

**MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN PROFESSIONAL FIELDS
CHARACTERIZED BY FEMININITY: AN EXAMPLE OF MALE TEACHER
CANDIDATES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the perceptions and experiences of male students enrolled in early childhood education, a domain often considered feminine. The research aims to uncover these students' perspectives on their chosen profession and their encounters within it. Conducted at a state university in the central Black Sea region of Turkey, the study engaged participants from the fourth year of the preschool education program. A total of 12 male students, ranging in age from 21 to 24 years, were selected for the research. Over the course of 24 weeks, these students completed practical teaching sessions at a local kindergarten. Data collection utilized a semi-structured interview format, designed to explore participants' motivations for selecting the preschool education field and their lived experiences in relation to both their academic journey and their masculinity. The collected data underwent content analysis, guided by themes derived from participants' responses and aligned with the research questions. Inter-coder reliability was established by re-coding transcriptions of three randomly selected interviews, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.85—exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.80 for such analyses. This study contributes to understanding the perspectives of male students in a predominantly female-centric field, shedding light on their motivations, experiences, and sense of identity. It highlights the nuanced landscape of early childhood education and opens avenues for further exploration into gender dynamics within academic and professional realms.

Keywords: Male teacher candidates; early childhood education; male early childhood teachers

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KADINSILIK İLE KARAKTERİZE EDİLEN MESLEK ALANLARINDA ERKEKLER VE ERKEKLİKLER: OKUL ÖNCESİ ÖĞRETMENLİĞİNDE OKUYAN ERKEKLER ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZET

Bu nitel çalışma, genellikle kadınsı olarak kabul edilen erken çocukluk eğitimine kayıtlı erkek öğrencilerin algılarını ve deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Araştırma, bu öğrencilerin seçtikleri meslek hakkındaki bakış açılarını ve bu meslekteki karşılaştıkları deneyimleri ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Türkiye'nin Karadeniz bölgesinin ortasındaki bir devlet üniversitesinde gerçekleştirilen bu çalışma, okul öncesi eğitim programının dördüncü sınıfını bitirmek üzere olan öğretmen adayları ile yapılmıştır. Araştırma için 21 ila 24 yaşları arasında değişen yaşlardaki toplam 12 erkek öğrenci seçilmiştir. Bu öğrenciler, 24 hafta boyunca yerel bir anaokulunda pratik öğretim oturumları tamamlamışlardır. Veri toplama süreci, katılımcıların okul öncesi eğitim alanını seçme nedenlerini ve akademik yolculukları ile erkeklikleri arasındaki deneyimleri keşfetmeyi amaçlayan yarı yapılandırılmış bir mülakat formatı kullanmıştır. Toplanan veriler, katılımcıların yanıtlarından türetilen temalarla uyumlu olarak içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. İki kodlayıcı arası güvenilirlik, üç rastgele seçilen mülakatın transkriplerinin yeniden kodlanmasıyla kurulmuş ve bu analizler için önerilen 0.80 eşik değerini aşan 0.85 güvenilirlik katsayısı elde edilmiştir. Bu çalışma, genellikle kadın merkezli bir alanda erkek öğrencilerin perspektiflerini anlama konusuna katkıda bulunmakta, onların motivasyonlarını, deneyimlerini ve kimlik duygularını aydınlatmaktadır. Aynı zamanda okul öncesi eğitimin yapısını vurgulayarak akademik ve mesleki alanlardaki cinsiyet dinamiklerinin keşfi için fırsatlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erkek öğretmen adayları; okul öncesi eğitim; erkek okul öncesi öğretmenleri

1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals choose professions, but employment conditions, job opportunities, and sometimes social norms play a role in the selection of a profession. One of the most important of these social norms is gender roles. Gender is a socially structured classification system based on binary categories, masculinity and femininity (Kosut, 2012), while gender roles are a group of expectations related to gender that society expects men and women to fulfill (Dökmen, 2004). Society constantly provides rewards and punishments to individuals according to whether they behave in accordance with this expectation, and conditions both men and women to behave in accordance with these roles (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014). These roles arise in professions as well as in areas such as household-related work and personal relationships. Early childhood education is one of these professions.

Early childhood education (ECE) teachers consist of males at a percentage of between 2-3% worldwide, and this ratio is persistent primarily in countries where deliberate efforts are in place to increase male representation in ECE. The scarcity of men in this important profession, which takes place at the intersection of caring and teaching, also indicates how deep the roots of sexism in our world are (Warin, 2018). Especially when it comes to masculinity in the context of sexism, it is necessary to look at the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” as described by Connell (1995).

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept used to define attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender inequality, including both the domination of men over women and the power of some men over other men (Connell, 1995). Hegemonic masculinity is also defined as the image of masculinity possessed by men who hold power (Türk, 2007). In other words, hegemonic masculinity is known as a form of masculinity that is presented to men as the norm and requires all men to position themselves according to this norm (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and emphasizes how men are positioned as masculine or non-masculine (Connell, 1995). Connell (1995), in addition to hegemonic masculinity, describes other classifications as subordinated masculinity (masculinities that are usually associated with femininity, tend to be emotional or tearful, and are also subjected to derogatory labels such as effeminate), cooperative masculinity (masculinities that contribute to hegemonic masculinity and share patriarchy, although they do not seem dominant), and finally marginal masculinity (masculinities that are excluded from standard masculinities and marginalized according to social positioning based on race, class, and ethnicity). From this perspective, men who enter women's professions face the risk of being perceived as non-masculine, that is, people who do not fit into the hegemonic masculinity scenario, and therefore being questioned regarding their gender identity (Nordberg, 2002). Therefore, men who choose the profession of early childhood education teachers also risk being questioned about their choice of profession.

