



Kindergarten Teachers' Identity and Their Professional Identity Formation in the Central Region of Ghana

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Abstract

The study examined the professional identity level of kindergarten teachers and the challenges affecting their identity formation in the Central Region in Ghana. The concurrent mixed method design using identical samples for both quantitative and qualitative data was used. The study comprised all Kindergarten teachers in the municipality. The census sampling procedure was thus employed in selecting 182 kindergarten teachers for the study. A questionnaire with some open-ended items was used to gather data. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively while qualitative data were thematically analysed. The study revealed that kindergarten teachers' professional identity level was high; kindergarten teachers faced challenges such as the description of themselves as little above babysitters and inadequate learning resources. The data also revealed that majority of the members of society perceived kindergarten teaching as work for less intelligent teachers who do not have the requisite skills and capabilities to teach at higher grades. It was recommended among other things that the district directorate of education policymakers embark on a communication drive to educate society on the significance of early childhood education; provide more professional development opportunities for teachers to upgrade and also provide adequate resources to make teaching at KG level effective.

Subject Areas

Pedagogy

Keywords

Kindergarten, Professional Identity, Early Childhood, Challenges

1. Introduction

Theoretically “teacher identity” has been explored as a concept, a connection of inter-locking variables, through which the teacher can be understood and appreciated as a professional as well as a social and cultural being. Teacher identity is not a fixed or coherent set of traits but something that is complex, often contradictory and subject to change across time and space (Morgan, 2004) [1]. The development of a teacher’s identity is therefore a continuing and dynamic process (Cooper & Olson, 1996) [2].

In learning to teach, identity construction takes place in the midst of complex systems of different relationships. It is a process characterized by tension and struggle (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009 [3]; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004 [4]). The development of a professional identity begins in the earliest stages of preservice education (Walkington, 2005 [5]). Through educational experiences in formal studies and practicum learning, students “develop a more sophisticated understanding of their work as teachers” (Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010, p. 456 [6]). Every teacher irrespective of his or her area of specialisation should have a professional identity that distinguishes him or her from other subject teachers or teachers in other disciplines by virtue of their training. This also goes for early childhood teachers or kindergarten teachers who are found to be teaching children at the most critical period of their lives. However, Moloney (2010 [7]) conducted a study to explore pre-school and infant teachers’ perceptions of professional identity in the early childhood care and education sector in the Republic of Ireland and reported that professional identity is contentious and problematic as the sector is predominantly associated with practitioners who lack mandatory training requirements. There is therefore compelling evidence that highly trained early childhood education professionals are being lost to the sector.

While teachers per se who teach at upper classes enjoy relatively some social status, their professional identity as infant teachers is compromised within individual school settings. Teachers believe that this is related to a perception that the infant class is akin to “playschool” and that teachers in the early childhood settings are low academic achievers. As a result, they do not get the same respect as teachers working in classes higher up the school. Besides, it appears most early childhood teachers may not be able to define their identity and distinguishing features that make them different from other teachers. Most of these teachers define their identity based on public opinion as a result of which they accept teaching other subjects at higher levels. It seems most of the studies on teachers’ professional identity in Ghana focuses most on subject teachers. Indeed, the most common focus is on teachers in higher education; none of the lists of desired teacher identity apply exclusively to kindergarten teachers in Ghana. Hence this study sought to explore the level of kindergarten teachers’ identity and the challenges affecting their professional identity formation in the Central Region of Ghana.

Research Questions

To carry out this study, the following research questions were examined;

- 1) What are the levels of early childhood teachers' professional identity in the Central Region of Ghana?
- 2) What are the challenges affecting early childhood teachers' professional identity in the Central Region of Ghana?

2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Teachers' form and define their identity based on the experiences and interactions they have within their immediate and remote context. Uriel Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is deemed apt for this study. The ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 [8]) illustrates how nested environmental contexts influence a child's development. This theory, born out of developmental psychology, can be adapted as a useful heuristic for mapping out the role that different levels of interactions and experiences kindergarten teachers go through influence their professional identity formation. This has been used in other fields as it is effective to explain the complexity of individual's experiences in society. The ecological model presents five interrelated systems (micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono) that have been adapted to understand how kindergarten teachers experience the complex realities of the profession, and how such realities are related to the wider social, political, economic and cultural contexts.

