

**Feminisation of Teaching: Factors Affecting Low
Male participation in Early Childhood Teaching at
Private Schools in Pakistan**

Meher Saigol₁

The Indus Academy
saigol.meher@gmail.com

Sana Danish₂

Independent Researcher
sanasidqi84@gmail.com

Abstract

This study was aimed at identifying associated barriers to entry of male teachers into early childhood teaching and to understand the gender inequality and the shortage of male role models for early learners at private schools of Karachi. A qualitative research was conducted with phenomenology as the chosen inquiry method. A purposeful sample of six in-service educators was selected from four private schools in Karachi two male post-secondary teachers, two female early childhood teachers and two private school female heads. The data were collected using three semi structured interviews one for each sample subtype. The study revealed that the male teachers did not teach early learners at private schools due to poor pay; low male adult and child compatibility; the influence of gender stereotypes and societal norms on occupational choice and child safety concerns. To create gender neutrality of early childhood teachers, male

participants expressed an interest to teach young learners if offered equitable pay and professional development opportunities, while female participants suggested increased pay and child protection policy implementation.

Keywords: early childhood education, feminisation, national education policy, private schools

Introduction

Across time and space, women have greatly pursued the teaching profession. In particular, the field of early childhood education, which initiates the formal education of children aged zero to eight is overwhelmingly dominated by female teachers (Sanders, 2002). Since norms dictate occupational choice (Ali, 2000); therefore, despite growing female liberalisation in professional spheres in Pakistan, women are expected to stay at home to raise their children and carry out domestic chores. It is also debated that there exists a natural link between motherhood and teaching (Pinnegar, Bigham, & Dulude, 2005). Early childhood practitioners generally believe that females are more naturally inclined towards caring for children than males are (Sanders, 2002). Furthermore, in teaching early learners, importance is given to relational skills rather than technical skills (Bolton & Muzio, 2008). These findings explain why the work force of early childhood educators is dominated by females.

Resulting from such gendered occupational choice is the low participation of male teachers in early childhood education. One study found that male participation in early childhood education was 1% in New Zealand and 2% in the United States (Sargent, 2004),

accounting for the lowest percentages of male early childhood educators in the world. The highest percentage of male early childhood practitioners was in Europe and that too was only 9% (Peeters, 2007). The main reason behind a largely female workforce in early childhood education is that historically, it has been viewed as women's work (Cameron, 2001).

In the early 1990's, the high profile sexual abuse cases involving Peter Ellis and Geoffrey Scott reduced public support for male educators in New Zealand (Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler & Ballantyne, 2005). It is possible that males have hesitated to enter early childhood education in fear of being mislabelled paedophile or being falsely charged of child harassment. Parents and school administrators of early learners have also expressed their hesitance towards males teaching young children due to their concerns for child safety against paedophile contact; however, no such evidence was found from Pakistan.

While the participation of male teachers in early childhood education has increased in advanced countries, the very idea of it is fairly new in developing countries such as Pakistan, particularly in the private education sector. According to statistics, out of 3437 in-service public school teachers, a mere 458 of them were male (UNESCO, 2007). While male teachers are employed at early childhood level in government schools, majority of men working at private schools are either employed in teaching post-primary classes or for school administrative purposes. Male teachers in early childhood education are only found teaching outdoor or for extra-curricular activities such as physical training, martial arts, music and swimming; whereas, teachers inside early learning

classroom settings are female. Government policy planning and implementation play a major role in ensuring gender equality in employment. Desirable employment objectives and practices advocate that employers should implement policies that are comprehensive and unbiased and must reflect the principle of equal opportunities of employment (Ministry of Education, 1998). Early childhood education has remained one occupation where a prominent gender gap needs to be bridged. This may be achieved through the initiation of government policy development and teacher education programmes. This issue is beyond the scope of this paper, but what is important is to consider whether or not such initiatives to improve the status of teachers need to be adopted on a scale wider than the current one to neutralise gender inequality of early childhood professionals.

Reasons for low male participation in early childhood teaching have been well researched in developed countries, but no current findings from Pakistan surrounding this issue of gender disparity were available. The purpose of this study is to identify, within the Pakistani context, the barriers to entry of male teachers into early childhood education at private schools in order to promote gender equality in the early childhood teaching profession.