It is well established in the literature that male preschool teachers and teacher candidates may experience difficulties due to gender-related expectations and stereotypes (Erden, Özgün & Aydilek-Çiftci, 2011; Fu, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). For example, it is stated that male teacher candidates encounter resistance due to their gender (Fu & Li, 2010), are discouraged due to sexist taunts and objections (Weaver-Hightower, 2011), tend to doubt the value of their profession (Fu & Li, 2010), and often encounter sexist assumptions and stereotypes that discourage them from pursuing a career in early childhood education (Fu, 2012).

On the other hand, being male preschool teachers may come with some advantages in addition to these difficulties. Based on the analogy of the “glass ceiling” (Freeman, 1990), which is used for the obstacles women face due to sexist attitudes while progressing in their professions, Williams (1992) uses the term “glass escalator” to explain the faster rise of men in professions where women predominate. Within this framework, in the professions where women constitute the numerical majority, it is usually assumed that men are more competent and better leaders than women. As a result, men are attracted to higher-paying jobs and administrative positions. The metaphor of “glass escalator” is used because the negative stereotypes about male sexuality of men who insist on staying in these professions and exposure to possible prejudices, including pedophilia, low wage payment, etc. push men to higher-paying and more prestigious positions (Williams, 2013). ECE is considered as one of these professions where men benefit from this advantage (Simpson, 2004; Deng et al., 2023). Within this framework, although the identities of male teachers are under threat of questioning due to discriminatory practices

and the pressure of hegemonic masculinity in the field of ECE, it is possible to observe that the privileged status in society is reflected in this field as well.

When the percentage of male teachers in the field of preschool education in Turkey is examined, an interesting parameter emerges. This percentage is currently 6.05%, according to the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MEB) data for the year 2022 (MEB, 2022). Considering that this percentage varies in the range of 2-3% worldwide (Warin, 2018), the proportion of men is interestingly higher than the world average. This is despite the more traditional and conservative structure of Turkish culture and values than other developed countries. However, the percentages of male ECE teachers in Turkey vary in public and private institutions. While the percentage of male preschool teachers working in public schools is 7.03%, this percentage decreases to 3.17% in private schools (Ministry of National Education, 2022). These ratios consider the influence of gender on career choice.

When the influence of gender on career choice is examined, the opinions of Gottfredson (1996), who stated that "vocational choice largely as a process of eliminating options and narrowing one's choices" (p. 179) emerges. Arguing that the individual's self-concept and perceived accessibility of a profession determine career decisions, he states that people sometimes give up their interests, prestige, and gender compatibility in choosing a profession (Gottfredson, 1996). Leung and Plake (1990) found that contrary to Gottfredson's model, the prestige of a profession is more critical, and people tend to abandon gender-appropriate occupations when the prestige of a job is higher. As a result, ranking the factors that are given up during the career selection process may vary depending on the degree of threat to self-perception (Gottfredson & Lapan 1997). As a result, it is thought that the difficulties experienced by teachers in settling down for a job in Turkey and the potential loss of prestige caused by the risk of unemployment may lead men to choose a career in ECE.

This research aims to examine how male students seeking a career in an ECE program evaluate the professions, and experiences of being a man, and how studying in this field affects their identity as a man in a female-dominated field. To achieve this, male teacher candidates with at least two semesters of teacher practicum are included in this study. In this context, this research seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons for male preschool teacher candidates to choose this profession?
2. What are the opinions of male preschool teacher candidates about gender role norms and their professions?
3. What kind of reactions do male preschool teacher candidates encounter about their profession?
4. What are the difficulties faced by male preschool teacher candidates within their profession?

2. METHOD

This research is a qualitative research. The qualitative approach is determined as the most appropriate method for determining the opinions and experiences of male students studying in ECE, which is considered a feminine field.

2.1. Participants

Participating in the research are ECE program seniors with at least two semesters of teacher practicum experience. The participants consist of students registered at a state university located in the central Black Sea region. Teacher candidates completed two semesters of teaching practicums in a kindergarten classroom once a week for a total of 24 weeks. The study group consists of a total of 12 male teacher candidates. The average age of the participants was 22.5, and all participants were within the 21 and 24-year-old range.

2.2. Semi-Structured Interview Form

A semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher was used as a data collection tool in the study. The questions included in the interview form used in the research have been prepared primarily based on the experiences and observations of the researcher. While preparing the questions included in the interview form, the opinions of a female academic who works in the field of psychological counseling and guidance and who also has expertise in the field of gender study were considered. The semi-structured interview was preferred in this study because it provides consistency between the interviews conducted, provides flexibility for interviewees to share their experiences in their responses, and provides an opportunity to ask explanatory questions to the researchers conducting the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This form consists of 10 open-ended questions that focus on the reasons why male students studying in ECE programs chose the field and the experiences they have during their studies and their lives in terms of masculinity identity.

2.3. Data Collection

The data were collected through online interviews with students who volunteered to participate in the study. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants for data analysis purposes. The interviews were conducted with the ZOOM program, an online video conferencing tool.

2.4. Analysis of the Data

Content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. First, the interviews were recorded, and then the recordings were transcribed. The themes were created based on the information contained in the transcripts and the research questions. The data were analyzed using the QDA Miner Lite (version 2.0.7; Provalis Research) program. To ensure the reliability of the data within the scope of the research, the researcher selected three interviews randomly and these interviews were re-encoded based on the

determined themes by a qualified researcher. The reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (2015) ($\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement}}$) was used to calculate the reliability coefficient. The reliability value of Miles and Huberman Decoders in the analysis was performed. It was calculated as 85. According to Miles and Huberman (2015), the reliability value between Decoders should be at least 80%. According to this criterion, the reliability value was calculated as 85 and accepted as within the acceptance limits.

