

Araştırma Makalesi

Parental Choices and the Dynamics of Early Childhood Education and Care in Türkiye: Home-Based Ecec or Institutional Ecec?

Nazlı KAZANOĞLU¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-0176-0816

DOI: 10.54752/ct.1842775

Abstract: Early childhood education and care (ECEC), one of the core components of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, refers to organized and sustained services that support the learning, development, and well-being of children. The short- and long-term benefits of investing in ECEC have been widely emphasized in both academic literature and reports by international organizations. However, in Türkiye, ECEC policies and practices remain fragmented, regionally uneven, and institutionally weak. In this context, this paper aims to examine the dynamics shaping parents' ECEC choices in Türkiye, whether institutional (preschool, daycare, nursery) or home-based (relatives or paid caregivers). Drawing on 600 surveys and 58 in-depth interviews, the findings reveal that parents' decisions are shaped by an intersection of structural and cultural factors. Limited public capacity, high private costs, and inflexible work schedules push families toward

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, : İstanbul Nişantaşı Üniversitesi İktisadi, İdari ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü, nazli.kazanoglu@nisantasi.edu.tr

KAZANOĞLU, N., (2026) "Parental Choices and the Dynamics of Early Childhood Education and Care in Türkiye. Home-Based Ecec or Institutional Ecec?", *Çalışma ve Toplum*, Sayı: 89, C.2, s.777-806

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
Makale Geliş Tarihi:15.12.2025 - Makale Kabul Tarihi:03.04.2025

home-based arrangements, while concerns over emotional security, developmental ‘readiness,’ and motherhood norms remain decisive in shaping their choices.

Keywords: child well-being, early childhood education and care, European Union, EU social policy model, ECEC, home-based ECEC, institutional ECEC, SDG4.

Türkiye’de Erken Çocukluk Eğitimi ve Bakımında Ebeveyn Tercihleri ve Dinamikleri: Ev mi Kurum mu?

ÖZ: Erken çocukluk eğitimi ve bakımı (EÇEB), Birleşmiş Milletler Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Amaçları’nın temel bileşenlerinden biri olup, doğumdan okul çağına kadar çocukların öğrenme, gelişim ve iyi oluşlarını destekleyen örgütlü ve sürekli hizmetleri ifade eder. EÇEB’e yapılan yatırımların kısa ve uzun vadeli faydaları hem akademik literatürde hem de uluslararası kuruluşların raporlarında geniş biçimde vurgulanmaktadır. Ancak Türkiye’de EÇEB politikası ve uygulamaları parçalı, bölgesel olarak dengesiz ve kurumsal açıdan yetersizdir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma Türkiye’de ebeveynlerin EÇEB tercihlerini – kurumsal (anaokulu, gündüz bakım evi, kreş) ya da ev temelli (akraba veya ücretli bakıcı) – belirleyen dinamikleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. 600 anket ve 58 derinlemesine görüşmeye dayanan bulgular, ebeveyn kararlarının yapısal ve kültürel etkenlerin iç içe geçtiği bir bağlamda şekillendiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sınırlı kamu kapasitesi, yüksek özel ücretler ve esnek olmayan çalışma saatleri aileleri ev temelli çözümlere yöneltirken; duygusal güvenlik, gelişimsel ‘hazır oluş’ ve annelik normlarıyla ilişkili endişeler kararlarda belirleyici olmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: çocuk refahı, erken çocukluk eğitimi ve bakımı, Avrupa Birliği, AB sosyal politika modeli, EÇEB, ev temelli EÇEB, kurum-temelli EÇEB, SKA4.

Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC), one of the core components of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, refers to organized and sustained services that support the learning, development, and well-being of children. Both the long- and short-term benefits of investing in ECEC have consistently been highlighted not only by a number of notable scholars but also by international organizations including Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, and the European Union (EU). These reports

reveal that high-quality, inclusive ECEC yields substantial individual and societal returns: improved school readiness and attainment, healthier developmental trajectories, higher employment and earnings in adulthood, and stronger gender equality and productivity in the present (Heckman, 2006: 1901; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000:97; OECD, 2017:32; OECD, 2021:25).

Despite this broad consensus, the ECEC enrolment rates in Türkiye remains significantly fragmented and uneven and service ecosystems vary widely by region in terms of affordability, availability, and quality (Alaca and Akbaşlı, 2025:87; Erbil and Göl-Güven, 2025:180). While national strategies have set ambitious targets and recent expansions are noteworthy, gaps persist in sustainable financing, and quality assurance especially for the 0–3 age group. Consequently, families' ECEC practices are mediated not only by access and price but also by institutional trust, social norms, and household resources. This has led to stubbornly low ECEC enrolment rates and concomitant low female labour market rates in Türkiye (Aldıkaçtı- Marshall, 2013:57; Ecevit, 2010:46; İlkaracan, 2010:195). Accordingly, formerly neglected early childhood education and care has gained an exceptional academic interest over the last decade, reflected in the large body of literature ECEC practices in Türkiye (Smits and Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2006:552). Scholars found that age, education and marital status are the key determinants in shaping the ECEC practices (Günay and Bener, 2011:163; Schöber, 2014:221). Yet, there is also a salient research gap not only in relation to rationally-, sociologically- and historically- driven reasons behind individuals' decisions with respect to ECEC practices but also in their expectations from institutional ECEC services. Furthermore, most of the previous research on parents' ECEC trends have been conducted in three big cities Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir and the findings have been generalized to the national level. Although the local dynamics, cultural codes, norms and values play a significant role in shaping parents' choices regarding ECEC, they remain unexamined. Seeking to fill these gaps within the literature, this article aims to explore the underlying dynamics that shape parents' choices regarding ECEC in Türkiye—whether opting for institutional settings such as preschools, daycares, and nurseries, or home-based arrangements provided by relatives or paid caregivers.

In the achievement of this aim, this research has adopted a sequential mixed-method approach, wherein the data are collected through the combination of online structured surveys, and semi-structured in-depth interviews in two linked stages. Relying on the combination of 600 structured online surveys and 58 in-depth interviews with parents with at least one child and active in paid employment from each administrative region of Türkiye, this article contends that

parents' choices between home-based and institutional ECEC in Türkiye are made at the crossroads of structure and culture.

Theoretical Framework

Importance of ECEC

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is widely recognised as a cornerstone of both individual development and societal progress. Beyond supporting children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, ECEC plays a critical role in advancing gender equality, promoting social justice, reducing poverty, supporting women's labour force participation, and strengthening long-term economic sustainability. A broad interdisciplinary literature demonstrates that investment in early education generates multidimensional benefits, ranging from improved life chances and equal opportunities to substantial social and economic returns (Bozan, 2014: 107; Erkan and Kirca, 2010: 101; Heckman, 2015:406).

Neuroscientific research highlights that early childhood is a period of rapid brain development during which neural connections are formed at an unparalleled rate (Lewis, 2006:429; Myers, 2000:82). Between birth and age seven, children are especially receptive to learning, and their cognitive, emotional, and social capacities develop most intensively during this stage (Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu, 2022:112; Mustard, 2002:29). High-quality ECEC provision has been shown to improve later educational outcomes and overall well-being. OECD evidence indicates that students with more than one year of preschool education score significantly higher in mathematics than those without ECEC experience. In Türkiye, PISA 2012 results similarly demonstrate a strong association between ECEC participation and higher academic performance. Comparable findings from the United States further confirm that ECEC participation increases the likelihood of high school completion (Calman and Tarr-Whelan, 2005).

The benefits of ECEC extend well beyond schooling. Heckman (2015:404) argues that early childhood is the most effective period for acquiring essential non-cognitive skills such as self-control, resilience, and sociability, which are critical for long-term productivity and employability. Empirical studies show that individuals who attended ECEC are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes in adulthood. In Türkiye, ECEC participation has also been linked to access to higher-status occupations (Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2009:771). These findings underline that early education contributes not only to academic success but also to lifelong social and economic outcomes.