Literature Review

Vast research findings have been amassed on the feminisation of teaching in early childhood education in different contexts across the world; however, limited data is available on the topic with regards to the context of Pakistan. Key themes established through existing literature will be discussed and analysed in this section.

Feminisation of teaching is a term used to describe the domination of females in a workplace, society, group or organization. According to Drudy, Martin, Woods and O'Flynn (2005), the term relates to the increasing number of females in a profession. The topic of feminisation of teaching continues to be heavily debated in socio-economically advanced countries such as Australia, UK and USA.

In 2000, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) issued a report offering three approaches for defining feminisation: Determining the number or percentage of females in a given occupation; providing meaning related to the effects of the number or percentage and the rate of access of females in an occupation (Wylie, 2000).

The feminisation debate is linked to the historical context of gender equality. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in societies where women were restricted from opting for professions of choice, teaching was their only channel of economic empowerment (Fischman, 2007). Historically, the increase in the number of females in teaching has been in correlation with the expansion of the collective education system (Carrington & Phee, 2008). Social constructs have continually driven the feminisation of teaching in early childhood education and its resulting underrepresentation of male teachers in the field; however, no findings from Pakistan were available to show this.

In Pakistan, society and culture play a significant role in making career choices (Ali, 2000). It is commonly perceived in Pakistani society that not all jobs are suited for women. Biologically, females have lower physical strength and forbearance, preventing

them from pursuing jobs that involve considerable physical input. Females; therefore, have limited career options due to inherited gender and social biases (Sadaquat & Sheikh, 2011).

Teaching in early childhood education is seen as women's work (Cameron, 2001). This is owing to the caregiving involved in a teacher's job which females are believed to have a natural tendency for. While this might be true for teaching in general, it is unclear from current findings whether or not prevalence of such social constructs are specific to the lack of male early childhood teachers at private schools.

The feminisation of early childhood teaching in Pakistan may also prevail due to the influence of societal beliefs and norms on career choices. According to the existing literature, gender-wise division of public and private workplaces has a significant effect on women's social and professional lives (Gazdar, 2003). Men have exercised more domination and power over women due to social, cultural and religious factors, so the model for the male breadwinner has applied itself with a strong gender hierarchy (Malik & Khalid, 2008). In Pakistani culture, it is believed that maintaining proximity from the opposite gender is a sign of chastity. In keeping with this belief and existing findings, females seeking employment are usually expected to pursue jobs where contact with adult males is minimal. Schools offering pre-primary and primary level education are deemed the most suitable workplace for women as they provide female employees with the opportunity to work in environments where there is little to no interaction with the adult males.

teaching has been vastly researched. The disparity between male and female teachers is positively correlated with the level of education they teach. In Pakistan in 1999, 38% of the school teachers were found to be females whereas, in 2002, the ratio increased to 50%, and it has seen an increase since then (Compendium on Gender Statistics of Pakistan 2009, 2010).

The feminisation of teaching in Pakistan is that the teaching profession provides working women with an opportunity to strike a balance between their professional and personal lives. The formal work hours in teaching, especially in early childhood education are shorter than work hours of traditional 9 to 5 jobs. Teachers of early learners have the luxury of dedicating equitable time towards domestic responsibilities as well as their jobs. On the other hand, the norm dictates males to be the main breadwinners of their families and thus they have to opt for better paying and more time consuming careers in order to meet family living expenses.

In 2001, the government of Pakistan introduced education sector reforms that brought about structural changes and expansion in the public and private education sectors. Public-private educational partnerships were created, coinciding with massive investments in the establishment of new schools, colleges and universities. Owing to gender division of labour, the resulting demand for teachers attracted a much larger influx of females into the teaching workforce than males.

