Men underrepresentation in Early Childhood Education in Iceland

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Thesis for BA degree
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Men underrepresentation in Early Childhood Education in Iceland

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Abstract

Men underrepresentation in the pre-school setting has been an issue of concern worldwide and highly debated by many researchers. Gender imbalance and feminization of the pre-school teaching profession has become a common practice for decades. The primary objective of this thesis was to seek an in-depth understanding of how socially constructed gender norms contribute to male teachers’ low representation in pre-school education settings resulting in a gender imbalance. The thesis established that major determinants that contribute to the gender imbalance in the pre-school settings in Iceland and across the globe could be attributed to stereotype and culture, low income, the fear of men being accused of sexual abuse, perception of female teachers and parents as well as low status attached to the profession. Finally, the thesis elucidated that the concept of gender is socially constructed and a major contributory factor to gender imbalance and feminization of the pre-school teaching profession.
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Preface

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understood the university code of conduct (November 7, 2003, http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/sidareglur) and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data, or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work. Signed:

Ebenezer Forson

Reykjavík, 8th May, 2020
1 Introduction

Over the years, considerable attention of men into pre-school education has garnered much attention. Feminization of the teaching profession and gender imbalance in pre-school education has become a problem (Mukuna, 2011). While everyone virtually agrees to the need to include men in the nurturing and caring for young children, practical steps in dealing with this dilemma are insufficient. Pre-school education happens to be one of the occupations highly gender swerved (Munkana, 2011). Gender imbalance within the workforce in pre-school education and care has been an issue of concern and happens to be a global phenomenon, with females dominating men in many countries in the west, including the United Kingdom, Germany, New Zealand, and Canada (OECD, 2013).

Research available indicates that the number of men who are actively working in pre-school settings revolves between 1-3% in most of the European countries, with few other countries like Denmark, Turkey and Norway achieving a rating above 5% (Peeters et al., 2015). Apart from Europe, these percentages are also reflected in other parts of the world. In the United States, for instance, the percentage of men who work in pre-school settings and kindergarten form 3.2% of the pre-school staff population (Menteach, 2015). In the case of New Zealand, according to research conducted by Koch & Farquhar (2015), the percentage of males working in pre-school education in New Zealand has seen a percentage increase to 3.2% compared to previous years. Males teachers constituted 2.2% as of 2013. The low representation of males working in pre-school settings, as established above, is comparatively worse from the current situation in Iceland.

According to an article published by Iceland monitor in 2017, the percentage of men working in pre-school settings form only 2% of the total workforce (Iceland monitor, 2017). This situation is not surprising because Jónsdóttir & Coleman (2014) established that, pre-school teachers in Iceland, compared to other countries are mostly females, and this situation has been in existence since the inception of formal early years education in the 1920s.

Nonetheless, as stated above, much emphasis is on women, with little done in bridging the gender disparity gap in areas of the economy that are women dominated, such as the pre-school education settings. The primary objective of this thesis is to seek an in-depth understanding of how socially constructed gender norms contribute to male teachers' low representation at the pre-school education settings resulting in a gender imbalance. To achieve this objective, the underlying research question is: why are men underrepresented in pre-school teaching roles in Iceland despite the various gender policies and initiatives instituted by the government?
This thesis made use of secondary sources of literature. Both qualitative and quantitative research sources were used. Ensuring an in-depth understanding of the main objective of the study and answering the research question allowed for the collection of literature that was relevant for the study. The thesis made use of peer-reviewed articles, open-access, reports and policy documents in Iceland and across the globe that were related to men and women in pre-school education, gender stereotypes, gender roles, male teacher stigmatization, views of parents and female teacher’s in engaging male teachers in the pre-school education settings.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In chapter one, the introduction, statistics about the gender imbalance in different countries in the world, and key terms used in the thesis are presented. It also discusses the purpose of the thesis and the research questions. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the Icelandic educational system. In this chapter, the pre-school education, the management of pre-school education as well as gender equality policies are discussed. Chapter 3 discusses policies and interventions for bridging the gender disparity gap in pre-school settings. A comparative analysis between Norway and the Flemish community of Belgium was carried out. These countries were chosen because they have a significant impact on increasing men's engagement in their pre-school setting through policies and initiatives. Chapter 4 discusses male representation in the pre-school setting. It examines the importance of engaging men in teaching roles in the pre-school settings as well as contributing factors leading to low engagement of men in the pre-school. Chapter 5 discusses the overview of gender and pre-school education. The chapter discusses the development of pre-school education, concepts of gender stereotypes, and feminization of the teaching profession. It further reviews the literature on gender stereotyping experiences in the pre-school setting. Chapter 6 presents a thorough discussion on the determinates of male underrepresentation in pre-schools and that men are duly represented in the lives of children in Iceland via various policies like the Paternity Act and the rights on Joint and visitation. In chapter 7, the conclusion is discussed based on the literature reviewed.

1.1 Definition of terms used in the thesis

- Gender equality in the context of this thesis has been used to refer to the state of valuing the differences and similarities of men and women in the society including the roles they play. This means that the rights of men and women, opportunities, and responsibilities must not be dependent on whether the individual is a male or female.
• Gender stereotyping in this context refers to the socially constructed preconception about the various characteristics or attributes that men and women ought to possess as well-defined roles that best suit men and women in the discharge of their duties. In the context of pre-school education, for instance, it is the perception that women are best suited for teaching roles in the pre-school is stereotypical.

• Gender balance as used in the thesis is referring to equal representation of males and females in the pre-school setting. It is based on ensuring that gender parity between men and female teachers exist in pre-school education settings.
2 Icelandic Educational System

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture has the sole responsibility of implementing legislations to all levels of the school systems in Iceland, including continuing and adult education. The educational system of Iceland, according to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2012) are divided into four main levels: the pre-school education (0 – 6 years), compulsory school (6 – 16 years), the upper secondary school (16 – 20 years) and the higher education (20 years and above). Education for all happens to be the fundamental principle underlying the Icelandic education. This principle gives equal rights and opportunities for everyone to acquire education irrespective of sex, religion, economic status, residual location, cultural or social background, and possible handicap.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is further tasked with the responsibility of creating curriculum guides for all the school levels, as well as executing educational reforms. The curriculum for the first three stages of the Icelandic educational system; namely, the pre-school education, compulsory and upper secondary schools are based on the foundation of six formidable pillars: literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, human rights, democracy, equality and creativity (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). These fundamental pillars are intended to develop the knowledge, attitude, and skills that would empower individual's future abilities to become competent and active individuals based on democracy and equality (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Ragnarsdottir (2016) posits that, except for foreign languages, the language of instructions for teaching and learning in the Icelandic educational setting is purely in Icelandic.

