

Male Teachers in Preschool Teaching Levels – A Feminist Viewpoint

Husam Alharahsheh

Lecturer in business Management at
University of Wales Trinity Saint David –
London and Senior visiting lecturer across several UK and
International Higher Education Institutions

Abraham Pius

Senior Lecturer in
Business Management and other related fields,
Consultancy, Manchester Metropolitan University and
Arden University (United Kingdom - London)

Imad Guenane

Director of Learning and Teaching
University of Westminster, London United Kingdom,

ABSTRACT

The aim of this brief paper is to explore and demonstrate the importance of teacher's gender at the preschool levels of education and would be focussing on men as professional teachers at the preschool level of education or nursery level of education, and how the participation of male teachers has contributed to the feminist view within teaching. The paper is primarily supported by secondary research through inclusion and consideration of different peer reviewed academic papers relating to the subject. The paper highlights key considerations and reasons derived from different countries in relation to the underrepresentation of males within this level of education including low salaries, dominance of female's numbers in the profession, the negative stigma associated with men working within this level of education, and social fears. However, male presence in this level of education is supported due to various reasons including diversification of students' experience within preschool levels of education and consideration of equality matters.

Keywords: Male teachers, feminist, preschool, education

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this brief paper is to explore and demonstrate the importance of gender at the preschool levels of education and would be focussing on men as professional teachers at the preschool level of education or nursery level of education, and how the participation of male teachers has contributed to the feminist view within teaching at the preschool or nursery level of education considering key challenges and arguments.

Feminist theory

Feminist theory is viewed as an extension of feminism viewpoint into several discourses including theoretical, fictional as well as philosophical. The main aim of it is explore the inequality of gender. It focuses on key roles relating to men and women in several contexts such as social and political, as well as other key variances including interests and experiences relating to particular contexts within different fields or specialisations such as education and economics (Gilligan, 1977; Lerman, 1990; Chodorow, 1989).

The basis of this brief paper is to focus on the perceived problem of male teachers' participation in preschool and nursery level of education and linking it to the feminist view within the same context. The topic was selected due to the observation that male teachers at this level of education are sought after with an increasing intensity. Although there is a perception that this is a mainly female dominated world (Milgram & Sciarra, 1974; Eisenhauer & Pratt, 2010; Tufan, 2018; Fu & Li, 2010; Heikkiläand & Hellman, 2017; Johnson, 2010). The paper would be supported by several arguments and studies to further explore and investigate the problem and providing some key considerations through the conclusion followed by personal reflection by the author.

Men in preschool teaching and feminism

It is discussed that there is only around 2.2 percent of the total number of teachers in preschool and kindergarten are males in the United States. However, it is argued that other countries have higher percentage than this due to differences in income levels as well as social perception. Reasons for this low participation were summarised as the following: Firstly, low salaries within the profession generally, the dominance of the female as a gender in early childhood education, and the stigma associated negatively with men working within this level (Eisenhauer & Pratt, 2010).

It is discussed that early childhood teachers should have good common traits regardless of their gender such as the ability to nurture others, excitement in regards to the level of curiosity that children have to explore the world around them, and respect for enhancing lifelong learning, recognition of the role that they play regarding children and their families, being a role model, as well as creation of inclusivity in terms of the surrounding environments (Eisenhauer & Pratt, 2010; Milgram & Sciarra, 1974).

However, a study was conducted by (Riley *et al.*, 1985) argued that only male students at the preschool level had higher level of self-concept and motivation in regards to having a male teacher in school with consideration of their father presence at home, and the same significance was not achieved with all students considering gender of students and their varying attitudes to school as well as self. Furthermore, in a study that included female teachers at the preschool level point of view regarding the perceptions and beliefs of men as teachers at the preschool level resulted that there is some remaining critique and doubts about the role of male teachers in preschool level due to some fears in some aspects such as fear of child sexual abuse, morality, and use of power in relations. However, the study suggested that this fear is being reduced as more men are entering the occupation. Hence, this view supports that the role of a teacher at the preschool level is more oriented to females to avoid the outlined fears above expressed by the other gender and supported by public (Tufan, 2018).

Key factors enhanced males' interest to become teachers at the preschool education level were such as strong motivation through understanding of the wider impact and contribution of the role, the impact the job has on lives of others including children and their families. However, a main challenge was identified that those father teachers had to act as dual roles of being fathers at home and students' teachers which had greater impact on them to distinguish between both (White, 2010).

