

Experiences of Ghanaian Male Early Childhood Educators: The Case of Effutu, Sagnarigu, and Adjumako Municipalities

Laryea, Prince¹ Aduna, Issah² Owusu, Nana³ Addai Juliana Anokye⁴

¹Institute for Distance and e-Learning (IDeL), University of Education, Winneba –Ghana

²Department of Education, Bagabaga College of Education, Tamale –Ghana

³District Education Office, Ajumako –Ghana

⁴Akokoasa AEDA Basic School, Agona East – Ghana

Abstract

Ghanaian women have traditionally assumed more responsibility in childcare, while men have preferred technical jobs. Thus, not many men work in childcare settings though researches indicate that the involvement of male educators in early childhood education is beneficial. Yet they covered a little percentage of the total population of educators. Relatively, minimal research has been conducted on the experiences of Ghanaian male educators on their teaching experience in early childhood education. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of Ghanaian males working in childcare settings in the Effutu, Sagnarigu and Ajumako municipalities. Using purposive sampling, five (5) male ECE educators participated in the study who met the criteria of having at least three-year teaching experience in Early Childhood Education and able to describe and narrate their experience as ECE educators. All data were collected through in-depth interviews. Data analysis suggested five (5) main themes including the burning passion, the exhausting beginning, a challenging profession, a fulfilling profession, and the questioning society. This study revealed that participants viewed their experience as both challenging and fulfilling, questioned by society but fuelled by the passion to teach children.

Keywords: Male Educators, Early Childhood Education, Lived Experience

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is one of the best investments any country can make in its future workforce [20]. Thus, enhancing the quality of young children's lives is a national and international priority. There has been an increased international attention to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and progress has been made in enhancing the quality and access to early childhood care and education worldwide (e.g. [8]; [7]).

When women cross gender boundaries and enter traditionally male occupations they are seen to move upwards in status, without the heavy regulation of gender identities that men experience when they enter into traditional female occupations [27]. This is especially true of teaching in the early childhood years of basic schooling, which is often labelled as women's work and where male educators are thus under-represented (e.g. [15]). Why do men not teach young children? In order to address this question it is important to see how educators themselves reinforce the early years of basic schooling as gender-specific work [10].

In this article, the researchers observed that in the Effutu, Sagnarigu and Ajumako municipalities, males usually avoid a teaching job because of low salary, status, and prejudice against male educators, isolation, and negative appreciation. However, researches have indicated that if the number of male educators' increases, the status of male educators working in early childhood settings may also rise. Then, the society may begin to value and appreciate male early childhood educators. Therefore, we need more male educators in early childhood education programs (e.g. [17]; [22]; [23]).

Though, extensive academic research has explored early childhood in Ghana, many of these recent studies but to mention a few, focused on the question of teacher background and quality early childhood education: A look at some selected schools in the Winneba Municipality, Ghana [2]; ECE in Ghana: Perceptions of stakeholders in Western Region [14]; Challenges facing early childhood education in Ghana. What do stakeholders, say? [3]; Quality and knowledge of best practices in early childhood programmes: perceptions of parents and educators [7]; Pre-school educators perception of the challenges facing pre-school education in Shama district [26]; Guidance and counselling in early childhood teacher training [1]; Early childhood education pre-service

educators' pedagogical content knowledge in teaching psychosocial skills across the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana [12]; Pre-service educators' self-efficacy and the implementation of the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana [6]; Assessment of kindergarten educators' use of learning activities and instructional resources in the implementation of the curriculum in central region, Ghana [5]; A multi-case study of instructional decision-making processes of educators in kindergarten classrooms in the cape coast metropolis [25].

While [4] narrowed on men in Ghana's early childhood education programme, the study veered into the possible factors that might militate against male enrolment in early childhood education in the Greater-Accra region. As of now, there is relatively scant empirical literature in Ghana in the study areas specifically that focused on the perception of the male educators on their teaching experience in early childhood education. In this article we describe the lived experience of Ghanaian male early childhood educators including the challenges and successes they encountered. The overarching research question is: How do male early childhood educators perceive their experiences in Effutu, Sagnarigu and Ajumako municipalities of Ghana?

II. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, exploratory and descriptive approach were utilised in this study. It is qualitative in that it is inductive and subjective as opposed to deductive and objective. Exploratory in the sense that the aim is to investigate and capture previously unexplored phenomena, with no hypotheses or presuppositions. Finally it is descriptive because the aim is to capture rich descriptions of the phenomena from the perspective of the units of analysis. The hermeneutic phenomenology is the chosen method for this study. The researchers deem this method appropriate for data collection and analysis, as this study describes the lived experiences of Ghanaian male early childhood educators. Thus, the researchers intend to make an effort to gather as much of the true feelings, beliefs, ideas, experiences, thoughts and actions of the participants as possible as suggested by [18].

Purposive sampling was used to identify male educators who are teaching in early childhood education. This method of sampling helped to create a homogenous sample of participants that have all experienced the phenomenon. Five (5) male educators were selected from the schools in Effutu, Sagnarigu and Ajumako municipalities, both public and private schools. Moreover, they were selected from nursery 1 to Kindergarten levels to focus the experience within the boundaries of young students. Finally, they were

required to have at least three (3) years of experience in teaching early childhood learners.

The researchers explained the study, its merits and the expected form of participation to the prospective participants. The participants were given a consent form before the interviews started. The informed consent form in detail included the purpose of the study and how it will be conducted; the benefits for the participants; how the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants will be ensured, among others.

The nature of data gathering in this phenomenological study was through one-on-one interview. Interviews were unstructured to have a smooth flow and flexible conversation between the researcher and the participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were read and re-read to obtain the general sense about the whole content. Significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study were extracted. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements.

The findings were presented in themes to discuss the meaning of the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, validation of the findings was sought from the research participants to compare the researchers' descriptive results with their experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The themes of meaning that emerged were as follows:

Theme No. 1: The Burning Passion

The participants expressed that their passion to teach children has been their reason of choosing and staying as early childhood educators. Two subthemes emerged out of this theme.

a. Acquired Passion

Two of the five participants shared that they have chosen the profession because of job opportunities. However, as they spend time teaching children, they come to enjoy what they are doing. They acquire the passion to teach young learners.

Participant 1 shared,

"I have chosen to be an Early Childhood educator for practical reason. The year when I enrolled in university was also the time when early childhood was gaining grounds; hence, more job opportunities for ECE educators. But along the way, my reason of teaching has

changed. It becomes a dedication to teach kids.”

Participant 2 expressed,

“I applied as a volunteer educator in Kindergarten just to gain a teaching experience. It was the time of the implementation of the early childhood education programme. Looking back, I didn’t plan to stay in this job for a long time. However, as time passed by I come to enjoy being with children.”

The experiences of the two participants showed that job opportunity is a factor of choosing a career path. Furthermore, the implementation of the early childhood program in the Philippines creates more opportunities for employment in the Early Childhood Education; thus attracting more individuals to join the profession. Reference [16] expressed that the increasing importance given to early childhood education, resulted to more opportunities in this field, which encourages even men to enter the profession. However, staying as an early childhood educator requires passion to teach children. Passion is the motivation that makes educators stay in their profession despite the challenges they encountered [21]. It stops them from throwing their hands in the air and giving up.

b. Innate Passion

Of the five participants, three expressed that they have chosen the profession because of their personal interest and passion to help children learn. They claimed that they enjoyed being with children even when they were not yet educators.

Participant 2 stated,

“I grew up with kids and I have been exposed to teaching kids during my teenage days. Those prior experiences deepen my interest to teach young learners.”

Participant 4 said:

“Since young, I enjoy being with children. The time I had to choose what career to pursue, it was easy for me to decide. Without hesitation I chose to become an early childhood teacher.”

The decision of becoming a teacher can be an innate calling at a young age and a profound personal experience. This suggests that male educators valued

the emotional significance of their job and that the other factors of choosing the profession, such as job opportunity and salary, are just secondary. Additionally, Participant 5 expressed that even his gender didn’t hinder him to become an early childhood teacher,

“...it is not the gender that makes a teacher effective but the drive and passion for teaching.”

