



DETERMINANTS OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TEACHING

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate determinants of pre-school teachers' attitudes towards teaching in Thika Municipality, Kenya. The concern to stakeholders was the negative attitudes of the pre-school teachers towards teaching. Such a concern called for investigation. To accomplish this task, a descriptive survey design and Ex-post facto design were used. A total of 53 pre-school teachers and 12 administrators participated in the study. A simple random technique and purposive sampling were employed to identify study samples. In addition, questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. The statistical procedures were carried out using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed in order to analyse the obtained data. The study revealed there were still low levels of training among pre-school teachers, teachers with few years of teaching experience were the ones involved in teaching in the pre-schools and teachers in public pre-schools were more positive towards their job than their colleagues in private schools. Among the recommendations were that pre-school teachers work under the Ministry of Education and an attempt be made to improve the retention level of teachers. Administrators should also work on modalities of motivating their teachers.

Keywords: preschool teacher attitudes, teacher attitudes, Kenya education, Kenya preschool, Kenya early childhood education, preschools, teachers attitudes and determinants.

Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a research study carried out in Thika, Kenya to find out the determinants of preschool teachers' attitudes towards teaching young children. In the paper the term preschool refers to institutions that care for and provide education for young children up to the age of six years. Such facilities are also referred to as nursery schools, kindergartens, day care centres, crèches, pre-primary school units, and Montessori schools. The term attitude refers to the opinions or feelings the teachers have towards teaching. This was shown in their responses to questions in the questionnaire. The word determinant means factors that influence a teacher's attitude towards teaching.

Background to the Study

Preschool teachers' attitudes and practices are a widely discussed subject. The subject has been examined from different perspectives, such as, economic, social, educational, psychological, and in early childhood studies. For example, one of the studies reviewed, Ndegwa (2004) examined preschool teachers' attitudes towards child-centred and teacher-centred teaching methods. She found that pre-school teachers preferred to use teacher-centred approaches. This paper particularly looks at the variables of professional training and the teacher's attitude, as well as the teacher's teaching experience and the teacher's attitude.

In studying attitudes, it was necessary to examine the entry requirements for teachers at this level. Requirements for preschool teachers vary the world over, some are high and require professional training, but others are low in comparison. In the USA, a high school diploma is all a person needs to teach in a licensed child-care centre. However, most preschools are not required to hire teachers who meet even the most basic professional requirement (Barnett, 2004). It is the American national goal to raise preschool or early childhood teacher's qualifications with emphasis on college degrees; the initial goal was that by 2008, fifty percent of these teachers should be holders of a degree. In New York, the target set is that these teachers should complete a masters degree after five years of employment (Whitebook, 2003). In France, pre-school teachers are required to have at least a basic degree to enter the profession. This is followed by two years of further professional training. This makes a total of five years at the university level. These requirements are the equivalent of a master's degree and are among the highest in the developed world (Barnett, 2004; Kaga, 2007). Japan similarly upholds high standards for pre-school teachers. It requires that the teachers have a bachelor's degree as a minimum requirement. Teachers also need to be licensed by the different boards of education in the country. This is issued after the teacher sit for examinations. In Kenya, teachers' qualifications are low (Koech, 2003). The Ministry of Education requires in its guidelines that pre-school teachers hold at a minimum a Kenya Certificate of Primary Education grade D plus be at least 18 years old and acceptable in the community (ICE, 2001). In the new national early childhood development policy framework, these requirements were not revised (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Comparing the Kenyan situation to the other countries above, shows that, while the others are pursuing professionalism by seeking to push the entry requirements higher, Kenya continues to maintain low requirements. This is important to note because the level of professionalism influences teachers' attitudes. The absence of high entry requirements maybe related to the observed teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching.

