

Examining the future and occupational anxiety of preschool teacher candidates

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between future anxiety and occupational anxiety among preschool teacher candidates. A correlational survey design was employed. The sample comprised 225 teacher candidates enrolled in the Preschool Education Department of the Faculty of Education at a state university. Data were collected using a Demographic Information Form, the Future Anxiety Scale for University Students, and the Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers. All measures were completed individually via an online platform. Results indicated that fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety were positively and significantly associated with all eight dimensions of occupational anxiety (task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety). Higher levels of fear of the future and hopelessness about the future were accompanied by higher levels of occupational anxiety, whereas lower levels were accompanied by lower occupational anxiety. Overall, future anxiety showed the strongest association with economic-social-centred anxiety and the weakest association with student communication-centred anxiety. Regression analyses further showed that fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety significantly predicted each dimension of occupational anxiety. Overall, future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centred anxiety and least strongly predicted student communication-centred anxiety. Taken together, these findings indicate that future anxiety is closely linked to how teacher candidates perceive and anticipate their professional lives.

KEYWORDS: Future anxiety; Occupational anxiety; Teacher candidates; Preschool teaching; Early childhood.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a critical phase in children's cognitive, affective, and social development and shapes foundational learning habits (UNESCO, 2010). The quality of experiences provided during this period has long-term implications for children's later academic achievement and psychosocial well-being. Within this context, preschool teachers play a pivotal role in the educational process (Kunt & Avci, 2023). They act not only as instructors but also as guides who foster curiosity, intrinsic motivation, and positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. Accordingly, the effectiveness of ECE is closely linked to teachers' professional competence, emotional well-being,

and psychological readiness (Einarsdottir, 2014). Beyond being a pedagogical choice, the critical role of ECE is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of children's right to a strong foundation and a key component of efforts to promote equity in education. In recent years, particular emphasis has been placed on the quality, stability, and well-being of the ECE workforce as central determinants of provision. Contemporary global reports indicate that initiatives to strengthen quality in ECE are directly tied to educators' working conditions, the attractiveness of the profession, entry into the sector, retention dynamics, and early-career support mechanisms (OECD, 2020; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, teacher candidates' perceptions of the future and their occupational anxieties should be understood not merely as individual-level variables, but also as structural indicators that may influence the sustainability of quality in ECE.

Preschool teachers are expected to possess current professional knowledge and a broad repertoire of skills, including classroom management, effective communication, and a sound understanding of children's developmental characteristics (Cheung, 2020; Köksal Akyol, 2012). They are also responsible for designing learning environments that stimulate curiosity and support the development of essential psychosocial skills and motivation to learn (Pianta et al., 2009). Among the many determinants of educational quality, teacher characteristics have been identified as particularly influential (Schmitt et al., 2023). In this regard, variables such as occupational anxiety, life satisfaction, and future expectations can shape instructional practices and the quality of teacher-child interactions (Gülbahar, Kuzu, & Sivacı, 2023). Within ECE, teachers' emotional well-being and occupational stress are closely linked to child outcomes through their influence on the quality of classroom interactions. Evidence from research conducted in the Head Start context indicates that workplace stress can be negatively associated with the quality of teacher-child relationships (Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, & Gooze, 2015). Similarly, systematic reviews examining teacher burnout emphasise that high levels of stress and burnout are associated with an increased likelihood of leaving the job or exiting the field, which may, in turn, pose risks to continuity and quality in children's early learning experiences (Ng, Rogers, & McNamara, 2023). International teacher surveys likewise report that a substantial proportion of the ECE workforce feels highly stressed, with workload and working conditions frequently cited as prominent sources of stress (OECD, 2025). From this perspective, understanding the anxiety experienced by teacher candidates is important not only for individual adjustment but also as a preventive approach to sustaining quality in ECE.

Teaching is widely recognised as an emotionally demanding profession. Evidence suggests that teachers report higher levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion than many other occupational groups (İşli, 2023). Preschool teachers, who work with younger children and engage in sustained communication with families, often require additional support in areas such as self-care, emotional regulation, and continuous professional development. These demands may contribute to both the intensity and the multidimensional nature of their occupational anxiety (Ada & Erdaş Kartal, 2020). Importantly, the quality of ECE is shaped not only by in-service teachers but also by the professional preparation of teacher candidates, whose training experiences can be decisive for later practice (Sağlam, Çelik, & Tunç, 2024). The constructs addressed in this study—occupational anxiety and future anxiety—can be understood through a shared explanatory lens. Under conditions of uncertainty, anxiety may increase when individuals perceive their personal resources (e.g., time, financial security, status, perceived control, and perceived competence) as insufficient. For preschool teacher candidates, expectations regarding job security, the likelihood of appointment, economic independence, and professional status may be key stressors shaping future-oriented cognitive appraisals. In the international literature on the ECE workforce, factors such as pay,

opportunities for progression, and working conditions have been linked to the attractiveness of the profession and intentions to remain in the field, suggesting that these issues can generate anticipatory anxiety as early as the preservice period (OECD, 2020). Therefore, considering future anxiety and occupational anxiety together may offer meaningful explanatory power at both psychological and structural levels.

