

**Title: Professional qualities of teachers in early childhood education a comparative study of Nairobi--pre school institutions by sponsorship**

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on the professional qualities of teachers in urban pre-school institutions and how these qualities are affected by various resulting from sponsorship. It is assumed that the focus on Nairobi City may shed a general light about the prevailing conditions in the other urban areas of Kenya. The term professional qualities refer to academic qualifications, professional qualifications and environmental conditions that affect the performance of the teacher. Data was collected from 20 pre-school institutions in Nairobi, five from each of the following categories: City Council (CC) Church Sponsored (CS), Private (P) and self-Help (SH) pre-school institutions. Interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analysis were the four research instruments employed in the study. Head teachers were interviewed and pre-school teachers were given questionnaire to fill. The objectives were to examine, in Nairobi: 1. Academic qualifications of pre-school teachers, 2. Professional qualifications of pre-school teachers, 3. Variations in the teaching methods being used in different categories of pre-school institutions, and 4. Variations in the physical facilities in the schools and teachers' conditions and terms of service. A number of important findings emerged from the study. Regarding the academic qualifications, most of the pre-school teachers are Kenya Certificate of Education holders. Those with Kenya Certificate of Primary Education or equivalent had joined the profession much earlier and had taught for ten years or more. They were prevalent in the CS and SH categories. Most of the teachers are trained, although the training varies. The largest number is trained by City Centre for Early Childhood Education (CICECE). Some are trained by the Montessori (Child Development) Institute. Others are trained by Kindergartens Headmistress Association (KHA). The heads of the pre-schools unanimously agreed that training is very important for pre-school teachers because it gives the latter a better ability on how to handle children. Majority of the headteachers agreed that, with long experience, a teacher is able to appreciate his/her profession more. The teachers with the longest experience are in the CC category. There are three main teaching methods prevalent in the pre-school institutions in Nairobi, i.e., the Activity/Ministry, the Montessori and the KHA methods. No significant difference was observed between the Activity and the KHA methods, neither in style nor in content. All the CC and SH schools in the sample used the Activity method. The schools using the Montessori method were from the CS category. The pre-schools used a variety of methods, although the Activity method was the most commonly used. Most schools, irrespective of category, have only fairly adequate physical and teaching - learning facilities. But the category hardest hit with inadequate facilities is the SH. The CC schools enjoy good physical facilities due to availability of space for expansion. Teachers unanimously agreed that availability of adequate physical facilities was crucial for them to execute their role well. Teaching-learning materials were equally found to be of great importance to the teachers' work because pre-school children need a lot of these materials in class. The conditions and terms of service for pre-school teachers receive training, although this varies. The level of education required for teachers in the profession is rising. There exists serious disparities in the pre-school institutions by sponsorship. This is evident in the methods

of teaching, physical facilities, teaching - learning materials, conditions and terms of service for teachers. The SES of the areas in which the schools are found contributes to the disparities. The CS category is the most affected by the socio-economic disparity. The kind of training received, the physical facilities, the teaching - learning materials, and the remuneration of teachers all affects their work. Although the early educators urged teachers not to overload children with a lot of knowledge beyond their age, actual and intensive teaching is going on in the pre-schools. The study, therefore, recommends that there be a clear-cut policy on pre-school teacher training in Kenya. Possibilities of uniformity both in the duration and in the content of training should be explored. The government should come up with a policy on the minimum requirements for teachers' terms and conditions of service. Parents should be sensitized on what is good for their children at pre-school age. More training opportunities should be extended to pre-school teachers, e.g., refresher courses and on-the-job training. Non-governmental organizations should also be called upon to assist in funding pre-school projects and to uplift poor pre-school institutions.