

Truffelli, Elisa & Balduzzi, Lucia (2019). **University training of early childhood educators: A longitudinal retrospective on motivations for course choice, attendance and completion among male students, to aid understanding of future career trajectories.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 22.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

Although benefits deriving from the mixed gender composition of educational teams in ECEC are widely recognised (Drange, Rønning, 2017; Huber, Traxl, 2017; Van Polanen, Colonnese, Fukkink, Tavecchio, 2016), male workers are a minority. The aim of this study is to understand better the experience of male participants in training for this profession, based on an analysis of career indicators among men enrolled in ECEC teacher training. The proportion of male students enrolled in Italian degree courses in Education Sciences remains low (ISTAT 2018) and the male presence in ECEC work teams is even more marginal (Eurostat, 2018). Nevertheless, studies undertaken in Italy on this topic are scarce, especially empirical studies. Based on theories of gender segregation in education (Passeron, Bourdieu, 1970) and deploying mixed methodology, this study undertook longitudinal analysis of 8 students' cohorts (1569 individuals) from the degree course "Educator in Childhood Services", University of Bologna. We processed the data in aggregated form and made it anonymous. The research design adopted a sequential mixed method model. Firstly, a correlational study revealed significant differences in career indicators by gender. Then a qualitative enquiry through semi-structured interviews explored reasons for non-completion among male students. To increase the male presence in ECEC work teams, effective intervention is needed in the university learning paths leading to this profession, not just within the profession itself. Therefore, it is important to monitor levels of engagement and reasons behind non-completion among male ECEC students, with a view to considering how to mitigate the latter.

Keywords

males in ECEC teachers training, dropout rate, reasons of non-completion among male ECEC students, longitudinal study, mixed methodology

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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

University training of early childhood educators: a longitudinal retrospective on motivations for course choice, attendance and completion among male students, to aid understanding of future career trajectories

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Framework

From a cultural theory perspective, the transmission of cultural capital fulfils the social function of legitimising social and gender differences and of sanctioning behaviours that are not in line with those of the dominant groups (Bourdieu, 1993, 1999).

Despite the changes and adaptations that have taken place in our society among core practitioners educating younger children, in ECEC **women still account for almost the entire population: 97%** in pre-primary education across OECD countries(OECD, 2017).

Scientific debate has set out the potential benefits deriving from a mixed gender composition of educational teams in ECEC (e.g. Drange, Rønning, 2017; Huber, Traxl, 2017; Van Polanen, Colonesi, Fukkink, Tavecchio, 2017).

The Council of the European Union (2011) stated that the proportion of men in childcare should be increased in order to have role models of both sexes and, hence, to break gender-stereotyped perceptions



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Problem

Although benefits deriving from the mixed gender composition of educational teams in ECEC are widely recognised, male workers are a minority and their related career trajectories show a trend of discontinuation.

Focussing on *the experience of male participants in training* for this profession (e.g. career indicators, motivations, obstacles) might help us to better understand what happens before these circumstances occur.

Traditionally, in Italy the minimum qualification levels of core educational practitioners in settings for younger children were a matter for regional autonomy. However, recent national legislation has defined the level as **tertiary level qualification (Bachelor degree)**.



Context

This study was carried out in the First cycle degree (Bachelor) in early childhood education.



Duration: 3 years

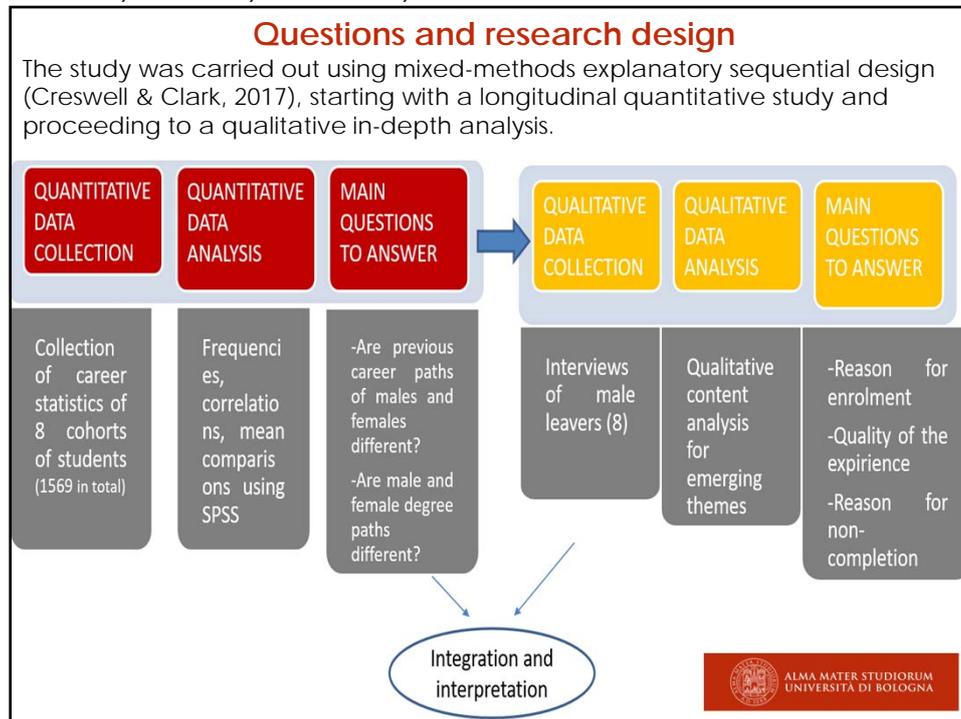
CFU: 180 comprised of courses, laboratories, and compulsory internship