Occupational anxiety refers to the concerns that teacher candidates experience regarding the professional roles, responsibilities, and challenges they may encounter upon entering the teaching profession. Research suggests that such anxiety commonly centres on classroom management, instructional effectiveness, assessment practices, and relationships with colleagues and families (Ada & Erdaş Kartal, 2020; Morton et al., 1997). For example, Morton et al. (1997) reported that trainee teachers in Britain experienced high levels of anxiety related to pupil discipline, teaching methods, and professional relationships. Taken together, these findings indicate that occupational anxiety can emerge early in the professional trajectory and may influence both professional development and teaching quality.

Alongside occupational anxiety, future anxiety constitutes another critical psychological factor affecting teacher candidates. Future anxiety has been defined as a dispositional tendency that differs from conventional conceptualisations of anxiety in that it is characterised by longer-term negative expectations about the future, perceptions of uncertainty, and a cognitive orientation towards adverse future scenarios (Zaleski, 1996). Work on the assessment of this construct suggests that future-oriented anxiety is not merely a transient affective state; rather, it reflects a cognitive pattern through which individuals represent the future primarily in terms of threat and risk (Zaleski et al., 2017). It is characterised by apprehension regarding potential negative changes in both the short and long term (Jannini et al., 2024). Within the teaching profession, future anxiety is often intertwined with concerns about employment, professional competence, and career sustainability (Gerçek, 2018).

In the Turkish context, future anxiety among teacher candidates is strongly shaped by structural and economic conditions. Graduates of faculties of education are required to take the Public Personnel Selection Examination (KPSS) and subsequently undergo an interview process to be appointed to public schools. This competitive and uncertain pathway constitutes a major source of stress and anxiety (Bulut & Yıldırım, 2020). Empirical studies consistently report that concerns related to the KPSS, appointment procedures, and post-graduation unemployment are among the most salient sources of anxiety for teacher candidates (Bulut & Yıldırım, 2020; Özcan, 2019). The prospect of unemployment, economic insecurity, and an inability to practise one's profession may undermine candidates' motivation, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life. Beyond individual aspirations, teacher candidates' perceptions of the future and employment prospects in Türkiye are also shaped by the state's employment capacity and broader youth labour-market indicators. For example, in the 2025 recruitment of contracted teachers, the Ministry of National Education allocated 1,321 posts to preschool teaching, suggesting that appointment competition may constitute a salient pressure even within early childhood education (MEB, 2025). In addition, official labour market bulletins indicate that unemployment among those aged 15–24 has remained in the double digits (ÇSGB, 2025). This structural context provides a critical background for understanding preschool teacher candidates' uncertainty about the future and their concerns about sustaining a foothold in the profession.

Research focusing on preschool teacher candidates suggests that levels of occupational and future anxiety vary according to factors such as academic achievement, psychological well-being, career planning, perceived professional readiness, and post-graduation employment opportunities (Arslan,

Tunca Güçlü, & Alkın Şahin, 2023; Geylani & Çiriş Yıldız, 2022; Gümrükçü Bilgici & Deniz, 2016). Individual characteristics, limited professional experience, and perceived inadequacies in pedagogical knowledge have also been identified as significant contributors to anxiety (Küleği Akyavuz, 2021). In addition, economic conditions have been shown to play a decisive role in shaping young people's future expectations in Türkiye, potentially intensifying future anxiety (Yücel & Buz, 2023).

Future anxiety, like occupational anxiety, has important implications for teacher candidates' psychological well-being. In a study involving 1,024 university students, Öztekin (2025) found that future anxiety was negatively associated with optimism and positively associated with pessimism. Optimism and pessimism were also found to mediate the relationship between future anxiety and well-being, suggesting that elevated future anxiety may erode students' psychological resilience and overall well-being.

Although numerous studies in Türkiye have examined teacher candidates' occupational and future anxiety separately (Cabı & Yalçınalp, 2013; Gümrükçü Bilgici & Deniz, 2016), the literature indicates a notable gap in research on the association between these constructs, particularly among preschool teacher candidates. While prior work has focused on demographic characteristics, self-efficacy beliefs, and professional perceptions (Akgün & Özgür, 2014; Apaydın Demirci & Arslan, 2020; Recep oğlu, Erdaş, & Aşıkuzun, 2017), the relationship between occupational anxiety and future anxiety has received limited empirical attention. Accordingly, examining the association between these two forms of anxiety among preschool teacher candidates constitutes a central contribution and an element of originality in the present study.

