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# Gender perspective: perceptions by pre-school education program students of a Chilean regional university

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The aim of this study was to analyze perceptions on gender, sexist practices and stereotypes by Pre-School Education program students in the context of pre-school classrooms. To this end, we carried out a mixed method interpretative research based on the case study of the Pre-School Education program of a regional University in Chile. For this purpose, we carried out a documentary analysis of the program's curriculum, as well as a Likert-type ad-hoc survey, a purposive sample comprising 45 students from different cohorts and a focus group of informant students in the framework of progressive internship courses. The main results suggest the inclusion of gender issues to the profile of a graduate of the program, as well as transversally in the courses of the curriculum. There is no significant association of knowledge regarding gender equality and sexual-gender differences in the courses the students were attending. In fact, the students suggest there is a need for further practical training in order to transfer such learning into the classroom. Additionally, there is an agreement among students regarding the significance of including gender perspective for Pre-School Education students. Lastly, the discussion regarding experiences in pre-school classrooms show that students are able to recognize gender stereotypes in games, toys and colors, among others.

## KEYWORDS

children's classroom, early childhood, gender perspective, initial training, pre-school education

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Gender perspective in pre-school education

Gender responds to a set of characteristics assigned by society that differentiate men and women in terms of ideas, prescriptions and social valuations, providing a hierarchy of rights and roles and perpetuating gender inequality (Figuerola-Vargas, 2023; UNESCO, 2018).

In this sense, gender stereotypes and roles act as simplified beliefs on how people should behave and what characteristics they should have based on their gender. Gender perspective aims at questioning and denaturalizing gender roles and power relations between men and women in order to understand social constructions and categories that are characteristic to men and women (Martínez-Sierra et al., 2022; Morad-Acero, 2022; Flores et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Several authors (Figueroa-Vargas, 2023; Prioretta, 2023; Pinto et al., 2021; Zhu and Chang, 2019) highlight the persistency of gender biases and stereotypes in teachers ranging from initial education to children's classrooms.

In spite of current progress towards gender equality, sexist and discriminatory practices persist. They are rooted in different institutions, including education, where it plays a socializing role that replicates and creates hierarchy, roles and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality between men and women by repeating historically attributed categories (Dorantes Carrión et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2020; PNUD, 2020).

By adopting a gender perspective, we can provide a framework that compels us to observe inequalities, allowing us to question the cultural patterns on which they are based (SEP, 2023). Conversely, the lack of a gender perspective might limit the ability of educators to properly fulfill the needs of children in diverse and multicultural educational contexts. So it is that integrating gender perspective into education turns out to be vital for more inclusive learning environments, such as teacher training, community engagement, and curriculum reform, impacting on enhance academic performance, reduce gender-based violence and promote social inclusion (Nkya and Kibona, 2024; Boholano et al., 2024).

Including a gender perspective in Pre-School Education is based on Ley 20.370 on General Education, Ley 20.536 on School Violence, Ley 20.845 on School Inclusion, Ley 20.609 on Measures against Discrimination, Ley 21.120 on the Right to Gender Identity and Ley 21.430 on Guarantees and Integral Protection of the Rights of Children and Youth (SEP, 2023; SEP, 2020), as well as Ley 21.369 (2021) on Sexual Harassment, Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination in Higher Education Institutions. This regulatory body sets forth requirements to be met by means of different actions within their academic communities. Consequently, institutions are required to develop and implement comprehensive policies that address prevention, investigation, sanctions, as well as elimination of such conducts. Similarly, Article 1 of Ley 21.120 (2018) acknowledges the right to Gender identity, as well as sex and registered name change. The law states that any person whose identity does not match their sex and registered name is entitled to request they be changed.

This is the response to the concept of mainstreaming, which refers to the process that allows the introduction of the gender perspective to any action that is planned, developed, implemented, supervised and evaluated, whether it is in legislation, policy or economic or social programs, with the aim of achieving gender equality (Vargas, 2022). In order to that, gender mainstreaming in education is essential for achieve more inclusive and democratic environments, studies highlight its role in eliminating stereotypes, while promoting equity and social justice, considering an appropriate educational policies and teacher training (Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2025; Hemillan-Sacro et al., 2022).