2.1 Pre-school Education in Iceland

The pre-school education national curriculum guide (2011), which is based on the pre-school education acts, is the legislative instrument that governs the general organization of the pre-school education activities in Iceland. According to Pre-school Act (2008), pre-school education must be recognized as the first level of a child's education process, although not a mandatory part of the educational system of Iceland. The responsibility of offering pre-school education to children is the responsibility of the Icelandic municipalities according to the Icelandic legislation. Pre-school education age is usually between 0- 6 years. However, many Icelandic children between the ages of 2 – 3, which constitutes about 95% are accepted into pre-school educations within their respective municipalities. Other services, such as special education, as well as psychological assistance, are also offered.
2.2 Management of pre-school educations in Iceland

The management of pre-school educations in Iceland is a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and authorities within the municipalities. The Ministry is charged with the mandates of formulating educational policies, as well as the publication of the national curriculum guidelines for pre-school educations. The municipal authorities, on the other hand, supervises the activities of schools and the pre-school educations including bearing the cost involved in its organization. Authorities within the pre-school education settings are also mandated to come up with their curriculum guidelines. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the municipalities to embark on supervision roles to ensure that the curriculum guidelines, as set by pre-school educations, are properly and effectively implemented.

2.3 Gender Equality Policies in Icelandic Education

Iceland, like many countries across the globe, has adopted several policies and initiatives that seek to ensure gender equality between males and females in the labour market. In Iceland, the Act on The Equal Status And Equal Rights of Women and Men No. 10/2008 is a policy that is geared towards bridging the gender inequality gap between men and women, by avoiding any form of discrimination, sexual harassment, ensuring wage equality, equal access to education and more. The Act mandates employers to exhibit flexibility with regards to work patterns and working hours, such that men and women could reconcile with their family (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2008). The Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave And Parental Leave No. 95/2000 gives full entitlement to both men and women the privilege of taking either paid or unpaid maternity and paternity leave to enable them to spend maximum time with their children (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2012). Also, the Act in Respect of Children No. 76/2003 also elucidate that both men and women have joint custody over their children in the event of divorce or dissolution of a legal cohabitation unless specific rules attached to this policy (The Center for Gender Equality Iceland, 2017).

Like gender equality Acts of other countries, the objective of the gender equality act in Iceland aims at establishing and maintaining equality and ensuring that equal opportunities exist for both men and women, as well as making sure that the status of all genders is equalized in every sector of the society (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2008). Although the act does not specifically target promoting gender balance in specific areas of employment, this policy focuses on bridging the gender equality gap in a broader perspective which could be applicable in every sector or area of work in Iceland, including pre-school development centers. Iceland’s current gender equality action plan for 2016 to 2019 establishes the government’s urgent commitment to promoting gender equality (The Center for Gender...
Equality Iceland, 2017). In promoting gender equality, the government seeks to ensure that gender equality issues are integrated into decision making and policy formulation. As men's involvement in gender equality issues continues to rise, the government's current action plan also focuses on and emphasises men and gender equality. An article published in Iceland monitor in 2017 indicated that the government in its quest to increase male representation in pre-school education initiated the Karlar í yngri barna kennslu (Men teaching younger children) project. The project sought to arouse the interest of young men to venture into a pre-school education teaching career. According to the article, the project set aside an amount of one million Icelandic Kronas (approx. 8665 euros) from Jafnréttissjóður Íslands (Iceland's Equality Fund) as a special grant, in a form of scholarship for selected men who seek to finish a master's degree in kindergarten teaching. Despite this intervention to increase males in teaching and nurturing roles in pre-school education, the result indicated that the project recorded a limited success, with male pre-school education teachers representing only 2%. 

Policymaking in education plays a critical role in educational planning and improve the organization of education in general. According to Jallade, Radi & Cuenin (2001), education policies assist educational authorities in their prospective decisions and actions about educational development, as well as those from international agencies. The definition of policy varies depending on the context in which it is used. In this context, the policy would be viewed as a framework or a course of action that is adopted by public authorities' in addressing peculiar problems or a set of problems that are interconnected (Pal, Aldur & Mallett, 2020). Although there are numerous policies and initiatives by international organizations and countries about gender equality, policies that seek to ensure gender balance in the teaching roles as well as retention and supporting teachers must be of the utmost importance when initiating national reforms in educational policies and planning.

Policies and interventions that seek to ensure gender balance in teaching and nurturing roles in pre-schools have been widely propagated by many international organizations across the globe. These policies and initiatives are mostly geared towards bridging gender imbalance between men and women in education, health, governance, equal pay, etc.

Although many countries around the globe have initiated various policies geared towards ensuring gender balance, most countries have not specifically made policies that would focus on ensuring gender imbalance disparity between male and female teaching professionals in the pre-school setting. Considering the OECD countries, for instance, women dominate the teaching profession from the pre-school education level up to the secondary education level. On average, it is estimated that every two out of three teachers, including other academic member staff, are women (OECD, 2013). According to a survey conducted by Salvi Del Pero & Bytchkova (2010), the proportion of women begins to diminish as the level of education increases. Statistically, however, men form the majority at the tertiary level of education compared to women. Women form 97% in pre-school education level, 83% in primary education, 68% in the lower secondary education, 56% in the upper secondary education, and 41% at the tertiary level of education.

Focusing on the pre-school education setting, research has proven that, countries who make conscious effort to bridge this disparity, have made a significant percentage increment in male teachers in the pre-school education setting gap through policy initiative and expedited the action. Norway, Germany, Belgium, and Turkey are classical examples of countries that have made a significant impact in bridging male and female teacher disparity.
gaps in the pre-school setting with their percentage increment above 3% (Peeters, 2015). This section makes a comparative analysis between Norway, and Germany in terms of policies that sought to bridge the gender disparity between male and female teachers in the pre-school education setting. Fig 1 below, shows the percentage increment of men's participation in pre-school education in Belgium, Norway, Germany, and Turkey within a certain period.

