

Dynamics of Gender Disparity among Teachers of Young Children in Thika District, Kenya

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Abstract

Parents are the main care givers and socializing agents of their children. They provide for their basic needs in terms of nutrition, health, care, love and affection, among others. In the process of development mothers provide warmth and tender touches to children while fathers are symbols of authority, strength and security. Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDC) are accepted the world over as alternatives to traditional childcare systems. Children start going to preschools at the age of 3 years. The experiences of the child in preschool are a continuation of the home. As such, the preschool teachers hold a double mantle of parent as well as teacher. Quality care for these children should be provided by both female and male teachers. However this concern of gender parity in childcare seemed not to be addressed in the reviewed studies related to pre-schools. This paper presents the results of a study conducted in two sampled districts of Kenya to establish the distribution of teachers in preschool centres by gender and to find out the factors influencing gender disparity among teachers of young children. The study was guided by two theories: Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Albert Bandura's social learning theory. The two theories contend that children need care and attention to enhance their growth and development; and that part of what they develop is emulated from male and female care givers. It is hoped that this study will help policy makers to consider encouraging male applicants to promote wholistic development of children. This is the only study in Africa South of the Sahara that focuses mainly on the preschool teacher and articulates the issues of gender disparity with such an emphasis.

Keywords: Care givers, Preschool centres, Gender parity, Double mantle, Childcare systems

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) generally involves the development of young children before they enter Primary School. It includes all those experiences that enable a child to learn to cope with more complex levels of cognition, emotion, socialization and body movement (Myers, 1988). Early childhood care and education are key to a child's proper holistic development because the scientific research available reveals that the first five years of life form a critical stage in a child's total development. Development deficiencies that occur during this period are sometimes irreversible (Republic of Kenya, 1997). It is during the early childhood period that the total personality of an individual is determined. As such any damage during this time is likely to persist into adulthood.

Parents are the main care givers, educators and main socializing agents of their children. They have the major responsibility of providing the young child with the basic needs through adequate nutrition, health, care, love, affection and early stimulation. Parents at home and at school need to be available for the children to facilitate their development through the various stages of life. The concern for proper child development during the early years of life is built on the realization that children who do not go through this period successfully are affected in their emotional, social and cognitive development which impacts on their later life.

Rapid and often unpredictable socio-economic changes in the country have contributed, to a large extent, to changes in the nature and structure of the family that catered for children. People have migrated to urban areas, others have settled in squatter settlements that lack basic amenities, moral and material support from the extended family. These, together with a high rise of single parent and women headed families and the money economy, have led to changes in roles of family members, changes in values, attitudes and patterns of socialization. Additionally, the growing number of women in employment means that they have to employ child minders (house- helps) or send children to pre-school for custodial care. This, in essence, means that pre-schools are very important in providing moral and emotional development of children. Studies have shown that the role of the pre-school teacher is very crucial. Besides the pre-school providing an opportunity for intellectual stimulation, it also plays an important role in upgrading social skills, improving language, developing academic-type interests and skills on the part of the children. Provisions are also made to improve the child's emotional security (McCandless, 1970).

ECD centres, also called pre-schools, were established to provide custodial care, socialization and general child development in a holistic way that ensures that the child develops physically, socially, mentally and emotionally. Children start going to pre-schools at the age of 3 years but some are taken even earlier where they remain up to the age of 6 years. Pre-school programmes also release elder siblings to go to school and mothers to work and supplement family income (Republic of Kenya, 1997). Early childhood care and development (ECCD) provided

in the pre-schools is crucial for human capital formation and for enhancing the educability of children. It lays a foundation for adulthood. Pre-schools need to provide appropriate care to children at this age.

From the foregoing, the gains made in pre-school are permanent and positively correlated with later life development. Pre-school teachers, also called, parents in the ECD Centres need to be professionally trained and with equal gender representation. They play the role of fathers (male teachers) and mothers (female teachers) to provide nurture, love, counsel, and security to the children. While the female teachers provide the warmth and tender touches of a mother, male teachers are symbols of authority, strength and much needed security (Mynard, 1976). As such, encouraging gender parity and training of these teachers is of paramount importance.