In Chile, there is evidence of the inclusion of gender-focused courses in only three different Pre-School Education programs, which reflects the small extent of training with a gender perspective in higher education programs, in spite of it being key in the promotion of education free of sex-based bias and discrimination in language, behavior and attitude (UNESCO, 2022; Ministerio de Educación, 2019a; SEP, 2018a; Falabella, 2017).

The Ministry of Education of Chile has published several guidelines to address gender equality. The Framework for the Good

Teaching of Pre-School Education represents the guideline that comprises gender as a matter of inclusion (Ministerio de Educación, 2019b). The Curricular Foundations of Pre-School (BCEP for its Spanish initials) framework encourages pre-school educators to assume an active role in “inclusive education, diversity, interculturalism, gender perspective, citizen education” (SEP, 2018b, p. 3).

Nevertheless, according to Muñoz-García and Lira (2020), they lack concrete guidelines in terms of the work in the classroom, as it is ambiguous and overly general. This raises the need of rethinking education from an intersectional point of view or otherwise “mainstreaming gender perspective,” thereby helping in understanding how it relates to other aspects of education (Marcelo and Alegre, 2023; Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas, 2021). It is essential to appropriately organize learning experiences so that all individuals present in the classroom have equal opportunities for exploration and learning (SEP, 2023).

## 1.2 Sexist dynamics in pre-school education

Evidence (Zhu and Chang, 2019) shows the perpetuation of gender-based biases and stereotypes in teaching practices since early education in children's classrooms. In this sense, the education system is a key foundation in perpetuating gender roles due to its dominant role in socialization (Sáinz and Meneses, 2018).

In Chile, there is research on pre-school education that shows that stereotypes and sexist practices continue to exist. In a Chilean study on sexism in pre-school education, Martínez-Palma et al. (2023) analyzed the representations of gender in Chile's reading plan included in the literary corpus for early infancy. The study showed that narrations and characters perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, which might have a negative influence on the gender perception of children during their early years of education.

Conversely, Cortázar and Vielma (2017) studied teaching interactions among female educators, who tended to help girls in their assignments without their asking for it. In contrast, educators made 30% more cognitively-focused questions to boys when compared to girls. Such behavior contributes to a sense of insecurity and lack of autonomy in girls. That's how often unconsciously teachers reinforce gender stereotypes through their behaviors, practices that can shape children's preferences, perpetuating traditional gender roles (Bay-Dönertaş, 2023).

In a qualitative study conducted in four educational institutions, Figueroa-Vargas (2023) found that teaching practices require continuous training and reflection by educators regarding the gender perspective. In fact, female educators perceive girls as passive learners, while boys are seen as inventive (Azúa et al., 2019; Cortázar and Vielma, 2017; Azúa, 2016). In Chile, according to Pinto et al. (2021), the “heteronormative culture” in early childhood contains gender representations and stereotypes both in their initial training and their career development.

Outside of Chile, Wingrave (2018) found that pre-school educators are not aware of their perpetuating gender stereotypes by reinforcing certain practices in the classroom. Halim and Ruble (2010) carried out a study in the United States, using the theory of cognitive development. This research showed that gender identity starts to

develop between 18 and 24 months of age, and those stereotypes are well established by the end of the pre-school stage. These factors significantly affect the behavior and preferences of children by influencing their choice of toys and activities. On that path, the use of inclusive literature can empower the students, foster self-acceptance and broaden their understanding of diversity gender, by a thoughtful selection and discussion contributing to different gender visibility and acceptance in the class (Luecke, 2021).

Despite educators see it as an effective teaching tool for child development, play can perpetuate gender stereotypes. This underlines the need of “critical gender alphabetization” in early years in order to transform teaching practices, taking into account that the development of inclusive and egalitarian environments is either promoted or limited in this stage (Priolella, 2023; SEP, 2023).

