

Level of Male Teacher Representation in Early Childhood Development and Education Centres in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract- Early Childhood Development and Education is the stage at which children acquire cognitive skills, learning habits and pro-social behaviour largely through observation and imitation of their teachers, which makes the composition of the teaching workforce a matter of pedagogical rather than merely administrative interest. That workforce is overwhelmingly female in Kenya as elsewhere, yet the extent of male underrepresentation at sub-county level, and the form it takes, has rarely been measured directly. This paper reports the first objective of a larger study and determines the level of male teacher representation in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya. A comparative research design with a causal-comparative approach was adopted within a mixed methods framework. From a target population of 1,014, a sample of 285 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and semi-structured interviews were conducted with head teachers, Curriculum Support Officers and the Sub-County Programme Officer, supported by observation schedules and document analysis. The teacher response rate was 94.1 percent and the overall response rate 96.1 percent. Male teachers constituted 10.2 percent of the 177 responding teachers, against 89.8 percent female. At centre level the imbalance was sharper still: only 14 of 76 centres, or 18.4 percent, had at least one male teacher, while 62 centres, or 81.6 percent, had none. Interview data identified three features of the pattern: an absolute shortage of male teachers, the concentration of that shortage such that most centres have none at all, and the deployment of many of the few available men into administrative rather than classroom roles. The study concludes that underrepresentation is better described as near-absence, and that its uneven distribution means most learners in the sub-county have no exposure to a male teacher at any point during their early years.

Index Terms- Early Childhood Development and Education, Gender Representation, Male Teachers, Teacher Deployment, Workforce Feminisation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Development and Education forms a critical foundation for learners' academic and social development, since the quality of early learning environments shapes cognitive, emotional and behavioural growth in ways that persist into later schooling [1], [2]. At this stage children acquire basic cognitive skills, learning habits and pro-social behaviours largely through observation and imitation of their teachers, a process accounted for by social learning theory and confirmed by contemporary applications of that theory in early childhood contexts [3], [5]. Evidence on classroom interaction supports the same conclusion from a different direction: higher-quality interactions and instructional support are associated with stronger language, cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes among young children [6], [7].

If learning at this stage proceeds substantially through observation of adults, then the composition of the teaching workforce is a pedagogical variable rather than a matter of staffing administration alone. The range of models available to a child is bounded by the range of adults present in the classroom. This makes the gender composition of the Early Childhood Development and Education workforce a legitimate object of empirical enquiry rather than a question of equity alone.

That workforce is heavily feminised. Internationally, men constitute a very small proportion of early childhood educators, in some contexts under five percent, reflecting a persistent imbalance across national systems [11], [16]. In Kenya, teaching at this level is predominantly undertaken by women, and human resource and social-cultural factors have been shown to influence male underrepresentation, with men substantially outnumbered in most counties [8].

Studies within Kenya have also documented that although some men do train as early childhood professionals, they remain underrepresented in classroom teaching and are often more visible in administrative functions [14]. Gender stereotyping, low remuneration and expectations regarding male earning responsibility have been identified as contributing causes [15].

The literature nevertheless leaves a specific gap. Most work on male participation in early childhood education has concentrated on stereotypes, recruitment barriers and the feminisation of the workforce in general terms [16], [17]. Comparatively little of it establishes, for a defined administrative area, how many male teachers are actually present, how they are distributed across centres, and in what roles they are deployed. Reported national or county averages conceal precisely the information that matters pedagogically, because a proportion of ten percent distributed evenly across centres and the same proportion concentrated in a handful of centres have entirely different consequences for the number of children who encounter a male teacher.

Matete Sub-County provides a suitable setting for such a measurement. It contains a mix of urban and rural settlement and of public and private provision, and centres within it vary in whether male teachers are present at all. This paper reports the first objective of a larger study and determines the level of male teacher representation in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Early Childhood Development and Education is critical to the academic foundation of learners, yet many centres continue to record inconsistent academic performance. Teacher modelling plays a substantial part in shaping learning behaviour and achievement, and teaching at this level in Kenya is predominantly female with very limited involvement of men. In Matete Sub-County the underrepresentation of male teachers exists alongside varied learner attainment, but there is little localised empirical evidence establishing the extent of that underrepresentation or the form it takes.

