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Gender in Preschool Education According to Pre-Service Teacher

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Abstract

In this study, the issue of gender in pre-school education was focused on the views of pre-service teachers. The study was designed as a phenomenological research which is one of the qualitative research approaches. The study group of the research consists of 39 pre-service teachers studying in the Preschool Teaching Programme at a university in Turkey. In the study, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used as a data collection tool, and the data obtained were analysed by content analysis. According to the findings, all of the pre-service teachers highlighted that they found gender elements in the behaviours of children and teachers. In their definitions of gender, the participants used the expressions of imposing roles, expectations, behaviors, values, norms on people, and putting people in unnatural molds to behave in accordance with their sex. Pre-service teachers stated that they observed gender elements in preschool children's preferences, peer relations and role behaviours. It was concluded that teachers use gender stereotypes while managing children's behaviours, giving instructions, reinforcing children and communicating with them, directing children to activities according to their gender, and distributing tasks/roles. Pre-service teachers made suggestions for social change/transformation, teachers, regulations in the education system and families to eliminate gender stereotypes.

Key Words

Gender • Preschool education • Preschool teacher

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Concepts

From the first years of life, individuals endeavour to understand and make sense of the environment they live in and themselves. It is possible to say that in addition to gender, questioning about gender roles and expectations are also included in this effort to understand and make sense of themselves. In other words, individuals live experiences that can be associated with the concepts of sex and gender. Although they are often used synonymously, the concepts of sex and gender are two different concepts. The differentiation between the constructs of sex and gender has been a subject of discourse spanning from historical antecedents to contemporary times, encompassing deliberations on the definition, appropriate utilization, as well as the disparities and correspondences inherent in these two concepts ([Aslanpay-Özdemir, 2022](#)).

According to [Lindsey \(2016\)](#), the concepts of 'sex' and 'gender' are distinguished from each other in terms of physical, biological, socio-cultural and psychological characteristics. Sex refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish people from each other. This definition emphasises being 'male' and 'female' in chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems and other physiological differences. She adds, gender refers to social, cultural and psychological characteristics linked to individuals through specific social contexts. While sex is the state of being 'male' or 'female', gender categorises people as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. Sex is a status attributed to a person because the person is born with it, but gender is a status that is acquired later due to its learnt characteristic. Similarly [Akkaya \(2023b\)](#) points out that the transformation of 'male' or 'female' persons revealed by the concept of gender into 'masculine' or 'feminine' persons in accordance with the society they live in and the culture dominant in that society is related to the concept of 'gender'. In brief gender refers to the categorisation of women and men in a socio-cultural context and the attribution of roles deemed appropriate to these classes.

Gender is a categorisation that refers to the differences between the sexes defined by existing genetic, physiological and biological characteristics, while gender is a socially constructed, cultural category. [Serdaroğlu \(2010\)](#) underlines that gender refers to common beliefs about what is masculine and what is feminine in different cultures, in different geographies and in different areas in different periods of history, and is defined as the attitudes and behaviours attributed to different genders and the roles and responsibilities to them. According to the author, in this categorisation, masculine traits are generally regarded as ideal and central, while feminine traits are considered marginal and secondary, so this gender-based understanding is established not only at the social level but also at the cognitive level. Gender, which emerges with the social reconstruction of biological sex, transforms into different forms over time from society to society and within the same society ([Maybek & Özateş-Gelmez, 2020](#)). It is argued that the acquisition of gender, masculinity and femininity is not 'natural' or purely 'biological', but rather a result of familial and cultural expectations and socialisation. Accordingly, there is a weak relationship between biological sex and social gender. The child learns society's ways of doing, hearing, thinking and discourses on gender and these are reproduced ([Günindi-Ersöz, 2016](#)).

In summary, sex is defined as the physiological/biological indicate of being 'female' or 'male', and gender is defined as the state of being 'masculine' or 'feminine' with the characteristics attributed to individuals by society. Elements related to gender may vary from individual to individual, from culture to culture, from society to society, and can be reproduced in society through experiences, belief forms and discourses. It is possible to say that the elements

of gender, which are reproduced by the society, are transmitted from generation to generation in various ways over time, sometimes unchanged and sometimes undergoing changes. Individuals are socialised with gender elements from the moment they are born, and they may be exposed to discourses and behaviours that contain gender elements in the society they live in, or they may become advocates of this understanding.

During the process of socialization, commencing within the familial context and extending into diverse societal settings, children acquire a myriad of knowledge, skills, experiential insights, and role models. Notably, it is during the preschool phase, characterized by rapid developmental growth, that children commence their understanding of the roles of individuals within the societal framework in which they coexist, thereby integrating these insights with their own inherent characteristics as an integral facet of their social development. It would not be wrong to say that the preschool period is a period when children begin to be interested in the differences between males and females. In this process, children begin to learn about gender roles and expectations by receiving messages about the role behaviours of men and women from their environment and the adults around them, from what they see, hear and do. Gender-related elements (colours, messages, icons, symbols, etc.) can be found in books, toys, digital content, clothes, and so forth for children. For example, parents prefer pink/blue items from the moment they learn the sex of the baby, and use analogies such as princess/lion for their babies while they are still in the womb. In addition, it can also be seen that various stereotypes are formed in social life with discourses such as "Women do/don't do" or "Men do/don't do" and individuals are raised with these stereotypes from childhood.

In addition to all these, teachers' behaviours that contain gender elements can also have an impact on children. Teachers are important actors in this period when children begin to define themselves and discover their gender identity. It is possible to assume that gender roles can be reproduced or prevented by teachers in schools. It is important for teachers to direct classroom practices away from gender stereotypes, in other words, with a critical approach to gender role stereotypes, and to help children develop gender equality in preschool education. In order to create sensitivity about gender starting from the preschool education period, it should be seen as a necessity to develop educational policies on this issue, to address this issue with a correct approach in educational activities and to support teachers' professional development in this field.

When the literature was examined, national (Akkaya, 2023a; Akkaya, 2023b; Aydın, 2023; Bal, 2014; Bingöl, 2014; Daşlı, 2019; Dinçer & Yirmibeşoğlu, 2020; Eroğlu-Şah, 2020; Gümüšoğlu, 2008; Gündüz & Tarhan, 2017; Maccoby, 2000; Moya et al. 2000; Mora, 2005; Taşkın & Nayır, 2021; Sönmez & Dikmenli, 2021; Vatandaş, 2007) and international (Annandale & Clark, 1996; Connell, 2009; Delphy, 1993; Kent & Moss, 1994; Krüger, 2008; Lindsey, 2016; Molla, 2016; Özaydınlık, 2014; Rose & Smith, 2018; Sandnabba & Ahleberg 1999; Torgrimson & Minson, 2005; Wood et al., 2002; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Yates, 1997) studies are found that focus on gender. Among these studies, there are many studies focusing on preschool education (Alabay & Özdemir, 2020; Bayraktar & Yağan-Güder, 2019; Emeksiz & Bay, 2022; Gürşimşek & Günay, 2005; Karabekmez et al, 2018; Karniol, 2011; Kaynak & Aktaş, 2017; Menekşe & Asan, 2019; Özdemir-Alpan, 2018; Şahin et al., 2016; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999; Witt, 2000; Yağan-Güder et al., 2017; Yağan-Güder & Güler-Yıldız, 2016).