No of students per year: 300

Placement: over 90%



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A comparison based on previous study paths (1/2)

Are male and female previous study paths different?

	F	M
CLASSICAL H.S.D.	4,5%	6,0%
LINGUISTIC H.S.D.	6,7%	2,0%
SCIENTIFIC H.S.D.	11,9%	14,0%
PROFESSIONAL CURR.	14,8%	10,0%
TECHNICAL CURR.	17,4%	40,0%
ARTISTIC CURR.	3,7%	20,0%
SOCIAL SCIENCES H.S.D.	32,1%	24,0%
OTHER H.S.D./CURR.	8,0%	20,0%
FOREING H.S.D./CURR	1,0%	0,0%
TOT	100,0%	100,0%

ϕ (phi) significant at level .00 ($p=0.00$)



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A comparison based on previous study paths (2/2)

Statistic for standard progression and continuity between the two educational milestones of school and university. The value is lower for male students.

	N	Mean	SD
F	1519	0,6	0,49
M	50	0,3	0,48
TOT	1569	0,6	0,49

Standard progression rate: theoretical maximum =1

(Anova test p= 0.00)

In summary, the differences between females and males seem to begin early in their study path, even before university.



A comparison based on on the statistical indicators for this course (3/3)

	F	M	TOT
LEAVERS	114 7,5%	5 10,0%	119 7,6%
TRANSFERS	61 4,0%	7 14,0%	68 4,3%
UNDECL.	112 7,4%	10 20,0%	122 7,8%
ST. PROGR.	539 35,5%	17 34,0%	556 35,4%
DEGREE	693 45,6%	11 22,0%	704 44,9%
TOT	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

