

## Personal attributes influencing gender disparity in development of early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Education determines the ability of individuals to connect and communicate with one another. Despite this view, the gaps in education opportunities in most developing countries are large. Public schools in Kakamega East Sub-County haven't escaped the waves of gender disparities that have affected both private and public schools in Kenya. This study, therefore, sought to establish personal attributes influencing gender disparity among early childhood development education (ECDE) teachers in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya. The study was supported by the social role theory. A descriptive survey study design was used, which is primarily concerned with the generic statistics that derive from the extraction of data from respondents. The location of study was Kakamega East sub-county in Kakamega County, Kenya. The target population was 1,106, including head teachers, deputy head teachers, teachers, program officers, and quality assurance officers (QUASO). Simple random sampling was employed to select 260 respondents, which constituted the sample size. Stratified random sampling was used to sample schools according to wards. Data was collected by the use of questionnaires and interviews with 37 head teachers, 37 deputy head teachers, and 184 teachers. A pilot study was conducted to validate the research instruments in advance. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) as a coefficient method to establish the reliability of the research instruments revealed a coefficient of 0.783, which shows that the instrument was reliable. Data was collected from the teachers in line with the three study objectives using questionnaires and interview schedules. Data obtained from the research instruments were analyzed inferentially and descriptively with the help of a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 22. Quantitative data was summarized to quantify the strength of the association between the variables; the researcher conducted a regression analysis to establish the effect of selected factors on gender disparity. Results were presented in tables. The findings revealed that personal attributes have a positive effect ( $\beta=.642, p<.05$ ) and explain 40.9% of the variance in gender disparity. It was concluded that all the selected factors had a significant influence on gender disparity in the early childhood education profession. The study recommends that teachers undergo training to help them build on their personal attributes and develop a positive attitude towards ECDE learners.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education, Gender, Personal Attributes, Teaching Profession, Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya

### I. INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity is an unequal treatment or opportunity due to gender, which is often rooted in the socially constructed roles and expectations (Wokocho, 2009). The teaching profession, especially the Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE), is a highly feminized profession around the world, with women constituting most of the sector since the cultural aspect of caregiving is associated with femininity (Sanders, 2016). Children of about 0-8 years old are served by ECDE, and this is highly seen as an extension of maternal roles, hence the low involvement of men. An example is a research in Europe that shows that less than 10 per cent of the male population is represented in early childhood education, showing that there is still a global gender imbalance (Peeters, 2007).

To a great extent, this difference is supported by the socio-cultural beliefs and stereotypes regarding women as naturally nurturing and more appropriate in raising children, as well as men who are considered to be incompatible with young children (Saigol & Danish, 2016). Studies also indicate that male caregivers tend to feel stigmatized, isolated, and suspicious, especially since the society fears children being harmed by male caregivers and because the society sees male caregivers as a sign of inappropriate conduct (Rohrmann, 2020). Moreover, low salary, insufficient career advancement, and social disrespect towards the profession prevent men to enter or stay in the ECDE profession (Magoma, 2021).

The same trends are observed in the African context. Research in South Africa and Pakistan points at cultural norms, substandard working conditions, and the view of teaching young children as work of women as key reasons that

hamper male involvement (Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021; Saigol & Danish, 2016). In Kenya, despite more men joining ECDE training programs, most are opting to work in administrative positions instead of direct teaching, which is a continuity of gender biases in the profession (Kamwitha et al., 2022). The societal perceptions tend to consider men in ECDE as going against the conventional masculine roles, which further deter them (Waigera et al., 2020).

In Kenya, empirical evidence also indicates that there is a large gender gap in ECDE staffing. Indicatively, in a study by Ngure (2014), over 80 percent of pre-school teachers are women and parental preference of women teachers is one of the reasons which creates the imbalance. Age, education level, remuneration, and working conditions also have been identified to be contributing factors to gender disparities (Nganga et al., 2023; Chepkonga, 2021). Although male teachers are known to be important role models (especially to boys), their underrepresentation restricts the diversity of learning experiences among children (Obeywa et al., 2022).