Revealing gender role stereotypes in the behaviours of children and teachers, who are the subjects of preschool

education, is seen as a valuable issue in terms of research. Based on the fact that it is a necessity to reveal gender role stereotypes in the behaviours of children and preschool teachers and to suggest solutions, the problem of this research is how the concept of gender is in preschool education according to the views of pre-service teachers. This study differs from others in that it reveals gender role stereotypes in the behaviors of both children and preschool teachers in the same study. In this research, according to the views of pre-service teachers; the definitions of the concept of gender, the gender elements in the behaviours of preschool children and teachers, and the suggestions for preventing gender stereotypes are included in a holistic manner. In this respect, it is thought that the research will contribute to the field.

The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the perspectives held by pre-service educators concerning the topic of gender within the domain of preschool education. In alignment with this overarching aim, the investigation will endeavor to address the following inquiries:

1. How do pre-service preschool teachers define the concept of gender?
2. According to the opinions of pre-service preschool teachers, what are the gender role patterns in the behaviours of preschool children?
3. According to the opinions of pre-service preschool teachers, what are the gender role stereotypes in the behaviours of preschool teachers?
4. How can gender stereotypes be prevented according to the views of pre-service preschool teachers?

Method

Research Model

The research was designed as a qualitative study. Qualitative research can be defined as research in which a qualitative process is followed to reveal perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in a natural environment by using qualitative information collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The study was designed as a phenomenology research, one of the qualitative research approaches. Phenomenology aims to reveal the deeper meaning that people base on their experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, based on the views of pre-service teachers, the concept of gender in preschool education was analysed in depth in a holistic manner and discussed in comparison with the researches.

Working Group

In this study, pre-service teachers' views on gender in preschool education were sought. For this purpose, the opinions of 39 pre-service teachers studying in the preschool teaching programme at a university in Turkey, were obtained. The sample of the study was determined by criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. Reviewing and examining all situations that meet predetermined criteria constitutes the basic logic of criterion sampling. The criteria to be taken as the basis for sampling can be developed by the researcher or a previously prepared list of criteria can be used (Patton, 2002; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021).

In this study, the study group was determined by taking into consideration the following criteria: (i) being a student in the preschool teaching programme, (ii) having practice (internship) experience in preschool education classrooms,

(iii) having previously made observations in preschool education classrooms, (iv) having received training on gender in undergraduate course programmes, and (v) volunteering to participate in the study. Accordingly, a study group consisting of volunteer pre-service teachers studying in preschool teaching programme, having observation and practice experiences in preschool education classrooms, and having received training on gender within undergraduate course programmes was formed. The distribution of the participants according to personal variables is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1.

Distribution of participants in the study group according to personal variables

Variable	Categories	N	%
Sex	Female	34	87
	Male	5	13
Age	20-21	14	36
	22-23	21	54
	24 years and old	4	10
Total		39	100

As seen in Table 1, 34 (87%) of the pre-service teachers participating in the study were female and 5 (13%) were male. It was thought that this distribution was due to the fact that mainly female pre-service teachers were studying in the preschool teaching programme. It is seen that the age range of almost half of the participants (n=21; 54%) is 22-23 years old. The age distribution of the other half of the participants is as follows: 14 (36%) participants aged 20-21, 4 (10%) participants aged 24 and over.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the research, semi-structured interview technique was used to analyse and reveal the views of the participants in depth. The semi-structured interview technique facilitates the researcher in obtaining systematic information in order to continue the interview in a certain direction (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). To accomplish this objective, a semi-structured interview instrument titled the "Gender in Preschool Education Interview Form" was meticulously crafted. The form, in its compositional design, comprises two distinct sections. The initial segment is dedicated to inquiries concerning the demographic attributes of the participants, while the subsequent section is designed to probe into topics encompassing the definition of the concept of gender, the discernment of gender-related components in the behaviors exhibited by both children and educators, as well as soliciting recommendations for mitigating or eradicating gender stereotypes within the preschool educational context. The form was presented to the experts in the field of preschool education¹ and educational administration² and the interviews were conducted after making the necessary corrections in line with the expert opinions.

Content analysis method was used to analyse the data. Content analysis aims to reveal the facts hidden in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Creating a coding scheme in content analysis constitutes the first step of the analysis.

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Qualitative data are classified according to this coding system. This classification creates a framework for organising and defining the data (Patton, 2002). In this context, the views of the participants in the study, which included similar gender elements, were reviewed by the researcher and code schemes were created. In line with these code schemes, according to the meanings derived from the participant opinions, the opinions were organised under certain categories and interpreted together with the opinions of the participants. Participant opinions were re-coded by an expert other than the researcher, and the reliability of the research was determined as %86 with the reliability formula suggested by Miles & Huberman (2021). In addition, the distribution of demographic information of the participants and the frequency of the categories created were calculated with descriptive statistics.

Findings

The findings obtained in this study, in which pre-service teachers' views on gender in preschool education were tried to be revealed, were discussed separately under the following headings in the context of the research questions.

Pre-service preschool teachers' views on the definition of the concept of gender

The definitions formed by pre-service preschool teachers about the concept of gender are categorised and presented in Figure 1 together with their frequency distributions.

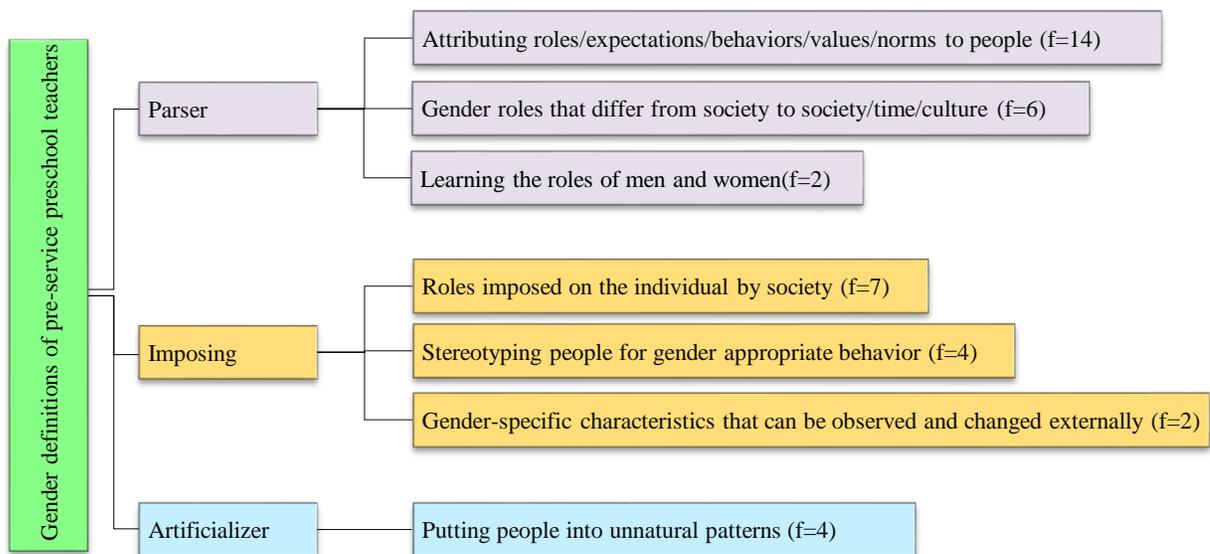


Figure 1. Prospective Teachers' Definitions of Gender

As can be seen in Figure 1, the definitions formed by the participants regarding the concept of gender are divided into three categories: (i) parser, (ii) imposing and (iii) artificializer. When these categories were analysed, it was found that the participants underlined that gender is relatively the most *parser*. Three different views were identified in this category. In the discriminative category, 14 participants defined gender as "Attributing roles/expectations/behaviours/values/norms on people". The other two definitions in this category are "Gender roles that differ from society to

society/time/culture " (f=6) and "learning the roles of men and women" (f=2). Some of the definitions coded under the parser category are given below.

