

Male Teachers in the Early Grade Centres: Views of the Public in the Northern Part of Ghana

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Abstract

The workforce in early grade centres is predominantly female, with women significantly outnumbering men in this field. Globally, there are efforts to enhance male participation in early grade teaching to bridge the gender gap. However, a stigma persists regarding men working with young children. This study investigates the views of the public about male teachers in early grade centres across Northern Ghana. Utilizing an interpretative qualitative research design, 60 participants (30 parents and 30 teachers) across the various regions of Northern Ghana were engaged by the researcher to understand their views about male teachers in early grade educational centres. A semi-structured interview format facilitated one-on-one discussions, with data analyzed through content analysis. Results indicated that sociocultural misconceptions contribute to the attrition of male teachers in early grade education. Factors such as stigmatization, suspicion, and bias reinforce gender stereotypes against men in these roles, leading to a strong preference for female educators. Nevertheless, a minority of participants acknowledged the importance of male teachers for achieving gender balance and serving as role modeling. The findings highlight the urgent need for increased awareness regarding the significant role of male teachers in fostering both the academic and social development of children in early education, along with efforts to boost the presence of male teachers in this sector.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Gender Disparities, Male Teachers, Early grade education, Early grade centres, Basic School, Teaching

Introduction

Gender disparities have long been evident in early grade centres, with women dominating the workforce (Sullivan et al., 2020). Research indicates a growing feminization of the teaching profession, particularly at foundational levels, resulting in a marked decline in male teachers (Katie Wagner Roberts, 2021). Reports indicate a rising attrition rate among male educators (Sahin et al., 2018), with women holding a disproportionate share of early grade education positions globally (Brody, 2015; Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017). Employment statistics reveal that in many African nations, male representation in early grade educational centers is alarmingly low, typically ranging from 1-3%, with some exceptions like Norway, Denmark, and Turkey, where the figures exceed 5% (Peeters et al., 2015). Male teachers constitute less than three percent of all educators in early grade settings (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2017), in

contrast to their 20.7% share in basic education and 41.5% in senior high school, underscoring lower male participation in early education (BLS, 2017). Evidence suggests a significant underrepresentation of men in early grade teaching roles (Mistry & Sood, 2015; Tennhof et al., 2015).

Amosun et al. (2021) noted that female early grade educators outnumber their male counterparts, as highlighted by 2016 statistics. Globally, women are over-represented in the teaching force and their numbers are rising from 91%, 93%, 94%, 94%, 94% since 2000 to 2020 and beyond (UNESCO, 2023). In Ghana, a similar trend is observed. (*Ghana Statistical Service, GSS (2016) 2015 Labor Force Report. Ghana Statistical Service, Accra. - References - Scientific Research Publishing, 2016*) reports that 89% of early grade teachers in Ghana are female, while only 11% are male. This disparity may be attributed to traditional gender roles, where women are perceived as primary caregivers (Garcia, 2014). In many African cultures, gender roles are distinctly polarized, with women primarily associated with domestic responsibilities and childcare (Ossai et al., 2021). Societal norms often dictate that certain jobs are categorized as masculine or feminine (Williams, 2020), with Charles and Grusky (2004) asserting that modern occupational gender segregation stems from essentialist beliefs about the differing abilities and interests of men and women. In early grade education, caregiving is often viewed as an inherently feminine endeavor linked to motherhood (Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021). This perception contributes to significant vertical gender segregation, as men typically avoid low-status, low-paying positions. Conversely, women in such roles may prioritize job security and flexibility over financial compensation, a sentiment not commonly shared by men. Early grade education may offer men pathways to higher administrative roles due to a greater male presence in management (Warin, 2018). The well-being and workplace dynamics of gender minorities can be influenced by personal beliefs and societal mechanisms (Moosa & Bhana, 2017). The culture surrounding male-dominated fields often shapes attitudes and expectations that hinder women's participation.

Literature Review

Research has identified several challenges faced by male teachers in basic education settings. Sims & Fletcher-Wood, (2021) noted numerous obstacles for male early grade educators. According to Ho and Lam (2013), parents' views on teaching and caregiving differ significantly. Moosa & Bhana, (2020) found that parents often view male teachers with suspicion and fear, perceiving them as potential predators or unfit for working with young children. Unlike female educators, male teachers face a "no-touch" rule that limits physical contact with students due to concerns over false accusations (Cruickshank, 2019; Cushman, 2005). This discrepancy perpetuates a gender equity gap, favoring women and imposing different standards on male teachers. Concerns about gender identity and sexual orientation also create apprehension among parents and employers regarding male early grade educators (Bernard et al., 2000). Fear of allegations of child molestation is cited as a significant barrier to male participation in early grade teaching (Roberts, 2021). Some individuals harbor beliefs that male educators may possess pedophilic tendencies, further deterring men from pursuing this career (Moosa & Deevia Bhana, 2020; Saigol & Danish, 2016; Hedlin et al., 2018). Consequently, male teachers often grapple with bias from parents, female colleagues, and administrators. These stereotypes complicate fair evaluations of male educators' performance (Son Hing et al., 2023).