It is indicated that across many countries such as Taiwan male teachers has a very small percentage within the preschool level due to various reasons perceived by male themselves such as lack of interest in the topic, and the perceived value that they get about themselves as well as from others in different communities (Fu & Li, 2010). However, it is also argued that male teachers at the preschool level can become more positive and overcome the perception that it is mainly female denominated occupation by providing enough training to enable them to perceive their roles differently as role models, develop second specialities, provide them with more support to further understand the challenges associated with the role, and enhance recruitment initiatives (Fu & Li, 2010; Johnson, 2010). This would arguably enable them to have more self confidence and can feel more appreciated about their role at this early stage of education for children given the consideration the stereotyping view coming from the wider society and the opposite gender that it is mainly female oriented role (Fu & Li, 2010; Tufan, 2018; Heikkiläand & Hellman, 2017). Furthermore, it has been discussed in a study conducted on kindergarten staff in relation to gender and distribution of values in education that male teachers at the early levels of education can bring strong education capability and resources to schools and enhance the learning experience and journey of students across levels. This would also enhance gender equalities across the profession as there is clear underrepresentation of males due to the perceptions expressed by different societies, males themselves as well as females as indicated in the research. Furthermore, this promotion of equalities can set a good example of male engagement in other sectors where there is less representation, and equally the same can be considered for females' engagement where some sectors have males as the majority (Olsen & Smepllass, 2018).

The case is even more extreme in other countries such as Jordan where it is less than 1% of the total active teachers at the preschool level of education even though many female participants of a study conducted in Jordan by (Ahmed et al., 2018) resulted that the perception of the participants was that having both male and female teachers within preschool level would enhance the diversity in experiences. However, this perception was mainly common from the younger aged female participants that were between 19 to 29 of the study than the older age groups. This indicated there is a shift in the mindset. However, considering the feminist view within the wider society including females and males it is still viewed as mainly dominated profession by females. This shift in mindset can be supported as It is argued that there is no direct relationship between improvement of pay as well as conditions of work within the preschool level workplace and increase of male worker's employment. However, if the first was extended to enhance professionalism, the scope of the improvement as well as quality this would have more relationship leading to having more male recruitment and acceptance in workplace at preschool teaching level (Cameron, 2006).

A study has been conducted by (Heikkiläand & Hellman, 2017) suggested that men in preschool teaching as well as similar roles have negotiated masculinities as it is perceived as

predominantly a feminine specialist work area. Furthermore, other studies suggest that male preschool teachers are slowly entering the female dominated profession due to various reasons as discussed above. However, their acceptance into this profession seemed to be more of intellectual acceptance rather than being full acceptance, and according to the study some of the male teachers felt that were disadvantaged due to some difficulties to perform their job as required in comparison to female teachers due to the already existing perception of their female colleagues as well as in many cases they are more likely to be the first one the school has every had (Milgram & Sciarra, 1974).

CONCLUSION

The paper was focused on male teachers at the preschool level with a feminist viewpoint. The work has been supported by several considerations from academic arguments and challenges as well as results of different studies.

The paper with the consideration of male teachers at the preschool level has highlighted key consideration from several countries such as the United States, Taiwan and Jordan as well as other generic literature. This has resulted in indicating some reasons in this underrepresentation of males such as low salaries, dominance of female's numbers in the profession, and the negative stigma associated with men working within this level of education. However, other studies have challenged this view through supporting the male presence as teachers in preschool education but studies have highlighted and discussed some key challenges such as social fears in several aspects leading to enhancement of the feminist view supporting more females being in the profession rather than men or at least with more preference due to the lower perception of possible fears generated from families as well as wider societies in different countries.

Despite the inequality and misrepresentation in terms of numbers of teachers compared between males and females as indicated in several arguments across the paper, there is an increasing perception and support to enhance the presence of male teachers as in some cases younger generations from the public with special reference to females have reflected more acceptance of males as teachers as stressed on the importance of diversifying the experience within preschool levels of education. Furthermore, supporting this increase some studies have indicated possible considerations to bring more equality were suggested such as focusing on recruitment initiatives and improvement of work conditions. However, until now the profession is still mainly dominated as female profession due to various reasons as discussed throughout the genre perceived by males themselves, the opposite gender in the form of females as well as the wider public.

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