According to Figure 1, it is evident that within some stipulated periods, Germany, Turkey, Norway, and Belgium have thrived to increase men's participation in pre-school education although the trends of improvement fluctuated at some points in time. Germany for instance made a steady increase from 1994 (2%) and shoot up to 5% in 2014. That is, between a period of 10 years.

In Norway, research has shown that the country has successfully succeeded in employing more males into pre-school education, as compared to other countries. Research conducted by Cameron (n.d) indicated that the percentage of male workforce in pre-school education forms about 11%. Within 20 years, Norway has seen a significant increase in the number of male workforces in pre-school education (Emilsen, 2012 as cited in Peeters, 2012). According to Peeters et al. (2015), several interventions were put in place to ensure that an increase in male teachers in pre-school is achieved. As part of the interventions, funds were assigned since 2001 purposely for recruiting men. More to this, there was an establishment of a network for men in kindergarten in various regions and municipalities within Norway. The network served as a form of meeting place for men workforce in pre-school education and was also strategically positioned to retain men already in the field.
Men who were already assuming pre-school teaching roles were perceived to the best characters who could help in sensitizing and encouraging more men to take up teaching roles in the pre-school. These men were, however, expected to serve as a positive role model to help change the prejudicial mindset of the male teachers who perceive the pre-school teaching profession to be solely for women (Karuppiah & Berthelsen, 2011).

The importance of having more men into early childhood education settings in Norway formed part of a greater discourse in the country. This was because having more men in the lives of children was seen to be of great importance and needed to be fulfilled. Secondly, the goal to ensure gender equality as enshrined in the Norwegian laws, curricular, and regulations could also be fulfilled and could contribute to bridging the gender disparity gap between males and females in the early childhood education settings. Thirdly, in providing young children with a stimulating and pedagogical setting, it was important to ensure a balance in gender in early childhood education. Young children must experience diversity in both their learning and play since different gender interactions with children could ensure a great atmosphere of diversity among the workers.

Male workers in pre-school education were perceived to be the best to encourage more men into the field and could play a vital role in male recruitment action. Despite all these interventions and positive reinforcement towards increasing men's involvement in pre-school education, Peeters et al (2012) posit that the percentage of male educators in this profession still falls below 10%. In respect to Cameron (2012), the reason for the fall could be attributed to how the pre-school is defined to mean a profession specifically for women. He explained that words like 'care', as used in the pre-school setting has the likelihood of being evaluated as 'female' while the definition of 'education' or 'pedagogy' as practice, is not closely associated with any gender. The Men's participation in pre-school education remains low in many regions within Norway. According to Emilsen (2012) and Opheim et al (2014), there is not substantial research to explain the reasons for which Norway thrived in recruiting more men into the pre-school education setting or justify the relevance of men's patronage in caring for younger children.

Furthermore, and in comparison, with the Flemish community in Belgium, research has shown that male engagement in pre-school education increased significantly (refer to fig 1). In their quest for more male engagement in pre-school, the Flemish community in Belgium, in 2001, initiated the 'Men in Childcare' project. This project received an overwhelming acceptance and support from the European Social Fund, in collaboration with the Flemish governmental organizations for employment and childcare, including other childcare organizations. A major intervention within the framework of this project was a media launch
campaign to propel more men to accept working in pre-school settings. As part of the project, initial research was conducted to get detailed information about men who were already working in Flemish pre-school settings, as well as students enrolled in pre-school education. Interview analysis provided more information about students in pre-school education and workers already in pre-school settings. Concerning the students, the study found out that textbooks were systematically screened to remove sexiest and stereotypical constructions that aligned men and women to specific gender roles. Most importantly, male pre-school teachers within the Flemish community do not suffer much disapproval from the public and parents.

On the contrary, they rather received much support from close friends, families, and colleague female teachers (Vandenbroeck and Peeters, 2008). According to Peeters (2012), further research established a gender bias in pre-school training curriculum and pinpointed the role teacher advise centers played in maintaining gender segregation in pre-school education (Peeters, 2012). The Flemish employment office consistently ensured track data of the number of men who train to become professionals in pre-school education. The media campaign which was carried out as part of the program to increase more men engagement in pre-school work had a great impact on the project. The project successfully saw an increase in the number of males employed in pre-school education settings, although sustainability is still an issue. In fig 1 for example, there was a drastic increase in men in pre-school education from 1% to above 3% between 2002 and 2010.
4 Male Representation in Pre-school Education Centers

Over the past decades, there has been a considerable change in social attitude about the rate at which men participate in children's upbringing. Men are now perceived as important and contribute to children's learning and development. Considerable research from many countries around the globe shows that female workers and parents welcome males into the pre-school education settings for various reasons (Aigner & Rohrmann, 2012; Cremers et al., 2012; Sak et al., 2019).

According to research, men's active engagement in pre-school education contributes enormously to children's early development. The widely held debate in support of this assertion is that children during the pre-school stage of their development need a male role model. It is believed that there is the likelihood of having children in the pre-school setting who do not have fathers, but who was solely raised by their mothers. In support of this motion, Jensen (1998) also posited that male teachers play a vital role in the lives of children who do not often encounter their fathers. In such a situation, male teachers serve as a form of a stable male figures that the children could rely on. Constantly exposing children in pre-school to a male role model positively have an impact on the children from the early stages of their lives. It is believed that such exposure is a remedy to social hitches children could encounter such as youth suicide, poor academic performance, truancy, and bullying in schools among boys (Morgan, 1997). Social learning theory, according to Holms (1996), supports the fact that male involvement in children's development is important and has a greater influence on children's attitudinal and behavioural development till they attain the age of eight years.

Theory and research, according to Clyde (1995), revealed that the engagement of male teachers in pre-school education is of great importance and contributes to the development of children's social and intellectual capabilities in two ways. First, through the children's constant observation of the male teacher and secondly through the way male teachers engage the children through interaction and work. On the other hand, male teachers' absence in the pre-school setting creates an impression in the mind of the children that men are incapable of engaging themselves in working roles such as this. Morgan (1997) establishes that the presence of male teachers in the pre-school setting develops the idea of both boys and girls on the masculinity of which is different when it comes to the women. To Jensen (1998), girls are very much affected than boys in an educational setting where males are employed especially with their choice of activities. To Jensen, children when with male teachers involve themselves more in movement and construction activities. The importance
of having male teachers in pre-school education is an encouragement for boys to learn to become caring through the examples male teachers demonstrate (Farquhar, 1997).