ECEC also has significant public health implications. Research suggests that children who attend early childhood institutions experience better health outcomes in adulthood, particularly through improved nutrition and early health monitoring among disadvantaged groups (Fogel, 2004:647). By addressing educational and health inequalities simultaneously, ECEC strengthens human capital at the societal level.

From a labour market perspective, inadequate childcare provision is a major barrier to women's employment. Following childbirth, many households shift to single-earner models, typically with women withdrawing from paid work (Edwards, 2015:781). In Türkiye, women's labour force participation drops sharply after the first child, with care responsibilities cited as the primary reason for non-employment (Kazanoğlu, 2021:37). Similar patterns are observed internationally. The expansion of accessible ECEC services enables women to remain in employment, reduces reliance on insecure or part-time work, and supports long-term career progression (Dedeoğlu, 2012:274; Kazanoğlu, 2021:59). Feminist scholarship emphasises that recognising childcare as a core social policy issue is essential for women's empowerment and gender equality (Razavi, 2011:882).

ECEC investment also generates substantial employment effects. Evidence from Türkiye shows that public spending on childcare creates significantly more jobs than investment in construction, with particularly strong impacts on female employment (İlkkaracan et al., 2015:24). Comparable findings from Austria and the United States demonstrate that ECEC expansion stimulates both direct job creation and wider local economic activity. Thus, institutionalised ECEC simultaneously creates employment and enables parents to re-enter the labour market.

The corporate benefits of ECEC further reinforce its importance. Access to reliable childcare reduces absenteeism, increases productivity, lowers employee turnover, and supports women's advancement into leadership positions, which in turn enhances organisational performance (Barsh and Cranston, 2014:2; Friedman, 2013:36).

Overall, ECEC functions as a powerful social equaliser by mitigating early-life disadvantages and improving social mobility. By strengthening families, supporting women's economic participation, improving health outcomes, and fostering sustainable growth, ECEC produces far-reaching societal benefits. Consequently, international organisations such as the OECD, the EU, and the United Nations increasingly frame ECEC as a central policy priority, as reflected in initiatives such as Starting Strong, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and Sustainable Development Goal 4. Yet, the realisation of these widely acknowledged benefits in everyday childcare practices remains uneven and is

shaped by a range of contextual and structural factors. The extent to which families engage with ECEC services depends not only on the availability and design of policy provision but also on how parents interpret, evaluate, and prioritise these benefits. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of ECEC systems requires a closer examination of parental choices and the broader childcare regimes within which these decisions are embedded.

Parental Choices and Childcare Regimes

Building on the multidimensional importance of ECEC outlined above, parental childcare choices emerge as a central analytical lens through which the functioning of ECEC systems can be understood. While a substantial body of literature has demonstrated the developmental, economic, and societal benefits of early childhood education and care, far less attention has been paid to how these benefits are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted at the household level. In practice, access to ECEC does not automatically translate into its utilisation; rather, childcare arrangements are shaped by a complex interaction of structural constraints, institutional configurations, and socio-cultural norms.

A growing body of comparative research demonstrates that parents' preferences between institutional and home-based childcare are influenced by multiple and often overlapping factors. These include affordability, accessibility, quality of services, and working conditions, as well as trust in institutions and perceptions of children's emotional and developmental needs (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004:461; Morgan, 2005:46; Plantenga and Remery, 2009:49). Feminist welfare state literature has long emphasized that care arrangements are deeply gendered, with women continuing to bear the primary responsibility for childcare across different institutional contexts (Daly and Lewis, 2000:284; Lewis, 2009:76; Kazanoğlu, 2021:131). Consequently, parental choices often reflect a negotiation between economic necessity and culturally embedded ideals of motherhood, attachment, and moral responsibility. This aligns with recent research emphasizing the structural nature of women's care burden in Türkiye (Gökmen, 2022:23), as well as policy-oriented studies highlighting the role of institutional childcare in supporting women's employment (Dedeoğlu et al., 2021:23²). In addition to institutional childcare, home-based arrangements also constitute a critical yet often under-theorised dimension of ECEC systems. While much of the literature has focused on expanding access to formal childcare services, a growing body of research highlights the persistence and centrality of home-based care, particularly

²Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/tr/publications/kurumlar-arasi-birlikleri-ile-kadin-istihdamini-desteklemek-erken-cocukluk>

in contexts where public provision is limited, uneven, or costly (Leitner, 2003:260; Saraceno and Keck, 2010:681). These arrangements are typically embedded in familial solidarity networks and rely heavily on women's unpaid labour, thereby reinforcing gendered divisions of care. Importantly, home-based childcare should not be interpreted solely as a residual or fallback option in the absence of institutional provision. Rather, it reflects a complex combination of structural constraints and normative preferences. Concerns about trust, emotional security, and individualized attention frequently lead parents to prioritise kin-based or maternal care, even when formal childcare options are available. In this sense, home-based care operates within a broader moral economy of care, where decisions are shaped not only by economic considerations but also by culturally embedded beliefs about what constitutes appropriate and desirable care for young children (Kazanoğlu and Ketola, 2022:614).

The concept of familialism provides a useful analytical lens for understanding these dynamics. In familialist welfare regimes, care responsibilities are predominantly assigned to families rather than the state or the market, resulting in a strong reliance on informal and home-based care arrangements (Leitner, 2003:357). In such contexts, even when institutional childcare services are available, families may continue to prioritise kin-based or maternal care due to concerns about trust, emotional security, and social norms surrounding early childhood. This suggests that childcare decisions cannot be explained solely through supply-side factors but must also be analysed in relation to deeply rooted cultural expectations and moral economies of care.

In the Turkish context, these dynamics become particularly pronounced. Existing research indicates that childcare preferences are strongly mediated by the intersection of limited public provision, high costs of private services, and persistent gender norms that position childcare as a maternal responsibility (Aybars and Tsarouhas, 2010:752; Buğra and Keyder, 2006:216; Dedeoğlu, 2012:281; Korkmaz and Demiryürek, 2025:311). While structural barriers such as affordability and accessibility play a significant role, cultural narratives surrounding motherhood, trust, and children's emotional well-being continue to shape parental decision-making processes. Taken together, these insights suggest that the distinction between choice and constraint in childcare decisions is far from clear-cut. In contexts where institutional childcare is limited in capacity and financially inaccessible for many households, home-based care cannot always be interpreted as a purely voluntary preference. Rather, it often reflects a constrained form of choice shaped by structural inequalities. At the same time, even among higher-income groups, cultural norms surrounding motherhood and emotional care contribute to the persistence of home-based arrangements. This indicates that

childcare decisions are produced at the intersection of necessity and normativity, rather than being reducible to either dimension alone. Despite this growing body of literature, there remains a significant gap in understanding how parents actively navigate and reconcile these structural and cultural factors in their everyday decision-making processes. In particular, limited attention has been paid to how parents interpret the trade-offs between institutional and home-based care under varying socio-economic conditions. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to provide a more nuanced and empirically grounded analysis of parental childcare choices in Türkiye by examining both the structural constraints and the subjective meanings that shape these decisions.

The State of ECEC in Türkiye

In Türkiye, the legal framework surrounding nursery and early childhood education rights remains fragmented and somewhat ambiguous. While the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (1982) guarantees the right to education and stipulates that primary education is compulsory and free for all citizens (Article 42), this obligation does not extend to ECEC (Ceylan et al., 2019:307; Çemrek and Özaydın, 2019:564; Üstün, 2020:1567). In other words, nurseries and preschools are not recognized as a compulsory component of formal education. Legally, services for children aged 0–3 are primarily regulated under the Ministry of Family and Social Services, whereas preschool education for children aged 3–6 falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). Preschool institutions are defined as part of ‘non-compulsory formal education,’ meaning that while they are institutionally located within the education system, attendance is not mandated by law. Over the past two decades, national development plans and education strategies have repeatedly underlined the importance of expanding access to early childhood education, and the MoNE has set ambitious targets for increasing enrolment rates, particularly in the 5-year-old age group. Nonetheless, the lack of constitutional obligation and the dual authority shared between MoNE and social services has limited the systematic institutionalization of nursery rights (Göl-Güven, 2018:57; Ulus and Çetin, 2022:136). Consequently, Turkey remains behind many OECD and EU countries where early childhood education is legally mandated and universally accessible, reflecting an ongoing policy debate about whether ECEC should be fully integrated into the compulsory education system.

