Teaching as an Ideal Career Choice for Women: Reasons and Gender Roles behind being 'ideal' and 'choice'

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Abstract

Gender, as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon rather than a purely biological distinction, shapes career choices and sustains occupational segregation that limits women's social mobility. In this context, gendered patterns in higher education preferences constitute a critical issue, as they reflect and reproduce unequal power relations and social norms that restrict individuals' access to educational opportunities based on gender, thereby undermining equality of opportunity in education. Accordingly, this study critically examines how gender influence female students' higher education preferences in faculties of education in Türkiye, situating these choices within the broader context of educational inequality and the reproduction of patriarchal norms. In the research, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was utilized, and the study group consisted of undergraduate students determined with purposeful sampling techniques in accordance with the qualitative research. The data were collected using semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers after expert opinions and pilot interview, and then were analysed with content analysis. The findings demonstrated how deeply embedded gender expectations, reinforced by family, school, and societal discourses, channel women into caregiving professions such as teaching. This process illustrates how

education systems function as microcosms of broader gender regimes, legitimizing existing social relations while constraining women's professional agency. The article argues for gender-transformative reforms that challenge the ideological and structural mechanisms of inequality, ensuring that women's academic success translates into genuine professional and socioeconomic empowerment.

Keywords: *gender roles, feminization of teaching, career choices, critical education, teaching in Türkiye*

Introduction

Equality of opportunity in education is that all individuals who live within the borders of the state have the right to equal access to the most suitable educational services which can develop their abilities and skills, without any discrimination, and it is affected by economic, geographical, social, political and individual factors (Mammadov, 2018). One of the factors that can transform this equality of opportunity into inequality of opportunity in education is gender.

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys, encompassing the norms, behaviours, roles, and relationships that shape interactions both within and between these groups (World Health Organization [WHO], 2026.). In the process of constructing this social identity, what plays a more significant role is not the inherent differences between women and men, but rather the act of differentiation imposed by various social, cultural, and institutional factors- an act that contributes to the formation of masculine male identity and traditional female identity, as well as to the emergence of the concept of gender and the problems associated with it (Butler, 2019). This process of differentiation not only constructs distinct gender identities but also reproduces hierarchical power relations that position men and

women unequally within social structures. From an equality-oriented perspective, questioning and transforming these constructions is therefore crucial for addressing structural disparities between women and men.

As well as being a cultural and social construct, gender is shaped by power relations between men and women (Council of Europe, 2019; UNESCO, 2014). Furthermore, gender roles function as a classification system that structures social life and identity (Connell, 2005). Therefore, a proper gender analysis cannot examine the construction of male and female identities in relation to each other without considering how these relations are rooted in power dynamics, and how they serve to reproduce inequalities in access to power, resources, and opportunities (Council of Europe, 2019). In this sense, gender should be understood not only as an identity or a set of roles assigned to women and men, but also as an indicator of the unequal power relations between the two sexes (Aslan, 2015).

The unequal power relations between men and women are significantly shaped by institutions such as the family, society, and the education system, which function together like a three-legged stool, forming a cohesive structure that maintains these dynamics (Aslan, 2015). Alongside these, mass media also operates collectively with these institutions, reinforcing traditional gender roles through the socialization process by assigning distinct expectations and responsibilities to women and men, thereby contributing to the continuation of gender inequality (Hayırsever, 2023; Örnek, 2021).

From birth, children internalize societal expectations of gender through the family, which shapes their behaviour according to gendered norms, while the education system further reinforces and legitimizes these patterns, thereby reproducing the socialization of gender (Aslan, 2015; Göğüş Tan *et al.*, 2000). This process results in two key outcomes: firstly, the formation of patriarchal

family roles, and secondly, a gender-based division of labour in the workforce (Aslan, 2015).

These processes operate through multiple reinforcing mechanisms, including parental role modelling, differential expectations for boys and girls, and the transmission of gendered norms through both explicit instruction and the hidden curriculum within schools (Bourdieu, 1977; Jackson, 1990; Giroux, 1983). Such processes, embedded in everyday classroom practices (Jackson, 1990), contribute to the reproduction of traditional gender roles and broader social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1977; Giroux, 1983). In educational settings, textbooks, teacher attitudes, classroom interactions, and institutional practices often implicitly reproduce traditional gender roles, thereby normalizing gendered divisions of labour (Apple, 2004). The interaction between family-based socialization and schooling thus creates a cumulative effect that sustains patriarchal structures across generations.

Gender and Career Choice

To provide a theoretical foundation for understanding gendered patterns in career choice and labour market outcomes, Kergoat's (2009) framework of the social division of labour offers a useful analytical lens. According to Kergoat (2009), the social division of labour underlying this pattern is shaped by two core principles: the separation principle, which distinguishes between jobs deemed suitable for men and those considered appropriate for women, and the hierarchy principle, which attributes greater value and prestige to men's work. The separation principle manifests in everyday life through the widespread belief that men are naturally more skilled in fields such as numeracy, technology, and management, whereas women are seen as more competent in caregiving, communication, and verbal expression (Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 23). These gendered perceptions and structural norms collectively sustain

occupational segregation and reproduce broader inequalities in the labour market.

Gender roles shape society through the creation of stereotypes, the steering of career choices, their impact on mental health, and the structuring of social interactions (United Way of the National Capital Area, 2025). With particular attention to their influence on career choices and higher education pathways, gender roles tend to steer men and women into certain professions, which often results in occupational segregation and persistent gender pay gaps (European Commission, 2025; United Way of the National Capital Area, 2025). A key factor contributing to this outcome is that individuals' perceptions of their own competencies and abilities are frequently shaped by culturally embedded gender beliefs, which influence how they evaluate their suitability for various professions (Correll, 2001, p. 1962; Eccles, 2011). These beliefs are internalized early on through the socialization process, during which parents, teachers, and broadcasting tools reinforce gender role stereotypes by directing boys and girls toward different expectations and behaviours—ultimately shaping women's future career aspirations (Lent *et al.*, 1994; Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 49).