"...Society attributes certain roles to men and women because of their gender. For example, in patriarchal societies, women are generally accused of sitting at home, taking care of children, doing housework, naive, fragile, weak, while men are accused of earning money, superior, head of the house, strong... For example, there is this distinction in terms of colours. Boys like blue, girls like pink..." (T2)

"...Gender is the shaping of femininity or masculinity according to the moulds of society and culture. Of course, these moulds may vary from society to society and from culture to culture. In different countries, in different cities, even in different parts of a city... Time... For example, things that were not considered appropriate for women in the past have become acceptable. Things like working and earning money, studying used to be unacceptable..." (T11)

"...The concept of gender reveals the differences between men and women in terms of social and cultural aspects. Gender and roles are learnt according to the customs, traditions, traditions, customs and norms of the society..." (T6)

When Figure 1 is analysed, it is seen that the definitions of gender created by 13 participants were coded under the category of *impositionist* under three different views. In the imposing category, the participants mostly (f=7) defined gender as "Roles imposed on a person by society". The other definitions in this category were coded as " Molding people to behave in accordance with their gender " (f=4) and "Gender-specific characteristics that can be observed and changed from the outside" (f=2), respectively. In order to be more explanatory, some definitions created by the participants are given below.

"...Society imposes some responsibilities on men and women according to customs and traditions. The responsibilities seen as belonging to the woman and the responsibilities seen as belonging to the man and the responsibilities seen as belonging to the woman are not welcomed by the society. Because society expects men and women to maintain their roles from childhood until the end of their lives. Otherwise, there are reactions. This situation leads to inequality between men and women..." (T27)

"...I can define it as a pattern of behaviours expected from women and men depending on the cultural characteristics of the society and other factors shaping the society. In society, women and men are expected to live in accordance with a certain appearance, communication, behaviour and preferences. For example, women are expected to be gentle, while men are expected to be tough and brave..." (T23)

"...Developing behaviours that people choose themselves or imposed on them from outside depending on their gender... For example, creating their appearance, determining their clothing style according to these patterns... Characteristics that can be observed and changed from the outside..." (T1)

The last category in Figure 1 is *artificializer* category. The definition made by four participants who highlighted that gender is "putting people into unnatural patterns" was coded in this category. The participant's viewpoint, which

has been categorized under this specific thematic domain and is presented verbatim below, represents a salient and noteworthy statement.

"...I can define gender as the moulding and artificialisation of the natural, innate sex. That is to say, there are certain moulds and deconstruction in gender. As time progresses, it undergoes changes. We often hear from our elders: "Oh, these young people today!", "In our time, could girls wear such things?", "And he will be a man! He has grown hair like a woman'. This shows us that values change with the passage of time, in fact, the accepted concept of gender is also changing..." (T18)

Gender elements that pre-service preschool teachers observe in children's behaviours

Pre-service preschool teachers' views on the gender elements they observed in children's behaviours are categorised and presented in Figure 2 with frequency distributions.

