

Examining the future and occupational anxiety of preschool teacher candidates

Hülya Gülay Ogelman¹  | İlkyay Göktaş^{2*} 

1 Department of Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Sinop University, Sinop, Türkiye | 2 Child Care and Youth Services Department, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Samsun, Türkiye

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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 the Demographic Information Form, Future Anxiety Scale for University Students, and Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers. All measures were completed individually using 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-, economic-, social-, student communication-, peer and parent-, personal development-, appointment-, adjustment-, and school management-centered 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 levels of occupational anxiety. Overall future anxiety showed the strongest association with economic-social-centered anxiety and the weakest association with student communication-centered anxiety. Regression analyses further showed that fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety significantly predicted each occupational anxiety dimension. Overall, future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centered anxiety and least strongly predicted student communication-centered 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; Preschool teacher candidates; Preschool teaching; Teacher education

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Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) represents a critical phase in children's cognitive, affective, and social development, as well as shaping foundational learning habits (UNESCO, 2010). The quality of experiences provided during this period has long-term implications for the academic achievement and psychosocial well-being of children. In 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 toward lifelong learning. Accordingly, the effectiveness of ECE is closely linked to the professional competence, emotional well-being, and psychological readiness of teachers (Einarsdottir, 2014). Beyond being a pedagogical choice, the

critical role of ECE is increasingly recognized 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 provision determinants. Contemporary global reports indicate that initiatives to strengthen quality in ECE are directly tied to educators' working conditions, the profession's attractiveness, 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 only 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 (Köksal Akyol, 2012; Cheung, 2020). They are also responsible for designing learning environments that stimulate curiosity and support the development of essential psychosocial skills and motivation for learning (Pianta et al., 2009). Among the many determinants of educational quality, characteristics of teachers have been identified as particularly influential (Schmitt et al., 2023). 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 emphasize that high levels of stress and burnout are associated with an increased tendency to leave the job or exit the field, which may, in turn, create risks for 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 feel 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 in terms of individual adjustment but also as a preventive approach to sustaining quality in ECE.

Teaching is widely recognized as an emotionally demanding profession. Evidence shows 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 their 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 multidimensional nature of occupational anxiety (Ada & Erdaş Kartal, 2020). 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 uncertainty, anxiety may increase when individuals perceive insufficient personal resources (e.g., time, financial security, status, perceived control, and perceived competence) as insufficient. For preschool teacher candidates, expectations regarding job security, appointment likelihood, economic independence, and professional status may represent key stressors that shape 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 experienced by teacher candidates regarding the professional roles, responsibilities, and challenges they may encounter upon entering the teaching profession. Research shows that such anxiety commonly centers 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 is another critical psychological factor affecting teacher candidates. Future anxiety has been defined as a dispositional tendency that differs from conventional anxiety conceptualizations in that it is characterized by negative expectations about the future, perceptions of uncertainty, and a cognitive orientation toward adverse future scenarios over the long term (Zaleski, 1996). This construct's assessment 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 involves apprehension regarding potential negative changes in both the short and long term (Jannini et al., 2024). Future anxiety is often intertwined with concerns about employment, professional competence, and career sustainability within the teaching profession (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 complete an interview process in order 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 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 (Küleççi Akyavuz, 2021). In addition, economic conditions have been shown to play a decisive role in shaping the future expectations of young people in Türkiye, potentially intensifying future anxiety (Yücel & Buz, 2023).

Future anxiety, like occupational anxiety, has important implications for the psychological well-being of teacher candidates. A recent study conducted by Öztekin (2025) involving 1,024 university students 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, indicating that students' psychological resilience and overall well-being are eroded by elevated future anxiety.

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

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 the professional motivation of candidates, adversely affect academic achievement, and hinder their readiness for the teaching profession. The literature has consistently documented the harmful effects of anxiety on performance, achievement, and both physical and psychological health. In contrast, teacher candidates with lower anxiety levels report greater confidence in fulfilling their professional responsibilities (Adıgüzelli, 2015).

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

Aim and Significance of the Study

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

The following are the specific research questions guiding the study:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the fear of the future of preschool teacher candidates and the types of occupational anxiety, namely, task-centred, economic-

socialcentred, student communication-centred, peer and parent-centred, personal developmentcentred, appointment-centred, adjustment-centred, and school management-centred?

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

Method

Design

This study employed a correlational survey design, which is 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). This study design was considered appropriate for investigating the relationship and predictive effect between future anxiety and occupational anxiety among preschool teacher candidates.