Pay scale plays a major role in attracting employees to jobs (Towers Perrin, 2003). The comparatively low status of teachers in Pakistan has been associated with low pay scales, possibly limiting male participation in teaching (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). In 2005, a
Vol. 3 No. 2 (December 2016)

study conducted in Pakistan found that elite or high income private schools offered teachers a salary package of between Rs 8,000 to Rs 15,000 per month, causing many teachers to seek secondary sources of income in order to cover family living expenses (Khan, 2005). UNESCO (2013) reported salary bands of private school teachers in the province of Sindh against fee level and across pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education. It was found that pre-primary private school teachers were paid the lowest salary range of Rs 2,500-Rs18,000 per month. Women agree to work for less pay than men since they have fewer job choices compared to their male counterparts (Lifton, 2001). Although low teachers' pay could explain why private sector teaching jobs are mostly taken up by females, it cannot be concluded that low pay scales are the only barrier to male entry into early childhood teaching. Further investigation is necessary to determine if other causes exist.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan

Learning in the early years of a child's life sets the foundation to learn in the future. ECE is crucial for a child's cognitive development and future learning success (Young & Mundial, 1996). In the past, any education received before class 1 was known as katchior informal education in the public sector (Shakil, 2002). It was not until 2002 that ECE was formally incorporated into the National Curriculum of Pakistan and ever since, awareness regarding the importance of ECE has become wide-spread. With growing awareness on the importance of ECE, the number of private schools offering early childhood education services in Pakistan have also increased.

The formalisation of ECE in the public education system of Pakistan created jobs for early childhood educators, both male and female. The overall education system (up-to degree collages) is served by 45% male teachers and 55% female teachers. In Pakistan, there are no separate preprimary education institutions in public sector (Academy of Educational Planning and Management, 2011). Although there were more females than males teaching at public schools, the associated gender disparity was not too prominent to cause concern. It must be noted; however, that public schools in Pakistan do not cater specifically to early childhood education. Existing research findings available on the public education sector collectively relate to different education levels, not ECE alone. Further, inquiry is necessary to identify the gender distribution of the early childhood workforce in Pakistan.

According to current research, the presence of male role models in the lives of young children at home and in school was found to be crucial in fostering positive attitudes to study among boys and that they were needed as role models (Skelton, 2003). In keeping with these findings, the inclusion of male workers in early childhood education and care is a growing phenomenon in England and has become a widely accepted channel of achieving gender equality and overcoming the supply shortage of pre-primary teachers in some countries of Europe (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). However, it is assumed in this scenario, that males are willing and able to teach young learners. In the Pakistani context, no evidence was found to portray male willingness to enter early childhood teaching, or the lack thereof.

Over the past decade, a large number of initiatives have been

undertaken by international donor agencies such as the USAID and UNICEF to address existing crucial problems and develop the public education system in underdeveloped nations such as Pakistan, especially in the rural areas. On the other hand, low male participation in the private teaching occupation is not even considered an issue of gender inequality in Pakistan.

While public schools cater to grade level education in general, the private education sector works very differently – an increasing number of preschools or playschools have been established in the private education sector of Pakistan to specifically offer schooling services for children until the age of five. Regardless of the growing workforce of early childhood educators, its teaching strand continues to be feminized. Considering the widespread nature of feminized teaching in ECE, effective policy measures need to be undertaken by the government to include more male professionals into teaching of early learners. The importance and role of government policy in this study will be discussed in the following section of the paper.

National Education Policy (NEP) of Pakistan

Effective government policy planning and aligned implementary strategies are necessary for sustainable socio-economic development of a state. This need has been strongly emphasised in international development policy standards time and again. In 2015, the United Nations introduced a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 in order to help the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and countries of sub-Saharan Africa achieve sustainable socio-economic growth. Provision of

free, equitable and quality education is one of the SDG indicators, but the National Education Policy of Pakistan is far from there, let alone introducing policies to address issues such as gender equality of educators and fair teacher remuneration.

The prospects of fair pay scales of teachers seem rather bleak as little to no active measures have been taken by the government to counteract this wide-scale issue, especially for the early childhood teachers of private schools. The government of Pakistan revised the salaries of public school teachers in 2013 to a band of Rs 8,000-Rs 10,000 per month (UNESCO, 2013), but this salary level is far from being sufficient to meet the high and ever-increasing living costs in Pakistan. Reforms of the National Education Policy to improve the status of teachers have been introduced in Pakistan, but poor implementation of policy reforms prevail. As a result, the socio-economic standing of teachers has elevated little – teachers remain poorly paid, which account for majority of the private education sector (Khan, 2005). Teacher trade unions have made efforts to renegotiate teachers' wage to equitable levels, but teachers still continue to receive low salaries. In light of this, underpaid teachers are often under pressure to seek additional sources of income to cover family living costs (Rehmani, 2006). Further research is needed to determine whether or not low pay scales limit the number of male teachers entering privately administered ECE. This study was aimed at filling this information gap as well.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research was the chosen method for this study. Qualitative research, also called naturalistic inquiry is developed within the social and human sciences and refers to theories on interpretation (hermeneutics) and human experience (phenomenology). This methodology includes various strategies for systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textual material obtained while talking with people or through observations. The aim of such research is to investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves (Malterud, 2001). According to Holloway (1997), qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live.

