



Stakeholders' Views on the Participation of Male Educators in Pre-schools: Implications for Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT This study explored the stakeholders' perceptions towards male educators in the Early Childhood Education (ECD) in East London Education District. A qualitative approach located in the interpretivist paradigm produced in-depth, rich data from personal perspectives and experiences interpreted through the social and cultural context of the respondent's lives. All ethical procedures were observed, and consent forms completed. The findings revealed that while parents desired fathers to be involved with their children in the ECD they were pessimistic about men as ECD educators being gentle, patient and capable of handling young children. The study revealed deep fear of male educators due to negative publicity of men being perpetrators of violence against women and children. The study concludes that breaking stereotype that a pre-school educator is the extension of mother is essential. The study recommends policies and programmes aimed at concerted drive in the recruitment of male educators in the Early Childhood Education.

INTRODUCTION

Research has proved the significance of fathers in the lives of young children to be associated with high physical, emotional, cognitive and social well-being development of children (Okeke 2014; Wilson 2015; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016). This has led to the interest in the importance of men as educators in the early childhood programmes. Interestingly, several researchers have the same opinion that promoting male presence in the elementary school would be advantageous to children's development and learning at various levels of their lives (Nelson and Sheppard 2005; Peeters 2007; Thérèse and Ay°e 2010). There is a strong belief that the presence of male educators will compensate for the absent fathers at home by being positive role models for the children (Aigner et al. 2012). More importantly, male educators can entice father engagement in children's education through an egalitarian model of parenting amid gender regarding child care roles (Koch and Farquhar 2015). Male educators promote improved involvement in learning activities and are known to react more positively to the boys' psychomotor needs (Huber and Traxl 2018).

The absent male figure in the early childhood programmes creates a gap in the momentum of success gained through the involvement of fathers in the early life of children. Hence, it has

been noted worldwide that gender imbalance in the early childhood education and lower primary classes has been female skewed with men becoming extinct in the arena (Martin and Luth 2000; Mukuna and Mutsotso 2011; Weegmann and Senger 2016). For instance, studies indicate that eighty-five percent of primary teachers in Netherlands are female, in the United Kingdom (UK) it is eighty-six percent while, Denmark has seventy-six percent female teachers in the primary schools (Peeters 2007). In addition, Finland is at ten percent, four percent in Germany, and only two percent in the United States (Mashiya 2014; Koch and Farquhar 2015). South Africa is not immune to problems resulting from gender prejudice, gender stereotyping and numerous systemic challenges leading to its failure to attract male teachers in pre-schools (van Broekhuizen 2015; Sayed and McDonald 2017). Men do not consider teaching in pre-school as a lucrative career option.

The desire to have male educators in the ECD has gathered impetus igniting the attention of researchers and policy makers in the recent years owing to the interrelated concerns such as; 1) the absence of men as fathers in their children's lives, 2) the scarcity of men in the early childhood arena, 3) an increased awareness of the significance of father involvement in Early Childhood Care and Education and 4) the argument that men are role models for children, espe-

cially boys. Abundant studies speak well of men's involvement as fathers in the early life of young children and that their participation is crucial for their social, emotional and cognitive development (Khewu and Adu 2015; Mashiya et al. 2015). The same emphasis is not highlighted on men as educators of young children, yet every child needs the influence from both male and female educators to develop socially, emotionally and achieve academic excellence. It is against this difference in perceptions on men as fathers and men as educators in the early childhood education that this study was conducted.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Social Role theory which distinguishes men and women according to the traditional division of labour where expected men's responsibility is frequently outside the home while women assume their responsibilities in homes (Eagly 2013). Gender differences suggest that most behavioural differences which are ascribed to males and females are expectancies reigned by the cultural stereotypes of their social roles (Eagly and Wood 2011; Eagly 2013). These expectancies of stereotypes regarding gender have affected the social behaviour of males and females resulting in them acquiring dissimilar qualities through this socialisation process (Eagly and Wood 2011). According to Halpern (2013), this theory explains that the inherent physical differences between men and women permeated the historical division of labour in society.