These patterns are sustained through interconnected mechanisms, including gendered self-assessments of ability, differential encouragement, and structural constraints that channel individuals into gender-typical fields of study and work. As a result, men and women tend to accumulate different forms of human capital and occupational experiences, which in turn contribute to persistent occupational segregation and gender-based wage disparities (Charles and Grusky, 2004; England, 2010).

This developmental aspect is further emphasized in Gottfredson's (1981) theory of career choice, which highlights the role of gender role attitudes and one's gendered self-image in shaping occupational preferences. According to

Gottfredson (1981), while growing up, children learn through interaction with the societal perceptions in which occupations and career paths are appropriate for males and females. From an early age, the gendered messages shape their perceptions of suitable career paths, ultimately limiting their occupational horizons (European Union, 2025; Guide, 2025).

These theoretical insights are reflected in current educational trends. While recent statistics reveal an encouraging increase in women's participation in higher education, concerns about persistent gender inequalities within tertiary education have grown over the last decade (UNESCO, 2021). Earlier research also pointed to a significant shift, described as a "social revolution," in which young women in OECD countries began to attain higher levels of education than men (Field *et al.*, 2007). However, despite these gains over time, strong gender-specific preferences for certain fields of study remain prevalent, particularly at the tertiary level (Field *et al.*, 2007). Male and female students continue to differ markedly in their choice of field of study, a pattern that has been consistently documented in both earlier research and more recent reports, beyond differences in access to higher education due to economic, social, psychological, and religious factors (CMEC, 2024; Lörz, Schindler, and Walter, 2011; UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, gender differences are evident not only in the level of education completed but also in the academic disciplines chosen by men and women, perpetuating inequalities both in education and, later, in the labour market (CMEC, 2024).

These educational pathways, shaped by gendered beliefs and socialization, translate directly into gendered patterns of employment. Occupational segregation is reflected in the persistent tendency for women to be employed in what are commonly referred to as "women's jobs," such as secretarial work, nursing, and teaching (Giddens and Sutton, 2016, p. 270). Professions traditionally associated with authority, power, and supervision are

predominantly assigned to men, while roles involving care, nurturing, and service are often regarded as inherently feminine (Bhasin, 2003). As a result, many women continue to be concentrated in careers such as nursing, teaching, and social work (European Union, 2025; Guide, 2025; Parker, 2015), as the behaviours expected in these professions align with the gendered behavioural patterns that women have been socially conditioned to adopt from an early age (Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 17). Conversely, certain fields—particularly science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), along with technical and vocational education and training (TVET)—have historically been dominated by men (CMEC, 2024; European Union, 2025; Guide, 2025). In parallel, men are systematically channelled into occupations socially constructed as "men's jobs," such as engineering, construction, and leadership roles, which are associated with technical competence, authority, and decision-making (Connell, 2005; Charles and Grusky, 2004). These gendered expectations not only limit women's participation in high-status fields but also reinforce normative pressures on men to conform to traditionally masculine career paths.

This underrepresentation of women in STEM fields which often offer higher-paying and more stable employment opportunities translates into different skills and task specializations, ultimately reinforcing occupational segregation (European Commission, 2025).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings demonstrate that gender roles operate as a powerful structuring force shaping individuals' educational pathways and subsequent career trajectories. Through processes of socialization, internalized beliefs, and institutional practices, both women and men are systematically channelled into gender-typical fields of study and occupations, reinforcing patterns of occupational segregation and inequality. In this regard, examining how gender shapes female students' higher education preferences becomes particularly important for understanding how

these broader structural patterns are reproduced within specific institutional contexts.

Gender and the Teaching Profession

One of the most illustrative examples of gendered occupational concentration can be observed in the teaching profession, which continues to be predominantly occupied by women across different educational levels and national contexts. Various studies support the claim that teaching is a female-dominated profession, as female students tend to choose it more frequently than their male counterparts (Kwatra and Gautam, 2024; Mutekwe and Maphosa, 2011; Nadeem and Khalid, 2018). Historically, teaching has largely been regarded as women's work (Apple, 2022), and this gendered pattern is clearly reflected in statistical data across different regions. According to the most recent data from the Pew Research Center (2024), women made up approximately 77% of the teaching workforce in the United States during the 2020–2021 school year, while men accounted for only 23%. Similarly, Eurostat (2023; 2025) reports that in Europe, 73% (3.8 million) of teachers employed in primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education were women in 2021, compared to 27% (1.43 million) who were men.

In line with this trend, in Türkiye, 61% of teachers working in formal education institutions during the 2023–2024 academic year were women, while men represented 39% of the teaching workforce (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of National Education, 2025). Globally, this gender imbalance has been increasing over time; for example, between 2000 and 2020, the proportion of female teachers rose from 92% to 94% in pre-primary education and from 59% to 67% in primary education (UNESCO, 2023).

While these patterns are observable across different national contexts, the extent and intensity of gendered occupational segregation may vary depending on

socio-cultural, economic, and institutional conditions. In this regard, the Turkish context reflects a distinct configuration shaped by persistent gender norms and structural constraints, which may reinforce these patterns more strongly compared to some other contexts. This variation underscores the importance of examining gendered patterns within specific national contexts rather than assuming uniformity across countries.

Then, beyond the statistics, what explains female students' tendency to choose a career in teaching? Is it their gender self-image, family or environmental expectations and pressures? Or perhaps all of these factors combine to unintentionally steer female students into a professional dead-end? In this context, gender roles—especially social factors like familial and societal expectations—play a critical role in shaping decisions related to higher education, such as choice of field of study, university, and even location, all of which are crucial life determinants. Therefore, it is essential to explore this issue from a qualitative perspective, conducting research not only on the numbers but also on the underlying reasons, a gap that remains largely unaddressed in the literature.