### 1.3 Objectives

This study addresses the significance of gender perspective, sexist practices and stereotypes that are perceived and experienced by students of the Pre-School Education program in children's classrooms, based on the following questions: What notions, ideas or perceptions regarding gender perspective have been internalized by Pre-School Education students? How do gender stereotypes and sexist practices manifest in pre-school classrooms? How does training on gender perspective influence educators in the reduction of sexist practices and gender stereotypes in children's classrooms?

Objectives:

- Carrying out a documentary analysis of the Pre-School Education program curriculum of one Regional University of the Biobío Region, Chile.
- Describing the perceptions of Pre-School Education students on gender perspective.
- Documenting the perceptions of students on gender perspective within the framework of the students' progressive professional internship in 2023.

## 2 Materials and methods

This study adopted an interpretative case study methodology, with the aim of exploring how students in the Pre-School Education program at a regional university in the Biobío Region, Chile, perceive the gender perspective and identify manifestations of sexism and gender stereotypes in early childhood classrooms. The research is grounded in the assumption that students value the integration of the gender perspective and recognize the importance of addressing discriminatory practices.

Based on an interpretative paradigm, the study sought to understand reality from the participants' perspective within a defined social context (Hernández Sampieri, 2018). A mixed-methods design was implemented, incorporating qualitative and quantitative strategies and combining inductive and deductive reasoning to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Vieytes, 2004).

The case study design enabled a detailed examination of a specific educational setting to reveal how gender dynamics operate in a real-world context (Hernández Sampieri, 2018). The purposive sample

included 45 female students who voluntarily agreed to participate. The inclusion criteria were:

- Being a regular student in the Pre-School Education program.
- Agreeing to participate voluntarily in the study.
- Signing an informed consent form.

The sample consisted only of women due to the actual demographic composition of the student body at the time of data collection, and not as a result of a deliberate exclusion of other gender identities.

Data collection was carried out in two sequential phases. The first phase involved a macro- and micro-curricular analysis to identify how the gender perspective is addressed both in graduation profiles and in course syllabi. A curricular matrix was used to record the presence, timing, and learning outcomes associated with gender-related content.

The second phase involved the administration of a Likert-type survey, validated by expert judgment, to measure student opinions on gender-related variables. The instrument included closed-ended and one open-ended question, which allowed for the identification of response patterns and their categorization.

Focus groups complemented the quantitative findings and included participants from all 4 years of the program. These sessions, held in the context of the course “Progressive Practices,” encouraged reflection on classroom experiences related to gender. The discussions were structured around thematic guides that enabled the collection of perceptions regarding gender bias. The categories of analysis were:

- Knowledge of gender perspective:
  - Gender conceptions
  - Lived experiences
- Training on gender perspective:
  - Gender-related topics in the curriculum
  - Importance in Pre-School Education
  - Experiences of discrimination or violence
- Perceptions and personal commitment:
  - Challenges
  - Opportunities

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics, Bioethics, and Biosafety Committee of the Vice-Rectorate for Research and Development at the University of Concepción, Chile (Resolution CEBB No. 3126-2025). The study adhered to national and international ethical standards for scientific research involving human participants, in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants gave their informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study.

Survey data were analyzed descriptively, while focus group transcripts underwent differential semantic analysis. This analysis involved identifying pairs of opposing terms that reflect evaluative judgments (Åkestam et al., 2021; Kollmayer et al., 2018), which made it possible to define dimensions attributed to either boys or girls.

Spearman's rank correlation and Chi-squared tests were applied to explore statistical relationships in student responses. A significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  was used. Although the first Chi-squared test did not yield a statistically significant result, it was transparently reported to avoid misinterpretation. The other two tests showed statistically significant associations. The use of Spearman's method was appropriate

due to the ordinal nature of the data, and the Chi-squared tests were suitable for categorical variables, consistent with the non-parametric nature of the sample.

