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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Classroom Strategies for Promoting Cooperation and Social Skills Among Kindergarten Learners: Teachers' Perceptions and Pedagogical Experiences in Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract

The development of cooperation and social skills among kindergarten learners is essential in promoting positive classroom behavior, emotional regulation, collaborative learning, and holistic child development. This qualitative study explored the classroom strategies, pedagogical experiences, and perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding the promotion of cooperation and social skills among learners in public elementary schools. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative research design, the study investigated how teachers facilitate social interaction, collaborative engagement, and prosocial behavior within early childhood classrooms. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis involving twelve kindergarten teachers from selected public elementary schools. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was employed in analyzing the data. Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Play-Based and Collaborative Learning as Foundations of Social Development; (2) Modeling Positive Behavior and Emotional Regulation; (3) Classroom Routines and Structured Social Interaction; (4) Challenges in Managing Diverse Social Behaviors and Learner Needs; and (5) Teacher Patience, Emotional Support, and Family Collaboration in Social Skills Development. Participants emphasized that play-based activities, cooperative tasks, storytelling, peer interaction, and guided classroom routines significantly enhanced learners' cooperation, communication, empathy, and social engagement. However, teachers also encountered challenges related to behavioral difficulties, short attention spans, limited parental involvement, and post-pandemic social adjustment concerns among learners. The study concludes that intentional classroom strategies, emotionally supportive environments, and collaborative teacher-parent partnerships are crucial in fostering social competence and cooperative behavior among kindergarten learners. Findings provide implications for early childhood pedagogy, classroom management, social-emotional learning programs, and teacher professional development in kindergarten education.

Keywords: kindergarten education, social skills, cooperation, classroom strategies, early childhood education, social-emotional learning, qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a significant role in shaping learners' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social development. During the kindergarten years, children begin to develop foundational interpersonal skills such as cooperation, communication, empathy, emotional regulation, sharing, and collaborative interaction. These social competencies are essential not only for classroom participation but also for learners' long-term academic success, emotional well-being, and social adjustment.

Kindergarten classrooms serve as important social environments where learners experience peer interaction, collaborative learning, and guided socialization processes. Teachers therefore play a crucial role in facilitating positive social behavior, encouraging cooperation, and creating emotionally supportive classroom environments. Effective classroom strategies help learners develop confidence, self-control, conflict resolution skills, and the ability to interact respectfully with others.

In contemporary educational settings, promoting social skills and cooperative behavior has become increasingly important due to growing concerns regarding behavioral difficulties, emotional regulation challenges, and reduced interpersonal interaction among young learners. The COVID-19 pandemic further affected children's opportunities for socialization, resulting in adjustment difficulties, communication challenges, and limited peer interaction among many early childhood learners upon returning to face-to-face instruction.

Research suggests that play-based learning, cooperative classroom activities, storytelling, modeling, and social-emotional learning strategies positively influence children's social competence and emotional development. However, kindergarten teachers continue to encounter challenges related to classroom management, learner diversity, behavioral concerns, and varying levels of parental involvement in supporting children's social development.

In public elementary schools, particularly within diverse and resource-limited educational contexts, teachers often adapt instructional and classroom management practices to address the social and emotional needs of kindergarten learners. Understanding teachers' pedagogical experiences and classroom strategies is therefore important in examining how cooperation and social skills are fostered in early childhood education.

Despite the recognized importance of social-emotional learning, limited qualitative studies have explored kindergarten teachers' lived experiences and classroom practices related to promoting cooperation and social skills in public elementary school settings. Existing studies frequently focus on quantitative developmental outcomes rather than the pedagogical realities and instructional experiences of teachers working directly with young learners.

Thus, this study explored the classroom strategies utilized in promoting cooperation and social skills among kindergarten learners by examining teachers' perceptions and pedagogical experiences in public elementary schools. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do kindergarten teachers describe their experiences in promoting cooperation and social skills among learners?
2. What classroom strategies and pedagogical practices do teachers utilize in fostering social interaction and cooperative behavior?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in promoting social skills among kindergarten learners?
4. How do teachers address learners' social-emotional and behavioral needs within the classroom?
5. What implications may be drawn regarding effective classroom practices for promoting cooperation and social competence in kindergarten education?

The findings of the study may contribute to early childhood education practices, social-emotional learning initiatives, teacher professional development, and classroom management strategies in kindergarten education.

Review of Related Literature

Social Skills Development in Early Childhood Education

Social skills refer to the abilities that enable children to interact positively and effectively with others. These skills include communication, empathy, cooperation, sharing, emotional regulation, listening, and conflict resolution. According to Denham (2020), early social competence significantly influences children's academic readiness, emotional well-being, and long-term interpersonal relationships.