The kindergarten teacher is at the centre of this nested system. The microsystem exemplifies interactions with pupils that relate to the teaching and learning of an intended curriculum. These interactions take place at the classroom level in the form of teacher instruction, learning activities and materials, assessments, and other conduits through which pupils engage with the curriculum (OECD, 2019 [9]). The KG teacher's understanding of the curriculum, access to resources and interactions with pupils influence their motivation to teach and their perception about their identity. The mesosystem involves school-level interactions between actors of the microsystem. This includes, for example, how KG teachers and teachers in upper classes connect with one another through formal and informal processes and structures, how school leadership facilitates interactions between and among teachers, the broader school community, and how teachers connect with families. How the colleague teachers teach at upper levels in the wider school community, school leadership, and parents in the society perceive and support KG teachers influence how KG teachers see and form opinions about themselves.

The exosystem involves policy activities that take place at local, district, regional, and national levels. Each of these government levels is a part of the exosystem because they each have jurisdiction over different aspects of education that directly impact the guidelines, training, time, and instructional materials that teachers have at their disposal to teach, which in turn directly impacts learners. Policies such as the early childhood education policy, conditions and requirements for teaching at the KG, teacher licensure and evaluation requirements, professional development provisions shape KG experiences and opinions about themselves and services they provide. Furthermore, external organisations such

as universities and NGOs occupy the exosystem alongside government agencies since they also involved in initial and continuous training of teachers. The macrosystem contains social and cultural policies and beliefs that affect the larger context in which the KG teachers operates. Societal and cultural beliefs about the purpose, or goals of early childhood education significantly affect teachers' opinion about themselves and consequently their professional identity. These beliefs, which can vary widely within countries and be hotly contested, strongly influence what KG teachers teach and how they teach (Spring, 2010 [10]).

Chronosystem consists of the pattern of environmental events and transitions and changes overtime. The development of a teacher identity is a dynamic process (Henry, 2016 [11]; Kaplan & Garner, 2018 [12]). It involves "the formation and restructuring of relations" within and between identities and takes place "through intra- and interpersonal processes" (Kaplan & Garner, 2017 [13]). This makes professional identity formation developmental in nature; beginning at the earliest stages of preservice education (Walkington, 2005 [5]) and increases overtime subject to experiences encountered. **Figure 1** reflects the ecological systems approach to kindergarten teachers' professional identity formation:

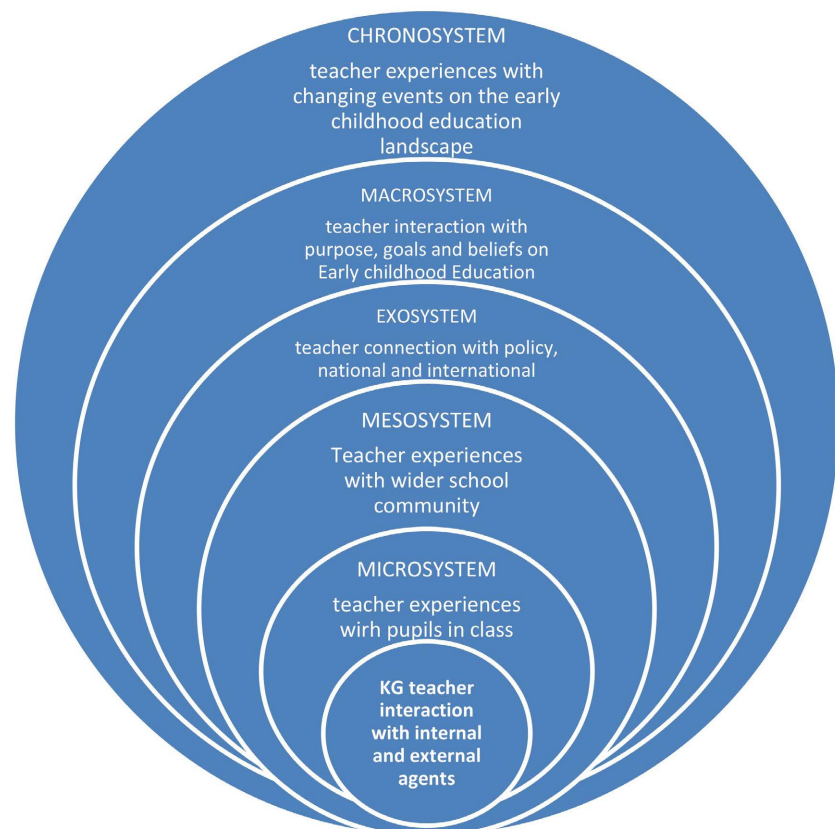


Figure 1. The ecological systems.