Globally, ECCE has drawn immense attention. Development of ECCE is the first of the six Education for All (EFA) goals. Research shows that the early years are critical for cognitive development and that the foundation for life-long learning is laid well before a child begins formal schooling (UNESCO, 2004). Teachers, parents and others are here directly responsible for providing such care that enhances holistic development of the child.

Studies have also demonstrated that ECCE is an astute investment, generating an array of positive outcomes in a country's education, social and economic development, sensitive to gender aspects. They have also shown that the benefits of ECCE are particularly felt among disadvantaged children and families. This has spurred recognition of ECCE as an effective strategy for reducing poverty and enhancing social and gender equity addressing their causes from the start. When such children grow up, they are an asset to society as they contribute economically more to their families and the country. Unfortunately, most world governments have not placed ECCE as part of public policy and have limited capacity for developing policies and systems for it.

Bearing this in mind world governments have continued to press for such care that would lead to the holistic development of the child. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is one such example. This 1989 convention was ratified by 191 members of the United Nations. Article 29. 1(a) is an agreement by states parties that the education of the child shall be directed to "the development of the child's personality, talents, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential."

In agreement to UNCRC African Countries under the Organization of African Unity (OAU) recommended that every child shall have an education that promotes holistic development in their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities. Both UNCRC and the African Charter lay emphasis on the role of the pre-school teacher to be that of teaching the child by word and deed to ensure total development of personality. It is therefore up to the world governments to provide such gender representation within the pre-school institutions to ensure the achievement of the above. The Kenya Government was on the forefront in ratifying both of the above agreements in support of Early Childhood Education (ECE). In this respect, the government recognizes the important role played by pre-school teachers in molding the lives of children. In recognition of this role, the Kenya Government and Bernard Van Leer Foundation in 1971 set up a pre-school project. The project involved training of pre-school teachers in some chosen districts where piloting was taking place, that is, Kiambu, Murang'a, Nairobi, Kilifi and Keiyo (Berc, 1992). The Government has also put in place a policy on ECE which includes guidelines governing among others the training of personnel under the District based in-service teacher training.

This would equip the teachers in their teaching and child-care giving roles since the pre-school child-care giving practices are a continuation of the home. Ndambuki (1990) reiterates that children need the security and guidance provided by parents and teachers who formulate and consistently apply reasonable standards of behaviour. In an ideal situation, children in pre-school should be under the care of female and male teachers. Unfortunately the male teachers are quite few in pre-schools, suggesting that the fatherly role and services are inadequately being provided (Waithaka, 2002).

In spite of the many gains to child development emanating from gender parity as noted above, most Preschools in Kenya are inadequately balanced in the number of male and female teachers of young children. Further, even though studies have explicitly underscored the detriments of gender disparity to the growth and development of children, glaring factors continue to bedevil preschool childcare centres in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Thika district, central province, Kenya. The district covers an area of 2,024 km² which is 15.4% of the total area of central province. The study targeted: Education divisions, pre-schools, pre-school teachers, and DICECE officers.

In Thika district there are five education divisions with a total of 665 private and public pre-schools from which the sample of the study was drawn. Two education divisions (urban Ruiru and rural Kakuzi), out of five, were purposively sampled one rural (Kakuzi) and the other urban (Ruiru) to ensure rural and urban representation since these are typical of the population under study. This enabled the study to look at the dynamics and diversity of gender disparity within rural and urban settings. The two sampled divisions had 304 pre-schools. All the 5 officers of DICECE were respondents. These included: - the DICECE Programme Officer and all other ECD Officers since they were not many. These were approached with the help of the D.E.O. The help of the

DICECE Officers was sought in the sampled divisions. All the pre-school teachers in the selected pre-schools (80 of them since some pre-schools have two teachers) were respondents. Using lists of parents from the selected pre-schools with the help of pre-school head teachers, 10% of parents were selected by gender. Names of parents were written on papers and 12 parents were sampled taking care of gender balance. The parents formed two Separate Focus Group Discussion groups of six members, male and female separate. Hence there were 12 FGD groups. In total the number of parents who turned up was 44 female and 18 male parents. The total sample was 157. The school heads helped converge the parents in the Centres for the focus group discussions. Thirteen male teachers were interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To establish the number of children in ECE centres by gender, data was collected from documents in the District education office and results are presented in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Thika district pre-school pupil enrollment and number of pre-school teachers by gender.

