

Perceptions and Attitudes of Students and Lecturers on Female Students Enrolment in the Early Childhood Development Program in Bulawayo

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Abstract- Women dominate the Early Childhood Development (ECD) program which is one of the main short courses offered in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at Bulawayo Polytechnic. The aim of the study was to determine perceptions and attitudes of students and lecturers on high female enrolment in the Early Childhood Development course, whether the inclusion of male trainees would result in benefits or disadvantages. Data was collected using questionnaires and interviews. The results show that a majority female trainees are motivated by the passion to care for children since most of these trainees are already mothers. Men are generally finding it hard to work with children, this is largely because of the implied social allocation of gender roles. The study also found that more men in the Early Childhood Development course would bring a range of benefits for children, but it could also lift the overall quality of teaching by introducing gender diversity, improve staff dynamics and encourage fathers to become more involved with their children's education at home. However, the results also reveal some worries expressed by a minority of respondents about how increasing the number of male teachers may impact on job security for females. Many respondents felt the lack of men in the Early Childhood Development Program was a social issue that need to be recognised as some other gender inequalities have such as the need for more women in Parliament or in professions such as motor mechanics and drivers of heavy vehicles. A commitment to gender equality in early childhood education would bring a new dimension to quality education.

Index Terms- Early childhood development program, female student, short course, department of Adult and Continuing Education

I. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of men in early childhood programs has garnered considerable attention over the years. This interest is due to three related trends: 1) the lack of men—usually fathers—in the lives of many young children, 2) the dearth of men in the early childhood field, and 3) an increased interest in father involvement in early childhood programs. While almost everyone agrees with the need to get men involved in the lives of young children, solutions to this dilemma are few and far between. Fagan (1996) notes that 97 percent of teachers in pre-K programs are women; the same figure was reported in a Center for the Child Care Workforce study (2002).

The field of early childhood is an overwhelmingly female one (Cunningham, 2004). How does this create a female culture, beyond the obvious? Some indications are: Many people in and out of the early childhood field deeply believe that women are naturally predisposed to caring for young children, and men are not (Cunningham, 1998; Nyoni, 2008; Cunningham and Dorsey, 2004). This belief is because in most cultures, including Zimbabwe, women have been charged with the responsibility of raising children, both in the home and in collective approaches (Lamb, 2000).

Males bring more play, active movement, entertainment, and rough and tumble play to the way they interact with their own children and the way they interact with children in a program (Fagan, 1996; Parke, 1996; Lamb, 2000). Male teachers' presence in ECD programs could help to compensate for the absence or marginality of men in many children's home lives as a consequence of single-parent family structures or long working hours (Gadsen, 2002). The male teachers induct boys into masculinity (Cunningham, 1998). Moreover, there are essential gender differences between boys and girls. Accordingly, male early childhood teachers are more able than their female counterparts to identify with and respond effectively to boys because they share an essential masculinity and an understanding of boys' perspectives and experience (Eisten, 1982). The current gender imbalance in ECD programmes in Zimbabwe is therefore to the detriment of boys. Gold and Reis (1982) posit that male and female teachers differ in their characters. Children value their contact with males other than female teachers. It is against this background that this study is hinged. The purpose of this study was to find out the factors that influence, "Perceptions and attitudes of students and lecturers on high female student enrolment in ECD program. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1.1 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.1 SEX ROLE THEORY

Davies (1989) notes that biological theories explaining differential treatment on men and women in ECD are grounded in functionalism and explain the way children acquire discursive practices of their society and learn to position themselves as male or female. Within institutional socialization theory, each individual or group has a particular role in society so as to maintain an integrative, cohesive social system (Cohen, 1993). The acquisition of traits of the role is governed by social structures within the society and these form important

determinants of the patterns of relationships that individuals will form over the course of their lives.

The socialization of children is viewed as a preparation for their adult roles and work in the spheres appropriate for their sex". Meena (1998) notes that there is an overarching traditional view that domestic work and ECD are appropriate provinces for females in Southern Africa. The sex role theory argues that women's private sphere is comprised to endless round of tedious, unpaid, and undervalued activities like ECD (Rothernberg, 2001).

This of course raises questions regarding whose interests, social reproduction theories serve in upholding this normative standard case. Other African feminists like Wamahiu (1998) argue that while there may be physical biological differences between men and women, gender differences should be realized as a socio-cultural construct which can be deconstructed in a way that makes females aware of their potential and allows them to realize their abilities to the fullest. In contrast to the sex role theory, the rights theory main thrust is to develop a legal frame work to fight women discrimination in ECD (Shaba,2002).