2.5. The Role of the Researcher

The author of this research is a male academic working in the field of ECE teacher training programs. The interviews were conducted by the researcher. The relevant literature was taken into consideration when interpreting the data collected for this study, but the researcher acknowledges that his own experiences may affect both the interview process and the interpretations.

3. FINDINGS

The qualitative data collected within the scope of the study were analyzed for the purposes of the research and the findings are presented below. The answers given to the semi-structured interview questions were classified into a total of five separate categories.

3.1. Findings on the Reasons for Choosing Preschool Teaching

Teacher candidates' reasons for choosing ECE field and their opinions on this issue have been collected under various codes and the findings are presented in Table 1. The codes created and examples of expressions of these codes are listed below.

Table 1. The Reason why Preschool Teacher Candidates Choose a Field

Category	Number of Interviewees Giving an Opinion	
	(N=12)	%
Job Security	8	66,70%
Popularity	3	25,00%
Proximity to Children	2	16,70%
Other	2	16,70%

3.1.1. Job Security. Within this code, participants stated that they chose the field because it has a high chance of having a job after graduation. 66.7 % of participants mentioned job security. For example, an interviewer describes job security as follows:

“When we evaluate the conditions of our country, it came across to me as a department where you could find a job comfortably when you graduate.”

3.1.2. Popularity. This code was created for participants when they expressed that the participants were advised to choose the program. Any answers related to popularity or a recommendation given by someone to choose ECE program were taken into account and 25% of participant talked about this category. An example given by popularity is as follows:

“We were told that in the future ECE will be more popular and it is a good program. If you choose this program, you will like it. Although I came a little unwillingly at first with these suggestions, I have grown fond of it and liked it later. I don't want to quit anymore.”

3.1.3. Proximity to children. Opinions about feeling close to children as the reason for choosing the field in interviews were coded as proximity to children and placed under this code. 16.7% of the participants expressed an opinion in this category. An example statement is included below.

“I have a slightly more moderate and warm attitude towards preschool children and I like to communicate with them.”

3.1.4. Other. When participants stated their reasons for choosing a profession as willing to educate or ease of the profession, these reasons were coded in this coding group. 16.7% of the participants expressed an opinion in this category.

3.2. Findings on the Category of Gender Roles in the Preschool Teaching Program

ECE teacher candidates' views on the perception of gender roles in the field and statements about judgments in society have been placed under this category and the codes are presented in Table 2. The explanation of the codes and sample expressions are included below.

Table 2. The Views of Preschool Teacher Candidates on Gender Perception

Category	Number of Interviewee Giving an Opinion	
	(N=12)	%
Women's Profession	10	83,30%
Gender Equality	9	75,00%
Administrative Positions	7	58,30%
Identity Crisis	3	25,00%
Male Authority	3	25,00%

3.2.1. Women's Profession. The comments expressed by the participants in the interviews and that this profession is perceived as more of a women's profession have been collected under this code. This code accounts for 83.3% of the participants. One of the participants described how the preschool teaching profession is looked at as follows:

“What about this way, for example, because society assumes such a meaning, obviously, because kindergarten for children is, after all, as it literally is considered as ‘mother school’ as the name also includes the word mother. The Society considers any preschool job you can think of is more suited for women. Like this job fit to women’s nature and man has no place within these schools. It is automatically assumed that women can take better care of children at this age and therefore they are more qualified for this job.” They don't perceive this as an education I guess, it is more like a mothering job.”

3.2.2. Gender Equality. The statements made by the participants about gender equality have been collected under this code. The percentage of participants who mentioned gender equality was 66.6%. One of the participants stated his opinion on this issue as follows:

“In raising a child close to the ideal is seen as the role of the mother, but I think fathers has equally responsible and effective role in raising the child. Relying on this, at least by entering ECE field, gaining experience there, seeing how things work there, how child psychology is, in practice, both internship and in theory, I also convinced myself that I would not have many difficulties on my own. I mean, being ECE teacher, I wouldn't want them to see gender when they look at this profession. According to gender norms, a male teacher cannot at a preschool, or an obstetrician cannot be a man. I would like to somehow overcome the prejudice.”

3.2.3. Administrative. The opinions of the students participating in the study regarding the roles they were supposed to have in ECE schools for their future professional life, as well as their own opinions related to administrative positions were collected under the administrative code. 58% of the participants in the study expressed an opinion on this issue. One of the statements in the administrative coding is indicated below.

“So I am about to finish the program. They tell me I should become a school principal or an assistant principal. I can't and shouldn't do this job. They told me this when I was doing my practicum at the school in the second semester. They think just because I am a man, I cannot teach in a preschool at all, so I should become an administrator. This happened in the last day of my internship.”

3.2.4. Identity Crisis. The expressions related to the identity crisis experienced by the male teacher candidates when they started the program, during their studies, or during the teaching practicum were collected under this code. 25% of the participants expressed an opinion on this issue. An example expression with this code is given below.

“So I wonder if it suits my character? So it looks like a women's profession. Yeah, I mean, taking care of the kids. I mean, from my own point of view, what does it make me feel from the point of my self-confidence, so there may be thoughts such as should I switch to a male profession?”

3.2.5. Male Authority. The opinions expressed by the participants about the authority of male teachers were collected in this code group. 25% of the participants expressed an opinion on this issue. Below is an example statement.

“How can I explain more, when I am dealing with a teacher My observations tell me that male teachers can set boundaries when they communicate more effectively. Parents and other teachers can feel the authority of a male teacher I think. At least as far as I have observed, that is, they need to watch their attitude a little more when they deal with a male teacher. Because when they deal with a male teacher, you know, they act differently. When they deal with a female teacher, they can be a little more friendly towards her and have a hard time setting boundaries.”