3. Teacher Professional Identity

The formation of teacher professional identity is a complex process, entailing not

only the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the development of new ways to define the self as professional (Sutherland & Markausaite, 2012 [14]). Although most rapid changes in the development of a professional identity occur when teachers graduate and begin their work in schools and classrooms, the development of teachers' professional identity begins with their education (Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010 [6]). During this period, a preaching identity arises from images of teachers held by the students, their initial beliefs about what constitutes a good teacher, and their implicit theories of teaching (Sutherland *et al.*, 2010 [6]) and continues to evolve. In making the transition from student to a full member of the professional community of teachers, teachers need to refine their understanding of pedagogical practices and develop their professional knowledge and create and recreate their image of themselves as members of a community (Sutherland *et al.*, 2010 [6]).

The concept of "teacher identity" has recently garnered the attention of many teacher educators and researchers in education discourses (Liu & Xu, 2011 [15]; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009 [3]; Zembylas, 2005 [16]; Danielewicz, 2001 [17]). Teacher identity has been addressed and examined in light of social and cultural changes (for example, globalization, post structuralism, and deconstruction). Teacher identity has been examined primarily by poststructuralists (Thomas, 2012 [18]), who have played a major part in the deconstruction of some assumptions related to the construction of teacher identity. According to poststructuralists teacher identity is not a fixed set of attributes; it is not a certain something. Instead, it is contingent (changeable and conditional), meaning that somehow it can be reformed and open for reconstruction (Liu & Xu, 2011 [15]; Watson, 2006 [19]; Pavlenko, 2003 [20]). From the poststructuralists' point of view, this dynamic, ongoing process of reconstructing teacher identity and the self is all about emotions, formed and controlled by "social conventions, community scrutiny, legal norms, familial obligations, and religious injunctions" (Rose, 1998 [21], p. 1). Thus, examination of teacher identity should occur in light of the role of emotions, power, agency, and resistance in teaching, all of which influence the construction of a teachers' identity.

Zembylas (2005 [16]) argued that for teacher educators to have a deep understanding of teacher identity, they must understand it in terms of the social and historical contexts in which meaning intersects with experiences, where teachers are subjects of and subjected to these experiences. In a sense, an understanding of the constitution of a teacher as a self and her or his experiences should focus on the discourse of experiences, not the experiences themselves. In other words, experiences do not constitute the self. Identities are influenced by and subjected to the social and historical contexts of practices and discourses in which these discourses do not simply reflect or describe reality, knowledge, experience, self, social relations, social institutions, and practices; instead, they play an integral role in constituting (and being constituted by) them. In and through these discourses [people] ascribe to [their] bodily feelings, emotions, intentions, and all the other

psychological attributes that have for so long been attributed to a unified self. In this sense, subjects of their emotions; emotions do not just happen to them. Professional kindergarten teacher identity is therefore considered as KG teachers' perceptions and images of themselves resulting from an interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis.

4. Challenges Affecting Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Identity

Notwithstanding the myriads of progressive initiatives, the Early Childhood Education sector continues to be undervalued and underestimated (Moloney, 2010 [7], 2011 [22], Moloney & Pope, 2012 [23], OECD, 2006 [24]). The low status of Early Childhood Education has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children (Lobman & Ryan, 2007 [25], OECD, 2006 [24]). Dalli (2002 [26]) argues that the traditional alignment of childcare with the role of mothering, and the attendant discourses of love and care, disempower early childhood practitioners from claiming professional status.

While agreeing with the connotations associated with the caring and nurturing nature of Early Childhood Education, other researchers (Osgood, 2010 [27]) claim that the issue is compounded by the highly gendered nature of the sector, which according to Osgood (2010 [27]) is hyper-feminine. Accordingly, gendering reinforces the notion that child rearing is essentially "women's work" (OECD, 2006 [24], Moloney, 2010 [7], 2011 [22], Moss, 2007 [28]). Moyles highlights practitioner concerns regarding criticisms directed towards their female caring roles which incline them towards "non-professional" and "woolly" thinking (2001:86 [29]).

