DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

"Everyone Can Do Everything!": Exploring Shifts in Gender Norms in Preschool Classrooms

"Herkes Her Şeyi Yapabilir!": Okul Öncesi Sınıflarda Toplumsal Cinsiyet Normlarındaki Dönüşümlerin İncelenmesi

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Geliş tarihi - *Received:* 22 May 2025
Kabul tarihi - *Accepted*: 31 July 2025
Yayın tarihi - *Published*: 28 August 2025

Ozen Uyar, R. and Yigit Gencten, V. (2025). "Everyone can do everything!": Exploring shifts in gender norms in preschool classrooms. *Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences,* 16(2), 3125-3146.
DOI. 10.51460/baebd.1704009

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Abstract. Preschool teachers play a critical role in shaping children's perceptions of gender and promoting gender equality in the classroom. This qualitative study focused on the classroom practices of five preschool teachers in Türkiye to examine how both the teachers' educational approaches and children's perceptions of gender roles changed. During the four-week implementation period, teachers designed and implemented weekly activities around themes such as toys, colors, domestic roles, and professions, utilizing methods such as drama, play, and interactive read-aloud. Research data were collected through teachers' reflective journals, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The data, analyzed through thematic analysis, were structured around three main themes: (1) confronting invisible patterns and transformation in practice, (2) children's developing gender awareness, and (3) ongoing tensions in gender-based preferences. The findings reveal that gender equality practices are not limited to classroom interventions aimed at increasing children's awareness; they also trigger an important learning and self-awareness process for teachers. Additionally, it was observed that some children developed more inclusive perspectives on gender roles, but that some boys continued to adhere more strongly to gender stereotypes in the context of play. This study highlights that in order to achieve gender equality in preschool education, priority should be given to teacher training, the development of gender-sensitive curricula, and the active involvement of families in the process.
Keywords: Gender equity, Gender stereotypes, Gender awareness, Early childhood education, Preschool teacher*.*

Öz. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet algılarını şekillendirmede ve sınıf ortamlarında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini teşvik etmede kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu nitel araştırma, Türkiye'de görev yapan beş okul öncesi öğretmeninin sınıf içi toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik uygulamalarına odaklanarak hem öğretmenlerin eğitimsel yaklaşımlarında hem de çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin düşüncelerinde nasıl dönüşümler yaşandığını incelemiştir. Dört hafta süren uygulama sürecinde öğretmenler, oyuncaklar, renkler, ev içi roller ve meslekler gibi temalar etrafında haftalık etkinlikler tasarlayıp uygulamış; bu etkinliklerde drama, oyun ve etkileşimli kitap okuma gibi yöntemlerden yararlanmışlardır. Araştırma verileri, öğretmenlerin yansıtıcı günlükleri, sınıf gözlemleri ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Tematik analiz yoluyla çözümlenen veriler; (1) görünmez kalıplarla yüzleşme ve uygulamada dönüşüm, (2) çocukların gelişen toplumsal cinsiyet farkındalığı ve (3) toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı tercihlerde süregelen gerilimler olmak üzere üç ana tema etrafında yapılandırılmıştır. Bulgular, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik uygulamaların yalnızca çocukların farkındalığını artırmaya yönelik sınıf içi müdahalelerle sınırlı kalmadığını; aynı zamanda öğretmenler için de önemli bir öğrenme ve öz farkındalık sürecini tetiklediğini ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, bazı çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine yönelik daha kapsayıcı bakış açıları geliştirdiği, ancak özellikle erkek çocukların oyun bağlamında toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargılarına daha sıkı bir şekilde tutunmaya devam ettikleri gözlemlenmiştir. Bu çalışma, okul öncesi eğitimde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin sağlanabilmesi için öğretmen eğitimine öncelik verilmesi, toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı öğretim programlarının geliştirilmesi ve ailelerin sürece etkin bir şekilde dahil edilmesi gerektiğine işaret etmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, Toplumsal cinsiyet kalıpyargıları, Toplumsal cinsiyet farkındalığı, Erken çocukluk eğitimi, Okul öncesi öğretmeni.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Genişletilmiş Özet

Giriş. Erken çocukluk dönemi, çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin ilk farkındalıklarını geliştirdikleri ve bu rollerin çoğunlukla kalıplaşmış biçimlerde içselleştirildiği kritik bir gelişim dönemidir (Gansen, 2019). Çocuklar, aile yaşamı, medya içerikleri ve eğitim ortamları aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyete ilişkin normları öğrenmekte ve çoğu zaman bu normları sorgulamadan benimsemektedir (Hill Jr ve Bartow Jacobs, 2020). Özellikle okul öncesi eğitim ortamları, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin görünür hâle geldiği ve yeniden üretildiği erken sosyalizasyon bağlamları sunmaktadır (Hardardottir ve Pétursdóttir, 2014). Bu süreçte öğretmenlerin kullandıkları dil, sınıf içi düzenlemeleri ve günlük etkileşimleri, çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet algılarını doğrudan etkilemektedir (Aina ve Cameron, 2011; Emilson vd., 2016). Warin ve Adriany (2017) toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini okul öncesi eğitimde sağlayabilmek için hem öğretmenlerin bu konuda farkındalık geliştirmesi hem de öğretim programlarının toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı biçimde yapılandırılması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, öğretmenlerin sınıf içi uygulamalar yoluyla çocuklara eşitlikçi yaklaşımlar sunması, toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarının erken yaşta sorgulanabilmesi açısından önemli bir fırsat alanı oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışma, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin sınıf içi toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik uygulamalarına odaklanarak hem öğretmenlerin eğitimsel yaklaşımlarında hem de çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin düşüncelerinde nasıl dönüşümler yaşandığını incelemektedir.

Yöntem. Bu araştırmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden durum çalışması deseni kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin güneydoğusunda yer alan bir üniversiteye bağlı uygulama anaokulunda yürütülmüş olup çalışma grubunu, bu kurumda görev yapan beş okul öncesi öğretmeni ve onların sınıflarındaki çocuklar oluşturmuştur. Katılımcı öğretmenler, gönüllülük esasına göre belirlenmiş ve sınıf ortamında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini desteklemeye yönelik uygulamalara açık olduklarını ifade etmişlerdir.