NUMBER OF ECD CENTRES	NO. OF PUPILS			NO. OF TEACHERS		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Male	Female	Total
665	10,096	10,445	20,541	46	821	867

Source: Ministry of Education Science and Technology

The study targeted: Education divisions, pre-schools, pre-school teachers, and DICECE officers. In Thika district there are five education divisions with a total of 665 private and public pre-schools from which the sample of the study was drawn. In terms of gender, it was observed that out of the 80 pre-school teachers that were selected in Kakuzi and Ruiru divisions 67 (83.8%) of them were female while 13 (16.2%) were male, as presented in Table 1.2

Table 1.2 Gender of teachers

	Frequency	Percent
Female teachers	67	83.8
Male teachers	13	16.2
Total	80	100.0

A study by Waithaka (2002) in Thika Municipality also established that there was a total of 166 pre-school teachers and only one was male. Gakii (2004) established that the total number of pre-school teachers in Miriga Mieru division was 475 and only 2 were men. These glaring disparities are not in tandem with educational and development policies.

Ensuring gender equality is a recurring theme of international conventions on education and social development. The role of the male and female teachers has been highly recognized as providers of a good learning climate for the „whole child“ (Dakar framework for Action 2000). Among its principles, was recognition of the need for a beneficial learning climate for the whole child.

An emerging issue that came up in the above characteristics was the preference of urban areas by male teachers. Of the 13 male teachers 10 were found in urban Ruiru division while 3 were found in rural Kakuzi. Those interviewed confirmed that the terms of service in the urban areas were much better than the rural with the salary being higher in urban than rural areas. This implied that the economic status of the urban dwellers was higher than that of the rural and hence the reason why the urban teachers were paid better. This characteristic was found to be an influencing factor that motivated the male teachers to preferring the urban setting. The analyses showed that there is a significant difference between the number of male and female teachers with a probability value of zero. These pre-school teachers were employed by parents through the school management committees (SMC).

Age of pre-school teachers

Majority of the pre-school teachers were within the age-range of 27-45 (56.25%). Out of the 80 pre-school teachers interviewed, 20 (25.0%) were within the age range of 15-26 years while 31 out of 80 pre-school teachers from both Kakuzi and Ruiru were aged 46 years and above. Teachers whose age was 15-36 were the majority as in table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3 Age of pre-school teachers

Age in years	Frequency	Percent
15-26	20	25.0
27-36	29	36.25
37<	31	38.75
Total	80	100.00

These teachers had children within the ages of 1-16 years. All the female teachers in this category preferred to

remain in the profession because it gave them ample time to take care of the young ones. The role of reproduction falls almost entirely on women's shoulders according to Myers (1988). Women are involved in biological reproduction (child bearing) and early nurturing of infants which only women are physiologically capable of performing. All the male teachers had between 1-3 dependants but these did not influence them to stay in the profession. This was confirmed by the interviews where they admitted that their wives took care of their children and that they would quit the profession if a greener pasture arose.

The above characteristic emerged during the study because the number of dependants impacted on the responsibilities that the pre-school teacher had. It was particularly found to have influenced the female teacher's choice of the profession unlike the male teachers as earlier mentioned. These dependants were either their own young children or other relatives under their care.

Table 1.4 below indicates that 40(50%) out of 80 teachers had 4-6 dependants, thirty one out of 80 teachers (38.8%) had between 1-3 dependants and nine teachers (11.3%) had seven dependants and above. Majority of the teachers (71.3%) had children aged between 1-16 years. Out of 80 teachers 15(18%) of them had children ranging from 17-25 years while only 8 teachers had dependants above 26 years.

Table 1.4 Number of dependants per teacher and Dependents' age bracket

Dependants	Frequency	Percent	Age	Frequency	Percent
1-3	31	38.75	1-8	34	42.5
4-6	40	50.0	9-16	23	28.75
7<	9	11.25	17-25	15	18.75
Total	80	100.00	26<	8	10.0
			Total	80	100.0

This indicated that the youngest group with the majority called for more parental attention and increased duties. The female teachers were once again found to be influenced into the profession by this factor.