This afore-mentioned fragmented structure of Türkiye’s legal framework on ECEC is clearly reflected in families’ ECEC practices across country. While the number of ECEC centres has grown steadily in recent years, enrolment rates remain strikingly low when measured against the overall child population within

the country. In 2024, there were a total of 18,886 ECEC institutions operating in Türkiye. Of these, 12,046 were public and 6,820 were private. A closer look at this distribution reveals that among the total number of these institutions, 6,097 functioned as private kindergartens, while 19,510 operated as nursery classes within existing schools. Within the private sector specifically, 4,520 were kindergartens and 1,319 were nursery classes. In addition to these public and private ECEC institutions under the authority of the MoNE, there were also 9,259 independent centres providing early childhood services. Enrolment figures illustrate the scope of participation across these categories. Out of Türkiye's 1,954,202 children aged 0–6, approximately 215,528 were enrolled in private kindergartens, 793,520 in public kindergartens, 55,882 in private nursery classes, and 643,488 in public nursery classes. Furthermore, 245,784 children received ECEC services through independent centres (MoNE, 2025:17)³. Taken together, these figures show that just over one-third of the total child population aged 0–6 is enrolled in formal ECEC institutions, underscoring both the progress made in expanding services and the significant gaps that remain when compared with OECD and EU averages.

Regional disparities compound this national-level picture. ECEC participation rates vary significantly across provinces, with some of Türkiye's most developed cities exhibiting significantly higher enrolment rates than the national average. For instance, in Istanbul, there are 4,997 early ECEC centres serving 320,104 enrolled children, while in Izmir there are 1,644 centres with 89,873 students and in Ankara 2,445 centres with 120,691 students. By contrast, in smaller provinces the figures are significantly lower: Bartın hosts only 107 centres with 3,382 enrolled children, Çankırı has 79 centres with 3,588 children, and Bayburt records merely 53 centres with 1,658 children (ibid:26). These statistics reveal striking regional disparities in the distribution of ECEC services across Türkiye. Metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir unsurprisingly have a larger absolute number of institutions and enrolled children, reflecting both their demographic size and greater service demand. However, the relatively lower enrolment figures in provinces such as Bartın, Çankırı, and Bayburt highlight structural inequalities in access to early education, which cannot be explained by population size alone. Limited institutional capacity, uneven resource allocation, and geographic disadvantages appear to play an important role in shaping these gaps. Such disparities indicate that Türkiye's ECEC system remains highly uneven,

³ Retrieved from:

https://sgb.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2025_03/19143714_meb_istatistikleri_organ_e_gitim_2023_2024.pdf

with children in less developed provinces facing significant barriers to participation.

Beyond geography, a wide array of demographic and socio-economic factors influence access to ECEC. Numerous studies demonstrate that household wealth, parental education levels, and maternal employment status are decisive in determining whether a child attends ECEC. Research conducted jointly by AÇEV, and the Education Reform Initiative (ERG) shows a strong correlation between family socio-economic status and ECEC participation. According to their findings, children from the wealthiest quintile are far more likely to attend preschool than those from the poorest quintile. For instance, while 33 percent of three-year-olds from the richest 20 percent of households are enrolled in ECEC, the figure is only 2 percent among their peers from the poorest 20 percent. At age four, the gap widens further, with participation rates of 71 percent and 17 percent respectively. By age five, the disparity persists, although it narrows somewhat due to the expansion of state-supported provision for this age group: enrolment stands at 92 percent in the richest quintile compared with 69 percent among the poorest (AÇEV and ERG, 2017:13⁴). These findings confirm that ECEC participation in Türkiye is heavily stratified along class lines, privileging middle- and upper-income families while leaving children from disadvantaged households underserved. Parental education, particularly that of mothers, further shapes patterns of participation. Children whose mothers have completed secondary or tertiary education are significantly more likely to attend ECEC, regardless of household wealth. In addition, maternal employment plays a dual role, both increasing demand for childcare and correlating with higher levels of education and income. Conversely, mothers outside the labour force are far less likely to enrol their children, either because of affordability constraints or prevailing cultural norms that associate childcare primarily with maternal responsibility.

Taken together, these dynamics underscore the structural and demographical factors that continue to suppress ECEC participation in Türkiye. Yet, in addition to these structural and demographic factors, families' cultural attitudes and subjective preferences have also significantly shaped ECEC practices across Türkiye, which the paper proceeds with.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.acev.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Türkiyede-0-6-Yaş-Cocuğun-Durumu.24.10.17.pdf>

Research Design

This study adopts a sequential mixed-method approach, which has the advantage of providing a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the research question through collecting data by using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The sequential mixed-method approach is considered as the most appropriate and applicable approach to this proposed research because mixing quantitative and qualitative methods are better in terms of data triangulation. While the quantitative approach of the research design provides the numerical data, the qualitative approach gives underlying reasons, thus the researcher achieves complete evidence and gains both in-depth and breadth information (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004:16). Among the sequential mixed-method design, this study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis are followed by qualitative inquiry aimed at explaining, interpreting and deepening the initial findings (ibid, 2004:17). In line with this design, the data were collected through the combination of online structured surveys, and semi-structured in-depth interviews in two linked stages. The research first identified the general patterns in parental childcare preferences through survey data and subsequently explored the underlying motivations, meanings, and contextual factors shaping these preferences through in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Under the scope of quantitative phase, a structured online survey was conducted with 600 employed parents of children aged 3–6 across Türkiye’s seven geographical regions. Survey participants were selected purposively and aimed to ensure regional diversity, one major city from each geographical region. This approach allowed the study to reflect regional variation while maintaining feasibility in data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were reached through online distribution channels. Survey participants predominantly consisted of urban, middle- and upper-middle-income households with varying levels of educational attainment and employment conditions. A significant proportion of participants reported stable employment and income levels above the national minimum wage, while a smaller segment represented more precarious or transitional labour market positions. In terms of education, participants ranged from secondary school graduates to individuals holding postgraduate degrees, allowing for the inclusion of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. These characteristics are analytically significant, as they indicate that the study does not merely capture childcare practices among economically disadvantaged groups but also reflects the preferences and decision-making processes of different socio-economic backgrounds. Surveys were carried out in one urbanized city from each

region, chosen on the basis of the number of employed women between June 2025 and October 2025. The selected cities were İstanbul, İzmir, Antalya, Ankara, Trabzon, Van and Gaziantep. The survey aimed, first, to gather information on the diverse reasons shaping women's current practices for reconciling employment with care responsibilities, and second, to explore their current needs and expectations regarding policies and services designed to support care responsibilities. It is important to emphasize that the primary goal of the survey was not to produce an in-depth analysis but to secure a large number of responses, thereby enhancing the representativeness of the findings at the national level.

The structured online survey was followed by the qualitative in-depth interviews, which was the last stage of the data collection. In this stage, an additional 58 semi-structured interviews were conducted with approximately 10 percent of the survey participants preferring institutional and home-based ECEC for a more nuanced exploration of the reasons behind current ECEC practices of Turkish parents and their needs and demands from ECEC policies and services. In so doing, a maximum variation sampling strategy was employed to ensure the diversity across childcare preferences (institutional or home-based care), socio-economic status, employment conditions (e.g. full-time, part-time, or precarious work), and family structures (e.g. dual-earner households, single parents, extended family arrangements). This enabled the study to maximise heterogeneity in the sample and allow for the exploration of diverse decision-making processes across different social contexts. Interview questions mainly focused on the socio-economic and socio-cultural reasons behind parents' ECEC practices. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The collected data then were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing the identification of recurring patterns, shared narratives, and variations in parents' ECEC practices. This method was chosen for its capacity to capture the depth, complexity, and context-specific nature of employed parents' ECEC practices as expressed through their own voices.

