

PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-SERVICE MALE TEACHERS TOWARDS EARLY CHILDHOOD AND LOWER PRIMARY EDUCATION AT HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBAMBA CAMPUS

Tulonga T. Uugwanga Shuukwanyama, Olia Ghiassi Razavi²¹

ABSTRACT:

This study intended to find out the factors that prevent male students from pursuing Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education. Male students from each of the 4 years Bachelor Degree in Early childhood and lower primary were participants in this study that aimed to find out the reasons for scarcity of male students in this field. A qualitative research approach was adopted for the collection and analysis of data in understanding the reasons for the reluctance of more male applicants. The findings indicated several factors prohibiting male students from opting for this specialization. Cultural and community notions of teachers in Pre and lower primary have a strong influence on the decision to join this phase of teaching. Securing employment was another influence on their choice of this phase. The study recommends more community awareness campaigns and dissemination of information to Secondary Schools with regards to reducing negative perceptions for this phase.

KEY WORDS: Early childhood, pre-service male teachers, perceptions

²¹ **Tulonga Shuukwanyama** is a mathematics lecturer in the department of early childhood and lower primary education at the University of Namibia (Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus). She was previously a teacher for 2 years before joining the University in 2013. She obtained her Master's degree from the University of the Western Cape in SA. Her research interests are mainly on novice teachers, pre-service teachers and mathematics language.

Olia Ghiassi Razavi Lopez Has been teaching at Ongwediva College of Education for more than 20 years. Have taught different Subjects and Modules during this time. Since 2011 Colleges of Education joined UNAM. Currently at HP Campus, teaching Environmental Education in the Department of Early Childhood and Lower Primary. Research interests are in Environmental issues which comprises human as well as other resources.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Early childhood and lower primary phase is an important first stage for learners as their whole lifelong learning begins there. This foundation lays the basis for all future generations of adults to build their capacities and aptitudes and become active members of their communities and societies wherever that may be. As the first encounters begin, the child is exposed to an environment which may be similar or different to where s/he comes from initially. In various countries, a female workforce dominates the teaching profession particularly at early childhood and primary levels. Booth (2014) states that relationships with teachers are a foundational component of young children's experiences in school. Booth (2014) provides strong evidence for the salience of teacher-student relationships as an important part of classroom contexts associated with the development of children's academic and social outcomes extending from early childhood through adolescence.

Based on UNESCO (2003-2004, in Wallet, 2006) in almost 157 countries surveyed, the proportion of female teachers at the Pre-Primary level is higher than that reported at the primary level, with a few exceptions. These trends seep into the University B Ed programmes as applicants for Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education are mostly females. This was quite noticeable in our Early Childhood and Lower Primary classes, thus we were intent on finding out the reasons for this and how do male students perceive this phase. It was important to find out as this gender disparity and skewed intake and graduation of mostly female teachers would further undermine future endeavours to enrol male students. We had to find out why male student teachers are wary of this phase, what can be the causes and what should be done to enrol and retain more. Though both researchers are females and thus partial by that, we tried to find out how our male students feel and think about this phase.

It is evident from the number of pre-service male teachers enrolled at the University of Namibia Hifikepunye Pohamba Campus in the department of Early Childhood and Lower Primary every year since its inception in 2011. As can be seen in the table below, the enrolment has been far less than that of their female counterparts.

Year	Registered students	Females	Males	% of males
2011	78	65	13	17%
2012	40	34	6	15%
2013	95	69	26	27%
2014	119	88	31	26%
2015	115	84	31	27%

Table 1. Number of pre-service female and male teachers as per performance statistics of 2013 in EC/LPE department.

Numerous studies have emphasized the need to incorporate many males in junior primary owing to various roles and advantages that men will bring to Junior Primary (Sumsion, 2005). There is an assumption that male teachers will instil positive attitudes work-oriented approach and as role model in the eyes of boys that especially lack a male figure at home. It further states that schools are locations where ranges of masculinities are produced. Masculinity and low number of males in primary are at the centre of perceptions. According to Sumsion (2005), a lack of men in junior primary may result in boys trying to demonstrate their maleness by refusing to learn or being far from the learning process in the guidance of a female teacher. This study is not however, stating that women are inept or incapable teachers, but it is targeting for a balance of both genders at the lower primary level, which we assume will be an advantage to all learners.