Kindergarten classrooms provide critical opportunities for children to develop social interaction skills through guided activities, peer engagement, and cooperative learning experiences. Positive social development during early childhood supports behavioral adjustment, classroom participation, and emotional resilience.

Cooperative Learning and Play-Based Pedagogy

Play-based learning is widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach in early childhood education. Through play, children develop communication skills, collaborative behaviors, creativity, and emotional understanding. According to Lev Vygotsky, social interaction and collaborative engagement play central roles in cognitive and social development.

Cooperative classroom activities such as group games, storytelling, role-playing, and peer interaction encourage learners to practice sharing, teamwork, empathy, and problem-solving. Play-based environments allow learners to develop social competencies in meaningful and developmentally appropriate contexts.

Social-Emotional Learning in Kindergarten

Social-emotional learning (SEL) focuses on developing children's self-awareness, emotional regulation, relationship-building, and responsible decision-making skills. According to CASEL (2021), SEL programs positively influence children's social behavior, emotional management, and classroom engagement.

Teachers serve as important emotional models and facilitators of positive behavior within early childhood classrooms. Emotionally supportive classroom environments promote learner confidence, cooperation, and positive peer relationships.

Challenges in Promoting Social Skills Among Young Learners

Kindergarten teachers frequently encounter challenges related to behavioral management, short attention spans, emotional outbursts, developmental differences, and varying family support systems. Post-pandemic educational settings have also intensified concerns regarding children's social adjustment and communication skills.

According to Pianta et al. (2021), teachers' emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional sensitivity significantly influence children's social and behavioral development. Collaborative partnerships between teachers and families further strengthen social-emotional learning among young learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Sociocultural Theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that children learn social behaviors and cognitive skills through interaction, collaboration, and guided participation within social environments. The study also utilized Social Learning Theory developed by Albert Bandura, which explains that children acquire behaviors through observation, modeling, imitation, and reinforcement.

These theories guided the interpretation of teachers' classroom strategies, social interaction practices, and pedagogical experiences in promoting cooperation and social skills among kindergarten learners.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, classroom practices, and pedagogical strategies of kindergarten teachers in promoting cooperation and social skills among learners. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions, instructional experiences, and classroom realities within early childhood educational settings.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the Philippines offering kindergarten education programs. The schools were selected because of their active implementation of learner-centered and play-based kindergarten instruction.

The participants consisted of twelve kindergarten teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants met the following criteria: currently teaching kindergarten learners in public elementary schools, possessing at least three years of teaching experience, directly involved in classroom management and social-emotional instruction, and willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis of classroom routines, instructional materials, and activity plans. The interview guide focused on teachers' classroom strategies, social-emotional learning practices, learner behavior management, cooperation-building activities, and pedagogical experiences in fostering social skills.

Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' perspectives were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview transcripts, classroom observation notes, and instructional documents were coded and categorized to identify

recurring themes and patterns related to social skills promotion and cooperative classroom practices. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement within the research setting.

Results and Findings

Theme 1: Play-Based and Collaborative Learning as Foundations of Social Development

Participants emphasized that play-based activities and collaborative learning experiences served as primary classroom strategies for promoting cooperation and social interaction among kindergarten learners. Teachers explained that group games, role-playing, storytelling, art activities, and peer interaction encouraged children to communicate, share, cooperate, and build friendships.

One participant shared:

"Mas natututo silang makisama kapag may group activities at play-based learning."

Another participant stated:

"Sa laro talaga lumalabas ang cooperation, sharing, at communication skills nila."

Classroom observations revealed that learners actively participated in cooperative games, group storytelling, and collaborative art activities where they practiced turn-taking, teamwork, and respectful interaction.

These findings support the study of Bodrova and Leong (2019), which emphasized that play-based learning environments strengthen children's social competence, communication skills, and emotional development. Similarly, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative engagement in children's developmental learning processes.

Theme 2: Modeling Positive Behavior and Emotional Regulation

Teachers highlighted the importance of modeling positive behavior, emotional expression, and respectful interaction within the classroom. Participants explained that learners imitate teachers' actions, communication styles, and emotional responses.

One participant explained:

"Kailangan makita nila sa teacher ang pagiging respectful at calm para gayahin nila."

Another teacher remarked:

"Tinuturuan namin silang magsabi ng sorry, mag-share, at mag-control ng emotions."

Teachers described the use of positive reinforcement, gentle reminders, emotional coaching, and behavior modeling to encourage empathy, kindness, and self-regulation among learners.

These findings align with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that children acquire behaviors through observation and imitation of role models. Pianta et al. (2021) also emphasized that emotionally supportive classrooms positively influence children's social adjustment and emotional regulation.