Level of education

In table 4.5 below, 63 (78.75%) out of 80 pre-school teachers in both Kakuzi and Ruiru divisions had completed secondary level of education. All the male pre-school teachers were in this category hence they had higher level of education than the female teachers. Ten of these were from urban Ruiru where salary scales and terms of service were noted to be higher and better respectively.

Table 1.5 Level of education for pre-school teacher

	Frequency	Percent
Primary	17	21.25
Secondary	63	78.75
Total	80	100.00

As illustrated in table 1.5 above 17 out of 80 (21.3%) teachers had primary level education while 63 (78.75%) had secondary school certificate. All the male teachers were in the latter category. The analyses indicated that there were larger numbers of secondary school graduates than primary education level in the selected schools. Hence there was a significant difference between the two categories by level of education. It emerged from the FGDs that the male teachers' higher level of education discouraged them from the pre-school teacher profession. Those interviewed confirmed that they would leave once greener pastures were available.

Pre-school Teachers' Remuneration

Literature reviewed as well as FGDs established that low remuneration had a positive relationship with gender distribution with male teachers preferring other professions while females went for it. A critical underlying factor that may sway men away from the profession is the low remuneration. Liang (1999) established that teachers are paid lower salaries than their counterparts in other fields. An underpayment of teachers in urban Bolivia by 35% relative to the control group was noted. Neugebauer (1999), and Sergent (2002) found out that teachers receive inadequate pay and benefits, a situation that scares them away from participating in ECD programmes. Table 1.6 below indicates that most pre-school teachers (67.5%) received a pay package ranging from Ksh. 3001 – 5000 while 20 teachers (25%) were paid between Kshs. 1000-3000. Only 6 teachers (7.5%) received Kshs. 5001 and above.

Sixty out of 80 teachers agreed that the salary payment was irregular and unpredictable. The problem of low and irregular salaries was voted by 72 (90%) out of 80 teachers as a cause that discouraged them in the profession. All the male teachers were in this group. This therefore meant that only a few male teachers would be willing to join the profession, hence the disparity. Eight teachers (10%) out of 80 voted job insecurity as a real problem they experienced.

Table 1.6 Remuneration versus gender

Salary in Ksh.	Male	Female	Total
1000-3000	3	17	20
3001-5000	7	47	54
Above 5000	3	3	6
Total	13	67	80

Parents' preference

Data from the focus group discussion indicated that 53 out of 62 parents (85%) preferred female teachers handling their children in pre-school while 9 out of 62 parents (15%) preferred their children to be handled by male teachers. The reasons given included cultural norms based on gender stereotype where the responsibilities of bringing up children are relegated to women. Those who preferred male teachers had boy children. One parent during the FGD clearly said that he would not want his boy child handled by a female teacher lest he copies female behaviour. The response on parent's preference of teachers was skewed towards the female teachers over the male teachers. This distribution of scores indicates the influence of socialization process where the role of bringing up very young children is assigned to women. Those parents who preferred male teachers were found to have been influenced by the same. See table 1.7 below.

Table 1.7 Parental preference versus gender

	Male	Female	Total
Male teacher	3	6	9
Female teacher	3	50	53
Total	6	56	62

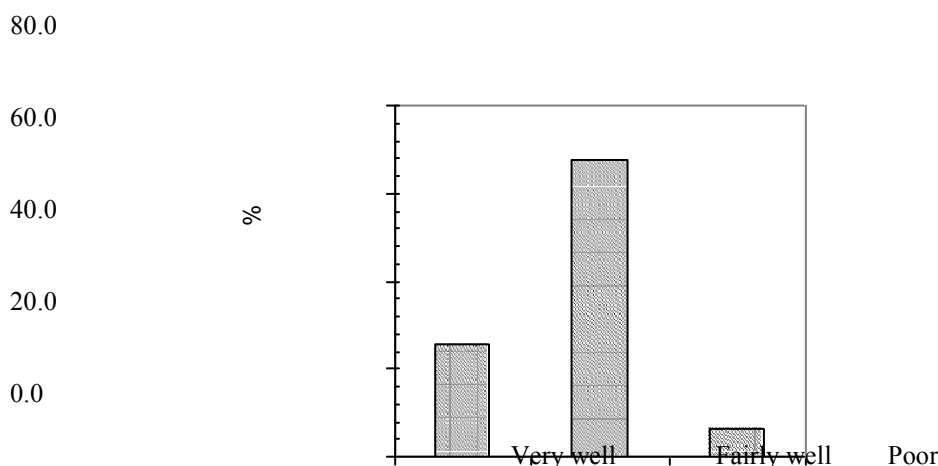
In both divisions selected for this study, girls were 509 (49.8%) and boys were 513 (50.2%). Although the children's gender did not seem to influence the gender distribution of teachers, it was evident from the parent's opinion that their children had preferences of ECD teachers in terms of gender. In table 1.8 below, 42 out of 62 parents (67.7%) agreed that their children preferred female teachers while only 20 out of 62 (32.3%) preferred the male teachers.

