

What Do the Names of Early Childhood Institutions in Türkiye Imply?

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Abstract

The names of preschool education institutions are not merely descriptive but reflect the identity, function, and educational philosophy of the institutions, and they constitute one of the factors influencing their perception and reputation in society. This study aims to identify the motivations and trends influencing the naming of private and public preschools in different geographical regions of Türkiye. The study comparatively analyzes preschool name selection across institution types and regions. Utilizing a document analysis approach, the dataset comprises all public and private preschools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education. Approximately 2.000 institutional interviews were conducted to enhance data classification reliability. The collected data were then categorized in Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, preschool naming narratives were documented. Findings reveal that preschool naming varies by region and institution type, shaped by multidimensional factors including educational philosophy, social values, cultural codes, and regional identities. Supplementary material is available online.

Keywords: Preschool names, naming strategies, toponymy, Türkiye

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Introduction

Naming plays an important role in the lives of individuals and societies. Names have a fundamental function in connecting us to the world. Societies assign names to a wide range of entities, including their children, occupations, places of residence, products, creative works, and the institutions they establish (Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro, 2023). According to research, names serve as tools that convey meaning both to the individuals and institutions they represent and to the people around them (Alford, 1988; Rymes, 1999; Van Langendonck, 2007; Völkel, 2023). In this context, institutional names are not merely labels but multi-layered tools that embody an institution's identity, mission, and cultural and social position, are strategically selected, and often carry profound meanings. Similarly, research conducted at the national and international levels indicates that school names serve an important function in reflecting the cultural identity, historical heritage, and values of society (Arslan, 2013; Jordan, 2012). These names not only keep the historical memory of society alive but also represent the value, mission, and vision of educational institutions.

Educational institutions may include themes such as national values, historical figures, terms reminiscent of children, names of plants and animals, names of philanthropists, or elements of nature. At the preschool level, analysing these trends is important in terms of discerning the pedagogical and aesthetic orientations of the school the children attend, the historical and cultural value system of society, and the educational-ideological orientations of decision-makers of the period. On the other hand, preschool educational institutions are the first point of contact for children with education. The choice of name in preschool education institutions not only creates the first impression of the school for children and families but can also affect the child's sense of belonging to the institution. The name chosen for preschool reflects the educational philosophy and values of the institution, while also taking on the task of transmitting the cultural and historical heritage of society to new generations. School names that create meaningful associations in children's minds can increase their curiosity about learning and their desire to go to school.

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The ‘name’ is not the factor that determines the quality or educational contribution of a preschool education institution. As is well known, the components of quality early childhood education include developmentally appropriate educational programs, safe and rich learning environments, qualified teachers, effective communication and cooperation with families, and pedagogical approaches that support the child's holistic development. However, it can be said that the name of a preschool complements and reinforces the other elements, thereby increasing the impact of the educational institution. Research on the naming of schools in Türkiye and around the world is quite limited, and existing studies are largely focused on universities (Rose-Redwood et al., 2024). In this context, Erdoğan et al. (2016) found that higher education institutions in Türkiye have a more limited number of name categories compared to the United Kingdom and that these categories have changed over time from geographical terms to city names, politicians, and historical figures to founders or donors. Güven and Koçak (2023) state that the names of Turkish universities highlight the national and spiritual sensitivities of society and the state.

The international literature also largely focuses on the analysis of university names, noting that names mostly carry cultural and historical meanings and serve as identity markers for institutions and communities (He et al., 2024; Rose-Redwood et al., 2024; Synn, 2023; Wu & Cheong, 2024). Extending this line of inquiry beyond higher education, Ko and Park's (2024) analysis of 195 Korean special school names similarly shows that 71.3 % employ Chinese characters and 72.8 % reference administrative or regional entities. In a similar vein, similar patterns are evident in the naming of other educational institutions in Türkiye. For instance, studies on the names of high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools show that naming practices in Türkiye have mostly been shaped by an approach that reinforces national identity, keeps social memory alive, and glorifies certain historical figures (Toprak, 2021). The frequent naming of educational institutions after historical figures, martyrs, national struggle heroes, or important figures in science, art, and thought clearly illustrates this situation (Kemiksiz, 2023, 2024). Such names often serve not only as tributes but also as instruments for reproducing official ideologies and national narratives. While Arslan (2013) argues that governments have prioritized alignment with their political views over a national perspective, Kurtoğlu (2018) suggests that naming institutions after influential individuals helps societies maintain a living connection with their past. In this context, Moran (2004) argues that naming public-school buildings in Kansas City reflects societal values and signals the locus of authority.

There are approximately 1.950.000 children enrolled in 39.957 early childhood education institutions with a wide variety of names in Türkiye (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2024). The process of naming nearly half of the preschools opened by the state is carried out under the MoNE Regulation on Opening, Closing, and Naming Institutions. Names assigned to public preschools are expected to be in Turkish, derived from words that align with the institution's purpose and level, selected in accordance with the characteristics of the surrounding area, and consistent with the overarching objectives of national education. The naming of preschool institutions is carried out by the governor's office in accordance with the decisions of the provincial national education commission. Institutions may be named after the settlements in which they are located, historical figures or events including Atatürk, martyrs and veterans, individuals who have achieved notable success in fields such as culture, science, and art, or state leaders. In addition, the names of individuals who have made financial contributions to the establishment of the institution may also be given to the institutions if deemed appropriate (MoNE, 2025, Art. 14-15).

However, the names given to private preschools, which constitute more than half of all preschools in Türkiye, are determined in accordance with the Private Education Institutions Law No. 5580 and related regulations. The process of naming private educational institutions in Türkiye is carried out under the supervision of the MoNE. The name proposed by the founder is reviewed by the provincial directorate of national education to ensure its alignment with the general objectives of national education. If deemed appropriate, the name is approved by the governor's office. In cases where the institution's field of activity changes or upon request, a name change may be carried out following a similar procedure; however, names of historical significance cannot be altered arbitrarily (MoNE, 2025, Art. 7). Building on Köse's (2014, p. 293) assertion that 'names are largely dependent on the wishes, desires, dreams, and beliefs of those who choose them, it can be argued that the naming of institutions is not merely an administrative procedure regulated by legislation, but also a deliberate decision that reflects the founders' values and educational vision.

