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Abstract

Only 4% of ECE staff in Sweden and Brazil are men, despite significant differences in gender equality policies and views on male caregiving. To address this gender imbalance, this study aims to explore the experiences of male preschool teacher students in Sweden and Brazil. What challenges do these students encounter, and which factors contribute to successfully completing preschool teacher education? While previous research often focuses on practicing professionals (Hedlin et al., 2019; Warin, 2015) and masculinity theories (Heikkilä and Hellman, 2017; Haddad and Marques, 2022), fewer studies center on male ECE students, the diversity within this minority group and their sense of belonging in higher education (Grimshaw et al., 2023). To address this gap, this study combines various minority theories (Frost and Meyer, 2023; Diamond and Alley, 2022; Moss Kanter, 1977). Thematic data analysis is performed using an abductive approach within a qualitative interpretative paradigm. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen male students at the end of the preschool teacher training program in Sweden and Brazil. The students gave informed consent, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. To ensure voluntary participation, the interviewing researchers had no examining role toward the students and emphasized their right to withdraw consent at any time without affecting their education. The results highlight the importance of male representation, mentorship, social network support, positive work experience in preschools, and the impact of intersecting categories like ethnicity and age. Also, several strategies for developing an inclusive and supportive environment for male preschool teacher students are suggested.

Keywords

male preschool teacher-student, higher education, gender, Sweden, Brazil

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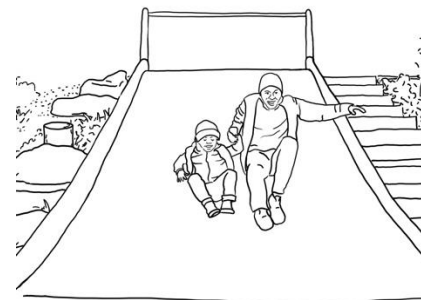


Male students' experiences of preschool teacher training programmes in Sweden and Brazil

Sara Frödén and Ricardo Gonçalves

Background

- Only 4% of ECEC staff in both Sweden and Brazil are men, despite significant differences in gender equality policies and attitudes towards men as caregivers in both countries.
- They also face challenges in recruiting male students and supporting them to complete their degrees. Dropout rates are higher among minority groups, such as men, in preschool teacher training programmes.
- Comparing these contexts offers broader insights into male students' experiences during their studies and how to attract more men to ECEC.



The study's aim and research questions

This study aims to explore the experiences of male students in Sweden and Brazil's preschool teacher training programmes.

- What challenges do these students encounter?
- Which factors contribute to successfully completing preschool teacher education?



Preschool Teacher Education Programmes



SWEDEN: The programme leads to a Bachelor of Arts degree in Preschool Education (3.5 years). Afterwards, students apply for a teaching certification to work as a preschool teacher in ECEC in Sweden.



BRAZIL: The programme (4 years) focuses on training professionals to teach in kindergartens, preschools, and the early years of elementary school, as well as other educational contexts.

Theoretical framework



Minority stress theory (Ilyan H. Meyer) provides a framework for understanding how chronic stress can impact the well-being of marginalised individuals.

Resilience refers to the ability to survive and thrive in the face of adversity, while also coping with the negative effects of stress.

The interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 16 male preschool teacher students at the end of their studies or shortly afterwards.

- **Before education:** Reasons for applying to the preschool teacher education programme and reactions from their families and friends.
- **During education:** Experiences of discrimination or bias based on gender inside and outside of the university. Suggestions on how to develop the programme to attract more men.
- **After education:** Experiences of how sexual abuses of children in preschools have affected perceptions of the profession and their job opportunities. Future work in ECEC and further career options.

Preliminary findings

- **Minority stressors:**
 - The invisibility, marginalisation, and exclusion experienced during breaks and in the classroom.
 - Female classmates' and teachers' comments about the idea of men in ECEC settings as potential perpetrators.
- **How they deal with:**
 - Remaining silent during discussions.
 - Forming groups with other male students or making female friends.
 - Avoiding work with the youngest children (0-3 years).
 - Switching to another career within ECEC or a different educational sector.
 - Acting very friendly, with a professional appearance during the teacher placement.

Minority stressors

- *Most teachers encourage me to continue in the profession, but in practice, there is exclusion. I have no voice in the classroom because all my classmates and teachers are women. There are topics discussed in the room where I feel I have no place to speak about. (Brazilian student 1)*
- *The preschool profession is still very much focused on women. The focus should not be only on women, but on education itself. Even during classes in the university, the teachers use examples in the feminine form: "as professoras". Sometimes I wanted to say: "Hello, I'm here too." (Brazilian student 2)*



There was this preschool teacher who worked there, and she made really inappropriate comments to me. She kept joking a lot about us going on dates and stuff, and it made me super uncomfortable being there. This was also during my very first teacher placement, and I was already kind of nervous about starting in a completely new setting. [...] I also felt the power difference between students and staff, so I didn't dare say anything. Some days, it honestly felt tough to go to the teacher placement, just because I thought it was so incredibly inappropriate and weird situation.

(Swedish student 1)





*It feels like you're in the wrong place,
but at the same time, you're not. I
really want to do this! (Swedish
student 2)*

Resilience

- **Individual-based**

- Proactively participating in discussions in the classroom at the university.
- Questioning restrictions on performing specific tasks during teacher placement.
- Emphasising the importance of men (as male role models) in ECEC.

- **Community-based**

- Social network support consisting of family, friends, and teachers.
- Positive experiences from working in ECEC earlier or during the programme.
- Regulated gender equality policies and other initiatives to enhance the status of the preschool teacher training programme and profession.

Differences between Brazil and Sweden



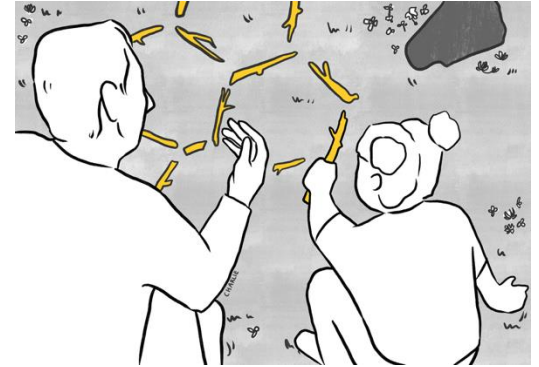
Brazilian male students are in a more vulnerable situation than Swedish students:

- Inability to secure a preschool teacher placement.
- Restrictions on performing specific tasks, mainly related to the hygiene of young children.
- Differences in employment opportunities (private and public ECEC settings).

Pedagogical implications for the preschool teacher training programme

Some possible actions:

- Inviting male preschool teachers to give lectures.
- Incorporating literature on men in ECEC.
- Implementing mentorship and a supportive group of men.
- Encouraging more discussions of sensitive issues such as sexual abuse and other critical perspectives.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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