

Maternal Gatekeeping: Links to Children's Social Competence, Problems, and Emotion Regulation

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between maternal gatekeeping behaviors--defined as how mothers facilitate or restrict others' involvement in childcare--and preschool children's social competence, problem behaviors, and emotion regulation skills within the Turkish context. Addressing a gap in early childhood research regarding the simultaneous impact of gatekeeping on various developmental aspects, the study utilized a relational screening model. The sample comprised 305 children (ages 48 to 69 months) and their mothers in Bal?kesir, Turkiye. Data were collected through mother and teacher assessments using the Maternal Gatekeeping Scale, the Social Competence and Behavior Assessment Scale, and the Emotion Regulation Checklist. Results indicated that encouraging maternal behaviors were positively correlated with children's emotional regulation, whereas restrictive behaviors were associated with increased emotional lability. However, no direct association was observed between maternal gatekeeping and children's social competence or behavioral problems. Furthermore, demographic analysis revealed that higher maternal education and longer preschool attendance were linked to improved emotional regulation and fewer behavioral issues. The findings suggest that while supportive maternal gatekeeping enhances emotional regulation, it does not directly influence social competence. Consequently, interventions aiming to support children's well-being should focus on fostering positive maternal engagement and promoting preschool attendance, while future research should explore these dynamics across diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Maternal gatekeeping, Emotion regulation, Preschool education, Social competence, Problematic behavior

Introduction

Early childhood is regarded as a critical stage in which the foundations of socio-emotional development are established and behavior patterns that persist throughout life are shaped [1], [2]. During this period, it is essential for children to acquire various socio-emotional skills, such as adapting to social norms, building healthy relationships, expressing their emotions, regulating their emotional responses, developing autonomy, demonstrating initiative, and participating in situations that require sharing and cooperation [3]. The development of socio-emotional skills shows a bidirectional relationship between social competence and emotional competence. In other words, while social skills shape children's emotional development, emotional development also influences the quality of their social skills [4]. Therefore, children's ability to initiate and maintain effective communication with peers and adults, regulate their emotions and behaviors according to the social environment, express themselves, take responsibility, and complete tasks they start are considered significant indicators of socio-emotional competence [5], [6].

Among the closest social models influencing the formation of children's socio-emotional skills and behaviors are mothers. As mothers are typically the primary caregivers who spend the most time with children, they establish strong, enduring, and unique relationships with them [7]. Compared to other caregivers, mother-child relationships are often more intense and longlasting. Thus, for children who learn through observation and imitation, the mother often becomes the first role model, shaping their behaviors and skills [8]. Previous research has demonstrated that both explicit and implicit communication between children and their parents significantly influences children's socio-emotional development. Positive parenting behaviors strengthen children's social competence, while negative practices increase the likelihood of problem behaviors [9], [10].

Social competence is defined as the capacity to demonstrate appropriate and effective behaviors in diverse social contexts. Bandura's [11], [12] Social Cognitive Theory explains social competence through mechanisms such as self-efficacy beliefs, observational learning, and self-regulation. Children with higher levels of self-efficacy exhibit stronger problem-solving skills, better interpersonal adjustment, and greater social initiative, whereas those with low self-efficacy tend to be more passive and withdrawn in social contexts [13], [14]. Thus, social competence is a multidimensional construct that encompasses behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aspects.

One of the most crucial emotional skills that supports children's social competence is emotion regulation. Emotion regulation refers to the ability to identify emotional experiences, express them appropriately, control emotional reactions, and flexibly adjust

these responses when necessary [15], [16]. This ability enables children to overcome their early emotional egocentrism, adapt to social rules, and pursue their own goals [17]. Research has shown that children with underdeveloped emotion regulation skills face difficulties in establishing peer relationships, while those who experience intense negative emotions are more likely to display problem behaviors compared to their peers [9], [18]. Therefore, emotion regulation should be examined in close connection with social competence and problem behaviors.

In recent years, the concept of maternal gatekeeping has gained increasing attention in the literature. Maternal gatekeeping refers to mothers' encouraging, restrictive, or controlling attitudes and behaviors regarding fathers' or other caregivers' involvement in childcare and the developmental process [19]. Such behaviors are thought to influence not only interparental dynamics but also children's socio-emotional development [20], [21]. In Turkey, empirical research on maternal gatekeeping remains limited and has been predominantly conducted in the field of psychology [22] - [24]. Studies examining the relationship between maternal gatekeeping and demographic variables (e.g., mothers' education level, socioeconomic background) have mostly been carried out with primary and secondary schoolaged children [25]-[27]. This highlights the originality and necessity of exploring maternal gatekeeping behaviors in relation to preschool children's social competence, problem behaviors, and emotion regulation skills.