Men’s involvement in pre-school education and training changes the perception that women are only capable of caring and nurturing children, but rather, an indication to other genders that men are also capable of nurturing and caring for children. According to Farquhar (1997), after publishing her research in New Zealand concerning male teachers, received quite a several letters from fathers who expressed displeasure about their inability of gaining access and custody of their children because of an institutionalized bias in the society demonstrating that children must be possessed by their mothers. Constant contact with male teachers, helps female teachers, as well as mothers to become mindful of their prejudice. Women most often after working with male teachers would always want to see male teachers among the teaching staff (Farquhar, 1997).

The involvement of men as part of the teaching staff sends a strong signal to fathers and the entire society that pre-school education settings welcome men and that, men could also contribute a great deal to the care, training, and development of children (Farquhar, 1997).

Meyerhof (1994), asserts that men tend not to engage themselves with activities involving young children because of the wrong misconception of the belief that men are either less or incapable of caring for young children as women could do. Research from Austria and Germany has proven that mothers, most especially single mothers appreciate and interact with male pre-school education teachers (Aigner & Rohrmann, 2012). The study indicated that male workers establish a good relationship with mothers, and this urges them to openly speak about their feelings and thought. This could be said to have a connection to the assumption that men´s engagement in pre-school education could serve as motivation for children with single mothers, although this assertion has been highly criticized according to Aigner and Rohrmann (2012).

Several European countries, such as Germany, Norway, and Turkey (Peeters, 2013) have put in place various mechanisms to increase men's patronage in pre-school education in the last two decades. However, the percentage of male workers engaged in pre-school education remains low internationally, with women still dominating the field. Cameron (n.d) asserts that young children´s education and care have always been noted as ‘women´s work’. Male teachers represent 1.6% in Taiwan (Fu & Li, 2010), 2.6% in Australia (Jopson, 2012), 2.0% in New Zealand (Morrison, 2014), and 2% in the United States (U.S Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2016). According to Peeters et al (2015), countries like Norway and Germany have greatly invested in programs and projects to increase the workforce of a male in pre-school education.
Despite these efforts, the percentage of males in pre-school education settings remains relatively low, compared to the projection by the European Commission Network on Childcare to increase males’ patronage by 20% in about 20 years ago. According to research, several reasons contribute to men’s low engagement in young children’s education and care in the pre-school Settings.

4.1 Socio-cultural factor

In many societies, there has been an accepted norm that caring and nurturing of young children are the responsibility of women. Mukuna (2011) posits that women were perceived to be most suitable for basic education because they were said to be nurturing than men. In the view of Kirk (2004), teaching younger children was regarded as a subset of motherhood roles. This phenomenon has become an institutionalized belief in our societies by most educators and the public. Male underrepresentation in pre-school education is a clear reflection of how gender roles have been clearly defined and perceived in our societies. Research conducted by (Chappell et al., 2014) indicated that men are mostly marginalized in societies when they become primary school teachers and are therefore given all kinds of names.

In an interview conducted by Naish (1995) with six pre-school male teachers, the result established that males are usually not encouraged in high schools or supported in teacher training colleges to become pre-school teachers. He further argues that the perception that pre-school education is not a male-oriented job continues to be an acceptable belief prevalent in our societies. Farquhar (1997) reports that decision of men becoming pre-school teachers is mostly less supported by friends and families than women’s decision to work with younger children. In an example cited by Farquhar in the same study, one female teacher asserted that her choice of occupation to work with younger children were pleased by people because it was regarded as the best job for a girl. On the other hand, an interview with a pre-school male teacher indicated that friends rather tease him and call him names such as a ‘girl’ or ‘child molester’. Besides, parents, as well as, individuals in the pre-school settings regard male teachers as homosexuals, especially when they are unmarried. A female teacher, on the other hand, reported no incident of name-calling or with such labelling.

Despite these prejudices, it is worth noting that the male representation in pre-school education contributes immensely to the development of children's education. According to Jensen (1998), the participation of male teachers in pre-school education is of great benefit to the pre-school profession because it enhances its status and encourages effective staff relationships as well as the dynamics at the workplace. To Mukuna (2011), aside from
female teachers, children value encountering male teachers as well, and the only way male teachers could survive in pre-school settings is their ability to counter stereotypical views from society.

4.2 Gender stereotypes

Social role theory according to Eagly and Koeing (2014) may underlie the social obstruction to men’s engagement in pre-school education. The theory assumes that women and men assume certain roles as a result of societal expectations. Division of labour based on the tenant of gender leads to the conception that men and women inherit certain traits that urges them to successfully take on these tasks (Clow, Ricciardelli and Betray, 2014). Gender stereotypes of men perceived as dominant and agentic, and women perceived as warm and communal arises as a result of each gender continually occupying such commonly accepted roles (Clow et. al., 2014).

Jost and Banaji (1994) aver that as men continue to take up task-oriented activities such as business executive and managerial roles, people are likely to assume that they inherit certain traits that probably make them best suitable for such professions compared to their women counterparts. When people think that men and women inherit certain characteristics that make them better suited for different social roles, the gendered division of labour within the society is likely to be perpetuated. Such assumptions, when made in society could be prejudicial because it may lead individuals to question men and women who take roles that are typically gender swerved (Eagly and Koenig, 2008).

Therefore, individuals and society may view male teachers as deficient in undertaking task-oriented activities that are dominated by women. Stereotyping the social role of women as the best in teaching children in the pre-school setting may lead to male teachers being stigmatized.