These reflections support the finding in the study of [28] which states that male educators’ love of children is the greatest reason of choosing to be an early childhood teacher. Prioritizing their love of children is a key motivator in seeking employment in the Early Childhood Education sector.

Theme No. 2: The Exhausting Beginning

The participant described their first year of teaching as a difficult challenge. As new educators, they struggled to keep their heads above the water. Despite their college trainings, they seemed to be unprepared of the realities of teaching young learners. They encountered situations and problems they had not anticipated.

Participant 4 declared,

“The most challenging stage of my career was my first year of teaching. The students were hesitant to get inside the classroom when they saw that they have a male teacher. Back then, I didn’t know what to do and how to make them feel comfortable. I find it quite awkward to act like one of them just for them to get closer to me.”

Children being afraid of their teacher and hesitant to get inside the classroom are common occurrences at the beginning of the school year. They may be scared of male educators because of their physical shape or looks [28]. These scenarios can be very challenging for a teacher who has experienced it for the first time.

Participant 3 also shared,

“During my first year of teaching, I struggled on how to handle the learners especially when they wanted to urinate or defecate. At that time, I wasn’t so equipped with the strategies on dealing with children.”

Taking care of children’s physical needs can be a tormenting experience for a first time teacher. It can be hard and can drain a lot of the teacher’s energy.

The challenges can range from dealing with difficult behaviours to attending to children's personal necessities [19]. Even though these male educators were not certain on how to deal with young learners, they still took charge with the responsibility for children's learning. So, they were teaching and learning how to teach at the same time. They struggled to be equipped with different strategies to keep the classroom functioning smoothly. However, it was noted that as educators gained more classroom experiences, they became more comfortable about how to interact with children [29].

Theme No 3: A Challenging Profession

The participants expressed that being a male early childhood teacher is a challenging profession. They specify that both learners and parents have made their job tough.

Participant 1 has difficulty communicating with the young learners. He narrated,

"I find it hard to communicate with children. I need to filter words that are appropriate for these learners in a language that they understand. I also need to ease the tone of my voice so that they won't be scared of me, unlike the females who have naturally sweet voice."

The teacher's right choice of words is a powerful tool in getting the attention and trust of the learners. However effective communication with them is not just about choosing the right words, but also using the pleasant tone of voice. Since most men educators have low and loud voice, they find it challenging to communicate with children. Moreover, they were perceived to have an ineffective communication especially with girls because male educators are unlike women who have naturally warm and affectionate tone of voice [9].

Participant 4 has become challenged with having more patience and being more creative. He shared,

"Being an early childhood teacher is challenging. I need to have more patience in dealing with the young learners. I also need to provide more interactive and interesting activities for the children. In ECE, I don't just focus in the academic, but most importantly in integrating play to our lessons. I need to be creative."

The same was experienced by a male teacher in the study of [11] who said that his greatest challenge was to effectively deliver the curriculum because of his reactions to learners' behaviour. [28], revealed that many considered men educators as not so patient with

young children. On the other hand, Participant 5 expressed that the parents' prejudices have made his job difficult. He said,

"It was a challenge for me to deal with parents' prejudices. They viewed a male teacher as strict; hence, making their children afraid of going to school. It's also hard to get their trust because they associate male educators with child abuse."

This experience mirrors the report of Lam (2014), stating that some parents of young learners were against the hiring of male educators. They expressed concern on male educators taking physical care of their children. Specifically, they are not comfortable about a male teacher who takes charge of their children when going to the toilet. Reference to [28] agreed that parents have concerns about their children's care in early childhood when taught by male educators. They are influenced by the traditional views that men are not skilful in caring. To sum up, parents' apprehensions about male early childhood educators include child abuse and male educators' inability to handle children's self-care [9].

Theme No. 4: A Fulfilling Profession

Male Early Childhood educators' experiences are not just about stories of struggles but also stories of successes. The participants described their experience as fulfilling.

