

Threats to Building a Gender-Balanced Teaching Workforce: Insights from Prospective Male Students on Considering the Teacher Training Course in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative study explored the views of prospective male students on considering teacher training and joining the teaching profession in the study area. A group of ten male participants was chosen through purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. All the participants had five Ordinary Level passes including English Language, Mathematics and Science. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was done to the collected data after administering a questionnaire with qualitative questions and unstructured interviews. Findings from the study reveal that the teaching profession has lost its glitter and is no longer regarded as a noble profession owing to high learner-teacher ratios and insurmountable workloads. The respondents surveyed also bemoaned poor remuneration which leads to teacher incapacitation in meeting survival and work needs. This had a ripple effect on low morale and loss of dignity which often end in male teachers considering abandoning the profession for greener pastures. The study recommends that the employer should improve the working conditions for the male teachers so as to keep the profession attractive for the new entrants. The schools are encouraged to adopt the system of income generating projects to assist these struggling teachers in order to attract more teacher trainees in future.

Key Words: gender-balanced teaching workforce, prospective male student teachers, teacher training course, Manicaland.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is one of the most important professions in the world and many people used to choose teaching as a profession. It is also noted that teaching has a legacy as an occupation that has been viewed as a career pathway for women. Buchmann, DiPrete and McDaniel (2008:320) note that while educational inequalities have traditionally been against women, this assessment is no longer true in industrialised countries where ‘...women have come to far outnumber men among new college graduates’. In the UAE, Abu Dhabi Education Council in year 2022 had 1,485 Emirati school staff last year but only 6.8 per cent of them were male, and Federal National Council statistics reveal a similar situation elsewhere. Dr Natasha Ridge, executive director of the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, said the lack of male teachers meant that young male pupils had no role models, adding that when a profession becomes feminised, salaries can dip. Of 28,078 teachers working for the Ministry of Education in 2013-2014, only

per cent, or 1,654, of them were Emirati men. In Germany the proportion of male elementary school teachers is 4%, in Finland it is 10% and in the United States it is 2% (Mashiya 2014). According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), fewer than 3 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers are men—and this figure has not changed substantially in recent decades (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995). In Africa, a similar trend is reported. According to Nyoni and Nyoni (2012) African societies have reservations on men who teach young children. In Tanzania, for example, teaching at primary schools is perceived as a low-status job meant for female teachers (Sayed & McDonald 2017). A study conducted in Kenya found that men are still under-represented especially in Early Childhood Development Education because the society is uneasy and suspicious about men who choose to work with young children (Mukana & Mutsoso 2011). Uneasy and suspicious here suggests that these men who choose to teach young children may have sinister motives like molesting young children or kill them for rituals.

The need for training male educators is informed by a desire to offer young children a more multifaceted experience of gender throughout their care and education. When young children do not have relationships with male teachers and caregivers, traditional gender stereotypes are reinforced, particularly as they relate to children's understanding of who is responsible for their growth and learning (Aina & Petronella 2011; Brownhill & Oates 2016). When young children do not experience a comparable range of models of masculinity, their view of what it means to be a boy or a man may be incomplete (Giese 2018). The harms caused by a culture of toxic masculinity are increasingly visible (Clemens 2018; Giese 2018), and the effort to create a more gender-balanced teaching workforce seems more important all the time. As we build the teaching profession, we seek to offer all young children a healthy and supported environment in which to grow, learn, and become themselves.

