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Navigating Learning in the Classroom: Preschool Learners' Experiences of Skill Acquisition and Attitudinal Development in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping learners' foundational skills, learning behaviors, and attitudes toward education. Preschool classrooms serve as important environments where young learners acquire cognitive, social, emotional, language, and motor skills that influence future academic success. This study explored the experiences of preschool learners regarding skill acquisition and attitudinal development at Sinamar Norte Elementary School, San Mateo South District, Philippines. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved fifteen (15) preschool learners, five (5) preschool teachers, one (1) school head, and ten (10) parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Findings revealed that play-based learning, teacher-guided interaction, collaborative activities, positive reinforcement, family support, and nurturing classroom environments significantly contributed to learners' skill acquisition and positive attitudes toward learning. Preschool learners developed communication skills, social competence, self-confidence, emerging literacy and numeracy skills, and positive learning behaviors through meaningful classroom experiences. The study highlights the importance of developmentally appropriate pedagogical practices in fostering holistic learner development during the early childhood years. Findings provide valuable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen preschool education in rural public schools.

Keywords: *preschool education, early childhood education, skill acquisition, learning attitudes, play-based learning, learner development, qualitative research*

Introduction

1. Introduction

The preschool years represent one of the most significant stages in human development. During this period, children acquire foundational skills, develop attitudes toward learning, and establish behavioral patterns that influence future educational experiences. Early childhood education serves as a critical platform for nurturing cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development. Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality preschool experiences contribute to improved academic achievement, school readiness, and long-term educational outcomes.

Learning during early childhood extends beyond academic content. Young learners develop communication skills, self-regulation abilities, problem-solving competencies, social awareness, and positive attitudes toward learning through interactions with teachers, peers, and learning environments. These experiences shape children's perceptions of school and influence their willingness to participate in future educational activities.

In contemporary early childhood education, learner-centered and play-based pedagogies are widely recognized as effective approaches for promoting holistic development. Through exploration, interaction, and guided experiences, preschool learners acquire knowledge and skills in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways. Such pedagogical approaches foster curiosity, creativity, confidence, and enthusiasm for learning.

In rural educational contexts, preschool education plays an especially important role in preparing children for formal schooling. Despite challenges associated with limited resources and geographical constraints, rural schools provide opportunities for young learners to develop essential competencies that support lifelong learning.

Sinamar Norte Elementary School, located in the San Mateo South District, offers preschool education to learners from predominantly agricultural and rural communities. Teachers have observed significant variations in learners' skill development, classroom engagement, and attitudes toward learning, highlighting the need to understand how young learners experience skill acquisition and attitudinal development within classroom settings.

This study explored preschool learners' experiences of skill acquisition and attitudinal development, providing insights into the classroom practices and learning experiences that support early childhood development.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to explore preschool learners' experiences of skill acquisition and attitudinal development at Sinamar Norte Elementary School.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Explore preschool learners' experiences in acquiring foundational skills.
2. Examine classroom experiences that support skill development.
3. Investigate factors that influence positive attitudes toward learning.
4. Identify the role of teachers and parents in supporting learner development.
5. Determine pedagogical practices that promote holistic growth among preschool learners.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Constructivist Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

Constructivist Theory posits that children actively construct knowledge through interactions with their environment. Learning occurs through exploration, discovery, and meaningful experiences.

Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, children learn through guided participation and collaboration with more knowledgeable individuals.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice advocates educational experiences that align with children's developmental needs, interests, and abilities. These frameworks collectively explain how preschool learners acquire skills and develop positive attitudes through classroom experiences.

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative case study design to explore preschool learners' experiences regarding skill acquisition and attitudinal development. A qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of learners' perspectives, behaviors, and interactions within the natural classroom setting.

The study was conducted at Sinamar Norte Elementary School, San Mateo South District, Philippines. Participants included fifteen (15) preschool learners, five (5) preschool teachers, one (1) school head, and ten (10) parents selected through purposive sampling.

Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and

document analysis. Classroom observations focused on learner interactions, participation patterns, play activities, and learning behaviors. Interviews and discussions explored perceptions regarding skill development, learning experiences, and attitudes toward school.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. Themes were generated through coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, prolonged engagement, member checking, and peer debriefing. Ethical standards including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

5. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Play-Based Learning Facilitates Foundational Skill Acquisition

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the study was the significant role of play-based learning in facilitating foundational skill acquisition among preschool learners. Participants consistently described classroom play activities as enjoyable and meaningful experiences that supported the development of early literacy, numeracy, communication, and motor skills. Teachers explained that play served as a natural medium through which children explored concepts, practiced skills, and developed confidence in learning.