## 3 Results

Based on the surveyed categories, we provide the following results obtained by means of the aforementioned instruments:

### 3.1 Documentary analysis

In the context of the training curriculum of the program, it is worth noting that the profile of a graduate expressly describes competence N° 3 in particular: *“comprehensively assuming the role of a teacher, consolidated in an ethical dimension of inclusion, respect, tolerance and the projection of universal human values to address regional and national demands of the educational system with social responsibility.” (Performance section: teaching in the educational system).*

In terms of curriculum, some syllabi include the topic within their learning outcomes, depending on the course and semester of study (Table 1).

Based on the table above, the topic under consideration is mentioned throughout the learning outcomes of the courses. This shows that they are included in the curriculum in different semesters of the study program (Tables 2, 3).

It should be noted that these explicit learning outcomes aim at the development of basic and intermediate skills of initial cognitive appropriation that students should show at a micro-curricular level. However, there is a need to work on minor curriculum adjustments that allow the students to transfer what they have learned about gender perspective in the context of progressive and professional practice training.

### 3.2 Likert-type survey

The descriptive statistical analyses show a very positive valuation of the gender perspective by the surveyed students: 80% agree and totally agree with the role of pre-school educators as mediators and facilitators for gender-related topics, as well the relevance of gender equality in initial teacher training. However, only one in five agree that they have sufficient information on gender equality and on recognizing sexual-gender diversity.

Also, 90% of the surveyed students agree that play is the best strategy to teach gender equality, closely linked to citizen education of children. The statement: “I have enough information regarding gender equality and recognition of gender diversity and gender dissidence” obtains 47% of responses in the categories disagree and strongly disagree.

It is noteworthy that, on average, 36% of participants do not agree nor disagree with the statement. This suggests it is a neutral category of one in three responses. Students may not have sufficient information or the information that is available may not provide them with the tools to act.

The main results show that the course to which the students belong (first, second, third and fourth year) does not have a significant impact on the knowledge about gender equality and diversity.

However, the Spearman correlation shows a significant negative relationship, i.e., students in more advanced courses might feel less informed about gender diversity and dissidences than first-year or second-year students.

Regarding the recognition of diversity in families, the Chi-squared test shows an important association regarding relational diversity, while Spearman correlations are significant and positive for both variables, i.e., students in more advanced courses tends to recognize family diversity more frequently.

Additionally, there are significant associations for the concepts of sexual orientation and intersex people. Conversely, the course does

TABLE 1 Curriculum.

SEM	Course	Learning outcome
I	Education, Society and Human Development	Identifying the principles of citizen formation, human rights, as well as their founding values.
I	Initial Progressive Internship I: Introduction to Pre-School Education Curriculum	Developing an attitude of self-awareness in the personal and academic space, as well as self-respect and respect for others.
II	Teaching Internship	Valuing the role of the teacher from an ethical perspective with inclusion, tolerance and respect, and by projecting universal human values.
IV	Educational Psychology	Valuing the effects of organizational culture in innovation, commitment, climate and coexistence.
VI	Assessment for Learning	Analyzing the principles, references and conceptualization of education of human beings in working with diversity and its inclusion in the classroom.
VII	Advanced Progressive Internship II: Second Cycle of Pre-School Education	Analyzing the ethical principles of teacher training, students' rights and values that are the foundation of education.
VII	Methods of Educational Research	Sustaining an ethical behavior when dealing with ideas or information (quotes and references), dealing with experimental groups and management of confidentiality (research deontology), in accordance with internationally accepted regulations.
VIII	Advanced Progressive Internship III: Curriculum Planning in Pre-School Education	Analyzing the ethical principles of teacher education, students' rights and values, planning experiences and actions that foster values and integrate the principles that are the foundation of education.
IX	Specialty Professional Internship	Designing teaching support related to the characteristics and needs observed in students in order to facilitate the learning process and to promote inclusion for all students in the classroom.

Source: Prepared by the authors.



TABLE 2 Chi-squared test in gender perspective training<sup>1</sup>.

Variable	Chi2	p-value	Interpretation
@4. Relevance of gender-related topics in Pre-School Education training	18.98	0.08	No significant association near the limit.

