

## The Career Journey of the First Male Preschool Teacher in Turkey: An Optimistic Perspective to A Female Dominated Occupation<sup>§§</sup>

Türkiye’deki İlk Erkek Okul Öncesi Öğretmeninin Kariyer Yolculuğu: Kadın Ağırlıklı Bir Mesleğe İyimser Bir Bakış Açısı

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**Öz.** Bu çalışma, Türkiye’deki ilk erkek okul öncesi öğretmenin gerçek hikayesine odaklanan vaka analizi şeklinde tasarlanmıştır. Çalışmanın temel amacı; a) Türkiye’deki ilk okul öncesi öğretmeni olmanın avantajları ve dezavantajlarının neler olduğunu b) çalıştığı okuldaki meslektaşlarının ve velilerin kendisine yaklaşımlarının nasıl olduğunu c) zorluklarla nasıl başa çıktığını d) erkek okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin okul öncesi eğitimdeki olası sosyal faydalarının neler olduğunu belirlemektir. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme ile toplanmıştır. Veriler, araştırma sorularına göre önceden belirlenmiş kategoriler altında tematik olarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin Türk sisteminde 30 yıldan fazla süredir mevcut olmasına rağmen, halen okul öncesi öğretimin kadın ağırlıklı bir meslek olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu çalışmadan elde edilen tüm bulgular, kişilik özelliklerinin, cinsiyetçi bir meslekte kariyer yapan ilk okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin kariyer tercihlerini ve yolunu şekillendiren bir faktör olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Erkek okul öncesi öğretmen, erken çocukluk eğitimi, cinsiyet, cinsiyete dayalı meslek, kadın meslekleri

**Abstract.** This study is designed as a single case which focuses on the real story of the first male preschool teacher in Turkey. The main purpose of this study is to investigate his perceptions related to; a) the advantages and disadvantages of being the first preschool teacher in Turkey b) the perception of school society towards him, c) how he handled the challenges, d) possible social benefits of male preschool teachers in early childhood education. Data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview. The data were thematically analysed under the predetermined categories in accordance with the research questions. The findings suggest that preschool teaching is still a female-dominated occupation despite the fact that preschool teachers are present in Turkish system more than thirty years. All the findings derived from this study implied the personal traits is a noteworthy factor that shaped the first male preschool teachers’ career choice and his career path in a gendered profession.

**Keywords:** Male preschool teacher, early childhood education, gender, gendered profession, female-dominated occupation

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## Introduction

In most societies, occupations are stratified horizontally into "women's work" and "men's work". According to Acker (1990, 145), "the structure of the labor market, relations in the workplace, the control of the process, and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, process of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men." In this regard, while there are relatively unqualified jobs in the "women's business" group with low status, temporary employment, and no job security, there is a high level of job and social security with high level of authority and responsibility in the "male job" group (Parlaktuna, 2010). West and Zimmerman (1987) indicated that many roles point to gender, and examples such as "female doctor" and "male nurse" constitute the exception to the rule. The teaching profession also takes place in the group called "women's work" in this group. "To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine." (Acker, 1990, 146).

Men are expected to have a higher position at a company, since in the labor market men are accepted as a "breadwinner" which is a core part of being masculine. "The desired attributes of managers and capitalists as entrepreneurs (thrusting competitiveness, ruthlessness, focus on the bottom line, etc.) are coded masculine in gender ideology, and in cold fact the people who fulfil these functions overwhelmingly are men." (Connell, 2005, 255). Several theoretical and empirical propositions were referred in the literature as the reasons for a global phenomenon. For example, Sumsion (1999) asserts that since early childhood is attributed to females as a career choice, men feel anxious about being falsely accused of child sexual abuse. Besides, the absence of career path, relatively low pay and status are the other reasons for underrepresentation in preschool teaching. Drudy (2008) explains these reasons as follows; a) the public perception that primary teaching is a woman's job, b) teaching is related to motherhood roles, c) low pay, d) the "domestic ideology" based on the historical and social processes that women's job choice should be consistent with homemaking obligations. In addition to these reasons maternal gatekeeping behavior might be another reason for males not to be willing to work in preschool teaching. Allen and Hawkins (1999) define maternal gatekeeping as a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between mothers and fathers in family work. Mothers might restrain fathers or ease fathers' connection to their children (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Based on such thinking, fathers' interest in childcare tends to be very limited which in turn challenges them in developing childcare skills (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

In a phenomenological study by Yang and McNoir (2017) on three male preschool teachers, participants reported the challenges as gendered divisions of labor, isolation in their interactions with colleagues on and off campus, and negative influence on marriage prospects because of low salary and status. Besides, traditional roles attributed to men can affect the perceptions attributed to males in early childhood education. For example, in qualitative study Demirtas, Demir and Demir (2014) reported that preschool teachers and school administrators view females more compassionate than males and more capable of self-care skills like cleaning and toilet habits. However, rare research (e.g. Joseph & Wright 2016) reports positive public perception related to male teachers' presence. The difference between the results of these researches may arise from the cultural differences.