1.1.2 RIGHTS THEORY

The rights theory follows the western model based upon individual rights. Most African countries have ratified international conventions and treaties that interpret for the improvement of women status in the society. Rights theorists therefore advocate for the abolition of patriarchal norms, traditions and practices and then focus on legal reforms as ways to realize the goal of achieving equitable distribution of ECD duties in the society, (United Nations, 2005:15).

Rights theorists reject the biological essentialist and determinists' explanation of sexual difference and expose socially constructed inequalities in ECD. Rights theorists view education as the key to women's quest with men. They premise their argument on the liberalism, philosophy of human rights arguing that females have the right to receive the same disaggregated opportunities as males, (MacFadden,2003:90). This approach however is more of an intervention strategy befitting the improvement approach. The empowerment approach is a dramatic departure from the social work practice and it concentrates on the strength of the victim towards liberation from his or her social problems, (Uys 2003). The researcher will utilize the empowerment approach for formulating gender equality as it is in line with the radical feminist theoretical framework which informs this study.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research strategy was essential in assisting to explore and discuss the Perceptions and attitudes of students and lecturers on high female students enrolment in the early ECD program: A case of Bulawayo Polytechnic's ECD short course. In this section the following aspects were presented thus research design, data collection and data analysis. This section also has an overview of ethical considerations and the measures which were observed to protect the rights of the respondents in the study.

1.2.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used a cross sectional study design employing a mixed method approach based on a combination of

quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyze primary and secondary data. The primary data was mainly drawn from the target population. The design enabled the documentation of the current situation regarding the objectives under review. The analysis also considered exposure to the program in order to assess exposure to the program in order to assess associations between outcomes and the program.

1.2.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS USED

1.2.2.1 INDEPTH INTERVIEWS

It is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive and non-threatening environment. Cunningham (1999) adds that it provides an opportunity to probe the participants' cognitive and emotional responses while observing underlying group dynamics. This tool was used to perceptions and attitudes of students and lecturers on the ECD course at Bulawayo Polytechnic. This was an appropriate tool as it helps to extract immediate feedback and get a variety of opinions from the participants.

1.2.2.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to meet the objective of describing the student's knowledge, attitudes and perceptions regarding perceptions of students and lecturers on high female student enrolment in ECD at Bulawayo Polytechnic, the researchers used a self-designed questionnaire for the study.

1.2.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATIONS

Data analysis involved breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated or to establish themes in the data (Gadsen,2002). As a first step of the analysis process all interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and subjected to qualitative data analysis. Thematic content analysis is a process of breaking down the text into themes and categorizing the patterns in the data. Shona and Ndebele interviews were translated into English and only the English translation was transcribed.

In presenting the results, the research returned to the voices of the participants to describe their experiences as participants. Tables, pie charts and graphs were used to show information collected and how it was expressed. Comments and analysis were given after presentation of data on each table and graphs. Percentages were used where ever possible to come out with findings, conclusions and recommendations emanating from the study.

1.2.4 ETHICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In gaining access to the participants the researcher accessed permission from the Principal in order to conduct the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Respondents were given verbal and written consent before participating on in-depth interviews. It was made clear that the participants were not under any obligation to participate as individuals and they had the chance to refuse to take part in the study and they could also refuse to answer questions at any point during the survey.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.3.1 GENDER AND STEREOTYPES

Teacher's gender has been a topic of discussion for most of the past two centuries. Gender plays a decisive role in how the teacher defines their profession. Most societies prescribe different activities and characteristics for male and females which come to be seen as natural by the people involved. Gender stereotypes are cultural constructions. Eiaten (1982) states that gender is not merely a biological divide but is a social construct. It is culturally created by the engagement in communication of those involved. This means that male teachers in ECD are perceived to be women because culturally child care is the domain of women (Mukuna, 2008). Women are expected to do lower cadre jobs as a social construct. Men in ECD are therefore taking the women's position. On average, men teach older children, teach more boys than girls and teach harder subjects. Most men decide to enter teaching later than women and concentrate on subjects required for satisfaction as administrators (Lamb, 1985). Greishaber (2001) found out that of the men he studied, 75% planned to leave the classroom, 51% of them hoped to go into higher position in education while 20% wanted to go outside the education field (Shaba, 2002).