It was also necessary to investigate teachers' level of training because training helps to shape preschool teachers' attitudes and relates to the quality of services delivered (Barnett, 2004). Previous studies reveal that the presence of degree level education and sub-specialization leads to better outcomes for young children (Barnett, 2004; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Howes & Brown, 2002). In Kenya, between sixty and seventy percent of preschool teachers are trained or are undergoing training (Koech, 2003). However, this is low level training with a majority attaining certificates and diplomas. At the higher levels of bachelors and masters degrees, the numbers are few. Therefore, outcomes for the young children remain wanting; the quality of service delivered remains low and many children's needs are not adequately met. Previous studies in Kenya show this position to be true. According to Gakii (2003) only one-half (50%) of the teachers in her study had positive relationships with the children in their classroom. Whereas some teachers were warm, nurturing, positive, and enthusiastic; others were short-tempered, harsh, and rebuking as cited in Koech, 2003. This report further stated that teachers did not appear to want the children to come close, but wanted to hurry them through the lessons. When their introduction in lessons on concepts or skills to be learned were inadequate, the children became confused or stopped paying attention, while the teachers on their part became harsh.

The research was carried out in Thika Municipality. There are 105 preschools and 240 preschool teachers. The number of these preschools is high compared to the size of the town. Some of the preschools open and then grow to be big schools, while others fail and close down. This in itself presented an issue that required investigation. Could the opening and closing down of schools be linked to the teachers' attitudes and how they handle children?

Statement of the Problem

Whereas the expectation of the government, stakeholders and parents is that preschool teachers should have a positive attitude towards teaching, this is not the case in Kenya. Assuming that they are in this career by choice, they have taken time to train because they like it and therefore enjoy teaching small children. This expectation is at variance with reality. Some of the preschool teachers do not take their work seriously. This is reflected in the manner in which they handle and teach the pupils. There is a history of complaints from different sources concerning preschool teachers' negative attitudes (Branyon, 2002; Gakuru & Koech, 1995; Koech, 2003). These negative attitudes are reflected, for instance, in their disregard for government prescribed teaching methods as many teachers are not positive to what government and parents want. While the government recommends use of child-centered approaches, most teachers prefer to use teacher-centred approaches (Branyon, 2002; Ndegwa, 2004; Ng'asike, 2004). The teachers also tend to use lower primary textbooks to teach (Ng'asike, 2004) in disregard to government instructions. These issues indicate that all is not well.

Parents too have viewed teachers' attitudes towards their children to be wanting. Some of the complaints touch on the teachers' behaviour and reactions towards the children. Observations show that some teachers are harsh; they beat the children and in some cases injure them. Children also get a lot of homework that takes most of the evening time to complete, leaving the children with in adequate time to rest. This approach to handling children reveals a lot of indifference on the part of the teachers. It is contrary to the expectations at this level of schooling where the teachers are supposed to be warm, caring, and nurturing. Consequently, it has been noted that, these kinds of experiences that children are going through in preschools make them

unable to cope well at the primary school level (Branyon, 2002; Gakii, 2003; Koech, 2003; Ng'asike, 2004).

Experts in early childhood studies complain that preschools are no longer healthy places for children. This is because there is a lot of emphasis on pre-primary education. Children are required to acquire specific learning skills, such as reading, writing, and counting. They are expected to prepare for examinations to gain entry to class one. Children are also taught advanced concepts (Kaga, 2007; Koech, 2003; Ndegwa, 2005; Ngasike, 2004). These complaints indicate that there is a problem with the preschool teachers' attitudes toward suitable teaching methods. If their attitudes were positive, then the cited complaints would not arise. Hence the need for this study, to find out what determines the teachers' attitudes towards teaching, so as to redress this worrisome situation and to aid in developing teachers that hold positive attitudes towards preparing children for schooling at this basic level.