1.1. Problem Statement

The future anxiety and occupational anxiety experienced by preschool teacher candidates are critical for both educational quality and individual psychological well-being. When these anxieties reach elevated levels, they may diminish candidates' professional motivation, adversely affect academic achievement, and hinder readiness for the teaching profession. The literature consistently documents the detrimental effects of anxiety on performance, achievement, and both physical and psychological health. By contrast, teacher candidates with lower anxiety levels tend to report greater confidence in fulfilling their professional responsibilities (Adıgüzelli, 2015).

From both individual and societal perspectives, it is therefore essential to examine teacher candidates' views and experiences regarding future and occupational anxiety. Expanding the number of studies in this field and diversifying the variables examined may contribute to the evaluation and improvement of teacher education programmes and teacher employment processes. Aydın Yıldız (2024) emphasised the need for further research to effectively support teacher candidates during their professional preparation. In addition, such research may pave the way for experimental studies aimed at enhancing teacher candidates' psychological well-being. In this respect, the present study is significant in drawing attention to the issue and encouraging further research in this area.

1.2. Aim and Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between future anxiety and occupational anxiety among preschool teacher candidates. By focusing on these two constructs simultaneously, the study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by addressing a relationship that has not been sufficiently explored in previous research.

The specific research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between preschool teacher candidates' fear of the future and the types of occupational anxiety, namely task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?
2. Does fear of the future significantly predict the types of occupational anxiety, including task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between preschool teacher candidates' hopelessness about the future and the types of occupational anxiety, namely task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?
4. Does hopelessness about the future significantly predict the types of occupational anxiety, including task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?
5. Is there a statistically significant relationship between preschool teacher candidates' future anxiety and the types of occupational anxiety, namely task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?
6. Does future anxiety significantly predict the types of occupational anxiety, including task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a correlational survey design, a descriptive research method. Correlational survey designs are used to examine the relationships, directions, and degrees of association between two or more variables without manipulating them (Creswell, 2017). In the present study, this design was considered appropriate for investigating the relationship and predictive effect between future anxiety and occupational anxiety among preschool teacher candidates.

2.2. Participants and Procedure

A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants. This approach, commonly employed in educational research, involves selecting readily accessible individuals who are willing to participate. The sample comprised 225 teacher candidates enrolled in the Preschool Education Department of the Faculty of Education at a state university.

The sample size was determined in line with methodological guidance for survey and correlational research. In the social sciences, samples of 200 or more are often considered sufficient to support reliable statistical analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) also note that samples exceeding 200 participants generally provide adequate statistical power to detect medium-

sized effects in correlational designs. Similarly, Field (2018) suggests that samples of more than 100 are acceptable for regression analyses, with larger samples yielding more stable and robust estimates. Accordingly, the sample of 225 preschool teacher candidates in the present study is methodologically adequate for the analyses conducted. Participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Information of Teacher Candidates Participating in the Study

	N	%
Gender	Female	175
	Male	50
	Total	225
Age	18–23	205
	24–27	15
	28–31	4
	32 and above	1
	Total	225
Year of study	First year	67
	Second year	70
	Third year	49
	Fourth year	39
	Total	225
University Entrance Attempt	First Attempt	74
	Second Attempt	113
	Third Attempt	34
	Fourth or more	4
	Total	225
Preference for the Department	Willingly	162
	Unwillingly	11
	Partially Willingly	52
	Total	225

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

2.3.1. Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form was developed by the researchers to collect demographic and background information about the participants. The form included items related to gender, age, year of study, number of attempts at the university entrance examination, willingness to choose the department, willingness to continue in the department, and post-graduation career plans.

2.3.2. Future Anxiety Scale for University Students

The Future Anxiety Scale for University Students was developed by Geylani and Çiriş Yıldız (2022). The scale comprises 19 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and includes two factors: Fear of the Future and Hopelessness about the Future. In the original study, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .91 for the total scale, .95 for the Fear of the Future factor, and .88 for the Hopelessness about the Future factor. The scale contains six reverse-scored items (Items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12). Higher total scores indicate higher levels of future anxiety, whereas lower scores reflect lower levels of future anxiety (Geylani & Çiriş Yıldız, 2022). In the present study, internal consistency was .92 for the total scale. For the subscales, Cronbach's alpha was .92 for Fear of the Future and .82 for Hopelessness about the Future.

