

Results of the Interviews with the Academics of Early Childhood Education in Turkey

The qualitative interviews are conducted at two vocational high schools for girls and at five early childhood education department of universities in different cities. The interviewees were: 2 technical assistant managers and 2 teachers of vocational high schools, a male dean of an education faculty, the dean and the head of the early childhood education department, 2 heads of the department, 2 professors at the early childhood education department and a male professor at the faculty of education. The majority of the academics in the early childhood education field are female.

The official term of the early childhood education in turkey is "preschool education". During the interviews the term preschool is used.

The questions and the answers were mainly about the concept of the gender, the aspects of early childhood education, the men in the field, the curriculum and the implementation and the obstacles in the field. Here is the summary of eleven interviews:

Gender Concept

Four out of eleven interviewees, three of whom teach at universities where the language of education is English, were aware of the concept of gender. The fourth one teaches a course on sexual health which includes also gender issues at a university in the capital city. The others perceived it as equality between women and men. And it is argued frequently that there is not any discrimination among children at this age group.

Among high school teachers and managers the term "gender" was not known well, therefore it had to be explained at some points before the interview.

Aspects of the Early Childhood Education

The current situation in early childhood education in Turkey inevitably changed the direction of our interviews into the difficulties in early childhood education itself. Specially the academics in universities emphasized the importance of early childhood education and the necessity of making it part of the compulsory basic education. Almost all of the interviewees had positive approach on using the term early childhood education instead of preschool education. All the heads of department have been even making efforts in order to change it. In the current situation, big proportion of preschool teachers are highschool graduates which is seen as a problem by all of the university professors. They believe that preschool teachers should be university graduates, and highschool graduates should be employed as their helpers. A university professor also draw attention to the common use of 'care' instead of 'education' in early childhood field which affects the status of the profession negatively in society. This naturally leads the profession to be less attractive.

Men in the field

The vocational high schools in preschool field have been only for girls traditionally. There are some technical vocational schools for girls where the boys can attend. They usually attend more "masculine" field and never choose child development department which is considered as "feminine" by boys. There were any male teachers in child development department in these high schools.

The average proportion of the male students at the universities where the interviews have been conducted is around 10%. Currently the academic positions are completely filled by women in these universities except one foreign male professor. However it is planned by universities to employ several male PhD students as soon as they finished their studies.

All of the interviewees are for more men in the field both in the academic and practical levels for various reasons. Some believe that male teachers are needed for physical activities at practical level. Some others think that male teachers could be role-models for boys. A high school teacher pointed out that a mother can not rely on a man for the care of the child. A university professor expresses the need of the complete change in the approach of the society toward early childhood education.

Curriculum

The high schools' curriculum does not contain any specific course about gender issue. There are courses about children psychology and development. The managers are not against the integration of gender concept in such a course. At the two universities in which the language of education is English the gender concept is integrated in the courses by the initiative of the academics. A dean believes the priority of the early childhood education is not gender issue but the institutionalization. An academic insist on the necessity of a course on a every kind of discrimination in which should contain also gender. An other academic is actually teaching a course on gender at the education faculty but it is not a compulsory course for the early childhood education department students.

Generally all of the interviewees are for the integration of the gender in a selective course rather than a specific course on gender.

Obstacles in Preschool Education Expressed by the Interviewees:

Majority of the interviewees complained about the general quality of the education system in Turkey. Overpopulation, bureaucracy, and some religious perceptions were pointed as the obstacles by one of the deans at one of the faculties of education. He said that it is even impossible to provide enough schools for primary school children let alone pre-schoolers.

One of the professors at a capital university complained about the lack of continuity in educational policy which according to her is a must. She drew the attention to the necessity of employing university graduates in pre-school institutions instead of high school graduates, and added that parents should encourage their children to choose this area of study at university since there are not enough graduates to cover the need at the practical level.