Uygulama dört hafta boyunca sürmüştür. Bu süreçte öğretmenlerden her hafta toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği temalı bir etkinlik planlamaları ve sınıflarında uygulamaları istenmiştir. Etkinlik konuları oyuncak tercihleri, renkler, ev içi roller ve meslekler gibi toplumsal cinsiyetle doğrudan ilişkili temalar etrafında yapılandırılmıştır. Öğretmenler, planladıkları etkinlikleri drama, oyun ve etkileşimli kitap okuma gibi çocuk merkezli yöntemlerle gerçekleştirmiştir. Etkinliklerin süresi, çocukların ilgi düzeyine göre farklılaşmakla birlikte 18 ila 36 dakika arasında değişmiştir.

Araştırma verileri; öğretmenlerin her bir uygulama sonrası tutukları yansıtıcı günlükler, sınıf içi gözlem notları ve uygulama sonrasında gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış bireysel görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Yansıtıcı günlüklerde öğretmenlerden, uyguladıkları etkinliklere ilişkin gözlemlerini, çocukların tepkilerini, uygulama sürecinde karşılaştıkları güçlükleri ve kendi farkındalık süreçlerini yazılı olarak ifade etmeleri istenmiştir. Sınıf içi gözlemler, araştırmacılar tarafından önceden yapılandırılmış bir gözlem formu doğrultusunda gerçekleştirilmiş; bu süreçte öğretmen-çocuk ve çocuk-çocuk etkileşimleri ile toplumsal cinsiyet temalı ve eşitlikçi sınıf içi söylemler ayrıntılı biçimde kaydedilmiştir. Dört haftalık uygulama sürecinin tamamlanmasının ardından gerçekleştirilen bireysel görüşmeler ise öğretmenlerin sürece ilişkin genel değerlendirmelerini, yaşadıkları dönüşümleri ve gelecekteki uygulamalara yönelik önerilerini derinlemesine anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Elde edilen veriler Braun ve Clarke (2006) tarafından önerilen altı aşamalı tematik analiz süreci doğrultusunda analiz edilmiştir.

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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Bulgular. Bulgular; (1) görünmez kalıplarla yüzleşme ve uygulamada dönüşüm, (2) çocukların gelişen toplumsal cinsiyet farkındalığı ve (3) toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı tercihlerde süregelen gerilimler olmak üzere üç ana tema etrafında yapılandırılmıştır. Araştırma, okul öncesi sınıflarda yürütülen toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik uygulamaların yalnızca çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin daha kapsayıcı düşünceler geliştirmelerini desteklemekle kalmadığını aynı zamanda öğretmenler için de önemli bir farkındalık ve dönüşüm süreci başlattığını ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmenler uygulama süreci boyunca kendi toplumsal cinsiyet algılarını sorgulamış ve kullandıkları dil, övgü biçimleri, sınıf düzeni gibi pek çok rutin uygulamalarını dönüştürme yoluna gitmiştir. Bazı öğretmenler öğrenme merkezlerindeki kalıpyargısal oyuncakları değiştirerek cinsiyete dayalı oyuncak tercihlerine müdahale etmiş, bazıları ise çocukların sözel ifadelerindeki kalıp yargılara ilişkin farkındalık sağlayarak daha kapsayıcı yaklaşımlar geliştirmiştir. Öğretmen rehberliğinde yürütülen etkinlikler ve akranlar arası etkileşimler aracılığıyla birçok çocuk kalıplaşmış inançları sorgulamaya ve daha esnek bakış açıları geliştirmeye adım atmıştır. Ancak bulgular, özellikle erkek çocuklar arasında, toplumsal beklentilerle şekillenen ve akran ilişkileriyle pekişen toplumsal cinsiyet temelli tercihlerin sürdüğünü göstermektedir. Çocuklar her ne kadar sözel olarak kapsayıcı fikirler ifade etseler de serbest oyun zamanlarında geleneksel kalıplara bağlılık gözlemlenmiştir. Özellikle erkek çocukların "kız oyuncağı" olarak etiketlenen materyallere karşı mesafeli davrandıkları, kalıp dışı davranışlarda bulunmaktan çekindikleri tespit edilmiştir. Bu durum, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine dair sosyal risklerin ve normlara uymanın çocuklar üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymaktadır.

Tartışma, Sonuç ve Öneriler. Bu araştırma, erken çocukluk döneminde toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik uygulamaların hem çocuklar hem de öğretmenler için dönüştürücü bir potansiyele sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmenler, toplumsal cinsiyet temalı etkinlikler aracılığıyla kullandıkları dilin ve sınıf rutinlerinin toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarını yeniden ürettiğini fark etmeye başlamıştır. Bu durum, erken çocukluk eğitiminde "nötr" kabul edilen uygulamaların aslında normatif rolleri pekiştirdiğini ortaya koyan önceki çalışmalarla örtüşmektedir (Aina ve Cameron, 2011; Gansen, 2019). Ayrıca, toplumsal cinsiyet temalı kitaplar ile öğretmen rehberliğinde yürütülen etkinlikler ve tartışmalar, çocukların kalıplaşmış inançları sorgulamasını desteklemiştir. Ancak çocukların toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine dair farkındalık geliştirmesine rağmen, özellikle erkek çocukların "kızlara ait" olarak nitelenen oyuncaklara karşı daha dirençli davrandıkları gözlenmiştir. Bu bulgu, erkek çocukların sosyal yaptırıma uğrama kaygısıyla geleneksel normlara daha sıkı tutunduklarını gösteren önceki araştırmalarla uyumlu görülmektedir (Martin ve Fabes, 2001; Skočajić vd., 2020). Araştırma bulguları doğrultusunda şu önerilerde bulunulmaktadır: (1) Cinsiyet eşitliği, öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının ve hizmet içi mesleki gelişim süreçlerinin temel bir unsuru haline getirilmelidir. (2) Öğretmenler, toplumsal cinsiyet duyarlılığı açısından nitelikli çocuk kitaplarını seçme ve bu kitapların okuma sürecinde çocuklarla etkileşimli, sorgulayıcı konuşmalar yürütme konusunda desteklenmelidir. (3) Ailelerin de sürece dahil edilmesi özellikle erkek çocukların üzerindeki toplumsal baskıların azaltılması açısından önemlidir.