Moloney (2011 [22]) intimates that although the practitioner's role is complex and multi-faceted, their professional standing is weak (Moloney, 2010 [7], 2011 [22], OECD, 2006 [24], Duignan, 2007 [30]). Clearly, training, working conditions and opportunities for early childhood education staff often contradicts public rhetoric about the value placed on young children and the importance of their early development and learning. This is particularly true of Early Childhood Education, traditionally viewed as one of the least powerful in society (Siraj-Blatchford, 1993 [31]), where salaries remain well below those of teachers, at times being pegged at minimum wage (Moloney, 2011 [22], OECD, 2006 [24])

The professional identity of the sector is also impeded by the diverse descriptors applied to those working within the sector. For instance, Adams (2005 [32]) identified 11 such terms in a Scottish study, while Moloney (2010b [7]) identified 20 terms associated with the workforce in Ireland. Moloney claims that professional demarcation in Early Childhood Education remains ambiguous and cites a multitude of terms associated with the sector, including "childcare assistant", "crèche worker", "pre-school teacher" and "practitioner". Referring to the wide range of vague and ambiguous titles, McGillivray (2008 [33]) states that no other

profession has experienced such great uncertainty and that the multiplicity of titles may have contributed to confusion about identity, creating uncertainty as to what the various titles, roles and responsibilities actually mean. Likewise, in questioning the rationale for the diversity of terms, Adams (2008: 20 [34]) claims that the real danger of such multiplicity is that it disperses the focus of professionalism.

The development of a profession that is committed to working with young children requires an inclusive and coherent, versus a fragmented, occupational identity (Adams, 2008 [34]). Equally, the profession must be clear about what workers are doing with young children. Thus, in Adams' words, "the adult working with the child is practicing care and education". Regrettably, in relation to Early Childhood Education, "a clear statement of the educative role within the job is missing and this could well be central to the struggle for professionalism in the sector".

Who and what constitutes an early childhood professional has been contested (Woodrow, 2007 [35]). It results from an eclectic mix of policy and practice, informed by a diverse knowledge base, which in turn has contributed to the ambiguity in professional identity. However, others (OECD, 2006 [24], Moloney, 2010a [7], Moloney and Pope, 2012 [23], Woodrow, 2007 [35]) associate weak professional identity with training structures, poor working conditions and low salaries. Notwithstanding the many difficulties outlined, Duignan (2007 [30]) maintains that an agreed vision of professionalism in practice does exist and can be revealed through analysis of key national policy documents. While agreeing that an agreed vision has been articulated within policy, Moloney (2011 [22]) is critical of implementation, suggesting that successive governments have failed to consolidate the identity of the sector through lack of resources and supports.

In Ghana, kindergarten is a level of education associated with children between four and 5 years. There are varying shades of professionals teaching at that level (Abroampa, 2017) [36] most of whom are para-professionals and non-professionals. This is as a result of the low regard people have for teaching at that level. Lemaire, Amoah, Nstiful and Bonney (2013 [37]) reports that education officials, teachers, parents and community members think that teaching early learners can be done by any teacher; whether the person is a professional or not. Abdulai (2014 [38]) also intimates that public prejudice is a challenge the early childhood education sector is confronted with. Such prejudices manifest in persistent societal stereotype about the essence, relevance, status and levels of intelligence of teachers involved in early childhood education; lack of parental involvement and commitment to early childhood education, lack of teaching staff and infrastructure, and institutional barriers.

5. Methodology

The study adopted the concurrent mixed method design using identical samples for both qualitative and quantitative components for the study. An identical relationship indicates that exactly the same sample members participate in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. The validating quantitative data

model was used to validate and expand the quantitative findings from the survey by including some open-ended qualitative questions. The Mfantseman Municipality has 78 public kindergarten schools with a trained teacher population of 182. The target and accessible population for the study were all 182 trained public kindergarten teachers in the Mfantseman Municipality. However, out of the 182 teachers, 160 trained kindergarten teachers in the Central Region of the Central Region of Ghana were used for the study. The 160 teachers were used because the rest of the twenty-two were indisposed at the time of data collection. The purposive and census sampling technique were employed for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to purposely select only public kindergarten schools found in the Mfantseman Municipality. The census sampling allowed the selection of all KG teachers since the number was moderate and selecting a sample from it would have resulted in using a smaller number of respondents. Data was collected over a period of five weeks. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The data was subjected to analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20), where weighted mean and standard deviations were derived. The researcher used thematic approach to derive meaning from the qualitative data collected.