The Context of Türkiye

In Türkiye, the principle of equal opportunity in education is firmly embedded in legal and constitutional frameworks. According to T.C. Anayasası [Turkish Constitution] (Republic of Türkiye, 1982, Article 42), it is guaranteed that no one shall be deprived of the right to education, that primary education is both compulsory and free in public schools, and that the state is responsible for providing financial support to students in need. In alignment with this, in Milli Eğitim Temel Kanunu [National Education Basic Law] (Republic of Türkiye, 1973, Article 8), it is stated that all individuals shall be granted equal opportunity in education, regardless of gender. Similarly, according to the Higher Education Law No. 2547 (Republic of Türkiye, 1981, Article 4), the

state is responsible for ensuring equality of opportunity in higher education. However, despite these strong legal frameworks, structural inequalities persist in practice—particularly in relation to gender. Gender inequality in education cannot be fully understood through legal provisions alone, as it is deeply embedded in social norms, cultural expectations, and power relations that shape individuals' educational experiences. A majority of teachers in Türkiye report that the education system does not effectively provide equal opportunities to all students (Polat and Boydak Özdan, 2020). Furthermore, women's access to and utilization of educational opportunities continues to be constrained by traditional patriarchal structures, particularly in conservative social contexts (Sayılan, 2009). These findings indicate a persistent gap between the formal legal framework and the lived educational realities shaped by gendered expectations and norms. In the Turkish context, these inequalities are reproduced through the interaction of family expectations, school practices, and broader societal norms, which collectively shape both educational choices and subsequent career trajectories. Empirical evidence further indicates that women's disadvantaged position in the labour market is shaped by structural factors such as unequal care responsibilities, wage disparities, and occupational segregation (Durceylan Kaygusuz *et al.*, 2023). This pattern has also been recognized in the Turkish policy context, where women's disproportionate responsibility for childcare, elderly care, and other forms of unpaid labour has long been identified as a key barrier to sustained labour force participation and career continuity (Denizli Polat, 2024). In this context, the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic labour and the persistence of social norms that associate women with caregiving roles not only limit women's labour force participation but also shape their educational trajectories and career choices (Durceylan Kaygusuz *et al.*, 2023). This pattern is also reflected in national data, which show that Türkiye has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates among OECD countries, while domestic responsibilities

remain the most commonly cited reason for women's non-participation in the labour market (Ağar, 2025). In addition, women's labour force participation is also influenced by marital status, as women are more likely to withdraw from the labour market after marriage, resulting in lower participation rates compared to single women (Çelebi and Bakan, 2022). Moreover, women's lower labour force participation cannot be explained by a single factor, but rather reflects the intersection of economic, social, cultural, and institutional dynamics, including the gendered division of labour and mismatches between labour market demands and women's skills (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023).

One of the most visible examples of gender-based occupational segregation in Türkiye can be observed in the teaching profession. Teaching has historically been one of the first public professions accessible to women and holds a unique position in the professional history of Turkish women (Göğüş Tan *et al.*, 2000). Today, women make up the vast majority of teachers in early childhood and primary education; however, their representation significantly decreases at higher education levels (Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 46). While women are often clustered in roles involving care and emotional labour, such as preschool or elementary school teaching, administrative and decision-making roles continue to be dominated by men (Gökçen Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2018). This reflects a clear gender-based division not only between professions but also within them. Importantly, these patterns are not merely the result of individual preferences but are embedded in broader power relations that assign different social values to men's and women's work. The continued perception of teaching as a "women's profession" further reinforces gender stereotypes and limits professional diversity (Göğüş Tan *et al.*, 2000). This perception is also reproduced at the level of individual attitudes, as teacher candidates frequently associate teaching with traditionally feminine roles and express concern over the declining number of male teachers, illustrating how gender norms shape

both access to and participation in the profession (Erginer and Saklan, 2020). This gendered perception is further reproduced at the level of lived experience, as women teachers frequently encounter work–family conflict arising from the intersection of professional responsibilities and caregiving roles, particularly motherhood, which not only constrains career progression but also reinforces the gendered structuring of the teaching profession (Erten and Erten, 2025). Such internal hierarchies within even female-dominated fields illustrate how deeply rooted gender norms operate within the Turkish education system, affecting not only career choice but also professional advancement. This pattern is not unique to Türkiye but is also reflected at the international level, where teaching remains one of the most feminized professions across many OECD countries (OECD, 2023).

Building on this context, although Türkiye's legal framework supports gender equality in education, formal equality does not necessarily result in substantive equality. Women and men may technically have equal access to education, yet persistent gender roles, social norms, and cultural expectations continue to shape the educational and professional trajectories of women. The dominance of women in fields such as teaching—while often viewed as a symbol of inclusion—may in fact reflect deeper societal patterns of gendered career steering. In this sense, women's concentration in such fields should not be interpreted solely as a marker of equality, but rather as an outcome of structural and cultural constraints that shape and limit available choices. Despite extensive statistical data, there remains a significant gap in understanding the qualitative reasons behind female students' occupational preferences, particularly how these preferences are shaped by the interaction of social norms, institutional structures, and gendered self-perceptions.

Beyond the national context, gender equality is not only a matter of personal development, but also a key principle of democracy, human rights, and

sustainable development (Council of Europe, 2019). It intersects directly with various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) (United Nations, 2025). As Apple (2022) rightly emphasizes, gender must be critically examined within educational discourse. One of the most visible areas where gender roles manifest is in young women's higher education choices—particularly their strong preference for traditionally feminized fields such as teaching. Understanding why these patterns persist is crucial for designing effective gender equality strategies in education policy and practice.

In light of these dynamics, this study aims to explore how gender roles influence the higher education preferences of female students in Türkiye—specifically those enrolled in faculties of education. By situating individual preferences within this broader socio-cultural and structural context, the study seeks to bridge the gap between macro-level patterns of inequality and micro-level decision-making processes. By focusing on the interplay between gendered self-perception, societal expectations, and institutional structures, the research seeks to uncover the underlying factors shaping women's educational trajectories. Ultimately, this study hopes to contribute to the broader efforts of mainstreaming gender equality in education by offering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how socially constructed gender roles continue to affect women's access to, and use of, educational opportunities. Acknowledging and critically engaging with existing realities is the first step toward meaningful transformation. In this regard, the study contributes to ongoing efforts toward social change by critically examining how gender roles shape educational choices.

Methodology

Research Design

The aim of this research is to reveal the influence of gender roles on the higher education preferences of the female students in faculties of education within the context of equality of educational opportunity. In parallel, phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was utilized to obtain influential, emotional and often intense human experiences and the underlying truth for those experiences (Merriam, 2023).