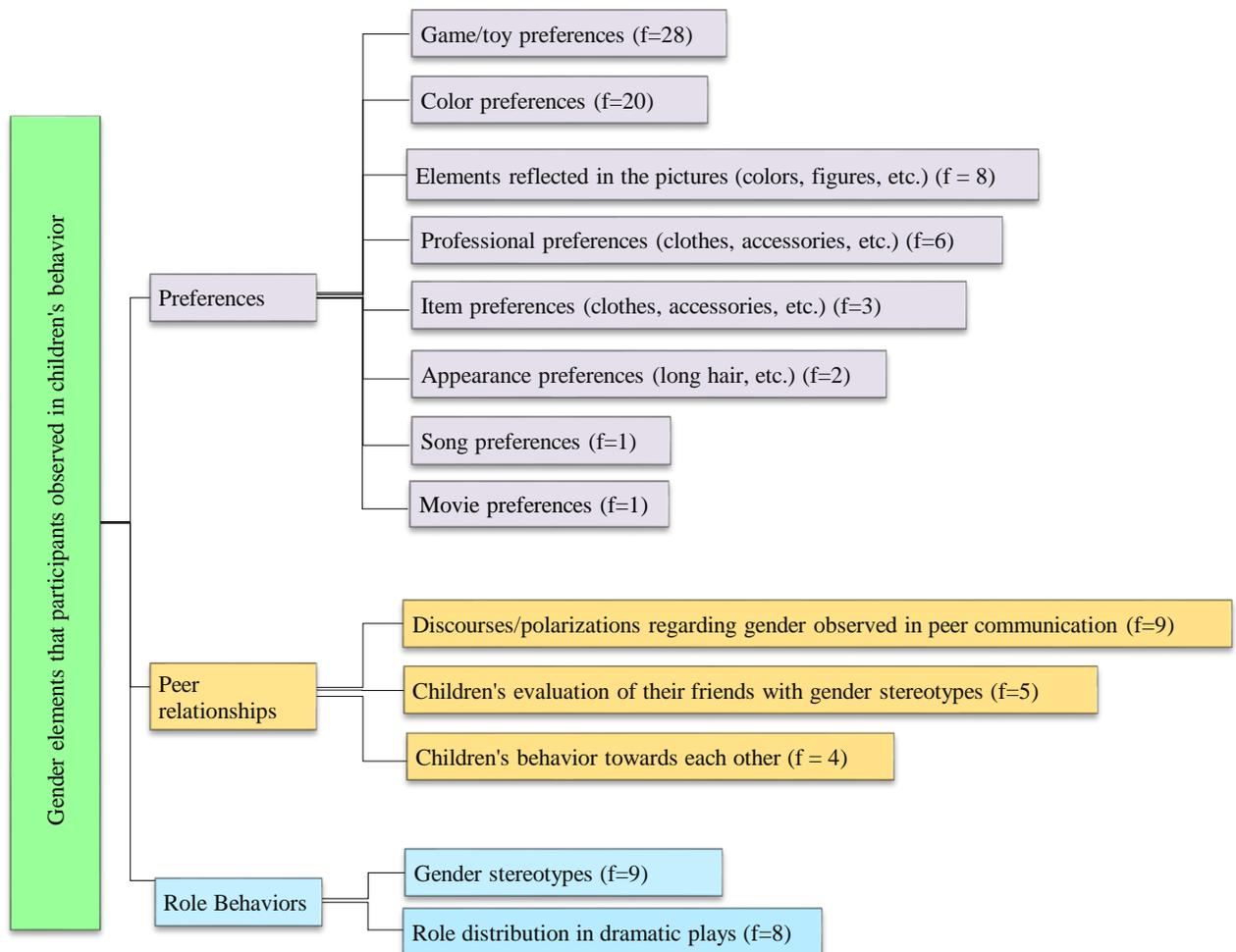


Figure 2. Gender Elements Observed by Participants in Children's Behaviour

When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that the gender elements that the participants observed in children's behaviours were coded in three different categories: (i) preferences, (ii) peer relations and (iii) role behaviours. The pre-service teachers indicated that they observed gender elements in children's *preferences* the most (f=69). When the eight opinions in this category were examined; the participants stated that they observed gender elements mostly in children's play/toy preferences (f=28) and colour preferences (f=20). In addition, the participants mentioned that they observed gender elements in the elements reflected in children's drawings (f=8), professional preferences (f=6), item preferences (f=3), preferences regarding their appearance (f=2), song (f=1) and film preferences (f=1).

Some of the opinions coded in the preference category regarding the gender elements that the participants observed in children's behaviours are given below.

"...In the classroom where I practice, boys spend most of their time in the block centre and girls in the art and dramatic play centre. The girls usually play with play dough and make cakes out of it, take them to the teacher to have them blown, and mostly use the kitchen set in the dramatic play centre to cook food. Conversations such as 'Look, this is my baby, I'm putting her to sleep, guests are coming in the evening and I'm making a cake' take place in their house playing games. Boys build towers with Legos and blocks, build walls, repair broken items with repair tools, hammer, nails.... 'I'm building a fence for my house', 'My car broke down, I'm repairing it'. They probably respect their fathers, the men around them. Girls also look up to their mothers and the women around them..." (T7)

"...In a school where I went to practice, a child said 'Oh, teacher, are you wearing earrings?' and then said 'Men don't wear earrings!..." (T5)

"...In the drawings made by the children, I observed that boys mostly drew buildings, Turkish flags and cars, while girls mostly drew flowers, houses with gardens and jewellery..." (T9)

"...In the internship I did last semester, while the children were playing in the drama centre, one of the children playing a married couple, the boy said to the girl: 'I am the father, I went to work and you cook at home. I can't help you because I'm going to work. Mums do the cooking anyway". This sentence was actually a sentence that clearly explained their routine at home. At the age of 5, the child saw the order imposed by the society and adapted to it..." (T15)

As seen in Figure 2, pre-service teachers highlighted that they also observed behaviours containing gender elements in children's *peer relationships*. Among the three different opinions coded in this category, the participants point out that they observed discourses/polarisations about gender in peer communication the most (f=9). Furthermore, participants conveyed the observation that children tend to assess their peers through the lens of gender stereotypes (f=5) and identified the presence of gender-related components within the interactions and behaviors exhibited by children towards each other (f=4).

Some of the opinions of the participants coded in the category of peer relations regarding the gender elements they observed in children's behaviours are given below.

"...A male student in my class has long hair and sometimes ties it up and sometimes wears it in a bun. Other male students treated this male student obviously differently and went to the extent of exclusion..." (T12)

"...In my first implementation class, a few boys were trying to do push-ups/squats while playing. A girl wanted to join them. One of the boys said, "Girls don't do sports!". There are some situations like this that children see, hear and learn from their environment... This is naturally reflected in their conversations and games with their friends. If someone wants to do something different, there are those who warn them to behave in accordance with that mould in group games..." (T30)

"...During playtime, boys generally play with toys such as blocks, cars, repair items and puzzles, while girls generally prefer to play with toys related to housekeeping. When they want to join the boys' game, they say "there are no boys in the game" and do not want to let boys into their games..." (T31)

The last category in Figure 2 regarding the gender elements that the participants observed in children's behaviours is related to *role behaviours*. Accordingly, they stressed that they observed gender stereotypes (f=9) in children's role behaviours. In addition, eight participants underlined that they observed elements of gender stereotypes in children's behaviours in the distribution of roles in dramatic plays (f=8). In order to be more explanatory, some of the participant statements are given below.

"...Again, during a conversation, when I asked a male student what do you do at home and do you help your mum, he said that women do the kitchen work..." (T8)

"...Another example I observed was when we were playing house, one of my male students played the role of father. He came from work, then sat down and asked the girl playing the role of the mother to bring him his dinner. Then he said, 'I am going to the café'. In one part of the play, the girl playing the role of the mother asked the boy to clean the baby's diaper. 'No, I'm the father. Mothers clean the baby's diaper.' He got the answer..." (T24)

"...Another event I observed was when the children were playing in the dramatic play centre during free play time, the girl played the role of mother and the boy played the role of father. One of them had to go to the bakery to buy bread for breakfast. The girl said 'You are the father, you should go to buy bread'..." (T34)

Gender Elements Observed by Pre-service Teachers in Preschool Teachers' Behaviours

The opinions of pre-service teachers about the gender elements they observed in the behaviours of preschool teachers are categorised and presented in Figure 3 with frequency distributions. As seen in Figure 3, the gender elements that the participants observed in teachers' behaviours were grouped under four different categories: (i) address/direction, (ii) choices/presentations, (iii) expectations, and (iv) gender awareness. Among these categories, the category of *addressing/directing* was the category with the most frequent (f=41) opinions, six of which were different from each other. When the opinions coded in this category were examined, the participants mostly (f=14) underlined that they observed gender elements in teachers' behaviours while managing children's behaviours in the classroom. A total of

eight participants noted instances wherein educators guided children towards activities based on their gender and allocated tasks and roles in accordance with gender distinctions. Four participants stressed that they observed gender elements in teachers' behaviours when giving instructions and reinforcing children. Finally, three participants stated that they observed gender elements in teachers' classroom communication with children.