6. Key Findings

Levels of kindergarten teachers' professional identity

This research question sought to ascertain the level of kindergarten teachers' professional identity considering the four main components of general teacher identity.

Kindergarten teachers' professional identity was categorized into four. The categorizations were professional knowledge, professional values, professional skills and reflective practice. To answer research question one, the mean values were calculated to determine the level of kindergarten teachers' professional identity. As reported in **Table 1**, professional knowledge had the highest mean value ($\chi^2 = 3.28$, $SD = 0.43$). This was followed closely by professional skills ($\chi^2 = 3.22$, $SD = 0.25$), professional values ($\chi^2 = 3.18$, $SD = 0.35$) and reflective practice ($\chi^2 = 3.16$, $SD = 0.30$). Generally, early childhood teachers' professional identity was high ($\chi^2 = 3.21$, $SD = 0.16$).

Table 1. Mean of Means of the Indicators of Early Childhood teachers' levels of their Professional Identity.

Professional Identity	Mean	SD	Level
Professional Knowledge	3.28	0.43	High
Professional Values	3.18	0.35	High
Professional Skills	3.22	0.25	High
Reflective Practices	3.16	0.30	High
Overall Professional Identity	3.21	0.16	High

According to the qualitative data, teacher professional identity indicators were mainly based on their professional knowledge, professional values, professional skills and reflective practice. The data suggested that teachers had concrete knowledge in early childhood practices, had the desire to teach infants, had the zeal to professionally assist the children and felt more competent with their profession. The data suggested that some teachers were quite content with the nature of their work despite the numerous challenges they faced. Their comments were suggestive of a disposition that favourably leaned towards a positive professional identity.

On professional knowledge, one of the respondents articulated

An Early childhood teacher should also demonstrate knowledge on the best strategies or methods of teaching at the KG level and knowledge on the best methods of assessment. (KGT 1)

Another respondent also expressed:

I think having knowledge of appropriate and engaging learning environments for children of different ages and also having knowledge of criteria for evaluating learning goals and objectives for young children as an early childhood professional is a must. (KGT 2)

A respondent stated:

It is also good as an early childhood teacher to have knowledge in planning and implementing learning experiences that advance the cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of children and also knowledge on behaviour management strategies that fit for early childhood settings. (KGT 3)

Responses on professional values

A respondent (KGT 4) stated:

I think other important values an early childhood teacher must have is love, enthusiasm and passion for children. Teaching these little children is demanding but at the same time fun and if you don't have the love for it, it will be very challenging to appreciate the job.

Another respondent (KGT 5) articulated:

An Early childhood teacher should also acknowledge his/her responsibility to provide the best possible care and education for children and to conduct him/herself with honesty, integrity and sense of responsibility.

A respondent (KGT 6) expressed:

I believe that apart from the above stated, early childhood teachers should also establish and maintain a relationship of trust, respect, confidentiality, coloration and cooperation with children and co-workers. Also knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other early childhood professional guidelines.

On professional skills

KGT 8 expressed:

Having skills in systematic observations and proper documentations of children's work, activities as well as their behaviours as an early childhood teacher is important.

Another respondent (KKG 9) stated:

I think an early childhood teacher should also have various or different assessment skills or effective assessment strategies to cater for the needs and abilities of individual child.

KGT 10 on professional skills stated:

Having skills in children's behaviour management and skill to evaluate children and then make decisions based on their needs. You will also need to have good Interpersonal skill that enables him or her to connect and bond with children to establish trust.

On professional reflective practice

KGT 12 articulated:

Early childhood teachers should also reflect on the resources, (i.e. materials and equipment use during teaching and learning) whether they are developmental appropriate and meet the needs of all children.