3.3. Reactions

The difficulties faced by preschool teacher candidates and their opinions on this issue have been collected under this category and the codes created are presented in Table 3. In addition, the definitions of each category and sample statements are given below.

Table 3. Reactions

Category	Number of Interviewees Giving an Opinion (N=12)	%
Positive Discrimination	9	75,00%
Society-Negative Reaction	8	66,70%
Parents-Negative Reaction	6	50,00%
Supportive Attitude	6	50,00%
Children -Positive Reaction	3	25,00%
Parents-Positive Reaction	3	25,00%
Family-Negative Reaction	2	16,70%
Children -Negative Reaction	1	8,30%

3.3.1. Positive Discrimination. The statements in which the participants stated that they were subjected to positive discrimination in the interviews were collected under this coding. 75% of the participants stated that they had been discriminated against because of their gender in some way. An example given by one of the participants in this direction is as follows:

“When I first went to the practicum, they didn’t assign me the three-year-old age group. They said I was a man. I would be better off working with the older five-year-old-age group. I don’t know, how can you take it? I don’t know if it’s right? I mean, that’s actually what I wanted at first. I thought I would have difficulty at the three-year-old group. I mean, because it’s just the first time. It was a relief to be treated a little more comfortably. Actually, it was a good thing from my point of view.”

3.3.2. Society Negative Reaction. The negative reactions that the participants received from the people in the society to being placed in the ECE program were collected in this code. 66.6% of the participants stated that they had received a negative reaction in some way. One of the participants expressed the reaction he received as follows:

“Yes, I mean, definitely, when they ask me what I study wherever I go, when they hear ECE, whether it’s a man or a woman, the reaction I get is that “What, it is a preschool and you are a male”. This is annoying. They met me for the first time, that’s how they really think they are not afraid to show how they feel about me being a male in ECE job.”

3.3.3 Supportive Attitude. The answers of the participants who stated that they experienced a supportive attitude for their choice as ECE teacher program were collected under this code. 50% of the participants stated that they got a supportive attitude or reaction. As an example of the answers given about this coding, one of the participants expressed the attitude of the practicum teacher towards him during the teaching practicum in this way:

“At the end of the semester, my practice teacher said, “I am glad that you have chosen this profession and I am glad that you are continuing. I was very pleased with your performance as an intern. She also said that I was able to perform as well as female interns do, and that’s why she wanted me to continue in this profession,” she said, and this made me very happy.”

3.3.4. Parents- Negative Reaction. The negative reactions that the participants received from the parents of the students at the school during the practicum were collected under this coding. 50% of the participants stated that they had received some kind of negative reaction. As an example of this, one of the participants shared his experience as follows:

“At the beginning of my practicum, I was opening the classroom door. I was welcoming the students, but they were asking whether I was working there. I was saying that I was not working. I was saying that I was a teacher candidate. When they see a male teacher, families react oddly. They were asking “How could a man be an ECE teacher?” I’m saying yes, yeah this happens sometimes. You might have seen a male ECE teacher for the first time, but it happens, I said.”

3.3.5. Parents-Positive Reaction. This coding was created for the situations in which the participants received a positive reaction from the parents during the practicum. These reactions occurred sometime after the teacher candidates got to know the children and their families. A response to this coding is included below.

“Then as time went on, after the first semester was nearing the end of the internship, I received such positive feedback from the students that the parents were already starting to ask. When is the male teacher coming? Because our children love him. And that made me happy, obviously.”

3.3.6. The Positive Reaction of The Children. The positive reactions that the teacher candidates received from the children during the teaching practicum were collected under this code. 25% of the participants stated that they faced some negative reactions from the children when they first started their practicum, but these disappeared in a very short time, and they started having good communication with the children.

“When I first started the internship, the children didn’t really like me. But in 1-2 weeks, all that prejudice against me has changed. So I realized that I can actually communicate my intentions and be understood well. In fact, the children have become much more sincere, so they have grown fond of me. Some of the children started coming over every day when they saw me in the morning and hugging and saying hello asking how I was.”

3.3.7. Family- Negative Reaction: The negative reactions that the participants received from people to being placed in the ECE teachers program were collected under this code. 16.70% of the participants stated that they had received a negative reaction in some way. One of the participants expressed the reaction he received as follows:

“It’s just that Mom said it’s a program that girls really prefer. Where I am from we have a more patriarchal point of view in society. I mean, it’s just a program that girls prefer.”

3.3.8. Children- Negative Reaction. The negative reactions that the participants received from the students at the school during their practicum experiences were collected under this code. Only one participant stated that they faced a negative reaction. One of the participants shared his experience in a kindergarten classroom as follows:

“There was a girl named B.... in the class. When she saw me first, she reacted so harshly. When I tried to talk to her, she frowned. She didn’t respond to what I said. She didn’t want to talk to me. When she went home, she told her mother, “A man came into our classroom today. Just a male teacher in the classroom. I didn’t like him very much,” kind of things she said. She showed that she was uncomfortable with the situation. And then, her mother told my practicum teacher. The internship teacher also told me that she did not like me.”

3.4. Difficulties

The difficulties faced by preschool teacher candidates and their opinions on this issue have been collected under this category and the codes created are presented in Table 4. In addition, the definitions of each category and sample statements are given below.

Table 4. Difficulties

Category	Number of Interviewees Giving an Opinion (N=12)	%
Employability	5	41,70%
Pedophilia Implication	5	41,70%
Negative Discrimination	3	25,00%

3.4.1. Employability. The answers given by the participants to the interview questions about the field of study have been collected under this code. 41.7% of the participants expressed their opinion about the difficulties in their employability. An example to the Workspace code is as follows:

“So let me think about it, for once I want to speak for the private schools and institutions. I want to talk about the private sector in our field. I don’t think we can get too many employment opportunities.”

