of gender roles was analyzed through regression models. The results indicated that gender significantly and positively predicted femininity ($\beta = 6.52$) and social appreciation ($\beta = .41$), while negatively predicting masculinity ($\beta = -9.75$). When femininity and masculinity were included as serial mediators, the regression coefficient of gender on general gender discourses was negative ($\beta = -.26$). Similarly, when femininity and social appreciation, or masculinity and social appreciation were included as mediators, the coefficients shifted to positive values ($\beta = .26$ in both cases).

In addition to the regression coefficients, the indirect effects provide deeper insight into whether each gender role orientation contributes to the relationship between sex and general gender discourses. The bootstrap confidence intervals indicate which pathways are statistically supported. The shifts in coefficients across different mediation models (from negative to positive values) suggest that the mediators absorb part of the variance explained by sex, yet only one mediator produces a statistically reliable indirect effect.

This indirect effect indicates that male teachers scored significantly lower on the feminine dimension, which in turn predicted lower endorsement of general gender discourses. Since masculinity and social desirability did not provide significant

pathways, the findings emphasize the unique explanatory value of the feminine role within this model.

Do Sex Roles Mediate the Relationship Between Preschool Teachers' Sex and Sex Role Characteristics?

The second hypothesis posited that "Gender roles do not mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and sex role characteristics." The direct effect of sex-on-sex role characteristics was found to be statistically insignificant ($B = .74$, 95% CI: $-.21$ to 1.80). However, femininity was found to significantly mediate this relationship ($B = .87$, 95% CI: $.19$ to 1.79). Neither masculinity ($B = .05$, 95% CI: $-.79$ to $.72$) nor social appreciation ($B = -.04$, 95% CI: $-.37$ to $.22$) served as significant mediators. Serial mediation involving combinations of femininity and masculinity ($B = .02$, 95% CI: $-.25$ to $.28$), femininity and social appreciation ($B = -.18$, 95% CI: $-.51$ to $.08$), masculinity and social appreciation ($B = .19$, 95% CI: $-.08$ to $.53$), and all three roles ($B = -.06$, 95% CI: $-.20$ to $.02$) did not yield significant results.

Thus, the findings indicate that femininity uniquely mediates the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and sex role characteristics, partially rejecting the second hypothesis.

The significant feminine-pathway suggests that feminine characteristics (e.g., sensitivity, empathy, nurturing qualities) serve as a critical mechanism explaining variations in teachers' perceptions of gender role characteristics. Because the direct effect was nonsignificant, the mediation is characterized as indirect-only mediation, indicating that gender influences these perceptions solely through the feminine role.

Do Sex Roles Mediate the Relationship Between Preschool Teachers' Sex and Gender Specific Behavioral Reactions?

The third hypothesis proposed that "Gender roles do not mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and gender-specific behavioral reactions." The analysis showed that sex negatively predicted femininity ($\beta = -6.52$) and social appreciation ($\beta = -.41$), while positively predicting masculinity ($\beta = 9.75$). When femininity and masculinity were included as serial mediators, the regression coefficient of sex on gender-specific behavioral reactions was negative ($\beta = -31.09$). Conversely, when femininity and social appreciation, or masculinity and social appreciation, were considered as mediators, the coefficients were positive ($\beta = .16$ and $\beta = .02$, respectively). Including all three gender roles as mediators resulted in a negative coefficient ($\beta = -.04$).

This significant mediation suggests that individuals high in feminine characteristics tend to interpret gender-specific behavioral reactions differently, regardless of their biological sex. Masculinity and social desirability did not contribute to any meaningful indirect pathways, reinforcing the dominant pattern observed across all models.

Do Gender Roles Mediate the Relationship Between Preschool Teachers' Sex and Gender Roles in Fairy Tales and Stories?

The fourth hypothesis explored whether gender roles mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and the representation of gender roles in fairy tales and

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stories. Bootstrapping analysis with 5000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval was conducted. The results showed that femininity significantly mediated the relationship between sex and gender roles in fairy tales and stories ($B = -.42$, 95% CI: $-.91$ to $-.09$). However, masculinity ($B = .14$, 95% CI: $-.18$ to $.47$) and social appreciation ($B = .04$, 95% CI: $-.22$ to $.29$) did not individually mediate this relationship. Serial mediation analysis indicated that combinations of femininity and social appreciation ($B = .20$, 95% CI: $.04$ to $.42$), and masculinity and social appreciation ($B = -.20$, 95% CI: $-.40$ to $-.05$) significantly mediated the relationship. However, when all three roles were considered together, no significant serial mediation effect was found ($B = .07$, 95% CI: $.01$ to $.16$).