Each level of Education needs an equal representation of both male and female teachers. However, evidences have been rife that few male students are opting to study Lower Primary Education. In fact majorities

were merely forced to enrol for lower primary due to a limited space in Upper and Secondary Education. Perceptions about fields of studies in our society are thus transferred to our prospective students and play a role in the decision that these students take in the fields of study to opt for. The research aimed at answering the following questions amongst others;

- How did male pre-service teachers view EC/LPE phase of study?
- Why did they actually enrol for Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education?
- Why are male applicants reluctant to study Early Childhood and Lower Primary Education?

Theoretical framework

Albert Bandura (1977) introduced the Social Learning Theory which states that: “most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1977) Learners will learn from their same gender teachers as their role models, but the extent to which they will internalize these behaviors depends on what their society deems appropriate for that gender.

According to Sammons (2016) the child is likely to attend and imitate behaviors of people that it sees similar to itself and as a result the child will imitate behaviors modeled by people of the same sex. A lack of male teachers at pre and primary will limit this observational and imitational behavior for male learners and will disadvantage them.

In addition, it is posited that because of feminization of teaching, boys in schools lack social role models and feel less engaged and do not perform well (Moses, Admiraal and Berry, 2016). Thereby the presence of male teachers at the pre and primary phase may boost the performance of male learners.

In some studies women were found better suited to serve role models and teachers of moral behavior and they possessed emotional qualities to work with youth (Wood, 2012). While that may be true, male teachers also bring qualities such as discipline and physical security. In addition, the presence of male is associated with better management since they are identified as being capable of overcoming challenging situations that may rise at school.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The need and the role of a male teacher in lower primary

The need for more male teachers has generally arisen from the discussions around boys' poor achievement which is apparently caused by the predominance of women teachers in schools that seems to be favoring girls and their learning styles over boys (Sumsion, 2005). In particular, the lack of male educators in ECE impacts negatively on boys. As research points to women favoring girls and reinforcing feminine attributes, boys may actually be currently disadvantaged. According to the Ninnes (2011) in a research carried out in Namibian schools, females had lower repetition rates and higher promotion rates than males up to grade 8, while the situation was reversed in the higher grades. Hence, improving the number of male teachers at junior level may lessen the repetition of male learners. Trends also show that enrolment for male in grade 1-3 has decreased. Literature has stressed the importance of male teachers in developing positive views of maleness and masculinity.

A case study by Sumsion (2005) illustrates that male educators are more able to identify with and respond to boys effectively than female educators because they share an understanding of boys' experiences and perspectives and an essential masculinity. Female educators are more likely to view unruly play as aggressive and have a negative

impression of more masculine behaviors than male educators. Therefore, boys are positioned to be disadvantaged and marginalized educationally within the current gender imbalance in early childhood settings (Sumsion, 2005).

Many researchers agree that if there are more men in early childhood settings carrying out caring roles, this could help to counter children's sex-stereotyped views of gender roles, reduce sexism and generally advance gender equality (Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler & Ballantyne, 2006:5; Marsiglio, 2009; Sumsion, 2005).

Male educators provide both girls and boys with various openings to experience different approaches to play and interactions, and are able to model behavior that breaks through male stereotypes. In addition to the above, while women are understood to be talkative and involved in discussing non-essential information, male elementary teachers tend to spend time more productively by staying focused on tasks to be accomplished during meetings and making decisions more quickly without being involved in non-essential discussions (Wood, 2012).

Male perceptions on junior primary teaching

Various studies show that there are barriers that influence men's attitude to taking ECE as an occupation. Perception of teaching as 'women's work', concerns about potential claims of child abuse, low salary, low social status, and the absence of a male peer group are common reasons for men avoiding teaching careers (Smith, 2004). According to Smith (2004) there is a connection between work and construction of various parts of self, such as identity, gender and sexuality.

In another study, males who chose primary teaching as a career have listed the following perceptions about lower primary teaching such as; a job in which their 'maleness' is necessary and of value; a job suited to females, but not exclusively a woman's job; a job in which a male presence might counter what they see as a female domain; a career

choice which might be seen by their peers as inappropriate for males; a job in which as males they may have to confront societal negativity about males working closely with young children; (Johnston , Mckeown & Mcewen, 1999:62). Booth (2014) identified that the perception that primary teaching relates to a mother's role, was the most frequently offered, other perceptions were that, the teaching is unattractive, boring, hassle causing, stressful, and requiring too much patience and low pay.