The number of preschool education institutions in Türkiye has increased rapidly in recent years, leading to greater diversity in naming practices across both public and private institutions. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies, both nationally and internationally, on how these institutions are named. Most existing research focuses on universities or general educational institutions, leaving a significant gap regarding preschool naming practices. This study aims to address this gap by systematically analysing the naming choices of public

and private preschools in Türkiye according to institution type and regional location, while critically exploring the factors that may influence these choices. Using data from the most populous provinces across different geographical regions, the research adopts a systematic and comparative approach. It provides a valuable resource for understanding the dynamics and trends that shape institutional naming practices and for analysing how preschools define and brand themselves within development-oriented and child-centred frameworks. It will also provide a solid foundation for future research that will seek the opinions of children and teachers about school names. In this regard, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most frequently used categories in the names of public and private preschools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in Türkiye?
2. Are there categorical differences in the names of public and private preschools?
3. How are the preferred categories in school names distributed across different geographical regions of Türkiye?

Methodology

The study employed the document review method. Document analysis is a data collection and analysis technique that involves the systematic review of relevant written sources to find answers to research questions (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Within the scope of the research, the names of private and public preschools affiliated with the MoNE were examined. The connotations and possible representational values of these names were analysed. The accessible universe of the study is all preschools in Türkiye. Since it was not possible to categorize the names of all preschool education institutions across the country by meaningful units, private and public preschools located in the most populous provinces of the country's seven geographical regions (Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, Şanlıurfa, Samsun, Van) were included in this study using stratified purposive sampling.

Data Analysis Process and Categorical Classification

According to Tisdell et al. (2025), the first step in the document analysis process is to identify and examine the most appropriate sources that align with the research objectives and questions. Based on this, data on preschool education institutions in the provinces listed above (institution name, province and district information, institution type, website address, telephone number, and physical address) were obtained from the official website of the MoNE. The classification of data on private and public preschools, which was updated on May 21, 2024, on the website is shown in detail in Table 1. Since this data was obtained from the official source of the MoNE, it is assumed that the names of the institutions are correct and valid as they appear in the records. Starting in June 2024 and continuing through August 2025, these institution names were tagged, classified, and divided into specific categories in Excel.

To examine preschool naming processes, sections such as 'About Us', 'History', 'Vision & Mission', and 'Founder's Note' on institutional websites were analysed. When necessary, institutions were contacted via email, WhatsApp, or phone. Approximately 2.000 calls were made to clarify name meanings, with some schools contacted multiple times, enhancing reliable labelling and classification. These inquiries revealed, for example, that "Deniz" referred to a person rather than the sea, 'Naz' to the founder's child, and 'Akın' to a local settlement rather than an individual. In another case, 'Özel Mor Anaokulu' (Special Purple Kindergarten) derived from the slogan 'Be More' was simplified to 'Mor' to comply with Turkish Language Association rules and thus classified under 'Education Philosophy & Vision' rather than 'Color & Nature.' The table below shows the number of schools (n) and the distribution of private and public preschools by province.

Table 1

Number and Percentage Distribution of Private and Public Preschools in Selected Provinces in Türkiye

	Ankara		Antalya		İstanbul		İzmir		Samsun		Şanlıurfa		Van		Toplam	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Private	477	55.9	106	38.7	1573	62.8	411	66	86	53.8	19	9	8	4.3	2680	55.8
Public	377	44.1	168	61.3	931	37.2	212	34	74	46.3	191	91	176	95.7	2129	44.3

Institutions lacking an up-to-date website or valid contact information, providing incorrect phone numbers, or unwilling to respond were excluded from the study. Additionally, 72 private and 13 public preschools that did not fit the defined categories were classified as ‘Other’ and excluded from the analysis. Examples include schools that could not use names like “Atlantis” due to TLA restrictions and opted for meaningless alternatives such as “Mavi Rota (Blue Route),” or those attempting to use the number 7 in English, which was interpreted differently according to TLA rules. These cases indicate that some preschool names violate the regulation requiring names to be in Turkish.

Preschool names in the dataset were carefully labelled by both researchers according to their meanings, with super-categories determined through regular meetings. The labelling process was dynamic, allowing categories to be revised and reorganized as the study progressed. Consistency was ensured by resolving differences between researchers and creating inclusive categories. Some names fit a single category, while others spanned multiple categories. For example, ‘Deniz Yıldızım (My Starfish)’ was labeled as ‘Animal Names,’ ‘Ümraniye Beyaz Zambak (Ümraniye White Lily)’ was classified as ‘Plant’ despite containing place and color elements, and ‘Millî Eğitim Vakfı Firdevs-Lütfü Orgun Preschool’ was categorized under ‘Foundation,’ with the person’s name considered secondary. The ‘Foundation’ category was ultimately included within the broader ‘Institution’ category. Personal names were classified based on the rationale for their selection.

Prior to the study, ethical approval was obtained from the Sabahattin Zaim University Research Ethics Committee (decision no. 2020/38-09, March 6, 2020), and ethical principles were followed throughout. Credibility, transferability, consistency, and verifiability were ensured (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Two researchers independently analysed preschool names, regularly compared their findings, and reached consensus through ongoing discussions. One illustrative case involved the first coder initially noting that two private preschools in İzmir were named as ‘earthquake martyrs’ in memory of children who reportedly died in the earthquake; however, further comparison with the second coder revealed that both children were rescued alive and became widely known as ‘miracle survivors.’ To ensure the reliability of the coding process, one researcher coded the names of public and private preschools separately based on website data and direct communication, while a second researcher independently coded 20% of both datasets. Interrater reliability (Cohen’s kappa) was satisfactory for both datasets: $\kappa = 0.77$ for private preschools and $\kappa = 0.89$ for public preschools. Credibility was supported through transparent procedures and verification via website review and interviews; transferability through detailed labelling; consistency through comparison of researchers’ analyses; and verifiability by documenting the entire process. Data were organized using a bottom-up approach: individual names were labelled, main categories created, and similar sections combined at the end of categorization. Additionally, narratives regarding the naming process reported by the preschools were recorded. The sixteen identified categories and their abbreviations are presented below.