These findings suggest that femininity, along with combinations of femininity and social appreciation, and masculinity and social appreciation, significantly mediate the relationship between preschool teachers' sex and gender representations in fairy tales and stories, leading to a partial rejection of the fourth hypothesis.

Although the feminine role again produced a significant indirect effect, the additional serial pathways point to a more complex structure for this outcome. Nevertheless, the lack of significance when all mediators were included simultaneously suggests that these combined effects may be unstable or dependent on shared variance among mediators.

The study's findings consistently highlight the significant mediating role of femininity across various gender-related constructs. Although the direct effects of sex on general gender discourses, sex role characteristics, and gender-specific behavioral reactions were not significant, femininity consistently mediated these relationships. Masculinity and social appreciation did not demonstrate significant mediating effects. These results underscore the critical role of femininity in shaping gender related attitudes and behaviors among preschool teachers.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to elucidate the mediating roles of feminine, masculine, and social desirability traits in the relationship between teachers' biological gender and their perceptions of classroom gender roles. Utilizing the mediation framework established by Baron and Kenny (1986), the analysis resulted in the rejection of all four null hypotheses (H_0). The findings provide robust evidence that teachers' gender significantly shapes their pedagogical perceptions of gender roles, with the feminine gender role emerging as a statistically significant mediator. This outcome necessitates a critical examination of the socio-cultural and psychological drivers that position femininity as a pivotal mechanism in early childhood education.

The internal gender-role orientations of educators are not merely personal attributes; they function as a lens through which classroom dynamics are filtered. The results suggest that teachers' internalized roles dictate their interactional patterns, activity selection, and the distribution of classroom responsibilities. These findings resonate with the work of Torun (2002) and Cahill and Adams (1997), who argued that educators' subjective belief systems and gender-related perceptions are fundamental

determinants of classroom practice. Furthermore, the findings corroborate Spilt et al. (2017), whose research indicated that female teachers tend to cultivate higher levels of closeness and lower conflict in teacher-student relationships compared to their male counterparts, possibly due to the alignment of traditional feminine traits with the nurturing demands of the profession.

The demographic imbalance observed in the study—a predominant female representation—is consistent with the national statistics reported by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2021). This phenomenon is largely attributable to the enduring societal perception of teaching, particularly in early childhood, as a "gender-typed" female profession. While Çakmak and Kayabaşı (2017) found no gender-based divergence in initial motivations for choosing the profession, the literature highlights significant barriers for males. Societal prejudices and future anxieties regarding career fit for men (Haskan-Avcı et al., 2019), coupled with heightened gender-related concerns for women (Başkal, 2009), perpetuate this cycle. These perceptions are further reinforced through early exposure to children's literature. In line with Kahraman and Özdemir (2019) and Anderson and Hamilton (2005), this study suggests that traditional gender scripts in picture books often relegate women to the domestic sphere while portraying men in dominant, external roles, thereby shaping the foundational gender schemas of both children and their future educators.

Interestingly, the mediating role of feminine traits offers a window into the evolving cultural landscape of Turkey. While traditional perspectives define Turkish society as patriarchal (Yeniasır & Gökbulut, 2020; Önal, 2019), more recent comparative data (Göğüş et al., 2012) suggest a decline in masculine structural dominance when compared to earlier cultural assessments by Hofstede (2001). This trend implies that factors such as increasing educational attainment and temporal shifts are moderating traditional gender ideologies.

In conclusion, although the relationship between gender and gender-role perceptions has been explored (e.g., Ünal et al., 2017), research focusing specifically on the classroom context remains extremely limited. By integrating the variable developed by Yıldız (2019), this study addresses a significant gap in the literature. It underscores that the formation of gender-role perceptions in education is a multifactorial process, where biological gender interacts with internalized roles—especially femininity—to influence the pedagogical environment.

Conclusion

The study further supports earlier findings suggesting that teachers' personal beliefs and gender-role orientations significantly shape teacher-student interactions and instructional practices. Prior research (Cahill & Adams, 1997; Torun, 2002) similarly demonstrated that teachers' gender related perceptions influence their decisions regarding activity planning, task distribution, behavioral expectations, and communication patterns in the classroom. The findings of the present study extend this

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literature by empirically illustrating that feminine gender-role orientation, rather than masculinity or social appreciation, constitutes the key mechanism explaining differences in classroom gender perceptions.