Participant 3 expressed,

"It feels rewarding when you teach young learners and you see how they improved, how they learn to read and write. I feel happy about it and would tell myself I'll stay in this profession."

Participant 4 shares the same sentiment and he said,

"Teaching young learners is a very fulfilling job. You get to see the improvements of your learners. For instance, I get to observe how my students learn to write their names. I feel happy when they proudly show to me their work."

Participant 5 added,

"It is rewarding seeing these learners learn and mature under my guidance."

According to [16], the presence of the male educators in the classrooms had helped learners academically. Significant improvements of young learners are very observable, such as learning to read and write. This

makes the educators feel a sense of achievement and worth. Male educators also take pride in maintaining classroom discipline. Participant 1 shared,

“I am proud that my students are more disciplined compared to the other students under a female educators. Other educators would even observe my class to learn some classroom management techniques.”

Male educators declared that they have more control on children making them follow the rules in the classroom [9]. Research also found that even the female educators think that male educators are better disciplinarians [16]. With this characteristic, the male educators are able to manage the class well and they serve as examples to their colleagues. The participants also view their experience as fulfilling because they get to enjoy while working. This perspective was mirrored by Participant 3 declaring,

I view my job as a positive experience because I get to enjoy and have fun while teaching. I also get the opportunities to play with children. Male educators are themselves boys who would love to play more with children.

In a comparable study, male educators shared that their most important contribution was giving children the opportunity to play while still enforcing learning [24]. In return, they too get to opportunity to play and enjoy. When the participants talked about making a difference in the lives of children, they considered all their efforts meaningful.

Theme No. 5: The Questioning Society

The society which includes the participants' family, friends, colleagues, and the public, has questioned their choice of profession.

Participant 1 shared,

“The people around me have many questions about my choice of profession.”

Participant 2 also remarked,

“It's perennial that other people ask why I've chosen to be a male ECE teacher. They said I have a brighter future ahead of me.”

The same thing was experienced by Participant 3 and he narrated,

“Some people around me would question my choice of profession and would ask how I cope with the demand of my job. They want me to be in the higher level because they see that the lower level (early childhood education) is for female educators.”

Reference to [24] suggests that frequently male early childhood educators have to defend their choice of career to their family members, friends, and colleagues. This is due to Society's perception that Early Childhood Education is mainly about child care, and is thus considered as women's work. Reference [28] revealed that people nowadays are influenced by the traditional view that ECE educators are aunts who care for children and even those who don't have a college degree are competent. Moreover, male early childhood educators are commonly described as unambitious and unpromising. The low status attributed to early childhood education has been identified as a reason there is only few men who join the profession [11].

IV. CONCLUSION

The lived experience of the male early childhood educators is a combination of struggles and fulfilments. Communicating with children and dealing with their behaviour are the aspects that made their job challenging. Additionally, parents' prejudices about them, such as their inability to handle children's self-care and being associated to child abuse have made their job even more difficult. They felt that their first year of teaching was the most challenging stage of their career. However, despite the trials that they have encountered, they considered their job as very rewarding. Seeing their students improved academically and behaviourally has made them feel fulfilled. And though the society questions their choice of profession, they are certain that they will remain as Early Childhood educators because of their passion to teach children.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abdulai, A. & Inkoom, A. (2016) “Guidance and counselling in early childhood teacher training “ American Journal of Educational Research, 4, (7), 531-538
- [2] Abdulai, A. (2013). “The question of teacher background and quality early childhood education: A look at some selected schools in the Winneba Municipality”, Ghana. Journal of Education and Practice, 4 (9), 80 – 86.
- [3] Abdulai, A. (2014) “Challenges Facing Early Childhood Education in Ghana”. What do Stakeholders, Say? *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 1 (3), 11 – 24