KGT 13 also stated:

Teachers should also reflect on their teaching methodology and whether their classroom environment encourage students to take risks during activities

On professional reflective practice (KGT 14) also expressed:

Reflect on the extent to which your assessment techniques is fair and appropriate for evaluating progress and for making instructional decisions.

The data presented suggest that teacher professional identity levels were mainly based on their individual teachers' content level in professional knowledge, professional values, professional skills and reflective practice. They expressed varying opinions on the various indicators which are consistent with their level of professional identity as depicted by the quantitative data suggesting that they gave a high professional identity. This is a healthy sign for early childhood education practice. In spite of the discouraging challenges teachers encounter, they demonstrate such favourable disposition regarding the development of their professional identity as kindergarten teachers. Teaching is a complex and demanding task and teachers are often expected to handle multiple roles both in the classroom and beyond (Chong & Cheah, 2009 [39]). They must therefore develop analytical skills that allow them to make sound decisions, investigate problems and understand students' needs (Darling-Hammond & Barnett, 2001 [40]). It is, therefore, necessary to prepare teachers who demonstrate and retain learned knowledge, skills, values and attitudes worthy of their practice.

7. Challenges Influencing Kindergarten Teachers' Professional Identity

This research question sought to identify the various challenges that influence the professional identity of kindergarten teachers (See **Table 2**).

Data gathered shows that (120, 68.7%, M = 3.081) agreed to the notion that, the continues under valuing of kindergarten teachers is a challenge that affect their professional identity. One hundred and four respondents representing 51.1% with

Table 2. Challenges affecting kindergarten teachers' professional identity.

Items	SA		A		SD		D		Mean	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
The continues undervaluing of early childhood Teachers affects me.	82	51.2	28	17.5	31	19.4	19	11.9	3.081	1.087
The underestimation of the early childhood teachers' services possesses a challenge to me	62	38.8	42	26.3	44	27.5	12	7.5	2.962	0.983
Early childhood services do not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations and this possess a challenge to my identity as a teacher	114	71.3	24	15.0	6	3.8	16	10.0	3.475	0.964
The low status of early childhood education has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children and his affects me	109	68.1	44	27.5	-	-	7	4.4	3.593	0.711
Traditional alignment of childcare with the role of mothering hinders me	70	43.8	54	33.8	8	5.0	25	15.6	3.112	1.087
The view that early childhood education is for low academic achievers possess a challenge to me	104	65.0	36	22.5	19	11.9	1	0.6	3.5188	0.72660
My personal description of myself as little more than babysitters affects me.	-	-	150	93.8	9	5.6	1	0.6	3.925	0.327
The poor facilities and infrastructure possess a challenge to me.	22	13.8	59	36.9	6	3.8	72	45.0	2.212	1.178
Challenges influencing my identity is compounded by the highly gendered nature of the sector which is hyper-feminine.	59	36.9	71	44.4	29	18.1	1	0.6	3.175	0.740
The inadequate supply of teaching learning materials to supports teaching and learning possess a challenge to me.	115	71.9	32	20.0	12	7.5	1	0.6	3.631	0.650

a mean value of 2.962 suggested that the underestimation of the early childhood teachers' services possess a challenge to their professional identity. Majority of the respondents (135, 86.3%, $M = 3.475$) agreed that Early Childhood services do not carry the social status that accompanies other occupations and that possess a challenge to their professional identity as Early Childhood teachers.

Concerning the low status of early childhood education that has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children, 153 representing 95.6% with a mean value of 3.59 agreed it is a challenge influencing their professional identity. Majority of the respondents (124, 77.6%, $M = 3.112$) agreed that the traditional alignment of childcare with the role of mothering hinders their professional development. One hundred and forty respondents, representing 87.5 with a mean value of 3.5188 agreed that the view that early childhood education is for low academic achievers possess a challenge to their professional identity.

More so, (150, 93.8%, $M = 3.925$) strongly agreed that their personal description of themselves as little more than babysitters affects their identity. Concerning the poor facilities and infrastructure 50.7%, disagreed. Majority of them (130, 81.3%,

M = 3.175) agreed that challenges influencing their identity was compounded by the highly gendered nature of the sector, which is hyper-feminine. **Table 1** further shows that 115 KG teachers, representing 71.9% with a mean value of 3.63 strongly agreed that inadequate supply of teaching learning materials to supports teaching and learning possess a challenge to them.