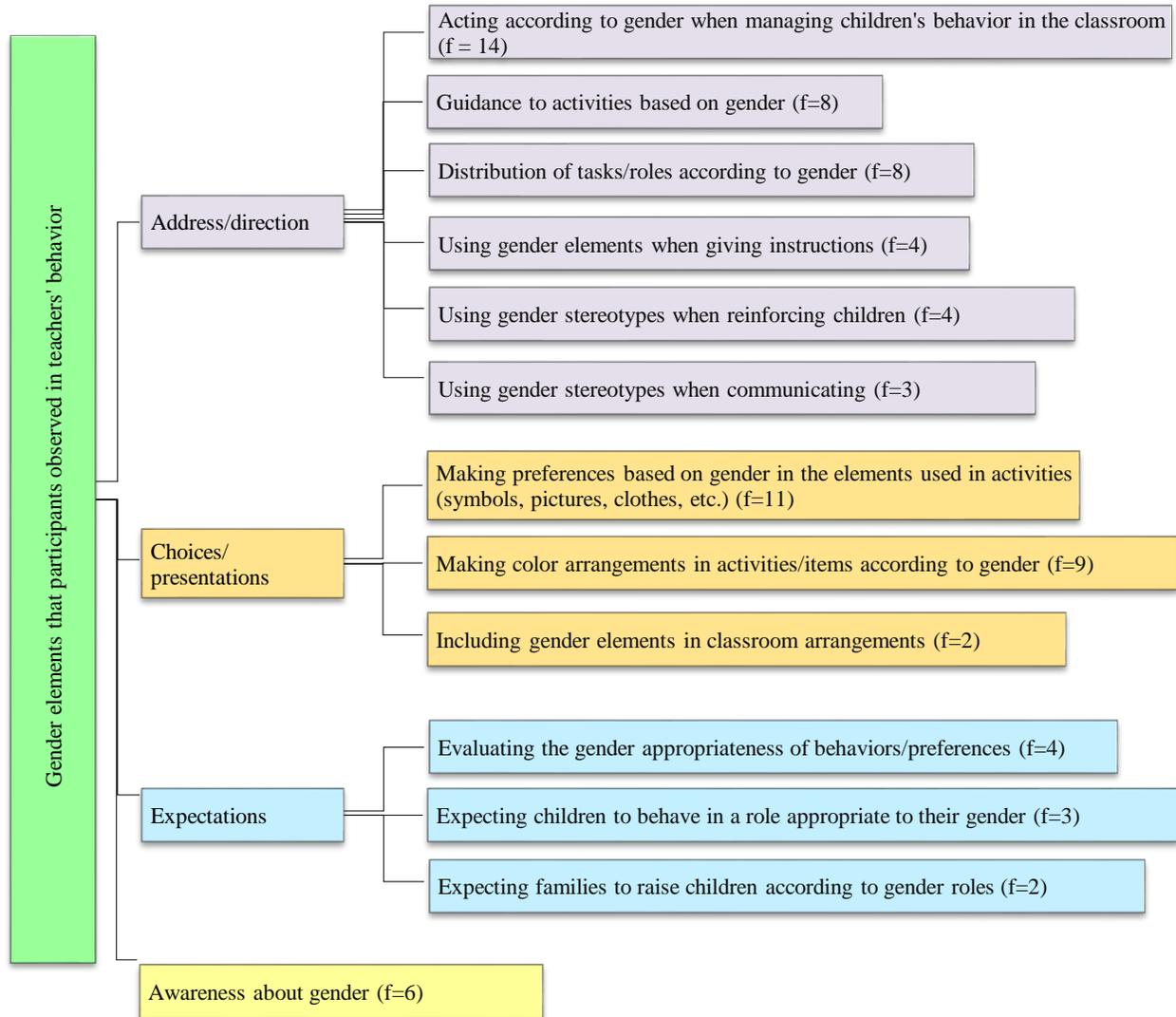


Figure 3. Gender Elements Observed by Participants in Teachers' Behaviour

Some direct quotations from the participants' views in this category are given below.

"...In the classroom, there were disagreements between the boys. One of them stood aside and started crying. While the teacher was trying to solve the problem, she also told him not to cry. She tried to silence him by saying that boys do not cry..." (T20)

"...Children were fighting over toys during free play time. The girls wanted to take the blocks and make houses. The boys wanted to make guns. They needed all the blocks. The children could not agree among

themselves. The teacher said, 'Girls, you paint and boys, you play with cars. No one will play with blocks!'..." (T19)

"...When the children entered the classroom in the morning and left in the evening, the teacher would say things like 'I always wish I had a girl student, I wish my whole class was girls!'. She said that boys were too noisy and naughty. In fact, there were also children in the class who were very quiet, who always raised their fingers and spoke and listened, but the teacher had a negative attitude towards boys. He approached girls more moderately by saying 'My beautiful daughter, my sweet daughter'. She was more distant to boys." (T3)

"...When children queue up as one when going to and coming from the washroom, teachers can direct them as 'Girls go first, then boys go'. For example, they can divide girls and boys into separate groups by giving commands such as 'First girls get dressed, then boys get dressed, first boys get up and drink their water, then girls get up and drink their water'..." (T4)

"...In the 18 March activities, girls were given the roles of nurses and boys were given the roles of soldiers..." (T21)

One of the categories in Figure 3 is related to the *choices/presentations* observed by the participants in teacher behaviours. Consequently, participants underscored their observations of teachers' conduct, which included instances such as exhibiting preferences in the selection of elements employed in activities (e.g., symbols, images, clothing) contingent upon gender (f=11), implementing color schemes in activities and items that were gender-oriented (f=9), and incorporating gender-specific elements within the configuration of classroom arrangements (f=2). For enhanced elucidation, select participant statements are provided below.

"...In one of my practices, I was going to make crowns for the children. The teacher brought green, blue, pink and purple coloured cardboards. She made a distinction according to gender by saying, 'Distribute green and blue to boys, purple and pink to girls'. For example, when working with scissors, boys were given blue scissors and girls pink scissors. In the picture frames in the children's cupboards, the boys' were blue and the girls' were pink..." (T22)

"...she was looking for clothes for the children for the 23 April event. She chose tulle, pink coloured, princess dresses for girls and trousers, shirts and jackets for boys..."(T32)

"...The fact that girls in the dramatic play centre and boys in the block centre were not intervened for a long time, I saw that nothing was done for this in all the internships I went to..." (T26)

"...Our teacher showed pictures such as male mechanic, male greengrocer, female teacher and female cook during vocational activities. Now I think that our teacher actually reflected to the children that professions were chosen according to gender implicitly in all the pictures she showed..." (T37)

According to Figure 3, another category in which the participants coded the gender elements they observed in teachers' behaviours is related to *teacher expectations*. In this category, the participants stated that there were gender

elements in teacher behaviours related to evaluating the appropriateness of behaviours/preferences to gender (f=4), expecting children to perform gender appropriate role behaviours (f=3), and expecting families to raise children according to gender roles (f=2). Some of the direct quotations related to this category are given below.

"...One of the things that attracted my attention was that teachers perceived girls who were more active than their friends as more abnormal than boys. Boys can be active, and this is the expectation most of the time. Otherwise, it is assumed that there is something wrong with the child. The fact that girls are more active is not welcomed by teachers and parents. The expectation from girls is that they should always be much more calm and harmonious, ladylike..." (T32)

"...In response to the chasing game of boys, the teacher of the 2-5 age group said, "The boys in this class are always playing active games. They continue the games they see at home here. Whereas girls are calm and play with toys"... (T4)

"...When my mentor teacher had any negative behaviour of the children, she found the blame on the mothers. She stated that it was the mother who raised the child. She said that mothers should take care of the children because fathers were usually busy..." (T13)

Finally, as can be seen in Figure 3, six participants highlighted that teachers had *awareness about gender*. One of the participant indicated that *"I have not yet encountered such a situation in the preschool institutions I attended. The preschool teachers I worked with were mostly sensitive about this issue. When there was a polarisation between boys and girls in the classroom, for example, when there was a disagreement, they did not ignore this situation. In order to break gender stereotypes, they sometimes gave the colour pink to boys. She sometimes invited boys to girls' games, and in the same way, she invited girls to boys' games. Teachers' approach towards boys and girls was the same"* (T31) is one of the prominent statements in this category.