- [4] Abdulai, A. (2016). "Men in Ghana's early childhood education program". *Education Research Journal*, 6(2): 42 – 48
- [5] Abroampa, W. K. (2018) "Assessment of kindergarten teachers' use of learning activities and instructional resources in the implementation of the curriculum in central region, Ghana". *International Journal of Innovative Research & Development*, 7 (6). 67- 73
- [6] Abroampa, W. K., & Abdulai, A. (2017). "Pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and the implementation of the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana". *International Journal of Development Research*, 7 (2), 11547-11554.
- [7] Ayisibea, F (2015). "Quality and knowledge of best practices in early childhood programmes: perceptions of parents and teachers. Unpublished Thesis. Accra": University of Ghana, Legon.
- [8] Belsky, J., Burchinal, M., McCartney, K., Vandell, D.L., Clarke-Stewart, K. A. & Owen, M.T. (2007). "Are there long-term effects of early child care?" *Child Development*, 78 (2), 681–701.
- [9] Gülçiçek, T. (2017). *Investigation of parents' perceptions of male early childhood teachers*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Middle East Technical University, Ankara.
- [10] Johnson, S. P., Middleton, R., Nocholson, N. & Sandrick, D. (2010). "Still so few male teachers: now what?" *Young Children* 65 (3): 18–23.
- [11] Joseph, S. & Wright, Z. (2016). "Men as early childhood educators: experiences and perspectives of two male prospective teachers." *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 5, (1), 213-219
- [12] Kankam, G. & Abroampa, W. K. (2016) "Early childhood education pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in teaching psychosocial skills across the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana". *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education* 10 (1), 67-86
- [13] Lam, D. (2014). "A study of male participation in early childhood education". *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28, (5). 498 – 509. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2013-0024>
- [14] Lemaire, M. B. Amoah, D. F., Ntsiful, D. K., Micah, S. A., & Bonney, E. A. (2013) "ECE in Ghana: Perceptions of stakeholders in Western Region". *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4 (9), 1 – 13
- [15] Martino, W., & Rezai-Rashti, G. M. (2010). "Male teacher shortage: Black teachers' perspectives." *Gender and Education*, 22 (3): 247–262.
- [16] Mashiya, N. (2014). "Becoming a (male) foundation phase teacher: A need in South African schools?". *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 4(3): 24-36
- [17] McBride, B.A. Rane, T.R. & Bae, J (2001). "Intervening with teachers to encourage father/male involvement in early childhood programs". *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 77–93.
- [18] McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2006). "Research in education-evidence based enquiry (6th ed.)." Texas: Pearson Education Inc.
- [19] Munday, A. (2016). "7 Challenges of a preschool teacher". Retrieved from <https://blog.himama.com/7-challenges-of-being-a-preschool-teacher/>
- [20] Reckhow, S. J. (2013). "Follow the money: How foundation dollars change public school politics". New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- [21] Serin, H. (2017). "The role of passion in learning and teaching". *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*.
- [22] Sumsion, J. (2000a). "Negotiating otherness: A male early childhood educator's gender positioning". *International Journal of Early Years Education* 8(2), 129–40.
- [23] Sumsion, J. (2000b). "Rewards, risks and tensions: Perceptions of males enrolled in an early childhood teacher education programme". *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 28(1), 87–100.
- [24] Sumsion, J. (2005). "Male teachers in early childhood education: issues and case study". *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 20. 109–123
- [25] Thompson, M. & Abroampa, W. K. (2019). "A multi-case study of instructional decision-making processes of teachers in kindergarten classrooms in the cape coast metropolis". *Research Journal of Education*, 5 (6), 91-98.
- [26] Twum, L .O. (2016). "Pre-school teachers' perception of the challenges facing pre-school education in Shama district." Unpublished Thesis. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast.
- [27] Wernersson, I., Warin, J. & Brownhill. S. (2016). "Conclusions." *In men, masculinities and teaching in early childhood education: International Perspectives on Gender and Care*, edited by S. Brownhill, J. Warin, and I. Wernersson, 130–137. New York: Routledge
- [28] Xu, Y. & Waniganayake, M. (2017). "An exploratory study of gender and male teachers in early childhood education and care centres in China, Compare". *A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2017.1318355
- [29] Zhang, W. (2017). "Male teachers in early childhood education: Why more men? A review of the literature." *Culminating Projects in Child and Family Studies*.