In keeping with challenges faced by male teachers; Drudy, Martin, Woods, and O'Flynn (2005) note multiple sociological factors discouraging males from entering a career in teaching, particularly in the primary grades. These factors include an overall devaluation of the teaching profession, a perceived inadequacy of professional standing, and apparent lack of professional control for teachers. These authors found that males are discouraged by a lack of control, the bureaucratic nature of education, and by the dearth of professional socialization due to the physical separation from peers that teaching typically entails. Koch and Farquhar (2015) argue that, although there is no systematic attempt being made to prevent men from attaining the same success as women in the teaching workplace, in practice, there are glass doors, which are not seen until they are walked into. Educators across the country continue to face challenges in teaching due to the economic and cultural practices which stereotyped teaching as a female arena or domain, social responsibilities and emotional impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Manicaland province of Zimbabwe, prospective male teacher trainees are shunning the teaching profession as seen in dwindling male enrolment figures in college statistics. Reasons for such a trend are not known. No current studies known to the researchers have been able to unravel the dynamics which present such an unfortunate development in Zimbabwe. Qualified teachers in Zimbabwe take long to be engaged into the teaching profession and continue to loaf around the streets for years. It might be a result of a host of other technical, interactional, supportive, and attitudinal challenges which may keep males away from the teaching profession thus, the present study will assess and give insights on the perspectives of prospective male students on considering the teaching profession.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the views of male prospective students on considering taking teaching as a profession?
2. How do prospective male students view the teaching coursework programme?

3. Why is the teaching profession failing to attract many male applicants in teacher's college?

METHODS

The study was located in the qualitative research paradigm. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand and explain participant meaning (Morrow & Smith, 2000). More specifically, Creswell (2012) defines qualitative research as, ".....an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem." The paper is guided by the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) which stipulates that career path to be followed is influenced by gender. The theory predicts that women will generally act more collectively and less instrumentally than men in the same context. Of particular interest are Early Childhood Development teachers who are in most cases female teachers as they are considered more caring than males. However, the males can learn roles which are believed to be reserved for women. Career choices is also influenced by economic status of the country. This is also supported by Maslow theory which postulates that needs fulfilment is the driving force behind one's choice of employment.

In order to gather data from this phenomenological study, the use of IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) was done by means of a questionnaire with qualitative questions (Creswell, 2012), with the aim of producing rich and meaningful data about a small number of people (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2006). IPA (Smith, 1996) focuses on exploring how participants make sense of their personal and social world. Semi structured in-depth interviews were also conducted. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This phenomenological study explored personal experiences of Zimbabwean male school leavers with regard to enrolling for teaching course by getting close to the participants' personal world through a process of interpretative activity. This allows the researchers to examine how participants perceive the teaching profession.

Sample and sampling strategy

In an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach, in which the study is predicated, there is use of small samples and the researchers purposively sampled ten male participants as research subjects. However, the researchers were sacrificing breadth for depth (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The few males who were enrolled at the teachers college studied assisted in identifying the research participants whom they had left behind or shunned the teaching profession when they joined the teaching course using linear snowballing strategy.

Data collection

The researchers made use of a questionnaire with qualitative questions and semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants. The form of interviewing used allowed the researchers and participants to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in light of the participants' responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arose during data collection.

Procedure

The researchers made use of the college social media platform to solicit for interested participants. The researchers had a meeting with the participants who would identify other participants made up of prospective male students who do not wish to join the teaching profession in the foreseeable future. This special group of participants were then contacted and the questionnaire and the interview schedule was given to them 2 weeks in advance. The interviews were done after the workshop in a quiet room and lasted

between 20 and 40 minutes for each participant.

Data analysis

The standard procedures for analysing data as outlined in the IPA approach were followed. The researchers read repeatedly the contents of each transcript after data collection. The re-reading was done as to note emerging themes from the initial notes as captured from the questionnaire and the interview schedule. Clustering of themes into a smaller number was also done and so was naming each cluster. This process directed the subsequent analysis of the transcripts for the whole sample which was studied.

Ethical considerations

The purpose of the study was disclosed to ten participants four weeks before interviewing and administering the questionnaire. The investigators availed to the participants the aim of the study which is to explore the views of prospective male students on considering teacher training and joining the teaching profession in the study area (Chetty, 2016) so that they are aware of why the study is being carried; other sufficient and accessible information about the research (They could withdraw from study at any without penalty). This was intended to make participants make informed decisions as to whether to become involved, or not (Singh, 2019; Gray, 2014). The investigators observed some ethical considerations like informed consent, privacy (Protection of participants and their disclosures), respect and anonymity (Where no identifying information will be published) of the subjects (Makore-Rukuni, 2004) and confidentiality (Where participants' disclosures will remain confidential) (Creswell, 2012).