Gender stereotyping is a phenomenon that has existed within humanity and society for centuries and continues to exist in almost every aspect of our lives. Research conducted by Mancus (1992) investigated the effects of gender stereotypes on gender roles. Due to the widely accepted stereotype on gender roles on the occupation for males and females, the male students subjected female teachers to negative attributions whiles the female students on the other hand, also made negative attributions on male teachers. The study further revealed that most of the male students finally asserted that teaching was not a profession they would consider venturing into as they grow up because the occupation has been highly feminized. This clearly shows how inclined the spirit of stereotyping has been inculcated in the children we are teaching to grow and change unaccepted norms that have taken dominion over us and society.
In a research conducted by Fukada et al., (1993), the study focused on the principals and vice-principals’ views about the assertion that females are more appropriate in teaching the elementary school grade than males. Overwhelmingly, the study revealed that principals and vice-principals perceived the lower elementary grades to be more appropriate for female teachers and regarded the upper elementary grades as more befitting for male teachers. This research demonstrates a clear indication of stereotyping that exists within the school system with regards to the most appropriate level relevant for a specific gender. This attitude of stereotyping was also evident in the responses given by the respondents in this study, especially when they were tasked to allocate male and female to grades that they deemed appropriate based on gender.

This study further revealed that the responses from the respondents indicated that the lower elementary grades are the best level appropriate for females while males’ better fits teaching roles at the upper elementary school grades. Also, school administrators agreed that males prefer teaching roles at the upper elementary grades whiles females preferred to teaching roles at the lower grades. In the same study, it revealed that these assumptions by the principals and vice-principals were perceptually distorted or stereotypically motivated with regards to the preferences of women in teaching as well as their leadership competencies.

Razumnikova (2005) found that the professionally held stereotyping about the dominance of male and female jobs have not changed. He noted that jobs like politics, economics, engineering, construction, agriculture, and the military are perceived to be male-dominated occupations while cooking and home economics are perceived to be female dominating jobs. He asserts that people continue to hold traditional values for males and females, such that, most males are linked to taking care of the welfare of the family whiles females are linked to taking responsibility for the family health. He posits that the more individuals attach occupations to masculinity values, the more male and female would intend to attach masculinity values to that occupation.

Sczesny et al (2006) researched masculinity and how gender stereotyping is linked to leadership competence. The research addressed the question of how sex perceived as a social category and physical appearance perceived as a specific gender stereotype component influences male and female leadership competence attributions. In this research, two experiments, that is, the influence of physical appearance and sex on the attribution of leadership competence were analysed. The experiment was carried with 72 participants, 36 males and 36 females were recruited for the study. The study revealed that the participant rated males, and all those viewed as masculine, irrespective of the gender,
as much competent in leadership. On the other hand, feminine males received the lowest rating in leadership competence although males were in general rated as competent. This study revealed that the participants did not realize their consideration of gender, but in fact, females were rated as possessing more competent abilities in leadership. The review above clearly demonstrates the biases individuals have developed for gender roles which constitute a form of stereotyping, most especially in the pre-school teaching settings. Just like as indicated above, teaching roles in the pre-school education centers has been stereotyped to suggest that it is solely an occupation for females, and why men are not actively patronizing those settings of our education in rather unfortunate and continue to be an issue of concern to school administrators and policymakers.

Most recently, Simpson (2020) researched gender stereotypes in schools concerning school subjects and how that was influential on status losses and gains. The research revealed that most of the participants hold the view that male teachers are better in teaching courses related to Mathematics and Sciences, while females are perceived to be better in teaching foreign languages and arts-related language courses. Interestingly, the research showed no significant differences in gender about who out of the two genders is more appropriate to teach social studies courses. Besides, other teachers awarded high status and reputation to a teacher who taught the same stereotyped subjects as him or her and awarded low status to a teacher who taught a different stereotyped subject. The next chapter would delve into why male teachers are underrepresented in pre-school education centers.

4.3 Feminization of the teaching profession
In many countries across the world, women dominate the teaching profession, most especially in the pre-school education settings (Kelleher, 2011). The feminization of the teaching profession is a phenomenon that has existed for a long time in both developed and developing countries (Kelleher, 2011). According to Munkuna (2011), the feminization of the pre-school teaching profession was one of the greatest transformations for women. This was because women had fewer job opportunities than men and that they were willing to work for less pay. The feminization of the teaching profession internationally could be attributed to two main causes in teacher education.

First has to do with socio-economic development. Socio-economic development has given birth to job opportunities that in turn urges the majority of male workers to assume new jobs, either for the interest of it or for a better salary, therefore leaving women for job opportunities associated with teaching (Kelleher, 2011). Giving the traditional views as men having the main responsibility of providing for the economic wellbeing of the family means
that most men would not choose to enter the teaching profession because of the low salary scale attached to it (Kelleher, 2011). The low salary attached to the pre-school teaching profession is a factor of male underrepresentation. The next section further discusses in detail.

Secondly, the feminized nature of the teaching profession is aligned to the socially perceived gender roles that associate teaching as a role for mothers. Mothers are perceived as competent in nurturing children (Drudy, 2008). Stereotypically, the teaching profession, according to Kelleher (2011), is perceived to be the proper place for women within the society because it is “God-given nature”.

4.4 Income level
Salary happens to be one of the most important factors of the condition of service that contribute to teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction within the teaching profession. Staff within the pre-school education settings are faced with challenges about better conditions of service; remuneration is usually below the minimum wage, as well as opportunities to progress in their career (McDonald et al., 2018).

According to McDonald et al. (2018) the major causer of low staff retention in the pre-school education settings could be attributed to low salary. The salary of workers within the pre-school settings portrays a great disparity in countries across the globe, with low salary usually having an impact on the behaviour of staff towards children. According to OECD (2020) data on pre-school educators’ salary in 2018, although Iceland’s entry salary (37,367 USD) per year is relatively better than countries like Korea (32,485 USD), Slovenia (28,031 USD) and Columbia (19,624 USD).

However, these countries' salary increment within a space of 15 years is relatively better as compared to that of Iceland. Nonetheless, these salaries are proportionally low compared to teaching staff working in other levels of education within the same countries. Statistically, within 15 years, the salary of pre-school staff in Iceland increased to 41,400 USD as of 2018, compared to Korea (57,179 USD), Slovenia (40,591 USD), and Columbia (35,788 USD) which has shown drastic increment within the same period. OECD (2020) statistics further indicate that women dominate the pre-school education settings compared to men. In Iceland for instance women constitute 94.6%, as well as Korea and Slovenia which represent 97.3% and 99.3% respectively.