It could be deduced from the foregoing that describing KG teachers as babysitters; inadequate supply of teaching learning materials; low status of Early Childhood education has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children and viewing teaching at the kindergarten level as a place for low academic achievers are considered as the four most critical challenges influencing the development of kindergarten teachers' professional identity in Ghana.

Regarding the qualitative data gathered, it can be inferred that KG teachers expressed opinions that where in consonance with the quantitative evidence gathered. For instance, KGT 22 commented:

There are many challenges influencing our self-esteem as Early Childhood teachers. The chief amongst it is the lack of infrastructure and teacher learner materials. Without these facilities, we are classified as baby sitters and that is very difficult to refuse.

KGT 24 accounted:

A major problem we face here is infrastructure and furniture and these are also very important to aid teaching and learning. Another problem has to do with parents, because the government says free education, parents do not want to supply their children with anything and this is a major challenge.

Another KGT 25 accounted:

Some of the parents make our work difficult, they regard us as untrained and they make comments to that effect. Sometimes they refuse to provide the necessary hygiene products to keep the children clean. There is no respect for us, they sometimes come to insult us when children misbehave and we discipline them. That shows the level of social regard for the job.

KGT 26 expressed herself:

Though working with children is fun and the job is emotional rewarding, it is difficult when there are no appropriate facilities, materials and tools to execute the work.

KGT 28 also expressed that:

Basically, the predominant negative regard of society for Early Childhood is what makes it more difficult for us to develop a positive personal identity.

KGT 29 stated:

It is perceived as a field for the less intelligent. Even in university, we were regarded as one of the cheapest departments, and thus the social perception. What can I do to change it? And yes, it affects my identity development.

The forgoing reveal that low social regard for kindergarten teachers, social perception of people involved in child care, lack of infrastructure, facilities and teacher learning materials, and attitude of parents were some of the various

challenges affecting the development of a favourable professional identity. Most members of society perceive Early Childhood education as work for less intelligent teachers who do not have what it takes to teach at higher grades. The data showed that there was a general acceptance of early childhood classroom as designated to women in their late years. The data showed that KG teachers perceive their job as sub-standard with some of them wanting to opt out if they are offered higher levels to teach.

The low social status and recognition for early childhood education and practitioners at that level has been belaboured in literature. This has affected the attention given to the sector by most governments across the globe including Ghana in spite of the abundant research underscoring the critical importance of giving children at the early childhood stage a good start (Moloney, 2010 [7], 2011 [22], Moloney & Pope, 2012 [23], OECD, 2006 [24]). Besides having the least qualified people teaching at that level, society has very spurious impressions about teachers at that level. In a study by Abdulai (2014 [38]) he bemoaned the prejudice society has about early childhood education. Lobman and Ryan (2007 [25]) and OECD (2006 [24]) opine that the low status of early childhood education has long been associated with untrained women who love and care for children. This further deepens the extent to which the sector has been stereotyped and prejudiced.

8. Conclusion

Developing professional teacher identity is of utmost importance, especially in the early childhood education sector, which often faces stereotypes and prejudices. While this study found that kindergarten teachers generally perceive themselves as having a strong professional identity, they also face various challenges that can influence their development in this role. In light of these findings, it is essential for district, regional education directorates, and policymakers to capitalize on the positive disposition of kindergarten teachers to support the sector effectively.

9. Implications

To ensure that kindergarten teachers continue to excel and adapt to the rapidly changing early childhood education landscape, it is crucial to provide ongoing professional development opportunities. This will help them stay updated with emerging trends and improve their teaching practices. The Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service should launch a comprehensive communication campaign. This campaign should aim to rectify misconceptions and prejudices associated with the early childhood education sector. By doing so, they can attract high-calibre teaching personnel and promote a more positive image of the field. Understanding the complex mix of interactions within various contexts and different levels that influence kindergarten teachers' experiences during training and practice is essential. Policymakers and education institutions should use this knowledge to create more supportive environments that foster the development of professional identity. To enhance the quality of early childhood education,

kindergartens must be adequately resourced with the necessary learning materials and staffed by qualified practitioners. Investing in the physical and human resources of kindergartens is essential for the holistic development of young children and the teachers who guide them.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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