2.3.3. Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers

The Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers was developed by Cabı and Yalçınalp (2013). The scale comprises 45 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and includes eight dimensions: task-centred anxiety, economic-social-centred anxiety, student communication-centred anxiety, peer and parent-centred anxiety, personal development-centred anxiety, appointment-centred anxiety, adjustment-centred anxiety, and school management-centred anxiety. In the original validation study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from .67 to .94, and the overall reliability coefficient was reported as .95 (Cabı & Yalçınalp, 2013). In the present study, internal consistency estimates (Cronbach's alpha) for the subscales were as follows: task-centred anxiety, .94; economic-social-centred anxiety, .88; student communication-centred anxiety, .90; peer and parent-centred anxiety .87, personal development-centred anxiety .88; appointment-centred anxiety, .79; adjustment-centred anxiety, .71; and school management-centred anxiety, .78.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 20). Prior to the main analyses, the assumption of normality was examined. The results indicated that the data were approximately normally distributed; therefore, parametric statistical procedures were used. Skewness and kurtosis values within the range of -1.5 to $+1.5$ were considered an acceptable approximation to normality, in line with the criteria suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013).

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between future anxiety and occupational anxiety and its sub-dimensions. In addition, simple linear regression analyses were conducted to assess the extent to which future anxiety predicted the dimensions of occupational anxiety. To interpret the strength of the relationships between variables, Büyüköztürk's (2021) classification was adopted, whereby correlation coefficients between 0.00 and 0.30 were considered low, those between 0.30 and 0.70 moderate, and those above 0.70 high. The results of the normality analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Normality Analysis Results

Variables	Skewness	Kurtosis
Future Anxiety	.061	.323
Fear of the Future	.227	-.140
Hopelessness about the Future	.348	.151
Task-Centred Anxiety	.034	-1.419
Economic-Social-Centred Anxiety	.710	-.673
Student Communication-Centred Anxiety	.314	-1.365
Peer and Parent-Centred Anxiety	-.088	-1.463
Personal Development-Centred Anxiety	.034	-1.491
Appointment-Centred Anxiety	1.219	.483
Adjustment-Centred Anxiety	.090	-1.281
School Management-Centred Anxiety	.362	-1.259

2.5. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected during the 2023–2024 academic year. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Ondokuz Mayıs University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Decision No. 2023-684; 28 July 2023). The research instruments were administered online via Google Forms. The average completion time was approximately 15–20 minutes.

Before participating, individuals were informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of the instruments, and participation was entirely voluntary. An informed consent statement was provided at the beginning of the online form, stating clearly that no personal or identifiable information would be collected. Participants completed the Demographic Information Form, the Future Anxiety Scale for University Students, and the Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers individually.

The reliability of the findings was supported by the internal consistency coefficients for the study's scales. As reported in the Data Collection Instruments section, the coefficients obtained in the present study were within acceptable to high ranges, indicating that the scales yielded reliable scores in this sample. Evidence of validity was drawn from the original development and validation studies, which reported satisfactory psychometric properties. Data collection took place over approximately four months and was conducted in accordance with ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights.

3. Findings

The results of the analyses examining the relationships between teacher candidates' Fear of the Future and the different types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis Between Fear of the Future and Types of Occupational Anxiety

Variables	\bar{x}	sd	r
Fear of the Future	38.83	10.62	
Task-Centred Anxiety	40.26	17.69	.385*
Economic-Social-Centred Anxiety	24.52	8.55	.499*
Student Communication-Centred Anxiety	18.95	8.21	.319*
Peer and Parent-Centred Anxiety	13.82	6.95	.468*
Personal Development-Centred Anxiety	11.91	5.87	.439*
Appointment-Centred Anxiety	11.98	3.40	.323*
Adjustment-Centred Anxiety	9.05	4.02	.469*
School Management-Centred Anxiety	9.77	4.17	.423*

* $p < .01$

As shown in Table 3, fear of the future was positively and significantly associated with task-centred anxiety ($r = .385$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($r = .499$, $p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($r = .319$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($r = .468$, $p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($r = .439$, $p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($r = .323$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($r = .469$, $p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($r = .423$, $p < .01$), indicating small-to-moderate effect sizes overall. Accordingly, as preschool teacher candidates' fear of the future increases (or decreases), their occupational anxiety levels may also increase (or decrease). The results of the analyses examining the extent to which fear of the future predicts the different types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Regression Analysis: Predictive Power of Fear of the Future on Occupational Anxiety Types