These specific gender roles relate to the perceived differences in societies and cultures, hence, women are regarded as children's primary caregivers and home nurturers while men serve as families' breadwinners. This thought resembles Coleman's (1988) social capital and how it takes precedence over the social capital. These expectations arose due to the natural differences between males and females which have been referred to as gender stereotypes (Eagly 2013). Furthermore, careers have been affected by these social and cultural expectations or gender categorising which have contributed to making them male-specific and female-dominated evident in the nursing and teaching professions where women mostly out-

number men, while in construction and engineering men also tend to dominate.

Eagly's theory asserts women as better nurturers than men due to gender-specific careers cultivated from inborn competences, hence, women dominate in the ECD. Confirming this assertion is the idea that gendered cognitive schemas influence the expected roles of males and females (Andersen and Taylor 2012; Petersen 2014). Consequently, the social role theory was chosen mainly to explain the existence of a wide range of stereotypes, for its ability to explain that men can learn, perform certain roles and breakthrough in exclusively female domains (Eagly and Wood 2011). Still, the social role theory proposes that, regardless of early socialisation, men can learn behaviours associated with the provider role through participating in social experiences once reserved for women, hence the adoption of this theory to explore stakeholders' views on the participation of male educators in pre-schools.

Importance of Male Role Models in the Classroom

A plethora of studies lament high father absence in families (Richter and Morrell 2006; Stats SA 2011). Yet, the high number of absent fathers in homes could be augmented by having more male educators in pre-school to fill the gap and address the consequence of single – parent family structures (Zhang 2017). Rezai-Rashti and Martino (2010) assert that male teachers inaugurate boys into masculinity and the boys respond effectively to men as they share an indispensable masculinity and an indulgent of boys' perspectives and experience. Girls also idolise their fathers, and, in their absence, male teachers can play a big role in stabilising the moral values for girls.

Fathers provide for their children those elements that mothers cannot afford them which stands to reason that male teachers inculcate the masculine domains essential for child development which female teachers cannot offer (Cushman 2006; Barnes and Harris 2009; Martino 2008). For male teachers to be good role models, parents expect them to exhibit characteristics that are stereotypically masculine such as being authoritative, a disciplinarian that is not

concerned with poetry and art but more interested in athletics (Suwada 2017).

Male Educators in Schools

Noticeably very few men enrol as educators in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) due to factors such as low remuneration (Wardle 2003), preponderance of women (Anliak and Beyazkurk 2008; Thornton and Bricheno 2008), the inadequacy of men's innate qualities of nurturing and child-care, cultural stereotype mind-set and gender-specific careers in the education (Eagly and Wood 2011; Eagly 2013). ECE is frequently referred to as 'Mother care' which discourages males from being involved (Richter et al. 2010) while men in that sector are branded as not 'real men' (Wiest et al. 2003). Anything to do with childcare whether done professionally or voluntarily has been a woman's domain as they are naturally and inherently good with children (Peeters 2007; Davidson and Nelson 2011). The discourse above reveals a widespread discussion loaded with the perception that early childhood care is a female occupation. Probably the belief stems from the maternal bond explained through the attachment theory which is the foundation to mother-child connection (Bornstein 2002).

Reasons for the Absence of Male Educators in Pre-schools

The role of care giving to the children has since time immemorial been a gendered chore for women, a female zone in education and causing a threat or preventing men from becoming pre-school teachers (Cockburn 2010). Male absence in the pre-school is attracting the interest of research and the society making the issue, a public domain worldwide (Thornton and Bricheno 2008). Gender preconception and stereotype emerge as major reasons for the minute number of men venturing into the childhood education (Drudy 2008). In South Africa, males shun teaching in the pre-school due to lack of public recognition emanating from the perceptions that it is peculiar for males to perform basic care chores (Sak et al. 2012) and the societal ignominy of men consistently portrayed as pae-

dophiles (Peterson 2016; Reuben et al. 2017). Furthermore, observations have been made that parents have lost confidence in male teachers as they are skeptical in their motive to teach pre-school classes.

Petersen and Petker (2011) found that cultural bias against male teachers in the pre-school education prevented males venturing into the sector. Generally, the society regards early childhood learning as an extension of home associating female teachers to this role as "baby sitters, nannies or care givers" which is more of a woman's role than a man's. In Turkey, female teachers have considered their male counterparts as outsiders in the pre-school education and societal prejudices are making it difficult for males to become teachers in the pre-school education (Inan et al. 2010).