Source: Prepared by the authors.  
<sup>1</sup>Chi2 = Chi-squared statistic; *p* = probability value.

TABLE 3 Chi-squared test in perceptions and personal commitment<sup>1</sup>.

Variable	Chi2	p-value	Interpretation
@9. Have you ever felt discriminated by professors based on gender dissidence in university classrooms?	32.34	0.00	No significant association.
@10. Have you ever felt discriminated by your peers based on gender dissidence in university classrooms?	26.31	0.00	Ibid

Source: Prepared by the authors.  
<sup>1</sup>Chi2 = Chi-squared statistic; *p* = probability value.

not show a statistically significant relationship in topics such as gender identity, gender-based discrimination, different abilities between men and women, and the perception of gender equality in Chile.

Training on gender perspective shows that there is no association between the program year and the perception regarding its relevance, gender stereotypes, sex education, the role of nursery school educators and the Curricular Foundations of Pre-School (SEP, 2018a).

It should be noted that Chi-squared tests are in Category 2. In Training on Gender Perspective, the outcomes are the following:

The results point to a shared awareness among students regarding the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in education. Nonetheless, the lack of statistically significant correlations indicates that further investigation is needed to understand the underlying processes through which students engage with gender-related content, particularly at the level of attitudes, values, and pedagogical choices.

The findings of this research suggest that gender stereotypes continue to be replicated in children’s classrooms in Biobio Region, Chile. Our results show that gender equality continues to be a goal for the future, but that it cannot be achieved without taking Pre-School Education into the equation.

This result is revealing since first and second year students have quickly incorporated the significance of the gender perspective in their training and their role as pre-school educators. It is possible to hypothesize about the role of gender mainstreaming, which has enhanced its effect several years after the beginning of the implementation of this policy in the curriculum.

In relation to the last category, which includes perceptions and personal commitment, researchers observed that the group under study is not linked to the adoption of a gender identity in their families or among their peers, or to the recognition of belonging to dissidences. It should be noted that these are students enrolled in a degree program that, in Chile, has traditionally been pursued by women.

Regarding the perception of discrimination in university classrooms by professors or peers, the Chi-squared test suggests that there is a significant relationship with the course, as shown below:

Therefore, committing to learning about gender equality and playing an active role as a citizen in inclusion and gender equality, do not show a statistical relationship with the course.

In this context, it is important to mention “Feminist May” in 2018 in Chile, which brought attention to topics such as sexual harassment and violence in university spaces. After several months of demonstrations by female students, agreements were reached which laid the groundwork for institutional policies. This has led to the creation of offices dedicated to gender equality in recent years (Garrido, 2023). In the same vein, the findings regarding gender stereotypes are worth mentioning since they are still replicated in children’s classrooms. Table 4 presents findings derived from the semantic differential analysis of focus group transcripts. These data reflect students’ direct observations and interpretations during their internships.

Table 4 shows results from most frequent to least frequent. It is noteworthy that the reference to colors and toys is the most common one, followed by behavior and emotions. In this regard, it is important to mention that color and toy types differentiated by sex are a symbolic representation of what society understands as feminine and masculine. Both are understood as an essence, a *must be*. As a result, girls have a *feminine essence* and boys a *masculine essence*, as evidenced by the following statement made by a student. *Telling girls that they have to be delicate and play carefully and telling boys that they are men and that is why they have to be brave and they cannot cry.*

This explains the suppression of emotions such as crying in boys and their being allowed messy and rough behavior. Conversely, girls are allowed to express sadness, but not anger, since they must be *quiet* and *delicate*. An example of this is the following sentence: *“girls cannot play as rough because that’s not lady-like.”* The use of differentiated spaces and activities is also mentioned: *“Giving girls babies or dolls and boys construction machines.”* Two students remarked: *“treating boys as stronger and capable of more complex things than girls”* and *“acknowledging males because of their achievement and learning.”* This reflects discrimination, as mentioned above.