The absence of such evidence has practical consequences. Decisions on teacher deployment, recruitment targets and gender-inclusive staffing policy require a count, a distribution and a description of roles, not a general statement that men are few. A sub-county may report a workforce proportion that appears low but tolerable while in fact the great majority of its centres have no male teacher at all, in which case the pedagogical consequence is not a reduced availability of male models but their complete absence for most children. Equally, where the few available men are deployed into administrative posts, a headcount will overstate the modelling exposure actually occurring in classrooms.

This study therefore sought to establish, for Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Matete Sub-County, the proportion of teachers who are male, the proportion of centres at which at least one male teacher is present, and the roles in which those teachers are deployed, so that subsequent analysis of modelling and its influence on attainment could rest on an accurate description of the workforce to which learners are actually exposed.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Bandura's social learning theory, which holds that people learn by observing others and that imitation, modelling and reinforcement are central to the learning process [3]. Individuals acquire new behaviours not only through direct experience but by observing others and the consequences that follow their actions. The theory is often described as a bridge between behaviourism and the cognitive approach, since it treats learners as active processors who reason about the relationship between behaviour and consequence. Bandura subsequently extended the account into social cognitive theory, giving greater weight to self-efficacy, self-regulation and the reciprocal relationship between behaviour, environment and personal factors [4].

Applied to the present objective, the theory establishes why a workforce count is a pedagogically meaningful measurement rather than an administrative one. If learners acquire behaviours by observing the actions of teachers and the consequences of those actions, then the set of available models is determined by the set of adults physically present in the classroom. A centre without a male teacher does not offer a reduced

quantity of male modelling; it offers none. The theory therefore predicts that the distribution of male teachers across centres will matter more than their aggregate proportion, and that the roles in which they are deployed will matter in addition, since a teacher in an administrative post is not available for classroom observation in the way the theory requires.

This reasoning determined the design of the present objective. Rather than reporting a single workforce proportion, the study measured representation at three levels: the proportion of teachers who are male, the proportion of centres at which any male teacher is present, and the roles those teachers occupy.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Global Patterns of Representation

Empirical work has consistently shown that male teachers are substantially underrepresented in early childhood settings. The workforce internationally remains heavily dominated by women, with men constituting a very small share of educators in many countries and under five percent in some contexts [11], [12]. European analyses report the same pattern across national systems and attribute it to a combination of occupational status, remuneration and cultural definition of the work [16]. The imbalance has been attributed principally to cultural norms and societal perceptions that treat caregiving and the teaching of young children as women's work, which discourages men from entering the profession and from remaining in it [13].

B. The Kenyan Context

Studies conducted in Kenya have documented the feminisation of the profession and have added an important qualification: although some men do train as early childhood professionals, they remain underrepresented in classroom teaching and are often more visible in administrative functions than in the classroom itself [14]. This distinction matters for the present objective, because it indicates that a headcount of male teachers may overstate the modelling exposure that learners actually receive. Gender stereotyping, low wages and societal expectations regarding male breadwinning have been identified as further contributing factors, with many men opting for occupations perceived to offer greater financial stability and social standing [15].

Recent Kenyan work reports that men comprise less than ten percent of the early childhood teaching workforce in most counties, and identifies both human resource factors, such as recruitment policy and deployment practice, and social-cultural factors, such as societal perception and gender norms, as determinants of the pattern [8]. Work on gender representation in Kakamega County specifically, including Matete Sub-County, reports an overwhelmingly female workforce with male teachers accounting for less than fifteen percent of the total [10]. Narrative work on the experience of male teachers in Kenyan early childhood settings documents the professional and social conditions that accompany these figures [19].

C. The Value of Male Presence

The interest in these figures derives from evidence that male teachers contribute distinct instructional, behavioural and social modelling and thereby support children's holistic development [9]. Where school leadership values gender diversity and supports male teachers through mentorship and professional recognition, those teachers are more likely to model effectively [18]. The pedagogical case for measuring representation accurately therefore rests on evidence that the presence being measured carries developmental consequence.