Theme 3: Classroom Routines and Structured Social Interaction

Participants emphasized that consistent classroom routines and structured social activities promoted discipline, cooperation, and positive peer relationships among kindergarten learners.

One participant shared:

"Kapag may consistent routines, natututo silang sumunod at makisama sa classmates."

Another participant stated:

"Ginagamit namin ang partner activities at classroom responsibilities para ma-practice nila ang cooperation."

Teachers implemented circle time discussions, classroom helper systems, paired activities, and cooperative classroom tasks to strengthen learners' social participation and responsibility.

Classroom observations revealed that structured routines reduced classroom conflicts and encouraged respectful interaction among learners.

These findings support the study of Denham (2020), which highlighted that structured social interaction opportunities improve children's interpersonal competence and classroom behavior.

Theme 4: Challenges in Managing Diverse Social Behaviors and Learner Needs

Despite positive classroom experiences, participants encountered challenges related to behavioral difficulties, emotional outbursts, attention span limitations, and varying levels of social readiness among learners.

One participant explained:

"May mga batang hirap mag-share at madaling magalit kapag hindi nasusunod ang gusto nila."

Another teacher shared:

"Iba-iba talaga ang social development ng learners kaya kailangan ng patience."

Teachers also observed that some learners experienced communication difficulties and limited social interaction skills, particularly after prolonged periods of remote or home-based learning during the pandemic.

These findings align with the observations of Jones and Kahn (2018), who noted that early childhood teachers increasingly encounter emotional regulation and behavioral adjustment challenges among young learners in contemporary educational settings.

Theme 5: Teacher Patience, Emotional Support, and Family Collaboration in Social Skills Development

Participants emphasized the importance of teacher patience, emotional support, and collaboration with parents in promoting children's social and emotional development.

One participant stated:

"Importante talaga ang patience at understanding sa kindergarten learners."

Another participant remarked:

"Malaking tulong kapag supportive rin ang parents sa pagtuturo ng magandang behavior."

Teachers described communicating regularly with parents regarding learners' behavior, emotional needs, and social progress. Participants emphasized that home-school collaboration strengthened consistency in promoting positive behavior and social skills development.

These findings support the study of Sheridan et al. (2020), which emphasized that family involvement and teacher-parent collaboration significantly contribute to children's social-emotional competence and behavioral development.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that promoting cooperation and social skills among kindergarten learners requires intentional, learner-centered, and emotionally supportive classroom practices. Play-based learning, collaborative activities, structured routines, and positive behavior modeling emerged as effective pedagogical strategies in strengthening learners' social interaction, empathy, communication, and emotional regulation.

Teachers' experiences demonstrated that social development is closely connected to classroom environment, emotional support, and guided interaction opportunities. Consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learners develop social competencies through interaction, collaboration, and scaffolded participation within supportive social environments.

The study also highlighted the challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers in addressing diverse learner behaviors, emotional needs, and varying levels of social readiness. Post-pandemic social adjustment difficulties further emphasized the importance of social-emotional learning and emotionally responsive classroom practices in early childhood education.

Moreover, the findings underscored the critical role of teacher patience, empathy, and family collaboration in fostering children's social competence and positive behavior. Teachers functioned not only as instructional facilitators but also as emotional guides and behavioral role models within kindergarten classrooms.

Conclusion

The study revealed that kindergarten teachers utilize play-based learning, collaborative classroom activities, structured routines, emotional coaching, and positive behavior modeling to promote cooperation and social skills among learners. These classroom strategies significantly contribute to learners' communication abilities, empathy, teamwork, emotional regulation, and social participation.

However, teachers also encountered challenges related to behavioral difficulties, limited attention spans, varying social readiness levels, and post-pandemic social adjustment concerns among learners. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated patience, adaptability, and emotional commitment in fostering supportive classroom environments conducive to social-emotional development.

The findings further suggest that effective social skills development in kindergarten education requires collaborative teacher-parent partnerships, emotionally responsive pedagogies, and intentional classroom structures that support positive social interaction and cooperative learning.

Implications of the Study

The findings imply the need for strengthened social-emotional learning programs and teacher professional development initiatives focusing on classroom management, emotional coaching, cooperative learning, and early childhood behavioral support strategies.

Educational institutions and policymakers may also develop support systems promoting play-based instruction, emotionally supportive classroom environments, and family engagement programs in kindergarten education. School administrators may encourage collaborative professional learning communities among kindergarten teachers to share effective classroom strategies and social-emotional learning practices.

Future studies may further explore learners' perspectives, parent experiences, and longitudinal social-emotional development outcomes in early childhood education settings.

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