Male teacher’s underrepresentation in pre-school education could be attributed to a low pay rate, and it is based on this same factor that has contributed to women dominating the pre-school education setting. Farquhar (1997) posits that it would be hard for men to
consider taking up employment at the pre-school education setting because of the low wages that exist within the setting. Farquhar asserts that social status and higher wages are dependent on the age of the child being catered for. She further established the fact that the older the child taught and catered for, the higher the wages. This, therefore, accounts for the reason why there are more male teachers at the primary school than the pre-school education and more males in the secondary school setting than in the pre-school setting. The reason for this disparity according to Farquhar (1997) could be attributed to the unresolved struggles of pre-school teacher’s agitation for salary increment.

In the same study, Farquhar noted that, despite the recent moves to ensure pay equity with teachers at the primary school setting, their low salary issues have not been resolved despite the many calls on governments and the education ministries. This happens to be one of the core reasons for which male teachers do not appreciate working in pre-school settings. In a recent study, Mukuna (2011) also mentioned salary as a major reason for men underrepresentation in the pre-school teaching profession. She asserts that the starting pay attached to the profession is not good and therefore not motivating enough for men. Jónsdóttir & Coleman (2014b) asserts that pre-school education teachers must be conscious politically and act as agents of change if they want to be valued as professionals.
5 Understanding Gender and Pre-school Education

Gender plays a significant role in defining a teacher's profession and goes on to define the level at which their teaching roles could be executed. Discussions about teacher’s gender have been a widely discussed topic for over centuries. The discourse of more male teachers needed within the context of pre-school education and the society at large has been widely accepted and appreciated to have a significant impact on education (Mistry & Sood, 2015). The wide debate about the fact that women show greater care is creative and sensitive (Garn & Brown, 2008) rather than males, have seen a paradigm shift. Despite the shift, society holds suspicious views about men working in pre-school centers, hence deterring most men from patronizing the profession (Hedlin et al., 2019).

Research has shown that the number of men who apply to pursue courses in pre-school education is very low compared to women despite various interventions that some countries have put in place to increase male patronage in pre-school education (Peeters et al., 2015). As of December 2018, Iceland had recorded 6,176 staff members working at the pre-primary schools. Men were noted to be 434, with the remaining numbers being females (Statistics Iceland, 2019). The professionalism of teachers in pre-school education plays a vital role in the development of children in a pre-school education setting (Jónsdóttir & Coleman, 2014).

Nonetheless, there seem to be contrasting views by researchers in establishing the professionalism of males and females in pre-school education settings. Cooks (2008) in his research elucidated that men are a better role model for male children than women. He argued in his paper that men are in a better position of meeting the educational needs of male children in any educational setting, especially male children who hail from underprivileged backgrounds. In contrast to this argument, Sabbe & Aelterman (2007) also argue from the perspective that positive attitudes by boys towards learning could be achieved only when female practitioners teach them.

This establishes that research on this field provides diverse results on which gender is suitable for teaching and nurturing children in pre-school education. It is obvious that both genders have important roles to play in caring for pre-school children and the combination of both in the teaching and learning environment could add great value in the upbringing of children in the pre-school setting.
5.1 Development of pre-school education

The history behind the development of pre-school education within the Western world could be linked to the position women occupy in society and the traditional gender roles (Hard and Jonsdottir, 2013; Van Laera et al., 2014). Pre-school and care were built on two core traditions, and that is care and education. The practical and conceptual distinction between education and care was, and still relevant in many countries in Europe (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010). Traditionally, women who ranked low professionally were essentially recruited as pre-school teachers in young children’s early education. Their profession was legitimized and greatly motivated by stereotypically constructed ideas of motherhood (Van Laera et. al., 2014). With time, the development of kindergarten emerged to provide pre-primary education and care for older children for primary education (Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

Young children’s education was accepted and seen as a form of employment for females because it provided women an opportunity of building their social life, as well as a form of employment for them outside of the home. It is out of this background that the traditional conception of the idea that women are naturally good in nurturing and caring for young children is still relevant in today’s society (Forrester, 2005).

5.2 Suspicion of Males at Pre-school Education and Care

Considerable research has shown that men are often associated with child sexual abuse cases in their quest to give care to children in pre-school settings. But it is worth noting that exhibiting professionalism as a teacher at the childhood setting would require physical contact with the children, and this is an aspect of the work that cannot be overlooked. Caring for children in the pre-school setting includes giving helping hand to children in certain situations such as changing diapers, dressing, and comforting children as well as during nap time. These are practical oriented activities that involve physical contact with the children.

According to Parr & Gosse (2011), one of the reasons for male underrepresentation at the pre-school education and care is because of false accusations that are most often levelled against them when undertaking such related activities with regards to children. According to research conducted by Brody (2015), he interviewed men in six different countries, and in this research, the conclusion established that there were divergent views on what is deemed a good way of handling children, and who is appropriate to give physical care to children. In Brody’s argument, he established that women more often give physical care to children, and they undertake such activities in the pre-school settings that were regarded as normal or natural. Men’s role in pre-school settings is to become a role model.
for the children, either representing or complementing the absence of their fathers. Men’s physical contact with children is often not seen as appropriate because their role as role models must not in any way have any relationship with physical contact with the children. It is therefore seen as not appealing and inappropriate for men caring for children at the childhood centers to have physical contact with them.

On the contrary, men who care and give physical contact to children are most likely to expose themselves to being stereotyped, ridiculed by society, and suspected as being paedophiles. Owen & Gillentine (2011), rightly established that men could be at crossroads when dealing with issues regarding children. It is either they give physical care to children in times of need or being exposed to the prejudiced assertion of being accused of child sex abuse. The surest way for men not to be accused of child sex abuse and also not being perceived as a probable paedophile is therefore to shun work that involves caring for children, or better still, take up positions which are also stereotyped as traditionally masculine within the work setting to avoid giving physical care (Willet, 2008).

5.3 Encouraging men into pre-school education and care

Young children must know the importance of all genders, and the critical role it plays in their education and their care as they grow. Pre-school education plays a vital role in the development of young children’s gender identity (Solomon, n.d). However, there is a re-enforcement of traditional gender stereotyping when there is no connection between children of younger age and male teachers, especially with their understanding of who is responsible for their learning and their growth (Aina and Petronella, 2011; Brownhill and Oater, 2016).