Phenomenology was the chosen qualitative research methodology for this study. Phenomenology is one research approach whereby the essence of lived experience is captured. Welman and Kruger (1999) state that “The phenomenologists are concerned with understanding the social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p. 189). The study was carried out not to initiate large scale social change (as done in critical research) or formulate a new theory (as in grounded theory), but rather to closely investigate underlying causes of an observed phenomenon. This investigation was directed at deciphering perceptions of contextually embedded individuals regarding underlying causes of low male teacher participation in Early Childhood Education resulting from the phenomenon of feminisation of teaching; therefore, phenomenology seemed the most suitable approach of data collection for this study.

Sample

The sample for this study comprised six in-service private sector educators aged 21 to 55 who were employed at four private schools offering early childhood education in different geographical locations of Karachi, Pakistan. Two participants were female early childhood teachers, two were male teachers employed at post-secondary level and two were female heads of schools offering early childhood education. The educational qualifications of the participants were bachelor's degree or higher in a related or non-related field. Each participant had minimum of one year of work experience in the field of education.

Data collection instruments

Unstructured face-to-face interviews were the data collection instruments used for this study. Three semi structured interviews were devised: one for each sample subtype, that is, the female teachers in ECE, the second for male teachers and the third for school heads. Each interview was voice recorded in a mix of English and Urdu, whichever language participants were comfortable to speak in. Interview responses were then transcribed exactly as they were spoken. Responses given in Urdu were transcribed into Roman Urdu with English translations; whereas, responses in English were simply transcribed in English.

The interview responses were analysed purely through description and thematic analysis. Numerical data was neither retrieved nor was it necessary to obtain in this study.

Results

Four themes emerged from this study: (a) male adult compatibility with young children, (b) poor rewards and incentives for teachers in early childhood education, (c) the influence of gender stereotypes and societal norms on occupational choice, and (d) concerns for child safety. Each theme will be discussed separately.

Teacher compatibility with young children

Teacher compatibility with young children was found to be a major factor affecting male entry into the early childhood teaching profession. Teacher compatibility with young learners was expressed in terms of teachers' patience, understanding and approach ability towards young learners. All participants, both male and female were of the view that male adults naturally do not possess the patience, understanding and approachability required to teach young children.

One of the male interviewees stated:

“Um... as far as women are concerned, they are so motherly. They have this motherly instinct in them. They handle young children very well as compared to men. Like they have a lot of patience as compared to men, and they are able to tackle the young kids very easily.”

One of the school heads responded:

“The other thing is lack of patience. Also, men, they don't have that much of patience to, uh, understand to handle children. And children at the kindergarten level are very young, so men usually don't have the patience to handle

children at that age so they don't go for teaching at early childhood level.”

Another school head response was:

“I personally feel that women can do teaching better than a man for the simple reason that they have more patience. They are more understanding.”

One female teacher working in early childhood education stated:

“Ladies make good teachers because they have that motherly nature, they get along well with the younger lot, and they understand their psyche.”

Another participant, a female preschool teacher, said:

“Well, I like children. They're my favourite. Every morning, when you go to school, you look forward to spending time with kids. It's the best day.”

One male interviewee said:

“The children as well, they learn better from females. My own four year old son keeps saying Aunty, Aunty at home. Aunty said this, Aunty said that. He will not prefer to learn from a male teacher.”

On the other hand, a male teacher stated:

“If you give me a help or assistance, it is fine. But I think we don't have such kind of patience in us that... and as they grow, our mental level goes up. So, to reach the kid level... the kid's level, it's quite important for a teacher.”

The same participant further said:

“For a little child, there is this mother kind of element in a female teacher.”

One of the school heads also stated:

“We want teachers to sit in the same chairs where the children sit. Usually, men hesitate doing such activities and don't usually indulge in children's activities.”