Objectives of the study

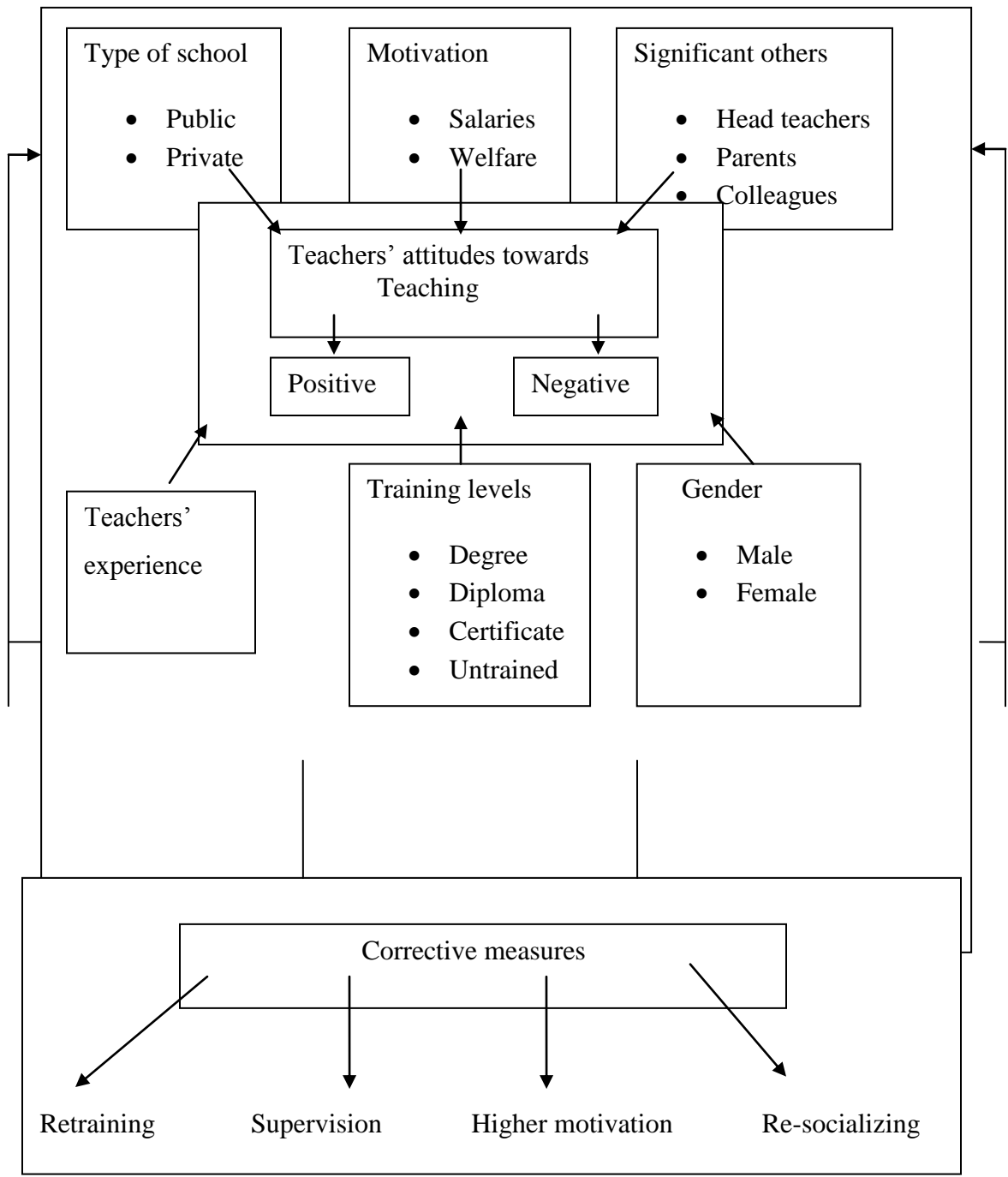
The general objective of the study therefore, was to find out what determines preschool teachers' attitudes towards teaching. Specifically, the study's objectives were to investigate the relationship between the following:

1. Training and preschool teachers' attitudes towards teaching and,
2. Experience and preschool teachers' attitudes towards teaching.

Conceptual Framework

In the conceptual framework, the researcher postulated that teachers' attitudes towards teaching were influenced or dictated by external factors, whether positive or negative towards their profession and pupils. Fig. 1:1 shows what the researcher stipulated in the conceptual framework.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework



Methodology

As far as methodology is concerned the study adopted two research designs, a descriptive survey design and ex-post facto design. According to Kombo and Tromp, 2006 a descriptive survey is a description of the state of affairs as it exists. Philip, 1985 also indicates that it is a procedure for systematically collecting information from people in the field by obtaining their responses to

questions using the questionnaire, interviews, and observations as instruments for data collection. This method can be used when collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits on any of a variety of education or social issues (Orodho & Kombo, 2002). The aim of the survey is to obtain information from widely scattered respondents, which can be analyzed, patterns extracted from it, and comparisons made (Bell, 1993). The descriptive survey therefore fitted well in what the researcher wanted to find out given the circumstances under which they were working. At the end of the process, the researcher reported the findings (Kombo & Tromp, 2006).