Those Containing the Word ‘Academy’ (Academy): Includes preschool names that imply a focus on developing the child’s academic skills and are more ‘educational, systematic, or scientifically based’ than others. (e.g., Altınçağ Academy, Bahçelievler İlgi Academy, Beykoz Children’s Academy Preschool)

Those containing the word ‘Garden’ (Garden): Covers preschool names that contain the word ‘garden’ (e.g., Güneşli Bahçe (Sunny Garden), Yeşilbahçe (Greengarden), Gülbahçesi (Rosegarden), Lalebahçesi (Tulip Garden), Saklıbahçe (Hidden Garden) Preschool).

Those containing the word ‘Child’ (Child): Includes school names containing the word ‘child’, which highlights the target audience (e.g., Lider Child, Happy Children, Children of the Century, Mother Child, Children’s Planet Preschool).

Science & Art & Sufism (S&A&S): Includes names that use the names of personalities who have made significant contributions in the fields of science, art, and spiritual thought, such as scientists, artists, and Sufis (e.g., Poet Mehmet Emin Yurdakul, Prof. Dr. Muharrem Ergin, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, Cemal Reşit Bey Preschool).

Plants & Animals: Includes institution names containing plant and animal names. (e.g., Meşegülü (Oakrose), Nar (Pomegranate), Kardelen (Snowdrop), Mutlu Arı (Happy Bee), Küçük Kelebekler (Little Butterflies) Preschool)

Educational Philosophy & Vision (EP&V): Includes names that represent the institution’s pedagogical approach, values, or educational goals (e.g., Yetenek (Talent), Üç Elma Bilim (Three Apples Science), Sevgi Umut Mutluluk Eğitim ve Farkındalık (Love Hope Happiness Education and Awareness SUMEF), Tahsilli Ahlaklı Değerli (Educated Moral Valuable Preschool).

Founder & Donor (Founder): Includes preschool names bearing the name of the person who established the institution, their child, their family, or themselves. While most founders of public preschools are ‘donors’, entrepreneurial ownership has been influential in private preschools (e.g., Nezahat – Ahmet Keleşoğlu, İnci Yıldız, My Story Gülsüm Demir Preschool).

Place: Includes names that incorporate the neighborhood, city, district, or natural environment where the preschool is located (e.g., Muradiye, Silivrikapı, Yedikule, Soğuksu Gölbaşı Preschool).

Color & Nature: Includes preschool names inspired by elements such as colors, celestial bodies, seasons, and natural phenomena (e.g., Blue Clouds, Snowflake, Water, My Sun, Green White Preschool).

Cuteness & Cartoon (Cuteness): Includes preschool names created with words such as ‘tiny’, ‘sweet’, ‘cute’, evoking cuteness and affection, as well as the names of cartoon characters (e.g., Cımcime, Tıpış Tıpış, Sevimli Pıtırıcık (Cute Pıtırıcık), Küçük Melekler (Little Angels), Şirin Kalpler (Sweethearts), Susam Sokağı (Sesame Street), Pamuk Prenses (Snow White Preschool)).

Martyr: Includes preschool names given to commemorate martyrs (e.g., Martyr Muhammed Eymen Demirci, Martyr Major Bedir Karabıyık Preschool).

Historical Figure: Includes preschool names bearing the names of historically, nationally, or culturally significant figures (e.g., Zübeyde Hanım, Nene Hatun, Mustafa Kemal, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Selahaddin Eyyubi Preschool).

Chain Schools: Branded private school chains with branches throughout Türkiye, covering all levels of education from preschool to high school. As the names of these schools do not include a specific preschool designation, they were not subject to detailed examination in the research (e.g., Bahçeşehir College, Sınav College, Bilfen Preschool).

Institution: Includes preschool names opened under municipalities, universities, foundations, or other public administrations (e.g., Küçükyalı Military Housing, Istanbul Technical University, ITU Development Foundation Private Beylerbeyi, National Education Foundation, TOKİ Hadımköy Preschool).

Other: Includes preschools’ names that do not fully fit into any of the above categories; names created with unique, mixed, or rarely used words (e.g., Şen İkizler (Happy Twins), Neon Yuva (Neon Nest), Çizgi Ötesi (Beyond the Line), İlköz (First Word), Amaç (Purpose), One Day Preschool).

Researchers compiled data from public and private preschools in selected provinces into Excel, creating a dataset suitable for descriptive statistics and reviewed by a statistician. Findings were then synthesized and interpreted according to the research questions. In the final stage, the findings were synthesized and interpreted in line with the research questions. The findings are presented descriptively under three headings related to the research questions: (1) the most frequently preferred name categories in public and private preschools in Türkiye; (2) the distribution of these categories according to Türkiye’s geographical regions; (3) the frequency of recurring words in preschool names.

Findings

A total of 4809 preschools were included in this study, comprising 2680 private and 2129 public preschools. In Türkiye, private preschools operate as private educational institutions under the MoNE, while public preschools operate as official educational institutions affiliated with the MoNE. Public preschools gain official status after being planned and approved by the relevant units of the MoNE, while private preschools are opened and operate under the permission and supervision of the MoNE, in accordance with private education institution legislation. Therefore, the establishment processes, legislation, and naming approaches of private and public preschools in Türkiye differ. The main objective of this study is to compare the names of these two different types of preschools by labelling them and to reveal the common themes and differences that stand out in their names. The study is organized in the order of private and public. The reason for this is that the number of private preschools (2680) exceeds that of public preschools (2129).