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Introduction

From fairy tales in which Little Red Riding Hood is swallowed by a wolf and rescued by a male hunter, to decades in which Barbie dollhouses defined femininity and toy stores were painted pink for girls and blue for boys, gendered messages permeate childhood. Preschool classrooms are no exception to this, and they are filled with such implicit and explicit gender cues. In such environments, we often find ourselves unthinkingly trying to discern what is biased and what is neutral. The language used, gestures, attitudes, and unspoken stereotypes indicate one's position on the gender equality spectrum (Midgette et al., 2023). This position not only guides our teaching practices but also deeply influences children's perceptions of gender. Children's perceptions of gender are directly shaped by the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the adults around them, as well as the playmates they choose, the roles they assume during play, and the language they use (Grieshaber and Krieg, 2024).

Early childhood education settings remain a paradoxical space where gender norms are both questioned and deeply entrenched. Despite its progressive discourse (Adriany, 2019), early childhood pedagogy often unconsciously reproduces the stereotypes it seeks to eliminate, and children naturally internalize these norms unless actively challenged (Vivaldi and Rose, 2024). This article aims to understand these contradictions by exploring how gender inequality subtly manifests in preschool classrooms and how preschool teachers can become more conscious, thoughtful, and transformative in their practices. Through classroom observations and practitioners' reflections and perspectives, we propose actionable strategies to create environments where all children, regardless of gender, can develop free from limiting expectations.

Literature review

The social construction of gender in early childhood

Children's peer interactions and play are key sites where gender is socially constructed in early childhood. Evidence shows that by age 3–5, children not only recognize gender stereotypes but actively enforce them in their playgroups (King et al., 2021). Xiao et al. (2019) documented the phenomenon of "gender enforcers", children (girls and boys alike) who attempt to exclude peers or police their activities based on gender. These young gender police might declare that "boys do not play with dolls" or insist on separating play spaces, thereby reinforcing a binary division in peer culture (Endendijk et al., 2014). Children who spent much time with such gender-enforcing peers became more likely to play only with same-gender friends and to develop biased gender beliefs themselves (Martin and Ruble, 2013). In other words, peer socialization powerfully amplifies gender norms: when a classroom atmosphere tolerates or has active gender policing, stereotypes and segregation among children can quickly intensify (Karabay et al., 2019). This peer dynamic illustrates what Davies (2003) termed "gender category maintenance work," in which children collectively uphold the boundaries of what is acceptable for "girls" and "boys." Through teasing, praise, or exclusion, children continually negotiate and reproduce the meaning of gender in their daily interactions (Heikkila, 2020).

At the same time, research grounded in poststructuralist gender theory emphasizes that children are not simply passive recipients of gender norms, they also exercise agency in interpreting

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Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

or even subverting those norms (Işıtan Kılıç, 2022). Ethnographic observations have captured moments when young children play with gendered expectations. For example, boys were seen engaging in nurturing behaviors typically associated with femininity, such as caring for dolls, while girls participated in activities like building and rough-and-tumble play, which are traditionally considered masculine (Martin, 2011). Such instances demonstrate that gender in early childhood is fluid and context-dependent, even if often constrained by social feedback. A qualitative case study by Chapman (2016) also illustrated how two preschool classrooms yielded very different play patterns, largely due to the educators' and peers' attitudes. In one setting, where teachers consciously encouraged cross-gender play and intervened in exclusionary behavior, children's play themes became less stereotyped and more mixed (boys and girls freely mingling in both "construction" and "house" centers). In another setting with more traditional attitudes, children's free play tended to split along gender lines, reflecting the educators' gender beliefs. Chapman's (2016) findings underscore that children's peer culture and play choices are highly responsive to the social cues given by adults. When gender norms are actively questioned and diversified by teachers, children show more flexibility in their play; when norms are taken for granted, children reinforce them among themselves (Warin and Adriany, 2017).

Notably, being accepted by peers often means conforming to group norms, which for young children include gender expectations. This can lead to self-socialization: children may internalize messages like "boys should be tough" or "girls should be quiet" because those traits earn peer approval. Conversely, children who defy gender norms (e.g., a boy who prefers playing "princess" or a girl who climbs trees with the boys) might experience social penalties. Research has documented that even at preschool age, children who violate gender norms can face resistance or ridicule not just from peers but also from adults (Sullivan et al., 2018). For example, an experimental study by Sullivan et al. (2018) found that adults rated gender-atypical preschoolers as less likable than gender-conforming peers, especially in the case of boys who behaved in "feminine" ways. This suggests that children likely sense these societal biases early on, which may reinforce their policing of each other. Peer interactions, therefore, do not occur in a vacuum, they mirror the wider gender values children see rewarded or sanctioned by adults at home, in school, and in the media. The interplay of peer dynamics and adult influences ensures that by the end of early childhood, most children have learned the "rules" of gender performance quite keenly, even as they may test or bend those rules in certain play contexts.

Teachers' roles in constructing gender norms

Educators in early childhood settings significantly shape how young children understand and act on gender. Recent studies show that even well-intentioned teachers may unintentionally reinforce traditional gender roles through interactions and expectations (Li, 2023). For instance, preschool teachers often claim to treat boys and girls equally, yet subtle biases emerge in practice – a teacher's casual assumption that "boys will be boys and girls will be girls" reflects an embedded belief in innate gender differences (Emilson et al., 2016). Such beliefs can translate into gender-differentiated classroom routines (e.g., praising girls for quiet behavior or expecting boys to be more active) (Maegdefrau, 2023). Importantly, research indicates that teachers' own gender stereotypes can transfer to children, constraining children's self-confidence and beliefs in their abilities and also deterring them from pursuing certain academic paths (Terrier, 2020). These biases can limit a child's exploration of activities and academic domains, with girls, for example, being subtly dissuaded from

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Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

STEM fields and boys from reading and writing (Miller et al., 2024). Over time, such patterns risk impacting children's self-esteem and narrowing their future aspirations in gendered ways.