Although there is a growing awareness of the role of gender balance in ECDE, most of the available studies have been based on structural and institutional elements, and little attention has been paid to individual characteristics like attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and personal motivations that shape career decisions. Also, there is a lack of context-specific studies of gender disparity in ECDE in local contexts like in Kakamega East Sub-County. Thus, this paper intends to fill this gap by exploring how individual factors contribute to gender difference in the process of developing the early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya. These factors are important to understand in the context of policy and interventions that should be in place to enhance gender balance and the quality of early childhood education.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Early childhood education (ECE) is very important in determining the cognitive, social and emotional development in children and the teacher is supposed to offer a nurturing, stable, and challenging environment to the child. In addition to caregiving, ECE teachers can be role models, authority figures and facilitators of holistic child development. But the profession has grown to be more feminized and this has created a high gender imbalance which restricts the involvement of the males and has raised the issue of diversity and role modelling to young learners (Sumsion, 2005; Peeters, 2007).

The low proportion of men in early childhood teaching has been attributed to the perception that caring jobs are female in nature, and the social norms that do not encourage men to take up nurturing careers both nationally and globally (United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015). Social stigma, invisibility, and lack of recognition are the most frequent complaints by men in the sector which further demoralizes their participation and sustainability in ECE (Cameron, 2001). This imbalance is experienced in most of the counties in Kenya, such as in Kakamega East Sub-County, where most of the teachers of ECE are female even though there are efforts to enhance gender inclusiveness in education.

Despite the fact that past research has addressed gender differences in teaching profession, majority have concentrated on structural and institutional determinants with little consideration on individual determinants including personal attributes. Attitudes, beliefs and self-efficacy, motivation and career perceptions are some of the factors that may have significant implications on whether individuals will join or stay in the ECE profession, but these factors are under-researched in the Kenyan setting (Moss, 2003). The existence of this gap means that a specific study is necessary to explore the role of personal factors in the area of gender disparity in early childhood education teaching. Hence, the research aims to investigate the personal factors contribute to gender inequality in the growth of the ECE teaching field in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya, in a bid to produce evidence to guide policies and interventions that can enhance gendering in the field.

### 1.2 Research Objective

The purpose of this study was to examine personal attributes influencing gender disparity in development of early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

#### 2.1.1 The Social Role Theory

The paper is based on Social Role Theory developed by Alice Eagly in 2013 which describes how expectations of society and culturally predetermined roles influence the behavior, attitudes, and career preferences of people. According to the theory, gender differences are attributed to the traditional division of labour with men being mostly linked to jobs that are not home related e.g., bread winning and women being linked to nurturing and care giving jobs at home. These gender roles shape individual qualities like interests, self-esteem, education desire and career choices which ultimately lead to gender inequality in several careers.

In early childhood education (ECE) context, the Social Role Theory offers an effective perspective to the long-standing underrepresentation of males in the teaching field. The early childhood level of teaching is viewed culturally as a nurturing and caregiving job and is closer to socially constructed feminine characteristics. Consequently, men might be deterred either directly or indirectly to embark on the profession based on societal expectations and stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Such stereotypes are supported by socialization processes which transform personal beliefs and behavior at a tender age resulting in internalization of gendered career paths.

An additional point in favour of this view is offered by Halpern (2013) who states that the historical divisions of labour based on biological and physical differences have shaped the modern gender roles and occupational segregation. As a result, women are perceived as naturally inclined towards the care giving professions like teaching and nursing, whereas men are perceived as being inclined towards the technical and physically challenging fields. Such perceptions lead to the formation of gendered cognitive schemas, which persist in shaping career choices and reinforcing differences in careers like early childhood education. These roles are also not fixed according to the theory. Eagly (2013) notes that people can accustom and learn behaviors that are not in the stereotypical gender roles by exposure and engagement in a variety of social environments. This means that men can be motivated to participate and succeed in early childhood education when society is confronted to change their perceptions and conducive environment provided. James S. Coleman (1988) also highlights how social capital, including networks, norms, and social support, influence individual opportunities and career paths, and believes that gender imbalances in ECE could be addressed by improving the amount of support systems.