Pre-service Preschool Teachers' Suggestions for Eliminating Gender Stereotypes

Preservice preschool teachers' suggestions for eliminating gender stereotypes are presented in Figure 4. When Figure 4 is analysed, it is seen that the suggestions developed by pre-service teachers for eliminating gender stereotypes are gathered in four different categories under 20 different opinions. These categories are (i) social change/transformation, (ii) teachers, (iii) arrangements in the education system and (iv) families. As seen in Figure 4, it was observed that the participants suggested solutions for *social change/transformation* to eliminate gender stereotypes. Among the eight different opinions coded in this category, the participants mostly suggested that the awareness of the society on gender should be increased (f=10) and that people should be made aware by using mass media (f=9). Other suggestions in the category of social change/transformation are as follows: organising trainings for adults (f=4), making arrangements in the economic field (f=3), making legal arrangements and applying sanctions (f=3), making arrangements in the public areas (f=2), developing policies based on gender equality (f=2), and shortening the cultural distance between the village and the city (f=1).

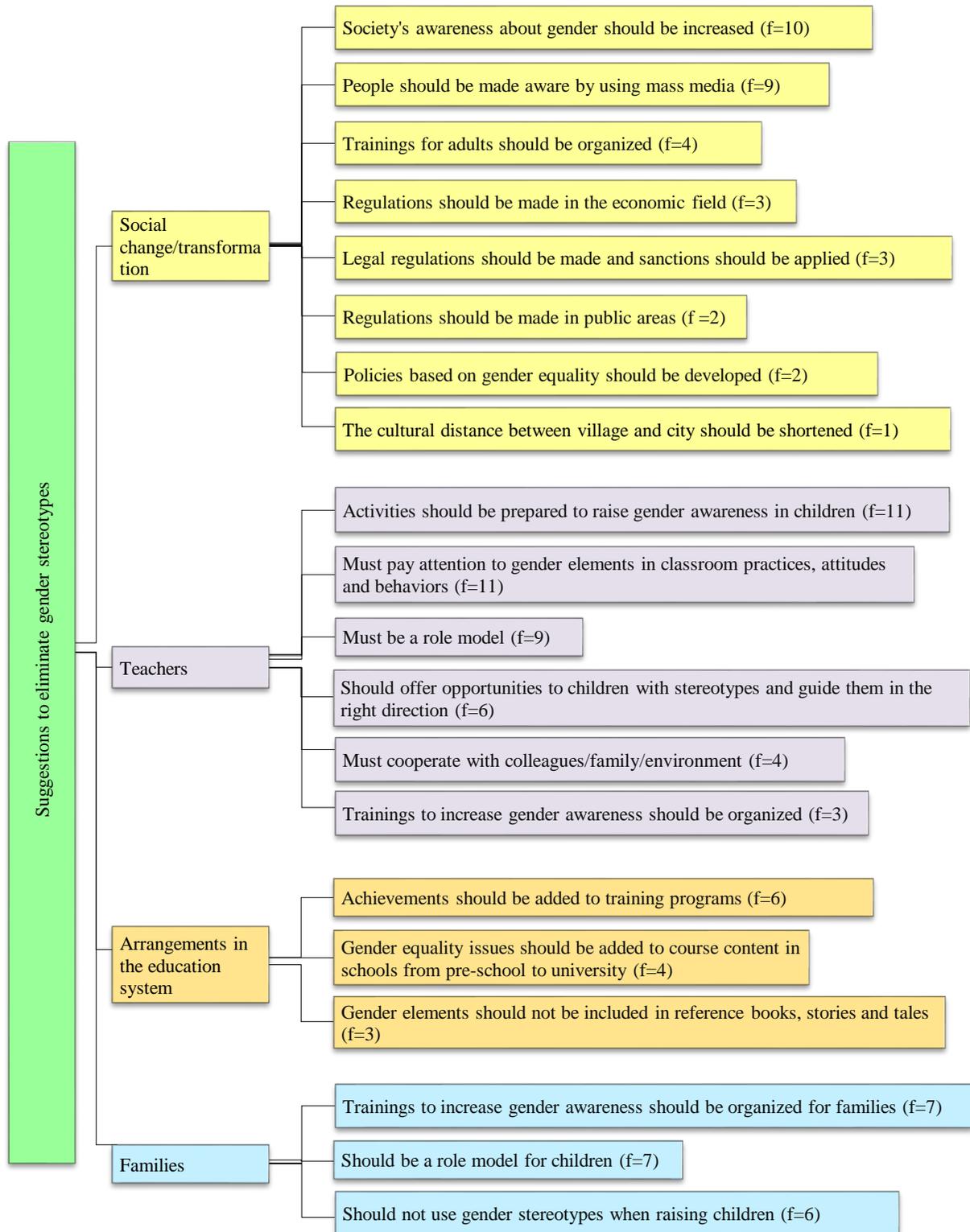


Figure 4. Preservice Preschool Teachers' Suggestions for Eliminating Gender Stereotypes

In order to make the subject more descriptive, some of the suggestions developed by pre-service teachers to eliminate gender stereotypes are given below with direct quotations.

"...I think the change in identities to a single colour removed an important obstacle to stereotypes. Because the fact that pink and blue identity cards, which were characterised by men and women, were issued by the state according to gender and at the moment we were born was something that reinforced gender stereotypes. Women are less visible in society than men. We see this even in the number of deputies..." (T4)

"...Discourses such as "Men cannot be pre-school teachers, men do not wear pink, women should break their knees, stay at home and take care of their children" need to change. If there are live examples of this in society, taboos and stereotypes will gradually break down. Education starts in the family, continues at school and continues outside. Raising awareness of the environment and starting education at a young age would be a revolutionary step to prevent stereotypes. I think pre-school education is very important in this sense..." (T25)

"...In addition, a supra-governmental policy must be defined and implemented by the state and the inequality of gender stereotypes must be resolved. These policies should be implemented in all areas, from education to health, from finance to agriculture. Women and men should be treated and supported equally everywhere. One way to prevent gender stereotypes is through economic freedom. By eliminating wage differences, women should be able to stand more upright in social life. If these policies are followed and the level of education following science is increased, these stereotypes and judgements can be prevented..." (T28)

In Figure 4, it is seen that six different suggestions developed by pre-service teachers to eliminate gender stereotypes are related to *teachers*. The suggestions that teachers should prepare activities to create gender awareness in children (f=11), pay attention to gender elements in classroom practices, attitudes and behaviours (f=11), and be role models (f=9) stand out in this category. Further recommendations proposed by participants for educators encompass the following: affording children characterized by gender stereotypes the opportunity for constructive engagement and appropriate guidance (f=6), fostering collaboration with colleagues, families, and the broader environmental context (f=4), and organizing instructional programs geared towards enhancing teachers' gender awareness (f=3). Noteworthy suggestions within this category are exemplified below through direct quotations.