Despite these challenges, many early childhood educators are increasingly aware of their role in countering gender stereotypes. In a Swedish study, Emilson et al. (2016) found that practitioners overwhelmingly believed preschools are responsible for challenging traditional gendered behavior and promoting gender neutrality. Teachers in this study strove to treat children as unique individuals rather than "boys vs. girls." However, they also faced dilemmas: on the one hand, they wanted to break stereotypes (for example, encouraging boys to play dress-up as princesses), but on the other hand, they felt they must respect children's choices and comfort (for example, some were hesitant when a girl persistently wore frilly dresses unsuited for active play). Studies suggest that simply adopting a "gender-blind" stance (treating all children the same) is not enough; without conscious efforts by educators to expand what is acceptable for each gender, young children tend to default to the stereotypes prevalent in their environment (Wang, 2023). Thus, the educator's role is crucial in perpetuating or disrupting gender norms in early childhood classrooms.

Curriculum, classroom environment, and media influences on gender construction

Beyond individual actors, the broader early childhood curriculum and environment set the stage for how gender is constructed. Official curricula in many countries now emphasize gender equality. For example, Nordic countries explicitly mandate that girls and boys be given equal opportunities and not segregated in preschool education (Heikkila, 2020; Papakosma, 2023). The intent is to eliminate structural reinforcements of gender difference, which encourages mixed-gender activities, and teachers are urged to avoid making gender a salient category (Chapman, 2021). This aligns with developmental research showing that when teachers deemphasize gender as a grouping (for instance, not separating play areas or lining children up by gender), children exhibit reduced gender stereotyping and more inclusive attitudes (King et al., 2021). In classrooms where teachers avoided calling attention to gender, children were more likely to play with cross-gender peers and showed less bias, whereas in classrooms with frequent "boys vs. girls" labeling, children's gender stereotypes and peer segregation grew stronger (Skipper and Fox, 2020). These findings reinforce that the "micro-curriculum" of day-to-day class practice, how teachers speak, organize groups, and select materials, communicates powerful messages about gender.

However, translating gender-equitable curriculum ideals into daily practice can be challenging. Even in progressive contexts, studies find a gap between policy and practice: Heikkilä (2024) notes that Nordic preschools, while guided by equality policies, still struggle with deeply ingrained gendered routines and assumptions, requiring continuous reflection and effort from staff. One practical strategy in curricula has been to audit and revise classroom materials (books, toys, posters) to ensure they are not uniformly portraying gender-stereotypical roles. The last decade of international research highlights the influence of such materials and media in children's gender construction. Children's literature is a prime example. Hill Jr and Bartow Jacobs (2020) qualitatively studied kindergarteners during picture-book read-alouds. They found that children actively interpret and talk about gender based on story cues. When characters' genders were ambiguous, or stories tried to challenge traditional roles, the children still often applied a binary boy/girl framework to make sense of them.

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Even when presented with narratives that question gender stereotypes, the children's discussions revealed how deeply societal gender categories shape their understanding. This underscores that diversifying classroom media (e.g., including storybooks with female astronauts, stay-at-home dads, or characters that defy gender expectations) is important but not automatically sufficient (Nguyen, 2022). Educators must also guide conversations and prompt critical thinking, helping children to notice and rethink stereotypes rather than simply imposing their preconceived notions on new material. The literature suggests that story time and playtime can become rich opportunities for teachers to scaffold more expansive views of gender, thereby gently challenging the default assumptions children bring (Burton, 2020).

In addition to books, children's playthings and popular culture influence gender construction in early education settings. Research on toys finds that many preschool environments still present highly gender-typed toys (trucks vs. dolls, blue vs. pink) due to tradition or donations, which can channel children into different skill-building play (Fawcett and Gellmer, 2025). As one review noted, early gender-typed play experiences can have lasting effects on cognitive and social development (e.g., spatial skills from "masculine" toys and nurturing language from "feminine" toys) (Li, 2023). Thus, scholars argue that a wide range of toys should be provided to all children and that non-stereotypical play combinations should be actively encouraged (Charalampous and Sidiropoulou, 2024). Likewise, children often bring themes from media (television, movies, games) into the classroom. Popular princesses, superheroes, and other characters become reference points in play, each carrying gendered connotations (Spinner et al., 2022; Wille et al., 2018). There has been debate about whether such gendered pop culture reinforces harmful stereotypes or can be used constructively. Earlier concerns, for example, warned that "princess culture" might glorify passive femininity and appearance for girls (England et al., 2011). However, a longitudinal study by Coyne et al. (2021) yielded a nuanced finding: children (of all genders) who engaged with Disney Princess media did not become more confined by gender stereotypes; in fact, they later showed more egalitarian attitudes and were less swayed by rigid "toxic" masculinity beliefs. This suggests that children may interpret media through their creative lenses, a boy who loves a princess might integrate kindness and empathy into his notion of masculinity, for example. The implication for educators is neither to forbid such gendered media play nor to let it dominate unexamined, but rather to participate in children's cultural worlds and open up discussion.

Theoretical framework

This study is based on Davies' (2003) poststructuralist gender theory, which was developed to understand how gender is constructed and maintained in early childhood education settings. Davies (2003) conceptualizes gender not as a biologically determined characteristic but as a socially constructed identity that emerges through ongoing interactions with gendered discourses based on norms and existing gender roles. In this process, individuals are both positioned by the discourses they hear from their surroundings and actively position themselves in relation to these discourses. In the context of early childhood, children often explore their gendered subject positions in order to be recognized as socially competent. The social contexts in which children find themselves, particularly classroom interactions and adult mediation, play an active role in shaping this process. At this point, based on Davies' (2003) theoretical framework, this study examines how preschool teachers

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

conceptualize gender equality and how these understandings are reflected in classroom practices. Additionally, we aim to see how these practices shape children's gender-related discourse and behavior.

Current study

The purpose of this study is to examine preschool teachers' classroom practices related to gender equity and the implications of these practices for both teachers and children. As a case study, this research simultaneously explores the development of teachers' awareness and the potential shifts and transformations in children's classroom interactions. The following research questions are investigated:

- How do preschool teachers engage with gender equity within their classroom practices?
- In what ways do preschoolers construct, negotiate, and challenge gender norms through classroom interactions?