Table 1.8 Preferred teachers by children (parents opinion)

Responses on	Frequency	Percent
Male teacher	20	32.3
Female teacher	42	67.7
Total	62	100.0

The findings revealed that regardless of teachers' gender, parents opinion suggested that most pre-school children (80.6%) related well with their teachers. Only twelve out of 62 parents (19.4%) indicated a poor child-teacher relationship. The scores of the above distribution are presented graphically in fig. 1.1 below: -

Fig. 1.1 Relationship between children and teachers (parents opinion)



The analyses indicated that most pre-school children related well with their teachers but the teacher's gender preference was determined by the parents most of them preferring female teachers. Further research on the role of parents in pre-school teacher recruitment will confirm the above observations.

Flexible work schedules

In spite of the dismal, irregular and unpredictable salary payment, 44 teachers (55%), all of them female, agreed liking the profession for its comfort as far as flexible work schedules, time, freedom and the young age of children were concerned (table 1.9) All the male teachers were not positive about the flexible work schedule. From the interviews two of them said that the free time availed to them was wasted man-hours. Therefore they looked for other small jobs to occupy themselves and earn a little money. It emerged from the study that this factor discouraged them in the profession. It was evident from the study that the fees paid per child could not adequately cater for the teachers' salary and learning materials.

Table 1.9 Flexibility of work schedule versus gender

	Male	Female	Total
Comfort	7	44	51
No otherwise	5	16	21
Others	1	7	8
Total	13	67	80

It was established from the FGD that out of 62 parents 50 (80.6%) paid between Ksh. 500 – 1000 per term per child while only 12(19.4%) out of 62 paid between Kshs. 1001 – 4000. Regardless of the low salaries the pre-school teachers admitted that the flexible work schedules, time and freedom enabled the mothers to look after their young children including going with them to the centres when house- helps disappeared or when money to pay them (house helps) was unavailable. This was confirmed by the Focus Group Discussions where 42 out of 62 parents agreed that the pre-school teachers were happy handling the small children.

Twenty one out of 80 teachers (26.3%) agreed to be in the profession for lack of an alternative occupation and were ready to quit if another greener pasture availed.

Most of the male teachers fell in this category. Out of 80 teachers 8 of them cited other reasons for preferring pre-school profession like too much demands from other professions.

There was a significant difference between the number of teachers willing to remain in the profession for more than six years and those unwilling. Only 5 teachers indicated willingness to remain in profession below 5 years. All the male teachers fell in this category.

More than 75 out of 80 teachers (93.8%) desired to serve more than six years in pre-school. Most of these teachers were aged below forty years and were in the child bearing age. This propelled them to remain in the pre-school as the comfortable work schedule gave them ample free time to look after their young ones. Those interviewed confessed that they had time and freedom to cater for their children's needs. Hence this has a relationship with desire to teach in pre- school (Liang 1989). Other pertinent factors found to be relevant in influencing gender disparity included:

i) Pre-school Teachers' Responsibilities

As can be noted in table 4.2 majority of the pre-school teachers fell within the age range of 27-45 years. Most of these were women of child bearing age who had children within the ages of 1-16 years. They showed preference of remaining in the ECD profession because it favoured child bearing, their reproductive roles and looking after children. It was established from the interviews and focus group discussions that the years of child bearing and care giving of children are very demanding especially for mothers. It is a situation that called for time and commitment for parents so that the young ones received good care and nutrition for holistic development.