Farquhar et al., (2006:5) provided more similar perceptions as to why there are men are reluctant to join lower primary teaching, some of them includes; Childcare work is commonly viewed as an extension of the role of women as mothers, Men who enter paid childcare work are often thought of as men who are not 'real' men or gay which is not the case for women to be viewed as lesbian. In addition, every woman is perceived to be safe to work with young children whereas any man is considered suspect if he goes for this type of work. Lastly, Childcare and teaching work is a low-pay and low-status occupation.

The belief of low wages and low social status within the early childhood field are inter-related factors that could mean some men would never consider early childhood teaching as an occupation. This is mostly because the wage-level is more crucial to men than to women. These seem to resonate in our Namibian society as well, whereby male teachers at the early childhood or lower primary may be looked upon in negative ways, thus the reluctance of male applicants for this phase of Education.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative approach, following a case study design was used. Our intention was to obtain pre-service male teachers' perspectives and this approach provided us with in-depth description of their experiences. Five (5) pre-service teachers from each of the four years of B Ed program in Lower Primary were purposively selected. In addition, 3

male lecturers who teach the EC/LPE were purposively selected to find out their views on the same topic of male perceptions. Questionnaires with mostly open-ended questions were designed and distributed to the pre-service teachers, with some alterations; the same questionnaires were distributed to the lecturers.

RESULTS

We received 15 questionnaires back from our students. The following highlights some of our questions and responses as indicated by the students.

Motivation to apply: we asked what were their motivation to apply for pre/lower primary program and why? Of the 7 respondents 4 said that Lower Primary (LP) was not their choice, one said that was the only phase available and only 2 said that they liked working with small children.

When asked if they are **proud of becoming a LP teacher**, 2 said that they are not proud because of doing something out of their interest, while one said though not, in order to succeed he has to be. Other respondents in year 2 stated that when they went for their School Based Studies (SBS) they realized that children are precious and made them to love the educational career.

On the question of **their perception when they first enrolled** in pre/lower primary: 2 didn't answer while these are some of their responses:

“there was no perception because there was no interest, my opinion was that this was a very easy course and it wouldn't give me a tough time to study, I thought it was going to be difficult to work and make children get what you are teaching them but unfortunately is not true because it actually works like magic, I never thought it was a male job, so I was thinking I am doing the wrong course, when I registered for

pre/lower primary I was waiting to be relaxing and doing simple things, despite things for kids but I later realized that this field requires commitment just like other phases.”

About the **perception of the community** towards male teachers in LP, these are some of the answers:

“one didn’t answer while 3 stated that the community considers LP teaching to be for females, one said that people in the community think we are doing LP because we score low points in our grade 12 and that we are doing simple things, community thinks that LP male teachers are not full men, but girlish guys, they look at you as half man like you are not male enough they think you are doing a female job they take it as taking care of children or babysitting.”

One of the questions asked about the **reactions to them when they were on SBS**; on the side of the staff and learners. This question was asked from students in years 2, 3, and 4.

“There was nothing different in the way staff and learners reacted since there were male teachers teaching at LP phase”. One said he was welcomed by some staff but not by others since they got wrong perceptions about males teaching in LP and learners did not really accept me as a teacher, one said, because he was teaching at his school many teachers asked him why I am doing LP and how am I finding it, however they were friendly and so were learners.”

To the question of **why they think some male teachers are reluctant to be LP teachers**, they answered:

“shame and the belief that this is for females not males, 2 said the salary is low, the community will laugh at them, male teachers only use to be principals not LP teachers, some don't like children, they don't think it is a male course since they were not taught by male teachers at that level, they have little information about education.”

On the **reaction of learners during SBS:**

“They had no respect for me. They treat me as their classmates and whenever they find me they always want to talk to me about lessons. They reacted the same way they reacted with female teachers but they had more respect toward me than toward female teachers, they had more attention toward me. At first, they did not take me as a teacher to be, but as time passed, they begun loving my teaching than their real teacher.”

We asked if they feel that there is **a negative perception towards male teacher** they said:

“yes, with different explanations such as: people still have the tendency that serving kids is a work for females, while they think it is a female job but a child need to be brought up by both female and male characters, because male do not really like giving attention and those small kids like attention, LP teaching requires attention which males seem not to give, males are very few and they don't feel proud to be LP teachers, and how can male teachers control the children in LP e.g. noise and dirtiness of primary class.”