3.4.2. Pedophilia Implication. The statements used by participants to express their thoughts about the difficulties they experienced due to their gender and common misconceptions about male teachers being potential sexual abusers in society were collected in this code group. 41.7% of the participants expressed an opinion on this issue. An example by one of the participants is given below.

“Last year, in the first semester, my internship teacher gave me some preliminary information, not a warning, but information was about not having too much contact with girls. Because, for example, children like to come and give us hugs. The younger ones, especially 5-year-olds. I mean, a girl pupil wants to hug me, for example, because I’m her teacher at work, or sometimes they cry and go their teacher for comfort. You know, kids like to touch. The teacher said that some of the parents may be uncomfortable with these issues. We don’t have any problems with you. The source of the problem is you. Parents can be sensitive about this. We more or less predict these things, we know, or there may be such a possibility, so they passed on a little information that it would be better for yourself and for us if you were a little careful.”

3.4.3. Negative Discrimination. The cases in which the participants stated that they were discriminated against because of their gender were collected under this code. 25% of the participants stated that they had been discriminated against because of their gender in some way. An example answer to this category is given below.

“When I started the teaching practice, the reaction we received was “Here we go again, another male student! Male students trainee students can’t do much”.”

4. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

This study examines in depth the complex challenges faced by male students on the preschool teaching career path, both during their academic journey and expectations for their future professional endeavors, and addresses the unique challenges, motivations, and aspirations that drive these individuals to pursue a career in a field traditionally dominated by their female colleagues. This study aimed to reveal the personal and professional complexities that shape male ECE teacher candidates' perceptions and careers through semi-structured interviews and hoped to shed light on the obstacles they may face. It is hoped that findings from this study will help society discover the transformative potential they may bring to the preschool education environment. The findings of the research show that male individuals who aim to become preschool teachers encounter various difficulties and reactions mainly due to gender stereotypes, but from time to time male identity can also turn into an advantage. In particular, the study reveals that the main concerns of the participants revolve around forward-looking social stereotypes, which are spread especially by parents of young children and the wider community towards male ECE teachers. Moreover, a subset of participants expressed concerns about their individual achievements and performance, which reveals that the widespread influence of gender stereotypes poses a central and challenging obstacle for men in this profession. In the following section, the study's findings are interpreted under categories within the same order as in the results.

4.1. Discussion and interpretation of the findings related to the examination of the reasons for choosing the ECE field

Job security is one of the main reasons why male teacher candidates choose ECE field. The participants consider the teaching profession as a financially and socially acceptable profession, especially in public institutions. Considering the economic conditions and unemployment rates of Turkey, working in a government institution is considered a guaranteed job, and the teaching profession provides certain living standards to individuals. It is thought that this is one of the reasons why the percentage of male preschool teachers in Turkey is higher than the percentage in the majority of countries, especially in many European and North American countries. Compensation has an important weight in shaping a person's career choices. This also applies to males who are following a path in their preschool education. Men have often faced the challenge of reconciling their passion for a fulfilling career with their responsibility to support their families financially. Considering that preschool teaching as a profession that generates a good level of income in the conditions of Turkey increases the preferability of this profession. The opposite of this situation is observed in Western countries. The financial aspect often appears as a significant deterrent factor that discourages men from considering teaching as a viable option. This has been revealed in previous studies. According to Cooney and Bittner (2001), the prevailing concern among men has been the possibility of earning insufficient earnings, especially given their role as the main source of livelihood of their households. The necessity of making financial concessions while pursuing their chosen profession is of great importance in decision-making

processes. In his study, Cohen (1992) pointed out that many male individuals trained in ECE are rapidly transitioning to more financially rewarding and respected roles in school administration and higher education. It turns out that the participants' desire for stability and assurance in their career paths significantly affects how these individuals select a career path. In a rapidly developing job market, this finding underscores the enduring value attributed to the security that the teaching profession can provide.

The concept of popularity as a factor in choosing a career has remarkable importance. The recognition of the popularity of a field reflects a contemporary social influence and emphasizes how external perceptions can lead individuals on certain paths. It turns out that a small portion of the candidates are motivated and interested in the education of young children. This coincides with the peculiar nature of the profession of ECE, in which a real passion for educating young minds is required. These findings are supported by other studies included in the literature (Buldur, Keskin, & Börekçi, 2021). It is thought that some of the participants perceive preschool teaching as an easy profession due to the structure of preschool education in Turkey. Usually, preschool educational institutions serve two different student groups, morning and afternoon, and teachers usually work half of a day.

When all these findings are evaluated, it is seen that preschool teaching in Turkey is more advantageous than many other professions in terms of working conditions and finding a job, which is effective for men to choose this field. This finding is parallel to the determination made by Leung and Plake (1990) that the ideas and preferences for choosing gender-appropriate occupations can be abandoned quickly when prestige of the profession is high. The ranking of the factors given up in the process of choosing a profession may vary depending on the degree to which the self-concept is threatened (Gottfredson & Lapan, 1997) given that the risk of loss of prestige created by the possibility of unemployment for a man may threaten his self more than the risk of working in a gender-inappropriate profession. This may lead to the fact that the gender conformity factor is more easily overlooked by some people when choosing a profession. It would be useful to look at why males choose teaching in ECE in Turkey from this point of view.

4.2. Discussion and interpretation of the findings related to gender role perceptions of ECE teacher candidates

Preschool teaching has historically been seen as a profession dominated by women (Baqi, 2023). This view, expressed by a large part of the participants, the prevailing perception that preschool education is a "Women's Profession" shows that deep-rooted gender stereotypes that persist in social perceptions are widespread. This observation emphasizes that it is critically important to challenge these stereotypes and expand the discourse surrounding career choices, as the ongoing impact of traditional roles can affect not only individual decisions but also the overall diversity in the field. It is worth noting that the perception that teaching is a woman's job in the preschool period is deeply entrenched in society (Seno et al., 2022). Male preschool teacher candidates have question marks in their heads both because

of this perception that has persisted in society, and this also affects their perception of how they position themselves in the ECE profession.