Some level of tension exists between men and women in early childhood programmes owing partly to the dominance of single mothers in sector who due to lack of support from their own children's fathers resent male teachers (Mukuna 2008). Similarly, female teachers estranged with their partners or ex-partners have challenges relating to fathers or male colleagues (Sanders 2002; Mukuna 2008). Consequently, male educators in the early childhood education must constantly explain to their families, friends, and female counterparts the choice of their own profession.

In some schools, learners have fallen prey to obnoxious educators who buy sexual favours from them, avoid prosecution by paying bribes to their victims and due to poverty, some parents encourage these illicit affairs (Gouws et al. 2008). It has been alleged that parents maintain silence when teachers impregnate their daughters as they are financially compensated although the union is not always solemnised (Jenkins and Lee 2002; Nolan 2002; Panday et al. 2009). Due to poverty, parents turn a blind, or openly encourage young girls to engage in sexual relationships as a way of financial survival. Furthermore, victims of child sexual abuse younger than five usually do not report the abuse because either the perpetrators are known to the victim or victims are threatened with death hence it is referred to as the "silent crime". For instance, on the 18th May 2018 Charles of IOL News reported that forty-one percent of rapes

committed in South Africa were against minors and on the 31st May 2018 Pitt of New24 reported that a 9-month-old was allegedly sexually abused. These and other undisclosed incidences have tarnished the image of men, making to be parents apprehensive of male educators in the early childhood settings.

Strategies to Encourage Male Educators into Pre-school

The concept that in schools, male teachers are what fathers are at home should be the key motivator to engaging males in pre-primary settings. Hence, there is need to come up with strategies that overcome the perceptions societies hold on men as educators, yet men as fathers are embraced in families and schools (Barnes and Harris 2009). Schools need to come up with policies that are family friendly, where men play a significant role in school events. In such environments schools plan and have regular events that bring families together with the school staff to collaborate in supporting children's learning and extra-mural activities.

Creating policies and practices that "acknowledge traditional and non-traditional families" can bring more male involvement in schools according to the Massachusetts Department of Education (2000). Involving male parents in various school functions and activities is bound to attract male educators as their value within the school community becomes more visible (National PTA, Standard 2: Parenting 2002). Since language can be deterrent to parental involvement, having translations and materials printed in local languages might encourage more male involvement leading to them developing an interest in becoming educators in the ECD. The above discourse has led the researcher to ask the following questions.

Main Research Question

What are the views of stakeholders on the participation of male educators in the pre-school education?

Sub-research Questions

- ♦ What challenges do male educators face in the pre-school education?

- ♦ What intervention stratagems can be employed to increase male educators in the pre-school education?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the qualitative approach anchored in realism paradigm which concedes that social phenomena are inherently meaningful with implication that is understood and not measured (Punch 2013). Purposive sampling was employed in selecting eleven participants comprising two male trainee teachers in the pre-school, three pre-school teachers, three fathers and three mothers who responded to the semi-structured interviews. The participants were considered more knowledgeable about the phenomena under inquiry (McMillan and Schumacher 2006). Data involving transcription of recorded data, interpretation and coding (Creswell 2014) were presented in themes and individual aspects which moulded logical classifications for the presentation of findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness of Instruments

As a criterion for evaluating qualitative research, trustworthiness assures the readers that the analysis of findings deserves due attention (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Interpretivists use terms such as credibility and authenticity, to define the qualities that instate the trustworthiness which was ensured through member checking for factual accuracy of the accounts given by the participants in this research (Flick 2014; Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010). A tape recorder was used to capture interviews to augment reliability and credibility of the study (Creswell 2014). Credibility of data was also done through member checks on transcripts and analysed texts (Mouton and Babbie 2005; Rossouw 2003).

Ethical Requirements

In conducting this research, the participants were assured that all their rights such as anonymity and confidentiality, avoiding harm, betrayal and deception, maintaining privacy including the right to pull out from participating at any stage of the research would be observed (Cohen et al. 2000). Using the clearance letters from University Ethics Committee and East London Dis-

strict office the researcher gained access to the research sites and participants through gatekeepers as the research required a considerable amount of time to be spent on this task to obtain an in-depth of the study (Okumus et al. 2007; Shenton and Hayter 2004).