Moreover, the low status and compensation associated with teaching pose substantial barriers for men in basic education. Evans et al., (2018) highlighted that teachers receive inadequate and irregular pay, often earning less than professionals in other fields. Teacher salaries reflect significant disparities compared to

other occupations (Nwakpa, 2014), leading to dissuasion among men from entering the teaching profession, as many are expected to fulfill the role of family breadwinners (Azubuike, 2006). The societal perception of teaching further exacerbates this situation, as male early grade teachers are often viewed as lacking masculinity (Jones, 2007; Cruickshank et al., 2021). In their professional environments, men frequently adopt multiple masculine identities, including disciplinarians, custodians, or father figures.

International organizations have advocated for greater male involvement in early grade education due to concerns about the long-term implications of gender imbalance. Research indicates that increasing the number of male teachers contributes to a more equitable workforce and helps dismantle gender barriers (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015). Bernard et al. (2000) found that male teachers significantly contribute to children's development, while Ahmed et al. (2018) reported that female educators recognize the value of male teachers as role models for boys. Previous studies have also shown that male teachers are viewed favorably as role models (Davolyte et al., 2024; Moreau & Brownhill, 2017; Abet et al., 2024). Frigerio et al., (2022) emphasized the necessity for a balance in teaching personality traits and gender roles, advocating for diverse interactions with both male and female educators to challenge stereotypes. Halper et al., (2019) suggested that for children to break the caregiver stereotype associated with women, they should be exposed to both genders in caregiving roles. Male early grade teachers can provide diverse perspectives and choices for children due to their representation of non-traditional masculinity (Frigerio et al., 2022).

The involvement of male educators is crucial for children's development (Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021; Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021; Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021). With the increasing prevalence of single-parent and blended families, the need for male role models, particularly for boys, has become a topic of discussion (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Male teachers play a vital role in offering positive representations of masculinity to young students (McDowell, 2023; Liang, 2024; Sullivan et al., 2020; Mahudi Mofokeng, 2024; SKELTON, 2003). Young children often have limited interactions with men, primarily encountering negative male portrayals in media (Sullivan et al., 2020). It is essential for boys to witness nurturing male figures, as these influences shape their identity.

Methodology

Design

The researchers employed a qualitative research methodology (Neubauer et al., 2019) aimed at exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Hennink et al., 2011). The interpretative research design focuses on gaining insights into individuals' understanding of significant phenomena in their particular contexts (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods are recommended for delving into the depth and complexity of such phenomena (Guest et al., 2017). Data regarding parents' and teachers' perceptions of male educators was collected in schools to gain a nuanced understanding of the factors contributing to the decline in male teachers within early grade education.

Participants and Sampling

The researchers employed a convenience sampling approach, selecting 60 participants (30 parents and 30 teachers) from 30 early grade centers across the three Northern Regions in Ghana (Upper East, Upper West and Northern). Convenience sampling involves gathering participants from readily accessible locations without strict inclusion criteria (Golzar et al., 2022).

Data Generation Methods

Four open-ended questions were posed to both parents and teachers during data collection. Participants were asked preliminary questions to gauge their perspectives, including:

1. Have you encountered a male teacher in early grade classrooms? If yes, please share your experience (for teachers and parents)?
2. Would you prefer a male or female teacher for your child in an early grade class? If yes, why? (for teachers and parents)?
3. How do you feel about working with a male teacher (for teachers only)?
4. How would you feel if your child was taught by a male teacher during their early years (for parents only)?

Follow-up questions were posed to clarify and deepen the interviewer's understanding of the participants' responses.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Thematic content analysis was utilized to analyze the data. Inductive coding helped identify barriers faced by male teachers in early grade education. The researchers clustered codes and identified themes by reflecting on patterns and underlying meanings within the data. The analysis adhered to the six phases of thematic data analysis as outlined by Nowell et al. (2017) to ensure trustworthiness:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Identifying themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

By following these phases, the researchers systematically reviewed the data set, generating codes and themes to produce the final report.