One preschool learner expressed:

"Masaya po kapag may laro kasi natututo akong magbilang at magbasa."

Another learner shared:

"Gusto ko po ang mga activities na may blocks at pictures kasi natututo akong gumawa at mag-isip."

Teachers observed that children demonstrated greater engagement and learning when instructional activities incorporated play-based approaches.

One teacher explained:

"Kapag ang pagkatuto ay ginagawang laro, mas aktibo at mas interesado ang mga bata. Hindi nila namamalayan na natututo na sila habang nag-eenjoy."

Classroom observations revealed that learners actively participated in educational games, storytelling activities, role-playing exercises, and hands-on tasks. These experiences provided opportunities for cognitive exploration, language development, and problem-solving.

The findings align with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which emphasizes the role of active exploration in learning. Research by Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2022) indicates that guided play promotes language acquisition, creativity, and conceptual understanding among young children. Similarly, Pyle and Danniels (2017) found that play-based learning enhances school readiness and supports holistic development in early childhood education. Weisberg et al. (2016) further argued that playful learning environments foster deeper engagement and more meaningful learning outcomes.

Theme 2: Teacher-Guided Interactions Promote Language and Communication Development

Another major theme highlighted the importance of teacher-guided interactions in supporting communication and language development. Preschool learners reported that conversations with teachers, storytelling sessions, songs, and classroom discussions helped them improve their speaking and listening abilities.

One learner shared:

"Gusto ko po kapag nagkukuwento si Teacher kasi natututo akong magsalita."

Another participant remarked:

"Kapag tinatanong kami ni Teacher, natututo akong sumagot at magkwento."

Teachers observed that regular interactions encouraged learners to expand their vocabulary, express ideas, and communicate more confidently.

One teacher stated:

"Napapansin naming mas lumalawak ang bokabularyo ng mga bata kapag madalas silang nakikilahok sa mga usapan at talakayan."

Observations revealed that learners became increasingly comfortable participating in conversations, asking questions, and sharing experiences. Teacher scaffolding enabled children to communicate ideas that they might not have expressed independently.

These findings support Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of guided interaction in language and cognitive development. According to Bodrova and Leong (2015), teacher-child interactions significantly influence language acquisition and emergent literacy skills. Dickinson and Porche (2011) similarly found that rich classroom conversations contribute to vocabulary growth and communication competence among preschool learners.

Theme 3: Collaborative Activities Foster Social Competence and Positive Peer Relationships

Participants consistently highlighted the value of collaborative classroom activities in promoting social competence and positive peer relationships. Learners described group games, partner activities, and cooperative tasks as enjoyable experiences that taught them how to interact with others.

One learner explained:

"Masaya po kapag may kalaro ako at nagtutulungan kami."

Another participant stated:

"Natututo po akong mag-share ng laruan at makinig sa mga kaibigan ko."

Teachers observed that collaborative activities encouraged cooperation, empathy, and social responsibility.

One teacher remarked:

"Sa mga gawaing panggrupo natututo ang mga bata na maghintay ng kanilang pagkakataon, tumulong sa iba, at makipagkaibigan."

Classroom observations revealed that collaborative experiences strengthened peer relationships and improved learners' ability to work together. Children demonstrated increasing levels of patience, respect, and cooperation during classroom activities.

These findings support the work of Rubin et al. (2015), who emphasized that peer interactions are essential for social development during early childhood. Coplan and Arbeau (2019) similarly argued that collaborative play contributes to emotional regulation, social competence, and positive peer relationships. Research by Denham et al. (2014) further suggests that social competence developed during preschool years serves as a strong predictor of future academic and social success.

Theme 4: Positive Reinforcement Builds Self-Confidence and Learner Motivation

A fourth theme emphasized the influence of positive reinforcement on self-confidence and learner motivation. Participants consistently reported feeling encouraged when teachers praised their efforts, recognized achievements, and celebrated progress.

One learner shared:

"Masaya po ako kapag sinasabihan akong 'Very Good' ni Teacher."

Another participant remarked:

"Kapag pinapalakpakan kami, gusto ko pang gumawa ng mabuti."

Teachers explained that positive reinforcement motivates children to participate and develop confidence in their abilities.