Method

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design. According to Creswell (2007), a case study is a qualitative approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents, and produces a detailed description or identifies emerging themes specific to the case. In line with this definition, the current study was conducted within a single institutional setting, a university-affiliated preschool, and explored in depth how preschool teachers implemented gender equality practices in their classrooms. Multiple qualitative data sources, including interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations, were used to comprehensively understand the phenomenon. The study was designed as a single-case embedded design (Yin, 2018), with each classroom, defined by an individual teacher's implementation of gender equality practices, serving as an embedded unit of analysis. This structure enabled a focused examination of how gender-related pedagogical strategies unfolded within distinct classroom contexts.

Participants

This study was conducted in a university-affiliated preschool in the southeastern province of Türkiye. The participants included five preschool teachers and the children in their classrooms. Each teacher was responsible for one classroom. Teachers were recruited voluntarily and expressed a willingness to engage in reflective practices to promote gender equality in their classrooms. All five teachers were female, held bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or child development, and had between one and three years of professional teaching experience. Their ages ranged from 23 to 27. The classrooms included between 7 and 14 children, with 60 children (31 girls, 29 boys) participating in the study. The children were between 36 and 71 months of age. They predominantly came from middle- to high-socioeconomic backgrounds, as most of their parents were employed as

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

academic or administrative staff at the university. To ensure confidentiality, all teacher names presented in this article are pseudonyms. Teacher and classroom profiles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Teacher and classroom profiles

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Highest education level	Teaching experience (years)	Classroom size	Child age (month)
Lale	Bachelor's degree	1	7	36-38
Defne	Bachelor's degree	2	13	48-60
Bahar	Bachelor's degree	1	14	36-44
Papatya	Bachelor's degree	1	13	40-48
Yasemin	Bachelor's degree	3	13	60-71

The preschool that was attended by this research adopted an eclectic educational approach and followed a full-day schedule. The curriculum used integrated emotion-focused and nature-based learning principles. Each classroom implemented a weekly instructional plan tailored to the children's developmental levels and individual characteristics. Two researchers from the university's faculty of education systematically reviewed and supported these plans and served as educational coordinators for the school.

Data collection tools

Multiple qualitative data collection tools were employed. To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' classroom opinions and practices, as well as potential transformations that occur throughout the implementation of gender equality-focused activities. The use of various instruments allowed for methodological triangulation (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) and contributed to a nuanced, context-rich portrayal of both teacher and child experiences in preschool settings.

Reflective journals

Throughout the intervention process, teachers were asked to keep reflective journals in which they recorded their thoughts, feelings, and observations about the gender-themed activities they implemented every week. To this end, each teacher was given a personal journal, which was returned to the researchers at the end of the study. Teachers were encouraged to take notes, particularly on children's responses to the activities, their interactions with peers, and any noticeable changes in classroom dynamics. They were also asked to record any points they found noteworthy in their observations throughout the week outside of the activities. These journals served as a valuable resource for understanding the teachers' experiences and encouraging them to reflect on their own experiences.

Classroom observations

The researchers conducted systematic observations during the implementation phase of the activities in the classrooms to examine classroom discourse related to gender roles and stereotypes. A structured observation protocol was used to maintain consistency across different classroom settings.

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

The observations focused particularly on how teachers articulated gender-equitable or gender-stereotypical messages and how children responded to these cues. Field notes were taken during and immediately following each observation session to capture both descriptive details and reflective impressions. Observations were carried out weekly in each classroom. In total, 20 classroom activities were observed, four per participating teacher. The duration of these observed sessions ranged from 18 to 36 minutes.

Interviews

Following the completion of the intervention, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with each participating teacher to evaluate their reflections. The interviews aimed to reveal perceived changes in gender awareness, changes observed in children's behavior or discourse, difficulties encountered during the intervention, and suggestions for future interventions. The interview guide was prepared by the researchers in line with the relevant literature. The guide, which initially consisted of 15 questions, was presented to three experts working in the field of preschool education. Three questions that were believed to be similar and repetitive were suggested to be removed by the experts. Some corrections were made to the wording of the questions. The final version of the interview guide consisted of 12 open-ended questions organized under four thematic areas: (1) practice and pedagogical reflection, (2) observations of children's responses and interactions, (3) challenges encountered and support needs, and (4) general reflections. Each interview lasted between 30 and 42 minutes. With the participants' consent, audio recordings were made and transcribed verbatim.

Procedure

The Ethics Committee of the Humanities and Social Sciences at the university approved this study. Prior to implementation, the researchers visited the participating preschools and provided detailed information about the study's purpose, scope, and procedures. Five preschool teachers who were interested in gender equality and wanted to enrich their classroom practices volunteered to participate. Each teacher signed an informed consent form stating that they understood the study and were participating voluntarily.

The implementation phase lasted four weeks. During this period, each teacher was asked to design and implement one activity focused on gender equality per week. The teachers incorporated these activities into their regular teaching plans. Before each session, they received formative feedback from the research team, which consisted of two faculty members who also served as academic coordinators at the school. Thus, teachers and researchers collaborated to develop each activity, ensuring its developmental appropriateness and alignment with the goals of gender equality. The activities focused on themes such as toy preferences, colors, domestic roles, and occupations, all of which were addressed with a focus on promoting gender equality. Each teacher planned their own activity by selecting the theme they thought was most needed by the children in their class. The activities were conducted through drama, play, and interactive reading sessions. Depending on the level of participation of the children, the duration of the activities varied between 18 and 36 minutes.

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

During the implementation period, teachers kept reflective journals in which they recorded their observations, the challenges they encountered, and their changing perspectives. In parallel, researchers conducted systematic classroom observations focusing on teacher-child interactions, classroom discourse, and children's behaviors related to gender norms. Field notes were recorded during and immediately after each session. At the end of the four-week implementation, individual interviews were conducted with each teacher.