The demographic structure of the sample, which reflects the female-dominated nature of the preschool teaching profession in Türkiye, should be considered in interpreting the results. The dominance of female teachers in early childhood education consistent with MoNE (2021) data reflects broader societal perceptions that regard early childhood teaching as a gendered occupation. Previous research (Başkal, 2009; Haskan-Avcı et al., 2019) indicates that cultural expectations, gender-based professional stereotypes, and societal attitudes concerning male preschool teachers contribute to this distribution. This sociocultural context may also shape teachers' own internalization of gender roles and their translation into classroom practices.

The findings regarding fairy tales and stories further underscore the need for critical awareness in material selection. Existing studies on children's literature in Türkiye (Kahraman & Özdemir, 2019; Temellioğlu, 2022) highlight the persistent presence of traditional gender representations in books frequently used in preschool classrooms. Given that such materials play a fundamental role in early gender socialization, teachers' perceptions as shaped by their own gender-role orientations may influence how they interpret and convey these narratives to children. The present study suggests that teachers' feminine role orientation may heighten sensitivity to gender representation in educational materials, implying an opportunity for professional development interventions.

Although previous research examined the relationship between sex and gender-role perceptions (Ünal et al., 2017), there remains a significant gap in studies exploring the mediating function of sex roles in shaping classroom gender perceptions. Additionally, research on classroom gender perception is limited, with Yıldız (2019) being the only study to develop a measurement instrument in this domain. Therefore, the present study provides an important contribution by offering empirical evidence regarding how sex roles, as psychological dispositions, are associated with teachers' classroom practices and gender-related interpretations.

Overall, the findings reveal a complex dual socialization process: while Turkish society is often described as having a masculine socio-cultural structure, children in preschool environments are predominantly exposed to teachers who model feminine role characteristics. This discrepancy highlights the importance of understanding how school environments and broader societal contexts jointly shape children's internalization of gender roles.

Recommendations for Future Directions

Based on the research findings, several key recommendations can be proposed to enhance gender equity and awareness within educational environments. Primarily,

teacher education and in-service training programs should be restructured to prioritize gender-sensitive pedagogy. This includes equipping educators with the skills to critically analyze instructional materials and recognize implicit gender cues in their daily classroom communication. Furthermore, there should be a stronger emphasis on reflective practices, allowing teachers to evaluate how their own gender-role orientations inadvertently influence their interactions with students. Diversifying the workforce, particularly by increasing the employment of male teachers in early childhood education, is also suggested as a means to provide children with more varied gender-role modeling.

Regarding future academic inquiry, a shift toward more nuanced methodologies is recommended. Qualitative and mixed-methods research—incorporating interviews and direct observations—could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the implicit messages transmitted in classrooms and how children acquire masculine, feminine, or socially desirable roles. Additionally, longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are essential to track how teachers' orientations develop over time and how geographical differences shape gender perceptions. Finally, future research should explore mediating variables such as pedagogical beliefs, empathy levels, and emotional labor to provide a deeper insight into the complex dynamics of gender in education.

Limitations

The limitations of the present study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. Primarily, the research is temporally limited to the 2021–2022 academic year. Geographically, the scope is confined to early childhood education institutions located on the Anatolian side of Istanbul, with the sample selected through a convenience sampling method. Furthermore, the data collection is restricted to the specific scales utilized within the framework of this research. Lastly, due to the high concentration of women in the field of preschool education, the study group consists predominantly of female participants, which may limit the generalizability of the results regarding gender-based comparisons among educators.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: İ.F.M; E.B.; T.K. Data curation: İ.F.M; Formal analysis: İ.F.M; Investigation: İ.F.M; Methodology: İ.F.M; E. B.; Data collection: İ.F.M Software: İ.F.M; E. B.; Writing, review and editing: İ.F.M; E. B., T.K.

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Declarations

Ethics approval

Ethics committee approval with 140 protocol number and 11.08.2021 date was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the Istanbul Okan university.

Informed consent

Consent to participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Consent to publish

The participant has consented to the submission of the case report to the journal I confirm that the manuscript has been not submitted to any journal and is not published, in press, or submitted elsewhere

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Artificial Intelligence Use Statement

No, artificial intelligence tools were not used.

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