D. Research Gap

Three gaps emerge from the literature. First, reported figures are typically national or county aggregates, which conceal the distribution across centres that determines how many children are actually exposed to a male teacher. Second, few studies distinguish between men employed within early childhood provision and men deployed in classroom teaching roles, despite Kenyan evidence that the two differ substantially. Third, no known study has established the level of male teacher representation in Matete Sub-County. The present study addresses all three.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study adopted a comparative research design, specifically a causal-comparative or ex post facto approach. Comparative research examines possible cause-and-effect relationships by comparing groups

that already differ on a particular variable, without manipulation of that variable [20]. In this study the naturally occurring difference was the presence or absence of male teachers in a centre. A mixed methods approach was employed throughout, combining quantitative and qualitative collection and analysis to permit triangulation.

B. Study Area

The study was conducted in Matete Sub-County, Kakamega County, in western Kenya. The sub-county contains a mix of urban and rural settlement and of public and private Early Childhood Development and Education centres, with varying levels of male teacher representation. Some centres employ male teachers in instructional roles while many remain staffed entirely by women, which made the setting suitable for comparative analysis.

C. Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all Early Childhood Development and Education stakeholders in the sub-county, totalling 1,014 persons: 214 teachers, 76 head teachers, 713 parents, 2 Curriculum Support Officers, 1 Sub-County Programme Officer, 4 centre sponsors, 2 village administrators, 1 ward administrator and 1 non-governmental organisation representative [22]. Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table [23], giving a sample of 285.

Sampling combined purposive and probability methods. Specialised stakeholders, namely Curriculum Support Officers, the Sub-County Programme Officer, sponsors, the ward and village administrators and the non-governmental organisation representative, were selected purposively on grounds of their specific knowledge and relevance to the objectives, as were head teachers in their capacity as key informants [21]. Teachers and parents were selected by simple random sampling from the teacher list and from school registers respectively [20].

Table 1: Target and Sampled Population

Category	Target (N)	Sample (S)
ECDE Teachers	214	188
Head Teachers	76	76

Category	Target (N)	Sample (S)
Parents	713	10
Curriculum Support Officers	2	2
Sub-County Programme Officer	1	1
Sponsors	4	4
Village Administrators	2	2
Ward Administrator	1	1
NGO Representative	1	1
Total	1,014	285

D. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires collected standardised quantitative data from teachers, an instrument appropriate for larger samples because it is economical and secures uniformity of response [22]. The questionnaire contained closed and open items covering demographic information, modelling practice, stakeholder perceptions and challenges, with closed items presented on a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interview guides collected qualitative data from head teachers, Curriculum Support Officers and the Sub-County Programme Officer [20]. Observation schedules recorded classroom interaction and modelling behaviour directly, on the principle that observation captures actual rather than reported behaviour [21]. Document analysis checklists were used to review academic records and attendance registers.

E. Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert review by specialists in educational research and early childhood education, and expert feedback was incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance and comprehensiveness of items. A pilot study involving 30 respondents, comprising 10 teachers, 10 head teachers and 10 parents drawn from centres in a

neighbouring sub-county outside the main sample, was used to identify ambiguous items, which were revised before the main collection. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above treated as acceptable [24]. The analysis yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Triangulation across sources and methods was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

F. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 27.0. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents and to determine the level of male teacher representation [24]. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, following familiarisation, open coding, theme development, review and refinement, and interpretation against the objectives and the theoretical framework [25]. Trustworthiness was supported through member checking, triangulation and peer debriefing.

G. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explanation of the purpose, procedures and voluntary nature of participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by the use of codes in place of names. The study was conducted so as to avoid psychological or physical discomfort. Approval was obtained from the University Graduate School, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation and the Kakamega County Education Office before data collection began.

VI. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Response Rate

Of 188 questionnaires distributed to teachers, 177 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 94.1 percent. All other respondent categories returned complete responses, producing an overall rate of 96.1 percent. A response rate of seventy percent or above is regarded as very good for analysis [26], so the rates achieved were more than sufficient.

Table 2: Response Rate

Category	Sampled	Returned (%)
ECDE Teachers	188	177 (94.1)
Head Teachers	76	76 (100)
Parents	10	10 (100)
Curriculum Support Officers	2	2 (100)
Sub-County Programme Officer	1	1 (100)
Sponsors	4	4 (100)
Village Administrators	2	2 (100)
Ward Administrator	1	1 (100)
NGO Representative	1	1 (100)
Total	285	274 (96.1)