RESULTS

Value of Men in ECE

The study sought the significance of male educator in pre-school. Peggy, a Grade R educator proposed: *"It would be good to have father figures in the foundation phase so that children who do not have fathers at home can also have a male role model. It would be good for discipline and the values because the foundation is important."* Reiterating similar sentiments, Thamie went on to say: *"Men are very rare. In the five years, I have been in this school, I am seeing a male teacher in the foundation phase for the first time, so far, I can see he has adjusted well and he has a good rapport with children. Female teachers are not strict like men. Male educators seem to handle discipline better and they are good in handling sporting teams. Men are more like the father figure and children listen to them hence, they perform better in school."*

Mothers echoed the educators' opinion on the importance of male role models in the pre-school. Mrs Moyo stated: *"Men as fathers are valued in families but for men to have the same value in the foundation phase there has to be a mind-set shift with people viewing the presence of men positively. True, we need men to continue that family stability they may also be role models for those who do not have fathers at home. Then, discipline will improve, and performance will improve because children sit and listen to men more than they do to women."* Expressing similar thoughts Ms Phyllay said: *"Where men are involved, families are stable, children behave and perform better in school so definitely, and for the sake of stability we need male teachers in the pre-school although presently they are rare to none"*. Tom opined that: *"It would be good to have a man in the early education, I think men can handle young children too because I have taken care of my*

children since they were babies. Yes, it's challenging, one has to have patience."

Data indicates that male educators are of great value in the early education of children as they fill the gap of absent fathers in families, can discipline and teach values to young children. When children are disciplined learning takes place thereby improving performance in schools.

Culture and Stereotype Mind-set

Even though the presence of men in children's early education is important, culture and stereotype mind-set prevent men from venturing into ECE as Mavis, an educator advanced that: *"Due to culture and stereotype mind-set, people think that men are not fit for early childhood teaching but should start at Grade 4. But we have one male educator who is here for school experience. Boys like him so much."* Confirming their stereotype mind-set Mrs Moyo said: *"I don't know if they would cope, men do not have that motherly love and patience with the little ones, pre-school demands one to be a hands-on person."* Similarly Ms. Phyllay advanced: *"People would look at him in pre-school as if he is stupid, other men would ridicule him... men are shy and don't want to be humiliated."* Despite the humiliation, Mrs. Khabo suggested: *"Men must change their mind-set, because children who need their firm hands. We have a young man in the school; he seems to be popular with boys."* Concurring Thamie said: *"Men as educators are not as accepted because of the negative stereotypes thinking that men are strict, harsh abuse children and are not patient."*

Besides the culture and stereotype mindset from women, men were also pessimistic about male educators in the pre-school, hence fathers had a "wait and see" attitude when they found that there were two young man doing school experience in the Foundation phase. Negative mind-set and stereotype attitude towards male educators deter men from venturing into female dominated teaching arena.

Suspicion of Child Abuse

Even though men play a vital role in nurturing children, there is so much mistrust of men around children in pre-school centres from the society. Ms Phyllay expressed that: *"As a moth-*

er, my fear about male teachers is that they may be too strict, small children are too delicate to be taught by men because men are not very patient." Expressing similar sentiments Thamie said: "People generally think that men will touch children inappropriately and sexually abuse them and when they are angry they would be aggressive and physically abuse children.... there is so much violence against women and girls." Jim who seemed to have kept himself abreast with this subject ventured that: "I do understand that research says men bring stability in families and children behave and perform better but I have seen families with men around with the worst maladjusted children more than children from single mothers. Some men can be very abusive to their families. Yes, financially they may be better but there are some men who don't care for their families even if they have money." Mrs Khabo expressed her deep-rooted fear and mistrust of men: "I would not be comfortable with a male educator in the pre-school. Men can be cruel and abusive as fathers or educators. I was traumatised by men in my family hence I had this child. Besides, children in the pre-school need toilet training, some changing of diapers which most men, especially African men are not socialised to do." Likewise, Peggie described her trauma "Men are so unpredictable because some are good, but others are very cruel.....I was raped by men I looked up to for protection when I was seven years.... So, I am sceptical about men is a class with very young children." Max who explained that, "Nowadays men drink a lot of alcohol and some use drugs so if a man is to teach very young children they must be of sober habits."