The Study Group

The study group consisted of undergraduate female students who studied in Faculties of Education in public universities in Türkiye. The universities were selected through convenience sampling, as the researchers were affiliated with these institutions, which facilitated access to participants and ensured feasibility in data collection. Although the study does not aim for statistical generalization, focusing on public universities provided a relevant context for exploring gendered educational experiences within higher education in Türkiye.

In this context, the study group was determined with purposeful sampling techniques acknowledging that qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples selected purposefully (Patton, 2002). In parallel, utilizing convenience sampling and paying attention to the distribution of the students across the fields of study, 22 students from different departments in two public universities were included in the research based on maximum variation (heterogeneity) of the sample (Patton, 2002). Maximum variation in the sample was primarily achieved through the inclusion of participants from different teaching departments, allowing the study to capture diverse perspectives across disciplinary contexts. This approach was considered particularly relevant, as different teaching fields may reflect varying

experiences and perceptions regarding gender roles and career choices. The sample size was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, as recurring patterns and themes became evident during the analysis process, and no new significant insights emerged in the later interviews.

In terms of participant characteristics, the sample included students from a range of departments within faculties of education, including language teaching programs (e.g., English and Arabic Language Teaching), Turkish Language Teaching, Special Education, Psychological Counselling and Guidance, Science Education, Chemistry Education, Preschool Education, and Music Education. Since the study focused on students' university preferences, the participants were predominantly first-year students, with a smaller number of second-year students included.

Data Collection

The data were collected using semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers. After preparation the interview questions, expert feedbacks were gathered from five experts including experts in assessment, curriculum development, educational administration, and language, and subsequently, pilot interview were conducted. After the necessary arrangements on the questions, the interview form was finalized. Finally, ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Sivas Cumhuriyet University (Approval No: E-50704946-050.04-568245).

Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation was ensured through informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning codes to participants and removing identifying information from the data.

Credibility, Transferability, and Consistency

To ensure credibility, transferability, and consistency as essentials for qualitative research, several strategies were employed. These mainly included utilizing purposeful sampling techniques, ensuring maximum variation, taking expert opinions, ensuring data saturation and participant validation as recommended by Merriam (2023).

In terms of credibility, researchers are expected to maintain consistency throughout the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and to clearly explain how this consistency is achieved (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2018). In this regard, the researcher continuously examined whether the findings were aligned with the conceptual framework and paid careful attention to the coherence and integrity of the results. Another strategy used to enhance credibility is expert review (Merriam, 2023). Accordingly, expert feedback was regularly sought during the processes of data analysis and interpretation. On the other hand, purposeful sampling is considered to be directly related to external validity, or transferability (Arslan, 2022). In addition, Merriam (2023) states that a study can be considered reliable if the findings are consistent with the presented data and suggests several techniques to ensure reliability in qualitative research, such as expert review, clarifying the researcher's role, and the use of an audit trail. An audit trail enables an independent reader to follow the research process and verify the findings by providing detailed explanations of how data were collected, how categories were developed, and how decisions were made throughout the study (Merriam, 2023). Similarly, Akar (2019) emphasizes that reliability can be enhanced by providing clear and concrete descriptions, preserving raw data, and ensuring the verifiability of findings.

In line with these considerations, the present study employed expert review as well as these techniques. In this study, the researcher acted as an instrument in the categorization and interpretation of the data obtained from the interviews.

Furthermore, the raw data obtained from the interviews were preserved, and detailed explanations of how analytical decisions were made—particularly during the data analysis process—are provided in the following section.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed through content analysis, with patterns identified and interpreted in relation to gender roles and teaching as a career. The coding process was primarily inductive, allowing codes and themes to emerge from the data rather than being predetermined. Initially, the interview transcripts were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. Meaningful units were then identified and coded, and similar codes were grouped into categories and broader themes.

To enhance analytical rigor, the coding process was reviewed by the researchers, and consistency in coding was ensured through ongoing comparison and discussion. In addition, expert feedback was sought during the development of themes.

As a result of this analytical process, the data were organized into categories and broader themes based on similarities and patterns identified across participants' responses. The analysis resulted in two main themes: Reasons for Preference and Perception of Ideal Career. These themes were further divided into categories such as City and Field of Study under the first theme, and Work Conditions/Work-Life Balance and Emotional Aspects of the Profession under the second theme. Within each category, specific codes were developed to reflect recurring ideas in the data, such as "being close to family," "family influence," "working hours," and "love for children." The frequencies of these codes and the participants contributing to each code were also documented to provide a clearer understanding of the distribution and prominence of the identified patterns.

Direct quotations were used to support the findings, and participants were coded as P1, P2, etc., to ensure anonymity. Since the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the quotations were translated into English by the researchers. A close, near-literal translation approach was adopted, with careful attention to preserving the original meaning and contextual nuances of participants' responses. To ensure translation accuracy and consistency, the translated excerpts were reviewed and validated by a language expert.

Findings

In this section, the findings obtained from the data were presented under relevant themes, categories, and codes. To strengthen the findings, direct quotations from participants' responses were also included. Initially, Table 1 provided an overview of the themes, categories, and codes, followed by a detailed discussion of each theme.

Table 1

Themes, Categories, Codes, and Participants

Theme	Category	Code	Participants	*f*
Reasons for Preference	City	Being close to family / family's guidance	P1 P3 P4 P5 P7 P8 P10 P11 P12 P16	10
		Being a safe city	P1 P7 P10 P11 P21	5
		Score ranking	P3 P4 P5 P13	4
	Field of study	Family influence	P3 P5 P6 P8 P10 P14 P18 P20	8
		Personal preference	P1 P2 P3 P4 P7 P15	6
		Teachers' guidance	P2 P5	2
Perception of Ideal Career	Work conditions/ Work-life balance	Working hours	P1 P2 P3 P7 P8 P11 P14 P15 P16 P17 P20	11
		Being suitable for starting a family	P1 P5 P6 P7 P13 P14 P15 P16	8
		Being suitable for child care	P1 P6 P7 P13 P15 P16	6
		Having long holidays	P1 P2 P3 P6 P19 P20	6
		Being a safe profession	P12 P16 P22	3
	Emotional aspects of profession	Better communication with children	P2 P3 P4 P8 P10 P11 P13 P18 P19 P20 P21 P22	12
		Sense of compassion	P3 P4 P8 P10 P15 P17 P18 P19 P21	9
		Love for children	P2 P4 P7 P12 P20 P22	6

As indicated in Table 1, the findings were presented under the themes of "reasons for preference" and "perception of ideal career".