This study aims to examine preschool children's socio-emotional skills across multiple dimensions (social competence, anger/aggression, anxiety/introversion, emotional variability/negativity, and emotion regulation), to investigate their relationship with maternal gatekeeping behaviors, and to analyze data collected from both mothers and teachers. In this respect, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how maternal behaviors influence children's socio-emotional development and to address important gaps in the existing literature.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The main purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between maternal gatekeeping behaviors and preschool children's social competence, problem behaviors, and emotion regulation skills. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between maternal gatekeeping behaviors and children's social competence, problem behaviors, and emotion regulation skills?
2. Do maternal gatekeeping behaviors (encouragement, barrier, control) differ based on demographic factors such as mothers' education level and the level of support received from their spouses or other caregivers?
3. Do children's social competence and problem behaviors (social competence, anger/aggression, anxiety/introversion) differ according to demographic characteristics such as mothers' education level and the duration of preschool education?
4. Do children's emotion regulation skills (lability/negativity, emotion regulation) differ based on demographic characteristics such as mothers' education level and the duration of preschool education?

Method

2.1 Research Model

This study aims to examine the relationship between mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and their children's social competence, problematic behavior, and emotion regulation skills. It was structured using a quantitative approach and conducted through the relational screening method within a descriptive screening model. This model is employed to assess individuals' attitudes, thoughts, and expectations regarding various subjects through the use of scales [28].

2.2 Sample

The study group for this research was determined using a cluster sampling method, in which educational institutions served as the clusters. Specifically, all kindergartens and primary or secondary schools with attached kindergarten classes located in the Karesi and Alt?eylul districts of Bal?kesir province during the 2022/2023 academic year were first identified. From this list, institutions were selected as clusters, and all children in the relevant kindergarten classes of the chosen institutions were included in the study. An examination of the types of educational institutions reveals that 9 (60.0%) are independent kindergartens, while 6 (40.0%) are kindergarten classes within other schools. Among the kindergarten classes, 1 (6.6%) is affiliated with a secondary school, whereas the remaining 5 (33.4%) are part of a primary school.

A total of 305 children--181 girls and 124 boys--who were enrolled in preschool education and aged between 48 and 69 months, along with their mothers, participated in the study. The demographic characteristics of the children and their mothers in the study group are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Children in the Study Group

Category	Definition	?	%
Children's Gender	Girl	181	59.3
	Boy	124	40.7
Duration of Children's School Attendance (Years)	1 Year	202	66.2
	2 Years	94	30.8
	3 Years	9	3.0
Children's Age (Months)	48-57 months	180	59.0

Category	Definition	?	%
	58-69 months	125	41.0
	Total	305	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the children involved in the study. An examination of the gender distribution reveals that 181 (59.3%) of the participants are girls, while 124 (40.7%) are boys. Additionally, it was found that 202 (66.2%) of the children have been attending preschool for one year, 94 (30.8%) for two years, and 9 (3.0%) for three years. Furthermore, the study determined that 180 (59.0%) of the children are between 48 and 57 months old, while 125 (41.0%) are between 58 and 69 months old.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Mothers in the Study Group

Category	Definition	?	%
Mother's Education Status	Primary education	11	3.6
	Secondary Education (High School)	141	46.2
	Associate Degree	24	7.9
	Bachelor's Degree and Above	129	42.3
Marital Status of Mother	Married	294	96.4
	Single	11	3.6

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the mothers in the study group. Among the mothers surveyed, 11 (3.6%) had completed primary school, 141 (46.2%) had completed secondary school (high school), 24 (7.9%) held an associate degree, and 129 (42.3%) possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. An examination of the marital status of the mothers revealed that 294 (96.4%) were married, while 11 (3.6%) were single.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Within the scope of the research, a demographic information form and three measurement tools were utilized. The data collection instruments employed are presented.

Demographic Information Form: The researchers developed an information form to gather various demographic characteristics of children attending preschool education and their mothers. This form includes variables such as the mother's education level, marital status, support from the other parent or spouse, quality time spent with her child, as well as the children's age, gender, number of siblings, duration of school attendance, and type of institution.

The Maternal Gatekeeping Scale-Mother Form (MGS-M) was adapted from the original 42-item MGS-M developed by Puhlman and Pasley [29]. This scale evaluates mothers' motivating, limiting, and controlling behaviors toward fathers. In the adaptation study conducted by Akta? and Ayd'n [22], a 6-point Likert-type rating scale was employed, with response options ranging from Never (0) to Always (5), including Very Rarely (1), Rarely (2), Sometimes (3), and Most of the Time (4). The study identified three sub-dimensions: Encouragement, Barrier, and Control. The Maternal Gatekeeping Scale-Mother Form (MPS-M) was evaluated among mothers of children aged 48 to 69 months attending preschool education.

The encouragement sub-dimension of the MGS-M is defined as the mother's behaviors that support the other parent (father) in the child's developmental process (Sample Item: I encourage my husband to spend time alone with his child). The barrier sub-dimension is characterized by the mother's restrictive, wall-building, and limiting behaviors toward the other parent (Sample Item: I interrupt my spouse's time with the child). The control sub-dimension refers to the mother's authority in decision-making regarding the child within the family and her supervisory behaviors (Sample Item: I control what my spouse wants to do with the child). The adaptation study conducted on the MGS-M concluded that mothers who scored higher on the scale exhibited more pronounced gatekeeping characteristics toward fathers [22]. According to the analysis results, the Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient for the MGS-M was determined to be .76, while the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the 'Encouragement', 'Barrier', and 'Control' sub-dimensions of the scale were found to be .83, .70, and .72, respectively.