The sentiments expressed reveal general lack of trust and deep-rooted fear of men as educators of very young children although men are valued as fathers. Data seems to indicate that men do not have the compassion possessed by women to nurture young children, mistrust by men on the intentions of other men venturing into ECD and the general suspicion of men being paedophiles. The root cause for this mistrust is the high crime rate among women and children in South Africa. Also coming out of this interview is that men equally do not trust other men with their children.

Gender Ascribed Role

Nurturing of children is a role generally ascribed to women. Confirming Eagly's Social Role theory Tom pointed out that: "As a man I was socialised that nurturing the child is a mother's duty while I have to go and fend for the family elsewhere. I have never really thought that a man is teaching in the pre-school he is actually fending for his family, however, I do agree that the children need male influence from early childhood." In agreement Jim pointed out that: "The perception is that males cannot do it because there is a lot of touching, hugging, wiping of this and that so we think that men do not have that kind of affection and patience. Personally, I would be suspicious of the motive of that man." Peggy's assertion was that: "Generally people think that men do not have the compassion to deal with little children because sometimes they do not show the emotion of love. Men are too strict and scare the little children. We have never had a man in the Foundation Phase, but Roy is a young man managing the class well." In defence of men Roy explained that: "Women have dominated the sector for too long that it has become difficult for us men to teach in the ECD because they just don't trust the men at school, maybe it is just the negative attitude or thinking about men. My friends have also quizzed me about teaching very young children, you see... the fact that I love children, I have children of my own does not count to the society, and they just view us men with suspicion." Stan, also a male ECD educator reiterated that: "My challenge has been to justify my motive to teach in the ECD mostly to my friends. It has taken some time for my colleagues to fully accept me. At times you can feel their suspicion and the way they look at you....it is like they are keeping a watchful eye on a prisoner at a distance... but I asked them why female teachers in high schools are never questioned of their motives." Confirming gender roles Max laughingly said he could not imagine men teaching very young children because that was a woman's job.

Data indicates that socialisation of men and women in the sampled area is inherent on ascribed gender roles.

Men's Motivation into Early Childhood Education

Two male educator trainees explained their motivation to train as pre-school educators. For Stan, financial assistance motivated him: *"The only available space with sponsorship was to train in the Foundation Phase so I took it up. It was not easy at first because people asked why to teach small children, but I love children and enjoy teaching them. I don't mind what people say because some of them laugh at me, but I will be working for my family. So far, I am managing well people have not complained. Other lady teachers are supportive, and I have learnt that the most important thing with small children is patience and compassion. Of course, people don't trust men in the pre-school you see by their frequent visits for minor things that they are checking up on you. But these days they are getting used to me."* Roy explained that: *"I was motivated to train as a pre-school educator by the failure rate at exit grades, so I wanted to learn more about what happens at the foundation of learning. My friends were discouraging me, but I told them that I was prepared to learn. Originally, I don't come from this Province but so far, I have not heard any complaints about me. The other teachers are friendly but at first, they looked at me with suspicion. I am learning a lot from them, and they like it when children listen to me. Parents have not complained but some are visibly surprised to see me in the class."*

Data also reveals that men who join the teaching profession in the elementary school must have a strong inner motivation to withstand criticism and suspicion.

Strategies to Motivate Men to Be Educators in the ECD

The study went on to find out how men could be motivated to teach in the ECD. Bev believed: *"There is need for a change of mind-set in people's perception which depends on the men's willingness to change, I think some men are just scared and others do not know it is possible for them to teacher in the EDC."* Expressing similar sentiments Mavis proposed that: *"Men should be recruited to design programmes of*