One teacher stated:

"Kapag kinikilala ang kanilang maliliit na tagumpay, mas nagkakaroon sila ng kumpiyansa at kagustuhang matuto."

Observations revealed that learners responded positively to praise, rewards, and affirming feedback. They became more willing to participate in classroom activities and take on new challenges.

The findings support Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, which posits that positive experiences strengthen individuals' confidence in their capabilities. Dweck (2017) similarly emphasized the importance of encouragement and growth-oriented feedback in promoting motivation and resilience among young learners. Research by Henderlong and Lepper (2002) found that constructive praise contributes significantly to self-confidence and learning persistence.

Theme 5: Family Support Reinforces Positive Learning Attitudes

Another major theme centered on the role of family support in shaping learners' attitudes toward learning. Parents and teachers consistently emphasized the importance of home-based encouragement and involvement in educational activities.

One learner explained:

"Masaya po ako kapag tinutulungan ako ni Mama sa aking assignments."

Another participant shared:

"Nagbabasa po kami ni Papa bago matulog."

Parents described efforts to support learning through reading activities, homework assistance, and emotional encouragement.

One parent stated:

"Kahit simpleng pagbabasa at pakikinig sa kanilang mga kuwento ay malaking tulong sa kanilang pagkatuto."

Teachers observed that learners who received strong family support demonstrated greater enthusiasm and confidence in school.

These findings align with Epstein's (2018) framework of school-family partnerships, which emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in promoting educational success. Sheridan et al. (2019) found that family engagement positively influences children's motivation, attitudes, and academic development. Likewise, Castro et al. (2015) reported that parental involvement contributes significantly to positive educational outcomes during the early years.

Theme 6: Nurturing Classroom Environments Cultivate Positive Attitudes toward Learning

The final theme highlighted the importance of nurturing classroom environments in cultivating positive attitudes toward learning. Learners consistently described their classrooms as places where they felt safe, happy, and

supported.

One learner remarked:

"Masaya po akong pumasok sa school kasi mabait si Teacher."

Another participant stated:

"Gusto ko po ang school dahil marami akong natututunan at kaibigan."

Teachers emphasized the importance of creating welcoming and inclusive learning environments.

One teacher explained:

"Kapag masaya at komportable ang mga bata sa silid-aralan, mas bukas sila sa pagkatuto."

Observations confirmed that supportive classroom climates encouraged participation, curiosity, and engagement. Learners displayed enthusiasm for learning activities and developed positive associations with school experiences. The findings align with research on classroom climate and early childhood education. Hamre and Pianta (2007) found that positive classroom environments significantly influence children's social, emotional, and academic development. According to Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2017), nurturing learning environments foster engagement, confidence, and positive learning attitudes among young children.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that preschool learners at Sinamar Norte Elementary School acquire foundational skills and develop positive learning attitudes through meaningful classroom experiences characterized by play-based learning, teacher-guided interactions, collaborative activities, positive reinforcement, family support, and nurturing classroom environments. These experiences contribute significantly to the development of communication skills, emergent literacy and numeracy competencies, social competence, self-confidence, and motivation.

The findings further reveal that attitudinal development occurs alongside skill acquisition. Learners who experience supportive and engaging learning environments develop positive perceptions of school, stronger enthusiasm for learning, and greater readiness for future educational experiences. The study highlights the importance of developmentally appropriate pedagogies that address both cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of early childhood development.

Ultimately, quality preschool education serves as a foundation for lifelong learning by fostering the skills, attitudes, and dispositions necessary for academic success and holistic growth.

7. Implications of the Study

1. Preschool teachers should continue implementing play-based and learner-centered instructional approaches that support holistic development.
2. Teacher training programs should emphasize developmentally appropriate pedagogies and effective teacher-child interactions.
3. Schools should strengthen family engagement initiatives that support children's learning experiences at home.
4. Classroom environments should be designed to promote safety, inclusion, curiosity, and active exploration.
5. Early childhood education programs should prioritize both skill acquisition and positive attitudinal development.
6. Educational leaders should recognize preschool education as a critical foundation for long-term educational success.

8. Recommendations

1. Enhance play-based learning opportunities that support cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.
2. Provide continuous professional development programs for preschool teachers on developmentally appropriate practices.
3. Strengthen home-school partnerships through parent education programs and family engagement activities.
4. Develop classroom resources that encourage exploration, creativity, and collaborative learning.
5. Establish school-based programs that recognize and celebrate learner growth and achievement.

6. Conduct future qualitative and longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of preschool learning experiences on educational outcomes.

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