The female teachers' liking for young children indicates that females get along better with young children than males do and are therefore, ideal to teach children. Both the male and female participants' responses stressed on the importance of patience, understanding and approachability towards children which in their view, were more so present in a female's maternal nature than in that of a male. Their statements either referred to teaching children regardless of age or the teaching profession in general. It is therefore, evident that females are more patient, understanding and approachable towards young children than males. This explains the low participation of male teachers in Early Childhood Education in the private education system.

Poor monetary rewards and incentives in ECE

During this investigation, it was found that males in Pakistan did not opt to teach early learners due to poor job rewards and incentives offered to teachers in the field of early childhood education. Four out of six participants were of the opinion that low pay package was the main motivators behind males opting for professions other than teaching in the ECE framework.

One participant, an in-service early childhood teacher, stated:

“In our culture, teachers, matlab (meaning) male teachers, aren't paid well. They have to run their house.”

The second participant stated:

“There are male teachers who are teaching at O levels and A levels and higher university level. There are more male teachers there because it's a well-paid job in those classes, but not in lower classes.”

The third participant said:

“It's the pay, the respect, unfortunately it's lacking here. In western countries, ECE is seen as a solid professional field which is not the case in Pakistan.”

All participants were of the opinion that pay is the main motivator for breadwinning males to choose jobs. Low pay scale for primary and pre-primary teachers acts as a barrier to entry of wage earning males into the profession because they need to earn sufficient income to provide for their families, which junior school teaching does not offer in Pakistan.

Even within the teaching profession in Pakistan's private sector, males choose to teach at secondary or in higher education levels. Relatively more equitable job incentives are offered to teachers above primary level, allowing those who are breadwinners to at least make ends meet. It is worth noting that the participants made no references to race, religion, sect or age group of teachers, indicating poor job rewards to be the ultimate cause preventing males of diverse backgrounds from entering the profession.

Gender stereotypes and societal norms

Through this study, it was found that gender stereotypes and societal norms also contributed to low male participation in the workforce of early childhood teachers. When asked why only femalesteach at early childhood level at private schools while men do not, the participants' responses were quite similar. One interviewee, while expressing his views on gender stereotyping in the field of early childhood teaching stated:

“The thing is that we have many perceptions in our mind. We have already assumed and associated many things with women and teaching is one of them.”

One of the female school teachers shared:

“Very honestly... I started to teach because my husband wanted me to teach.”

Another femaleparticipant also said:

“My parents, especially my father stressed that I could only teach because in their opinion teaching, teacher service, was a very respectable job, which has minimum interaction with men in general.”

When asked to suggest strategies to invite more males to teach in early childhood education, one school head said:

“Teaching somehow or the other is not considered to be some kind of low status profession-for men and women alike. Pakistan is a progressive society and male should be encouraged to consider this profession as their career.”

In reply to the same question, another participant said:

“Parents and husbands prefer their females teaching younger levels even if the pay is less so that their females do not have to interact with boys.”

In line with other participants' responses, one male participant stated:

“Upbringing [of children] is the job of women.”

All the participants' responses revealed that teaching young learners wasstereotyped as women's work in Pakistani society. One male participanteven affirmed his belief that womenwere responsible for the upbringing and education of children, not men. It was widely viewed as a caregiving, maternal job which as per Pakistani norm was the female's responsibility. Gender stereotypes and societal normswere found to influence differences in occupational choices across male and female workers.Furthermore, in keeping with existing literature from other countries, career choices were found to be gendered in Pakistan as well, owing to what societal normsdictated; while it was found that males were expected to earn for their families through better paying jobs than teaching primary or pre-primarychildren. Females were pressurised by the expectations of their family members, especially males to teach young children in order to avoid contact with male teachers. It was clear from the findings of the present study that societal norms were the underlying causes behind lack of male early childhood teachers in private schools; however,only the context of urban private schooling was accounted for. In the present study, due to constraints of financial resources and physical mobility, the rural landscape was not included in this study.

Concerns for child safety

Data gathered through this study revealed a new and unexpected finding. A likely barrier to entry of males into the early childhood teaching profession is the concern among school stakeholders for child safety against paedophile abuse. One principal elaborated:

“Parents prefer female teachers, especially for their daughters because they have issues of their safety and protection from the other gender.”