Social Competence and Behavior Assessment-30 Scale (SCBA-30): (SCBA-30) was utilized in this study. This scale, developed by La Freniere and Dumas [30] and later adapted into Turkish by Çorapç? et al. [5], is completed by either the child's teacher or parent. In this research, scoring was conducted by the child's teacher. The 6-point Likert-type scale comprises three sub-dimensions: social competence, anger-aggression, and anxiety-introversion, with each sub-dimension containing ten items. The social competence sub-dimension of the SCBA-30 evaluates positive traits, including children's ability to cooperate with peers and seek solutions to conflicts. (Sample Item: Works with other children in group activities, cooperates with them). The anger-aggression sub-dimension assesses symptoms of externalizing problems, such as disobeying adults and exhibiting maladaptive and aggressive behaviors toward peers. (Sample Item: He/She is moody, angry, and rages easily). The anxiety-introversion dimension measures symptoms of internalizing problems, such as children displaying sad, depressed, and timid behaviors in group settings. (Sample Item: Sad, unhappy, or depressed).

According to the analyses conducted to determine the Cronbach Alpha (α) coefficients of the SCBA-30 and its sub-dimensions, the overall Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the scale was found to be 0.75. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the sub-dimensions of 'Social Competence', 'Anger-Aggression' and 'Anxiety-Introversion' were found to be 0.89, 0.77, and 0.74, respectively. Based on the information presented, it can be concluded that the SCBA-30 used in the study is reliable.

Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC): The Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC) was developed by Shields and Cicchetti [31] and later adapted by Batur and Yaşar [32]. This scale comprises 24 items that assess the emotional reactivity of preschool and school-age children and the organization and expression of emotions in relation to environmental conditions. It consists of two sub-dimensions: 'Emotion Regulation' and 'Lability-Negativity.' The Emotion Regulation sub-dimension refers to the ability to exhibit emotional responses that are appropriate to the situation and to manage emotions according to contextual factors (Sample Item: He/she can say that he/she is sad, angry, or scared). The Lability -Negativity sub-dimension addresses mood variability and emotional dysregulation (Sample Item: She is prone to anger outbursts and moodiness episodes). The items on the ERC are organized as a 4-point Likert type (1 = Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Frequently, 4 = Always). High scores on the ERC indicate that children possess strong emotion regulation skills. This scale, suitable for collecting data from both mothers and teachers, was completed by the mothers of the children participating in the study. The Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficient for the ERC used in the study was found to be .78, while the 'Lability /Negativity' sub-dimension had a coefficient of .70, and the 'Emotion Regulation' sub-dimension had a coefficient of .72.

2.4 Data Collection

The study's ethical and legal responsibilities were fulfilled per the established rules and permissions. First, necessary permissions were obtained via email from the researchers who conducted the adaptation study of the SCBA-30, MGS-M, and ERC measurement tools to collect data related to the study. The request for the study was formally conveyed to the appropriate schools and individuals via a petition. In this context, permission was granted by Balıkesir University Institute of Social Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: May 10, 2022; Decision No: E-19928322) and the Balıkesir Provincial Directorate of National Education (Date: July 21, 2022; Decision No: 53875278). After securing the necessary permissions, 15 preschool education institutions were visited and selected based on the principles of accessibility, convenience, and volunteerism. School administrators and teachers were informed about the research. For the mothers in the study group, the school administrators sent information messages to the parent groups, providing preliminary details about the research.

After the necessary authorization regarding the implementation process was gathered, the participants in the study group were provided with a participation acceptance form and a parental consent form, emphasizing that participation in the study was voluntary. Subsequently, to collect information about the demographic characteristics of the mothers and children, the researcher presented the Information Form to the mothers, who were asked to complete it. Once the demographic information forms were collected, preschool teachers evaluated the SCBA-30, a data collection tool in the study, to assess the children's problematic behaviors and social competence skills. Additionally, support was obtained from the mothers through the MGS-M and the ERC to evaluate their guarding behaviors and their children's emotion regulation skill levels. Mothers rated their children's emotion regulation skills after assessing their gatekeeping behaviors. Teachers and mothers were given seven days to complete the scales. The scales were administered to the mothers and teachers at different times, with the mothers completing them first, followed by the children's teachers. After the completion of this process, the data were analyzed.