At the Campus, are you treated differently because you are studying LP?

	No	Yes	Reason
	2		
From the side of lecturers	3	1	Because they understand what we are doing
From the side of Management & Administrative staff	3	1	No explanations
From the side of fellow students in LP	2	2	No explanations
From the side of students in Upper Primary/Secondary		6	No explanations or reasons given

However, no reasons were given.

One question asked **if they feel inferior because of studying LP.** Which they answered:

“One said no. Another said: at the beginning, but no more. Not at all, LP is just a phase like others and mostly I do perform higher than those students studying Upper and Secondary phases. Yes, because throughout my juvenile years I was never taught by any male teachers. I believe LP is merely for females. Another said: no more, I used to feel so when I was in year 1, semester 1, but now all my dreams are about staying and working with kids because they are best friends that will never bring you lots of problems, I realize. One said not at all, I feel proud of studying LP because I will be the first to shape the children when they come to school. No, I feel superior because I have this mentality that people are specializing in upper or secondary are depending on us to build a good foundation, and if we build it weak then they will suffer and us without them we have nothing to lose or suffer from.”

To the question of **how they view LP primary teacher as a job for male, female or both** these are their answers:

“all answered that both can be LP teachers with the reasons of: everyone has the right to study and do what they like. Because of gender equality, because a child has to be brought up by both parents for them to grow well and be a person in life.”

We asked about **how to encourage male candidates to apply and join LP** and these were their responses:

“LP is just a phase like others and let’s cut that belief that it is only for females. Explanations about the foundation of education that it starts with lower primary. Increase the salary and change the LP syllabus. Encourage people to be aware of what LP is all about compared to other phases. The career advisors and career fairs should give correct info to the applicants or learners. They should give the advantages that come with the phase like getting a grant from the GRN, getting the same salary as others. It is the most wonderful course that you can enjoy; you teach as if you are playing, you teach in many enjoyable methods. The emphasis should be at the value of children, make people understand that lower primary is the foundation of children education and it needs to have strong team to make sure that children develop positive understanding towards school.”

As to **any other suggestions**, they responded:

“UNAM must admit students to the course they applied for because they are discouraging students to apply for education. Institutions must encourage male students to apply for lower and pre-primary. People should not hesitate to do their best because of people’s belief about them. Some people are forcing themselves to do courses that please other people instead of themselves; they usually end up failing while the time is going. Enough info must be distributed about the careers, the advantages and the packages that come along with career especially the ones offered by Government like giving them to each Secondary/High schools. I think LP male students should be asked if they are ready to work hard before they are granted that opportunity to study because I believe it requires hard worker not just anyone.”

DISCUSSION

Based on the data that was summarized in the previous section, the following patterns were noticeable.

Motivation to apply: many revealed that LP was not their first choice but had no option but to register it. Some although applied for other fields were redirected to LP since that was the only option. One of the crucial factors in determining careers is gender; mostly people tend to choose careers that reflect their gender roles (Moses et al., 2016). One may infer that due to limited options at Upper and Secondary Education fields, applicants are re-directed to Lower Primary. According to Wallet (2014), it is thought that gender imbalances provide an indication of the labour market situation of teachers in general. For instance regions with high unemployment level will inevitably demonstrate higher proportions of male teachers as there are fewer employment possibilities available to the general population. This seems to be the case in Namibia whereby males would go for LP to secure a job.

Once spaces are full for Specialization at Upper and Secondary Phases, applicants who meet the requirements are redirected to LP even if they did not apply or was their second choice. We have experienced how both females and males have admission letters to LP whereby they did not apply for and due to no other options; they have to take up LP. That sends the wrong message of everyone and anyone can and should do EC/LPE which will gravely lower the poise and standards. There could be no surprises of low or no quality teachers if this is the case whether for males or females. According to Smith (2004) most men who join primary education do so without the knowledge of their family and with little planning and anticipation of this choice and that most men were not seeking admission to that entry. Only applicants who are interested and meet the requirements should be admitted.

Filling up the quota with reluctant or downright unenthusiastic applicants, though a short term solution will only make matters worse in the long term. Joseph & Wright (2016) stated that men generally perceive Early Childhood as low status because of a lack of understanding of what the profession is all about.