Pay, salary and standard of living were among the factors that they cited. Married men expressed their concerns more. Meena (1988) found that two years after his study, 10% of the male preschool teachers had left the profession. They reported that what would have kept them there was more money. Cohen (1993) suggests that male and female teachers are much more similar than different in their effectiveness in class; other factors influence learners' achievement other than sex differences. Further, there are many people who believe that the low status and abysmal benefits of the early childhood field are a direct result of it being a women's profession. It would make little sense for these feminists to support the emergence of men – including white men – in the early childhood field. There is alienation and pressure male early childhood professionals feel (Lamb, 2000). This view of institutions in our society reflecting and perpetuating the power structures within our society poses a strange dilemma regarding the early childhood field. Further, because of the lack of anything close to adequate wages and benefits, many of them are poor.

1.3.2 WHY THERE IS NEED FOR MORE MEN IN ECD

The absence of men in early childhood centers also means young children may be missing out on any substantial contact with male role models. For children in single parent families, that could mean they have virtually no contact with men at all. Sarah Farquhar also argues that while the early childhood sector, like other sectors of society, stresses non-sexist behaviors, attitudes and choices of play, the composition of the workforce is failing to "practice what it teaches. Farquhar also blames the preponderance of women in the early childhood sector for holding back pay rates for so long, although the recent move to pay equity with the primary education sector has now pushed those rates up. Down at the kindergarten, men involved in early childhood teaching strongly believe in the role both men and women play in educating the under fives" (Rothenburg, 2001). For Tahu Loper, having both men and women on the staff is "the natural way to teach" with each bringing a different perspective to the job (MacFadden, (2003)

1.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

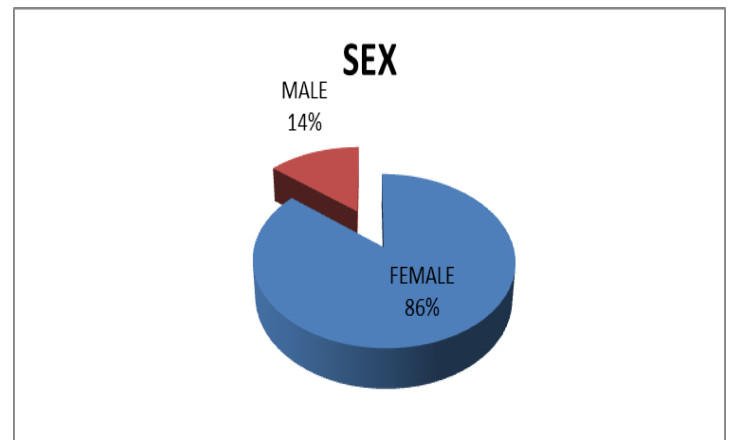


Fig. 1

Fig. 1 is a pie chart on sex of the respondents who participated in the study. The pie chart reflects that 86% were female and 14% were male. In this regard it can therefore be noted that the study had more female respondents than the male counterpart.

1.4.2 AGE RANGE

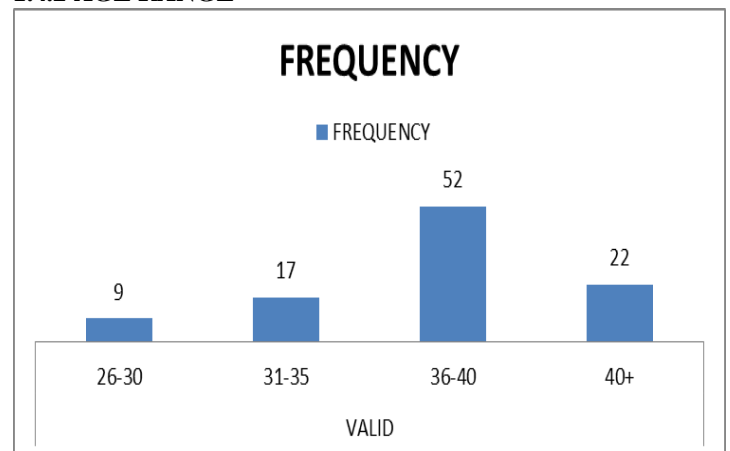


FIG. 2 AGE RANGE

Fig. 2 shows the age range of the respondents who participated in the study. The study reflects that the majority of the respondents (52%) in the study were from the age of 36-40 years. This was followed 22% whose age range was above 40 years. The least percentage was 9% from the 26-30 years. It can therefore be noted that most ECD educators are between 36-40. This reflects that ECD is taught by experienced people.