The Most Popular Name Categories in Private and Public Preschools in Türkiye

Private preschools rank first in both total student numbers (18.1 %) and number of schools (36.1 %) when compared to other levels (elementary school, middle school, high school) (Türkiye Eğitim Derneği Eğitim Politikaları Araştırma Merkezi [TEDMEM], 2025). Table 1 clearly shows the regional implications of this

situation. In large cities such as Istanbul (62.8 %) and Izmir (66 %), private preschools constitute a significant portion of the total number of preschools. In contrast, in provinces such as Şanlıurfa (9 %) and Van (4.3 %), the proportion of private preschools remains below 10 %; in these provinces, the number of public preschools is significantly higher. The following analysis presents the most frequently used labels in the names of private and public preschool education institutions in these provinces. The main objective of this preliminary study is to provide a general and comparative perspective on the prominent trends in preschool naming practices.

Table 2 shows the most common preschool name categories in Türkiye by province. Istanbul has the most private (1.573) and public (931) preschools, while Van and Samsun have the fewest private (8) and public (74) preschools, respectively. For private preschools, the most frequent category is ‘Educational Philosophy & Vision’ (435), whereas for public preschools it is ‘Space’ (506). Overall, the ‘Founder’ category is notable with 744 schools.

Figure 1

Total Number of Private & Public Preschools in Türkiye by Category

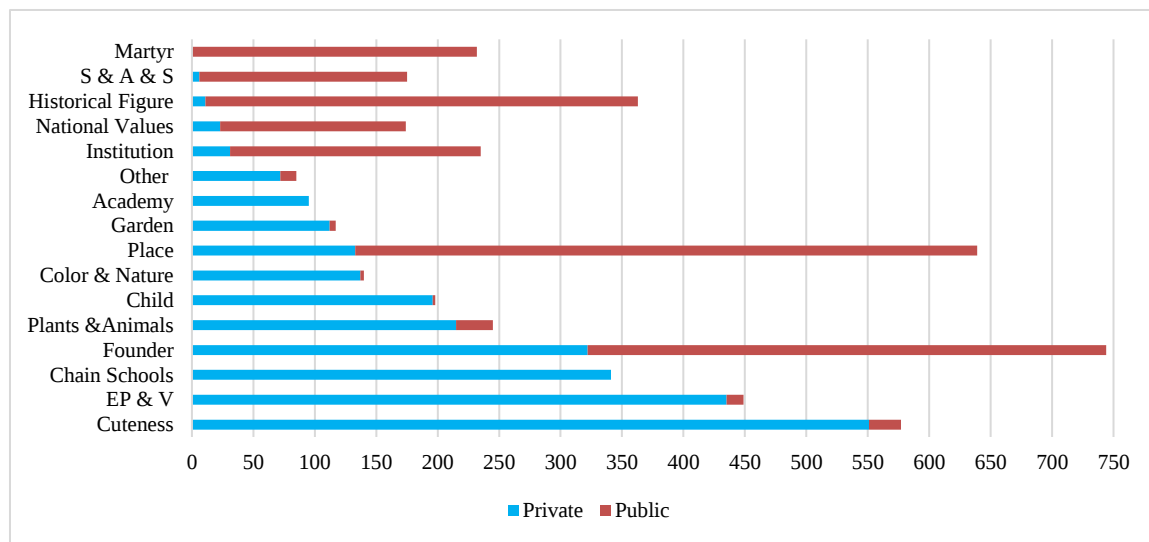


Figure 1 compares preschool name categories by private and public institutions. Names were thematically categorized and quantitatively analysed. The ‘Founder’ category is prominent in both sectors, representing 12 % (322) of private and 19.8 % (422) of public preschools. Although the ‘Founder’ category is seen at high rates in both types of institutions, the meaning of this category differs between public and private preschools. In private preschools, names often reflect the founder’s or their relatives’ names, including creative forms such as acrostics—for example, “Bil-Tan,” combining the founder’s maiden name *Bilgiç* and her husband’s surname *Vatan*—emphasizing personal and symbolic connections. Such naming preferences show that founders tend to add emotional and symbolic value to the institution by reflecting their identities, family ties, and personal life stories in the school name. On the other hand, most of the names in the ‘Founder’ category in public preschools consist of the names of philanthropists and donors who have covered the construction costs of the school or contributed to its construction.

Figure 1 shows that terms like ‘Chain Schools’ and ‘Academy’ appear only in private preschools, while ‘Martyr’ is exclusive to public preschools. Private preschools dominate categories such as ‘Cuteness,’ ‘Educational Philosophy & Vision,’ ‘Child,’ ‘Color & Nature,’ ‘Plants & Animals,’ and ‘Garden,’ reflecting efforts to highlight pedagogical approaches, child-centered themes, and emotional engagement. Public preschools are concentrated in ‘National Values,’ ‘Historical Figures,’ ‘B&S&T,’ ‘Institution,’ and ‘Place.’ Overall, Figure 1 shows that private

Table 2*Distribution of Private and Public Preschool Names by Category and Total Number of Schools in Selected Provinces in Türkiye*

	Ankara		Antalya		Istanbul		Izmir		Samsun		Şanlıurfa		Van		Total		
	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Prvt	Pblc	Total
Academy	14	0	3	0	69	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	1	0	95	0	95
Garden	11	2	7	0	75	0	16	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	112	5	117
S & A & S	0	29	0	3	6	108	0	5	0	4	0	13	0	7	6	169	175
Plants & Animals	22	7	8	2	148	14	29	1	8	0	0	2	0	4	215	30	245
Children	47	1	6	0	109	0	29	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	196	2	198
Other	9	4	1	1	41	4	18	2	3	0	0	2	0	0	72	13	85
EP & V	98	1	14	0	224	6	80	0	14	1	5	3	0	3	435	14	449
Founder	51	63	5	63	209	198	35	63	17	7	3	21	2	7	322	422	744
Institution	2	44	1	6	22	98	6	24	0	8	0	15	0	9	31	204	235
Place	29	68	6	46	70	177	17	36	7	21	4	61	0	97	133	506	639
National Values	6	22	0	11	9	60	6	18	2	8	0	15	0	17	23	151	174
Color & Nature	10	0	5	0	109	3	12	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	137	3	140
Cuteness	92	12	22	0	305	4	114	1	14	0	1	4	3	5	551	26	577
Martyr	0	72	0	18	0	88	0	29	0	7	0	13	0	5	0	232	232
Historical Figure	1	52	0	18	4	171	4	33	1	18	1	42	0	18	11	352	363
Chain School	85	0	28	0	173	0	44	0	7	0	3	0	1	0	341	0	341
Total Number of Schools in the Province	477	377	106	168	1573	931	411	212	86	74	19	191	8	176	2680	2129	4809

Note. Prvt: Private , Pblc: Public

preschools emphasize vision, values, nature, and child-centred themes, while public preschools focus on institutional, historical, and spatial elements. Figure 2 presents the percentage distribution of private and public preschools across categories.