B. Characteristics of Responding Teachers

Of the 177 responding teachers, 18 were male, representing 10.2 percent, and 159 were female, representing 89.8 percent. The largest age group was 30 to 39 years at 38.4 percent, followed by 40 to 49 years at 27.7 percent and 20 to 29 years at 23.7 percent, with only 10.2 percent aged 50 or above. The most common qualification was a Diploma in Early Childhood Development and Education, held by 42.9 percent, followed by a certificate at 27.7 percent and a bachelor's degree at 23.7 percent, with 5.6 percent holding a postgraduate qualification. On experience, 34.5 percent had served between five and ten years, 26.6 percent between eleven and fifteen, 21.5 percent fewer than five and 17.5 percent more than fifteen. Provision was almost entirely public, at 98.3 percent, against 1.7 percent private and no faith-based centres.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Responding Teachers (n = 177)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Male	18	10.2
Female	159	89.8
Aged 20–29 years	42	23.7
Aged 30–39 years	68	38.4
Aged 40–49 years	49	27.7
Aged 50 years and above	18	10.2
Certificate in ECDE	49	27.7
Diploma in ECDE	76	42.9
Bachelor's Degree	42	23.7
Postgraduate Degree	10	5.6
Under 5 years experience	38	21.5
5–10 years experience	61	34.5
11–15 years experience	47	26.6
Over 15 years experience	31	17.5
Public centre	174	98.3
Private centre	3	1.7

C. Level of Male Teacher Representation

Male teachers constituted 10.2 percent of responding teachers against 89.8 percent female. The centre-level distribution proved sharper than the workforce proportion alone would suggest. Only 14 of the 76 Early Childhood Development and Education centres in the sub-county, representing 18.4 percent, had at

least one male teacher on the staff. The remaining 62 centres, representing 81.6 percent, had none.

Table 4: Level of Male Teacher Representation

Item	Frequency	Percent
Male teachers among respondents	18	10.2
Female teachers among respondents	159	89.8
Centres with at least one male teacher	14 of 76	18.4
Centres with no male teacher	62 of 76	81.6

The two measurements describe different things and the distinction is material. A workforce proportion of roughly one in ten might suggest that a learner has some prospect of encountering a male teacher. The centre-level figure shows otherwise: in four centres out of five there is no male teacher present at any point, so for the learners attending them the prospect is nil rather than reduced.

D. Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interview data produced a first theme of severe underrepresentation, resolving into three sub-themes that together describe the shape of the shortage.

The first sub-theme concerned the absolute number of male teachers. All head teachers interviewed confirmed severe underrepresentation. One head teacher at a public centre reported:

“In our centre, we have only one male teacher among twelve teachers. It has been difficult to attract men to teach in ECDE because many parents and community members still believe that taking care of young children is a woman's job.”

A Curriculum Support Officer set out the sub-county position:

“Across the sub-county, we have only 18 male teachers out of 214 ECDE teachers. This is a very small number. Most of these male teachers are in urban centres; rural centres have none. The

situation is alarming and requires urgent intervention.”

The second sub-theme concerned the concentration of the shortage. Most head teachers reported that their centres had no male teacher, and several described sustained failure to recruit. One explained:

“We have not had a male teacher in this centre for the last five years. We have tried to recruit but the few men who qualify for ECDE prefer to go to other professions that pay better and are more respected in the community.”

The third sub-theme concerned deployment. Several respondents observed that the few male teachers present in early childhood provision were frequently assigned administrative rather than teaching duties. One head teacher noted:

“The male teachers we have are often given administrative duties. They become head teachers or deputies. Rarely do you find a male teacher in the classroom teaching young children. This limits their modelling influence on learners.”

The three sub-themes are cumulative rather than separate. The men are few; they are unevenly distributed so that most centres have none; and a proportion of those who are present are deployed away from the classroom. Each stage reduces the modelling exposure available to learners below what the preceding figure implies.

E. Summary of Findings

Male teachers constituted 10.2 percent of responding teachers. At centre level, 18.4 percent of centres had at least one male teacher and 81.6 percent had none. The interview evidence corroborated these figures and added that the shortage is geographically uneven, with male teachers concentrated in urban centres, and that deployment into administrative roles further reduces classroom presence.

VII. DISCUSSION

The finding that male teachers constitute approximately one in ten of the workforce places Matete Sub-County within the range reported elsewhere in Kenya, where men have been found to comprise less than ten percent of the early childhood

teaching workforce in most counties [8], and below the figure of under fifteen percent reported for Kakamega County as a whole [10]. It is consistent with the international pattern of a heavily feminised workforce [11], [16] and sits above the under-five-percent figure reported for some national contexts [12]. The sub-county is therefore not anomalous; it exhibits, at measurable scale, a pattern documented across systems.