FINDINGS

The findings of the study contain verbatim accounts of the study participants whose identities are protected by means of numbers. The major themes as generated from the collected data include the participants views about the teaching profession; the opportunities in the teaching profession as well as the challenges in the teaching profession. The participants views on attracting new male entrants in the teaching profession

The participants' views about the teaching profession:

The participants studied no longer hold the teaching profession in high regard. The following excerpts illustrate the waning confidence about the once popular mother of all professions in Zimbabwe:

...is no longer regarded as a noble profession by many young men. It is not a good venture for 'real' men.
(Participant 3)

Similarly, another participant expressed frustration with the issue of failing to get absorbed in the teaching service upon completion of training:

...there is no guarantee for immediate employment after completing the teacher's course. There should be an improvement on policy on teacher deployment and remuneration to attract new entrants into the profession. Teachers are being paid peanuts and we have seen more and more teachers quitting.
(Participant 1)

One respondent implored young male people to consider other avenues outside the teaching profession:

...young males coming from school should seriously consider other more rewarding professions.
(Participant 8)

There was this other respondent who believed that males can consider the teaching qualification as a stepping stone for joining other careers:

...males can join teaching presently but should seriously consider it as a stepping stone for other more rewarding careers such as being insurance officials, social services and career development. Teaching is for women. (Participant 2)

This other respondent supported the above idea and added that the teaching qualification helps in further academic advancement:

...it is a good profession which provides the basis for knowledge to mankind. One can acquire other higher qualifications like degrees upon completing a diploma in education course. (Participant 7)

The participants gave their own views on why the teaching profession no longer attracts male teachers.

Participants' views on challenges in the teaching profession:

The participants' views across the sample studied indicated that there were few options for those males considering joining the teaching profession as highlighted in the following excerpts:

...there are insurmountable workloads in the teaching profession. (Participant 3)

There was a problem of failing to meet the basic needs as this respondent added:

....most teachers are complaining of incapacitation. They are failing to meet their daily survival needs because of poor remuneration. (Participant 5)

The teaching profession had a challenge of unattractive remuneration as the following respondent explained:

...owing to poor remuneration which is currently not commensurate with qualifications and experience. The conditions of service are dire, we have seen teachers quitting their profession embarking on agricultural projects and some search for greener pastures, even joining other more rewarding sectors of the government . (Participant 10)

The respondents reiterated the challenge of having to wait longer periods before getting absorbed in the service as emphasised below:

...it will be a difficult choice for a male school leaver who, in most cases, is a breadwinner who would have to wait for longer periods after completing a teacher's course to get employment especially in government schools. (Participant 6)

The respondents bemoaned some challenges in the teaching profession which often keep many males out.

Participants views on attracting more male entrants into the teaching profession:

The participants gave their views on what to improve if the teaching profession should attract new male entrants as indicated below:

...there is need to improve the teachers' status. (Participant 4)

Vibrating in the same frequency, this participant wished that the issue of salaries be addressed especially by government:

...government should prioritise paying teachers well since poor salaries are keeping many male prospective teachers out. (Participant 9)

Not to be outdone, this other participant wished that salaries and working conditions need improvement:

...Good remuneration and proper working conditions is a better strategy to attract more males. (Participant 7)

Echoes of more remuneration in the teaching service rose to a crescendo as this participant emphasised:

...The status of preschools and salaries needs to be improved if men are to be attracted. (Participant 10)

In order to assist financially struggling teachers, this other respondent besought schools to undertake income generating projects:

...school can design income generating projects geared towards supporting incapacitated teachers. (Participant 1)

The participants presented mixed views on how the teaching profession may attract new male entrants although the issue of remuneration played centre stage.