Despite being less referred (e.g. Stroud, Smith, Ealy & Jurst 2006; Anliak & Beyazkurk 2008), being a male preschool teacher may provide some advantages such as priority in hiring to balance the gender inequality, less demanding conditions for career promotion than female peers and "the perceived importance of male role models and the potential positive impact on children's gender formation and

personality development” (Yang & McNair 2017). In other words, male teachers are expected to contribute differently from females adding their male perspective which can be positive for children and the staff (Hedlin & Aberg 2013). Empirical research supports these expectations proving that male teachers in Austrian context “interact somewhat more frequently in a positive manner, and somewhat less frequently in a punitive manner with the children in their care” (Huber & Traxl, 2018, 460).

Williams (2013) uses the concept of “glass escalator” to define the advantages that men get from female-dominated occupations such as nursing and teaching. Bryan and Bowder’s (2013) research on an African American male preschool teacher extend these common reasons by analysing “Henry’s experience” under two themes which they call as “cycle of institutional tensions” and “cycle of personal triumphs”. “Cycle of institutional tensions” cover microaggressions, hyper-visibility, the ascription of incompetence and ascription of masculinity whereas “cycle of personal triumphs” includes challenging institutional inequities within the predominantly white institution and moving beyond Mr. Classical Presence. Henry’s story starts with the cycle of institutional tensions but his strong will to become a good teacher and courage to challenge the unjust behavior of his professor moved him beyond the classical teacher image which the researcher defined it as a personal triumph. Thus, individual factors seem to matter.

Cameron (2001) mentions three fundamental reasons to energize men to choose early childhood education. The first assertion is related to the disappearing fathers because of the change in family compositions such as divorce and separation. Although it is questionable that male teachers may help to compensate father’s absence with a positive male role model, it is possible to provide role models especially for boys to “have someone to identify with and to help them develop interests”. The third assertion is that the promotion of male preschool teachers may help to transform the conventional and broadly held thought that some occupations are naturally gendered. Peeters (2007) suggests possible measures such as improving the quality of prospective teachers’ training processes through men-only courses and the support of male mentors. However, the necessity of male teachers in early childhood education is controversial and there is little empirical evidence (e.g. Hedlin & Aberg 2013; Besnard & Letarte 2017) to claim these theoretical assumptions. A recent study (Polanen, Colonnese, Tavecchio, Blokhuis, & Fukkink 2017) proved that male and female staff in childcare had same levels of attention, sensitivity and stimulation towards children. For example Grossmann et al. (2008) found that “male professional caregivers may have, as fathers, a complementary role in caregiving, displaying less sensitivity and responsiveness than female caregivers but stimulating the child more in exploration and play.” (cited in Polanen et al.).

When it comes to preschool teachers, this distinction is sharpening against men and the ratio of male teachers to female teachers is very low. This is the case in all over the world including Turkey. For example, according to 2015 UNESCO data, the ratio of female preschool teachers to male teachers is 100% in Hungary, 99.9% in Armenia and Azerbaijan, 99% in Italy, 97.2 in China, 96.7% in Germany, is 96.4%. Similar to these countries, very limited number of males choose early childhood education in Turkey because of the stereotypes about gender and work. According to 2016-2017 Ministry of Education statistics, a total of 77109 teachers consisting of 4429 male and 72680 female teachers are working in the preschool educational institutions in Turkey. According to this, the ratio of females working in preschool institutions to males is 95.24%. In other words, five percent of the teachers working in preschool education institutions in Turkey are male. Although the percentage of male preschool teachers is low, it is possible to infer that among these countries Turkey has a higher number of male preschool teacher. These statistics show that despite the increasing numbers of male preschool teachers in Turkey, early childhood education is still highly perceived to be a female occupation. As

Baris (2013) stated, kindergarten is called as “anaokulu” that means the school of the mother. Apart from the other factors, this term implies the gendered attributions attached to the early childhood professionals in Turkish culture. On the other hand, rare examples to challenge this attribution takes place in press reporting that the number of male teachers have become majority in a preschool in Amasya where the school is called as “babaokulu” (“Ana Degil Babaokulu”, 2016)