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Private & Public Preschools by Category

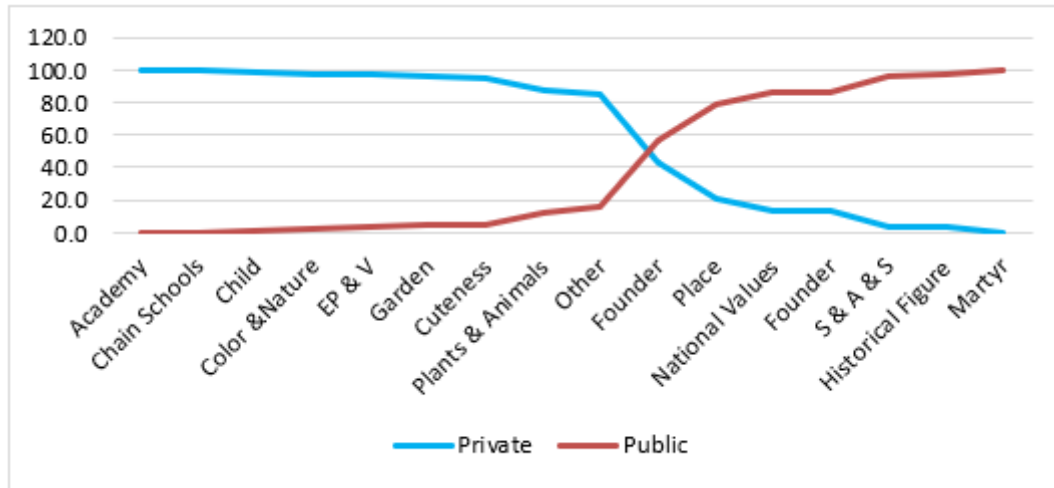


Figure 2, shaped like a ‘pincer,’ highlights clear differences in naming preferences: private preschools predominantly favor eight categories (left to ‘Other’) with over 85 %, while public preschools favor five categories (‘National Values’ to right) above 85 %, except for ‘Founder’ and ‘Location.’

Distribution of Name Categories According to Türkiye's Geographical Regions

Data on the percentage distribution of preschool naming categories by province and the frequency of names relative to the expected value are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3

Percentage Distribution of Categories in Private Preschools by Province

Private	Ankara	Antalya	Istanbul	Izmir	Samsun
Academy	2.9	2.8	4.4	0.2	8.1
Garden	2.3	6.6	4.8	3.9	2.3
Plants & Animals	4.6	7.5	9.4	7.1	9.3
Child	9.9	5.7	6.9	7.1	4.7
EP & V	20.5	13.2	14.2	19.5	16.3
Founder	10.7	4.7	13.3	8.5	19.8
Place	6.1	5.7	4.5	4.1	8.1
Color & Nature	2.1	4.7	6.9	2.9	0.0
Cuteness	19.3	20.8	19.4	27.7	16.3
Chain Schools	17.8	26.4	11.0	10.7	8.1

Table 3 shows the provincial percentage distribution of private preschool names. Each column sums to 100 %, indicating category shares within the province. For example, 20.5 % of Ankara’s private preschools fall under ‘EP & V,’ and 9.9 % include ‘Child.’ Highest provincial percentages are displayed in bold and italics: ‘Chain Schools’ in Antalya (26.4 %), ‘Cuteness’ in Istanbul (19.4 %) and Izmir (27.7 %), and ‘Founder’ in Samsun (19.8 %). Cells with bold font show the highest category rates across provinces, e.g., ‘Garden’ in Antalya, ‘Plant & Animal’ and ‘Color & Nature’ in Istanbul, and ‘Academy,’ ‘Founder,’ and ‘Place’ in Samsun.

Table 4*Name Frequency Based on Expected Value in Private Preschools*

	Ankara	Antalya	Istanbul	Izmir	Samsun
Academy	0.83	0.80	1.24	0.07	2.30
Garden	0.55	1.58	1.14	0.93	0.56
Plants & Animals	0.57	0.94	1.17	0.88	1.16
Child	1.35	0.77	0.95	0.96	0.64
EP & V	1.27	0.81	0.88	1.20	1.00
Founder	0.89	0.39	1.11	0.71	1.65
Place	1.23	1.14	0.90	0.83	1.64
Color & Nature	0.41	0.92	1.36	0.57	
Cuteness	0.94	1.01	0.94	1.35	0.79
Chain Schools	1.40	2.08	0.86	0.84	0.64

Note. The use of 'expected value' in this table should not be confused with the weighted mean $E(X)$ in probability theory. In this table, the expected value is constant and equal to 1.