Predictor	Outcome	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Fear of the Future	Task-centred anxiety	.385	.148	38.777	.103	.385	6.227	.000*
	Economic-social-centred anxiety	.499	.249	74.067	.047	.499	8.606	.000*
	Student communication-centred anxiety	.319	.102	25.300	.049	.319	5.030	.000*
	Peer and parent-centred anxiety	.468	.219	62.681	.039	.468	7.917	.000*
	Personal development-centred anxiety	.439	.193	53.243	.033	.439	7.297	.000*
	Appointment-centred anxiety	.323	.104	25.952	.020	.323	5.094	.000*

Predictor	Outcome	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
	Adjustment-centred anxiety	.469	.220	62.933	.022	.469	7.933	.000*
	School management-centred anxiety	.423	.179	48.465	.024	.423	6.962	.000*

As shown in Table 4, preschool teacher candidates' Fear of the Future significantly predicted task-centred anxiety ($R = .385$, $R^2 = .148$, $F = 38.777$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($R = .499$, $R^2 = .249$, $F = 74.067$, $p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($R = .319$, $R^2 = .102$, $F = 25.300$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($R = .468$, $R^2 = .219$, $F = 62.681$, $p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($R = .439$, $R^2 = .193$, $F = 53.243$, $p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($R = .323$, $R^2 = .104$, $F = 25.952$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($R = .469$, $R^2 = .220$, $F = 62.933$, $p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($R = .423$, $R^2 = .179$, $F = 48.465$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that Fear of the Future explains approximately 15% of the variance in task-centred anxiety, 25% in economic-social-centred anxiety, 10% in student communication-centred anxiety, 22% in peer and parent-centred anxiety, 19% in personal development-centred anxiety, 10% in appointment-centred anxiety, 22% in adjustment-centred anxiety, and 18% in school management-centred anxiety. The results of the analyses examining the relationships between teacher candidates' Hopelessness about the Future and the different types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis Between Hopelessness about the Future and Types of Occupational Anxiety

Variables	\bar{x}	sd	r
Hopelessness about the Future	14.04	4.20	
Task-Centred Anxiety	40.26	17.69	.346*
Economic-Social-Centred Anxiety	24.52	8.55	.381*
Student Communication-Centred Anxiety	18.95	8.21	.262*
Peer and Parent-Centred Anxiety	13.82	6.95	.322*
Personal Development-Centred Anxiety	11.91	5.87	.348*
Appointment-Centred Anxiety	11.98	3.40	.287*
Adjustment-Centred Anxiety	9.05	4.02	.431*
School Management-Centred Anxiety	9.77	4.17	.296*

As shown in Table 5, Hopelessness about the Future was positively and significantly associated with task-centred anxiety ($r = .346$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($r = .381$, $p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($r = .262$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($r = .322$, $p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($r = .348$, $p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($r = .287$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($r = .431$, $p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($r = .296$, $p < .01$), with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate. Accordingly, as preschool teacher candidates' Hopelessness about the Future increases (or decreases), their occupational anxiety

levels may also increase (or decrease). The results of the analyses examining the extent to which Hopelessness about the Future predicts the different types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Regression Analysis: Predictive Power of Hopelessness about the Future on Occupational Anxiety Types

Predictor	Outcome	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Hopelessness about the Future	Task-centred anxiety	.346	.120	30.393	.119	.346	5.513	.000*
	Economic-social-centred anxiety	.381	.145	37.908	.064	.381	6.157	.000*
	Student communication-centred anxiety	.262	.069	16.424	.069	.262	4.053	.000*
	Peer and parent-centred anxiety	.322	.104	25.880	.053	.322	5.087	.000*
	Personal development-centred anxiety	.348	.121	30.634	.045	.348	5.535	.000*
	Appointment-centred anxiety	.287	.082	19.990	.028	.287	4.471	.000*
	Adjustment-centred anxiety	.431	.186	50.808	.031	.431	7.128	.000*
	School management-centred anxiety	.296	.088	21.467	.033	.296	4.633	.000*

As shown in Table 6, preschool teacher candidates' Hopelessness about the Future significantly predicted task-centred anxiety ($R = .346$, $R^2 = .120$, $F = 30.393$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($R = .381$, $R^2 = .145$, $F = 37.908$, $p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($R = .262$, $R^2 = .069$, $F = 16.424$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($R = .322$, $R^2 = .104$, $F = 25.880$, $p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($R = .348$, $R^2 = .121$, $F = 30.634$, $p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($R = .287$, $R^2 = .082$, $F = 19.990$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($R = .431$, $R^2 = .186$, $F = 50.808$, $p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($R = .296$, $R^2 = .088$, $F = 21.467$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that Hopelessness about the Future explains approximately 12% of the variance in task-centred anxiety, 15% in economic-social-centred anxiety, 7% in student communication-centred anxiety, 10% in peer and parent-centred anxiety, 12% in personal development-centred anxiety, 8% in appointment-centred anxiety, 19% in adjustment-centred anxiety, and 9% in school management-centred anxiety. The results of the analyses examining the relationships between preschool teacher candidates' future anxiety and the different types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Correlation Analysis Between Future Anxiety and Types of Occupational Anxiety