Further, this framework is further enriched by the concept of intersectionality, which appreciates that gender inequalities are mediated by the social identities that overlap the social status, culture, and educational levels. When these factors are added to the individual factors in the context of Kakamega East Sub-County, they can either be reinforced or defied to support or oppose the established gender norms in the teaching profession. Social Role Theory can be specifically useful in this study since it can be used to explain how individual factors including interest, self-view, education level, and career expectations are influenced by societal demands and cause gender inequalities in early childhood education. Through this theory, the research will aim to elaborate on the social and psychological mechanisms that underlie the low rate of male involvement in ECE and will inform policies and interventions that will support gender equity in the field.

## 2.2 Empirical review

Drudy (2008) and Zhang (2017) explain that the historical lack of male teachers has been triggered by several factors such as "economic growth, urbanisation, women's social status, the culture of masculinity and [low social] childcare values." To draw more men on the ground, it will not succeed to rely on any single factor. Barnard, et al. (2000) suggested that more progress in hiring male teachers could be accomplished through collaborative work by administrators, government policymakers, existing teachers and teacher trainers. Most men decide to take part in education later than women and focus on topics needed as administrators for fulfilment (Lortie, 1975). Mason (1992) discovered that 75% of the men he surveyed intended to leave the school, 51% hoped to get a higher education job, and 20% wanted to leave the educational sector. The factors cited were pay, wages and standard of living. Married men voiced further questions about them. Robinson (1998) found that 10% of the male pre-school teachers had left their profession two years after his research. They claimed that there was more money to keep them. Barnard et al. (1985) suggested that teachers are far more similar than their class effectiveness; that the achievement of learners other than the gender gaps can be influenced by other factors. In addition, there are those who conclude that a women's career is a direct product of the low standing and abysmal benefits of the early childhood sector. There is no sense in supporting the rise of men in the early childhood – even white men.

Nearly every country in the world now urges policymakers to attract more ECEC citizens. Some countries are moving forward to decide policies for the target. In early infant services Norway has set a goal of 20 percent male staff (Moss, 2003). The program for 10 USD 4 500 men who are taking part in the ECE teacher education program has now been revealed by New Zealand. The German project 'Early Childhood Education and Care' has invested 13 million euros and its long-term objective is 20 percent (Hammond, 2013). Although the results were small, some progress was made to achieve a lower-gendered ECE workforce. In the meantime, the United States has progressed slowly, and the results are misleading. Wilkins and Gamble (2012) asserts it would be beneficial to recruit more male teachers to ECE, for example, by raising teacher remuneration or introducing government payback systems and offering school scholarships. In addition, it is vital for male teachers to create a network in which they can interact, help and protect each other. The NAEYC Forum, Education Network Men, and Teaching of Men are examples of similar projects. As Cunningham (1999) puts it, many people believe they are subjected to a slew of charges that could force them to resign. As a result, policies to protect them are required.

Isobel et al. (2021) considers it necessary to include meaningful male imagery in everyday learning and show at school in administrators and classroom teachers. For instance, images of men working in nursing and caring

professions should be displayed as well as posters for a president in the lobby. Teachers and administrators should examine their gender bias through the use of gender-neutral language in relation to young children, provide opportunities for each student to explore themselves and encourage staff to observe and reflect each other. Moreover, teachers and administrators should consciously collaborate with secondary schools to give students the opportunity to learn and appreciate the teaching career of ECEC. According to Katarina Farkas, who is responsible for the Zug Teacher Education project in Switzerland (Isobel et al., 2021), male instructors who inspire children to pursue ECC education as a career need real-life role models rather than virtual ones in order to generate realistic pictures of males. In other words, managers and current teachers should provide children with more possibilities for learning what is like being a male teacher.