According to Macmillan and Schummacher (1989), the ex-post facto design is used to explore possible relationships among variables that cannot be manipulated by the researcher. The reason for this is that the events have already taken place. The design helped to investigate and establish the nature of relationship among the stated variables. That is training and teachers' attitudes towards teaching, as well as experience and teachers' attitudes towards teaching. However, the design had some limitations. According to Kerlinger (1973), the design lacks control. It is not possible to manipulate the independent variables and the researcher risks improper interpretation of results. This study therefore employed both the descriptive survey design and ex-post facto design as described by the scholars referred to in this section.

Sample Size

In selecting a sample, the researcher referred to (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000) who define a "sample" in a research study as any group on which information is obtained. Sampling refers to the process of selecting individuals who will participate (be observed or questioned) as part of the study. The sampling techniques that were employed are described in the section below.

Sampling Techniques

In this research simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used. A simple random sample is one in which each and every member of the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). It is the most desirable kind for almost every survey and is extremely important to the reliability and validity of the data. It is the best because it is most representative of the entire population (Alreck & Settle, 1995). This technique was used to select twelve out of the 105 preschools in the Municipality. Names of the preschools were written on pieces of paper. The papers were then folded and shuffled in four separate bowls. These were categorized into private-big, private-small, public-big, and public-small schools. The researcher then drew out three names from each bowl to form a total of twelve preschools to be studied. The sampled schools constituted 10% of the total population. As Gay (1992) explains, a minimum of 10% of the target population is enough for descriptive surveys.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve administrators of the twelve preschools sampled in the study. The technique was also used to select all preschool teachers in the selected preschools. Fifty-three preschool teachers were therefore included in this study. The researcher hoped that they would be willing to provide the data required. Therefore, all the preschool teachers in the sampled schools formed a study sample.

Data Collection Techniques

As far as this study is concerned the researcher obtained a research permit from the Ministry of Education to conduct research in Thika Municipality. She also got approval from the Thika

Municipal Education Office to research in the preschools within the municipality. Thereafter, the researcher sought permission from the administrators to administer the questionnaires to both the school administrators as well as the teachers. Further to this, the administrators were interviewed. The researcher followed the following steps: Over lunch hour, questionnaires were administered to teachers. In the afternoon, administrators filled in questionnaires. Then the researcher conducted interviews with twelve administrators and some selected teachers. Fifty-three preschool teachers filled in the questionnaire and twelve were interviewed. Twelve administrators filled in the questionnaire and were also interviewed.

Data Analysis

In this study data analysis procedures involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures. In qualitative data analysis, information collected was transcribed into written texts by combining the notes taken. These were then organized by using various thematic categories in the data, which were distinct from each other. In quantitative analysis, the data were grouped according to the research questions and analyzed through percentages and frequencies.

Study Findings

The background information on the participants of the study show that 71% of teachers were trained, while 23% were undergoing training, and a small percentage (6%) were not trained. Some teachers (9%) did not indicate their level of training as fig 1:2 shows.

Training and Teachers' Attitudes towards Teaching in Thika Municipality

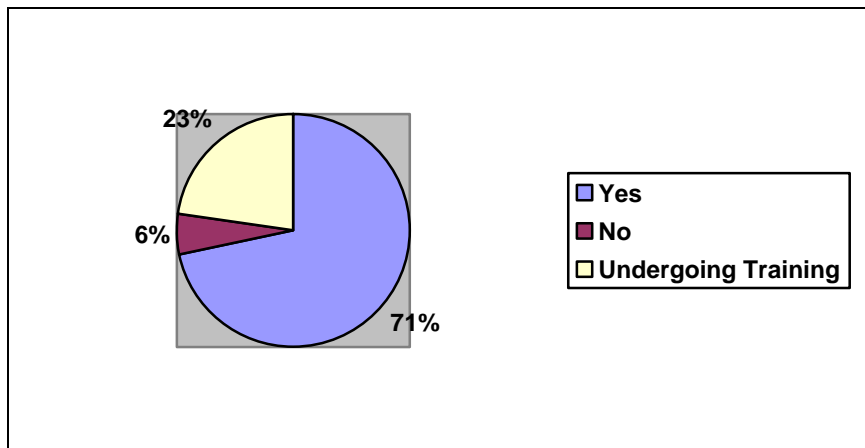


Figure 1:2 Preschool teachers training status.