Data analysis

The qualitative data, collected through interviews, teachers' reflective journals, and classroom observation notes, were analyzed using a thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006). The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than relying on existing theoretical frameworks in the literature. At first, the researchers read all transcripts, and field notes multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the data. Then, initial codes were systematically created across the dataset, capturing key features related to the study's focus. In subsequent stages, these codes were reviewed, refined, and grouped under general themes reflecting the experiences of teachers and children in gender-themed activities.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, two researchers independently coded the data in the initial phase. Following this, the researchers held a joint analysis meeting where they compared their coding results, identified points of disagreement, and discussed draft themes. Through this collaborative dialogue, the researchers addressed and integrated differences in interpretation into a common thematic framework. Disagreements were resolved through repeated discussions until a consensus was reached. Triangulation of data sources (interviews, diaries, and observations) further enhanced the analytical depth and validity of the findings.

Results

Research findings indicate that activities focused on gender equality in preschool classrooms lead to changes in both teachers' educational practices and awareness, as well as children's understanding of gender. The research findings reveal increased awareness among both children and teachers, as well as occasional resistance from children. The findings are organized around three key themes that reflect the multifaceted nature of the transformation: (1) Confronting Invisible Stereotypes and Transforming Practice, (2) Children’s Emerging Gender Consciousness, and (3) Negotiating Gendered Preferences and Resistance.

Confronting invisible stereotypes and transforming practice

The findings revealed that as teachers implemented activities focused on gender equality, they began to critically examine gender stereotypes they had not previously noticed and classroom practices they had labeled as “natural” or “normal.” This process served not only as an intervention aimed at children's perceptions of gender equality, but also as a learning experience in which teachers reviewed their own practices and awareness.

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

Most teachers became aware of how their everyday language reproduced and perpetuated gender stereotypes during this process. Teacher Lale expressed that she used gendered expressions of affection and had never questioned their meanings until this training: *"I would say 'my son' to my male students and 'my princess' or 'my sweet bird' to the girls.* Now I've started paying attention to that." Such reflections show that teachers are beginning to recognize how well-intentioned but gendered language can reinforce binary divisions. Similarly, teacher Defne said she realized that the praise she used for children contained implicit gender messages: *"I would say 'you look beautiful today' to girls and 'you look handsome' to boys. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but then I started to think that this could reinforce stereotypes. So, during the implementation process, I tried to tone down these kinds of comments."* Another moment of realization for teacher Defne came when she objected to a student using the expression *"police uncles"* (referring to male police officers): *"One of the children said, 'Teacher, it's not just police uncles, police aunts come too.' That's when I realized that, without meaning to, my language was reinforcing gender roles."*

Findings also showed that teachers experienced changes not only in their discourse but in their day-to-day classroom practices. Teacher Bahar shared how she became more intentional about promoting gender equity in ordinary conversations with children: *"One child mentioned that her father had set the table for dinner. In the past, I would've just said 'Oh, really?' or 'How nice,' and moved on. But this time, I started a discussion about equality in household roles."* This example demonstrates how teachers began to consciously reconstruct pedagogical interactions through a gender-sensitive lens.

Some teachers also intervened in the physical layout and materials of the classroom to disrupt gendered patterns. Teacher Lale, for example, revised the learning centers after noticing that girls predominantly played in the kitchen area while boys gravitated toward toy cars. *"I temporarily removed the kitchen toys and brought in plush animals and Legos instead. The girls liked playing with cars, so I added more of those as well."* This behavior demonstrates a growing awareness of how classroom organization can subtly reinforce gender roles and how purposeful and conscious changes can create more inclusive play opportunities.

Participating teachers saw the implementation process not as a temporary intervention but as part of their ongoing professional growth. Teacher Papatya mentioned that the experience gave her a new insight: *"Gender stereotypes affect who we are, deeply. To overcome them, we need to think about and design activities around these issues, at every age."* Teacher Defne's experience is an example of a more profound implementation transformation. Previously inclined to directly correct children's gendered comments, she began shifting toward a more reflective approach: *"Instead of suppressing what they say, I now try to let them express themselves freely. I want to understand why they think the way they do."* This change emphasizes the teacher's evolving role as a facilitator of critical thinking. The teacher expressed how this change reshaped his professional identity as follows: *"From now on, I will not try to erase children's ideas. I will try to understand what lies behind them. I am not the same as I used to be."*

Although teacher Yasemin did not mention a dramatic transformation, it is clear from her statements that this process has led to subtle conflicts with accepted norms. She described feeling uncomfortable for a moment when a male student tied his long hair back: *"It felt strange for a moment.*

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

But then I thought that it was his choice and that I should respect it." This moment reveals that even teachers who see themselves as egalitarian can become more aware of the silent and often unnoticed influence of gender norms on their perceptions.

Children's emerging gender consciousness

The findings show that implementing activities focused on gender equality in preschool classrooms supports children in developing a more flexible and inclusive understanding of gender. This transformation became particularly evident as children began to inquire about gendered assumptions related to toys, housework, occupations, and colors. Notably, this critical thinking process occurred not only through adult intervention but also often through children's own interactions, such as correction, questioning, and redefinition among themselves.

In several classrooms, children were observed correcting one another's gender-stereotypical remarks. For instance, in Teacher Defne's classroom, when one child stated, *"Only boys can be police officers,"* another promptly responded, "*No, girls can be police officers too. I saw one at the mall."* Teacher Bahar similarly noted, *"Now, when one child says, 'girls can't drive cars,' another quickly replies, 'Why not? My mom drives.'"* A compelling example of peer-mediated change occurred between a pair of twins in Teacher Bahar's classroom. Initially, the boy told his sister, *"You can't be a police officer. You're a girl."* Yet, following the intervention period, he revised his stance and remarked, *"I'll be the boy police officer, and you can be the girl police officer,"* signaling a significant shift toward accepting non-gendered professional aspirations.

Classroom discussions led by teachers, particularly those focused on children's literature, have played an important role in shaping children's gender understanding. Rather than simply conveying messages about equality, these interactions have provided opportunities for children to engage in dialogue, listen to and questioning each other's assumptions, and develop more inclusive gender understanding. In a read-aloud activity of the book *Boys and Girls Can Do Anything* (Gourion, 2024) led by teacher Defne, children were asked to look at the cover illustration and guess the gender of the characters. The children's responses revealed that their gender perceptions were based on stereotypical visual cues such as hair length, clothing, and ballet, while also demonstrating the development of their peers' ability to question and reflect on one another's thoughts.