Cunningham and Charyn (2002) suggested that understanding the differences they can make in the ECE is now important for male teachers in pre-service. Trainers should also add new masculine teachers to support and instructor mentors. Colleges can also work on the possibility of work in the ECEC with the career services and trainers. Finally, trainers should ensure that male students are better prepared for literacy. One of the best programs is the Call Me MISTER (CMMP), a collaborative project between Clemson University and three private institutions that have been historically black in South Carolina that provides participants with far more opportunities to learn and practice in the field of teaching and provide strong teaching and mentorship facilities. This proposal would have relied on career advice and guidance from Cunningham and Charyn (2002). What's more, Cunningham and Charyn (2002), from a survey of licensed child care workers in Washington State, suggested for teacher educators: Include the phrases "men encouraged to apply" or "men welcome" in ads for employees; Place ads under "recreation" rather than "child care"; "Recruit and train men through high school and college work study programs, sports teams, and for work during school breaks; Use men to recruit other men; if a candidate is reluctant to be the only man on staff, ask if he has a friend who might like to work with him and start men working with school-age children with whom they may initially feel more comfortable and accepted". Whereas Cunningham and Charyn (2002) suggest the placement of ads, no other publicity method has been explored.

Decades of attempts to promote more men at ECE have taken place, and in each country, there are various proposals and strategies. Effectiveness studies of these recommendations are essential in order to find the most appropriate methods for the recruitment of further ECE men. David Baxendell, an early childhood teacher at Christ Church, believes that one of the reasons why more men aren't interested in a career teaching children under the age of five is that it isn't seen as a profession. He believes the sector can be taken as part of the education profession rather than "care" through events like the necessity for to be completely trained in early childhood teachers in 1879.

Another impediment according to men who work in the system is that men's position in the early childhood sector is invisible and therefore unrecognized. TahuLoper, a five-year teacher, claims that all of the photographs in early childhood teaching preparation literature were of women, as were the brochures used to attract students, and that the same is true in the broader media, such as nappy advertisements on television. Duncan Fisher, a colleague, suggests that young men who may be involved in teaching young children are actually unaware that the position exists. Therefore, the current study sought to determine the personal factors influencing gender disparity among ECDE teachers in Kakamega East sub county, Kenya

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

The study employed a descriptive research design. In this study a Correlational research design. Descriptive research design was important in the study as it gave opportunity to determine the relationship between each independent variable with the dependent variable. According to Creswell and Creswell (2005), a descriptive research design was used to determine the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent or outcome variable) in a population.

#### 3.2 Study area

The study was carried out in Kakamega East Sub-County which is found in the eastern part of Kakamega County formally referred to as Shinyalu Division. The researcher selected the area because there's a gender disparity in development among early childhood education teachers for example Isukha East and Isukha west in Kakamega East Sub-County, according to County Education Report of 2021. It was imperative to understand effects of gender disparities in development of among early childhood education, Kenya in order to seek practical ways of supporting the pupils to improve in their development, thus making the current area of study worth investigating, Kakamega East Sub-County (Kakamega County Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022).

### 3.3 Study Population

The study was conducted in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kakamega County, Kenya. The target population comprised 807 respondents, including 97 head teachers, 611 teachers, 97 section heads, one Sub-County Quality Assurance Officer, and one Sub-County Education Officer. These respondents were selected because they are directly involved in the administration and implementation of early childhood education and are therefore well positioned to provide information on gender disparities in educational development.

### 3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Sampling is the process of selecting a representative subset of a target population for participation in a study. This study employed stratified random sampling, whereby schools were first stratified according to wards to ensure adequate representation across the study area. Thereafter, respondents within each stratum were selected using simple random sampling, giving every eligible member of the population an equal chance of selection. This approach enhances representativeness, minimizes sampling bias, and improves the generalizability of the findings (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Given the finite target population of 807 respondents, a sample size of 260 respondents was considered adequate to provide representative data while maintaining the desired level of precision. The sample was proportionately allocated across the different respondent categories based on their respective population sizes to ensure that each subgroup was adequately represented. The Sub-County Education Officer and the Sub-County Quality Assurance Officer were purposively included in the study because of their oversight roles in early childhood education.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The researcher administered both open and closed ended questions questionnaires to teachers and pupils to obtain both personal and specific details from the respondents. The questionnaires targeted the Head teachers, deputy head teachers and the teachers. A questionnaire was considered appropriate for this study since it allowed responses to be gathered in a standardized manner which was easier to analyze and further provide access to a bigger group of respondents cost effectively (Charmaz, 2020). Interview was carried out with two participants who included 1 the sub county quality assurance officer and education officer were ideal for the study. It consisted of information on the study objectives and sought their qualitative description of the objectives

### 3.6 Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher sought permission from the school of graduate studies, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) after which the permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovations (NACOSTI) was also sought to enable the researcher to carry out the study among public primary schools in Kakamega East Sub-County upon the issuance of the research permit, the researcher then obtained clearance from the county Education officer to visit each of the schools under study.