Reasons for Preference

The reasons behind female students' preferences were examined in terms of city and field of study.

Preference of City

Based on the data, it was observed that female students preferred the city for the reasons such as "being close to family/family's guidance" (*f*=10), "being a safe city" (*f*=5), and "score ranking" (*f*=4). These findings suggested that "being close to family/family's guidance" and "being a safe city" can be interpreted as gendered considerations when read together with participants' references to family oversight, protectiveness, and safety concerns influencing higher education preferences. These codes and categories were developed from participants' recurring references to staying geographically close to their families, following parental guidance in city selection, and prioritizing cities perceived as safer and more socially acceptable for women. These considerations were interpreted as gendered not merely because students valued proximity or safety, but because participants explicitly linked these preferences to family control, protection, and their position as daughters, reflecting socially constructed expectations regarding women's mobility and safety.

> *"It was my family's and my preference. Actually, I wanted Samsun, and although I was accepted there as well, my family influenced me a bit, saying things like 'stay closer to us.' Since it is close, they thought it would be better, I could go home at the weekends; otherwise, I wanted another city."* (P7)

> *"Definitely the biggest factor, the main reason why I ranked it at the top, was its being close to my family and our perception of it as a safe city since it is in Central Anatolia."* (P1)

> *"Mostly because it is the capital. The presence of white-collar people creates a safer image. Of course, this was influential… Regarding the city, they did not really want me to go to another city, naturally. Since I am the only daughter in the family, they could be a bit overprotective, but for Ankara, they did not discourage me from going."* (P11)

> *"My ranking played an important role in my preference. I listed my choices from the highest to the lowest based on my score. The city where I would study was not important to me."* (P13)

Universities derive significance not only from their academic offerings but also from the cities in which they are located (Taş *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, the characteristics of a university's host city play an important role in students' university selection processes. Supporting this notion and the research findings, studies have shown that proximity to one's hometown is an important factor influencing students' choices of both city and university (Taş *et al.*, 2017; Uyar, 2018).

In making these decisions, students often consult with their immediate social environment, including friends, family members, and parents, who provide crucial guidance and influence (Johnston, 2010; Uyar, 2018). This is consistent with research demonstrating that family, cultural context, and individual differences significantly shape students' educational decisions, with parental influence emerging as a key predictor further shaped by gender and socio-economic factors (Salami, 2007; Olmos-Gómez *et al.*, 2021).

In the present study, however, this influence takes on a gendered character, as family guidance is closely linked to concerns about safety, proximity, and socially acceptable choices for women. In this context, such preferences are frequently shaped by gendered expectations and familial guidance, reflecting societal norms that position women as more dependent on family oversight and safety considerations when making life choices. For women, parental and family

involvement can be particularly pronounced, as families may steer daughters toward choices perceived as safe and socially acceptable, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Moreover, beyond social influence, perceptions of city safety, alongside the reputation of the university and the quality of social life, act as significant determinants of students' higher education preferences (Ceylan *et al.*, 2017). This is particularly significant for female students, as research shows that concerns about safety and social acceptability play a critical role in shaping girls' and women's educational participation and mobility (UNESCO, 2019). These findings align with research highlighting that women's decisions are often shaped by social norms that regulate acceptable behaviour, mobility, and independence, particularly in relation to safety and family expectations (UN Women, 2023). Taken together, these findings demonstrate how gendered socialization shapes not only career aspirations but also logistical decisions such as the location of study.

Preference of Field of Study

In terms of the field of study, the findings indicated that female students chose their majors due to the reasons such as "family influence" (*f*=8), "personal preference (*f*=6), and "teachers' guidance" (*f*=2).

Many female students reported that their career choices were significantly influenced by their families.

> *"My family also affected my choice; they really wanted me to become a teacher. The more they wanted it, the more I wanted it too. I considered other fields during the process, like psychology, which interested me. But my family said teaching suits me better... My gender plays a significant role; they believe that I can handle certain things better, perhaps because I'm perceived as more sensitive… The more they associated teaching with me, the more I leaned toward it. They told me, 'You can do that better, we see you as a teacher… My family wanted it so much that I eventually agreed with them." (P3).*

> *"When I couldn't get into the department I wanted, my father strongly pushed me to choose teaching. Then I said, if I'm going to be a teacher, it should be the best option, so I chose psychological counselling and guidance." (P8)*

> *"I actually wanted a different department. If it had to be teaching, I preferred Special Education. When I couldn't get into Special Education, I wanted to choose Gastronomy, but my family didn't approve of it. So, as a second option, I chose Early Childhood Education." (P18)*

> *"This wasn't the profession I initially had in mind. I wanted to become a police officer, but I couldn't convince my father, so I ended up with this department. He thought it was a difficult profession and not really suitable for women, which is why they didn't want me to pursue it." (P20)*

Some female students reported that their career choices were also influenced by their teachers as well as their families.

> *"Actually, I was eligible to study law — my ranking was quite good, and I was also the top student at my school. So, I listed law programs among my top six or seven choices. For the remaining preferences, my teachers suggested Special Education, saying that it has good career prospects. My family always said that teaching is the most suitable profession for a woman. That might be the reason why I shifted directly from law to teaching in my preferences. My ranking in the science track was also strong, but I still ended up choosing teaching — probably due to my family's pressure and the fact that I'm a woman. Honestly, I didn't shape my own career path; it was shaped by those around me." (P5)*

> *"The choice of my department was my own decision. My family gave me enough support, and I made the choice. Besides that, my guidance counsellors kept telling me that teaching suited me well. Since my communication with children is strong and positive, I didn't have much difficulty choosing this department." (P2)*

Some female students expressed that their career choices were based on their own preferences, rather than external influences.