Ethical Approval

This research fully complies with the principles and guidelines stated in the 'Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics in Higher Education Institutions.' None of the actions described under the section titled 'Violations of Scientific Research and Publication Ethics' were undertaken during any stage of the study.

Ethics Committee Approval Information: The ethical approval for this study was obtained from İstanbul Nişantaşı University

Findings

In today's Türkiye, ECEC arrangements can generally be categorized into two main types: home-based and institutional. Home-based care refers either to care provided by relatives such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles, or to care provided by non-relatives, including neighbours or hired caregivers. Whereas, institutional care, by contrast, encompasses more formalized settings and is typically divided into four categories: preschools, nursery classes, crèches, and day-care centres. Building on this distinction, the findings of this study reveal that parents' childcare preferences in Türkiye are shaped by a complex and multi-layered set of factors that extend beyond a simple dichotomy between home-based and institutional care. While this binary classification provides a useful starting point, the empirical evidence suggests that parents' decisions are embedded in broader structural conditions, socio-economic positions, and cultural frameworks, which have been discussed below.

Determinants of Preference for Institutional ECEC

Most of the parents interviewed under the scope of this research (422 out of 600) expressed a preference for home-based ECEC arrangements for their children, while only 178 reported favouring institutional ECEC over home-based care. A closer examination of the demographic profile of the latter group reveals that 169 of these parents are married and cohabiting with their spouses, while 9 are divorced and raising their children as single parents. In terms of educational attainment, the group is relatively diverse: 3 hold doctoral degrees, 11 hold master's degrees, 69 have completed a bachelor's degree, 27 are associate degree graduates, and 64 have completed secondary education. Interestingly, this distribution of educational backgrounds appears to diverge from the conclusions of earlier studies. For example, the policy brief *Participation in Early Childhood Care and Education in Türkiye*⁵ published by ERG and AÇEV in 2017 as well as Çemrek and Özaydın (2019:568), who analysed parents' expectations from ECEC services, suggested a strong positive correlation between maternal education levels and the likelihood of preferring institutional ECEC. The present findings, however, do not support such a straightforward relationship. Instead, they highlight that in contemporary

⁵ Available at:

[https://egitimreformugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OkulOncesiEgitimRapor.25.12.17.web .pdf? gl=1*i4kig8* ga* OTIyNjI3OTM5LjE3NTA5MzU1ODE.* ga_5TQG6VTHTG*czE3NTg2MzAwNTQkbzIkZzEkdDE3NTg2MzAxMzUkajQ0JGwwJGgw](https://egitimreformugirisimi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/OkulOncesiEgitimRapor.25.12.17.web.pdf?gl=1*i4kig8*_ga*OTIyNjI3OTM5LjE3NTA5MzU1ODE.*_ga_5TQG6VTHTG*czE3NTg2MzAwNTQkbzIkZzEkdDE3NTg2MzAxMzUkajQ0JGwwJGgw)

Türkiye, factors beyond parental education particularly economic resources play an increasingly decisive role in shaping childcare preferences.

Among the most striking determinants is household income. Of the 178 families opting for institutional ECEC, 146 reported a monthly income exceeding approximately three times the minimum wage (over 70,000 TL). This suggests that the affordability of institutional childcare remains a significant barrier for families in lower income brackets, despite its perceived educational and developmental benefits. In this sense, institutional ECEC appears to function not only as a developmental and educational choice but also as a marker of socio-economic stratification. Families with higher levels of disposable income are better positioned to take advantage of the services offered by institutional settings, while families with more constrained financial resources continue to rely heavily on home-based arrangements, either provided by relatives or by hired caregivers. Alongside household income, parents' employment status also plays a decisive role in determining the likelihood of utilizing institutional ECEC services. The working arrangements, job security, and flexibility of parents shape their childcare preferences and their capacity to afford institutional options. To this end, all 178 parents who reported enrolling their children in institutional ECEC settings were found to be in paid employment. This finding directly resonates with the conclusions of the World Bank's Supply and Demand for Childcare Services in Türkiye Report⁶ as well as the ERG and AÇEV's Participation in ECEC in Türkiye Report, both of which highlight the strong correlation between parental employment and childcare service utilization.

However, unlike these earlier studies, the findings of this research further emphasize that how and from where parents work significantly influences their ECEC decisions. Among the 178 employed parents who opted for institutional ECEC, 106 reported working entirely on-site, 64 in hybrid arrangements, and only 8 fully remotely. This distribution underscores a critical point: while the availability of flexible or remote work arrangements theoretically offers greater childcare autonomy, in practice, parents often perceive institutional ECEC as indispensable for maintaining productivity and managing work-life balance. For those working full-time or on-site, institutional childcare is not merely an educational investment but a structural necessity that enables continued participation in the labour market. In contrast, hybrid or remote-working parents tend to frame ECEC enrolment as a strategy for enhancing children's socialization and development rather than a

⁶ Available at:

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/690781468000932565/pdf/98884-TURKISH-WP-P146295-PUBLIC-Box393197B-Binder-TR.pdf>

response to time constraints. These findings point to a nuanced intersection between labour market structures and childcare practices. They illustrate that ECEC preferences in Türkiye are not only economically conditioned but also deeply embedded in the levels of income and organisation of work. Beyond these demographic determinants, the underlying motivations behind parents' preference for institutional over home-based ECEC were revealed through qualitative insights. As discussed in the methodology section, surveys were complemented by in-depth interviews to capture a deeper understanding of parents' decisions in terms of ECEC. To this end, the reasons articulated by the 18 parents interviewed under the scope of this research can broadly be grouped into three overarching themes, each reflecting distinct social, economic, and developmental factors influencing their childcare preferences. These themes include: (a) children's social and behavioural development, (b) children's academic and cognitive development, and (c) parents' need for dual income or, in the case of single parents, the necessity of earning an income.

Institutional ECEC as Developmental Investment

To begin with, many of the parents interviewed within the scope of this research emphasized that sending their children to institutional ECEC settings had significantly contributed to their children's social and behavioural development. Parents consistently underlined that such environments offer far more than basic childcare; they serve as structured social spaces where children can learn how to navigate relationships, cooperate with others, and express themselves in socially appropriate ways. They observed that institutional ECEC programs expose children to routines, group activities, and shared responsibilities, all of which foster emotional regulation, patience, and a sense of belonging. Several parents highlighted those daily interactions with peers of similar age helped their children to better understand empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution. For instance, a working mother living in Istanbul described how, within a year of her child's enrolment in preschool, she observed remarkable improvements in her child's ability to spend the day meaningfully with peers. She explained that her child, who had previously spent most of the day in a home environment, had become noticeably more social, cooperative, and expressive since attending the institutional ECEC program:

I mean, I cannot really blame my child, what else could she do? There are no children at her age around here. It is just me and her father, and there is not so much we can do to engage at her level. That is why she really did not know how to share; she could not spend time without the iPad games or YouTube videos. But now, you should see her, she is playing in her room, drawing pictures, bringing her

toys to show us. I truly believe all of this has developed over the past year because she has been spending time with peers their own age at the kindergarten.

Moreover, parents also noted that teachers' guidance played a crucial role in modelling positive behaviours and reinforcing respect for others, skills that parents felt were difficult to cultivate in home-based or informal childcare environments. One of the high school graduates- mothers living in Ankara mentioned:

I believe it is always beneficial to learn things from the experts. After all, I am raising my child through trial and error he is my first child, and I do not have any background in teaching or child development. So, I think I used to do some things inadequately. For example, when I told my son to wash his hands, he would resist. But I think he learns these kinds of rules much better at kindergarten and actually follows them now. For instance, he has developed a new habit: after eating, he says, 'Mom, shall we brush our teeth?' That is why I feel that sending him to kindergarten was truly the right decision.