The current study is inspired by the story of an Australian male early childhood educator who spent a decade in a traditionally female job (Sumsion 1999). This case aroused the curiosity of the researchers that in what ways his Turkish colleague’s experience as the first male teacher may overlap and/or differentiate from his equivalent in the other culture. The researchers investigated the first male teacher who chooses to work as a preschool teacher on the internet. It was easy to access him since he has several reports in newspapers experience as the first early childhood education. Analysing the perception of the first male preschool teacher in Turkey may provide some insights to understand his unique experience as being the most typical representative of his profession. This could possibly enable international comparisons as well. This study has also potential to open up a new space to discover an optimistic perspective to a gendered profession agenda which is not consistent with the findings (e.g. Sumsion 1992, Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Erden, Ozgun, & Ciftci 2011) of the relevant literature. Because this Turkish case, has a more optimistic perspective when compared to his international equivalents, we hope that this study will shed some light on the facts that shape a male preschool teacher’s identity in a highly feminized profession through his voice revealing the gender-related tensions, disadvantages as well as the advantages in a non-western context.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of the first male Turkish preschool teacher related to his gender-professional identity integration through his thirty-two-years teaching career in a female-dominated profession. More specifically, professional experiences of the first male preschool teacher are analysed through a single case qualitative study by using a semi-structured interview technique. This case study may contribute to extending the literature on early childhood education as a gendered profession by analysing a non-western context, Turkey and it may be possible to make international comparisons. Within the general purpose of this study, the following questions were answered through the semi-structured interview:

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being the first male preschool teacher in Turkey?
2. How does he perceive the attitudes of his students, colleagues, principals, and parents towards him as the first male preschool teacher?
3. How was his relationship with the educational stakeholders? Has he ever come across with prejudices? If so, how did he handle them?
4. What kind of social benefits do male preschool teachers have for girl and boy students?
5. Is there any need to support males to choose the profession of preschool teaching? Why?

## Method

### Study Design

The current research portrays the career journey of the first male teacher in Turkey using a single case study design to analyse 32-years experience as an early childhood educator. “A case study is an investigation defined by an interest in a specific phenomenon within its real-life context. It is a qualitative form of inquiry that relies on multiple sources of information. Its distinctive feature is the case that may be an event or process considered worthy of study.” (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998, 128). According to Creswell (2013, 98) case study starts with identification of a special case and it can be patterned to reveal a unique case within the framework of its single nature. The single case study is considered to be “an extremely valuable method of social science research when used for the purpose of analysing how people frame and solve problems” (Barzelay, 1993). The single case study is thought to be suitable to understand the experience of the first male preschool teacher being the most typical representative of his type in Turkey. This single case has the potential to reveal the gender stereotypes attributed to female dominated profession in early education literature.

### Participant

Extreme case sampling was used because the case was unusual and special. According to Patton (1987, 52) “unusual or special cases may be particularly troublesome or especially enlightening, such as outstanding successes or notable failures”. The first preschool male teacher’s case in Turkey may provide useful insights to understand the unusual case of a male preschool teacher by analysing his troublesome or outstanding experiences in a highly feminized profession.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through a semi-structured in-depth interview via Skype chat by two researchers. The participant was living in a different city than of researchers’. His contact information was reached by internet searches and through his secretary, he was invited to participate the study with the two researchers via Skype. The interview lasted for 172 minutes. The skype interview was recorded to two mobile phones with the permission of the participant.

The interview questions included three initial questions and five main research questions to grasp an overview related to the participant’s background and perception related to the early childhood education teaching as a male teacher. Initial questions included questions such as the reasons for career choice and the university education experiences. Within the general purpose of this study, five questions were sought answer through the semi-structured interview. The questions in the semi-structured interview form were same with the research questions explained under the title of purpose. Additionally, initial questions took place before the main questions including the reasons for choosing the preschool teaching and whether preschool teaching can be considered as male or female profession. Main questions were as follows:

1. As a male preschool teacher, how do you evaluate the attitudes of educational stakeholders and society towards you? (Adapted from Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008)
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being the first male preschool teacher? (adapted from Yang & McNair, 2017)

3. As a male preschool teacher, do you think or feel that the behavior of students, teachers, administrators and parents towards you is different from that of female teachers?
4. Is there any need to support boys to choose the preschool teaching? Why?

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed through two main approaches which are called as deductive and inductive. Deductive approach is performed when predetermined framework or research questions guide the data analysis process (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). As mentioned above, the research questions were the same with the semi-structured interview questions. In accordance with the requirements of the deductive approach, the data were coded under the relevant categories and sub-themes were formed in accordance with the themes where possible.

To ensure the internal validity, findings were supported with direct quotations. Besides, member checking was applied to ensure the internal validity (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016, 280). Data analysis was sent to the participant via e-mail to control for the accuracy of the codings. Elo et al.,(2014) suggest that double-coding is helpful to develop the quality when deductive approach is used. Based on this, data were read and coded in relation to the main questions of the study by two researchers separately. The similarities and differences were mutually discussed when there are discrepancies between the codes and interpretations. In the second round of coding, they reached an agreement on controversial codes and sub-categories. The dialogue among co-researchers has often been considered a valuable approach that supports the credibility or conformability.