Ethical Considerations

The Department of Early Childhood Education, Winneba granted ethical approval for this study. Participants were provided with a consent form detailing the study's purpose and methodology, participants were assured of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Findings

The study presents three themes regarding perceptions of male teachers in early grade education centres throughout the three Northern Regions of Ghana. Participants generally viewed male teachers as failures within society, and many expressed that having male educators in early grade centres was unconventional. However, a small number of participants acknowledged the importance of male teachers for achieving gender balance and effective role modeling.

Sociocultural Misconceptions Leading to Male Teacher Attrition

Most participants recognized a significant shortage of male teachers in early grade education, yet perceived it as "abnormal" for men to take on these roles. Some parents suggested that early grade teaching

is better suited for women who typically do not bear substantial family responsibilities and are less concerned about social status.

"Since the salary of teachers is low, most men are breadwinners in their families, and ... the salary of teachers is not enough, they (teachers) opt for other well-paying jobs. It is almost normal not to find a male teacher in early grade schools in this city" [P6].

Cultural and societal factors further perpetuate the attrition of male teachers in early grade settings. Participants articulated that society generally holds men in these roles in low esteem.

"There is a very low respect for males who teach in early grade schools" [P3].

Data indicated that societal perceptions label men who teach in early grade centers as failures, undermining their standing within the community. As Participant 9 noted,

"It is also abnormal for a man to choose early grade teaching as a career in the present economic situation. More so, society perceives male early grade teachers as failures and never-do-wells. I feel the job is for women. Men should pursue careers in more lucrative fields" [P6].

Beyond societal disdain for male educators, many participants believed that early grade teaching is inherently more suited for women, who are perceived as naturally more capable of nurturing children.

"I prefer my fellow women in early grades because they are more suitable for the job. They are well-composed and endowed with the skills for taking care of children. Men cannot take the pains of nurturing children" [P10].

A teacher-participant echoed this sentiment,

"Most male teachers have difficulty managing disruptive children; they tend to be strict and impatient" [T3].

Such views imply a belief that men lack the necessary attributes for early grade teaching, a notion supported by another teacher, who stated,

"Men are too serious for this job. They lack team spirit and tend to behave in ways that suggest impatience with children" [T8].

Moreover, many parents expressed discomfort with their children being taught by male educators.

"It is no longer news that child sexual abuse is common in society today; I will not enroll my child in a class taught by a male. For me, males lack the qualities required for the job" [P1].

Participant 1 articulated strong distrust towards male teachers, associating them with prevalent child abuse cases. Participants generally perceived young children as vulnerable to potential abuse from male educators, who are often viewed as predators. A range of factors contributing to negative stereotypes against male early grade educators was identified, including fears of sexual abuse and stigmatization.

"I prefer female teachers to male teachers for so many reasons. I detest male teachers who come close to young children because most of them are sexual predators" [P10].

Participant 5 also expressed concerns regarding the prevalence of sexual abuse by adult males against minors, stating, "it is so disturbing. Pedophiles are everywhere."

Another parent reflected on the necessity of female teachers in early grade settings due to,

"The prevalent cases of child sexual abuse. Men are more likely to abuse children sexually than women. It scares many of us from enrolling kids in classrooms where men teach" [P2].

Such beliefs and suspicions have led to stigmatization of men entering early grade education, deterring potential candidates who wish to teach in these settings.

Overriding Preference for Female Teachers in Early Grades

A significant majority of participants expressed a strong preference for female teachers in early grade classrooms, voicing their aversion to male educators. Generally, participants believed that women possess inherent qualities such as patience, compassion, and nurturing, which make them more suitable for early education roles. Supporting quotes include:

"I would prefer a female teacher to teach my child in early grades because it involves other responsibilities beyond just teaching. Women will do better in taking care of these kids who are naive and young" [P6].

Participant 9 added, *"the job requires empathy and meekness, which most men don't possess."*

Many participants concluded that early grade classrooms are unsuitable for men, asserting that such roles should be reserved for women.

"Early grade classrooms are not meant for males. Teaching at this level should be strictly for females" [T4].

It is clear from the findings that male educators are perceived as lacking the essential qualities required for early grade teaching, leading to the conclusion that they are unsuitable for these responsibilities. These perceptions indicate a form of gatekeeping by parents and teachers, reinforcing the notion that early grade education is "strictly for females." The societal stereotype that childcare is a female responsibility remains a significant barrier to male involvement in early childhood education.

Participant 7 articulated this sentiment: *"The societal prejudice and stigmatization push them away from the job."*

While some participants recognized the positive attributes of male teachers, their contributions were often seen as limited. One participant described male educators as skilled in teaching but lacking in nurturing, stating,

"They excel in teaching but are not typically adept at caring for children. They tend to be impatient and easily frustrated. They possess unique teaching skills and rarely tire" [P7].