The more consequential finding is the centre-level distribution. That 81.6 percent of centres have no male teacher at all is not derivable from the workforce proportion, and it changes the interpretation substantially. Social learning theory holds that behaviours are acquired through observation of models physically available to the learner [3], [4]. On that account the relevant quantity is not the aggregate proportion of male teachers in the sub-county but the probability that a given child encounters one, and the present findings show that probability to be low for the great majority of learners. Underrepresentation is therefore a misleadingly gentle description of what was observed; near-total absence is nearer the case for four centres in five.

The deployment finding compounds this. The observation that the few male teachers present are frequently assigned administrative duties confirms earlier Kenyan evidence that men in early childhood provision are more visible in administrative functions than in classroom teaching [14]. The implication for the theoretical framework is direct: a head teacher or deputy is on the establishment but is not available for the sustained daily observation through which modelling operates. A headcount of male teachers consequently overstates the modelling exposure occurring in classrooms, and the true figure lies somewhere below the 10.2 percent recorded.

The explanations offered by respondents align with the causes identified in the literature. The reference to community belief that the care of young children is women's work reproduces the cultural mechanism widely documented as the principal deterrent to male entry and retention [13]. The reference to men preferring occupations that pay better and carry higher standing corresponds to the socioeconomic account of recruitment difficulty [15], and is consistent with European analyses attributing the imbalance to

occupational status and remuneration as much as to gender norms alone [16]. The observation that male teachers are concentrated in urban centres suggests a further distributional dimension not captured by county-level reporting, and one that places rural learners at a particular disadvantage.

Taken together, the findings indicate that the value attributed to male modelling in the literature [9], [18] is not being realised in this setting, not because the modelling is ineffective but because the models are largely absent from the classrooms where they would operate. This establishes the necessary baseline for the subsequent objectives of the wider study, which examine the influence of male teacher modelling where it does occur.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study establishes that male teacher representation in Early Childhood Development and Education centres in Matete Sub-County is extremely low. Male teachers constituted 10.2 percent of responding teachers, and at centre level only 18.4 percent of centres had at least one male teacher while 81.6 percent had none.

The distributional finding is the substantive contribution. Aggregate workforce proportions conceal the fact that the shortage is concentrated rather than spread, so that most learners in the sub-county pass through early childhood education without encountering a male teacher at any point. The qualitative evidence adds two further qualifications: male teachers are concentrated in urban centres, leaving rural provision more severely affected, and a proportion of the men who are employed are deployed into administrative rather than teaching roles, which reduces classroom modelling exposure below what the workforce figure implies.

The pattern reflects entrenched cultural norms defining the care and teaching of young children as women's work, together with remuneration and status considerations that direct qualified men towards other occupations. The study concludes that underrepresentation at this scale limits learners' exposure to male models to a degree with probable consequences for their academic and social development, and that policy responses framed in terms of aggregate proportions will not address a

shortage whose principal feature is its uneven distribution.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should implement targeted recruitment measures to attract men into early childhood teaching, including scholarship and bursary provision for male candidates entering training, competitive remuneration and defined pathways for career progression.

Second, deployment policy should distinguish between employment and classroom presence. Setting representation targets in aggregate terms will not remedy a shortage concentrated in four centres out of five, and targets should therefore be expressed as the proportion of centres at which at least one male teacher is present in a teaching role.

Third, deployment should give explicit attention to rural centres, where the qualitative evidence indicates that male teachers are effectively absent, so that the existing shortage is not further concentrated in the centres least able to attract staff.

Fourth, the Ministry of Education, working with community leaders, should conduct awareness activity addressing the cultural perceptions that deter men from entering the profession and that generate community suspicion of those who do.

Fifth, mentorship and professional support networks should be established for male teachers in early childhood settings in order to reduce the professional isolation associated with small numbers [27] and to improve retention among those already recruited.

Sixth, further research should replicate this measurement across other sub-counties in order to establish whether the distributional pattern observed here is general, and should examine directly whether learners in the 18.4 percent of centres with male teachers differ in outcome from those in the remaining 81.6 percent.

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