### Case Background

S.Ö is a 55-year-old (on 27 June 2017), married early childhood education teacher. He has no child. He graduated from a large-scale university from Ankara between 1979-1984. Early childhood education teaching was his second choice. His first choice was the medical faculty and his third choice was veterinary. He was the first who worked as the male teacher in Turkey after graduating the department of Child Development and Education. He started his career as a teacher at a private early child education school. In his own words, "he had a very intense job search in the private sector". He worked as a teacher in two different locations in 32 years career process. His started his career at a private preschool where children of upper socio-economic level families live in Ankara. A year later he opened his own school in a district located in the upper socio-economic level in Izmir. The Department of Child Development and Education, where S.Ö. graduated, had registered a "male" student a year before he enrolled in the program. However, according to the S.Ö.'s statement, he did not teach and worked in a different field. Four male students enrolled for the year in which S.Ö. was registered in the program. One of them could graduate a year later. The other two graduates did not continue their career as teachers and tried to work in institutions such as hospitals in the public institutions. S.Ö. was the first male teacher who tried to work as a preschool teacher in Turkey. He never thought of working in a public school because his career plan was to open up his own school in the future and realize his dream with the school in his mind. In 1987, he opened his first preschool education institution

He answered the question of how to open up the school as follows:

I prefer to carry my own big picture rather than a part of someone else's project. Please do not think that it is an inflated ego or something. This is a matter of vision. I opted out of visions that I found very inadequate, as a

student, to spend that process and create my own school... It was not easy to do this in someone else's institution. But I will be free in my own institution.

Because he wanted to open his own school, S.Ö. thought that he had to earn his teaching experience in a private school and started to apply for work. In his own words:

No one trusted me and wanted to work with me. I applied almost all the schools in Ankara. School administrators were concerned that how they can present a male teacher to the parents and how he can win the trust of the parents.

During the undergraduate study period of S.Ö., there were 40 students in total, including four male and 36 female students. There were no males in the lower grades.

Before moving on to the main questions of the research, the participant was asked whether he had chosen the preschool field as his initial questions and whether there were role models that affected this choice. S.Ö. described the reasons for choosing the preschool field as follows:

When I earned this program, I was able to score medical faculties in Kayseri and Sivas affiliated to Hacettepe University. I entered with a very high score here. Like I said, I wanted a job that I can work about the human being, frankly, after I got into it, I was even more concentrated, so would I try the medicine faculty again? No. Because I really felt that I would get a substructure and hardware to do all I wanted to do here and all I really wanted to do was go ... I have nothing to do with my family at all. In fact, I did not have many teachers around me. I actually had very bad experiences. There were not very pleasant schools. For example, I graduated from Beyoğlu Atatürk Boys' High School before going to Hacettepe University's Child Development department, which is a building consisting only of girls... I was a cheerful person, so after my unhealthy school experiences, there was something that I had accumulated a lot in my own life, related to a beautiful school. I wanted to have a good life. This is actually related to my preference that not to work in a public school. Because it would be very difficult for me to realize myself in a system that was pre-structured by the state and I could not control. Instead of this, I chose a style where the drum and the knob was in my own.

## Findings

As a result of the data analysis, six major categories were clustered under twelve major sub-categories. These categories and sub-categories were presented in Table 1 to summarize the findings and their interpretations as a whole. For example, one major category was defined as “advantages” and its related sub-categories were “disadvantages”, “personal characteristics” and “perceived advantages”.

**Table 1.**

*Many Sides of Being the First Male Early Childhood Education Teacher in Turkey*

Category	Sub-Categories	Code
1. ADVANTAGES	Sub-category 1: Support of the university professors	Code 1: positive discrimination Code 2: academic support
	Sub-category 2: Perceived advantages	Code 1: openness to experience Code 2: self-confidence Code 3: self-control Code 4: sense of responsibility Code 5: be grown in urban culture Code 6: the need for male role model in school industry

**Table 1. (continued)**

2. DISADVANTAGES	Sub-category 1: Employer-related	Code 1: difficulty in finding job Code 2: distrust Code 3: incompetency Code 4: commercial concern
	Sub-category 2: Personal	Code 1: despair Code 2: being in a female-dominated profession Code 3: competition
	Sub-category 3: Societal	Code 1: cynicism Code 2: contempt
3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS	Sub-category 1: Relationship with students	Code 1: students' admiration
	Sub-category 2: Relationship with teachers	Code 1: positive
	Sub-category 3: Relationship with principal	Code 1: supportive Code 2: cooperative Code 3: friendly
	Sub-category 4: Relationship with parents	Code 1: pleasant Code 2: out-of-school time employment
4. STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH PREJUDICES AND PROBLEMS	Sub-category 1: Struggling	Code 1: prioritizing the superiorities in other areas Code 2: try to do a good job
5. SOCIAL BENEFITS OF MALE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS	Sub-category 1: Necessity	Code 1: necessity for the development of the child's sexual identity Code 2: presenting the samples of both gender (female-male)
6. SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE GENDER BALANCE	Sub-category 1: Positive discrimination	Code 1: Providing advantage in undergraduate entrance exams Code 2: Assigning a specific quota to each school for recruitment

### Category 1. Advantages of Being the First Male Early Childhood Education Teacher

Based on the experiences and events shaped S.Ö.'s career, he reflected many sides that can be related to the advantages of the male preschool teaching. We preferred to name them as perceived advantages because almost all his expressions seemed to us person specific. One of these facts can be an exception which he called as positive discrimination of his professors in favor of him.