Before the actual study the researcher made an acquaintance visit in all selected public primary schools. Appointment was booked with sampled respondents so that adequate preparation is made for that purpose. The selected schools were administered randomly. This had an advantage due to the busy schedules. Thereafter, the questionnaires were administered to teachers and pupils in the sampled schools on the same day. However, due to the nature of information of the study the researcher did much of the work.

### 3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data on influence of gender disparities in development of among early childhood education in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya was analysed accordingly. This involved examination of the data from various respondents already stated herein. The completed instruments were collected and collated. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented using tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. The data collected was coded and entered in the computer for analysis with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was analyzed using descriptive and analytical statistics. In addition, the researcher used multiple regression to quantify the strength and influence of the variables. On the other hand, qualitative data collected through open-ended questions were organized into themes, categories, and patterns that are relevant to the study's goals (Mishra & Alok, 2022).

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

The objective of the study sought to establish the personal attributes influencing gender disparity among ECDE teachers. This was also guided by the research question which stated that "What are the personal attributes influencing gender disparity among early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya?" First,



the study sought information from the respondents on their preferable employment agency by asking “ Which agency would you prefer to recruit ECDE teachers?” With a return rate of 252 from the 260 respondents, the findings are presented as shown in Table 1 using frequency counts and percentages. Agencies entailed BOM, County Government, National Government and TSC.

**Table 1**  
*Preferable Employment Agency*

<b>Employment Agency</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
BOM	22	8.7
County Government	87	34.5
National Government	88	34.9
TSC	55	21.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The results showed the strong preference pattern of teachers towards their preferred employer. Most of the respondents, 88 (34.9%) preferred employment under the national government followed closely by 87 (34.5%) who preferred County Governments. This close match implies that teachers believe that both governments are equitable employers, perhaps because of the perceived job security, salary structures and public service benefits. The similarity in percentages also indicates a healthy balance in the perception of employment opportunities in the public sector with neither the national nor the county government overwhelmingly preferred by teachers.

However, a smaller number of teachers, 55 (21.8%), preferred recruitment through the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and 22 (8.7%) preferred to be recruited by employment agencies. The comparatively poor preference for jobs in the TSC might reflect the problems they encountered with administrative procedures, distribution of workload, or lack of flexibility as compared with direct government employment structures. Employment agencies being the least preferred may suggest perceptions of instability, low job security or worse working conditions in these arrangements. Overall, the results indicate that teachers strongly prefer to work in the formal public sector, especially in the national and county government sectors, in which they believe their working conditions are more stable and predictable. The distribution further suggests that teacher preferences are influenced by the reputation of institutions, job security and employment benefits. The conclusions drawn from these results have significance for education policymakers, especially in improving the employment conditions of the education sector to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

**Table 2**  
*Category of Salaries*

<b>Category of Salaries</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
2000-9000	24	9.5
10000-15000	23	9.1
16000-20000	148	58.7
Above 20,000	57	22.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Does salary encourage during recruitment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	202	80.2
No	50	19.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Most ECDE teachers (n=148, 58.7%) earned a monthly wage of between KES 16000 and KES 20 000 while 57 teachers (22.6%) earned above KES 20 000. Besides, a total of 23 (9.1%) teachers were earning between KES 10,000 and KES 15,000. While, 24 (9.5%) were earning between KES 2,000 and KES 9,000. As for the salary's impact on recruitment into the ECDE teaching career, most respondents, 202 (80.2%) affirmed that salary was a motivating factor to join the profession. Whereas, 50 (19.8%) stated that salary did not influence their career choice.

The above study shows that remuneration is an important personal characteristic influencing entry in the ECDE teaching profession. Pay appears to draw in teachers and keep them in their profession. Low pay might drive off potential entrants, especially men, who have must take care of economic responsibilities and opt out for other jobs. As a result, the salary levels may partly cause gender disparities in the development of the ECDE teaching profession.