Another finding on the background information of the teachers showed that a high percent, 66% of the teachers had been trained at the certificate level, 15% were at the diploma level, and only 4% were at the degree level. The findings therefore, reflect low level training among the teachers in Thika Municipality and they concur with the studies by Koech (2003) and Wawire (2006). As fig 1:3 shows.

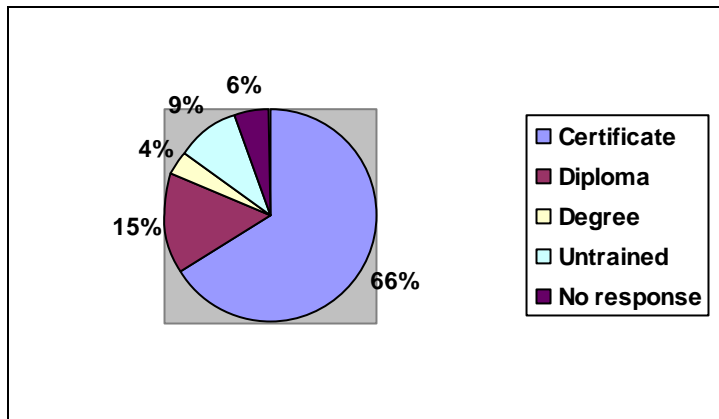


Figure 1:3 Preschool teachers' highest level of training

These findings were influenced by other factors as follows: The study found that administrators preferred to hire teachers with low level training, such as diplomas or certificates. The main reasons cited for this choice was that degree holders demanded higher salaries. It was also difficult to retain them for long because when they got better jobs they moved on. Many of the respondents indicated that they were hindered from advancing their training by lack of finances. It also appeared that if they acquired high levels of training that attracted higher pay, it might be difficult to get appropriate jobs because administrators were still not ready to pay higher salaries for teachers at this point.

During the data analysis as indicated in Appendix 1, the relationship based on the calculated χ^2 value of 1.17 and the critical χ^2 value of 12.59 was not significant at 0.05 level of significance. Based on that analysis, the null hypothesis which stated that, there is no significant relationship between the professional training of preschool teachers and their attitudes towards teaching was accepted. The study therefore concluded that professional training does not significantly determine preschool teachers' attitudes towards teaching in Thika Municipality.

In this study the number of years that teacher taught in a pre-school was also investigated. It was found that this had an influence on the teachers' attitude towards teaching and towards the pupils. Following is fig1:4 which showed the number of years preschool teachers had spent teaching.

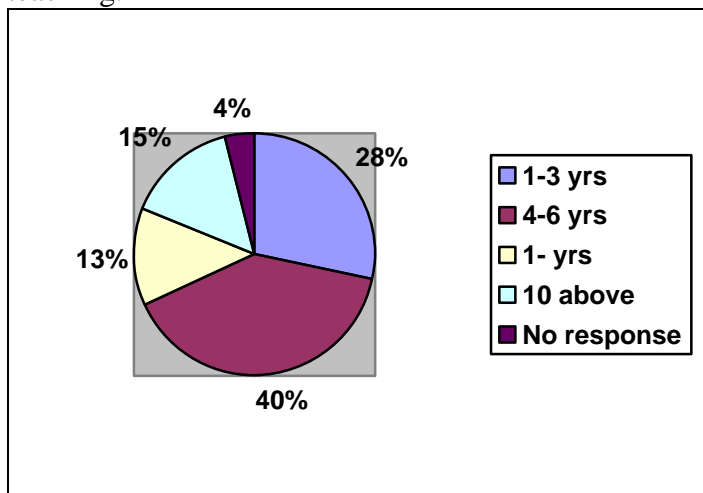


Figure1: 4 Number of years preschool teachers spent teaching.