Through children’s frequent exposure to varied female teachers, they tend to experience a variety of womanhood and femininity models. Comparatively, young children’s idea of what it means to be a man or a boy may be incomplete when they do not get exposure to masculinity models (Giese, 2018). Ensuring the improvement of gender equality within the workforce of pre-school education settings would provide children with a great deal of diversity in role models, most especially during this critical time of developing their gender identity (Drudy, 2008). This chapter discusses how men could be encouraged in pre-school teaching.

Research, according to Peeters (2007) has shown that no country in Europe has managed to increase the participation of male workers without government policies and initiatives encouraging it. In increasing male participation in pre-school education in New Zealand.
O’Brein (2012) posits that the Ministry of Education worked using an entirely new promotional strategy that was adopted and focused on improving the status of teaching and increased the variety of the teaching workforce, including the percentage of men. Jones (2009) argues from the perspective that governments could improve the fortunes of pre-school education by supporting, recruiting and maintaining men in pre-school education settings, as well as improving the status of pre-school education, providing targeted scholarships and training, embarking on national advertising, ensuring good and quality working conditions, and using indirect advocacy. A research conducted in Britain revealed that 55% of parents want male workers and caregivers to work with their children (Jones, 2009). Like Britain, Farquhar’s (2012) research findings established that specific government policies are an important ingredient for encouraging men into pre-school education settings.

There are a variety of inputs that support the idea of increasing male representation in pre-school education, such that pre-school education teaching could become an attractive career option. These inputs, according to Farquhar (2012) include using media campaigns, establishing scholarship packages, and setting performance indicators. However, a section of opposers to government interventions have expressed fear about what the outcome could be if more male teachers are recruited into pre-school settings. The fear stems from the fact that recruiting more men into pre-school education setting cost the sector, teacher standards, and less availability of job to women (Farquhar, 2012). This suggests that a substantial amount of change is required to support the involvement of men in the pre-school environment. Many studies argue that men must not only embrace their roles as caregivers, nurturers, and educators to children but the belief and attitude of women towards men in early, childhood environments must also be examined (Neugebauer, 2005). Men who teach in pre-school environments have the conviction that they belong to a community where their contributions are valued. In this sense, there is the likelihood of men workforce increasing to the level where the culture of pre-school education would be free from biases, scrutiny, as well as commonly held assumptions about male teachers that are embedded in today’s workforce.

5.4 Merits and demerits of increasing men in pre-school education

Many studies have shown that more men caregivers are needed in pre-school education for different reasons. According to studies conducted by Farquhar et. al (2006), in the context of social and economic change, the involvement of men in pre-school is important because men represent male figures for children, especially in the lives of children whose fathers are absent in their lives. According to a national survey conducted by Farquhar (2012), the
result demonstrated that children with single mothers need men as a role model, such that boys could learn what it is to be called a man or a boy and girls on the other hand also learn how to relate with men. Further research has shown that the absence of males in pre-school education settings impacts negatively on boys. Studies have shown that women favour girls and reinforce feminine attributes. This demonstrates that boys in pre-school settings are disadvantaged (Cooney and Bittner, 2001; Farquhar, 2005). MacNaughton and Newman (2001) assert that male teachers could reinforce masculinity in boys, and this could have an impact on children who lack positive male role models in their homes.

Critical research has shown that the involvement of men in pre-school education could be beneficial to both boys and girls through observation and interaction with male figures in a non-traditional role. According to Sumsion (2005), boys and girls could be assisted in the construction of new ideas about masculinity by well-educated male teachers. A lot of research has demonstrated that the involvement of more male teachers in pre-school education settings could help the children to overcome the notion of sex-stereotyped views regarding gender roles, minimize sexism and ultimately promote gender equality (Farquhar, 2006; Marsiglo, 2009). According to Piburn (2006), endorsing the idea of non-traditional gender roles presume gender equality and could in the long run help children. Critics, however, argue that the study lack insight into how children could manage conflicting comprehension of gender identities (Sumsion, 2005).

In terms of play and interactions, male teachers expose children to a variety of approaches and can shape behaviours that overcome male stereotyping. Studies conducted by Sumsion (2005) establishes that male teachers could respond to and identify with male children more effectively than female teachers. This is because male teachers understand boys’ experiences and perspectives, as well as essential masculinity. According to Peeters (2007), the unruly play of boys is likely to be viewed by female teachers as aggressive and have an entirely negative impression about masculine behaviours than male teachers. Male children are therefore likely to be marginalized and positioned at a disadvantage within the current gender imbalance in pre-school education settings.

5.5 **Colleague teachers and pre-school education**

A more diversified workforce with the representation of both men and women is perceived to be an important element in expanding the quality of pre-school education for children. It encourages diversified viewpoints as well as how work is conducted in pre-school settings (Farquhar, 2012). Involving more male teachers, according to researchers, is beneficial to the pre-school profession because it has the tendency to change workplace dynamics, staff interrelationship and enhance the status of pre-school teaching (Lyons et al., 2003). Further
studies have shown that the involvement of male teachers in pre-school education settings could bring a unique perspective and energy to school programs. Male patronage in pre-school education contributes to bridging male and female gender balance in pre-school education settings and promote a gender-fair learning environment, as well as positive behaviour and attitude that is acceptable for children (Bittner and Cooney, 2003). Involving male figures in pre-school education teaching role reinforces, rather than disrupting gender stereotypes in the educational field Cummingham (1999).

Descent wages for workers in pre-school education continues to be an issue of concern in the sector, and a major setback to recruiting highly competent and qualified staff. Higher wages for the working force in the pre-school education setting could be highly beneficial to the sector because it will boost the sector with more qualified, as well as the active participation of male teachers. Other than that, staff turnover is likely to remain low (Farquhar, 2012). Furthermore, Bittner & Cooney (2003) assert that male teachers could contribute to the quality of pre-school when a conducive environment that enhances gender-free classroom, better wages, as well as recognition of male role figure is created and appreciated.