The fact that some of the participants in the study expressed opinions indicating that they were experiencing identity confusion reveals a complex layer of personal struggle. This feeling offers a glimpse into the difficulties that can arise when one's desires clash with traditional gender norms. Investigating the root causes of this identity conflict can reveal the emotional complexities that individuals have when following a path that can defy societal expectations. Current research has shown how male teachers avoid the preschool teaching profession because it may cause them to question their masculine status (Brody et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2020). This a finding of the research can be evaluated according to the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Considering that hegemonic masculinity is defined as a form of masculinity that is presented to men as a norm and requires all men to position themselves according to it (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), it can be inferred that men who will work in a field seen as a "women's profession" have difficulty in positioning themselves within hegemonic masculinity. The fact that many participants refer to the dimension of doing the school administration profession, which they find more masculine than this profession, which also includes care, can be explained by the fact that the participants feel obliged to position themselves according to the hegemonic norms of masculinity.

School administration emerges as a remarkable category with a serious tendency to leadership roles among the participants. This reflects a desire to contribute to the educational ecosystem beyond the classroom, potentially by influencing policies and practices. As mentioned by Cohen (1992), it is important to recognize that a significant number of professionals specializing in preschool education are rapidly shifting to more financially lucrative and respected positions in the fields of school administration and higher education. Boyd and Newman (2019) found that a significant number of ECE teachers prefer to work in elementary schools instead of preschool education centers due to unsatisfactory career paths, low status, and poor working conditions. Garvis and Pendergast (2015) also reported that pre-service ECE teachers in Australia often prefer to work with older children rather than younger children in preschool education settings. In Turkey, on the other hand, this has caused male ECE teacher candidates to be looked at as possible administrators. Examples of this have also been observed in other countries. This finding was put forward by Williams (1992). It can also be explained by the metaphor of the "glass escalator." Especially in the professions where women constitute the numerical majority, it is assumed that men are more competent and better leaders than women, and as a result, men are attracted to higher-paying specialties and administrative positions (Williams, 2013). Within the study, this is observed as male preschool teacher candidates in Turkey also benefit from this advantage. When considered by Connell (1995) in terms of masculinities positioned within the framework of hegemonic masculinity, it can be interpreted that men who plan to use this advantage are

included in the classification of “cooperative masculinity,” who take advantage of hegemonic masculinity and share in patriarchy within this framework.

Similarly, the fact that some participants stated that the presence of male teachers in preschool educational institutions in a predominantly female-centered area would positively contribute to the dynamics of authority and even contribute to communication between parents and teachers raises some interesting questions. They say that in preschools where there are no male colleagues, female teachers have problems with particularly demanding parents, simply implying that if the teacher is male, these problems will not occur. As Harris and Barnes (2009) stated, another dimension of male role modeling includes the expectation that male teachers will naturally have disciplined characteristics in the educational environment. As Haase (2008) emphasizes, male educators often perceive a sense of responsibility to maintain traditional masculine behaviors among boys within the framework of patriarchal gender. This perspective shows that stereotypical judgments of society can play a role in this process when creating professional identities and determining the roles of male teacher candidates who intensively and every time realize gender equality in preschool education.

It is an essential finding that gender equality is accepted as an important issue by most of the participants. This reflects a growing awareness among these individuals of the need to eliminate gender biases and promote equal opportunity for all genders. This awareness aligns with the developing discussions on gender equality (Anliak & Şahin Beyazkürk, 2008). It suggests that preschool education is not immune to broader social changes.

4.3. Discussion and interpretation of the findings related to the opinions of ECE teacher candidates about the reactions they received

The findings obtained within the scope of this study are expected to help us understand the reactions, problems, and feelings faced by male preschool teacher candidates by shedding light on the experiences of male preschool educators during the teaching process. Male preschool teacher candidates sometimes stated that they were subjected to positive discrimination in practicum schools and sometimes in universities because they were men, but a few participants expressed discomfort with this. These findings are similar to the findings of other studies in the literature (Demirkasımoğlu & Taşkın, 2019). However, the presence of a wide range of negative reactions, from the immediate environment to parents and even children, shows that social prejudices can prevail and informs us about how to meet the challenge of society’s well-established norms by choosing the profession of preschool teaching. The existence of supportive attitudes that teacher candidates encounter during their education and the important role of encouragement from peers, mentors, and institutions show. Anliak and Şahin-Beyazkürk (2008) emphasize the importance of this support in their study of male preschool teacher candidates. Such supportive attitudes can often serve as a foundation for resilience in the profession, strengthening their belief in the value of their chosen profession and helping them overcome difficulties.

While positive reactions highlight the importance of preschool educators' potential to be a catalyst for overcoming gender norms and promoting inclusivity, negative reactions show us the biases that preschool children may have internalized from the broader social fabric.

4.4. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings Related to the Difficulties Faced by Male Preschool Teacher Candidates

Understanding the difficulties ECE teacher candidates face can offer various possibilities for solving the problems inherent in their chosen career path. The Field of Study (Work Environment) category emphasizes the complex interaction of conditions within the field itself. The challenges in this category may be related to the demands of ECE education, including the need for patience, adaptability, and endurance in the profession to progress in a dynamic and often challenging working environment. Many of the participants mentioned the difficulties of finding a job as male teachers, especially in the private sector. As a reason for this, it has been stated that private institutions use their preschool teacher preferences in favor of women teachers. These findings show that this problem is a global problem. A study conducted in South Africa revealed that there are no male educators in kindergartens in the region where the research was conducted (Okeke and Nyanhoto, 2021). Various factors negatively affecting boys' participation in the preschool education sector have been identified. It is noted that these factors may include misinterpretation of cultural roles, stigmatization, fear, prejudice, low educator status in the preschool sector, and lack of male recruitment policies. On the other hand, unlike public schools, where commercial concerns are at the forefront, male preschool teachers are not preferred due to the concern that parents will not prefer male teachers. There is a common belief among participants, and they mostly believe that they will not be hired for positions in private schools. This could be considered as a disadvantage for male ECE program graduates.

