

Analysis of Male Preschool Teachers’ Thoughts Regarding Their Careers

Ramazan Sak

Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Fatma Tezel-Şahin

Gazi University, Turkey

Abstract

This research examined the thoughts of male preschool teachers about the situations they encountered at the start of their careers. The participants of the study consisted of 106 male preschool teachers in Turkey. A questionnaire with 52 questions and 5 scales was used as the data collecting tool. Responses given to items by male preschool teachers have revealed significant differences according to the teachers ages and occupational seniority. Results of the study showed that male preschool teachers between 27 and 32 years old encountered more negative situations at the start of their careers than those in the age 22-26 group. They included parents unawareness of male preschool teachers presence, negative reactions of school administration and other teachers, not being treated as a teacher by the children, and general social prejudice considering ‘men’ unfit for that job. It has also been found that male preschool teachers with more than three years experience encountered more negative situations at the start of their careers when compared to those with less than two years experience.

[key words] preschool education, male preschool teacher, age and occupational seniority

Correspondence and requests for reprints should be sent to Ramazan Sak, Middle East Technical University, Department of Elementary Education, 06800, Ankara, Turkey
E-mail: rsak@metu.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION

Sumsion (2000a) expressed “*Despite increasing male participation in recent years in many traditional ‘female’ professions, early childhood education continues to be widely regarded as women’s work* (p. 129).” Her idea was based on studies of Murray (1996), Steinberg (1996) and King (1998). However, we still argue in 2011 that early childhood education is a women’s profession. For instance, although only 166 of 11896 (1.39%) Turkish preschool teachers were male in 2000 it reached to 3414 of 48330 (7.06%) in 2011 (Ministry of National Education Statistics, 2010). Similar to these results, the population of male teachers is less than the female population in the early childhood education area all over the world. For example, according to The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), the rate of males who work as preschool and kindergarten teachers is 3% in the USA. The male preschool teachers’ rate in the New Zealand is less than 1% (Jones, 2009). Norway has the highest rate of male preschool teachers in Europe with 9% (Peeters, 2007). Although it has been possible to encounter male preschool teachers in recent years, women still make up the majority of preschool teachers (Cameron, 2001; Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2005; Sumsion, 2005).

On the other hand, the minority of male preschool teachers results from society’s fear of potential sexual abusers (Drudy, 2008; Farguhar, 1997), low status of preschool teachers (Drudy, 2008) and low wages of teachers (Drudy, 2008; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009). Also another reason is that names of the institutions such as nursery, kindergarten (Kelvin, 1986). Lastly, the prejudicial assumption that males do not have patience to care for children and the stereotype that male preschool teachers are either homosexuals or lack masculinity are other reasons for the low number of male preschool teachers (Cohen, 1992; Cushman, 2005; Farguhar, 1997; Santiago, 1989; Shaham, 1991; Thornton, 1999).

Occupations are separated based on gender in Turkey. Males generally choose their career based on what is socially accepted, such as a soldier, mechanic, and engineer. When a male or female chooses a career deemed not appropriate for his or her gender based on society’s perception, they are subject to ridicule and are often not trusted as professionals. Therefore, when males choose preschool teaching as a career, they can encounter some undesirable situations. In spite of these negative reactions, the population of male preschool teachers has recently increased in Turkey (Ministry of National Education, 2011).