These findings support Ingersoll (2001) and suggest that financial rewards and job security are the major reasons why people choose to take up teaching as a profession. Likewise, Richardson and Watt (2006) found that extrinsic motivations, such as salary and employment conditions, impact career choice among would-be teachers. Poor pay in

centres is making ECDE profession less attractive, according to Orodho (2014), while also contributing to staffing challenges in the country Kenya. Similarly, Ngugi (2018) discovered that low pay and fewer perks prevented qualified people from joining and remaining in the ECDE sector. Thus, if the remuneration and employment conditions are improved, a wider and more diverse pool of teachers may be attracted and gender gaps reduced in the ECDE teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County.

Finally, the study sought a rating of personal attributes affecting gender disparity using a Likert scale ranging from 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree as; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point, Disagree (D) = 2 points, Undecided (U) = 3 points, Agree (A) = 4 points and Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 points. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, which entailed frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations. The findings are presented as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Personal Attributes affecting gender disparity*

Personal Attributes	SD F(%)	D F(%)	U F(%)	A F(%)	SA F(%)	M	STD
There is no difference between a male and female teacher to learners	20(7.9)	47(18.7)	23(9.1)	70(27.8)	92(36.5)	3.7	1.35
Male pre-school teachers are effective classroom teachers	31(12.3)	58(23)	47(18.7)	58(23.0)	58(23.0)	3.2	1.35
I can only trust female pre-school teachers with my child	37(14.7)	52(20.6)	19(7.5)	77(30.6)	67(26.6)	3.3	1.43
ECDE programs should reflect staff diversity	19(7.5)	36(14.3)	42(16.7)	80(31.7)	75(29.8)	3.6	1.26
Male pre-school teachers lack patience with the children	19(7.5)	8(3.2)	15(6)	73(29)	137(54.4)	4.2	1.17
Personal interests	23(9.1)	36(14.3)	22(8.7)	90(35.7)	81(32.1)	3.7	1.30
Education aspirations	67(26.6)	69(27.4)	50(19.8)	27(10.7)	39(15.5)	2.6	1.39
Self esteem	58(23)	31(12.3)	56(22.2)	59(23.4)	48(19)	3.0	1.43
Salary	62(24.6)	45(17.9)	78(31)	39(15.5)	28(11.1)	2.7	1.30
Career preference	20(7.9)	47(18.7)	23(9.1)	70(27.8)	92(36.5)	3.7	1.35
Mean and Standard deviation						3.4	.72

**Key:** SD-Strongly disagree, D-Disagree, U- Unsure, A- Agree and SA- Strongly agree. M- Mean, STD-Standard Deviation.

The results show that teachers' perception of gender difference in early childhood education was generally low with 36.5% of the respondents strongly agreeing and 27.8% agreeing that there is no significant difference in the effectiveness of male and female teachers to the learners. This is supported by the relatively high mean ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ), indicating that gender does not seem to be a significant factor in teaching effectiveness in preschools. This discovery is consistent with Acker (1990), who suggests that gender inequities in teaching are more likely to be a function of gendered socialization than of actual teaching effectiveness. Likewise, Cushman, (2005) concluded that there is no difference between male and female teachers in their effectiveness for students, especially in early childhood education where the roles of caring and teaching are intertwined.

As for the role of male preschool teachers, 46% agreed or strongly agreed that male teachers are effective classroom practitioners ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). This indicates that there are more male teachers in ECE, reflecting a shift towards the participation of men in this field – with caution: traditional stereotypes may still linger. These results are similar to those obtained by Sumsion (2005) note that male early childhood teachers sometimes dispute gendered assumptions, and are effective in spite of societal expectations. The moderate mean, however, suggests that acceptance is still not a universal occurrence, indicating that there is remaining cultural expectations that early childhood education is a job for women.