involvement in the school as educators as well as fathers. Encourage boys when leaving grade 12, that when they should choose teaching in the ECD as their career." Ben thought that men were not given a fair chance hence, his proposal was, *"If universities can advertise that fifty percent of the post would be offered to male students willing to take up teaching in the ECD, with the assurance of bursaries, then boys coming out of metric will take up the offer thereby increasing the change of people's mind-set and perception that ECD is for women."* In collaboration with others Stan opined that, *"The emphasis placed on the importance of men as fathers should be the basis of encouraging men to be educators in the ECD hence, highly involved men and the few male educators should mobilise men to become educators in the ECD. For real change to take place women who have experienced the value of men in the lives of their children should also be mobilised to campaign for male educators in the ECD. Tradition, culture and stereotype are issues that should be addressed by communities collectively with male dominated clubs, groups and movements, you see the belief that men are abusers of which mostly they are, must be dealt with by all sectors of the community. Having fears without action will not solve the problem and at the same time we cannot expect the few brave men leave their calling because of stigmatisation and suspicion."* This mouthful suggestion came from a father who has been raising up his two daughters and a son after the death of his wife three years ago.

DISCUSSION

Significance of Male Educators in Pre-school

In this discourse, the status of male educators is viewed as crucial in standing in *loco parentis* of absent fathers and maintaining discipline (Abdulai 2016; Peeters 2007; Wilson 2015). The study acknowledged that having male educators in pre-school enforces discipline, improves learning outcomes and would improve father participation. This concurs with scholars like Martin et al. (2010) who found that besides advancing a gender-diverse workforce, male educators attract the male parental involvement

in early childhood educational practices and nurturing children. Furthermore, the presence of men in Early Childhood Education is pertinent in developing children's socio-emotional status (Wardle 2004).

Female Dominance in Early Childhood Programmes

The findings of this study also confirm worldwide research lamenting that the industry is predominantly female. Concurring is Scouller (2013) who found that globally women dominated the early childhood education sector. Similarly, Abdulai's (2016) research carried out in Ghana revealed that men were not attracted to teaching in the early childhood education because it was a woman's work. This study's findings show a resemblance to Peeters' (2007) remarked on the waning in male educators worldwide. The study confirms the need for male educators as role models for the many children with absent fathers (Stats SA 2013) yet suspicion, questions about their intentions and traditionally ascribed roles of men continue to overshadow the importance of male educators (Abdulai 2016; Mashiyi et al. 2015; Peeters 2007).

Male Prejudices

Male educators in ECD are acknowledged as pivotal in moulding good behaviour whereas social attitudes and prejudgments, and prejudices have kept them away from the profession (Demuyneck and Peeters 2006; Mukuna and Mutsotso 2011; Sak et al. 2012). Male educators face rejection from the communities they intend to serve and resistance from the female educators (Mashiyi et al. 2015), and Gawlicz and Star-nawski (2013) who found that discrimination, marginalisation and the prevalence of gender inequality against male educators in pre-school was very high in many countries including South Africa. Traditional beliefs, cultural values and stereotype were found to be barrier affecting men's participation in the early childhood development because of the long standing believe that nurturing children was a woman's work (Green 2003; O'Brien 2004; Mathwasa and Okeke 2016). Meanwhile, endearing male-dominated clubs or association was found to be a robust stratagem in influencing men's participation in the ECE confirming the proclamation that male

solidarity groups can suppress negative perception against male educators in ECD (King 2000; Yeung 2004). Currently, these male-dominated clubs and associations are on the drive fighting gender-based violence and restore men's status as heads and protectors of the family.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the stakeholders' perceptions on the participation of male educators in pre-schools. A qualitative research approach that used semi-structured interviews to collect data was adopted. The importance of male educators in the pre-school in filling the gap of absent fathers was acknowledged by all stakeholders in this study. However, despite their importance, men faced a sundry of challenges such as rejection, marginalisation and were viewed with suspicion of being paedophiles. The study concluded that male educators may positively influence children's achievement in learning compelling multi-stakeholder collaboration on intervention to change people's mind-set and motivate men into the sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding the overhead findings this study suggests the following recommendations:

1. Male-dominated clubs/associations to join forces with existing male educators in the drive to change societal mindset on male educators and motivate the recruitment of men into the pre-schools.
2. Teacher training institutions to offer incentives such as special bursaries for men training to be Early Childhood Education practitioners.
3. The design of policies and programmes that aim at concerted drive in the recruitment and retention of male educators in the early childhood education by having non-discriminatory salary scale and design promotion by merit.

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