Variables	\bar{x}	sd	r
Future Anxiety	52.88	13.32	
Task-Centred Anxiety	40.26	17.69	.416*

Variables	\bar{x}	sd	r
Economic-Social-Centred Anxiety	24.52	8.55	.518*
Student Communication-Centred Anxiety	18.95	8.21	.337*
Peer and Parent-Centred Anxiety	13.82	6.95	.475*
Personal Development-Centred Anxiety	11.91	5.87	.460*
Appointment-Centred Anxiety	11.98	3.40	.348*
Adjustment-Centred Anxiety	9.05	4.02	.510*
School Management-Centred Anxiety	9.77	4.17	.430*

As shown in Table 7, a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation was found between future anxiety and all dimensions of occupational anxiety. Specifically, future anxiety was positively associated with task-centred anxiety ($r = .416, p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($r = .518, p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($r = .337, p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($r = .475, p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($r = .460, p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($r = .348, p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($r = .510, p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($r = .430, p < .01$). These findings indicate that increases or decreases in preschool teacher candidates' future anxiety are accompanied by corresponding increases or decreases in their occupational anxiety levels across all dimensions. The results of the analysis regarding the predictive power of future anxiety on the various types of occupational anxiety are presented in Table 8.

Table 8 Regression Analysis: Predictive Power of Future Anxiety on Occupational Anxiety Types

Predictor	Outcome	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Future Anxiety	Task-centred anxiety	.416	.173	46.696	.081	.416	6.833	.000*
	Economic-social-centred anxiety	.518	.269	81.937	.037	.518	9.052	.000*
	Student communication-centred anxiety	.337	.114	28.595	.039	.337	5.347	.000*
	Peer and parent-centred anxiety	.475	.226	65.047	.031	.475	8.065	.000*
	Personal development-centred anxiety	.460	.211	59.742	.026	.460	7.729	.000*
	Appointment-centred anxiety	.348	.121	30.707	.016	.348	5.541	.000*
	Adjustment-centred anxiety	.510	.260	78.361	.017	.510	8.852	.000*
	School management-centred anxiety	.430	.185	50.695	.019	.430	7.120	.000*

The results of the regression analyses examining the predictive role of future anxiety on occupational anxiety dimensions are presented in Table 8. An examination of Table 8 demonstrates that future anxiety significantly predicts all eight types of occupational anxiety. Future anxiety was found to be a significant predictor of task-centred anxiety ($R = .416$, $R^2 = .173$, $F = 46.696$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centred anxiety ($R = .518$, $R^2 = .269$, $F = 81.937$, $p < .01$), student communication-centred anxiety ($R = .337$, $R^2 = .114$, $F = 28.595$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centred anxiety ($R = .475$, $R^2 = .226$, $F = 65.047$, $p < .01$), personal development-centred anxiety ($R = .460$, $R^2 = .211$, $F = 59.742$, $p < .01$), appointment-centred anxiety ($R = .348$, $R^2 = .121$, $F = 30.707$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centred anxiety ($R = .510$, $R^2 = .260$, $F = 78.361$, $p < .01$), and school management-centred anxiety ($R = .430$, $R^2 = .185$, $F = 50.695$, $p < .01$).

These results indicate that future anxiety explains approximately 17% of the variance in task-centred anxiety, 27% in economic-social-centred anxiety, 11% in student communication-centred anxiety, 23% in peer and parent-centred anxiety, 21% in personal development-centred anxiety, 12% in appointment-centred anxiety, 26% in adjustment-centred anxiety, and 19% in school management-centred anxiety.

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The present study revealed statistically significant positive relationships between fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety and all eight dimensions of occupational anxiety examined: task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred anxiety. The findings indicate that increases in preschool teacher candidates' fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety are accompanied by corresponding increases in occupational anxiety, whereas lower levels of these future-oriented anxiety indicators are associated with lower occupational anxiety. Among the dimensions, fear of the future and overall future anxiety showed the strongest associations with economic-social-centred anxiety and the weakest associations with student communication-centred anxiety. Hopelessness about the future was most strongly associated with adjustment-centred anxiety and least strongly associated with student communication-centred anxiety.

These correlation findings suggest that the observed relationships are not only statistically significant but also meaningful in practical terms. The regression results further support this pattern. In particular, the relatively higher proportions of explained variance in dimensions such as economic-social-centred anxiety and adjustment-centred anxiety—both of which are closely tied to everyday life circumstances and the transition into the profession—indicate that future-oriented uncertainty may contribute to occupational anxiety in a multidimensional manner among preschool teacher candidates.