2.5 Analysis of Data

All statistical analyses for the study were conducted using the SPSS 24.0 software package. Initially, to assess the normality of the data distribution, skewness and kurtosis values, as well as the homogeneity of the variables, were evaluated. Based on these assessments, appropriate parametric or nonparametric tests were selected for the study. Specifically, to determine whether the item scores from the MGS-M, the SCBA-30, and the ERC followed a normal distribution, the mean, standard deviation, mode, median, skewness, and kurtosis values of the factors were analyzed. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Sub-dimensions of Maternal Gatekeeping Scale, Social Competence and Behavior Assessment-30 Scale and Emotion Regulation Checklist

Dimensions	M	SD	Mdn	Mo	Skewness	Kurtosis
Encouragement	3.86	.78	4.06	4.33	-1.42	3.36
Barrier	1.08	.63	1.00	.67	.91	.976
Control	1.79	.75	1.75	1.17	.392	-.268
Lability /Negativity	1.92	.39	1.86	1.67	.585	.136
Emotion Regulation	3.23	.44	3.25	3.63	-.715	.414
Social Competence	45.80	8.11	45.00	40.00	.015	-.515
Anger/Aggression	16.42	4.90	16.00	10.00	.691	.098
Anxiety/Introversi on	17.87	5.30	19.00	19.00	.391	-.302

According to Hair et al. [76], data can be considered approximately normally distributed when skewness values fall between -2 and +2, and kurtosis values are within +7. In this study, skewness and kurtosis values (see Table 3) fall within the acceptable range, indicating that the data approximates a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests were applied using a 95% confidence level with a significance threshold of $p < .05$.

Before the data were included in the analysis process, incomplete and inaccurate forms that could introduce bias into the statistical results were removed. Subsequently, to assess the reliability of the data obtained from the scales, Cronbach's Alpha (α)

coefficients were calculated for both the scales and their sub-dimensions included in the study. A scale or sub-dimension is considered reliable when its a coefficient exceeds .70 [33]. The analyses conducted in this context indicated that each scale and its sub-dimensions were reliable data collection tools, as their Cronbach's Alpha (a) coefficients were all above .70.

In this study, which aimed to determine the relationship between mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and their children's social competence, problematic behavior, and emotion regulation skills, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between mothers' scores on the MGS-M and their children's scores on the SCBA-30 and the ERC. This analysis was appropriate as the data were normally distributed and the variables were continuous. In the correlation analyses, the reference values for the correlation coefficient were defined as follows: 0.00-0.30 indicated a low level of correlation, 0.31-0.70 indicated a medium level of correlation, and 0.71-1.00 indicated a high level of correlation [33]. For the purposes of this research, these correlation coefficient ranges were accepted, and evaluations were made accordingly. To assess the gatekeeping behaviors of mothers in the study group in relation to the research question, the Independent Samples T-Test--a parametric test used for comparing paired groups of quantitative variables--was employed to determine whether the scores obtained from the MGS-M and its sub-dimensions differed based on the mother's education level and the support received from the other parent or spouse. In order to assess whether the scores obtained from the SCBA-30 Scale and the ERC sub-dimensions--used to evaluate children's social competence, problematic behavior, and emotion regulation skills--differ based on the mother's educational status and the duration of her child's preschool education, an Independent Samples T-Test was employed. This statistical method is commonly used for comparing means between independent groups for quantitative variables.

The findings derived from the statistical analyses conducted are presented below in accordance with the research questions.

3.1 Findings on the Relationship Between Mothers' Gatekeeping Behaviors and Their Children's Social Competence, Problem Behavior, and Emotion Regulation Skills

Within the scope of this study, the relationship between mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and their children's social competence, problematic behaviors, and emotion regulation skills in preschool education was examined. To this end, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among the factors measured by the scales, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Pearson Correlation Analysis on the Relationship Between Mothers' Gatekeeping Behaviors and Their Children's Social Competence, Problematic Behavior and Emotion Regulation Skills

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
(MGS-M) Encouragement	-							
(MGS-M) Barrier	-,330**	-						
(MGS-M) Control	.105	,545**	-					
(ERC) Labilty /Negativity	-.019	,160**	,145*	-				
(ERC) Emotion Regulation	,155**	-.07	-.057	-,404**	-			
(SCBA-30) Social Competence	-.022	-.029	-.051	-.045	.06	-		
(SCBA-30) Anger/Aggression	.021	.032	.037	,223**	-.03	-,390**	-	
(SCBA-30)Anxiety/Introversio n	-.048	.033	-.022	-.029	-.036	-,455**	,228 **	-

*p

When examining Table 4, no significant relationships were found between the "Encouragement", "Barrier", and "Control" sub-dimensions of the MGS-M and the "Social Competence," "Anxiety/Introversion," and "Anger/Aggression" sub-dimensions of the SCBA-30 ($p > .05$). Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between mothers' supportive, controlling, and restrictive behaviors and their children's social competence, anger/aggression, and anxiety/introversion behaviors of their children.

On the other hand, a positive and low level significant relationship was found between the "Encouragement" factor of the MGS-M and the "Emotion Regulation" factor of the ERC ($r = .155$; $p .05$). When examining the correlation values for the sub-dimensions of the SCBA-30, a moderately significant negative relationship is observed between the "Anger/Aggression" factor and the "Social Competence" factor ($r = -0.390$; $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that as the externalizing behaviors of the children in the study increase, their social competence decreases. Additionally, an analysis of the "Anxiety/Introversion" sub-dimension in relation to the "Social Competence" sub-dimension reveals a similarly moderate negative relationship ($r = -0.455$; $p < 0.01$). In this context, it can be inferred that as the social competence of the children increases, their internalizing behaviors decrease. In summary, the results indicate that as both internalizing and externalizing behaviors of the children in the study increase, their social competence declines.