The existence of the Pedophilia implication expressed by many participants is noteworthy and reflects a disturbing aspect of social prejudice. This situation suggests that some individuals in society may unfairly associate male educators with negative assumptions in ECE, which may harm the general perception of the profession. Male teachers may also experience social exclusion from their female colleagues and are highly aware of the risk of alleged sexual abuse of children (Yang, 2018). In order to ensure that unfounded accusations do not hinder the pursuit of a meaningful career, such perceptions need to be addressed critically through awareness campaigns and discussions.

Another difficulty identified is negative discrimination, which indicates situations where individuals may face prejudices due to their gender and career preferences. This category reveals the ongoing impact of gender stereotypes that perpetuate prejudices against boys in preschool education. As Yang points out in her study (2018), many parents or guardians express their concerns when their young children are assigned a male teacher, which can create a sense of doubt and pressure on male teachers

(Yang, 2018). This reveals a systemic obstacle that requires concerted efforts to challenge these biases and improve the environment of equality and inclusion.

Basically, these findings paint a portrait of the obstacles and problems ECE teachers face. Despite these difficulties, male preschool teachers find their jobs valuable and feel good about themselves (Seno et al., 2022). These findings reflect the complexity of male ECE participants' journeys, which encompass both the inherent demands of the field and the social prejudices that need to be eliminated. These challenges collectively highlight the need for robust support mechanisms, awareness campaigns, and policy initiatives to create an environment in which preschool educators, regardless of gender, can thrive without excessive biases or unfounded assumptions.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS and LIMITATIONS

This study was carried out to examine the reasons for choosing the professions of male preschool teacher candidates and their experiences and opinions during the education and internship process. As a result of the analysis of the data collected in the research, several important results have been obtained. First of all, it has been found that male preschool teacher candidates choose this profession for reasons such as job finding anxiety and popularity when choosing this profession. Within this framework, it has been found that in a country where traditional gender role separation is prominent, such as Turkey, anxiety about finding a job prevents suitability for a male role. The majority of male preschool teacher candidates interviewed within the scope of the research stated that sometimes they can be evaluated differently by children, parents, and sometimes even colleagues due to gender role expectations. In this context, they stated that they encountered difficulties such as seeing this profession as a woman's profession, reactions from the environment, and the implication of pedophilia. On the other hand, male ECE teachers can sometimes benefit from positive discrimination and can maintain the advantage of being a man in society by being promoted to administrator or other higher positions.

Also, the majority of the participants emphasized the importance of gender equality and it was observed that a certain awareness was formed on this issue. Again, it was observed that the participants emphasized that they had the opportunity to positively impact children's emotional and social development. As male role models, they have stated that they help children discover their own identity, especially in gender-diverse classrooms.

Based on the results of this study, it is thought that it will be useful to organize educational programs and awareness-raising activities for teachers in preschool educational institutions, gender equality, and gender diversity issues. In vocational guidance studies conducted at all levels of education, it should be emphasized that professions should be selected not by gender, but rather by considering interests and abilities.

While this study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of male students in early childhood education, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, data collection solely from students and the absence of perspectives from children and parents within the educational setting represent limitation, potentially overlooking the holistic dynamics of early childhood education. Secondly, the participants being in the early stages of their teaching careers with limited practical experience may impact the depth of insights into their profession. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the study's outcomes and provide opportunities for further research to address these gaps and contribute to the comprehensiveness of future investigations in this area.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

KADINSILIK İLE KARAKTERİZE EDİLEN MESLEK ALANLARINDA ERKEKLER VE ERKEKLİKLER: OKUL ÖNCESİ ÖĞRETMENLİĞİNDE OKUYAN ERKEKLER ÖRNEĞİ

GİRİŞ

Bu çalışmanın amacı, kadınsı bir alan olarak görülen okul öncesi öğretmenliği bölümünde okuyan ve en az iki dönem staj deneyimi olan erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının mesleklerini nasıl değerlendirdiklerini, erkek olmaktan kaynaklı yaşadıkları avantaj ve dezavantajları ve bu alanda okumanın erkek olarak kimliklerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemektir. Araştırma, erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının mesleki deneyimlerini anlamak ve toplumsal cinsiyet normları bağlamında bu deneyimlerin nasıl şekillendiğini anlamak amacıyla yürütülmüştür.

Araştırma Soruları

Bu çalışma kapsamında, aşağıdaki araştırma sorularına yanıtlar aranmıştır:

1. Erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının bu mesleği seçme nedenleri nelerdir?
2. Erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının toplumsal cinsiyet rol normları ve meslekleri ile ilgili görüşleri nasıldır?
3. Erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının mesleklerine yönelik karşılaştıkları tepkiler nelerdir?
4. Erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının mesleklerine yönelik karşılaştıkları zorluklar nelerdir?