These quotations clearly suggest that parents perceive institutional ECEC not merely as a form of childcare, but also a formative environment that actively shapes children's socialization processes and behavioural competencies. The narratives reveal that structured ECEC plays a compensatory role, particularly for families with limited social networks or constrained opportunities for peer interaction. Moreover, parents' recognition of teachers as professional role models underscores an emerging trust in institutional expertise and pedagogical authority, which could be perceived as an element that distinguishes institutional ECEC from home-based arrangements. In this sense, ECEC institutions function as both educational settings and socializing agents.

Alongside social and behavioural considerations, many parents' decisions to enrol their children in institutional ECEC were also driven by the belief that these settings nurture early academic skills and cognitive development. In this regard, mothers frequently emphasized the benefits of institutional ECEC centres in enhancing children's language and communication skills (such as the ability to express themselves more clearly), thinking and reasoning abilities, as well as their pre-literacy, numeracy, musical, and artistic skills. Several participants noted that after the age of three, children become increasingly talkative and inquisitive and therefore spending time with professionally trained educators was considered particularly beneficial for their cognitive stimulation and intellectual curiosity. From the parents' perspective, early childhood cognitive and pre-academic development plays a crucial role in determining children's later educational achievement. Fo example, one of the respondents stated that:

When I first decided to send my daughter to kindergarten despite its quite heavy budget, my main concern was not only for her to play with other children,

but also for her to learn new things that I could not easily teach at home. I can see that being with professional teachers makes a big difference. Since day one, she learns songs, colours, numbers, even simple English words. She asks more questions now and tries to explain her thoughts in complete sentences. At home, I would not have known how to guide her in that way. I feel that these small steps, like recognizing letters or counting objects, are not just games; they are preparing her mind for real schooling in the future. That is why I see preschool as an investment in her future education rather than just a place to spend the day.

In a similar manner, one of the fathers that have been interviewed under the scope of this research mentioned:

As a father, I used to think that kindergarten is another economic burden on my shoulder. But after my son started attending, I realized how much he was actually learning. Every week he comes home with something new. He repeats the names of the objects around the house, asks me about planets, or sings songs about the days of the week. I can see that he is not just memorizing things, but trying to understand how the world works. The teachers at the preschool encourage him to ask questions and think independently, something I really value. I truly believe that this gives him a rhythm and prepares him for the responsibilities of school life.

As can be seen, many mothers believed that institutional ECEC settings lay a solid foundation for future learning, helping children acquire basic cognitive and learning habits that prepare them for primary school. In this sense, ECEC institutions are viewed not only as spaces of care and socialization but also as essential environments for early academic readiness, with long-term implications for children's educational success and lifelong learning trajectories.

Institutional ECEC as Economic Necessity

The findings of this research reveal that several parents enrolled their children in institutional ECEC settings not out of preference, but out of necessity. Beyond the developmental and educational advantages often associated with institutional ECEC centres, a number of parents particularly single parents and those in dual-income households facing economic constraints reported that they had no alternative childcare options. For these families, enrolling their children in kindergarten was described as a pragmatic solution rather than a deliberate educational choice. Divorced mothers, in particular, often highlighted the lack of family support networks and the absence of reliable caregivers as the primary factors compelling them to rely on institutional childcare. The findings also clearly indicate that the high cost of private preschools and the limited availability of affordable public ECEC institutions further exacerbate the difficulties faced by

such families. Many parents stated that they would prefer public childcare facilities if sufficient capacity and quality standards were available, yet the shortage of public ECEC centres forces them to turn to costly private alternatives. Consequently, parents who lack both a support network and access to trustworthy public services often find themselves in a state of helplessness, juggling employment responsibilities with the emotional and financial strain of securing appropriate care for their children. This situation underscores a broader structural problem: the inadequacy of accessible, high-quality, and affordable early childhood education and care services disproportionately affects socioeconomically vulnerable families. In this context, institutional ECEC while designed to promote equality of opportunity paradoxically becomes a site where inequalities in income, gender roles, and caregiving responsibilities are most visibly reproduced.

All in all, parents' decisions regarding ECEC are shaped by a complex interplay of economic, social, and developmental factors. While some parents view institutional ECEC as an environment that enhances children's social, behavioural, and cognitive development, others are driven by structural necessities, such as dual-income dependency or the absence of family support. In this regard, institutional ECEC emerges as both a mechanism of opportunity and a reflection of inequality, revealing how access to early education is mediated by socioeconomic conditions and the availability of public provision. However, as previously noted, Türkiye lags behind both EU and OECD countries in terms of institutional ECEC centre enrolment rates. Reducing this gap and increasing ECEC enrolment rates in Türkiye requires understanding why certain families choose not to enrol their children in institutional ECEC settings, a question which this paper now proceeds to explore.

Determinants of Preference for Home-Based ECEC

As discussed earlier, among the 600 parents interviewed within the scope of this research, 422 reported preferring home-based childcare arrangements over institutional childcare options. Among these 422 respondents, 101 stated that they relied on daytime caregivers, 32 employed live-in caregivers, 17 reported that the father was the primary caregiver, and 95 indicated that their children were cared for by grandmothers. The remaining 173 parents noted that although they had been employed before the birth of their child, they had since withdrawn from the labour market to assume full-time caregiving responsibilities themselves. Of these 173 mothers, 71 had resigned from their positions, while 102 had taken unpaid leave. A closer examination of the demographic characteristics of the parents who preferred home-based childcare reveals that 251 held undergraduate degrees, 146

were high school graduates, 21 had completed master's degrees, and 4 possessed doctoral degrees. In terms of marital status, 319 respondents were married and cohabiting, 16 were married but living separately, and 87 were divorced. Geographically, 339 of these families resided in urban areas, while 83 lived in rural regions. Finally, in terms of socioeconomic background, 401 of the 422 families reported a monthly income exceeding approximately three times the national minimum wage (around 70,000 TL), indicating a predominantly middle- to upper-middle-income profile among those opting for home-based care. The demographic profile of these families reveals how socioeconomic status, gender norms, and childcare preferences intersect in Turkey. The predominance of urban, educated, and financially secure parents among those choosing home-based childcare challenges the idea that such arrangements stem only from economic constraints. Instead, it reflects cultural norms and gendered expectations that valorise maternal caregiving even among privileged groups. Many mothers appear to make a choice within constraint, withdrawing from work due to persistent social pressures rather than pure necessity. The gendered nature of labour market is also evident as many mothers resigning or taking unpaid leave. This clearly highlights the stubbornly existing traditional gender roles. The reliance on grandmothers and family networks also exemplifies Turkey's familialist welfare model (Aybars and Tsarouhas, 2010:749), where care remains a private, not public, responsibility. Finally, the prevalence of high-income families opting out of institutional childcare suggests that barriers are more emotional and moral than financial.

In addition to these demographic patterns, the qualitative findings provided deeper insights into why many parents opted for home-based childcare instead of institutional ECEC. As detailed in the research design section, the survey data were complemented by in-depth interviews to capture a more nuanced understanding of parental decision-making processes. The reasons expressed by the 41 parents, who preferred home-based childcare can broadly be grouped into three overarching themes. These include: (a) reasons related to institutional factors (such as limited availability, cost, distance etc.); (b) concerns regarding children's emotional development as well as physical safety and well-being; (c) the existence of traditional gender roles.

Structural and Institutional Inadequacies of ECEC Services

First, most of the respondents have highlighted the structural and institutional inadequacies within the existing ECEC services as a decisive factor shaping their preference for home-based childcare. The limited availability of day-care centres, coupled with the prohibitively high fees and the incompatibility of operating hours with parents' work schedules, emerged as a recurrent concern. These constraints

were particularly salient among working mothers and mothers willing to work. They reported significant difficulties in reconciling their employment obligations with the rigid and often inflexible opening hours of formal childcare institutions. For example, one of the respondents who had to take an unpaid care mentioned:

To be honest, I was really torn. On the one hand, I wanted my child to attend a daycare so that I could return to work or at least work part-time. But on the other hand, there are certain realities of life. If I work part-time, the daycare fee alone would amount to almost two-thirds of my monthly salary. So, what's the point? I end up exhausted in two different areas, unable to fully concentrate on either my child or my job. Working full-time is not really an option either, because if I must drop my child off at daycare in the morning and pick them up in the evening, it falls far short of my actual working hours. And since I work for a corporate company where you must clock in and out every day, being late regularly isn't an option. So, when I weighed all the pros and cons, taking unpaid leave seemed like the most reasonable decision.