1.4.3 OPINIONS REGARDING GENDER IN ENROLMENT CHOICE OF TEACHER IN ECD

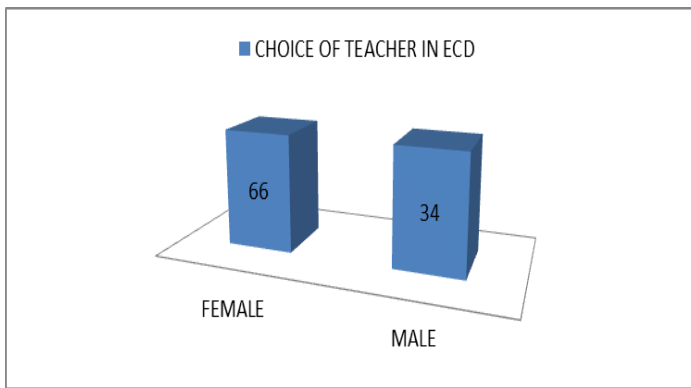


FIG. 3

Fig. 3 reflects that the majority of the respondents (66%) felt that women were more desirable in an early childhood classroom. 34% noted that gender did not have any effect as they argued that gender is a social construct.

Regarding commonly held perceptions on the role of male and female in ECD teaching profession, both male and female pre-school teacher felt that the respondent's gender is a point of concern when parents choose schools for their children. The same question was posed to lecturers who agreed that they consider the gender of the parents who agreed that they consider the gender of the teacher since young children need to be "mothered". The respondents also noted that male teachers may not be patient with the ECD children.

70% of respondents noted that children may be uncomfortable being escorted to the toilet by male teachers. On the other hand 30% of the respondents were of the view that caring can be done by either females or males and any form of abuse on the children could be done by either males or females. 96% of the respondents reported that women are loving and tender while men can help with coaching, breaking up fights, moving and repairing equipment.

1.5 FACTORS WHY THERE ARE FEW MALES IN ECD

Responses to the question that asked male teachers why they think the ECD profession is dominated by women elicited the following responses;

- low salaries
- stereotyping
- Fear of being accused of abuse
- low status of the profession
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VARIABLE	PERCENTAGE %
Low salaries	82
Stereotyping	95
Fear of being accused of abuse	92
Low status of the profession	90

1.5.1 LACK OF MALE ROLE MODELS

The majority of early childhood educator's are women (86%) who can be inspiring role models for girls. However, the lack of male educators denies boys positive male role models. A mix of male and female educators also has the potential to bring more male creativity to the activities and approaches. The

respondents noted the implication of having few men the profession and argued that this leaves the children without male role models.

1.5.2 DEVALUING OF ECD EDUCATORS

Facilitating ECD classes is often seen as women's work and natural extension of women's work and natural extension of women's unpaid family duty to care for children. In many countries this keeps wages for early childhood educators disrespectfully low. Low wages are a barrier to recruiting and sustaining good educators in ECD. In the study it was noted that 82% of the respondents were of the view that low salaries made men not to venture into the profession.

1.5.3 CULTURE

Societal labelling of early childhood as women's work also creates a stigma that pushes men who should be excellent early childhood educators away from the profession. Men in some socio-cultural environments also face societal and institutional barriers to becoming ECD educators. 95% of the respondents noted that men who want to venture in ECD training are deemed as misfits. A respondent from an interview noted that one of the reasons more men are not attracted to a career teaching ECD is that it is not seen as a profession,

"That's been a hangover from the days when the work was voluntary - a job for girls in the gap between leaving school and getting married."

Another respondent noted that developments such as the requirement that early childhood teachers must be fully qualified will help the sector be accepted as part of the education profession rather than as "care".

1.5.4 LOW STATUS OF THE PROFESSION

The acceptance of early childhood teaching as a profession will be slow to men,

"Some people really don't understand what's involved. [They think] it's not a real job, you're just playing with children. Men still don't understand just what's involved in the pedagogical aspect of the job because they haven't spent time with their children or visited an early childhood centre and seen what goes on."

Pay rates are seen as another reason why men have not been attracted to the early childhood teaching sector. 67% of respondents notes that when they began teaching, starting pay was not good. This was concurred by one respondent who argued that,

For males with small children and being the single income earner it is very difficult to keep the family going." He believes, too, that had there been more men in the sector the pay rates would have improved much sooner. "Women have always got the short end of the stick in terms of pay rates and I don't think the men in early childhood have been sufficient to drag that up."