Table 4 is a different perspective of Table 3 for private preschools. In this table, the distribution of name categories across provinces is compared with the expected value. The expected value is 1. This value was calculated by dividing the numerator of the rational expression by the sum of the relevant category in the province and the denominator by the total number of schools in the province divided by the total number of schools in the sample, as formulated below. This calculation was performed separately for private and public preschools. For example, as shown in Table 1, there are 80 schools in the 'EP & V' category in Izmir. The total for the relevant category based on private schools is 435. While there are a total of 411 private schools in Izmir, the number of private schools across Türkiye is 2680.

$$\frac{\text{value of the relevant category in province} \div \text{total of the relevant category}}{\text{total number of schools in the province} \div \text{total number of schools}} = \frac{80 \div 435}{411 \div 2680} = 1.20$$

Therefore, 411 private preschools, or 15.3 % of the total, are located in Izmir. An equal distribution would expect the 'EP & V' category to represent 15.3 % within Izmir. However, 80 of the 435 'EP & V' private preschools, or 18.4 %, are located in Izmir. In this case, the naming focused on 'Educational Philosophy and Vision' has occurred 20 % more than expected in Izmir ($18.4 \% / 15.3 \% = 1.20$). Based on this calculation, 'Chain Schools' are seen more than twice as much as expected in Antalya, and 'Academy' in Samsun. In Ankara, preschools named 'Place' are 23 % more than expected; 'EP & V' are 27% more than expected, and preschools containing the word 'Child' are 35 % more than expected. In Izmir, 'Academy' is 24 % more preferred, and 'Color & Nature' is 36% more preferred. While low frequency naming was observed in certain categories in all provinces, it was determined that the distribution in Istanbul was balanced, i.e., it did not contain extreme values, except for the categories 'Science, Art, Sufism (0.3%)' and 'Martyr (0.0 %)'. In this city, the average value of the categories was calculated as 0.98 (expected 1.00) and the standard deviation as 0.37, showing that all categories were within one standard deviation of the average. While analyzing private preschools, Şanlıurfa and Van were included in the calculations but are not included in the expected value table above. This is because the ratio of the number of private preschools to the total number of preschools is below 1 % in Şanlıurfa ($19/2680$) and Van ($8/2680$).

Tables 5 and 6 below present the percentage distribution and expected values by category for public preschools at the provincial level. Unlike Tables 3 and 4 (private preschools), the provinces of Şanlıurfa and Van are included in the table because public preschools in these two provinces constitute approximately 17% of the sample.

Table 5*Percentage Distribution of Categories in Public Preschools by Province*

	Ankara	Antalya	Istanbul	Izmir	Samsun	Şanlıurfa	Van
S & A & S	7.7	1.8	11.6	2.4	5.4	6.8	4.0
Plants&Animals	1.9	1.2	1.5	0.5	0.0	1.0	2.3
Founder	16.7	37.5	21.3	29.7	9.5	11.0	4.0
Institution	11.7	3.6	10.5	11.3	10.8	7.9	5.1
Location	18.0	27.4	19.0	17.0	28.4	31.9	55.1
National Value	5.8	6.5	6.4	8.5	10.8	7.9	9.7
Cuteness	3.2	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.0	2.1	2.8
Martyr	19.1	10.7	9.5	13.7	9.5	6.8	2.8
Historical	13.8	10.7	18.4	15.6	24.3	22.0	10.2

Table 5 shows that ‘Martyr’ names are most common in Ankara (19.1 %), ‘Founder & Donor’ names in Antalya (37.5 %), Istanbul (21.3%), and Izmir (29.7 %), and ‘Place’ names in Samsun (28.4 %), Şanlıurfa (31.9 %), and Van (55.1 %). By category, ‘Science, Art & Sufism’ names are most common in Istanbul (11.6 %), ‘Institution’ names in Ankara (11.7 %) and Izmir (11.3 %), ‘National Values’ in Samsun (10.8 %) and Van (9.7 %), and ‘Historical Figures’ in Samsun (24.3 %) and Şanlıurfa (22 %). Notably, about half of the underrepresented ‘Plant & Animal’ and ‘Cuteness’ names appear in Ankara and Van, including examples such as Cimcime (Sweetie), Sevgi Çiçeği (Flower of Love), Minik Güller (Little Roses), Beyaz Nergis (White Narcissus), Papatya (Daisy), and Karanfil (Carnation) Anaokulu).

Table 6*Frequency of Names According to Expected Value in Public Preschools*

	Ankara	Antalya	Istanbul	Izmir	Samsun	Şanlıurfa	Van
S & A & S	0.97	0.22	1.46	0.30	0.68	0.86	0.50
Plants & Animals	1.32	0.84	1.07	0.33	0.0	0.74	1.61
Founder	0.84	1.89	1.07	1.50	0.48	0.55	0.20
Institution	1.22	0.37	1.10	1.18	1.13	0.82	0.53
Location	0.76	1.15	0.80	0.71	1.19	1.34	2.32
National Value	0.82	0.92	0.91	1.20	1.52	1.11	1.36
Cuteness	2.61	0.0	0.35	0.39	0.0	1.71	2.33
Martyr	1.75	0.98	0.87	1.26	0.87	0.62	0.26
Historical	0.83	0.65	1.11	0.94	1.47	1.33	0.62

Note. The use of ‘expected value’ in this table should not be confused with the weighted mean $E(X)$ in probability theory. In this table, the expected value is constant and equal to 1.

In the expected value comparison in Table 6, the highest frequency was observed in Ankara in the ‘Cuteness’ category, at 2.6 times. 17.7 % of public preschools are located in Ankara. Under the assumption of an equal probability distribution, 4.6 of the 26 schools in the ‘Cuteness’ category in public preschools were expected to be located in Ankara at a rate of 17.7 %, while the observed number was 12. This value corresponds to approximately 2.61 times the expected value. Founders' names were more frequently used in Antalya (89 %) and Izmir (50 %), while names of ‘Science & Art and Sufism’ figures were more frequently used in Istanbul (46 %), and ‘National Values’ (52 %) and ‘Historical Figures’ (47 %) were more frequently used in Samsun than expected. In Şanlıurfa, names related to ‘Place’ and ‘Historical Figures’ (33 % each) and the ‘Cuteness’ category (71 %) were preferred more. In Van, where 95.7 % of preschools are state-run, ‘Plant & Animal’ names (61 %) and ‘National Values’ (36 %) were chosen more than expected, while naming in the ‘Place’ and ‘Cuteness’ categories was more than double the expected amount. Public preschools constitute almost all of the preschools included in the sample in Şanlıurfa and Van. However, unlike Ankara, Antalya, Istanbul, and Izmir, which are economically developed, the proportion of schools built by donors is below the expected value, at 45 % in Şanlıurfa and 80 % in Van.