Teacher: *Do you think the person on the cover is a boy or a girl? Why?*
Child 1: *A boy, because the hair is short.*
Child 2: *A girl, because she's doing ballet.*
Child 3: *The shoes are green, both boys and girls can wear green.*
Child 7: *She's wearing tights and doing ballet. So, she's a girl.*
Child 8: *I think he's a boy.*
Teacher: *Why do you think he's a boy?*
Child 8: *Because his hair is short.*
Child 7: *But girls can have short hair too, like some of our classmates.*
Child 8: *Maybe… but the pants are grey, so maybe a boy.*

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

These exchanges revealed how children's initial assumptions could be softened and reevaluated through peer interaction, leading to more inclusive understandings.

In another activity reported by Teacher Bahar, the class read *Izzy Gizmo* (Jones and Ogilvie, 2023). When prompted with *"Who comes to mind when you think of a repair person?*", children initially answered *"my dad"* or *"the repairman."* However, after reading about Gizmo, a girl inventor, responses shifted to statements like *"Girls can fix things too, like Gizmo."* In a related discussion following the book *This Is My Dad* (Berk, 2020), children responded to the question *"Can dads wear purple pants?"* with a range of views. One child insisted, *"No, that's inappropriate,"* while another replied, *"It's not! Dads can wear colors too."* The teacher reinforced this point, saying, *"Colors are for everyone. I'm wearing blue pants. Are they just for boys?"* prompting the children to agree that all colors could be worn by anyone, regardless of gender.

Changes were also observed in children's toy preferences and play patterns. Teacher Lale recorded that at the beginning of the implementation, the only boy in her classroom avoided kitchen sets. However, after replacing those with plush toys and building blocks, children, regardless of gender, began to play collaboratively. *"Now the girls are fixing toy cars with screwdrivers. There is no toy segregation anymore,"* she noted. Similarly, in Teacher Yasemin's classroom, boys actively participated in pretend play and caregiving roles, with several stating, *"There's no such thing as' girl toys 'or' boy toys."*

Perceptions of domestic roles and professions also underwent significant shifts. Teacher Papatya observed that at the start of the implementation, children frequently made gender-based claims such as *"moms cook"* and *"only men are repairer."* Over time, these beliefs gave way to more inclusive views. Many children eventually stating that "roles should be shared."

Notably, individual children who embodied gender equality played a key role in disrupting norms. In Teacher Defne's classroom, a boy with long hair who enjoyed wearing pink and playing with dolls became a powerful role model for the other children. *"I could not reach some children with my words,"* Teacher Defne said, *"but he reached them just by being himself."* In addition to peer and teacher influences, the findings also revealed the significant role of media in shaping children's understanding of gender. For example, Teacher Bahar noted that girls in her class expressed a strong preference for the color blue, not because of its traditional association with masculinity, but due to the character Elsa from *Frozen*. She explained, *"There are no gender stereotypes about colors in my class. The girls love blue, especially because of Elsa. They walk around saying, 'I love blue!' because Elsa has blue hair and wears a blue dress."* Teacher Bahar further reflected that media could similarly shape boys' preferences: *"If Spider-Man were pink instead of red, most boys would probably love pink."* These observations underscore how popular media can both reinforce and disrupt conventional gender norms in young children's thinking.

Persistent tensions in gendered preferences

While many children exhibited flexible thinking and a growing willingness to questioning gender norms, the data also revealed ongoing tensions and contradictions in their preferences,

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

particularly within the context of play. These tensions did not always manifest in explicit statements; instead, they became evident in moments of hesitation, subtle resistance, or selective participation when children were encouraged to engage in roles or activities that challenged traditional gender expectations. For instance, in a structured activity facilitated by Teacher Defne, two separate play tables were arranged, one featuring toys stereotypically associated with girls (e.g., dolls, kitchen items) and the other with those linked to boys (e.g., trucks, tools). Children were first asked to switch tables and play, then later given the freedom to choose where to play. While some children engaged out of curiosity, others appeared reluctant. One boy stated plainly, *"I don't want to play at the girls' table."* Although the children verbally agreed that *"anyone can play anywhere,"* Teacher Defne observed that when given free choice, most girls returned to the table with "girls' toys," and boys gravitated toward the "boys' toys."

A similar pattern emerged in Teacher Papatya's classroom during a profession-themed activity. Children were invited to select from four stations, chef, mechanic, operator, and hairdresser, each representing a different occupation. When one girl chose the chef table, she stated, "I came to this table because I'm a girl. Boys can't be chefs," and even asked a male peer who had joined her to leave. These moments illustrate how internalized gender norms can subtly, yet powerfully, influence peer dynamics and limit cross-gender participation, even in inclusive classroom environments.

Although gender-stereotyped beliefs were observed among children of all genders, teachers consistently noted that such beliefs appeared more rigid and deeply entrenched among boys. Teacher Defne expressed this disparity: "With boys, the gender stereotypes are stronger. If they like blue, they absolutely won't use pink. And when those same ideas are reinforced at home, it's much harder to break through." Her observation points to the way gendered expectations are socially reinforced and internalized, making them more difficult to unlearn.

Teacher Lale's three-phase toy activity further underscored this gendered asymmetry. In the first phase, traditionally "masculine" toys such as trucks and tools were placed around the classroom. Girls were observed playing freely with these items. In the second phase, when kitchen sets and food toys were introduced, the girls quickly engaged, while the boys largely avoided them. In the final phase, all toys were made available. Again, girls used a variety of toys without concern, while boys gravitated exclusively toward those aligned with masculine-coded play. Teacher Lale concluded: *"The girls didn't draw boundaries. But the boys were still saying things like, 'This toy is for girls,' and wouldn't touch it."* This finding was echoed in Teacher Yasemin's classroom, particularly during a discussion about the piloting. One boy remarked, *"Girls can be pilots, but they don't drive well. They might crash. Boys don't crash."* His statement revealed how gender norms are already forming in the preschool period. Even when girls were acknowledged as capable of participating in certain roles, they were still framed as inherently less competent.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendation

This study reveals that practices focusing on gender equality in preschool classrooms not only help children develop a more inclusive understanding of gender roles but also initiate a process of critical thinking and transformation among teachers. Although many children have begun to question

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

stereotypes and adopt more flexible perspectives through teachers' guidance, interactions with peers, and gender-themed picture books, the findings also reveal that gender-based tensions shaped by social expectations and reinforced by peer dynamics continue to exist, especially among boys. For teachers, this process served as a kind of professional development opportunity, enabling them to reevaluate implicit gender messages in their talk, classroom organization, and daily routines. These findings highlight the potential of intentional educational practices to challenge gender norms while also emphasizing the need for broader and more systematic efforts to sustain such transformations.