In contrast to this assertion, other researchers are on the view that men retain their traditional advantage in the workplace when they are recruited into female-dominated jobs and have the tendency of rising to more administrative positions that pay a higher salary (Farquhar, 2012). According to other researchers, men's communication style is more straightforward and open than females and therefore, tend creating tension at the workplace could increase if men assume high management positions (Sargent, 2005).
6 Discussion

This thesis set out to investigate why the gender imbalance of men in pre-school education continues to persist despite various interventions by international organizations and governments through gender policies and initiatives. The literature indicated that men underrepresentation in pre-school education could be linked to several factors. Among some of the factors reviewed in the research include socio-cultural factors, where the society have prejudiced mindset about the pre-school teaching profession, low income, where staff engaged in teaching roles, especially women are paid less salary as compared to their male counterpart in other levels of the teaching profession and male teachers being accused of sexual abuse cases. The literature review elucidates that gender imbalance about men underrepresentation in pre-school teaching roles in Iceland and other parts of the world is deeply rooted in gender inequality as well as social-cultural construction from family, friends, and the society at large. Gender inequality in the sense that pre-school teachers are not given a fair share of the national cake in terms of salary. This research clearly showed that women dominate the pre-school teaching profession, and in terms of salary, these pre-school teachers have for many years suffered low salaries compared to their male counterparts teaching in other levels like the upper secondary schools.

The perception that pre-school teaching is a profession for women or a mother's role exists because women have dominated this role for over many years. It is an undisputed fact that this global phenomenon is deeply rooted in issues about position women occupy in society, economic development, the value society places on children and childcare, and the cultural definition of masculinity (Drudy, 2008). The society in the first place has preconceived mindset about the fact children are best nurtured and cared for by women than men (Garn & Brown, 2008), and this preconception has translated into the school system to mean that certain activities, like feeding, changing diapers, putting them to sleep carried out in the pre-school setting could not be undertaken by men because teaching in the pre-school goes beyond teaching and learning. It also involves taking physical care of the children when the need be. These activities are already undertaken by women in our natural home settings, hence the notion that they can best care for children within the pre-school setting. Nonetheless, the literature has demonstrated that despite these factors, some section of male figures takes up teaching roles in the pre-school sectors.

However, men who take up teaching roles are ridiculed and are mostly subjected to being called all sorts of names by society, friends, and families (Chappell et. al., 2014). Male teachers wanting to take up teaching roles in the pre-school settings receive less support from friends and families because men are perceived to take up jobs in engineering and
higher education settings which are valued and attract a higher salary. This institutionalized socially constructed gender roles that are prevalent in our societies could be said to be the root of gender inequality between male and female teachers’ engagement in nurturing and caring for children in the pre-school education settings. These reasons according to the literature contribute to teaching roles in pre-school education looking unattractive to men.

Although teaching roles in the pre-school education settings is highly feminized and socially constructed, this narrative is gradually changing in this 21st century, such that men are actively involved in nurturing and caring for young children but may not only be executed through the school system. In Iceland for instance, the gender equality act (Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women) enjoins employers to give flexibility in work patterns and working hours to enable men and women to reconcile work and family responsibilities. This is a sign of positivity and a road to bridging the gender disparity gap between males and females as well as changing mindset about gender roles. The Paternal Act No. 95/2000 entitles both men and women the privilege of embarking on a paid or without paid maternity and paternity leave. This law was enacted to ensure that both men and women have maximum access to their children.

This argument of men serving as role models for the children, especially children with single parents to me is shallow. The paternal act does not give responsibility to a single parent. In an event where the parents are separated must not bring an end to men having full access and responsibility towards their children. If both parents are living in their homes, men could equally extend that privilege of having to spend maximum time with their children during their paternal leave as enshrined in joint custody and visitation rights in Iceland. According to this law, both parents have equal rights to have access to their children in the events of marriage or cohabitation resolution.

One of the key issues reviewed in the literature and which could play a critical role in bridging the gender disparity between men and women workforce in pre-school education has to do with policies that seek to address gender equity and equality in teacher education. In bridging the gender disparity gap between male and female teachers in the pre-school education would mean that proper and effective policies that seek to encourage men, support their training, as well as their retention, be put in place. In chapter 3, there is no doubt that Iceland is one of the countries in the world championing the course of gender equality. The gender equality policy in Iceland is geared towards ensuring that the gender inequality gap between men and women is bridged. Salient areas the policy promotes include discrimination, sexual harassment, wage equality which is currently being championed as well as equal access to education. Despite gender equality policies, men
underrepresentation in the pre-school education setting is an area that has not been given much attention. Men constitute only 2% of the total workforce in pre-school education.

Although the action plan for 2016-2019 captures an element of government commitment in ensuring that men involved in gender equality issues are integrated into policy formation, much has not been done to ensure its implementation. Taking the pre-school act for instance, only article 2 mentions equality. Even with that, equality focuses on children’s interests and wellbeing, and the same applies to the Act on the compulsory school curriculum. Although men underrepresentation in pre-school education is a global canker, there is no or enough study on this issue in the context of Iceland, drawing the attention of authorities on the need to ensure that men are encouraged to take up teaching-related roles in the pre-school education settings.

However, comparing Iceland to Norway and the Flemish community of Belgium, it was evident that these countries have made a significant increase in the number of male teachers engaged in teaching roles in the pre-school setting. These countries were able to achieve this enacting gender-specific policies which solely focused on bridging that long existed disparity gap between men and women in the pre-school education setting. Although the parity has not been fully achieved, yet there is an indication of a positive outcome. Bridging the gender parity between male and female teachers in the pre-school education setting should be at the heart of national and school policies, reforms, and educational planning in Iceland.
7 Conclusion

The research established that major determinants impeding gender balance between men and women in pre-school education include stereotype and culture, low income, the fear of men being accused of child abuse, perception of female teachers and parents, and low status attached to the profession. Generally, the concept of gender is socially constructed and that has imposed gender imbalance and feminization in a pre-school education setting in Iceland and across the globe. Men representation in pre-school education is important and could contribute positively to the upbringing and nurturing of children. In this regard, it is prudent that governments and school authorities put in place holistic national reforms and policies that would encourage men to take up teaching roles in the pre-school setting. In doing so, men could be encouraged to apply for pre-school jobs. The policies, mission, and vision of pre-school education programs should be reflective of staff diversity and the active employment of male teachers. Ultimately, salaries should be adjusted to look attractive for staff working in the pre-school setting, just like other professions that are perceived to be having high status.
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