Given that the youth unemployment rate in Türkiye was reported as 15.1% in March 2025 and that only 1,321 posts were allocated to preschool teaching in the 2025 recruitment cycle, it is unsurprising that economic-social-centred anxiety emerged as the most salient concern among preschool teacher candidates (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2025; Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu [TÜİK], 2025). These findings indicate that teacher candidates' anxieties should be understood not only in relation to individual characteristics but also in light of a quota-based and highly competitive public employment structure. The persistence of double-digit youth unemployment can be viewed as a structural indicator that intensifies uncertainty during the transition into the profession (TÜİK, 2025). Similarly, the allocation of 1,321 posts for preschool teaching within the 2025 recruitment of 15,000 contracted

teachers provides a concrete context for why appointment-related and economic-security concerns may become particularly pronounced (MEB, 2025).

Consistent with this pattern, Teke and Koç (2017) reported that teacher candidates experience heightened anxiety related to post-graduation appointments, difficulties in transferring knowledge to pupils, and difficulties in establishing classroom authority. Likewise, Koşar (2018) found that candidates' primary concerns centred on economic conditions and communication with school administrators, parents, pupils, and colleagues. Özcan (2019) similarly noted that appointment-related anxiety is a prevalent source of concern among teacher candidates.

The findings are consistent with theoretical accounts that interpret teacher candidates' anxiety through the lens of uncertainty about the future. Conservation of Resources theory conceptualises stress and anxiety as arising, in part, from anticipated or actual losses of valued resources such as financial security, status, social support, time, and energy (Hobfoll, 1989). In professions that involve high levels of emotional labour, such as teaching, perceptions of threatened resources may intensify not only concerns about entry into the profession and appointment but also anxieties about workload, perceived professional competence, and relational responsibilities. In addition, uncertainty-based explanations highlight fear of the unknown as a transdiagnostic component of anxiety, which may help to account for why future-oriented threat appraisals generalise across multiple domains of occupational anxiety (Carleton, 2016).

The predictive analyses conducted in this study demonstrated that fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety significantly predicted all dimensions of occupational anxiety. Among these predictors, fear of the future and overall future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centred anxiety and least strongly predicted student communication-centred anxiety. Hopelessness about the future most strongly predicted adjustment-centred anxiety and least strongly predicted student communication-centred anxiety. These results underscore the considerable influence of future-oriented concerns on teacher candidates' professional perceptions, particularly regarding economic security and employment prospects. Previous research aligns with these findings, indicating that rising unemployment and economic uncertainty are associated with heightened anxiety among young people in Türkiye (Koç, Bayramoğlu, & Koç, 2024; Rüzgar & Cura, 2023). Similarly, Lin et al. (2017) reported elevated anxiety among teacher candidates in China, attributed to increasingly competitive labour-market conditions. Güçlü, Abbak, and Toprak (2023) found that higher unemployment anxiety was negatively associated with teacher candidates' attitudes towards the profession. International evidence likewise suggests that teacher candidates across contexts experience substantial anxiety about their professional futures. For instance, Keller et al. (2014) reported that candidates who perceive themselves as inadequately prepared for teaching tend to experience higher anxiety, whereas Mapfumo, Chitsiko, and Chireshe (2012) observed that teacher candidates in Zimbabwe entered teaching practice with enthusiasm but reported increasing stress and anxiety over time. In the context of early childhood education and care (ECEC), these findings should not be considered solely in terms of individual well-being. Anxieties experienced during teacher preparation may trigger a chain of effects that extend into the transition into the profession, shaping burnout risk, intentions to remain in the field, and the quality of classroom interactions that ultimately influence children's experiences. Meta-analytic evidence linking teacher burnout to intentions to leave the profession suggests that anxiety during the pre-service period may be critical for workforce stability (Madigan & Kim, 2021). OECD reports focusing on the early childhood workforce similarly emphasise that working conditions, well-being, and stress are key

determinants in maintaining and strengthening the quality of the ECEC workforce (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025).