Overall, participants' views regarding male teachers in early grade settings are heavily influenced by unfounded sociocultural beliefs, without empirical support. The persistence of gender stereotypes poses a significant barrier to gender inclusivity within early grade education.

Discussion of Findings

Research on perceptions of male teachers in early grade centres in Ghana is limited. This study aimed to explore parents and teachers' perceptions of male teachers across early grade education centres in the three Northern Regions of Ghana. Participants predominantly conveyed negative views towards male teachers in early grade centres. Interviews revealed a significant shortage of male teachers in these centres, with participants characterizing male teachers as unsuccessful, inappropriate, and of low social standing. These perceptions have directly impacted male enrollment in the profession. The identified themes illustrate the prevailing attitudes towards male teachers in early grade education. Similar attitudes have been documented in studies from other countries (Chalmin-Pui et al., 2021).

For example, Douglas (2021) found that male teachers in early grade centres in Turkey faced more gender stereotyping than their female counterparts, highlighting the various challenges they encounter, including biases from parents and the general public. Baris (2013) also noted negative attitudes towards male teachers among female early grade teachers. Ahmad et al., (2017) found that Jordanian mothers and female EGE teachers recognized the diverse experiences provided by both genders in early education. The current study aligns with previous findings indicating that male teachers serve crucial roles in early care settings

(Scholarworks & Williams, 2020; Mathwasa & Sibanda, 2021; Mokhele-Makhalwa, 2023). While bias against male teachers is prevalent in early grade centers globally, the extent of these stereotypes may vary within the Ghanaian context due to unique sociocultural dynamics.

The overwhelming preference for female educators in early grade education aligns with other research indicating that male teachers are often viewed as unsuitable for such roles (Şahin et al., 2018; Dogutas, 2021; Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021; Arrabis & Fabella, 2020). The attrition of male teachers in early grade schools creates a significant gender imbalance in the workforce, posing challenges for men considering careers in this field (Brody, 2015). The low proportion of male caregivers may stem from widespread beliefs regarding their unsuitability (Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017). Conversely, increasing the number of male teachers fosters a more balanced workforce and helps dismantle gender barriers (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015). Young children educated by both male and female teachers are likely to cultivate a more balanced understanding of gender roles and workplace dynamics while avoiding entrenched stereotypes. The study also illuminated barriers associated with suspicion, stigmatization, and bias, which perpetuate gender stereotypes against male teachers in early grade centers. Participants indicated that male teachers are often viewed as potential sexual predators, rendering them unsuitable for early education roles. This aligns with research indicating that male educators are frequently perceived as sexual threats to young children (Sullivan et al., 2020; Dogutas, 2021; Mncanca et al., 2021; Moosa & Bhana, 2020). In early grade education, male caregivers face dual challenges of being feminized while simultaneously being sexualized, leading to accusations of abuse that female caregivers do not face (Mncanca et al., 2021; Ramírez-Perdomo et al., 2024). This is particularly problematic for male teachers who are expected to maintain close contact with the children they teach (Bonnett & Wade, 2022). While this stigma may be pronounced in three Northern Regions of Ghana, existing literature indicates that, Ghana as a whole and the entire globe is not of exception to this issue. The increasing prevalence of child sexual abuse, particularly by men, exacerbates the stigma against male teachers interacting with young children. The findings suggest that stigmatization arising from suspicion constitutes a significant barrier to achieving gender inclusivity within the early childhood education workforce.

Recommendations and Practical Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, administrators, school proprietors, teacher and parents in early grade education. Support systems and programs are necessary for both in-service and pre-service male teachers in early grade centers to boost their confidence in pursuing this profession. Initiatives should focus on sensitizing current early grade educators about the importance of reducing gender stereotypes against males in EGE, which may help mitigate stigmatization. Raising awareness to challenge stereotypes and biases against male teachers is crucial for increasing male enrollment in early grade education. Teachers should also receive training on professional ethics and conduct to prevent allegations of abuse. Parents should be educated to alter their perceptions of male teachers, as not all male educators pose risks. Furthermore, governments should provide incentives to encourage male candidates to enroll in early grade teacher education programs at the tertiary level especially in the Colleges of Education.

Conclusion

This study highlights that parents and female early grade teachers generally harbor negative perceptions of male teachers. While a minority of participants acknowledged the benefits of including male teachers

in early grade education centres, the research revealed significant barriers rooted in sociocultural contexts. The limited number of participants restricts the capacity for broader generalizations. Nevertheless, the findings underscore the necessity for a concerted effort from parents, female early grade teachers, school administrators, employers, and government officials to enhance the enrollment and retention of male teachers in early childhood education.

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