> *"I wanted to become either a journalist or a teacher, but teaching is a more stable profession. In journalism, there's no distinction between day and night if you want to succeed... That's why I chose teaching — and my family also wanted that." (P1)*
>
> *"I made this choice entirely on my own; no one influenced me. Becoming a teacher has been my dream since childhood. I have always felt that I am well-suited for teaching. I love children and believe that I get along well with them." (P4)*
>
> *"For a girl, the best professions are either nursing or teaching." (P10)*

While family influence and teachers' guidance can be considered directly gender-related factors influencing career choices, personal preference appears to reflect indirect gender-related influences, as evidenced in the participants' quotations.

First of all, most of the female students in the study reported that they were influenced by their families when making decisions about both their career paths and the cities where they would pursue higher education. This finding is consistent with the existing literature. Sayın Güran (2021, p. 63) emphasizes that female teachers are often encouraged—and at times pressured—by their families when choosing the teaching profession. This familial guidance is largely rooted in the societal perception of teaching as a "woman's profession," closely aligned with traditional gender roles such as caregiving, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities. The narratives of the participants also reflected that, in some cases, this guidance moved beyond mere suggestion and became a form of constraint, limiting their ability to make independent choices about their future careers.

Secondly, environmental influences—particularly teachers' guidance—were found to play a significant role in shaping the career choices of female students. This influence is often embedded in broader gendered structures within the educational environment. As noted by Mollaeva (2018), gender stereotypes are not only prevalent among students but also among teachers and families, and

these stereotypes are reinforced through communication patterns, the gendered division of learning, and the hidden curriculum. Such underlying norms contribute to the internalization of gendered expectations regarding appropriate career paths for women and men. Furthermore, although female science and mathematics teachers tend to report lower levels of self-efficacy compared to their male counterparts, their students perform equally well or better; however, this lack of confidence may reflect internalized gender stereotypes and potentially undermine the self-efficacy of female students who see them as role models (UNESCO, 2020). These perceptions held by teachers may also influence how they guide female students in their career choices.

Thirdly, several female students stated that they made their own career choices, a finding that aligns with existing literature to some degree. Gender roles are commonly divided into traditional and egalitarian categories (Larsen and Long, 1988). Research on the impact of gender roles on university students' career choices shows that students tend to adopt a more egalitarian attitude in their professional preferences (Dikmen and Öner, 2024). Female teacher candidates, in particular, tend to embrace these egalitarian views more than their male counterparts, who often hold on to more traditional gender expectations (Soylu and Esen, 2022; Beşparmak, 2021). However, this does not necessarily mean that female students fully shape their career paths solely based on personal preference and evolving gender norms. The participants' quotations explicitly revealed that their career choices were significantly influenced by gender roles even if they were not consciously aware of it. Research indicates that men and women who believe in sharing work and household roles tend to prefer different job characteristics compared to those with more traditional beliefs that emphasize men as breadwinners and women as homemakers (Beşparmak, 2021).

These influences can stem from the gendered images and expectations constructed within family life, school environments, and particularly through the curriculum. Within family life, not only the way parents share responsibilities but also the tasks and duties assigned to children according to gender stereotypes significantly shape children's perceptions of which professions are suitable for men and women (Çetin Gündüz and Tarhan, 2017). This influence originates from the fact that gender socialization begins in early childhood—a critical developmental period—and continues throughout all stages of formal education in school life (Üstündağ-Yıldırım and Zabun, 2024). These gender stereotypes and perceptions are further reinforced through the curriculum. Research indicates that school curricula convey gendered messages, particularly through textbooks, which play a critical role in reflecting and reproducing traditional gender roles. Research has shown that male figures are typically portrayed in a wider variety of occupations and more active, work-related roles, while female figures are largely confined to domestic settings (Özdemir and Balcı Karaboğa, 2019). Similarly, it is seen that women in textbooks are often associated with caregiving and household responsibilities—even in public settings—whereas men are more frequently depicted in positions of power and authority across a broader range of professions (Sarıtaş and Şahin, 2018). Supporting these findings, the Gender Equality in Education Project developed in partnership with the European Union and the Turkish Ministry of National Education, emphasized that schools function as environments where gendered stereotypes are both explicitly and implicitly transmitted. The report highlights how curricula, instructional materials, and teacher attitudes collectively contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles among students (Demir *et al.*, 2016).

Overall, this gendered socialization—and consequently the higher education preferences of female students—is shaped through multiple channels across

different stages of life. Throughout these stages, various factors play a role, including parental role models, colours, toys, fairy tales, cartoons, peer influence, teacher attitudes and behaviours, instructional materials, school climate, and administrators—from early childhood to adulthood (Hayırsever, 2023; Üstündağ-Yıldırım and Zabun, 2024). In this sense, gendered socialization can be understood as a mechanism that both compels individuals to conform to the dominant ideology and reproduces its practices, thereby reinforcing existing social structures and expectations (Althusser, 2010).

Perception of Ideal Caree

Female students' perceptions of ideal career were categorized under "work conditions/ work-life balance" and "emotional aspect of profession".

Work conditions/ Work-Life Balance

In terms of work conditions/ work-life balance, the findings indicated that female students perceived teaching as an ideal profession due to "working hours" (*f*=11), "being suitable for starting a family" (*f*=8), "being suitable for child care" (*f*=6), "having long holidays" (*f*=6), and "being a safe profession" (*f*=3).

Most of the female students regarded teaching as an ideal profession not only because of its favourable working hours and long holidays, but also due to its perceived compatibility with family responsibilities, childcare, and cultural expectations of women as nurturing figures. As reflected in participants' perspectives, teaching was consistently described as a safer and more comfortable career path for women, which minimizes late working hours, reduces exposure to risks commonly associated with other professions, and allows greater flexibility in balancing the dual roles of wife, mother, and professional.