#### *Support of the university professors*

S.Ö. indicated that his professors in graduate education made "positive discrimination" to support him and his male friends. He also mentioned that he got their "academic supports".

**Table 2.**

*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Support of the Professors*

Codes	Sample Quotations
Positive Discrimination	There was positive discrimination towards the male students. For example, if the deadline of homework or a project was on Friday, I could give it next Friday while girls could have a great difficulty if they do not. It was okay for me.
Academic Support	Our professors were supporting us. As we were male students, they had high



expectations about us.

### *Perceived Advantages*

S.Ö.'s graduate experience as a prospective teacher and early years of his teaching career as a male teacher may be analysed as a different category than the researchers coded as "perceived advantages". It is called so because he frequently noted his personal characteristics while reflecting his own story and his advantages.

**Table 3.**

*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Perceived Advantages*

Codes	Sample Sentences
Openness to experience	My advantage was that I had agreed with the school administration for a three months trial period. I said "Try me. If you are not satisfied with my performance, be sure that I would go by myself.
Self-confidence	At the end of the first year of my teaching, my class was the most crowded class with 16 students. I could say it because I was proud of myself, and at that time I really thought the school industry needed such a model. I was very confident in myself.
Self-control	I think you are paying more attention to yourself when you're tagged with something. The first male kindergarten teacher... This title is spoken by the others, but you also stick it to yourself in time and you say that it is me. Then you think about what it should be and act accordingly.
The sense of responsibility	There are also times that you concern about your gender and sometimes act considering this. I mean, I do not know if it is exactly like this, but I can say that I feel that I feel important and valuable. Maybe I'm different from my other colleagues. So, I felt that I had to give this title in a valuable way and keep it alive. I felt more responsibility. Anyway, the feedbacks of people, their face expressions who say that "mmm a man" or something, you need to do more things to cope with your disadvantage that comes from this manhood. You can evaluate it in this way and translate it into positive.
Be grown in urban culture	Luckily, I grew up in big cities like Istanbul and Izmir because of my family. I had a life in the city culture whereas my other friends were from small cities. They saw the big city life in university for the first time. I was a little advantageous from them in the university life. It's a subjective assessment but urban culture brought me an advantage.
The need for a male role model in school industry	At the end of my first year, the most crowded class was mine with 16 students. I could say it because I was proud of myself, and at that time I really thought the school industry needed such a model. I was very confident in myself.

### **Category 2. Disadvantages of Being the First Male Early Childhood Education Teacher**

Disadvantages of being the first prospective male preschool teacher can be analysed under three sub-categories that are employee-related, personal and societal.

#### *Employer-related*

S. Ö. explained some of the difficulties that he encountered in his early years at his profession by referring his employers.

**Table 4.**

*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Employer-related*

Codes	Sample Sentences
Difficulty in finding a job	No one trusted me and wanted to work with me. I applied almost all the schools in Ankara. School administrators were concerned that how they can present a male teacher to the parents and how he can win the trust of the parents. The main concerns were there. It's not related to my identity, it's a question about my gender. There is no such a model, it is a revolutionary thought. Who can do such a thing? ... If I was not a man and if I were a woman as who I was with my presentable skills, maybe I could find a job in kindergarten where I first went. But I was able to find it much later ... I do not remember the exact number but I can say that it was over 15. Some of them turned away from the door. I could not even get into the guest room. At that time there was no such thing as a CV. We took our file and went and knocked the gates of the schools.
Distrust	Frankly there was a distrust of a male teacher in the class.
Incompetency	In addition to education in pre-primary education, care for children is also very important, by parents and school administrators. They were always thinking that a man might be inadequate in these issues.
Commercial concern	I think the trouble was a commercial worry. How do the parents react to such a thing? Do they trust our children to our school?

**Personal**

S. Ö. explained some of the difficulties that he encountered in his early years at his profession by associating his personal experiences.

**Table 5.**

*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Personal*

Codes	Sample Sentences
Despair	I did not think much on this issue during the period when I went to the university, but I started to think about it during the internship period, so I got my tips when we started to share the ideas with the school administrators in case I could work there one day. They were saying that they would not choose too many male teachers. After that I was frustrated.
Being in a female-dominated profession	It is really hard for people to maintain their presence in a ladies-only sector. That is to say, while you are interested in football and sports in daily life as a man, everyone is talking about knitting models and nail polish during four years. It is not so easy.
Competition	I have been a bit annoyed in that years. There was a competitive environment. But I do not remember very hurtful things, a little bit old time, over thirty years passed. I do not think I've experienced anything negative affecting me. But I am a person who I directly forward, who does not regard the problem as a problem, who does not look at it at all.

