

More men signing up as pre-school teachers

Number has doubled over past 5 years, with 245 men teaching kids at the start of year

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The number of male teachers in Singapore's pre-schools has almost doubled over the past five years amid an expansion of the early childhood sector.

There were 245 male pre-school teachers in January 2024, up from 130 in 2019, said the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) in response to queries, adding that it will continue efforts to attract talent – both men and women – into the sector.

Ms Thian Ai Ling, general manager at pre-school operator My First Skool, said male teachers are an important source of manpower for the early childhood sector.

“Encouraging men to pursue careers in early childhood education promotes the idea that teaching young children is a valuable and rewarding career for anyone, regardless of gender,” she said, adding that male teachers challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

“By seeing men in nurturing and educational roles, children learn that caregiving, empathy and teaching are not gender-specific qualities.”

Ms Thian said that apart from bringing different perspectives, experiences and teaching styles that complement those of female teachers, male teachers can be positive role models, especially for children who may not have strong male figures in their lives.

“This can be particularly impactful in fostering a sense of security, confidence and well-being among children,” she added.

Still, teachers like Mr Muhammad Syahmi Supian and Mr Matthew Jason Tjong are a rare breed, as male pre-school teachers make up less than 1 per cent of the whole fraternity.

Growing up as one of the older cousins in his family, Mr Syahmi, 24, was always surrounded by



Mr Matthew Jason Tjong showing children how shapes and objects can be transformed at Little Seeds Preschool. Male pre-school teachers make up less than 1 per cent of the whole fraternity. PHOTO: LITTLE SEEDS PRESCHOOL

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young children.

“I was always tasked to babysit and take care of them because of the huge age gap. So being able to work well with young children, and as a people-oriented person, I decided to pursue this in polytechnic,” said Mr Syahmi, who graduated from Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 2019 with a diploma in early childhood education.

He was one of 10 males in the cohort of 200 students enrolled in his course.

He joined the sector in 2021, and is now a Kindergarten 2 English language teacher at My First Skool at 187 Marsiling Road. He is one of 40 male educators across 159 My First Skool centres.

As the only male teacher at his pre-school, Mr Syahmi feels that he is able to share personal and unique experiences with the children there.

“I joined the industry after national service, so for events like Total Defence Day, I can share my first-hand experiences with the class,” he said.

He has also grown in confidence since he joined the profession.

“When I first had to sing songs and dance with the children, I was very shy. But the children don't

judge you. They helped me to be more confident and outgoing.”

Many people think that being a pre-school teacher is a simple job, he added. “They think we just teach them ABCs, 123, counting and spelling. But what they don't see is the amount of background work, like planning for lessons, and putting thought into the materials for the lessons with pre-schoolers.”

Mr Syahmi, who hopes to stay in this profession for a long time, recounted an incident when a child showed him concern when his voice became hoarse.

“He came up to me and asked if I was okay a few times throughout the day. Then the next day, he gave me a sweet, and said it was to help with my voice.

“We always teach them to be nice and care for others, but you don't get to see it play out first-hand in class. But through his actions, I could see that I had an impact on him, and I hope to have more of these rewarding moments.”

During a church mission trip to Chiang Rai, Thailand, in 2015, Mr Tjong, 24, got his first experience teaching young children basic English in a village school.

He recalled seeing a student cry after being moved by a story he was reading to them.

“A few of his friends came up to comfort him. I was only 15 then, but it has been imprinted in my mind ever since. It was a ‘wow’ moment, seeing how children are able to interact and lean on each other.”

Inspired by that incident, Mr Tjong went on to study child psychology at Ngee Ann Polytechnic from 2017 to 2020, and is now an early childhood educator at Little Seeds Preschool in Dover.

“Teaching in a pre-school has been extremely rewarding. Firstly, they are very adorable. I find it cute when they ask questions, and we have meaningful conversations about all sorts of topics.”

Like Mr Syahmi, Mr Tjong is the only male teacher at his centre, and is one of five male teachers across the 16 Little Seeds pre-schools.

Men are very much needed in the sector, he said. “I think having a male figure, in a sense like a father figure, is very important in every child's life. But without interest and a love for children, it'll be very hard to stay in the sector.”