"I think it's generally a good option because you get plenty of holidays and can arrange your time accordingly. For example, when you have a child, you still have lots of time off and can manage it yourself. I believe there's also an extra one and a half years of unpaid leave now. So, especially when starting a family, teaching becomes more appealing." (P1)

"I personally think teaching suits women better. Considering family life, being a wife and a mother, it's a comfortable profession. You know the saying, 'The female bird makes the nest'—because women are generally more nurturing, and since there will be children in the future, they will put in extra effort. So I see teaching as an easier profession. The working hours are also really good. That's how most people see it—it's quite an advantageous job for women." (P7)

"Of course, teaching is ideal if, for example, your spouse doesn't help with housework or doesn't show much interest in the child, it would definitely add extra fatigue. That's just how it is." (P5)

"In our country's conditions, you don't stay out late in the evenings. Because of the working hours, this is actually a good thing. To put it simply, your risk of facing situations like those currently experienced by doctors and healthcare workers is much lower. Compared to a hospital, a school is a safer place." (P12)

"Teaching is ideal for sure because you don't really interact much with the opposite sex; it's mostly a student-teacher relationship with no direct contact. For a woman, I think the working hours are also good. It's truly a profession suited for women. For example, as a woman, you don't have to come home late — you're definitely home by five." (P16)

"Spending time with younger children at the elementary or middle school level and educating them feels safer. Rather than meeting with men and women together in a company or working outside in any field, working with children or younger individuals is, in my opinion, safer for women." (P22)

Historically, particularly in many patriarchal societies, including the Turkish context, women's identities have often been constructed around the domestic sphere, positioning them as the primary agents within the realms of home,

childcare, and family, while men have been granted more visible and influential roles in social, political, and administrative life through their participation in paid labour outside the household (Gökçen Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2018). This deeply ingrained division of labour has persisted even in advanced industrial societies, where women continue to be confined to housework or channelled into service-sector occupations that are often devalued and categorized as "women's work," whereas men overwhelmingly occupy higher-paid and higher-status positions (Marshall, 1999). Within this enduring ideological framework, men are socially constructed as breadwinners and primary providers, while women are expected to shoulder the responsibilities of childrearing and family maintenance, thereby perpetuating gendered hierarchies and reinforcing traditional power relations (Moya, Expósito and Ruiz, 2000).

Within this context, women's career choices are largely shaped by traditional gender norms that both encourage and constrain them to pursue occupations compatible with domestic and family responsibilities (Gökçen Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2018). Women are often guided toward professions such as teaching, nursing, social work, and medicine, which enable them to balance professional responsibilities with family and childcare demands, whereas men are more often directed toward occupations that emphasize authority and active engagement, such as managerial roles, military service, policing, and engineering (Çetin Gündüz and Tarhan, 2017). The behavioural expectations associated with these professions align closely with women's prior socialization, reinforcing pre-existing gendered identities and familiar societal images of femininity (Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 85; Weisgram *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, research demonstrates that women exhibit a pronounced tendency toward certain occupations while remaining significantly underrepresented in managerial and leadership roles, even within the professions they actively choose, highlighting the structural and

cultural limitations imposed on their professional trajectories (Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 33, 62).

The findings of this research are consistent with the literature on women's career choices shaped by traditional gender roles. Previous studies indicate that motherhood, homemaking, and family responsibilities play a central role in women's professional decisions partly due to the specific advantages of teaching such as long holidays, half-day schedules, and seasonal breaks, which allow women to dedicate time to childcare and household management (Çelebioğlu, 2017; Gökçen Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2018; Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 79). This pattern reflects Becker's (1985) argument that women are traditionally assumed to be primarily responsible for family and childcare and are consequently expected to invest less time and effort in their professional lives than men. Furthermore, women have internalized these traditional roles, particularly those of mother and wife, which are imposed by societal expectations and define them within reproductive and domestic relations; these roles are also substantially embraced by the women themselves (Aslan, 2015).

Accordingly, women are generally guided toward professions such as teaching, nursing, social work, and medicine, which enable them to balance professional responsibilities with family and childcare demands, whereas men are more often directed toward occupations that emphasize authority and active engagement, such as managerial roles, military service, policing, and engineering (Çetin Gündüz and Tarhan, 2017).

In conclusion, the perspectives of women teacher candidates illustrate how teaching is not only perceived as a practical and manageable profession but also as one that aligns with socially constructed expectations of women as caregivers and homemakers. By offering extended holidays, flexible schedules, limited exposure to risk, and minimal interaction with men, the profession reinforces

traditional gender norms and legitimizes women's confinement to roles compatible with family and domestic responsibilities. These findings underscore the ways in which dominant gender ideologies continue to shape occupational choices, illustrating how women's internalization of motherhood and domestic responsibilities sustains the reproduction of gendered hierarchies and limits their professional agency within the labour market.

Emotional aspect of profession

In terms of emotional aspect of teaching profession, most of the female students associated teaching with "better communication with children" (*f*=12), "sense of compassion" (*f*=9), and "love for children" (*f*=6).

> *"Of course, my choice is related to being a woman. In my opinion, female teachers communicate more effectively with children in our profession. My family also told me that teaching is the perfect profession for me because I love children. Additionally, the holidays and free periods generally have a positive impact on people." (P2)*
>
> *"I think we approach children with a motherly affection. Women, compared to men, show this kind of maternal care… I don't think any man can do this. Since we women are a bit gentler, we can behave more softly than male teachers and approach children with more compassion, and by doing so, we can earn their affection." (P3)*
>
> *"I want to mention the maternal instinct in this context because mothers are more compassionate, merciful, and understanding. For this reason, I think women can do this job better. I'm not saying men can't do it, but women are able to do it better… Since I was little, I have dreamed of being a teacher. I have found myself more suited to teaching. I love children very much and think I get along well with them." (P4)*
>
> *"All teaching branches involve working with people under 18 years old. I personally prefer being around children rather than adults in my environment." (P12)*
>
> *"In my opinion, the most ideal profession for a woman is teaching, so that there is an emotional bond with children. I believe a woman always communicates better with children. Just as a mother's bond with her child is unique, I think a woman is capable of considering even the smallest details in this regard." (P18)*

> *"For example, kindergarten teachers—I've never seen a male kindergarten teacher. I definitely think women get along with children better. Whether it's with young children or their families, I believe women's communication is much stronger." (P21)*