NON-COMPLETION RATE	
F	M
18,9%	44%
81,1%	56%
100,0%	100,0%

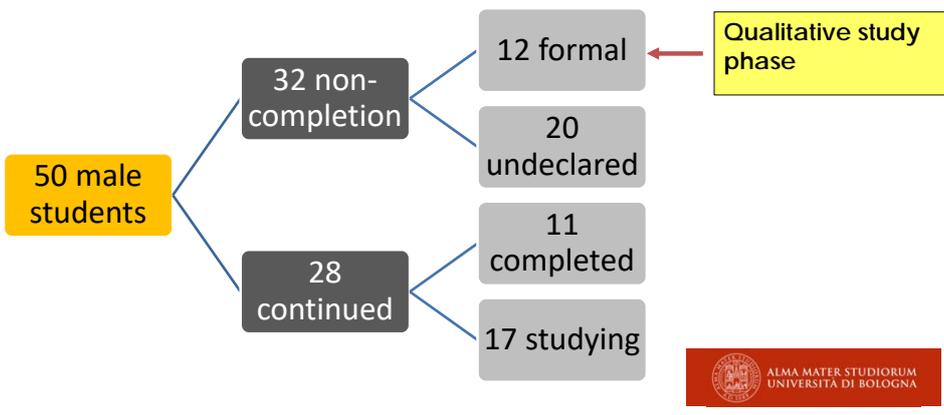
χ^2 test sign. level = 0.000



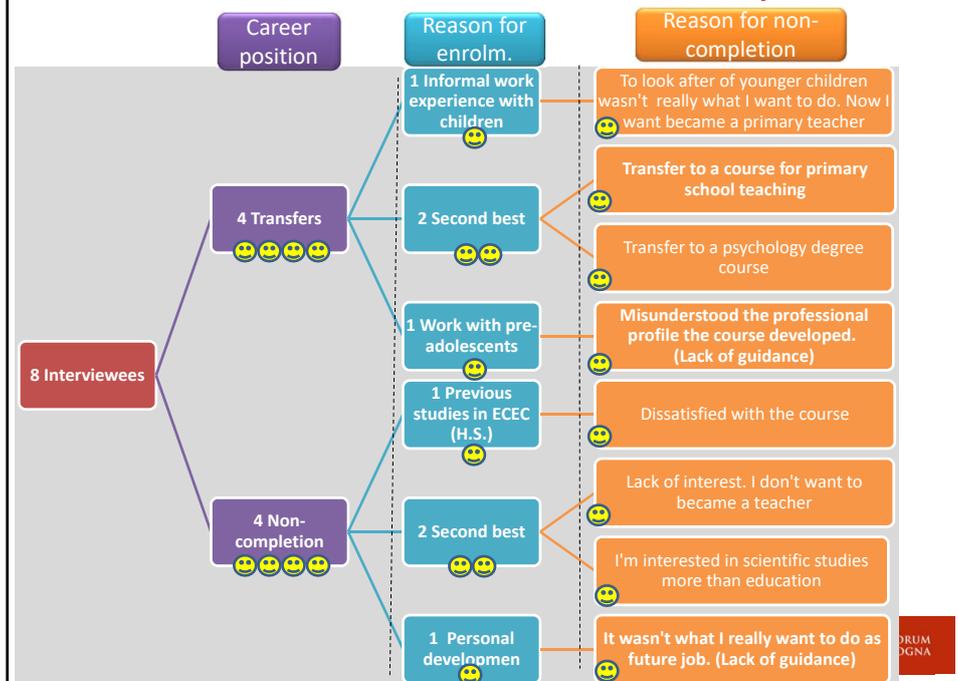
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FOCUS: male students' progression flow

Below is an overview of the flow of progression for male students. About *half of the group* undertook a standard or successful journey, while the rest did not continue, either formally or informally. A qualitative in-depth analysis – as a sequel to the quantitative survey – was carried out among formal leavers through interviews.



Reasons for enrolment and for non-completion



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Support from family and peers

All those interviewed stated that they had received support from family and peers, apart from one person.

M1: "my sister and my mother both encouraged me, so yes, I certainly had their full support"

M3: "As in all the choices I have had to make in life, no-one supported me!"

From a Cultural Theory perspective, we can state that in general **no cultural sanction** took place either from families or peers.

Only one of those interviewed revealed that his friends had dissuaded him from the course and advised him to work so that he could begin earning straight away.

M1 "In my group I was the only one who was going on to further study, so the others said to me 'come with us and work in the factory so you can start earning' "



Quality of the experience in this ECEC course

The majority of those interviewed did not reveal any problems in relation to the course experience. When we asked if the large presence of female created any issues, only two people revealed that they felt like black sheep:

M5: "First of all [I had some difficulty] relating to others on the course, because as you know I was the only male in a very large group of females so I think they viewed me as a bit of a black sheep - that was my impression, but I don't know..."

M8: "I linked up with the other males on the course and we made a nice little group [...] To be frank, I didn't have the idea that there would be only women on the course. I was disorientated. In reality, I think it is a choice that both genders can make, whether male or female"

The comments of these two interviewees highlight the **social pressure that weighed on their choice**, revealing a mild discomfort and the sense that they were not in the right place.



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Conclusions

The difference in career trajectories in the early childhood education sector can be traced to the preceding study paths, leading to these outcomes:

- Males access the course a year or two later than females, on average.
- The proportion of males graduating is manifestly inferior to the female proportion.
- Non-completion, transfer to another course/location, or interruption of course without any formal notification are all more frequent among males.

Qualitative analysis reveals uncertainty about the choice of course:

- For half of the sample, it was an expedient or second-best choice, sometimes made after not having passed the selection criteria for other training courses.
- In two other cases a poor knowledge of the characteristics of the professional profile resulting from the course was evident.

The integration of the two analyses confirms that:

- generally males on this course arrive less clear about their career trajectory, and seem to be less academically driven, and
- once on the course they seem affected by social pressure.

To combat the dominant cultural representation in this field, it would be opportune:

- to promote the figure of the male early childhood educator
- for these courses to provide more transparent information on educational opportunities and outcomes, to better support course choice



Ευχαριστώ πολύ

Thank you for listening and engaging!

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