The highest naming rate in the historical personality category was achieved in Samsun, exceeding expectations by 47%. Of the 18 schools in this category in Samsun, 5 are named 'Zübeyde Hanım', 2 are named 'Atatürk', 1 is named 'Mustafa Kemal', 2 'Nene Hatun', 1 'Şerife Bacı', 1 'Necatibey', and 1 'Kazım Orbay', carrying names associated with the War of Independence (72%). This situation can be explained by the fact that the Turkish War of Independence was actually started by Atatürk in Samsun on May 19, 1919. Furthermore, the most frequent naming in the 'National Values' category was again observed in Samsun (52%), with all names (e.g., Arıburnu, Kubilay, İstiklal, Cumhuriyet) chosen with inspiration from the War of Independence. In the institution category, the most frequent naming was observed in Ankara (22% more), and the names in this category generally covered district municipalities and central organizations (e.g., Court of Accounts, Council of State, State Hydraulic Works, Ministry of Industry and Technology, Mamak Municipality Kindergarten). In Istanbul, TOKİ and Foundations stand out as institutions that increase the frequency of naming. In addition, while 'Martyr' names are not found in private preschools, they are observed close to and above the expected value in provinces other than Van and Şanlıurfa. Among the categories with low standard deviation, namely 'Place', 'National Value', 'Historical Figure', and 'Martyr', the category with the highest expected value average is the 'Martyr' category at 1.15%.

Frequency of Repeated Words in Preschool Names

As shown in Figure 1, the names of private and public preschools have been classified into 16 different categories based on the themes they contain. The most frequently recurring words or word groups within these categories have been one of the focal points of the research. In the word clouds in Figure 3 (Private) and 4 (Public), the sizes of the words are scaled according to their frequency of use, thus visually presenting which words were preferred more.

Figure 3

Frequently Repeated Words in Names of Private Preschools



Figure 4

Frequently Repeated Words in Names of Public Preschools



Figure 3 shows that the most frequent words in private preschool names are ‘Tiny’ (118), ‘Star(s)’ (74), ‘First’ (68), ‘Knowledge/Wise’ (59), ‘Blue’ (56), and ‘Pearl’ (54), followed by moderately frequent terms like ‘Little,’ ‘Colorful,’ ‘Happy,’ and ‘Joy.’ Less frequent but notable words include ‘Bright,’ ‘Fable,’ ‘Play,’ ‘Pretty,’ ‘Sugar,’ ‘Development,’ ‘Green,’ and ‘Love.’ Figure 4 shows that the most frequent public preschool names are Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (39), Cumhuriyet (36), Zübeyde Hanım (28), Mehmet Akif Ersoy (21), anniversary expressions (50th, 75th, 100th; 20 total), and Nene Hatun (16). These data show that the name ‘Atatürk’ clearly stands out in school naming; it is also seen that the name of Atatürk’s mother, ‘Zübeyde Hanım’, is used very frequently. These results are consistent with the findings reached in Kemiksiz’s (2023) study. On the other hand, it has been observed that the age of the Republic (50th year, 75th year, 100th year) is widely used in school names.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study addresses a topic that has not been researched in the literature on preschool education. The main motivation of the study is to categorize the names of private and public preschools and to analyse the similarities and differences between the names in a comparative manner. Private and public preschools differ in terms of their organizational form and management structure. The study aims to identify the motivations and trends that influence the naming of preschool education institutions located in different geographical regions of Türkiye.

The study finds that private preschool names in Türkiye often emphasize childhood-related themes such as ‘Garden,’ ‘Nature,’ ‘Plant,’ and ‘Cuteness,’ whereas public preschool names highlight social and cultural values like ‘Martyr,’ ‘National Value,’ ‘Place,’ and ‘Historical Figure.’ For example, a public preschool was named after Serdar Aksun, a child who died in 1979—the “Year of the Child”—to raise social awareness and reinforce national values. Similarly, the ‘Turkish-Swedish Friendship Preschool’ in Esenyurt (Istanbul) reflects international solidarity in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area. Preschool names thus convey institutional identity, pedagogical approach, values, and positioning. Another notable finding is that the predominance of private institutions in the ‘Other’ category reflects greater creativity and diversity in their naming practices, whereas public preschool names tend to follow well-defined themes, resulting in more consistent and standardized classification.

The frequent use of the “Founder” category in both sectors indicates the role of capital contributions: private preschools often reference founders or their families, while public preschools honor philanthropic donors, emphasizing public memory and social respect (Göksu & Aslan, 2019). This situation shows that the naming preferences in the context of founders in public preschools are primarily based on the aim of contributing to society and preserving social memories. Moreover, these patterns reveal notable geographical variations in naming practices. In economically developed metropolitan provinces, donor names are more commonly used, likely reflecting philanthropic contributions, tax incentives, and social prestige. In contrast, in less-developed regions such as the Black Sea, Southeastern, and Eastern Anatolia, school names tend to emphasize local or geographical references.

The fact that ‘EP & V’ is the main theme preferred in private preschools stems from these institutions’ desire to make their educational approaches and pedagogies visible in their names. This situation arises from the presentation of educational services in the private sector as a brand value and competitive factor (Akyol & Yılmaz, 2016). In this context, private preschools use themes such as ‘cuteness,’ ‘nature,’ ‘animals,’ and ‘colors,’ which are compatible with their development, in accordance with the principle of child-centeredness when naming. This preference can be considered a conscious strategy aimed at establishing an emotional bond with the child and instilling trust in parents. On the other hand, the requirement to comply with the MoNE’s school naming regulations has directed naming preferences in public preschools towards spatial, historical, and national values. The aim of associating public values with school culture has justified the preference for themes such as ‘Martyr,’ ‘Historical Figure,’ and ‘Place’ in public preschools. The prevalence of names associated with the War of Independence, particularly in Samsun, highlights the importance given to the spatial representation of historical events. In this context, school names are not only an identity but also a carrier of historical narrative (Assmann, 2011; Türkoğlu & Günay, 2018). Lefebvre (2014) states that space connects the cultural with the mental and the social with the historical. This perspective is parallel with the findings of a socio-onomastic analysis conducted on selected schools in the Kabwe District, which concluded that names function as a deep-rooted historical record transmitting specific aspects of a people’s way of life including their history and beliefs (Kangwa et al., 2024).