Pride in becoming a LP teacher: Two said they are not proud, but the rest stated that they are. A few indicated that through experiences during SBS their minds changed and begin to like children. This can be confirmed that when we discuss SBS with our classes after the completion of this practice, some who were reluctant to be teachers in the Lower Primary phase find themselves liking it. Though there are those who still prefer other fields.

Community's Perceptions: majority responded that community perceives LP teaching to be suitable for females. Some went to the extent to state that they are perceived as "half-men or "girlish guys". This seriously affects the male students' applicants from pursuing an all "female" phase. Smith (2004) supported this by saying that male teachers are likely to receive unpleasant comments from relatives, friends and community at large about their decision to become LP

teachers. In addition, community usually views them as pedophiles and/or homosexual since they chose to work with children and women.

According to Johnston et al., (2010) some males have internalized the idea of femaleness in regards to Primary teaching with statements such as teaching is a woman's job. Peterson (2014) states that women's dominance in Foundation Phase has negative connotations with associated notions of childcare and woman's work. This can be proven from students' comments about how the community perceives them unsuitable for teaching at this phase. Peterson (2014) explicates that all these perceptions lead to negative cultural associations that classifies women as more suited to teach LP.

As to the question of the **Reluctance of male students to be LP teachers**: shame and belief that they can be laughed at by the community, the LP teachers receive lower salaries, male teachers only used to be principals not teachers in those days, they don't think it is a male course if you go around male LP teachers are scarce and student teacher 2 said that they think this is females work. This can be confirmed as most LP teachers are females, though there are male LP teachers as well. Booth (2014) clearly stated some of these perceptions that discourage male teachers to join LP such as, it relates to a mother's role, teaching is unattractive, boring, hassle causing, stressful, and requiring too much patience and low pay.

As to **Reaction of learners during SBS**: Some students stated that learners were friendly towards them and treated them as their peers, while one said that they had more respect for him than the female teacher. This could be in accord with Peterson (2014) who asserted that men have a lot of power and children are scared of father figures. She continues to state that male teachers are more associated with effective discipline. This may explain the respect shown to the pre-service teacher.

As to the way they **perceive LP phase to be male or female work**: it is heartening to see that they considered both to be capable as the children have both parents. It seems that after studying at this phase and their experiences during SBS gave them the confidence to state that while in the beginning they were very reluctant, their attitudes and feelings have changed for the better. Mistry and Sood (2015) found that male teacher trainee admitted that teaching at lower primary was not suited for male and was not natural for male to work in LP since it requires nurturing and caring characteristics that men do not possess. However, some male may use this phase as a stepping stone for getting better posts of Head of Department and Principal due to a lack of ambition on the part of female teachers. In her research Wood (2012) find that although most the majority of teachers where female, most of the administrative positions are held by men.

CONCLUSION

We embarked on this study to find out the perceptions of pre-service male student teachers towards teaching at the lower primary teaching. The rarity of male students at early childhood and lower primary is a concern that may have long term consequences for the education sector in general. The findings point out to skewed perceptions from the communities and society as a whole. Though our sample was few, our decision to include all four years was pertinent. We could see that our students' attitude and feelings had changed once they progressed through years 2, 3 and 4. With more experiences of teaching during SBS, a change of attitude was visible and many did not feel negatively towards EC/LPE teaching anymore as attested in the above statements. One of the major issues is that there are a number of perceptions on the side of the community, making it difficult for male applicants to opt for EC/LP field of study.

Gender based conceptions of suitable professions for each gender needs to be addressed, as it is ingrained on everyone's minds. The absence of more male teachers in LP field contributes to these misconceptions.

Why do we still think that only females are suitable for teaching at the LP level or phase? This trend seems to be global as research find that in many countries this is the norm rather than an exception. Social learning theory cannot fully explain the role of modelling and imitating, however while a large number of students indicated that the gender of the teacher was unimportant, the majority of students indicated the social benefits of having male teachers in primary schools (Booth, 2014).

One of the recommendations was to disseminate more information of the lower primary phase and start doing it in the career fairs and other platforms about the important role male have in lower primary and to encourage more male applicants to apply to Early Childhood and lower primary phase. Communities should be made aware of the importance of the equal presence of both males and females in all spheres of employment and not to feminize or masculinize certain careers to the exclusion of others.

Future studies should continue with finding out how do female student, teachers, staff and community members perceive male student teachers at the EC/LP phase. Our study mainly focused on male students and lecturers, but we should continue to find out these perceptions from Upper Primary and Secondary student teachers and lecturers.

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