The finding that overall future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centred anxiety is consistent with the existing literature. By contrast, the relatively weak predictive effect of future anxiety on student communication-centred anxiety may be attributed to the scope and structure of preschool teacher education programmes. Throughout the four-year undergraduate curriculum, teacher candidates receive both theoretical and practice-oriented preparation in areas such as classroom management, effective communication with young children, and facilitating social skills. Such coursework is intended to develop the competencies required for constructive, developmentally appropriate interactions with children. Consistent with this interpretation, previous studies have reported that teacher candidates generally demonstrate strong communication skills (Çuhadar et al., 2014; Dilber & Akhan, 2019), which may help to explain why future anxiety exerts a comparatively limited influence on this dimension. At the sub-dimension level, it is also unsurprising that future anxiety was more strongly associated with economic-social-centred anxiety and appointment-centred anxiety, as these dimensions reflect concerns directly related to sustaining everyday life and gaining entry into the profession. Moreover, the fact that future anxiety significantly predicted dimensions such as task-centred anxiety, personal development-centred anxiety, school management-centred anxiety, and peer and parent-centred anxiety suggests that teacher candidates' anxiety is not solely an employment-related issue, but is also intertwined with expectations regarding relationship management and professional performance. In particular, the more pronounced predictive role of hopelessness about the future for adjustment-centred anxiety may indicate that, during the post-graduation transition, reductions in self-efficacy and perceived control over the future can lead anxiety to cluster around adaptation and settling into the professional role.

A growing body of evidence indicates that future anxiety is associated with multiple aspects of psychological functioning. Bayram and Pala (2025) reported that higher future anxiety was linked to lower psychological well-being, with occupational stress operating as a mediating variable and psychological resilience functioning as a moderating factor. Similarly, Gülbahar, Kuzu, and Sivacı (2023) found positive associations between teacher candidates' attitudes towards the profession, life satisfaction, anticipated teacher selves, and emotional states, suggesting that expectations and concerns about future professional roles are closely connected to overall well-being. Gerçek (2018) further reported that occupational anxiety across several dimensions—including task-centred, economic-social-centred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal development-centred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and curriculum-centred anxiety—was negatively associated with career adaptability. Collectively, these findings suggest that elevated occupational anxiety may diminish teacher candidates' confidence in their capacity to cope with future challenges, adapt to change, and progress in their careers.

In line with the findings, future anxiety—both at the total-score level and at the subscale level—was associated with all dimensions of occupational anxiety and significantly predicted each dimension. This suggests that teacher candidates' future-oriented anxieties may be an influential factor shaping their professional outlook.

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, it was limited to future anxiety and occupational anxiety and employed a cross-sectional design, which precludes causal inference. Second, the sample comprised preschool teacher candidates from a single university,

which may restrict the generalisability of the findings. In addition, reflecting the gender distribution typical of preschool education programmes, female candidates were overrepresented in the sample. Based on the study's findings and limitations, several recommendations can be proposed. Teacher education programmes should be reviewed in light of the observed associations and predictive relationships between future anxiety and occupational anxiety. In line with Öztekin's (2025) recommendations, universities are encouraged to implement interventions to enhance students' well-being, optimism, positive future orientation, and individual strengths. The findings also suggest that teacher candidates may benefit from structured support mechanisms to manage uncertainty related to post-graduation employment. Accordingly, universities could offer regular informational seminars, career guidance activities, and stress-management workshops in collaboration with psychological counselling units and career centres. In this respect, recommendations should not be limited to general workshops; rather, it may be beneficial to implement structured mentoring supports that specifically target the transition into the profession following graduation. In addition, meta-analytic evidence on programmes designed to reduce teachers' stress and psychological strain indicates that brief psychological skills interventions adapted for teacher candidates (e.g., mindfulness-based approaches) can be justified (Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018). Future research could employ qualitative, mixed-method, longitudinal, or experimental designs to further examine the relationship between future anxiety, occupational anxiety, and other psychological variables such as resilience, depression, and well-being. For example, resilience-focused intervention programmes could be developed and evaluated for their effects on future anxiety, optimism, and psychological well-being. Qualitative studies may also provide deeper insight into teacher candidates' lived experiences and perceptions. Finally, multi-site studies involving candidates from multiple universities, as well as comparative analyses by gender or institutional context, may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of these issues.

5. Declarations

5.1. Author Contributions (CRediT)

Author 1 (Hülya Gülay Ogelman) Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization; Validation; Project administration.

Author 2 (İlkay Göktaş) Conceptualization; Methodology; Investigation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing; Visualization; Validation; Project administration.

5.2. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests, institutional affiliations, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. If any potential conflicts exist, they are disclosed as follows: None

5.3. Funding Statement

This research received no external funding. The authors declare that no funding source had a role in the study design; data collection, analysis, or interpretation; manuscript preparation; or the decision to publish the results.

5.4. Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

5.5. Ethics Approval

This study was conducted with the approval of the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences at Ondokuz Mayıs University (Approval No: 2023-684; Approval Date: 28.07.2023). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

5.6. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools

AI tools were not used to generate or alter empirical data, produce analytical results, or shape the study's core findings and conclusions.

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