The mean score on the trust perception was  $M = 3.3$  ( $SD = 1.43$ ), with a significant portion of respondents (30.6% agreed and 26.6% strongly agreed) saying only female preschool teachers can be trusted with children. This finding is a continuation of gender stereotypes that link caregiving and trust to women. Drudy (2008) also concluded that the same was true. It is often thought that male teachers in early childhood education programs have been viewed suspiciously, even when they are competent, as found by Robinson (1998). This indicates that although competence might not vary between women and men, social perceptions remain present in levels of trust in the profession. The study also found that staff diversity was perceived positively ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ), and most of the respondents agreed that the staffs in the schools had diversity. This is in line with UNESCO (2015) findings that the multi-grade classroom improves the social development of the learners and increasing inclusivity through the presence of diverse teaching staff. Likewise, personal interest ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) was rated very highly, highlighting the intrinsic motivation of



teachers. This is in agreement with Sanders (2016) and it can be concluded that intrinsic motivation plays a great role in improving job satisfaction and performance.

Education aspirations were, however, generally disagreed with ( $M = 2.6$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) which may indicate that there is not a strong link between higher education aspirations and perceived teaching effectiveness in this context. The low rating could be a result of a lack of career progression opportunities or contextual limitations in ECE environments. Teacher identity and engagement are shaped by moderately to highly rating of self-esteem ( $M = 3.0$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ) and career preference ( $M = 3.7$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ). This is consistent with Bandura (1997) Self-efficacy, which is crucial to professional behaviour and performance, is one of the factors emphasized by. In contrast, salary proved not to be a strong personal attribute,  $M = 2.7$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ , meaning that money may not be a teacher's foremost incentive in this area. This confirms the results of Ingersoll, (2001), who pointed out that although pay is important, intrinsic and professional reasons are also more likely to influence teacher retention and satisfaction.

In general, the high mean scores on most constructs suggest that personal attributes play a significant role in perceptions of gender disparity in ECE. These results overall indicate that the formal equality of teacher effectiveness is generally recognised, but that there are still strong underlying cultural norms and motivational constructs that influence perceptions of the gender roles of teachers. The objective of the study was to examine the personal attributes influencing gender disparity in development of early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya. A corresponding research question formulated asking what were the personal attributes influencing gender disparity among early childhood education teaching profession in Kakamega East Sub-County, Kenya. To answer this question development of ECE teaching Profession was regressed against personal attributes. The findings are presented in the Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Percentage Variance in gender disparity among early childhood education teaching profession Explained by Personal Attributes*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.642 <sup>a</sup>	.412	.409	.61281	.412	175.015	1	250	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), personal attributes

The results suggest that there is a strong and statistically significant connection between personal qualities and the gender difference in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) teaching field. There is a moderately high positive correlation between the two, with a multiple correlation coefficient value of  $R = 0.642$ , indicating that individual (personal) attributes are strongly related to individual (gender disparity) attributes of ECE teachers. This supports the notion that personal attributes, including attitudes and interests, personality traits and self-perceptions, can affect career decisions and perpetuate gendered trends in the teaching workforce (Wang & Degol, 2017). UNESCO (2015) also finds that the gendered career paths in the education sector are influenced, among other things, by individual dispositions, which relate to the overall societal expectations.

The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.412$ ) also indicates that 41.2% of the variability of gender disparity is attributable to personal factors. This suggests that there is a significant role for personal characteristics in explaining gender distribution in ECE teaching. Richardson and Watt (2018) reported similar results, finding that motivational beliefs, self-efficacy, and personal values towards career strongly predict entering teaching professions, particularly the early childhood field where gender disparities are seen. The model is not overfitted, as can be seen from the relatively stable adjusted  $R^2$  (0.409), which indicates the reliability of the relationship observed.

The  $F(1, 250) = 175.015$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , shows that the relationship between personal attributes and gender disparity is statistically significant and not a random variation. This aligns with previous research, for example Ingersoll (2001) highlight the importance of teacher workforce composition as both intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a role, with personal characteristics important for shaping entry and persistence in the profession.

Personal attributes do explain a substantial amount of the variation (41.2%), however, there is also a significant amount of variation which is not explained by personal attributes (58.8%) indicating that contextual and structural factors also play a significant role in gender imbalance in ECE teaching. They can be cultural gender norms, institutional recruitment norms or socio-economic factors. This aligns with Mukuna and Mutso (2011), who suggests that individual factors are not the only reasons for gender segregation in education professions; that wider social and organizational factors also play a role.