As fig 1:4 shows 68% of the teachers had experience ranging from one to six years. Another 15% had 10 years and above experience, while 13% had less than one year experience. Some teachers (4%) did not indicate their number of years of teaching experience. The findings of this study indicated that Thika Municipality had a high percentage of preschool teachers with only a few years of experience. These were the ones actively teaching in the preschools.

On the question of experience versus attitude, this study assumed that the number of years preschool teachers spent teaching was an indication of what experience the teacher had. Relating the number of years a teacher taught to the attitude of the teachers, findings showed that experience influenced teachers either positively or negatively. On the positive side, experience meant that teachers acquired better teaching methods and were more at ease working with the children. On the negative part, experience meant that the teachers became complacent in their work. Long-serving teachers according to the administrators were hard to supervise because they felt they knew more than them, therefore did not want to be corrected by their seniors.

This information was put to a statistical analysis and Appendix 2 shows that the relationship based on the calculated χ^2 value of 4.74 and the critical χ^2 value of 12.59 was not significant at 0.05 level of significance. Based on this analysis, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between preschool teachers' teaching experience and their attitude towards teaching was accepted. This further strengthened the position that experience is not a good indicator of attitudes. Presence of experience could either evoke positive or negative attitudes in the teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the study results, it was recommended to the Ministry of Education that:

Registration of preschool teachers under the Teachers Service Commission should be strengthened. The teachers need to be recognized as part of the national teaching workforce in the country. Preferably preschool teachers need to be under the Ministry of Education.

Preschool teachers with high qualifications like degrees should be hired by the government. They should be paid well like other graduates. They also should then be deployed to head the preschools. Preschools should also have head teachers that are specifically trained in that field.

The Ministry of Education needs to help reduce the turnover rate. Improved retention levels would enhance stability at the preschool level. It was also recommended to Kenya's National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) that it should come up with refresher courses for preschool teachers in the area of attitudes. Many of the teachers did not seem to understand well what attitudes are and how these attitudes impact on their performance.

APPENDIX 1

Table 4:5 Analysis of teachers' attitudes towards teaching by professional training

	HIGHEST PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION					TOTAL
	CERTIFICATE	DIPLOMA	DEGREE	UNTRAINED	TOTAL	
ATTITUDE TOWARDS TEACHING	30	7	2	4	43	
	69.8% *	16.3% *	4.7% *	9.3% *	100.0% *	
	62.5% **	14.6% **	4.2% **	8.3% **	89.6% **	
NEUTRAL	3	1			4	
	75.0% *	25.0% *			100.0% *	
	6.3% **	2.1% **			8.3% **	
N/A	1				1	
	100.0% *				100.0% *	
	2.1% **				2.1% **	
TOTAL	34	8	2	4	48	
	70.8% *	16.7% *	4.2% *	8.3% *	100.0% *	
	70.8% **	16.7% **	4.2% **	8.3% **	100.0% **	

Calculate $\chi^2 = 1.17$ Critical $\chi^2 = 12.59$ $df = 6$ significant level of 0.05 * Column percent ** Row percent

APPENDIX 2

Table 4.9 Analysis of teacher's attitude towards teaching by teaching experience.

	PERIOD YOU HAVE BEEN TEACHING						TOTAL
	LESS 1 YEAR	2- 3.5 YEARS	3.6-4.5 YEARS	5+ YEARS			
ATTITUDE TOWARDS POSITIVE TEACHING	11 24.4% *	13 28.9% *	3 6.7% *	18 40.0% *	45 100.0% *		
NEUTRAL	22.0% **	26.0% **	6.0% **	36.0% **	90.0% **		
N/A		1 25.0% *		3 75.0% *	4 100.0% *		
		2.0% **		6.0% **	8.0% **		
		1 100.0% *			1 100.0% *		
		2.0% **			2.0% **		
TOTAL	11	15	3	21	50		
	22.0% *	30.0% *	6.0% *	42.0% *	100.0% *		
	22.0% **	30.0% **	6.0% **	42.0% **	100.0% **		

Calculated $\chi^2 = 4.74$

Critical $\chi^2 = 12.59$

df = 6

Significance Level of 0.05 * Column percent ** Row percent

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