DISCUSSION

The central focus of this study was the desire to understand why prospective male teachers in Manicaland province are shunning the teaching profession. The perceived feminization of the teaching profession in the area studied is a result of the fact that recently, teaching has become a less-respected profession, and that social status, combined with historically low salaries and economic opportunities for teachers, contributes to this problem. From the literature, this view is also shared by Sayed and McDonald (2017) who identify teaching as a low-status job meant for female teachers. On another note, the precipitous decline in the number of male teachers in education has been noted in both research and literature (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011). In the Zimbabwean context, there is dearth of literature on why males are snubbing the teaching profession, hence the study is ground-breaking.

Results show that males shy away from teaching due to low remuneration and that males are uncomfortable joining the profession since they might have responsibilities in some cases. Many participants in our research cited inadequate wages and benefits as an explanation for why there are so few men in the field. Less males taking the teaching job in these findings are supported by Drudy (2008). This challenge was also identified by Cushman (2008) and Skelton (2009) as cited in McGrath & Sinclair (2013:2) when they state that the perceived need for more male primary school teachers has emerged as an international issue with research and media reporting proportional and absolute decline in the number of male primary school teachers in Australia, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Finland, Canada and the USA. However, the low status of the profession and levels of compensation are endemic to the field and a problem for male and female educators alike as shared by Whitebook, McLean and Austin (2016). There were some participants who reported lack of support at home, a perception of poor job opportunities, and upon completing training they are not readily absorbed into teaching service and end up in the informal sector-a disconnection with their professional training.

The prospective male teachers surveyed expressed reservations in joining the teaching profession. Even those prospective teachers who wish to pursue careers in teacher education programs are charged with understanding the process of all pre-service teachers. Failing to understand the needs of an underrepresented

population in the teaching force does the teaching profession and the children that profession serves a great injustice. This understanding should take several forms. There might also be a host of other inappropriate societal pressures that conspire to discourage males from the teaching profession which future researchers may investigate.

CONCLUSION

The study unearthed the challenges which keep male prospective teachers from joining the teaching profession. It is appropriate for teacher educators to become fully responsive to the challenges facing male teachers. Because of their current scarcity in the field, male educators may require intentional supports that address the particular circumstances and challenges they face. Although teaching is also one of the lowest paid professions relative to the amount of education and training required for the position; low pay is one of the major reasons why individuals are avoiding or leaving teaching, along with insufficient funding for education overall and lack of continued professional development. This awareness comes through both college programmes and placement issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations:

- New hands on programs such as carpentry, agriculture are needed in teacher education designed to increase the number of male teachers who may need income generating projects.
- Teachers colleges must become considerably more aware of the challenges facing male teachers.
- Recruitment programmes in teacher training should focus on gender balance and attractive remuneration within the education sector
- Resuscitation of vocational training loan in teachers college so that student teachers can help themselves and their families

Research gap

There is need for continued study in this area to provide much-needed understanding and direction. Such research should focus on models to determine the effectiveness of recruitment efforts of potential male teachers. Additional studies should focus on the educational system, societal issues, and examples of successful programs producing male teachers. Examples of successful teacher education programs along with case studies and other research on successful male teachers and the schools and education systems that employ them will also provide models appropriate for training and recruiting male teachers in similar contexts.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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All the authors listed above contributed immensely in the production of the manuscript through literature review and guiding the research process, research data collection, analysis and discussion. All the authors had a chance to proofread the entire manuscript. The researchers acknowledge the work done by research participants (prospective male teachers) during data collection.

Place and date of previous oral presentation

The oral paper presentation was carried out at Marymount Teachers College Hall on Wednesday 30

November 2022 at 1030 hours. All the authors were there and the corresponding author presented. The authors assisted in responding to questions from the audience who included students from the last cohort and some lecturers from administration and student affairs.

Statement on the availability of data

Data is available and can be accessed from the corresponding author upon request.

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