She further stated:

“With smaller children there is one thing these days that we are looking into which is child protection policy. There have been cases of child sexual abuse. So, to avoid any such conditions in my school, I might not hire a male. That is also a very serious concern. That’s why we prefer females.”

Later in the interview, the participant continued to say:

“Personally, I believe males should not enter the Early Childhood Education field. They are not suited for this role. They will beat the hell out of the children.”

Another female participant said:

“The reason I feel that men are not welcomed to teach younger children, especially in a co-education kind of situation is that parents are not very comfortable to have their little children, especially their girls or daughters around male teachers.”

Female participants voiced their concerns of parents for child safety against male paedophile contact, especially in the absence of child protection laws in Pakistan. The female participants were unanimous in saying that parents did not prefer their children, especially their daughters to be taught by male teachers because young children depend heavily on elders to function in their daily lives, usually in close physical proximity, as they are too young to take care of themselves. Concerned school stakeholders viewed such close teacher-student proximity as a risk factor contributing to child victimisation against aggression and sexual abuse by male teachers.

To sum up, within the Pakistani context, feminisation of teaching in early childhood education at private schools is sensitive to pay scales of early childhood teachers, teacher-student compatibility level, the influence of gender stereotypes and societal norms on career choice and lastly, school stakeholders’ concerns for child safety against sexual abuse.

Discussion

This study was aimed at investigating determinants of male underrepresentation in early childhood education. Data obtained through this study revealed four possible barriers to male participation in teaching in early childhood education: poor rewards and incentives for teachers; lack of compatibility between males and young children; gender stereotypes and societal norms; and concerns for child safety against male paedophiles.

Feminisation of teaching in the context of early childhood education has led to a lack of male participation in this field. Most people in and out of the early childhood education field view it as

women's work. One study found that the main reason behind a largely female work force in this field is that historically it is viewed as women's work (Cameron, 2001). The reason behind the feminisation of teaching is that women are willing to work for less pay as compared to their male counterparts since they have lesser employment opportunities as compared to men. A previous study has established that women are predominantly found in early childhood education but are rarely found in managerial positions at all levels. (Coffee & Dealmont,2000).

The most apparent factor of poor male participation in early childhood teaching in the private sector is low pay. Males being the breadwinner for their families, find it very difficult to make both ends meet in the amount of money that is being offered at this level. One of the major reasons steering them towards teaching at higher levels or grades is that there they earn an acceptable salary. It must be highlighted that private sector teachers and school heads alike deem weak government policy and implementation of acceptable salary packages to be responsible for low participation of male teachers in ECE. It has already been established that within the teaching profession in Pakistan, the lowest paid are those employed in early childhood education (UNESCO, 2013). Even high income private schools in Sindh that charge students a monthly fee of at least Rs.5,000 to Rs.18,000 pay primary level teachers at an average up to Rs.25,000 per month. Findings from this study are therefore consistent with existing research pertaining to teachers' pay.

Teacher-student compatibility was found to be a strong indicator for teaching young children. Early childhood practitioners

generally believe that females are more naturally inclined towards caring for children than males are (Sanders, 2002). According to Dorsey and Cunningham (2004), women by nature are predisposed to caring for young children, but men are not. The male gender lacks the patience and temperament to handle young children. Being the dominating figures of the society, they refuse to lower themselves to the child's level which is an important part of teaching young children. Within the indigenous context, teachers of lower primary pre-school level are only females because the job demands patience, understanding and approach ability with young children. Males themselves believe that they are not suitable for this job, hence they do not opt for teaching at this level. They themselves accept the fact that they lack the ability of handling young children and even if they teach children at the early level, they will not do as good as their female counterparts.

The findings of the research study also indicate that one of the apparent influencing factors causing feminisation of teaching and poor male participation in this field is the impact of societal norms and perceptions of the society associated with women in Pakistan. As stated earlier in the literature review, society and culture in Pakistan plays a significant role in making a career choice. According to Sadaquat and Sheikh (2011), women lack physical strength, so they have limited career options due to inherited gender and social biases. In the Pakistani society, women are the ones who are responsible for domestic and household chores and teaching at the early levels provide them with the opportunity to easily strike a balance between work and domestic responsibility - the major reason being flexibility in working hours. Teaching at the early levels engage in minimal or no contact with their male counterparts, which is also

a reason family prefer their women to teach at ECE level. Women in our society have always been stereotyped and assumed to be suited to the role of care givers and nurturers. Having these perceptions and assumptions associated with the profession of teaching at early childhood level, males usually consider it as a menial job with low or no respect, hence they do not opt for it, so the societal norms and gender stereotypes associated with the profession of early childhood teaching also serve as a barrier for male participation in this field.