Participants and the Procedure

A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants. This approach, which is commonly employed in educational research, involves selecting individuals who are readily accessible and 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 according to the 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 noted that samples exceeding 200 participants generally provide adequate statistical power to detect medium-sized effects in correlational designs. Similarly, Field (2018) maintained that samples above 100 are acceptable for regression analyses, with larger samples yielding more stable and robust

estimates. Accordingly, the present study's sample of 225 preschool teacher candidates can be considered methodologically adequate for the conducted analyses. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the participants

	N	%
Gender		
Female	175	77.8
Male	50	22.2
Total	225	100.0
Age		
18–23	205	91.1
24–27	15	6.7
28–31	4	1.8
32 and above	1	0.4
Total	225	100.0
Year of study		
First year	67	29.8
Second year	70	31.1
Third year	49	21.8
Fourth year	39	17.3
Total	225	100.0
University entrance attempt		
First attempt	74	32.9
Second attempt	113	50.2
Third attempt	34	15.1
Fourth or more	4	1.8
Total	225	100.0
Preferences for the department		

	N	%
Willingly	162	72.0
Unwillingly	11	4.9
Partially willingly	52	23.1
Total	225	100.0
Willingness to continue in the department		
Yes	193	85.8
No	6	2.7
Partially	26	11.6
Total	225	100.0
Post-graduation plans		
Work in public schools	171	76.0
Open my own school	20	8.9
Undecided	18	8.0
Pursue a master's degree	10	4.4
Work in private schools	3	1.3
Pursue a non-teaching profession	2	0.9
Do not plan to work	1	0.4
Total	225	100.0

The sample comprised 225 preschool teacher candidates, of whom 175 (77.8%) were female and 50 (22.2%) were male (Table 1). Most participants were aged 18–23 ($n = 205$, 91.1%), 15 (6.7%) were aged 24–27, 4 (1.8%) were aged 28–31, and 1 (0.4%) was aged 32 or older.

Regarding the year of study, 67 (29.8%), 70 (31.1%), 49 (21.8%), and 39 (17.3%) participants were in their first, second, third, and fourth years, respectively. In terms of the number of attempts at the university entrance examination, 74 candidates (32.9%) entered on their first attempt, 113 (50.2%) on their second attempt, 34 (15.1%) on their third attempt, and four (1.8%) on their fourth or subsequent attempt.

With respect to motivation for choosing the department, 162 (72.0%), 11 (4.9%), and 52 (23.1%) participants reported willingly, unwillingly, and partially willingly selecting the program, respectively. Similarly, most participants indicated that they were willing to continue the program ($n = 193$, 85.8%), whereas six (2.7%) reported continuing unwillingly and 26 (11.6%) partially willingly. Regarding post-graduation plans, most participants ($n = 171$, 76.0%) intended to work in public schools. Other plans

included opening their own school ($n = 20$, 8.9%), pursuing postgraduate study ($n = 10$, 4.4%), working in private schools ($n = 3$, 1.3%), pursuing a non-teaching career ($n = 2$, 0.9%), and not planning to work ($n = 1$, 0.4%). A further 18 (8.0%) participants reported being undecided about their post-graduation plans.

Data Collection Instruments

Personal Information Form

The researchers developed the Personal Information Form 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.

Future Anxiety Scale for University Students

Geylani and Çiriş Yıldız (2022) developed the Future Anxiety Scale for University Students. 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 .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 this study, the internal consistency was .92 for the total scale. For the subscales, Cronbach's alpha was 0.92 for Fear of the Future and 0.82 for Hopelessness about the Future.

Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers

Cabı and Yalçınalp (2013) developed the Occupational Anxiety Scale for Prospective Teachers. The scale comprises 45 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and includes eight dimensions: task-centered anxiety, economic-social-centered anxiety, student communication-centered anxiety, peer and parent-centered anxiety, personal development-centered anxiety, appointment-centered anxiety, adjustment-centered anxiety, and school management-centered anxiety. In the original validation study, the 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-centered anxiety .94, economic-social-centered anxiety .88, student communication-centered anxiety .90, peer and parent-centered anxiety .87, personal development-centered anxiety .88, appointment-centered anxiety .79, adjustment-centered anxiety .71, and school management-centered anxiety .78.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 20). Prior to the main analyses, the assumptions of normality were 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 taken to indicate an acceptable approximation to normality, in line with the criteria established 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. Büyüköztürk's (2021) classification was adopted to interpret the strength of the relationships between variables, 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. Table 2 presents the results of the normality analyses.