**Societal**

S. Ö. mentioned that he had to face some sarcastic words of the people around him, which are coded as cynicism and contempt.

**Table 6.**  
*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Societal*

Codes	Sample Sentences
Cynicism	When we graduated from high school, we had university results with my friends we graduated with. That's where everyone earned a place or not. S.Ö. earned his education in child development. Oh, you're gonna clean my child? ... There was a lot of ridicule. The same went on in college. Babysitter caregiver, come and look after me in the evening or something.
Contempt	Those who do this are all men. It was a humiliating thing. But this was a joke. I mean, it's not like putting pressure on me, but it could be a joke among men.

### **Category 3. Relationships with Educational Stakeholders**

Being the first male teacher in Turkey, S.Ö.'s experiences with students, colleagues, school administrators and parents were presented as sub-categories below.

#### ***Relationship with students***

S. Ö. pointed out that he had good relations with his students. His words coded as "students admiration".

I can call it a transcendental relationship. I had students who looked in my mouth and even stood the same as my shirt, walking like me, speaking like me and acting like me. They say that "S.Ö." *Abim*\*\*\* at home is doing so... I had a student named Yavuz. I never forget. At that time I had a red chequered shirt. I know from his mother that she roamed the stores in all shopping malls for a month and looked for the same shirt. Because I did not have many shirts at that time I was wearing the same shirt or something three days after a few days. He sewed the same clothes".

#### ***Relationship with teachers***

S. Ö. pointed out that he had good relations with his colleagues. His words coded as "positive".

We also had very positive relationships with the colleagues and there were negative things among them.

#### ***Relationship with principal***

S. Ö. stated his relations with his principal was supportive, cooperative and friendly.

**Table 7.**  
*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Relationship with Principal*

Codes	Sample Sentences
Supportive	I had a very good relationship with my principal because they were both from my college and graduated from my department. They really supported me a lot. After a while, I started at my first school, I was on the front of every subject. We had a very positive relationship.
Cooperative	When a new parent or a teacher visits the school, s/he was brought up to my class. I would be called to speak out.
Friendly	We used to meet out of the school and it is still going on.

\*\*\* *Abim* is a Turkish word and it means elder brother.

### ***Relationship with Parents***

S. Ö. stated that he had positive relations with parents and he looked after some of his students after work to earn some extra money. Thus, his statements are coded as “positive” and “out-of school time employment”.

**Table 8.**

*Codes and Sample Sentences of Subcategory Relationship with Parents*

Codes	Sample Sentences
<i>Positive</i>	We have a very positive relationship with the parents. Because the parent is looking directly interested in whether the teacher makes her/his child happy. At first, it could be a question mark depending on the gender but it was always positive afterward. At that time, I was doing an additionally looking after their children hourly to earn extra money because I needed money. It was very enjoyable.
<i>Out-of-school time employment</i>	I went to the parents' houses and looked at their children. For example, I was paid for four hours despite working two hours. Because I was living alone, the parents were very helpful in preparing meals and cook the thing I loved. I was eating with the kids.

### **Category 4. Strategies for coping with prejudices and problems**

As a male teacher in a female-dominated area, he mentioned some strategies to cope with the difficulties. Firstly, he mentioned that he prioritized the advantages and his words clustered under “prioritize the advantages in other areas” code below:

If you come across a competition or an upsurge about your program in undergraduate education or your profession, you can comfort yourself by prioritizing the superiorities to another area

Secondly, he mentioned that he does his best at work and his words clustered under “try to do a good job” code below:

So if you talk about that style, you may feel yourself inadequate but it is very comfortable that you can cope with it by doing your job well. I do not know if it might be related to my personality. I tried to respond by doing my job well.

### **Category 5. Social Benefits of Male Preschool Teachers**

S.Ö. explained his view that numerical balance between male and female teachers among preschool teachers is necessary for the development of children's sexual identities with the following considerations:

I think it is a great necessity for children to see a male role model, especially at a time when gender identity is determined. I am very sure about that. I see that children are suffering from gender identity confusion or being overwhelmed by their exaggerated or repressed identities. So I think that every sample (female and male) should be present. Second, women are structurally more analytically thinking entities. And that's a good thing. Men also think globally. I think there is a need for children to blend them together. I see that ladies are losing themselves in details and lose the totality. I see how the men are saying that we're all in the picture and are looking for the whole picture. I think that they will produce a much more efficient result when they come together. Everything is better when they are natural. ... Just as there are about 50% of boys in society, I think preschool teachers will be better in line with this ratio. Male teachers are much more rational, and they can independently evaluate the child more easily. I can see that female teachers are also affected by the feedback given by the teacher and especially affected by the feedback given by their mother and may be shifting in their attitudes. And I try to control it.