The last possible barrier to the entry of male teachers into early childhood education is the concern for child safety against paedophile abuse. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, in New Zealand in the early 1990's, high profile child sexual abuse cases reduced the public support for male educators. School heads avoid hiring male teachers for early learners as a child protection measure because paedophilic abuse is on the rise. The safety and comfort element that participants claimed that parents of young learners found in interacting with school staff of the same gender could probably imply that male teachers' fear being mislabelled as a paedophile and a threat to young learners. In a society like Pakistan, child abuse by male teachers is a common taboo that is never openly discussed nor actively addressed by regulatory authorities. It is also important to note, that no literature was found to verify this belief. Those male teachers falsely accused of paedophilic crime may then have slim chances of pleading innocent in court; however, whether or not this is a sure cause behind lack of male early childhood teachers needs to be ascertained through further inquiry.

Contrary to popular belief, the inclusion of male

teachers in early childhood education appears favourable for several reasons – it can immensely help raise the status of teaching at lower primary and pre-primary levels, thereby neutralising the associated gender disparity under study. Inviting more males into early childhood teaching may aid in disassociating the profession with the label of women's work, thereby creating gender neutrality in the workplace of early childhood educators.

As discussed in the literature review, significant male role models in school or at home have proven to foster positive attitudes in boy child learners (Skelton, 2003). With world divorce rates on the rise (United Nations, 2008), single mother families have become increasingly common in the present era. The associated absence of fathers in the lives of young children in home settings may be substituted in part, with a significant male role model in school in the form of male teachers. Furthermore, a more gender neutral culture in the early childhood workforce may aid in reducing gender labels that children are socialised into in their early years of life. It is in this context that the shortage of male teachers in ECE should be seen as an issue, although it seems that in Pakistan little to no awareness regarding this matter prevails.

The study despite its advantages is not without its limitations. The first limitation of the study was its context. It was conducted in Sindh's urban city of Karachi where private education is more common and also of a higher standard than in rural areas. Furthermore, only middle and high income schools were considered for the sample. Another limitation of this study was scarcity of available resources – financial limitations placed

restrictions on access to existing literature required for the study. Finally, at the time the study was conducted, tools to measure teacher compatibility were considered important to decipher compatibility levels of male and female teachers; however, no such tool was found nor could it be developed within the time frame allotted for the study.

Recommendations and Conclusion

A diverse set of social change initiatives must be undertaken by school stakeholders to invite more male teachers into ECE teaching and there by promote gender equality in the profession. Based on the findings culled from this study, it is suggested that:

1. The government of Pakistan should liaise with supranational donor agencies such as the USAID and UN to actively increase teachers' salaries to equitable levels.
2. More education and training institutes should introduce and promote pre-service teacher education programs that are universal to both males and females.
3. School heads of private education institutions should introduce a Whole School Improvement Program for pre-service and in-service teachers into their teacher professional development plans to formalize Early Childhood Education into a growth-oriented field.
4. Private school managers should devise and implement child safety regulations, while also legally protecting rights of male employees in order to promote gender equality of teachers within

child safety regulations.

5. Educationists and human rights activists should raise awareness regarding the importance of male role models in the lives of young children at home and at school.

The low participation of male teachers in the field of early childhood education goes beyond labelling jobs in early childhood education as women's work. Males in Pakistan do not pursue careers as teachers in early childhood education because females are considered the more child-compatible gender. Early childhood teachers receive low salaries that are insufficient for breadwinning males to provide for their dependents, so they opt for better paying jobs.

In the present era, there is a growing evidence to support the notion that the inclusion of male teachers in early childhood education is favourable in many ways stated earlier in this paper; however, inviting men to teach in early childhood education goes far beyond the scope of school management. Collective endeavours initiated by both internal and external school stakeholders are necessary. As for gender stereotypes and societal norms, concerted efforts to re-engineer social constructs in Pakistani society may be a solution, though realising their effects would be a matter of decades.

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