"...Teachers should ensure that all students benefit from all centres and toys without discriminating between girls and boys. When necessary, they should encourage children to play with different games and materials by getting involved in the games themselves..." (T17)

"...Gender stereotypes are taught to children not only by the family and social environment but also by mass media such as advertisements, television, newspapers, magazines, music videos, song lyrics, children's stories, fairy tales and textbooks. For example, today we see that story books for children are grouped as "for girls" and "for boys". This is also the case with toys produced for children. For

example, toys are produced in pink for girls and blue for boys. The child can form these stereotypes even from the TV series that the family sits and watches at night..." (T16)

"...I think trainings should be organised to raise teachers' awareness about gender. We see that there are teachers who behave with these stereotypes in the classrooms. I think that teacher trainings are important for teachers to manage the class by going beyond stereotypes and to raise children with this awareness of equality. I think that teachers should be trained with seminars during or after university..." (T19)

In the category of *arrangements in the education system* in Figure 4, it is seen that pre-service teachers developed three different suggestions to eliminate gender stereotypes. The participants most frequently (f=6) suggested that achievements should be added to education programmes. In addition; "Gender equality issues should be added to the course content in schools from preschool to university" (f=4), "Gender elements should not be included in resource books, stories and fairy tales" (f=3) suggestions are also prominent in this category. In order to be more understandable, some of the suggestions developed by the participants are given below with direct quotations.

"...The basis of these lies in education, and I think that pre-school education has a more important place in this regard. If children are given this education during their critical periods, a big step will be taken for change..." (T39)

"...Topics related to human rights and freedoms and gender equality can be included in the school curriculum. Maybe even a separate course on character development can be organised and topics related to the concept of gender can be included in that course. Because gender is a subject that affects our character to a great extent. For example, a man wants to wear earrings, but he gives up wearing them thinking about what people will say. Afterwards, he realises that he has formed his character in line with the stereotypes of the environment and gets upset..." (T25)

"...Children should also be careful in choosing toys and books. Visuals that do not emphasise gender stereotypes should be preferred in visuals such as books, videos and pictures to be used in the classroom. In the fairy tales read for children, female characters who are victims of violence are portrayed as poor and abandoned. Male heroes, on the other hand, save the heroine by kissing her, fighting the enemy, killing the enemy, taking her to his palace or breaking the spell. Older women in fairy tales are also often characterised as witches, wicked or stepchildren. The diversity in the heroism of male representation is absent in female representation... Such stereotypes in stories and tales can be presented by changing or comparing them..." (T10)

In the last category in Figure 4, it is seen that pre-service teachers made suggestions for *families* to eliminate gender stereotypes. The frequency of the suggestions for families to organise trainings to increase gender awareness (f=7) and for families to be role models for children (f=7) is the same. Another prominent suggestion in this category is that gender stereotypes should not be used when raising children (f=6). Some of the suggestions developed by the participants for families are given below with direct quotations.

"...Families also play a big role in the formation of these stereotypes. Children adopt and accept the stereotypes they see from their families. Families can be spoken to for this. Families can be trained. By cooperating with families, it can be ensured that families get rid of such stereotypes and become role models for their children. Sometimes, no matter how much we show our children, there is an imbalance in children when they encounter opposite examples at home. Therefore, we need to carry out this process in co-operation with the family..." (T36)

"... Families should set an example for their children with the distribution of work at home. Families should make careful choices about the film series watched at the same time. They should also be careful in choosing toys and books for their children. Of course, another important thing is to carry out studies to educate families on this issue..." (T33)

"...The fact that parents love their children with gender judgements is of course one of the most important factors triggering this. Boys are always lions and girls are princesses...Thus, the child starts to be intertwined with the concept of gender for the first time in the family. These stereotypes are formed at the very beginning by saying 'this is a man's colour, this is a man's toy, this is a man's job, this is a woman's job'. It is important for families to raise awareness in order to overcome these..." (T13)

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study conducted to reveal the views of pre-service teachers on gender in preschool education, all of the pre-service teachers defined the concept of gender, stated that they found gender elements in the behaviours of children and teachers and made suggestions. The education of children begins in the family and continues in schools through teachers. It is a fact that all kinds of educational activities have an important place in the development of the child. The necessity of the support of families and teachers especially in the attitudes and behaviours gained by children in early childhood years cannot be denied. It would not be wrong to say that planned and programmed activities performed in cooperation with families in preschool education institutions can create awareness about gender from early years in the lives of individuals. From this perspective, it is apparent that this circumstance holds the potential to make a meaningful contribution to societal change and the advancement of gender equality. In light of this consideration, this research study was centered upon the examination of gender-related aspects within the domain of preschool education, with the resultant formulation of recommendations, all of which were derived from the insights provided by pre-service educators.

Firstly, pre-service teachers were asked to define the concept of gender. *In their definitions*, the participants emphasised the parser, imposing and artificializer features of the concept of gender. The participants used definitions of gender such as attributing roles/expectations/behaviours/values/norms on people, and putting people into unnatural patterns to behave in accordance with their gender. In addition, the participants emphasised that gender is specific characteristics that can be observed externally and that differ from society to society/time/culture, and described the concept as people learning the roles of men and women. From this point of view, it is possible to say that the definitions formed by the participants are similar to the definitions of gender in the literature. For example, [Torgrimson & Minson \(2005\)](#) define gender as behavioural, cultural or psychological characteristics typically associated with sex. [Cornell](#)

(2009), points out that individuals gain a place in the gender order by the way they behave in daily life or that they respond to the place assigned to them. The definitions formed by the participants within the scope of this study are similar to the statements of the mentioned authors.

According to the results of the research, pre-service teachers point out that they observed *gender elements in the behaviours of preschool children*. One of these elements is related to children's preferences. The participants underlined that they observed elements of gender in children's preferences such as games/toys, colours, occupations, items such as clothes/accessories, appearance such as long hair, songs and films. Furthermore, an inference was drawn that gender-related attributes manifested within children's artistic renderings. This aligns with existing literature, as evidenced by studies conducted by [Alabay & Özdemir \(2020\)](#), [Emeksiz & Bay \(2022\)](#), [Karniol \(2011\)](#), and [Wood et al. \(2002\)](#), which yielded results congruent with those obtained in the current investigation. [Emeksiz & Bay \(2022\)](#), for instance, conducted an observational study involving 30 kindergarten children engaged in dramatic play, and their findings demonstrated the presence of gender stereotypes in the children's toy and material preferences, with girls gravitating towards dolls and boys exhibiting a preference for car-type toys such as trucks. [Karniol \(2011\)](#), in an examination of the impact of gender stereotypes concerning color (pink vs. blue) and illustration (Batman vs. Bratz), revealed that colors and objects were influenced by gender connotations, with color selection serving as an expression of an individual's gender identity. In the study conducted by [Wood et al. \(2002\)](#), it was revealed that parents prefer to buy gender-appropriate toys for their male children. It is a fact that the toys that parents buy according to the gender of their children will create gender stereotypes in children. As a result of the research conducted by [Alabay & Özdemir \(2020\)](#) to determine the gender perceptions of 36-72-month-old children attending preschool institutions towards professions, it was concluded that a high proportion of children perceived the professions of nurse, tailor, teacher, cook, cleaning staff as female gender-specific professions, and the professions of mechanic, construction equipment operator, captain, football player, pilot, firefighter, police officer, announcer, singer and cabin attendant as male gender-specific professions. In this study, it was determined that pre-service teachers encountered gender stereotypes (girls cannot be soldiers, boys can be policemen, etc.) in the profession preferences of preschool children in classroom practices. Another result obtained in this study is that there are gender discourses/polarisations in children's peer relations, especially in peer communication, and that they evaluate each other with gender stereotypes. Similar to this result, [Witt \(2006\)](#) argues that strict adherence to traditional gender roles is strongly encouraged by the peer group and supported by parents, school and media.