### Category 6. Suggestions to Promote Gender Balance

In order to promote the gender balance in preschool teaching profession S.Ö. offered suggestions which are subcategorized as “positive discrimination”. His suggestions are examined into two codes. The first one is “providing advantage in undergraduate entrance exams”:

It can be done by positive discrimination. Just as we propose that the number of female parliamentarians in the parliament is set as a certain quota, maybe a similar quota may be set for men who wish to choose this occupation

The second one is “assigning a specific quota to each school for recruitment”:

Perhaps I think that these can be achieved by giving priority to the profession or by having the necessities such as the presence of men at certain levels in each school. I do not know if there is any research on this, but I do not think it will be over 2-3% of the total population.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This case has demonstrated that preschool teaching is still a female-dominated occupation despite the fact that preschool teachers are present in Turkish system more than thirty years. This conclusion may be drawn from the voice of S.Ö. as the first male preschool teacher as well as the voice of a preschool administrator who has more than thirty years experience in early childhood education. Since the beginning of his career, preschool teachers have very low levels of interest in an early childhood education career.

As the first preschool teacher in Turkey with his 32-years preschool career, S.Ö. perceived similar difficulties of a gendered profession reported in the literature as well as the advantages. Accordingly, S.Ö. came across with the difficulties caused by the employers, the society and himself. Difficulties that arise from employers include distrust in male teachers that they cannot be professionally inadequate, not to hire a male teacher, and commercial anxieties. Apart from these, it is understood that S.Ö. has experienced difficulties such as being scorned by the society and mocked by his boyfriends. Anliak and Beyazkurk (2008) reported similar findings related to the male undergraduate students who were studying in preschool teacher education programs. Participants have stated that they are in a field that is known as women's profession. They reported their anxiety of being ridiculed and mocked.

In another study, it was reported that the results semi-structured interviews with eight male preschool teachers showed that male teachers were seen as babysitters even by well-educated people (Erden, Ozgun, & Ciftci 2011). These similarities show that male teachers are exposed to professional gender discrimination. S.Ö. has stated that maintaining a job as a man in a female-dominated profession requires involvement in the matters that only women concern. This situation means a disadvantaged start for a man and it requires more competitive behavior to prove himself. In contrast to these disadvantages; he was positively discriminated by his professors. His personal characteristics such as being open to different experiences, self-confidence, raised in urban culture and the need for a male role model in school industry were the advantages that he perceived.

The case of S.Ö. is different from other male preschool teachers in the sense that he does not care about the prejudices and traditional view related to gender as much as the other examples (eg. Sumsion 1992; Anliak & Beyazkurk 2008) reported in the empirical cases. This case also revealed that personal characteristics of S.Ö. is an important factor to understand a male preschool teacher's career expectations, perceived advantages and disadvantages in a gendered profession. Perhaps, the most

original finding of this study is that personal characteristic of S.Ö. challenged a female-dominated profession reversing the situation in favour of his gender. In other words, S.Ö.'s resilient characteristics enabled him to handle the prejudices and challenges quickly and to "realize himself" (as defined by him) in his career pathway.

One of the questions that sought an answer in this study was the quality of S.Ö.'s relationship with school stakeholders and whether he encountered prejudiced behavior in these relationships. His relationship with his students was excellent. While S.Ö.'s relations with his students were like a brother-in-law relationship, in Tokic's research (2018), preschool teacher students were expecting to fill the gap of the father figure in the lives of children in the event that the parents were divorced and the mother was a single parent. Besides, he has supportive, collaborative and friendly relationships with his school administrators and the parents. S.Ö. believed that the preliminary judges of the parents disappeared very quickly when they saw a teacher who made their children happy. Parents also hired him for the hourly basis to take care of their children except for the school time. These findings suggest that it is not very difficult to overcome the prejudices of the parents who have concerns about teachers' gender. Similarly, Sak et al., (2015) found that male preschool teachers can establish good relationships with their students' parents. On the other hand, it may be useful to point out that, as explained in the background of S.Ö, the families reported here are socio-economically high-ranking families. It is possible to think that the prejudices of the families in this group can change more easily than the families in the low socio-economic level. In the study carried out by Anliak and Beyazkurk (2008), the interpretations male preschool teacher candidates' related to the disadvantages of being male in this profession are similar. Participants of that study were of the opinion that parents in small cities were more likely disapprove a male preschool teacher than the big-city parents when they start teaching. As S.Ö. reported about the job search process, he was able to find a position after an intense job seeking period. It was a school preferred by socio-economically upper-class families in Ankara. Similarly, he opened his first preschool education institution in a socio-economically high part of İzmir which is the third most populated city in Turkey. At this point, socio-economic level can be a meaningful variable to understand gender-based occupational discrimination. In the future, it may be expected that future quantitative studies on this issue to include the socio-economic level as a variable.