Beyond issues of access and affordability, parents also voiced substantial apprehensions regarding the quality and safety standards of existing childcare centres. While some participants questioned whether these ECEC centres employed a sufficient number of qualified and well-trained staff so that they can entrust their children, some other participants raised concerns about whether these centres are able to meet the basic standards in terms of hygiene. Furthermore, parents highlighted the physical location of ECEC centres as an important determinant of their decision-making: accessibility, neighbourhood safety, and the reliability of transportation to and from these ECEC centres. In this manner, one of the respondents from İstanbul stated:

I am not really against the idea of sending my child to daycare, not at all. But there isn't a decent daycare near our home. My child is only four years old; should they really spend an hour commuting in the morning and another hour and a half in the evening, stuck in traffic? And even if I find a place, yes, I'm sure they're a bit more attentive since they accept younger children, but still, it's hard to entrust your child to someone else. A thousand worries cross your mind: is the place clean, is the food healthy, are they really taking good care of the kids? Honestly, there's very little left in this country that one can truly trust.

These narratives clearly underscore how parents' ECEC choices are embedded not only in economic and logistical considerations but also in deeply rooted perceptions of safety, trust, and institutional reliability. In this regard, the preference for home-based ECEC among many families emerges less as a purely voluntary choice and more as a pragmatic adaptation to systemic inadequacies and the perceived erosion of institutional confidence within the ECEC sector.

Concerns over Children's Safety and Well-Being

Beyond the institutional constraints discussed above, many of the parents interviewed under the scope of this research have also expressed concerns about their children's emotional well-being and sense of security, which further discouraged them from enrolling their children in formal childcare settings. A prevailing belief among the respondents was that, for the sake of children's social and emotional well-being, it was preferable for them to be cared for by their mothers or, when this was not possible, by grandmothers at least until the age of three, and in some cases up to four. Many respondents voiced apprehensions that early and prolonged separation from the mother could result in a lack of maternal affection, which they believed might have lasting consequences for their children's psychological well-being. Several mothers associated this deprivation with future emotional fragility, difficulties in forming secure attachments, and lower self-confidence, suggesting a perceived causal link between early maternal absence and long-term emotional development:

I think I was more career-oriented with my first child. When my daughter turned one, we enrolled her in a daycare that we trusted very much. At first, everything seemed fine or at least we did not notice any problems. But when she reached primary school age, we began to see that she was struggling to get along with her classmates. Her second-grade teacher referred us to a child psychologist, who suggested that between the ages of one and four, she might have felt somewhat invisible in a crowded environment, perhaps surrounded by older children. The psychologist thought that her current irritability and difficulty adapting could be traced back to that early experience. At the time, I was pregnant with my son, and we were truly heartbroken over what we had learned. As a result, I decided to stay home and take care of my son myself for the first four years of his life. I wanted him to receive all the love he possibly could from me to feel secure and know that I would always be there for him, no matter what.

This conviction reflected a deeply ingrained cultural understanding of early childhood as a formative stage of emotional dependency and attachment, during which maternal care is perceived as both natural and irreplaceable. At the same time, this belief is reinforced by the physical dependency of young children and their need for constant, individualized attention. Consequently, many parents identified self-sufficiency and basic communicative competence as key prerequisites for institutional enrolment. A commonly shared view was that a child should have acquired basic language and self-expression skills before attending an ECEC centre. Parents often stressed that these skills enable children to articulate their needs such as hunger, toilet use, or discomfort with peers to their caregivers. Similarly, basic self-care abilities, such as being toilet-trained and able to eat

independently, were viewed as indicators of readiness for childcare. These developmental milestones were seen as not only necessary for the child's comfort and safety but also as protective mechanisms ensuring that children could signal mistreatment or neglect if it occurred. In this regard, many parents agreed that around the age of four, children generally attain sufficient maturity to adapt to ECEC environments. A mother from Ankara in this manner stated:

My child has been a bit late compared to their peers when it comes to toilet training. He will only go to the bathroom with his father; he does not even want to go with me. So how could I possibly send him to daycare now? I thought about enrolling him for half-days, but I cannot be sure what would happen? would he try to hold it in for four or five hours? That is why, while I recognize that daycares are beneficial in many ways, I do not believe there should be a rigid rule that children must start at age two. In my opinion, they should begin attending when they are able to express their physical or emotional needs or at least manage them independently. Otherwise, we might do more harm than good, even with the best intentions.

Gendered Norms of Caregiving

Last but not least, some of the respondents mostly from Türkiye's rural and relatively less-developed parts pointed Türkiye's enduring familialist welfare regime, in which the responsibility for care and emotional labour is predominantly assigned to women within the private sphere. The domestic realm continues to be seen as the natural and legitimate site of women's social contribution. For them, entrusting their young children to non-familial care at an early age evokes feelings of guilt and anxiety. These sentiments are deeply intertwined with gendered expectations that define 'good mothering' through constant physical presence, self-sacrifice, and hands-on caregiving. In this sense, maternal care is viewed not merely as beneficial for a child's healthy development but as a moral imperative, which is an embodiment of women's virtue and devotion to family.

All in all, these findings suggest that childcare preferences cannot be understood merely in terms of access or affordability. Rather, they are embedded within a wider moral economy of care that privileges emotional security, familial trust, and maternal presence over institutional efficiency. Parents' emphasis on maternal or kin-based care illustrates how cultural expectations and emotional rationalities intersect to shape everyday childcare decisions. Ultimately, this belief in the irreplaceability of maternal care underscores the persistence of gendered caregiving norms and reveals how social reproduction continues to rely heavily on women's unpaid labour within the home.

Conclusion

Seeking to understand the current ECEC patterns in Türkiye, this article has found that Türkiye's fragmented legal and institutional framework for early childhood education and care continues to generate persistent inequalities in access and participation. Despite the gradual expansion of public and private childcare facilities, enrolment rates remain far below the OECD and EU averages, revealing the limited reach of existing policy interventions. The dual authority shared between the MoNE and the MoFSS, the absence of a constitutional mandate, and the uneven distribution of institutional capacity across regions collectively constrain the universalization of ECEC.

At the micro level, age, parental education, marital status, household income, and employment patterns have emerged as decisive parameters shaping childcare practices across the country. Parents with higher income levels and stable, full-time employment are significantly more likely to choose institutional ECEC, viewing it as both a pedagogical investment and a practical necessity for maintaining labour market participation. In contrast, lower-income families often perceive institutional childcare as financially inaccessible, regardless of its developmental advantages. Similarly, parental education and age shape attitudes toward childcare: while highly educated and older parents tend to emphasize the cognitive and social benefits of professional early education, younger or less-educated parents are more likely to favour home-based care rooted in familial trust and emotional security. Marital status further deepens these divides, as single parents and dual-earner families often turn to institutional care out of structural necessity rather than deliberate choice.

These patterns, however, cannot be fully understood through structural determinants alone. The findings demonstrate that childcare decisions in Türkiye are shaped by a complex interplay between material constraints and deeply embedded cultural norms. While institutional ECEC is often framed as a rational and beneficial choice, access limitations and financial barriers significantly restrict its feasibility for many families. In this context, home-based care should not be interpreted solely as a voluntary or culturally driven preference. Rather, it frequently reflects a form of constrained or bounded choice, shaped by structural inequalities related to income, access, and labour market conditions.

At the same time, the persistence of home-based care among relatively advantaged households suggests that cultural norms surrounding motherhood, trust, and emotional care continue to play a significant role in shaping parental preferences. Concerns about safety, individualized attention, and emotional attachment lead many parents to prioritise familial care, even when institutional

options are available. This highlights the importance of what may be conceptualised as a moral economy of care, in which decisions are guided not only by economic rationality but also by normative understandings of appropriate caregiving.