3.2 Findings on mothers' gatekeeping behaviors

The gatekeeping behaviors of the mothers participating in the study were analyzed using an independent samples t-test to determine whether the scores on the MGS-M sub-dimensions differed significantly based on the mothers' educational status and the support they received from their spouse or other parent. The results are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Mothers Participating in the Study on the MGS-M Scale According to Their Educational Status

MGS-M	Mothers' Educational Status	N	x	sd	t	df	p
Encouragement	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	3.73	,83	-2,55	303	,011*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	3.95	,70			
Barrier	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	1,18	,65	2,61	303	,009*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	,99	,60			
Control	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	1,89	,75	2,26	303	,024*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	1,70	,74			

*p

The gatekeeping behaviors exhibited by mothers, categorized by their educational status, were analyzed using an independent samples t-test, and the results are presented in Table 5. The analysis revealed a significant difference in the sub-dimension scores of mothers' gatekeeping behaviors based on their educational attainment, which includes primary school, secondary school, associate degree, bachelor's degree, and higher ($p < .05$). Furthermore, mothers with higher educational levels demonstrated more supportive behaviors ($x = 3.95$), restrictive ($x = 0.99$) and controlling ($x = 1.70$) behaviors. In contrast, mothers with lower educational levels exhibited more restrictive ($x = 1.18$) and controlling behaviors ($x = 1.89$), along with encouraging behaviors ($x = 3.73$) compared to their higher-educated counterparts.

Table 6. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Mothers Participating in the Study on the MGS-M Scale According to the Status of Receiving Support from Their Husband/Other Parent

MGS-M	Mother's Status Receiving Support from the Other Parent/Spouse	N	x	sd	t	df	p
Encouragement	Yes	264	3,91	,68	3,97	303	,000
	No	41	3,40	1,15			
Barrier	Yes	264	1.03	,61	-3,34	303	,001
	No	41	1,39	,69			
Control	Yes	264	1,78	,74	-1,03	303	,303
	No	41	1,91	,81			

*p

Table 6 presents the results of the independent groups t-test for mothers' scores on the MGS - M, categorized by their status of receiving support from their spouse or other parent. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the "Encouragement" ($t = 3.97$; $p .05$). Upon examining the mean scores for the "Encouragement" sub-dimension, it was found that mothers receiving support from their spouse or other parent had higher mean scores ($x = 3.91$) compared to those not receiving support ($x = 3.40$). Conversely, for the "Barrier" and "Control" sub-dimensions, mothers receiving support exhibited lower mean scores than those who did not receive support. These findings suggest that mothers who receive support from the other parent during their child's development demonstrate more encouraging behaviors and exhibit fewer obstructive and controlling behaviors compared to mothers who do not receive such support.

3.3 Findings on children's social competence and problematic behaviors

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the scores of the children in the study, as measured by the SCBA-30 Scale sub-dimensions, differed significantly based on their mothers' educational status and the duration of their children's preschool education. The results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Children Participating in the Study on the SCBA-30 Scale According to the Educational Status of Their Mothers

SCBA-30	Mothers' Educational Status	N	x	sd	t	df	p
Social Competence	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	44,90	8,11	-1,93	303	,044*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	46,69	8,03			
Anger/Aggression	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	17,21	5,27	2,83	303	,005*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	15,64	4,39			
Anxiety/Introversi on	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	18,11	5,37	,78	303	,432
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	17,63	5,23			

*p

Children's social competence and problematic behaviors were examined in relation to their mothers' educational status using independent samples t-tests, with the results presented in Table 7. The analysis revealed no significant difference in the sub-dimension of "Anxiety/Introversi on" ($t = 0.78$; $p > .05$). However, a statistically significant difference was found in the sub-dimensions of "Social Competence" ($t = -1.93$; $p < .05$) and "Anger/Aggression" ($t = 2.83$; $p < .05$). This indicates that children's social competence and externalizing behaviors vary according to their mothers' educational status, while their internalizing behaviors do not show such variation. Furthermore, an examination of the mean scores from the SCBA-30 indicates that as mothers' educational status increases, their children exhibit fewer problematic behaviors. Conversely, a decrease in mothers' educational status correlates with a decline in children's social competence skills.