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-Centered Anxiety	.034	-1.419
Economic-Social-Centered Anxiety	.710	-.673
Student Communication-Centered Anxiety	.314	-1.365
Peer- and Parent-Centered Anxiety	-.088	-1.463
Personal Development-Centered Anxiety	.034	-1.491
Appointment-Centered Anxiety	1.219	.483
Adjustment-Centered Anxiety	.090	-1.281
School Management-Centered Anxiety	.362	-1.259

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

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

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

Internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) were calculated for the scales used in the study to assess the reliability of the measurement instruments. As reported in the Data Collection Instruments section, the coefficients obtained in this study were within acceptable to high ranges, indicating that the scales yielded reliable scores in this sample. The original development and validation studies, which reported satisfactory psychometric properties, provided evidence of validity.

Data collection occurred over approximately 4 months and was conducted in accordance with ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participants' rights.

Findings

Table 3 presents the results of the analyses examining the relationships between teacher candidates' fear of the future and the different types of occupational anxiety.

Table 3 Correlation analysis between fear of the future and occupational anxiety types

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

* $p < .01$

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

Table 4 presents the results of the analyses examining the extent to which fear of the future predicts the different types of occupational anxiety.

Table 4 Regression analysis: predictive power of fear of the future on occupational anxiety types

Variables	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Fear of the Future <i>Task-centered anxiety</i>	.385	.148	38.777	.103	.385	6.227	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>Economic-social-centered anxiety</i>	.499	.249	74.067	.047	.499	8.606	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>Student communication-centered anxiety</i>	.319	.102	25.300	.049	.319	5.030	.000*

Variables	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Fear of the Future <i>Peer- and parent-centered anxiety</i>	.468	.219	62.681	.039	.468	7.917	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>Personal development-centered anxiety</i>	.439	.193	53.243	.033	.439	7.297	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>Appointment-centered anxiety</i>	.323	.104	25.952	.020	.323	5.094	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>Adjustment-centered anxiety</i>	.469	.220	62.933	.022	.469	7.933	.000*
Fear of the Future <i>School management-centered anxiety</i>	.423	.179	48.465	.024	.423	6.962	.000*

* $p < .01$

As shown in Table 4, preschool teacher candidates' Fear of the Future significantly predicted task-centered anxiety ($R = .385$, $R^2 = .148$, $F = 38.777$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centered anxiety ($R = .499$, $R^2 = .249$, $F = 74.067$, $p < .01$), student communication-centered anxiety ($R = .319$, $R^2 = .102$, $F = 25.300$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centered anxiety ($R = .468$, $R^2 = .219$, $F = 62.681$, $p < .01$), personal development-centered anxiety ($R = .439$, $R^2 = .193$, $F = 53.243$, $p < .01$), appointment-centered anxiety ($R = .323$, $R^2 = .104$, $F = 25.952$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centered anxiety ($R = .469$, $R^2 = .220$, $F = 62.933$, $p < .01$), and school management-centered 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-centered anxiety, 25% in economic-social-centered anxiety, 10% in student communication-centered anxiety, 22% in peer and parent-centered anxiety, 19% in personal development-centered anxiety, 10% in appointment-centered anxiety, 22% in adjustment-centered anxiety, and 18% in school management-centered anxiety.

Table 5 presents the results of the analyses examining the relationships between the hopelessness about the future of teacher candidates and the different types of occupational anxiety.

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-Centered Anxiety	40.26	17.69	.346*
Economic-Social-Centered Anxiety	24.52	8.55	.381*
Student Communication-Centered Anxiety	18.95	8.21	.262*
Peer- and Parent-Centered Anxiety	13.82	6.95	.322*
Personal Development-Centered Anxiety	11.91	5.87	.348*
Appointment-Centered Anxiety	11.98	3.40	.287*

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	r
Adjustment-Centered Anxiety	9.05	4.02	.431*
School Management-Centered Anxiety	9.77	4.17	.296*

* $p < .01$

As shown in Table 5, hopelessness about the future was positively and significantly associated with task-centered anxiety ($r = 0.346$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centered anxiety ($r = 0.381$, $p < .01$), student communication-centered anxiety ($r = 0.262$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centered anxiety ($r = 0.322$, $p < .01$), personal development-centered anxiety ($r = 0.348$, $p < .01$), appointment-centered anxiety ($r = 0.287$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centered anxiety ($r = 0.431$, $p < .01$), and school management-centered anxiety ($r = 0.296$, $p < .01$), with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate. Accordingly, as the hopelessness about the future of preschool teacher candidates increases (or decreases), their occupational anxiety levels may also increase (or decrease).

Table 6 presents the results of the analyses examining the extent to which hopelessness about the future predicts the different types of occupational anxiety.