The pre-school profession was therefore found to avail such flexible work schedules and convenience both of which were demanded for child rearing. These characteristics of age did not however seem to attract the male teachers into the profession. The age of the pre-school teachers and the responsibilities that went with it therefore influenced the gender distribution with a female majority. It also agrees with Liang's (1999) observation in 12 Latin American Countries that women teachers enjoyed longer summer vacations, mid- year holidays and short workdays which is good when raising a family.

ii) Proximity to ECD Centre

Most pre-schools are attached to public and private primary schools. Others are owned by religious organizations and individuals.

Most of the teachers handling pre-school children are from the neighbourhood where they walk for not more than one kilometer. All the female teachers preferred this proximity to work stations and they agreed that it gave them the convenience to combine work with other responsibilities like house hold chores and small businesses around the home. They also did not have to walk for long distances to work places. Out of the thirteen male teachers, six travelled as far as five kilometers to the ECD Centre where they teach. Two said that they crossed several ridges to get to the centre.

It was interesting to learn from the teacher's interview that the shortness of distance to the ECD Centres preferred and enjoyed by the female teachers did not attract the male teachers. To them it did not matter how far or near they walked since they did not have to combine two tasks at the same time.

iii) Pre-school programme

The daily programme of pre-school centres was prepared by the teachers to suit the pre-school children with their different age groups. The language of the catchment area was used for instruction and the children related with the teachers just like in the home. With this arrangement the female teachers often found their way out of the school to attend to one or two house-hold chores or a visitor who called on them without much worry and still would catch up with the school programme. One of the female teachers who lived near the school had a small kiosk where she sold vegetables occasionally as she taught.

This informal setting and non-rigidity of the pre-school daily programme which could be changed at will to suit the interest of the children attracted the female teachers to the profession. This was found to discourage male counterparts who preferred rigid programmes and strict timetables, which they associated with order, organization and high job performance that favoured their male ego. Those interviewed associated the informal setting and non-rigid programmes of pre-school with low "status". They dismissed it as a child rearing practice that was a woman's responsibility.

This was confirmed by the focus group discussions where the male parents felt that the pre-school programme is organized much like a home and is more fitting to females than the males. This therefore discouraged the male from joining the profession.

iv) Government policy on pre-school teachers' recruitment

This factor was found to be of importance in order to check whether the government made any deliberate effort to improve on gender equity among the pre-school teachers through the recruitment procedures. The data were obtained from the Ministry of Education documents and District Centre for Early Childhood (DICECE) officers from Thika District. Five DICECE Officers were interviewed regarding government procedures on recruitment of pre-school teacher trainees.

Four out of five officers agreed that the recruitment procedure was fair to both female and male teachers since it was advertised in the local newspapers. One of them felt that more needed to be done in terms of advertisement including writing circulars to primary schools and pre-school centres. She chose to remain neutral. In practice, all officers agreed that more women than men were considered. It was noted during the study that there is a deliberate policy on the advertisement encouraging men to apply although only a dismal number usually responds. The officers also put local advertisements on their office notice boards. They all agreed that although only a few male applicants apply for diploma training and none for certificate training, it is important for the male teachers to handle the pre-schoolers to enhance holistic development of children.

The remuneration of pre-school teachers was not determined by the gender of the teachers. Therefore, there is no significance difference between the salaries offered to male or female pre-school teachers. Table 1.10 represents this.

Table 1.10: Remuneration of Pre-School Teachers versus Gender.

Salary in Ksh.	Male	Female	Total
1000-3000	3	17	20
3001-5000	7	47	54
Above 5000	3	3	6
Total	13	67	80

Table 1.11 Flexibility of Teachers' Work Schedule versus Gender

	Male	Female	Total
Comfort	7	44	51
No otherwise	5	16	21
Others	1	7	8
Total	13	67	80

The flexibility of pre-school teachers work schedules in Table 1.11 was an important factor considered by pre-school teachers when opting for pre-school teaching job. Therefore most pre-school teachers choose teaching as a job because of the flexibility of the teaching work schedules. Due to this flexibility, the pre-school teachers have adequate time to attend to their personal issues outside their teaching work schedules.