Table 8. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Children Participating in the Study on the SCBA-30 Scale According to the Duration of Attending Preschool Education

SCBA-30	Duration of Child's Pre-School Education (Years)	n	x	ss	t	df	p
Social Competence	1 Year	202	45,37	8,11	-1,29	303	,197
	2 Years and Above	103	46,64	8,07			
Anger/Aggression	1 Year	202	16,83	5,21	2,05	303	,041
	2 Years and Above	103	15,62	4,13			
Anxiety/Introversi on	1 Year	202	17,93	5,41	,29	303	,770
	2 Years and Above	103	17,74	5,08			

*p

Table 8 presents the results of the independent samples t-test conducted to examine the scores of children on the SCBA-30 Scale, based on the duration of their preschool education. The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in the sub-dimensions of Social Competence ($t = -1.29$, $p > .05$) and Anxiety/Introversi on ($t = .29$, $p > .05$). However, a statistically significant difference was found in the Anger/Aggression sub-dimension ($t = 2.05$, $p < .05$). Further analysis of the mean scores

showed that children who attended preschool for two or more years had higher mean scores in the Social Competence sub-dimension ($x = 46.64$) compared to those who attended for only one year ($x = 45.37$). Conversely, in the Anger/Aggression ($x = 15.62$) and Anxiety/Introversion ($x = 17.75$) sub-dimensions, children with longer preschool attendance had lower mean scores than those with shorter attendance.

These findings suggest that children who attended preschool education for a shorter duration exhibit more problematic behaviors, such as anger and anxiety/introversion, than those who had a longer preschool experience. Additionally, children with longer preschool attendance demonstrate higher levels of social competence.

3.4 Findings on children's emotion regulation skills

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether the scores of children participating in the study on the ERC sub-dimensions differed significantly based on their mothers' educational status and the duration of their pre-school education. The results are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Children Participating in the Study on the ERC According to the Educational Status of Their Mothers

ERC	Mothers' Educational Status	N	x	sd	t	df	p
Lability /Negativity	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	2,00	,37	3,60	303	,000*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	1,85	,39			
Emotion Regulation	Primary Education-Secondary Education	152	3,15	,45	-2,86	303	,004*
	Associate Degree-Bachelor's Degree and Above	153	3,30	,42			

*p

The emotion regulation skills of children, in relation to their mothers' educational status, were examined using an independent samples t-test. The results are presented in Table 9. When the analysis results were examined, it was determined that the scores of the children on the ERC exhibited a statistically significant difference in the sub-dimensions of "Lability /Negativity" ($t = 3.60$; $p < .05$) and "Emotion Regulation" ($t = -2.86$; $p < .05$) based on the educational status of the mothers. Furthermore, it was observed that as the educational level of the mothers increased, their children demonstrated improved emotional regulation. Conversely, as the educational level of the mothers decreased, their children showed a greater tendency toward emotional lability and negativity.

Table 10. Independent Sample T-Test Results of the Scores of the Children Participating in the Study on the ERC According to the Duration of Attending Preschool Education

ERC	Duration of Child's Pre-School Education (Years)	n	x	ss	t	df	p
Lability/Negativity	1 Year	202	1.97	,36	2,834	303	,005*
	2 Years and Above	103	1,84	,41			
Emotion Regulation	1 Year	202	3,17	,45	-3,01	303	,003*
	2 Years and Above	103	3.33	,4			

*p

Table 10 presents the results of the independent samples t-test for children's scores on the SCBA-30 Scale, categorized by the duration of their preschool education. Upon examining the analysis results, a statistically significant difference is observed in the sub-dimensions of "Lability/Negativity" ($t = 2.83$; $p < .05$) and "Emotion Regulation" ($t = -3.01$; $p < .05$). This indicates that children's emotion regulation skills vary based on the length of their preschool education. It can be concluded that children who participate in preschool education encounter a range of emotions while interacting with their peers, which provides them with opportunities to manage their reactions and develop coping strategies for negative emotions.

Conclusion And Recommendations

The results and recommendations derived from this research, which aimed to examine the relationship between the social competence, problematic behavior, and emotion regulation skills of children in preschool education and the gatekeeping behaviors of their mothers, are presented below.

4.1 Results on the relationship between mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and their children's social competence, problem behavior, and emotion regulation skills

A child's developmental process is shaped by interrelated domains, and social-emotional development plays a critical role in present and future well-being. As Rubin et al., [34] note, deficits in social skills and challenges in emotional regulation may manifest as problematic behaviors, such as negative externalization and internalization. The findings of this study highlight nuanced patterns. While no statistically significant association was found between mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and children's social competence or problem behaviors, correlations point to important links with emotional processes. Specifically, higher maternal restrictive and controlling behaviors were associated with greater emotional variability in children, suggesting that controlling parenting practices may intensify the display of negative emotions. In contrast, maternal supportive behaviors toward fathers appeared to strengthen children's emotional regulation skills, enabling them to manage emotions more effectively.

Further analysis revealed a moderate negative relationship between children's aggressive behaviors and their social competence, indicating that externalizing tendencies can undermine positive peer interactions. This aligns with prior research reporting similar patterns, e.g.[35]. Moreover, positive correlations between the SCBA-30 "Anger/Aggression" factor and the ERC "Lability/Negativity" factor indicate that increased externalizing behaviors coincide with greater emotional instability, consistent with findings by Kayhan Akturk [36] and Kurt [37].