Table 6 Regression analysis: predictive power of hopelessness about the future on occupational anxiety types

Variables	R	R ²	F	Std. Error	β	t	p
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Task-centered anxiety</i>	.346	.120	30.393	.265	.346	5.513	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Economic-social-centered anxiety</i>	.381	.145	37.908	.126	.381	6.157	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Student communication-centered anxiety</i>	.262	.069	16.424	.126	.262	4.053	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Peer- and parent-centered anxiety</i>	.322	.104	25.880	.105	.322	5.087	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Personal development-centered anxiety</i>	.348	.121	30.634	.088	.348	5.535	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Appointment-centered anxiety</i>	.287	.082	19.990	.052	.287	4.471	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>Adjustment-centered anxiety</i>	.431	.186	50.808	.058	.431	7.128	.000*
Hopelessness about the Future <i>School management-centered anxiety</i>	.296	.088	21.467	.064	.296	4.633	.000*

* $p < .01$

As shown in Table 6, preschool teacher candidates' Hopelessness about the Future significantly predicted task-centered anxiety ($R = .346$, $R^2 = .120$, $F = 30.393$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centered anxiety ($R = .381$, $R^2 = .145$, $F = 37.908$, $p < .01$), student communication-centered anxiety ($R = .262$,

$R^2 = .069$, $F = 16.424$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centered anxiety ($R = .322$, $R^2 = .104$, $F = 25.880$, $p < .01$), personal development-centered anxiety ($R = .348$, $R^2 = .121$, $F = 30.634$, $p < .01$), appointment-centered anxiety ($R = .287$, $R^2 = .082$, $F = 19.990$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centered anxiety ($R = .431$, $R^2 = .186$, $F = 50.808$, $p < .01$), and school management-centered 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-centered anxiety, 15% in economic-social-centered anxiety, 7% in student communication-centered anxiety, 10% in peer and parent-centered anxiety, 12% in personal development-centered anxiety, 8% in appointment-centered anxiety, 19% in adjustment-centered anxiety, and 9% in school management-centered anxiety.

Table 7 presents the results of the analyses examining the relationships between preschool teacher candidates' future anxiety and the different types of occupational anxiety.

Table 7 Correlation analysis between future anxiety and occupational anxiety types

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	r
Future Anxiety	52.88	13.32	
Task-Centered Anxiety	40.26	17.69	.416*
Economic-Social-Centered Anxiety	24.52	8.55	.518*
Student Communication-Centered Anxiety	18.95	8.21	.337*
Peer- and Parent-Centered Anxiety	13.82	6.95	.475*
Personal Development-Centered Anxiety	11.91	5.87	.460*
Appointment-Centered Anxiety	11.98	3.40	.348*
Adjustment-Centered Anxiety	9.05	4.02	.510*
School Management-Centered Anxiety	9.77	4.17	.430*

* $p < .01$

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

Table 8 presents the results of the analysis regarding the predictive power of future anxiety on the various types of occupational anxiety.

Table 8 Regression analysis: predictive power of future anxiety on occupational anxiety types

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

* $p < .01$

Table 8 presents the results of the regression analyses examining the predictive role of future anxiety on occupational anxiety dimensions. 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-centered anxiety ($R = .416$, $R^2 = .173$, $F = 46.696$, $p < .01$), economic-social-centered anxiety ($R = .518$, $R^2 = .269$, $F = 81.937$, $p < .01$), student communication-centered anxiety ($R = .337$, $R^2 = .114$, $F = 28.595$, $p < .01$), peer and parent-centered anxiety ($R = .475$, $R^2 = .226$, $F = 65.047$, $p < .01$), personal development-centered anxiety ($R = .460$, $R^2 = .211$, $F = 59.742$, $p < .01$), appointment-centered anxiety ($R = .348$, $R^2 = .121$, $F = 30.707$, $p < .01$), adjustment-centered anxiety ($R = .510$, $R^2 = .260$, $F = 78.361$, $p < .01$), and school management-centered 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-centered anxiety, 27% in economic-social-centered anxiety, 11% in student communication-centered anxiety, 23% in peer and parent-centered anxiety, 21% in personal development-centered anxiety, 12% in appointment-centered anxiety, 26% in adjustment-centered anxiety, and 19% in school management-centered anxiety.

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-centered, economic-social-centered, student communication-centered, peer and parent-centered, personal development-centered, appointment-centered, adjustment-centered, and school management-centered anxiety. The findings indicate that increases in the fear

of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety of preschool teacher candidates 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-centered anxiety and the weakest associations with student communication-centered anxiety. Hopelessness about the future was most strongly associated with adjustment-centered anxiety and least strongly associated with student communication-centered anxiety.