When examined together, these findings highlight a paradox: institutional ECEC, while designed to promote equality of opportunity, simultaneously reproduces socio-economic and gender inequalities through limited accessibility and persistent normative expectations about caregiving. Addressing this paradox requires a comprehensive policy shift that redefines ECEC as both a social right and a public responsibility. Through such an integrated and rights-based approach, Türkiye can begin to reconcile its fragmented childcare landscape, ensuring that every child regardless of socio-economic background, region, or family structure has access to high-quality ECEC so that every parent, particularly women, can participate fully in social and economic life.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Erken çocukluk eğitimi ve bakımı (EÇEB), doğumdan ilkokula geçişe kadar çocukların bilişsel, sosyal ve duygusal gelişimini destekleyen örgütlü ve sürekli hizmetleri kapsamakta; aynı zamanda toplumsal refah, verimlilik ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği açısından stratejik bir sosyal politika alanı olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Birleşmiş Milletler Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Amaçları (özellikle SKA 4) bağlamında EÇEB'e yapılan yatırımların çocukların okul olgunluğu, eğitimde başarı, sağlıklı gelişim örüntüleri ve yaşam boyu gelir/istihdam olasılıkları üzerinde belirleyici etkileri olduğu; bunun yanında kadınların işgücüne katılımını destekleyerek hane refahını ve ekonomik sürdürülebilirliği güçlendirdiği ulusal ve uluslararası literatürde güçlü biçimde vurgulanmaktadır. Buna karşın Türkiye'de EÇEB alanı; 0–3 yaş ile 3–6 yaş grubuna yönelik hizmetlerin farklı kurumların yetki alanına dağılması, anayasal zorunluluğun bulunmaması, finansman ve kalite güvencesi mekanizmalarının sınırlılığı ve bölgesel kapasite farklılıkları nedeniyle parçalı ve eşitsiz bir görünüm sergilemektedir. Bu tablo, yalnızca hizmet arzını değil, ebeveynlerin kurumsal EÇEB ile ev temelli bakım arasında yaptığı tercihlerin niteliğini de şekillendirmektedir.

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de ebeveynlerin EÇEB tercihlerini—kurumsal (anaokulu, kreş, gündüz bakım evi, anasınıfı vb.) ya da ev temelli (anne/baba, büyükanne, akraba veya ücretli bakıcı) belirleyen dinamikleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, ardışık karma yöntem (sequential mixed-method) tasarımıyla yürütülmüştür. İlk aşamada Türkiye'nin yedi coğrafi bölgesini temsilen seçilen şehirlerde (İstanbul, İzmir, Antalya, Ankara, Trabzon, Van ve Gaziantep) en

az bir çocuğu olan ve ücretli istihdamla ilişkisi bulunan ebeveynlerle 600 yapılandırılmış çevrimiçi anket uygulanmıştır. İkinci aşamada ise anket katılımcılarının yaklaşık yüzde 10'u ile, tercih gerekçelerini derinlemesine anlamayı hedefleyen 58 yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yapılmış; görüşmeler deşifre edilerek anonimleştirilmiş ve tematik analiz yoluyla çözümlenmiştir.

Nicel bulgular, örnekleme ev temelli bakımın kurumsal bakıma kıyasla daha baskın bir pratik olduğunu göstermektedir: 600 katılımcının 422'si ev temelli bakım modelini tercih ederken 178'i kurumsal EÇEB'i tercih etmektedir. Kurumsal EÇEB tercihinin en belirgin belirleyicilerinden biri hane geliridir: kurumsal bakım kullananların büyük çoğunluğu asgari ücretin yaklaşık üç katı ve üzeri gelir bildirmiş; bu durum kurumsal bakımın Türkiye'de güçlü bir "erişilebilirlik ve satın alma gücü" boyutu taşıdığını ortaya koymuştur. Bununla birlikte, yalnızca gelir düzeyi değil, ebeveynlerin çalışma rejimi de tercihleri belirgin biçimde etkilemektedir. Kurumsal EÇEB kullanan ebeveynler arasında işin tamamen işyerinden yürütüldüğü (on-site) çalışma biçimi daha yaygındır; hibrit ve tamamen uzaktan çalışanlar daha sınırlı bir grubu oluşturmaktadır. Bu bulgu, kurumsal bakımın birçok aile için pedagojik bir tercihten öte, işgücü piyasasına bağlı kalabilmenin yapısal bir koşulu hâline geldiğine işaret etmektedir.

Nitel bulgular, kurumsal EÇEB'i tercih eden ebeveynlerin gerekçelerinin üç ana tema etrafında kümelenildiğini göstermektedir. Birincisi, çocukların sosyal-duygusal ve davranışsal gelişimiyle ilişkilidir: akran etkileşimi, rutinler, paylaşma, duygu düzenleme ve sosyal becerilerin desteklenmesi ebeveyn anlatılarında öne çıkmaktadır. İkincisi, bilişsel ve erken akademik gelişime yönelik beklentilerdir: dil gelişimi, ifade becerileri, düşünme/akıl yürütme, erken okuryazarlık ve numerasyon gibi kazanımlar kurumsal bakımın "eğitime hazırlık" işleviyle birlikte değerlendirilmiştir. Üçüncü tema ise ekonomik zorunluluk ve bakım açığıdır: özellikle tek ebeveynli haneler ya da çift gelirli fakat güvenilir bakım ağına erişimi sınırlı aileler kurumsal EÇEB'i "alternatifsizlik" çerçevesinde deneyimlemektedir.

Ev temelli bakım tercih eden ebeveynlerin gerekçeleri ise üç ana eksende toplanmaktadır. İlk eksen kurumsal/altyapısal kısıtları kapsamaktadır: kamu kapasitesinin yetersizliği, özel kurum ücretlerinin yüksekliği, kurumların mesafe/ulaşım yükü ve çalışma saatleriyle uyumsuz hizmet zamanları, ebeveynleri ev temelli çözümlere itmektedir. İkinci eksen çocukların duygusal güvenliği ve fiziksel iyi oluşuna ilişkin kaygılardır: hijyen, personel niteliği, kurumlara duyulan güven, kalabalık ortamlarda "görünmez kalma" endişesi ve küçük yaşlarda anneden ayrılmanın olası olumsuz etkileri ev temelli bakımın gerekçelendirilmesinde güçlü bir yer tutmaktadır. Üçüncü eksen ise toplumsal cinsiyet normları ve "iyi annelik" idealleridir: özellikle annelikle özdeşleştirilen bakım sorumluluğu, suçluluk duygusu ve aileci refah rejiminin ürettiği kültürel beklentiler, eğitilmiş ve kentli gruplarda dahi

ev temelli bakımın meşrulaştırılmasına katkı sunmaktadır. Bu noktada çalışma, ev temelli bakımın yalnızca ekonomik yoksunlukla açıklanamayacağını; orta ve üst-orta gelir gruplarında dahi duygusal ve normatif gerekçelerle güçlenen bir tercih/desen olduğunu göstermektedir.

Araştırma bulguları genel olarak, Türkiye’de EÇEB tercihlerinin kamu kapasitesi, maliyet, çalışma rejimleri, bölgesel eşitsizlikler ile güven, annelik normları, duygusal güvenlik ve hazır oluş anlayışları kesişiminde şekillendiğidir. Kurumsal EÇEB, eşit fırsat yaratma potansiyeline sahip olsa da sınırlı erişim ve maliyet bariyerleri nedeniyle aynı zamanda sosyoekonomik ve toplumsal cinsiyet temelli eşitsizliklerin yeniden üretildiği bir alana dönüşebilmektedir. Bu nedenle çalışma, EÇEB’in bir ‘piyasa hizmeti’ veya hane içi çözümlere bırakılacak bir alan olmaktan çıkarılıp sosyal hak ve kamusal sorumluluk olarak ele alınmasını; kamu arzının özellikle 0–3 yaş grubu için güçlendirilmesini, kalite güvencesi ve denetim mekanizmalarının geliştirilmesini ve hizmet saatlerinin işgücü piyasasının gerçekleriyle uyumlu hâle getirilmesini tartışmaya açmaktadır. Böyle bir bütüncül yaklaşım, hem çocukların nitelikli erken eğitime erişimini genişletecek hem de özellikle kadınların istihdamda kalabilmesini destekleyerek Türkiye’de refah, eşitlik ve sürdürülebilir kalkınma hedeflerine katkı sunacaktır.