### 3.3 Focus group

The analysis of the applied technique allows us to state that, despite being in different years of the program, there is an agreement

TABLE 4 Differential semantic analysis on gender stereotype.

Aspect	Boy	Girl
Color	Blue	Pink
Toys	Cars, construction	Dolls
Behavior	Messy	Quiet
Behavior	Rough	Delicate
Expression of feelings	Anger, rage	Sadness
Forbidden emotions	Crying, sadness	Anger, rage
Appearance	Short hair	Long hair
Referents	Heroes, dragons	Princesses
Physical ability	Strength	(Lack of) strength
Expectations	Higher	Lower
Achievements	Remarkable	Less remarkable

Source: Prepared by the authors.

among students regarding the value of gender perspective, which contributes to reducing discrimination and promoting an inclusive society. However, the students recognize that there is a lack of training, not only in relation to theory but also regarding practice, to transfer this knowledge into the classroom.

The students share their experiences in the classroom regarding gender stereotypes, more interestingly with respect to how they address gender and biases in their relationship with families, other educators and the technical team. Having practical experience is key for putting theoretical learning into practice in the children's classroom.

In fact, the internship experiences show diversity regarding the topic: from classrooms without gender stereotypes to classrooms with stereotypes, which is mainly evidenced in topics like games, toys and colors. In the experiences below, the students express their reflections on gender stereotypes and different scenarios they have faced:

*"(...) in my internship there was a boy who used to dress up as a princess and there were girls who said: "Oh, no, why did you dress up as a princess? We have to wear those ourselves, the girls," and he was very happy with the princess costume (...). The classroom had costumes that children could wear whenever they wanted. Then I explained to the boy that everyone could wear whatever they liked, whatever they wanted (...). I think it is important to apply this perspective from an early age, so that they understand it."*

*"In my internship last year at JUNJI, everything was established (...). The nursery school had a space that represented a home and everyone could play the role of a mother. Those who took care of a baby had to go to another space. I remember the construction space, where everyone could be a builder of different things (...). I did not see that kind of marked stereotypes. Everything was quite inclusive."*

Based on the focus group corpus, it is possible to state that the main challenge identified by the students is putting gender knowledge into practice that is, working in the classroom with a gender perspective. To this end, it is proposed to strengthen the work with families, which should also be extended to schools and the school community.

The gender perspective should be expanded, with families and teaching and technical teams. For example, we propose implementing inclusive games, without gender stereotypes. In this regard, the

incorporation of the gender perspective in the Pre-School Education curriculum has a positive value. The students raise their concerns regarding the difficulties involved in working with "more closed-minded" families, in which traditional gender roles are assigned, and in this sense, they see educators as "agents for change" who contribute to this purpose by "setting an example," "not imposing beliefs" and educating "for inclusion since early childhood." For this reason, it is necessary to find a balance between accompanying boys and girls with a gender perspective and accompanying families.

*"(...) A good challenge for me would be to develop more strategies to work with families. I think it is relevant because change begins in early childhood and we can promote it by working with families. We must not forget the role of the first educator and caregiver, which makes as a collaborating agent. We want to do a lot, but we need the families to be supportive in the process. I think we have to focus on that, on how to work with families, on how to present those situations that may be taboo for some. How can we do it from this side of the street?"*

The weak association of the gender perspective with various spheres of social life is worth noting. In other words, the participants do not fully see the influence of gender inequalities throughout people's lives. In this sense, there is a need for more learning about basic issues such as the promotion of gender equality, not only in relation to games or colors, but also regarding the fact that what boys/girls and women/men do is equally valuable. This is precisely one of the most deep-rooted causes of inequality and sexism, thus imposing the male sex as superior to the female sex. Furthermore, the gender perspective is seen as an opportunity to promote a more just society, where gender roles do not restrain boys, girls and youth from their decisions and interests. A relevant issue for future teachers relates to expectations. In male-sexist societies these tend to be higher for boys to the detriment of girls, which affects self-esteem. Expectations and self-esteem require a joint work when developing strategies for children's classrooms.