Conclusion

Among the factors discussed and analyzed are teachers' gender, age, level of education and remuneration. Other factors that emerged during the study included; pre-school teachers' responsibilities, number of dependants, proximity to ECD Centres, pre-school daily programme and lack of a government policy on pre-school teachers terms of service. The study also concluded that the majority of both male and female parents preferred female to male teachers to handle their children because they were like mothers unlike their male counterparts. The analysis therefore showed a positive relationship between cultural stereotype and frequency of large numbers of female teachers in pre-school.

There was a significant relationship between teacher remuneration and their gender distribution with the female teachers preferring the ECD profession regardless of the low salaries. Most of them, being in the child bearing age preferred the short working hours which favoured child rearing.

Findings

In both Kakuzi and Ruiru there was a significant disparity in the number of male and female pre-school teachers. While the females were 83.7% the male teachers were 16.3%. Two thirds of the latter were in the urban Ruiru while a third was from rural Kakuzi. These were employed by parents who seemed to prefer female to male teachers and hence influenced the large number of female teachers employed in the pre-schools. Teachers' age ranged between 20-56 years. Majority of the teachers were women within 26 – 46 years and in the child bearing age. This seemed to influence their preference to stay in the profession because it favoured child rearing and other reproductive roles. Thus the flexible work schedules gave them ample time to look after the young ones and attend to other household chores. This was supported by the fact that in Kakuzi, it was established that some of these female teachers did not employ house helps but went with their small children to pre-school centres.

There was a significant relationship between gender distribution of pre-school teachers and teacher remuneration. The salary was described to be dismal, irregular and unpredictable. This has put away most male teachers who choose to take up more promising careers. There was no significant relationship between the distribution of pre-school teachers and government policies on ECCE.

In terms of educational level for pre-school teachers, the study established that there were larger numbers of secondary school graduates than primary education level in the selected schools. Most of the male teachers were in the former category. Their higher level of education discouraged them from the pre-school teacher profession.

Proximity to work stations allowed the female teachers to combine work with other responsibilities like household chores and small businesses around the home. This influenced them into the profession unlike their male counterparts who felt that it did not matter how far or near they walked since they did not have to combine two tasks at the same time.

The informal setting and non-rigidity of the pre-school daily programme which could be changed at will to suit the interest of the children attracted more female than male teachers to the profession. The latter preferred rigid programmes and strict time tables. The male teachers interviewed reckoned that such working terms were more respected and augured well with the male ego. It was also far removed from baby care that was characteristic of the pre-school profession and which the men were unwilling to be identified with.

Conclusion

A number of factors were seen to contribute to gender disparity among pre-school teachers in Thika District. These included parents' influence and teacher remuneration. Other factors established included flexibility of the ECD programme in terms of time, proximity to the centre, socialization, pre-school teacher's age, number of dependants, and teacher's responsibilities.

Most parents preferred female to male teachers handling their children and therefore influenced the employment. This indicated the parents' inadequate knowledge of the developmental aspect in children and hence their preference of female teachers.

There were more female teachers in the child bearing age of between 27-45 years than male teachers. This influenced their preference of pre-school profession because of the long holidays and short working hours. Both of these favoured child bearing and parenting roles.

Recommendations

The parents with knowledge and skills about teacher selection and employment should be consulted during teacher recruitment. It is important to give them seminars and short courses on the developmental aspects of a child to enable them see the need for gender parity in teachers handling their children. The parents need to be sensitized on the importance of motivation of teachers through better salaries to reduce turnover and ensure consistent care for their children. Parents should be encouraged to change their attitude towards male teachers in pre-school through sensitization and community mobilization meetings.

There is need for policy makers to engage methods of encouraging male teachers to apply. This may require them to give incentives to encourage more male applicants to join the profession. There is also need to consider putting pre-school teachers on the government payroll and improving their terms and conditions of service.

There is need to carry out a comparative study between rural and urban pre-school centers. This would help find out how various factors impact on gender disparity among pre-school teachers. The same study can be done for other levels of education since the presence of both genders is important for the social and emotional development of the child. There is need for a study on the impacts of gender disparity on the social, emotional

and cognitive development of children.

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