Beyan

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı

Yazar, bu çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmadığını beyan eder.

REFERENCES

- Alaca, M. F., & Akbaşlı, S. (2025). Some Indicators Regarding Early Childhood Education and Care in Türkiye and Their International Comparison. *International Journal of Educational Spectrum*, 7(1), 80-95.
- Aldıkaçtı-Marshall, G. (2013). *Shaping gender policy in Turkey: Grassroots women activists, the European Union, and the Turkish State*. State University of New York Press.
- Aybars, A. I., & Tsarouhas, D. (2010). Straddling two continents: Social policy and welfare politics in Turkey. *Social Policy & Administration*, 44(6), 746-763.
- Barsh, J., & Cranston, S. (2014). Can women fix capitalism. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 1-5.
- Bozan, N. (2014). *Okul öncesi eğitimde oyunun öğretmen görüşlerine göre değerlendirilmesi* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Buğra, A., & Keyder, Ç. (2006). The Turkish welfare regime in transformation. *Journal of European social policy*, 16(3), 211-228.
- Calman, L. J., & Tarr-Whelan, L. (2005). *Early Childhood Education for All: A Wise Investment: Recommendations Arising from the Economic Impacts of Child Care and Early Education, Financing Solutions for the Future, a Conference Sponsored by Legal Momentum's Family Initiative and the MIT Workplace Center*. Legal Momentum.
- Ceylan, Ş., Kahraman, Ö. G., Kılınç, N., & Ülker, P. (2019). Vineland Sosyal-Duygusal Erken Çocukluk Ölçeği'nin (VSDEÇÖ) Türkçe Uyarlaması: Geçerlik ve Güvenirlik Çalışması. *Journal of History, Culture & Art Research/Tarih Kültür ve Sanat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(1), 299-319.
- Çemrek, F., & Özyayın, Ö. (2019). Okul Öncesi eğitimde ailelerin kreş tercihleri ve kreşlerden beklentileri: Eskişehir örneği. *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 20, 559-575.
- Daly, M., & Lewis, J. (2000). The concept of social care and the analysis of contemporary welfare states. *The British journal of sociology*, 51(2), 281-298.
- Dedeoğlu, S. (2012). Equality, protection or discrimination: Gender equality policies in Turkey. *Social Politics*, 19(2), 269-290.
- Ecevit, Y. (2010). İşgücü Piyasasında Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği. *El Kitabı, Ankara: TÜİK Yayınları*.
- Edwards, A. (2015). Recognising and realising teachers' professional agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 779-784.
- Erbil, F., & Göl-Güven, M. (2025). Accessibility and Affordability of Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Türkiye. *Early Childhood Education in the Mediterranean: Availability, Accessibility and Affordability of Services*, 5, 180.
- Erkan, S., & Kırca, A. (2010). Okul öncesi eğitimin ilköğretim birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin okula hazır bulunuşluklarına etkisinin incelenmesi. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 38(38), 94-106.

- Eslen-Ziya, H., & Kazanoğlu, N. (2022). De-democratization under the New Turkey? Challenges for women's organizations. *Mediterranean Politics*, 27(1), 101-122.
- Friedman, M. (2013). *Mommyblogs and the changing face of motherhood*. University of Toronto Press.
- Fogel, R. W. (2004). Health, nutrition, and economic growth. *Economic development and cultural change*, 52(3), 643-658.
- Gökmen, Ç. E. (2022). A new perspective on women's care burden and employment in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 66, 11-34.
- Göl-Güven, M. (2018). The relationship of the type of preschools with child development and parent involvement. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 10(1), 50-62.
- Günay, G., & Bener, Ö. (2011). Kadınların toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri çerçevesinde aile içi yaşamı algılama biçimleri. *Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 153-171.
- Heckman, J. J. (2006). Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children. *Science*, 312(5782), 1900-1902.
- Heckman, J. J. (2015). Introduction to a Theory of the Allocation of Time by Gary Becker. *The Economic Journal*, 125(583), 403-409.
- Himmelweit, S., & Sigala, M. (2004). Choice and the relationship between identities and behaviour for mothers with pre-school children: Some implications for policy from a UK study. *Journal of Social Policy*, 33(3), 455-478.
- İlkkaracan, P. (2010). Re/forming laws to secure women's rights in Turkey: The campaign on the penal code. *Citizen Action and National Policy Reform: Making Change Happen*.
- İlkkaracan, I., Kim, K., & Kaya, T. (2015). The impact of public investment in social care services on employment, gender equality, and poverty: The Turkish case. *Research Project Report, Istanbul Technical University Women's Studies Center in Science, Engineering and Technology and the Levy Economics Institute, in partnership with ILO and UNDP Turkey, and the UNDP and UN Women Regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia*.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Kagıtcıbası, C., Sunar, D., Bekman, S., Baydar, N., & Cemalçılar, Z. (2009). Continuing effects of early enrichment in adult life: The Turkish Early Enrichment Project 22 years later. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30(6), 764-779.
- Kazanoğlu, N. (2021). *The politics of Europeanisation: work and family life reconciliation policy*. Routledge.

- Kazanoğlu, N., & Ketola, M. (2022). Understanding the moral economy of state-civil society relationships: Islam, women's NGOs and rights-based advocacy in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 23(4), 600-622.
- Korkmaz, B. C., & Demiryürek, Y. B. (2025). Türkiye'de çocuk bakım kuruluş modellerine güncel bir bakış. *Toplum ve Sosyal Hizmet*, 36(2), 299-320.
- Leitner, S. (2003). Varieties of familialism: The caring function of the family in comparative perspective. *European societies*, 5(4), 353-375.
- Lewis, J. (2006). Work/family reconciliation, equal opportunities and social policies: the interpretation of policy trajectories at the EU level and the meaning of gender equality. *Journal of European public policy*, 13(3), 420-437.
- Lewis, J. (2009). Work–family balance, gender and policy. In *Work–Family Balance, Gender and Policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Morgan, S. L. (2005). *On the edge of commitment: Educational attainment and race in the United States*. Stanford University Press.
- Mustard, F. (Ed.). (2002). *Early child development and the brain – the base for health, learning and behaviour throughout life*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Myers, R. G. (2000). Financing early childhood education and care services. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(1), 75-94.
- OECD (2021), *Starting Strong VI: Supporting Meaningful Interactions in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en>.
- OECD (2017), *Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>.
- Plantenga, J., & Remery, C. (2009). Parental leave in the Netherlands. *CESifo DICE Report*, 7(2), 47-51.
- Razavi, S. (2011). Rethinking care in a development context: an introduction. *Development and Change*, 42(4), 873-903.
- Saraceno, C., & Keck, W. (2010). Can we identify intergenerational policy regimes in Europe?. *European societies*, 12(5), 675-696.
- Schober, P. S. (2014). Day care trends for children under three years in Germany. In *The transformation of care in European societies* (pp. 208-232). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Smits, J., & Hoşgör, A. G. (2006). Effects of family background characteristics on educational participation in Turkey. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 26(5), 545-560

- World Bank Group. (2015). *Supply and demand for childcare services in Turkey: A mixed methods study*: Türkiye’de çocuk bakım hizmetlerinde arz ve talep durumu. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/690781468000932565>
- Ulus, L., & Çetin, M. (2022). Türkiye’de okul öncesi eğitim politikaları ve yeni politika önerileri. *Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, (107), 129-165.
- Üstün, K. T. (2020). Kadının ücretsiz bakım emeğinin azaltılması kapsamında kurumsal çocuk bakım hizmetlerine erişim kreş hakkı. *Çalışma ve Toplum*, 3(66), 1557-1590.