## 4 Discussion and conclusion

One of the main findings of this research is that teacher education programs include the subject of study and explicitly reference it both in the graduate profile and across various courses. However, opportunities for improvement are identified through curricular adjustments that would allow for the transversal and sustained integration of this approach. These adjustments should align with current legal regulations and incorporate complementary courses aimed at developing knowledge and skills for gender-focused education.

Despite the formal inclusion of the subject in the curriculum, a gap persists between theoretical knowledge on gender perspective and its effective application in early childhood education classrooms. This disconnect between knowledge and practice suggests that strategies aimed at promoting equality must also address structural and contextual dimensions of the educational process.

Participants not only expressed a positive view toward the inclusion of the gender perspective, but also demonstrated the ability to identify stereotypes. Nevertheless, they reported that the information available during their training was limited.

Family dynamics related to gender roles also significantly influenced the perceptions and pedagogical practices of future teachers. Those from traditional family contexts tended to express different attitudes and behaviors regarding gender compared to those raised in more egalitarian environments. Focus group narratives revealed how these early experiences influenced their pedagogical decisions. As stated by the SEP (2023), the family is the first educational agent and plays a key role in promoting an environment of equality, which significantly impacts how children interpret and engage with their surroundings.

These observations highlight the importance of considering personal experiences in initial teacher education, given that gender roles begin to form from birth, influenced by social differences and life strategies shaped by specific contexts (Zhu and Chang, 2019).

In this context, it becomes necessary to adopt an intergenerational approach in teacher education to question and transform traditional gender patterns (Figuerola-Vargas, 2023; Priolella, 2023; Pinto et al., 2021; Zhu and Chang, 2019).

Students' shared experiences also reveal that some families' resistance to the inclusion of gender equality topics represents a significant barrier. This underscores the need to develop strategies that actively involve families, promoting gradual and collaborative change.

The findings from the focus groups also contributed to strengthening participants' ability to identify gender biases and stereotypes that are still replicated in early childhood education. Along these lines, it is essential that educators are equipped with tools to observe, question, and transform sexist practices. Although some curricula in Chile have incorporated public policies with a gender perspective, gender equality remains an unresolved issue that requires urgent attention.

Initial teacher education can play a central role in promoting gender equality from early childhood. Various actors, such as the Ministry of Education, civil society organizations, and international bodies, have emphasized that strengthening the gender perspective is essential for building more equitable societies. The main challenge lies in ensuring its effective implementation in classrooms, which requires the incorporation of concrete pedagogical strategies through a transversal approach within teacher training programs, aligned with a comprehensive institutional policy (Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas, 2021).

The findings of this study support the need to revise curricular strategies to more effectively integrate the gender perspective, both in theory and in practice. Psychoeducational implications include strengthening initial teacher training through experiential and reflective components.

This study presents limitations related to the sampling design, primarily because it was conducted with students from a degree program composed exclusively of women, with no male participants or individuals with openly diverse sexual and gender identities. Therefore, its findings are generalizable only to similar cases. It is worth noting that future studies should consider the inclusion of greater diversity in gender identities and explore the longitudinal effects of gender-sensitive curricula.

This limitation reflects the structural composition of early childhood education in Latin America, where teaching roles have historically been attributed to women, reinforcing traditional caregiving roles (Lagarde, 2015). In Chile, 99% of students enrolled in Pre-School Education programs are women (Ministerio de Educación, 2025). While the study does not aim to exclude

other gender identities, it reflects the reality of an all-female student cohort in the context under analysis. Future research should incorporate masculinities and non-binary identities to provide a more inclusive understanding of the relationship between gender perspective and teacher training (Zhu and Chang, 2019).

In light of the findings and limitations identified, future research should:

- Incorporate non-binary and transgender identities to capture a broader spectrum of experiences.
- Design gender-sensitive and participatory methodologies that amplify marginalized voices in educational settings.
- Evaluate the impact of inclusive policies and practices that recognize gender diversity in early childhood education.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

LN-P: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. GS-V: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AC-H: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. VS-H: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JG-B: Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. YF-M: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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