Bu araştırma, erkek okul öncesi öğretmen adaylarının mesleki deneyimlerini derinlemesine anlamayı ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri bağlamında bu deneyimlerin nasıl şekillendiğini aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, erkek öğrencilerin okul öncesi öğretmenliği alanında karşılaştıkları deneyimleri anlamak ve meslekleriyle olan ilişkilerini geliştirmek isteyen araştırmacılara, eğitimcilerine ve karar vericilere ışık tutabilir. Literatür incelendiğinde genel olarak erkek okul öncesi öğretmenleri ve öğretmen adaylarının toplumsal cinsiyet ile ilgili beklenti ve kalıpyargılar nedeniyle zorluklar yaşayabildiği görülmektedir (Erden, Özgün & Aydılek-Çiftci, 2011; Fu, 2012; Weaver-Hightower, 2010). Örneğin erkek öğretmen adaylarının cinsiyetlerinden kaynaklı dirençle karşılaştıkları (Fu & Li, 2010), cinsiyetçi alaylar ve itirazlar nedeniyle cesaretlerinin kırıldığı (Weaver-Hightower, 2011) mesleklerinin değerinden şüphe etme eğilimine girdikleri (Fu & Li, 2010) ve onları okul öncesi öğretmenliğini bir kariyer olarak sürdürmekten caydıran cinsiyetçi varsayımlar ve klişelerle sıklıkla karşılaştıkları (Fu, 2012) belirtilmektedir.

YÖNTEM

Araştırma nitel bir yaklaşım olan derinlemesine görüşme tekniği kullanmıştır ve okul öncesi öğretmenliği alanında erkek öğrencilerin meslekleriyle ilgili görüş ve deneyimlerini belirlemeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırmaya katılanlar, okul öncesi öğretmenliği programının 4. sınıf öğrencilerinden

seçilmiş ve orta Karadeniz bölgesindeki bir devlet üniversitesinde kayıtlı olan 12 öğrencidir. Katılımcılar, 4. sınıfta toplam 24 hafta boyunca haftada bir tam gün olarak bir anaokulunda öğretmenlik uygulaması derslerini tamamlamıştır.

Araştırma verileri, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Bu form, okul öncesi öğretmenliği bölümünde okuyan erkek öğrencilerin bölüm seçme nedenleri, okudukları süreçte bölüm ve erkeklik kimliği açısından yaşantılarına odaklanan açık uçlu sorulardan oluşmaktadır. Görüşmeler online olarak, ZOOM programı kullanılarak yapılmış ve kaydedilmiştir.

Verilerin analizi içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Görüşmeler kaydedilip deşifre edilerek temalar oluşturulmuştur. Verilerin analizi QDA Miner Lite programı kullanılarak yapılmıştır. Analizde kodlayıcılar arası güvenilirlik hesaplaması yapılarak güvenilirlik değeri belirlenmiştir.

TARTIŞMA, SONUÇ VE ÖNERİLER

Araştırmanın bulguları, okul öncesi öğretmeni olmak isteyen erkek bireylerin toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargılarından dolayı çeşitli zorluklarla ve tepkilerle karşılaştıklarını göstermektedir. Bu zorluklar öncelikle cinsiyet önyargılarıyla bağlantılı olsa da, erkek eğitimci olmanın da avantajlı olabileceği durumlar vardır. Çalışma sıklıkla katılımcıların endişelerinin toplumsal stereotipler ve erkek okul öncesi eğitimcilerle ilgili cinsiyet önyargılarının ileri düzeyde yayılması etrafında döndüğünü vurguluyor. Dahası, katılımcıların bir alt kümesi bireysel başarılar ve performansla ilgili endişelerini dile getiriyor; bu da cinsiyet stereotiplerinin bu meslekte erkekler için ne kadar merkezi ve zorlu bir engel teşkil edebileceğini vurgulamaktadır.

Ayrıca bulgular, erkek öğretmen adaylarının erken çocukluk eğitimini bir kariyer yolu olarak seçme motivasyonlarını da tartışmaktadır. İş güvenliği, finansal istikrar ve sosyal kabul gibi faktörler temel motivasyon unsurları olarak vurgulanıyor. Çalışma, erken çocukluk eğitiminde bir yol izleyenler de dahil olmak üzere, kariyer kararlarında finansal hususların önemli bir rol oynadığını öne sürüyor. Erkek okul öncesi öğretmeni oranlarının bazı Batılı ülkelere göre nispeten daha yüksek olduğu Türkiye'de, finansal kaygıların bu kariyer seçiminin çekiciliğine katkıda bulunması muhtemeldir.

Özette aynı zamanda erken çocukluk eğitimindeki toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin algılar da ele alınmaktadır. Kadınların bu alandaki tarihsel üstünlüğü kabul ediliyor ve erken çocukluk eğitiminin toplumsal algısının "kadın mesleği" olduğu vurgulanıyor. Katılımcılar, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet rolleriyle ilişkili toplumsal normlardan ve stereotiplerden kaynaklanan kimlik çatışmalarını dile getiriyorlar. Çalışma, kendilerini öğretme tutkuları ile toplumsal erkeklik beklentileri arasında kalmış bulan erkek katılımcıların mücadelesini tanımaktadır.

Erkek öğretmen adaylarının karşılaştığı zorluklar, çalışma ortamı ve okul öncesi ortamlardaki erkek eğitimcilere yönelik olumsuz algılar gibi faktörler de dâhil olmak üzere daha ayrıntılı olarak araştırılmıştır. Özetle ayrıca erkek eğitimcilerin toplumsal önyargılara ve temelsiz varsayımlara rağmen

gelişebilecekleri bir ortam yaratmada destek mekanizmalarının, farkındalık kampanyalarının ve politika girişimlerinin önemi ortaya çıkmıştır.

Erken çocukluk eğitiminde kariyer yapmak isteyen erkek bireylerin karşılaştığı deneyimlerin ve zorlukların kapsamlı bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Erken çocukluk eğitiminin daha kapsayıcı ve çeşitli bir alanını yaratmak için cinsiyet önyargılarını ele almanın, destekleyici ortamları teşvik etmenin ve farkındalığı artırmanın öneminin altını çiziyor.