**Table 5**  
*Contribution of Personal Attributes on Gender Disparity among Early Childhood Education Teaching Profession*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.548	.133		11.677	.000
	personal attributes	.509	.039	.642	13.229	.000

a. Dependent Variable: mean early childhood development

The findings suggest that personal attributes are highly and significantly ( $\beta = .642, p < .05$ ) positively related to gender disparity in early childhood education teaching. This indicates that there are measurable differences in the representation of genders in the profession that can be accounted for by personal attributes. The beta coefficient ( $\beta = .642$ ) suggests a fairly high correlation between personal characteristics and gender gap. In practice, this means that increases or changes in personal characteristics correlate with an increase in gender disparities of 0.642 points in the field of teaching in early childhood education, when other factors remain unchanged. The p-value, which is less than .05 or statistically significant, validates that this relationship is not random and can be taken as valid for interpretation.

The study also reveals that certain aspects of personal qualities (personal interests, education ambitions, and self-esteem) are important factors in the formation of gender differences in the profession. For example, there are gender differences in career interests and educational objectives that may affect the likelihood of entering and staying in early childhood education, a traditionally female-dominated career. Likewise, self-esteem influences career decisions and staying in the line of work, which in turn helps to further establish the gender status quo. Overall, the findings provide evidence that there are significant impacts of personal attributes on gender differences among ECE teachers. Addressing issues regarding interests, aspirations and self-confidence may be crucial in decreasing the gender gap within the profession and more equitable participation in the profession between different genders.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

The research determined that individual factors play a major role in creating gender differences in the teaching career of the early childhood education (ECE) field. Major features identified were self-esteem, salary expectations, career preferences and educational aspirations. The results showed that these factors are more likely to coincide with female teachers compared to male teachers, hence, increasing the proportion of females in the profession.

Building on this point, we can assume that female people have a higher chance of having or developing personal qualities that are linked to early childhood teaching including nurturing behaviors, intrinsic desire to have care giving roles, and lack of focus on monetary compensation than in other careers. Conversely, male people can be susceptible to societal norms that emphasize more paid and more stereotypically masculine professions and these do not necessarily conform to the perceived attributes or benefits of the ECE profession. Consequently, men might be less interested in, less self-efficacious, and less aspiring of early childhood teaching.

Moreover, the comparatively low pay that comes with ECE jobs can demoralize the involvement of males especially in areas where men are socially required to hold the primary breadwinner roles. Educational ambitions also contribute to this with females possibly having more motivation to get training in education related areas and males choosing other career paths that are viewed to give a better advancement opportunity.

All in all, these individual characteristics, which are influenced by larger socio-cultural standards, promote gender inequalities in the ECE industry. The paper thus finds that gender inequality in early childhood education needs specific interventions that would help transform the image of the profession, increase remuneration and career advancement rates, and promote positive self-image and interest in males. This would assist in establishing a more balanced and inclusive teaching force and this would eventually lead to better quality and diversity of early childhood education.

### 5.2 Recommendations

According to the study results and conclusions, it is suggested that educators should be subjected to ongoing and organized professional training courses that will help them to enhance their personal qualities and develop positive attitudes towards Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) students. Such training ought to be geared towards the development of essential personal qualities such as self-esteem, motivation, emotional intelligence, communication skills, and commitment to work, which are essential in determining effective teaching practices.

Moreover, the training programs must also include gender-sensitive methods that will help in breaking the current stereotypes and assist both male and female teachers to freely participate in ECDE without any form of discrimination. This would assist in dealing with unfavorable attitudes towards the profession and inclusivity. The



implementation of capacity-building activities, including workshops, mentorship programs, and peer learning platforms must also be considered so that teachers have the opportunity to share their experiences, gain confidence, and gain a better insight into child-centered pedagogical practices.

Moreover, stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education and institutions that train teachers should include courses on attitude development, professional identity, and engagement with learners in teacher education programs. Institutionalization of regular in-service training and refresher courses should also be put in place so that teachers constantly refresh their skills and keep up to the needs of evolving education. Investing in personal and professional growth of teachers will allow the education system to contribute to better interactions between teachers and ECDE learners, better learning outcomes, and, eventually, help to narrow the gender gap in the teaching profession.

### Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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