Feminine gender roles are often associated with sensitivity, empathy, and emotionality (Zara and Özdemir, 2013). Analyses of metaphors used by teacher candidates reveal that their self-perceptions and views of men reflect traditional, patriarchal values and biases (Aslan, 2015). For example, 41.4% of women and 15.0% of men described men with traits such as rudeness, harshness, and lack of emotion, while 48.8% depicted women as weak, sensitive, emotional, and in need of care, indicating that emotionality is widely seen as inherently feminine (Aslan, 2015). Correspondingly, teachers often associate their professional identity with love and compassion (Oplatka, 2009), and for female teachers, a love of children is central to their choice of teaching, as it aligns with their desire to support child development (Çelebioğlu, 2017). This pattern reflects broader societal expectations that direct women toward nurturing, instructive, and psychologically oriented professions such as teaching, nursing, or airline stewardship, while men are steered toward careers emphasizing authority and power, including policing, firefighting, and engineering (Bhasin, 2003). Together, these findings demonstrate how internalized gender norms shape professional choices and identity, reinforcing traditional constructions of femininity and masculinity in the workforce.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study underscores the complex interplay between gender roles, societal expectations, and women's career choices in Türkiye, with a particular focus on the teaching profession. The findings revealed that female students' higher education and career preferences were shaped by a combination of family influence, safety considerations, gendered expectations, and perceptions of teaching as a profession compatible with both work–life balance and emotional

dispositions. These findings are consistent with existing research indicating that female students' preference for teaching is shaped not only by practical considerations such as working hours and flexibility but also by internalized social norms associating women with caregiving and domestic roles (Çelebioğlu, 2017; Gökçen Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2018; Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 18). The emotional dimensions of teaching, including perceived competence in communicating with children and demonstrating compassion, further reinforce the association between teaching and traditionally feminine traits (Aslan, 2015; Oplatka, 2009; Zara and Özdemir, 2013). The study also highlighted the pivotal role of families, as participants reported that expectations regarding proximity, safety, and gender-appropriate careers shaped both city and field of study. In this regard, families, as primary agents of socialization, further reinforce these expectations by shaping perceptions of gender-appropriate career paths (UNESCO, 2023). Teachers and school environments also contributed to these gendered patterns through guidance, curricula, and materials that often reproduce traditional norms (Aslan, 2015; Mollaeva, 2018; Üstündağ-Yıldırım and Zabun, 2024). While some students exercised personal agency, their decisions were still circumscribed by internalized gender expectations, suggesting that even egalitarian attitudes are mediated by enduring societal norms (Dikmen and Öner, 2024; Beşparmak, 2021).

Educational systems often reflect the gender structures of broader society, reproducing existing social relations and practices (Göğüş Tan *et al.*, 2000). In this context, dominant gender ideologies operate across multiple levels—from family guidance and teacher recommendations to societal expectations—steering women toward professions compatible with domestic responsibilities while restricting access to high-status or leadership roles (Çetin Gündüz and Tarhan, 2017; Sayın Güran, 2021, p. 31). Even when exercising personal agency, women's career choices remain shaped by internalized norms,

reflecting the persistence of structural and cultural barriers shaping women's career trajectories. Despite women's success in higher education, this advantage does not consistently translate into labour market outcomes (Niemi, 2017), revealing a persistent gap between educational attainment and professional outcomes, which highlights the need for policies that address structural and cultural inequalities.

Ultimately, within the Turkish context, teaching remains both a practical and socially sanctioned "ideal" career for women, offering emotional fulfilment and compatibility with family responsibilities. However, without deliberate interventions across multiple levels—from curriculum reform and teacher training to parental engagement—the reproduction of gendered hierarchies and constraints on women's professional agency will persist. Therefore, promoting equitable, inclusive, and gender-transformative educational practices is essential to ensure that women's educational successes are translated into genuine socioeconomic and professional empowerment.

In this regard, to address these challenges, ensuring inclusivity and equity within educational systems is crucial, providing fair opportunities for success irrespective of gender, social background, or personal circumstances (Roemer, 1998). Schools play a pivotal role in shaping gendered expectations, as they can perpetuate or challenge societal biases through three key mechanisms: curriculum (explicit or hidden), teaching materials (textbooks and supplementary resources), and teacher attitudes (Aslan, 2015; Kılavuz and Balcı Karaboğa, 2021). Addressing these mechanisms is essential to prevent the reproduction of restrictive gender norms and support more inclusive educational environments (Baba, 2007).

Building on the findings of this study, several implications emerge for educational policy and practice.

First, schools must become central sites for challenging gender bias. This requires critical engagement with curricula, teaching materials, and teacher attitudes through the integration of gender-sensitive pedagogies and the revision of textbooks to counter stereotypical portrayals. As the findings of this study revealed, teaching was perceived as a gender-appropriate profession and closely associated with emotional attributes such as compassion and communication with children; therefore, educational practices should challenge both stereotypical career assumptions and the association between care-related skills and femininity. This can be supported by incorporating diverse role models and representations of women in various professional and leadership positions within educational content and practices.

Second, families must be recognized as pivotal agents of socialization. The findings demonstrated that parental influence—whether through explicit guidance or implicit expectations—was decisive in shaping both higher education choices and career aspirations. Therefore, awareness-raising initiatives targeting parents are essential to challenge deeply internalized gender stereotypes that shape daughters' educational and career choices. In line with this, structured parental engagement programs can complement school-based interventions by supporting the expansion of women's career possibilities (UNESCO, 2023).

Third, universities must embrace their transformative potential. Beyond supporting their own students, universities can also play a broader role in challenging gender norms and raising awareness at the societal level. Given that the findings of this study indicated that gendered career perceptions were largely shaped before higher education, universities should extend their efforts beyond their student populations. In this regard, universities can contribute through community engagement and public outreach initiatives, targeting families, teachers, and school communities to challenge gender stereotypes at

earlier stages. In line with this, research highlights the role of higher education institutions in promoting gender equality through awareness-raising, role modelling, and collaboration with broader social actors (Rosa and Clavero, 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Such efforts can contribute to disrupting gendered career patterns and supporting more equitable educational and professional trajectories.

Finally, policy interventions must adopt a comprehensive and multi-level approach. Efforts should not be confined to expanding access to education but should focus on dismantling structural barriers and cultural norms that constrain women's professional agency. This requires comprehensive strategies, including curriculum reform, teacher education, parental engagement, and higher education initiatives, to ensure that women's educational achievements translate into genuine professional and socioeconomic empowerment. Ultimately, such an approach is essential for achieving sustainable gender equality and ensuring that women's educational attainment translates into equitable labour market outcomes.

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