S.Ö.'s experiences are quite different from the case of the first male (James) to enroll in his home city as an early childhood professional in Australia (Sumsion, 1992). James had a very hard relationship with the school society because of the prejudices towards a male early childhood teacher. Parents' fear of child sexual abuse was the foremost difficulty that James should handle. Then comes the prejudices directed by the parents and his director. Besides his female colleagues ignored him he wanted to talk about the suspicions related to the questions related to his gender. The need to protect himself overweighed in James's experience and it gets more difficult for him that he lost his enthusiasm to work with children as the time passed. So, James's experience is not a pleasant one. These two contradictory findings may be related to the personality differences. For example, James (Sumsion 1992) describes himself as "... I've never been a very pessimistic sort of person" while S.Ö. describes himself as "...anyway, I am a forward-looking person who goes on to problems and I do not regard the problem as a problem and do not look back at all. That's why these are not the things that I think much about them. I was disappointed for a while, but later I developed my own resistance to give them a more honest answer...". As can be understood from two different male preschool teachers' self-description, S.Ö. is highly optimistic whereas James cannot be taken very optimistic. These differences may result in different dispositions in case of prejudices and problems. This comparison may be extended with the findings of Bryan and Bowder (2013) who analysed an African American male preschool teacher's experience. As stated earlier, Henry did not only report similar tensions about male

preschool teachers' challenges but he also reported difficulties related to being black in early childhood education setting. The way he managed the difficulties is similar to S.Ö.'s experience in the sense that he chooses to struggle with tensions and become a good teacher. That's why the researchers called his struggle as "cycle of personal triumphs". These two cases imply that personality traits may be a key factor in coping such challenges.

This study identified some factors that may help to manage gender-related tensions. To come up the prejudices related to this gendered profession, S.Ö. used the strategies as to prioritize his strengths in other areas and do a good job to prove himself. Similar findings have been reported in a study (Anliak & Beyazkurk 2008) that covered the opinions of male preschool student teachers. Male student teachers viewed male teachers advantageous in the sense that competitive conditions develop the equality of education. Similarly, S.Ö. stated that since women teachers are more advantageous, he had to spent much more effort to prove himself and to be accepted by students and parents. At present, according to research findings, male teachers who start at a disadvantageous position for women in the profession need to make more efforts to break down the prejudices and to prove their professional competences. In sum, this disadvantaged situation may be viewed as an advantage by some male teachers, if it is managed properly.

Based on his observations in both teaching and school administration, S.Ö. sees the existence of male preschool teachers in the education system as a very important requirement especially during children's periods of sexual identity development. For example, women stand out with emotional characteristics, while men are more rational and analytical. Unlike his opinions, two participants of Tokic's research (2018) mentioned that men have lower social and emotional intelligence compare to women and one of them pointed out the male disorganization.

At this point, S.Ö. believes that to increase the presence of male preschool teachers in the education system, it can be useful to positively discriminate male candidates for early childhood education programmes, and apply a specific quota to each school for recruitment. Similarly, Anliak and Beyazkurk (2008) found that male students in preschool education programs think that prospective male teachers should be encouraged to involve in childhood settings. Another support for the need to encourage male teachers in early child education comes from Stroud, Smith, Ealy, and Jurst (2006) for different reasons. Male graduate students participated in his research reported that male teachers can be a role model especially in case of single-parent families.

### **Implications**

The current study has some implications for practice and researchers. All the findings derived from this study implied the personal traits is a noteworthy factor that shaped the first male preschool teachers' career choice and his career path in a gendered profession. Within the scope of the research, the participant answered his experiences by referring his personal characteristics. In our opinion, personal characteristics may have a critical role in career goals, career expectations, and the construction of career paths of employees in gender-dominated professions. This conclusion is perhaps one of the most interesting implications of this research which is unexpected at the same time. Personality traits appears to be a remarkable variable in interpreting and interpreting professions in future research where gender predominance exists.

The current study was designed as a single case. As Kennedy (1979) asserted, single case studies may not be generalized to great parts of the population. S.Ö. does not seem to represent the early childhood education teachers in a gendered profession. However, he has noteworthy characteristics that may

inspire early childhood education teachers and prospective preschool administrators who want to choose this job and be successful. Thus, the story of S.Ö. cannot be generalized to experiences of early child educators in Turkey but it can provide important clues to understand their realities in a female-dominated profession. Additionally, future research may include case comparisons to explore the cultural differences (e.g. western and non-western) towards a gender dominated profession. Lastly, the underrepresentation of males in early child education needs a special attention in attracting and selecting males to preschool teaching. The rise in male teachers in early child education may have a positive role in gender identification of boy preschoolers.



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