In the study, it was concluded that *teachers commonly used* gender stereotypes while managing children's behaviours in the classroom, giving instructions, reinforcing children and communicating with them, directing children to activities according to their gender, and distributing tasks/roles. In addition, it was determined that teachers included gender elements in activities and classroom arrangements. In the study, it was also concluded that teachers expect children to behave in gender appropriate role behaviours, evaluate the appropriateness of children's behaviours/preferences to gender, and have expectations from families about raising children according to gender roles. In addition to all these, it has been determined that there are also teachers who are aware of gender issues. To illustrate it in more detail, as a result of this research, it was found that teachers used "lion" for boys and "princess" for girls when managing children's behaviours in the classroom, preferred figures and colours for girls (e.g. pink Barbie doll) and boys

(blue Jackson Storm car) in activities, directed girls to the dramatic play centre and boys to the block centre during free play time, assigned girls as "nurse" and boys as "soldier" when distributing roles, and divided girls and boys into separate groups in classroom games. There are studies in the literature that coincide with the results of this study. For example, [Akkaya \(2023a\)](#) points out that gender roles are reproduced in schools through teachers. In the study, similar to the findings of this study, teachers mostly make discourses and behaviours towards female students to sit ladylike. [Trepanier-Street & Romatowski \(1999\)](#) underlined that since children are in the process of developing gender schemas and their ways of thinking are particularly susceptible to environmental influences, it is critical for teachers to use activities that promote a worldview based on gender equality. It is important that children are exposed to non-stereotypical models in early childhood so that they can see various occupations, activities and roles as options.

In the study, pre-service teachers made suggestions for social change/transformation, teachers, regulations in the education system and families to eliminate gender stereotypes. The *suggestions* developed by the participants to eliminate gender stereotypes are as follows.

For social change/transformation; awareness of the society on gender should be increased, people should be made aware by using mass media, trainings should be organised for adults, regulations should be made in the economic field, legal regulations should be made and sanctions should be applied, regulations should be made in the public sphere, policies based on gender equality should be developed, and the cultural distance between the village and the city should be shortened. In the mass media, women's identity is defined as an object that has no property rights over its own body, contributing to the formation and establishment of the image of women in the collective consciousness of the society according to good and bad evaluations, especially television is known to be more effective in the formation of gender roles than printed media ([Mora; 2005; Uluyağcı & Yılmaz, 2007](#)). Change/transformation should be initiated to eliminate gender stereotypes through the language used in visual, printed or social media, the content produced and egalitarian discourses, and gender equality should be supported through mass media. It would not be wrong to say that legal injustice, which can be considered as a situation that causes gender reproduction, actually emerges with gender discrimination. It is an important obligation to be aware of prejudices based on culture, tradition and other reasons related to gender inequality, to prohibit them in legal norms, and to reflect a perspective based on gender equality both in norms and in the perspective of law practitioners. In other words, it is necessary to be aware of the prejudices and stereotypes that support and perpetuate gender inequality and to create and implement legal norms with this awareness. In addition, it is another important obligation to clearly set out norms that eliminate inequality in economic terms ([Uygur, 2015](#)). Inequalities constitute impediments to the attainment of sustainable development, with the substantial disadvantages experienced by women representing a prominent source of such disparities. Augmenting women's engagement in the workforce exerts a favorable influence on economic advancement while concurrently enhancing their standing within both societal and familial contexts ([Şahin & Bayhan, 2020](#)). Therefore, it is necessary for sustainable development to make arrangements that will increase women's participation in employment and eliminate inequalities in labour markets. [Özaydımlık \(2014\)](#) underlined that education is the most important factor that determines the role of women in economic development and helps them to fully participate in employment. In addition to being employed in precarious jobs with low wages, it is known that women's domestic roles, especially childcare, in traditional family structures create obstacles to their participation in employment. Increasing women's education level

and employment participation rates will be significant intermediaries in eliminating gender inequality and gender stereotypes.

Teachers should prepare activities to create gender awareness in children, pay attention to gender elements in classroom practices, attitudes and behaviours, be role models, offer opportunities to children with stereotypes, guide them correctly, and cooperate with colleagues/families/environment. In addition, trainings should be organised for teachers to increase gender awareness. Bayraktar & Yağın-Güder (2019) underlined that teachers perpetuate stereotypes of gender roles in the classroom, either consciously or unconsciously, and that teachers' beliefs and expectations about gender roles affect children's behaviour. Researchers emphasise that teachers have the most important power to create a non-sexist education and that it is important for teachers to know what they can do in the classroom about gender equality and what ways they can help children develop an egalitarian perspective.

Necessary arrangements should be made in the education system by adding achievements to the education programmes, adding gender equality issues to the course content in schools from preschool to university, and emphasising gender equality in resource books, stories and tales. Trepanier-Street & Romatowski (1999) emphasise that high quality children's books are a valuable resource for introducing children to non-stereotypical models and that the use of children's literature and related classroom activities is a powerful tool for influencing children's gender attitudes. Gürşimşek & Günay (2005) point out that illustrated children's books, which are one of the stimuli presented to children in the preschool period, give important messages with the way they deal with traditional gender role patterns and behaviours common in society.

Trainings should be organised for families to increase gender awareness, families should not use gender stereotypes while raising children and should be role models for their children. According to traditional gender roles and stereotypes, men are assigned the task of providing for the household (work orientation), while women are assigned tasks such as child care and responsibility for family life (family orientation) (Moya et al., 2000). It is possible to say that these traditional gender roles assigned to women and men by the society are effective in family structures, in the way families raise children, and thus in children's formation of gender stereotypes. Yağın-Güder & Güler-Yıldız (2016) examined the role of family in preschool children's gender perceptions and found the following findings: Factors such as mothers being housewives, mothers being subjected to violence and children witnessing it, and traditional distribution of responsibilities within the family are effective in children's stereotypical views on women and men. In the aforementioned study, it was determined that children whose mothers and fathers took responsibility for housework together were less stereotypical about domestic responsibilities. To put it briefly, parents' encouraging fair behaviour in terms of gender and behaving in a fair manner in terms of gender will set a positive example for their children (Witt, 2006).

In conclusion, it is possible to say that gender roles, which can be described as the roles assigned to individuals according to their gender, and stereotypes attributed to these roles are reproduced through the society itself and social institutions, although they vary according to time/space/culture. Education is the most important way to ensure that there is a break in this reproduction process and that there is a change/transformation in gender over time. In this study, an evaluation that will shed light on child rearing and education policies for the elimination of gender inequality by

examining gender in preschool education in depth has been made. This study is anticipated to foster heightened consciousness pertaining to gender-related issues, facilitate the eradication of gender stereotypes, and bolster the advocacy for gender equality, particularly commencing in early childhood, among both families and educators.

Ethic

In this study, all scientific ethical rules were followed. For this research, ethics committee permission dated 27.04.2023 and numbered E-23688910-050.01.04-2300038115 was obtained from Bartın University Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

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