Factors Influencing Gender Disparities among Preschool Teachers in Thika District of Central Province, Kenya.

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Parents are the main caregivers and socializing agents of their children. They provide for their basic needs in terms of nutrition, health, care, love and affection, among others. In the process of development mothers provide warmth and tender touches to children while fathers are symbols of authority, strength and security. Early Childhood Development Centres (E.C.D.C.) are accepted the world over as alternatives to traditional childcare systems. Children start going to preschools at the age of 3 years. The experiences of the child in preschool are a continuation of the home. As such, the preschool teachers hold a double mantle of parent as well as teacher. Quality care for these children should be provided by both female and male teachers. However this concern of gender parity in childcare seemed not to be addressed in the reviewed studies related to pre-schools, hence the need for the proposed study. This study therefore intended to find out the factors influencing gender disparity among teachers of preschool, whose objectives were to establish the distribution of teachers in preschool centres by gender in some sampled divisions of Thika District; identify the factors that explain the prevailing distribution of female and male teachers in Pre School and suggest solutions to remedy the problem of gender disparity among preschool teachers as an important area of Early Childhood Development. The study was guided by two theories: Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory and Albert Bandura’s social learning theory. The two theories contend that children need care and attention to enhance their growth and development; and that part of what they develop is emulated from parents and teachers. The participation of female and male parents is thus important for holistic development of children. The study was done in two divisions of Thika district, central province, Kenya, sampled in a way to ensure rural and urban representation. The study was carried out in 20% of preschools in each of the two divisions. All teachers in the sampled preschools were respondents as they were not many. Interview schedules were utilized for preschool teachers and District Centre for Early Childhood Education officers while a Focus Group Discussion guide was used to generate information from parents. In data analysis, three hypotheses were tested by use of Chi Square to describe the relationship with the dependent variable. It was used to measure the degree of significance between each independent and dependent variable. The data was processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive findings were presented in the form of frequencies, percentages, graphs and detailed discussions on the level of significance of influence between
variables under study were made. The results of the analyses showed that cultural influences, teacher remuneration and age scored highest in influencing gender disparity in that order. There was a significant relationship between the flexible work schedule in preschool and the large number of female teachers. The study concluded that a number of factors contributed to gender disparity among preschool teachers in Thika District. These included parents influence, flexible work schedules, proximity to the centre, age and number of dependants. Finally, from the findings of this study, recommendations were made among which was that parents with knowledge and skills about teacher selection and employment should be consulted during the exercise. Policy makers should endeavour to change parents attitudes towards male teachers in preschools through sensitization meetings. Further a study on whether parental socialization influences choice and recruitment of preschool teachers was recommended.