The presence of the categories ‘Chain School’ and ‘Academy’ exclusively in private preschools indicate these institutions’ strategic efforts to enhance long-term brand value and cultivate a professional identity. This

reveals that, in addition to service quality, branding is also very important as a driver of competition in the private school market (Ball, 2007). The name categories seen in private preschools vary more across geographical regions than in public preschools. This suggests that public preschools follow more standardized, regulation-driven naming patterns. In provinces such as Şanlıurfa and Van, where the average per capita income is relatively low, preschools are built with the state's own resources, without relying on donors. In these preschools, whose construction was undertaken by the public sector, themes such as 'Cuteness' and 'Plants & Animals,' which are not explicitly mentioned in the MoNE school naming regulations, were used more frequently than in public preschools and those built by donors and institutions. One of the prominent results in the expected value analyses is that institutional identity and donation-based naming are preferred in metropolitan cities, while local and spatial themes are preferred in eastern Anatolia. The data also indicate that preschools in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia were largely built with the state's own resources. Furthermore, it was observed that names with themes of 'Cuteness' and 'Plants & Animals' which are not explicitly mentioned in the MoNE's regulations on naming schools, were used more frequently in this region, where the state is the driving force behind the establishment of schools.

The prominence of words such as 'Tiny', 'Star(s)', 'First', 'Wise', 'Pearl', 'Pretty', 'Color(ful)', and 'Love' in private preschools indicates that naming strategies are based more on pedagogical, emotional, and aesthetic connotations. In contrast, the preference for historical figures such as Mustafa Kemal, Atatürk, Zübeyde Hanım, and Mehmet Akif Ersoy in the names of public preschools, as well as the use of names such as 'Republic' and '50th/75th/100th Year' marking its anniversary, shows that these schools tend to keep social memory alive and preserve national values. This situation coincides with the findings of Kemiksiz (2023), who argues that the naming processes in public schools serve an ideological function in line with the MoNE policies. School names play a key role in preserving and transmitting material and immaterial culture, forming social memory, and keeping historical and cultural memory alive. In preschool education institutions, it is particularly important to choose names that are appropriate for the children's level of development, supportive, instil a sense of belonging, and align with the core values of the educational programs.

In conclusion, preschool naming practices in Türkiye are shaped by many variables, such as institution type, regional location, social values, and economic conditions. Public preschools tend to prioritize symbols such as historical memory, public contribution, spatial representation, and national values, while private schools name their institutions based on individual vision, branding, and emotional connection strategies. In Türkiye, the differentiation of school names between institutional structures and geographical regions produces a multi-layered field of meaning shaped at the intersection of local cultural values and neoliberal education policies. In this context, there is a need for more comprehensive studies examining the pedagogical, sociological, and political dimensions of preschool names.

Recommendations

- Based on the findings, it is recommended that both private and public preschool websites be regularly updated for content, accessibility, and currency, as they reflect the school's identity and support communication with the community. Public preschools may require more frequent improvements than private institutions.
- Comparative studies are encouraged to examine the similarities and differences in preschool naming practices between Türkiye and other countries.
- This study provides a foundation for further research exploring the impact of preschool names on children's sense of belonging and their attitudes toward school.
- Future research may also investigate the influence of preschool names on parents' decision-making processes when selecting an educational setting for their children.
- To support the pedagogical enhancement of naming practices, in-depth studies examining the perspectives of both children and teachers regarding preschool names are recommended.
- Future studies should establish child-sensitive research environments that genuinely recognize children as active contributors, using methods suited to their developmental capacities to co-construct knowledge and elicit their insights on preschool naming practices.

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Türkiye’de Okul Öncesi Eğitim Kurumlarının İsimleri Ne Söylüyor?

Öz

Okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarının isimleri yalnızca birer tanımlayıcı değil; aynı zamanda kurumların kimliğini, işlevini ve eğitim anlayışını yansıtan, toplumdaki algı ve itibarını etkileyen unsurlar arasında yer alır. Bu çalışma Türkiye’nin farklı coğrafi bölgelerindeki özel ve devlet anaokullarının isimlendirilmesinde etkili olan motivasyonları ve eğilimleri tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, kurum türleri ve bulundukları bölgelere göre isim seçimlerindeki benzerlik ve farklılıkları karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Doküman analizi yaklaşımıyla yürütülen araştırmanın veri seti, Millî Eğitim Bakanlığına bağlı ‘resmi anaokulları’ ve ‘özel anaokulları’ statüsündeki eğitim kurumlarıdır. Kurumlarla yapılan yaklaşık 2000 görüşme, verilerin doğru etiketlenmesi ve tasnifinde güvenilirliği artırmıştır. Veriler Excel’de düzenlenmiş, kategorilere ayrılmış ve betimsel istatistiksel yöntemlerle analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca anaokullarının isimlendirme süreçlerine dair aktardıkları hikâyeler not edilmiştir. Türkiye’de anaokullarının isimlendirilmesinde, coğrafi bölge ve kurum türüne bağlı olarak farklılıklar gözlenmiş; bu farklılıkların kurumların eğitim felsefesi, toplumsal değerler, kültürel kodlar ve bölgesel kimlikler gibi çok boyutlu faktörlerle şekillendiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Çalışmayı destekleyen dosya çevrimiçi olarak mevcuttur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Anaokulu isimleri, adlandırma stratejileri, toponimi, Türkiye