The findings show that gender-focused activities in preschool classrooms are not only interventions targeting children but also initiate a meaningful reflective learning process for teachers. As teachers began to engage with gender equality content, they started to notice how their language use and routine classroom practices contributed to the reproduction of gender stereotypes. This aligns with previous research emphasizing that practices often perceived as "neutral" in early childhood education, such as forms of praise, modes of address, and classroom organization, can in fact reinforce normative gender expectations (Aina and Cameron, 2011; Callahan and Nicholas, 2019). Gansen (2019) similarly highlights how teachers' behavioral expectations and gender-based disciplinary strategies contribute to the embodiment of gender within classroom contexts. In line with this, Hardardottir and Pétursdóttir's (2014) long-term observational study demonstrated how everyday practices in preschool settings normalized binary gender divisions by categorizing children into "boys" and "girls." These findings largely align with Davies' (2003) poststructuralist perspective, which argues that gender is not an innate characteristic but rather a performative and relational construct shaped and sustained through repeated social and discursive practices. From this perspective, teachers' language and interaction patterns play a structural role in reinforcing or challenging gender norms. In the present study, teachers' efforts to critically examine their own practices signified not only the development of individual awareness but also a structural step toward creating more equitable learning environments. As Warin and Adriany (2017) argue, achieving gender equality in early childhood education requires both cultivating gender-conscious educators and implementing gender-responsive teaching practices. This study, which demonstrates that teachers' self-awareness can play a crucial role in transforming habits that perpetuate gender inequality, makes a significant contribution to the literature on teacher-led change.

The findings emphasize that children's developing gender awareness does not occur in isolation, but is embedded in broader socialization processes, including teacher-guided activities, peer dialogues, reflective storytelling, and daily interactions in early educational settings. As noted by Hill Jr and Bartow Jacobs (2020), young children typically enter preschool with internalized binary understandings of gender. In this context, the strategies educators employ, particularly during playtime and classroom routines, can either reinforce these normative frameworks or create opportunities for children to develop more inclusive and fluid understandings. One of the most important findings of this study highlights the role that gender-themed picture books and teacher-facilitated discussions play in challenging children's stereotypes. For example, during the read-aloud of the book *"Boys and Girls Can Do Anything"* (Gourion, 2024), children initially identified characters' genders using superficial indicators such as hair length or clothing color. However, as the conversation progressed, peers began to question each other's reasoning and shifted to collaborative thinking. This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the role of children's literature in shaping

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

gender perceptions and reinforcing or challenging cultural norms (Aina and Cameron, 2011; Kneeskern and Reeder, 2022). Kim (2016) similarly found that literary discussions about gender-themed picture books in preschool classrooms encouraged critical thinking and reduced stereotypical beliefs. The current study expands this literature by showing that such reflective participation can emerge not only with adult support but also through peer interaction. As children correct, question, or confirm each other's interpretations of gendered characters and roles, peer interactions themselves become powerful tools for social learning. This highlights the importance of considering both explicit strategies and implicit peer dynamics when examining how gender awareness is actively co-constructed in early childhood settings (Chapman, 2016).

Despite classroom practices aimed at promoting flexibility in gender norms, the findings of this study reveal that some children remain strongly attached to traditional gender roles. This attachment is particularly evident in play settings. While many children express inclusive views verbally (e.g., “everyone can play with any toy”), the behaviors they exhibit during free play often align with gender stereotypes. When encouraged to participate in activities that challenge these expectations, a few children showed hesitation, discomfort, or outright resistance. This pattern was particularly evident in boys who showed a strong aversion to toys perceived as “feminine,” completely avoiding them or engaging with them only briefly when they believed they were not being observed. These findings are consistent with those of Skočajić et al. (2020), who observed that boys are significantly more likely than girls to stereotypically classify masculine toys and to impose stricter peer sanctions for behavior that deviates from norms. One possible explanation for this is that boys face harsher social penalties when they violate gender norms. Martin and Fabes (2001) found that boys who exhibited feminine behaviors in preschool settings were criticized more frequently by both their peers and teachers, while girls with gender-nonconforming preferences were generally praised very little or not at all. This finding is supported by Sullivan et al. (2018), who found that adults found boys who did not conform to gender norms less likable than boys who did conform to gender norms. This finding highlights implicit biases that may influence children's socialization experiences. These interrelated dynamics, peer control, adult reinforcement, and internalized norms, create an asymmetrical social environment where boys' gender expressions are more strictly regulated. Therefore, promoting gender equality in early childhood education requires not only providing inclusive materials and activities but also educational strategies that acknowledge and address the relational and emotional risks children face when they challenge normative gender boundaries.

Based on the findings of this study, multifaceted and sustainable strategies are needed to promote gender equality in early childhood education. First, gender equality should be planned as one of the core components of teacher preparation programs and professional development programs. Teachers need support to reflect on their implicit biases and develop more inclusive practices. Picturebooks serve as powerful tools for initiating discussions about gender norms. However, these books must be carefully selected and analyzed for how gender roles are represented before being used in classroom settings. At this point, teachers need to be equipped to evaluate and select high-quality books that depict non-stereotypical characters and narratives. Classroom environments should also be intentionally structured to support gender equality; for example, play areas that do not reinforce binary gender norms and learning materials that are organized in an equitable manner are important. Efforts to promote gender equality should not be limited to the classroom. The active involvement of

Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2025), 16 (2), 3125-3146.
Araştırma Makalesi / Research Paper

families is crucial, particularly in reducing the social pressure boys face when engaging in non-traditional gender behaviors. Awareness-raising efforts targeting parents can help eliminate stigmas associated with boys deviating from normative gender roles. Finally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of classroom practices are crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of gender equality initiatives in early childhood education settings.

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DOI. 10.51460/baebd.1704009

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