Taken together, these results underscore the complex interplay between maternal gatekeeping practices and children's socio-emotional outcomes. Although direct associations with social competence and problem behaviors were not established, the findings suggest that maternal behaviors, particularly supportive versus restrictive tendencies, may shape children's emotional regulation capacities [36], [38] - [40]. As the literature currently lacks studies that examine maternal gatekeeping in conjunction with children's social competence, problem behaviors, and emotion regulation skills, this research provides an initial contribution and emphasizes the need for further investigation in this area.

4.2 Results regarding mothers' gatekeeping behaviors

In the study, it was determined that the educational status of mothers significantly influenced their behaviors. As the educational level of mothers increased, their supportive behaviors also increased. Conversely, as their educational level decreased, they exhibited more controlling and obstructive gatekeeping behaviors compared to mothers with higher educational statuses. This finding aligns with existing literature [24],[26], [27], [41]- [44]. In a study conducted by Donmez [45] involving 524 mothers, a significant difference was observed in the mothers' gatekeeping behaviors based on their education levels. The findings indicated that less educated mothers exhibited stronger gatekeeping behaviors. This suggests that mothers with lower education levels may be more inclined to adhere to traditional motherhood roles, whereas those with higher education levels tend to demonstrate less maternal gatekeeping. This difference may be attributed to their more democratic attitudes, reduced attachment to traditional gender norms, and greater willingness to engage in collaborative efforts with their spouses. When examining the results related to mothers' gatekeeping behaviors and their educational status, it becomes evident that the findings are both consistent and inconsistent with existing literature. Karabulut [46] indicated that the educational status of mothers did not result in a significant difference in his research on maternal gatekeeping as perceived by fathers. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that the study involved parents of children across various age groups, and the gatekeeping behaviors of mothers were assessed through the perceptions of fathers. Additionally, the scarcity of studies available for comparison complicates the interpretation of these findings. Consequently, further research is necessary. The current study is significant not only because it focuses on parents of children enrolled in preschool education but also because it relies on reports from mothers. "Maternal gatekeeping," a concept that has been studied internationally for the past 30 years and in our country for only 5 to 6 years, emerges as one of the most significant factors influencing the involvement of fathers and other parents in the parenting process. This concept reflects the extent to which spouses support one another and collaborate in their parenting efforts [19].

In the study, it was determined that support from the mothers' spouse or other parent significantly influenced their gatekeeping behaviors. It was observed that mothers who received support from their partner during their child's development exhibited more supportive behaviors and demonstrated fewer restrictive and controlling behaviors compared to those who did not receive such support. Closeness and support between spouses are linked to effective parenting by fathers. When mothers do not receive support from their partners, marital harmony diminishes, which in turn reduces the involvement of the father in the child's growth and development process.

According to research conducted by Sert [47], a relationship exists between the level of fathers' participation in their children's developmental processes and their perception of maternal gatekeeping. The findings indicate that an increase in gatekeeping behaviors exhibited by mothers diminishes marital harmony, which subsequently leads to a decrease in father involvement. Upon reviewing the studies presented, it can be concluded that the results obtained are consistent across the research. Hauser [48] demonstrated that mothers who have exclusive authority over decisions concerning their children, who maintain control, and who act as gatekeepers, restrict fathers' participation and distance them from assuming responsibility in the care-giving process. In this context, mothers must recognize that the responsibility for childcare does not rest solely on their shoulders; rather, it can be shared. When fathers and other parents are given the opportunity and support, their involvement in the caregiving process becomes more feasible [49].

As demonstrated, the concept of maternal gatekeeping plays a crucial role in facilitating father participation. Therefore, it is essential to investigate maternal gatekeeping, a topic that has been studied only briefly in our country. This examination should provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between maternal gatekeeping and father participation, exploring the findings in greater depth and from various perspectives through new research.

4.3 Results regarding children's social competence and problem behaviors

Children acquire numerous skills related to social competence from their parents before entering the school environment. As one of the primary caregivers, mothers play a crucial role in the development of their children's social skills and behaviors. According to the findings of the current study, the educational level of mothers has a significant impact on children's social competence and negative externalizing behaviors. Specifically, the scores obtained in the Social Competence and Anger/Aggression sub-dimensions of the assessment revealed statistically significant differences based on maternal education level. A review of the literature supports these findings. Several studies have reported that higher maternal educational attainment is positively associated with children's social competence [38], [50], [51] - [54]. For instance, Saito [55] examined the social skills of 385 preschool children and found that children's social skill scores varied significantly according to parental education levels. In line with these findings, the present study observed that children whose mothers had lower levels of education displayed more negative behaviors and lower levels of social competence compared to children whose mothers had higher levels of education. Similarly, in a study conducted by Gulay Ogelman and Çiftçi Topaloğlu [56] involving 227 children and their parents, it was found that the social competence scores of children with university-educated parents were significantly higher than those of children whose parents had only completed primary education.