Another hindrance, men working in the system say, is the fact that the role of men in the early childhood sector is invisible and hence unrecognized. One respondent noted that the photos in the training literature about early childhood teaching were of women; so were the brochures used to recruit students; and the respondent noted that the same applies in the wider media, for

example, nappy ads on television. *"They're not directed at fathers but they change nappies too!"*. Another respondent noted that young men who might be interested in early childhood teaching simply don't even know the job exists.

1.6 DISCUSSION

There are, of course, many reasons to include men in the lives of young children. Foremost of these is the need for young boys and girls to develop positive relationships with men, and to develop positive views of maleness and masculinity (Cunningham and Dorsey, 2004; Mukuna, 2008). The overall positive impact of father involvement in the healthy development of young children has been well documented (MacDonald and Parke, 1984; Lamb, Pleck, and Levine, 1985; Gadsden and Ray, 2002; Mukuna, 2008). One way to increase the involvement of men in the lives of their children is to include more fathers, other male relatives, boyfriends, etc., into the early childhood education program (Fagan, 1996). And the best way to attract these men is to make them feel welcome.

Research shows that fathers are more likely to become involved with their children when opportunities to do so are provided for them (Cohen, 1993). As Kay Sanders suggests, "If we truly want to include men in the early childhood culture, we must create supports within the early childhood profession that allow male teachers to build a sense of belonging" (2002: 46). Paul Sargent (2002:30) adds, "Rather than confining our efforts to changing men, it is apparent that our profession must make some significant changes to the culture of teaching to recruit men and help them enter and remain in the field".

This requires a radical change of the culture itself, and it is unethical to attempt to attract men to our field until we make these changes. However, regardless of whether we really want men involved in caring for young children, we cannot ignore the importance of including fathers and other significant men in our programs. The research on the positive impact of father involvement on children's success is clear and definitive (Gadsden and Ray, 2002). Further, research also suggests that when mothers believe men are capable of nurturing and their involvement is valued, fathers devote more time to being with their infants and young children (Beitel and Parke, 1998).

1.7 CONCLUSION

The early childhood years are critical for cognitive, social and emotional develop. Early childhood education that meets the distinct needs of girls and boys can positively affect their performance in primary school and their self esteem. It is a building block for life. However, millions of girls and boys still do not have access and quality. The everyday reality of girls differs from that of boys. This must be carefully assessed in order to create both the access and quality that is each girl's and each boy's right. All education stakeholders have a key role to take social and gender discrimination out of early childhood education and replace it with empowerment. It emerged from the study that the majority of ECD trainees were female. From the information gathered from interviews questionnaires the following conclusions were made:

- The ECD course at Bulawayo is dominated by females (86%).

- Societal attitudes towards ECD male teachers are at best described as hostile. Male ECD educators are viewed as perverted members of the community.
- 70 % of the respondents noted that they were uncomfortable leaving their young girl children or relatives in the hands of male educators .
- The trainees respondents noted that males would take up jobs to be educators in ECD as a last resort or were interested in administrative duties. Therefore gender is socially constructed and has dictated feminization and gender imbalance in ECD in Zimbabwe.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Building strong foundations for gender equality in early childhood training offers lifelong benefits for learners, their families and communities. The interventions needed at different levels are summarized using Bronfenbrenner's conception of the child's social environment whose focus is on, policy context, community support, ECD centres and families.

- Conduct public awareness campaigns to promote gender equality in the early years
- Focus on equality and empowerment. Implement social policy that goes beyond gender parity in education to focus on gender equality.
- Advancing gender equality includes helping the disadvantaged sex, which is often, but not always girls.
- Increase respect and appreciation for early childhood educators. Community recognition and appreciation is important to sustain the good work of early childhood educators and to raise status of this segment of the education profession. Effort is also needed to build community acceptance of male early childhood educators.
- Train early childhood educators to be gender sensitive. Include gender training in initial and in-service teacher training.
- Encourage male early childhood educators. There are few male early childhood educators. Increasing male educators in early childhood will benefit boy learners from the male role models.
- Some prospective ECD teachers cross the floor under pressure from traditional societal attitudes. There should be mechanisms in place to counsel such students. Pre-counselling can for arm such students to stand the anticipated heat.
- More outreach programmes are required to educate society on the ECD course.

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