These correlation findings indicate that the observed relationships are not only statistically significant but also meaningful from a practical perspective. The regression results further support this pattern. In particular, the relatively higher proportions of explained variance in dimensions such as economic-social-centered anxiety and adjustment-centered 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 15.3% 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-centered 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 the anxieties of teacher candidates should be understood not only in relation to individual characteristics but also considering 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 appointment, difficulties in transferring knowledge to pupils, and difficulties in establishing classroom authority. Similarly, Koşar (2018) found that candidates' primary concerns centered 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 the anxiety of teacher candidates through the lens of future uncertainty. Conservation of Resources theory conceptualizes stress and anxiety as arising, in part, from anticipated or actual losses of valuable resources such as financial security, status, social support, time, and energy (Hobfoll, 1989). In professions that involve high levels of emotional labor, such as teaching, perceptions of threatened resources may intensify not only concerns about entry into the profession and appointment but also anxieties related to 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 explain why future-oriented threat appraisals generalize across multiple domains of occupational anxiety (Carleton, 2016).

Predictive analyses demonstrated that fear of the future, hopelessness about the future, and overall future anxiety significantly predicted all occupational anxiety dimensions. Among these predictors, fear of the future and overall future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centered anxiety

and least strongly predicted student communication-centered anxiety. Hopelessness about the future most strongly predicted adjustment-centered anxiety and least strongly predicted student communication-centered anxiety. These results underscore the considerable influence of future-oriented concerns on the professional perceptions of teacher candidates, particularly in relation to 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 labor market conditions. Güçlü, Abbak, and Toprak (2023) found that higher unemployment anxiety was negatively associated with the attitudes of teacher candidates toward the profession. Similarly, international evidence shows that across contexts, teacher candidates 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 ECEC, these findings should not be considered solely in terms of individual well-being. Anxieties experienced during teacher preparation may generate a chain of effects that extends to 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 demonstrates that anxiety during the pre-service period is critical for workforce stability (Madigan & Kim, 2021). OECD reports focusing on the EC workforce similarly emphasize that working conditions, well-being, and stress are key determinants in maintaining and strengthening the quality of the ECEC workforce (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2025).

Overall future anxiety most strongly predicted economic-social-centered anxiety is consistent with the existing literature. In contrast, the relatively weak predictive effect of future anxiety on student communication-centered anxiety may be attributed to the scope and structure of preschool teacher education programs. Across the four-year undergraduate curriculum, teacher candidates receive both theoretical and practice-oriented preparation in classroom management, effective communication with young children, and social skills facilitation. Such coursework is intended to develop the competencies required for constructive and 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 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-centered anxiety and appointment-centered 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-centered anxiety, personal development-centered anxiety, school management-centered anxiety, and peer- and parent-centered anxiety suggests that anxiety among teacher candidates 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-centered anxiety may indicate that reductions in self-efficacy and perceived control over the future can lead anxiety to cluster around adaptation and settling into the professional role during the post-graduation transition.

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 the attitudes of teacher candidates toward 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-centered, economic-social-centered, student communication-centered, peer and parent-centered, personal development-centered, appointment-centered, adjustment-centered, and curriculum-centered anxiety—was negatively associated with career adaptability. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that elevated occupational anxiety diminishes the confidence of teacher candidates in their capacity to cope with future challenges, adapt to change, and progress in their careers.

Consistent with the findings, future anxiety—both at the total-score and subscale levels—was associated with all dimensions of occupational anxiety and significantly predicted each dimension. This indicates that future-oriented anxieties of teacher candidates are an influential factor shaping their professional outlook.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study 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 generalizability of the findings. In addition, reflecting the gender distribution typical of preschool education programs, female candidates were overrepresented in the sample.

Based on the study's findings and limitations, several recommendations can be proposed. Teacher education programs should be reviewed considering 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 aimed at enhancing students' well-being, optimism, positive future orientation, and individual strengths. The findings demonstrate that teacher candidates require structured support mechanisms to manage post-graduation employment uncertainty. Accordingly, universities could offer regular informational seminars, career guidance activities, and stress management workshops in collaboration with PCUs and career centers. In this respect, recommendations should not be limited to general workshops; rather, implementing structured mentoring supports that specifically target the transition into the profession following graduation may be beneficial. In addition, meta-analytic evidence on programs 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 resilience, depression, and well-being. For example, resilience-focused intervention programs could be developed and evaluated in terms of their effects on future anxiety, optimism and psychological well-being. Qualitative studies may also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of teacher candidates. Finally, multi-site studies involving candidates from multiple universities and 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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