A review of the relevant literature indicates that some studies have found no significant relationship between maternal education level and children's social competence or social skills [57],[58]. For instance, Yuvaç [59], in a study involving 293 children and their parents, concluded that maternal education did not significantly impact children's social competence. It is believed that this outcome may have been influenced by the data being reported by fathers rather than mothers, which contrasts with the current study. In the present study, it was observed that as the educational level of mothers increased, children's negative behavior scores decreased, while their social competence scores improved. Specifically, children whose mothers had only primary or secondary education exhibited more destructive and introverted behaviors, demonstrating lower levels of social competence in challenging situations compared to children whose mothers held at least a bachelor's degree.

Preschool is a crucial environment where children engage in academic learning while also developing emotionally and socially. It serves as a vital context for acquiring social competence through interactions with peers and teachers [60]. Positive communication within the preschool setting fosters self-confidence and helps mitigate behaviors such as aggression, anger, introversion, and shyness. Consequently, access to early childhood education is deemed essential for supporting children's overall developmental processes.

When the scores of the SCBA-30 were analyzed in relation to the duration of pre-school attendance, it was found that children who attended preschool for two or more years exhibited higher social competence scores and lower levels of aggression and anxiety compared to those who attended for only one year. These findings suggest that a longer duration of preschool education is associated with enhanced social competence and a reduction in negative behaviors. Similar findings were reported by Kapran et al. [61], who discovered that four-year old children exhibited lower levels of social skills compared to their five and six-year old counterparts. They also observed that children attending preschool for the first time had lower social skill scores than those who were attending for the second time. These results align with the findings of the present study. However, it was also found that the duration of preschool education significantly affected only externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression), while no significant differences were observed in internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety/introversion) or social competence. Supporting this, Olcay [62] reported a significant relationship between the length of pre-school education and children's behavioral problems. Similarly, Kose [63] found that levels of anger and aggression in children varied according to the duration of their pre-school education.

4.4 Results regarding children's emotion regulation skills

The findings of the study revealed that the educational status of mothers significantly influences their children's emotional regulation skills. In other words, children's ability to manage their emotions is affected by their mothers' level of education. This result aligns with findings from previous studies in the literature [52], [63] - [65]. For instance, Bozkurt Yukcu and Demircioğlu [64], in a study involving 240 preschool children and their parents, found that children's emotional regulation skills varied according to their mothers' educational levels. Similarly, Vardi and Demiriz [66], in a study with 428 children, also concluded that maternal education has a significant effect on children's emotional regulation.

An analysis of the scores obtained from the Emotion Regulation Checklist indicated that as mothers' educational levels increased, their children exhibited higher levels of emotional expression and lower emotional variability. These findings corroborate earlier research in the field [64], [67] - [70]. However, in contrast to these findings, some studies have reported no significant relationship between maternal education and children's emotional regulation skills [39], [50], [71], [72]. Additionally, the duration of preschool education significantly affects children's emotional regulation abilities. As the length of time children spend in preschool increases, emotional variability decreases, while the ability to express emotions improves. These findings are consistent with previous studies [66], [73].

The preschool period is a crucial stage in the development of emotional regulation. During this time, children engage with peers in various social settings and encounter new experiences. Teachers play a vital role in this process by modeling appropriate emotional responses and assisting children in navigating different emotional situations. Consequently, preschool education offers an essential opportunity for children to develop emotional regulation skills through experiential learning and social interaction

[74]. Nevertheless, some studies report differing findings. For instance, research conducted by Kose [63], Özkan [75], and Şahin [74] found no significant relationship between the duration of preschool attendance and children's emotional regulation skills.

4.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations are proposed:

The study was conducted with children aged 48 to 69 months who were attending preschool classes in kindergartens and primary schools in the city center of Balıkesir, along with their mothers. Future research could extend to more diverse samples representing different socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts, while also considering variables such as parents' working and study hours, parenting attitudes, marital harmony, parental occupations, and children's temperament, socio-emotional skills, and behavioral characteristics. While this research adopted a descriptive, quantitative design, future studies could employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, to provide richer insights into the dynamics of maternal gatekeeping. Additionally, as maternal gatekeeping is a relatively new area of research in Türkiye, there is a need to develop culturally sensitive measurement tools that reflect Turkish family values and norms, rather than relying solely on adapted instruments.

The study relied exclusively on mothers' self-reports; therefore, future research should include fathers and other caregivers as informants to capture a fuller picture of family dynamics and shared responsibilities.

At the policy and practice level, family education programs should be designed to:

Promote equal responsibility sharing between parents by including joint workshops for mothers and fathers, emphasizing cooperation in child-rearing and household tasks.

Integrate practical strategies such as role-playing, scenario-based discussions, and guided reflection sessions to help parents recognize and adjust gatekeeping behaviors.

Provide ongoing support through parent schools or community centers that offer regular sessions on positive parenting, communication skills, and emotional regulation strategies for children.

Collaborate with early childhood education institutions so that teachers and school counselors can reinforce these efforts by engaging both parents in school-family partnerships.

Such structured programs can not only raise awareness about maternal gatekeeping behaviors but also contribute to healthier family dynamics, stronger father involvement, and improved socio-emotional development in children.

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