

# Lived Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers in Developing and Maintaining a Positive Relationship with Parents and Families

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**Abstract:-** The role of kindergarten teachers in fostering a positive relationship with parents is crucial for a child's educational journey. This study aimed to explore the specific challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights that kindergarten teachers encounter and employ. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study involved kindergarten teachers from Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and were subsequently analyzed through thematic analysis. Two main themes emerged for challenges: Structural and logistical challenges and socio cultural and emotional complexities. For coping mechanisms, the themes were open and honest communication, providing emotional and academic support for students, and individualized problem-solving. Insights gained included the importance of strong teacher-parent ties, good communication to clear misunderstandings, and the role of parent involvement in a child's academics. The study's findings have broad implications for various stakeholders, including educational policymakers and school administrators. The identified challenges point to the need for interventions such as cultural sensitivity training and strategies to increase parental involvement. The coping mechanisms and insights can be integrated into teacher training programs and can inform the development of best practices for family engagement in early childhood education.

**Keywords:-** Kindergarten Teachers, Parent-Teacher Relationships, Phenomenological Study, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Insights, Educational Policy, Family Engagement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten is a pivotal time in a child's life, and the role of kindergarten teachers in fostering positive relationships with parents and families is critical to a child's educational success. Effective communication and collaboration between kindergarten teachers and parents/families can promote a supportive and engaging learning environment for children, leading to improved outcomes in academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains. However, developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families can be challenging for kindergarten teachers, especially when there are cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic differences to navigate.

In the Philippines, the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships between kindergarten teachers and parents/families is widely recognized, as it is seen as a key factor in promoting children's academic and social-emotional development. However, there are several challenges that kindergarten teachers in the Philippines face in building and sustaining these relationships. Given these challenges, it is important to understand the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families in a local setting. Through a phenomenological inquiry, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of kindergarten teachers, and to identify strategies for effective family engagement and support in low-income communities.

The study titled, "Lived Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers in Developing and Maintaining a Positive Relationship with Parents and Families" study sought to address a gap in the literature on effective family engagement in early childhood education, particularly in multicultural and low-income contexts. Through a phenomenological lens, the study aimed to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the unique experiences of kindergarten teachers in these contexts, and to identify best practices for building strong partnerships with parents and families.

The findings of this study will have implications for the Department of Education (DepEd), as they may benefit by gaining insight into effective family engagement strategies that can be integrated into national policy and practice. School heads may benefit from this study by gaining insight into effective practices for promoting family engagement and support within their schools. Kindergarten teachers may benefit from the findings of this study by gaining insights into the lived experiences of their peers, and by identifying effective strategies for building positive relationships with parents and families. Students may benefit from this study by experiencing positive outcomes in their academic and social-emotional development as a result of strengthened relationships between teachers and families. Finally, future researchers may benefit from this study by building on the findings to explore related topics and to expand the knowledge base in the field of early childhood education.

In conclusion, this study aimed to fill a significant gap in the literature on effective family engagement in early childhood education, with a particular focus on multicultural and low-income contexts. By employing a phenomenological lens, the research provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the unique experiences of kindergarten teachers working in these settings.

## II. METHOD

The researcher in this study makes several qualitative assumptions that shape the way in which knowledge is constructed and interpreted. In the context of this study on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families, this assumption acknowledges that kindergarten teachers are best positioned to provide rich, nuanced descriptions of their experiences and perspectives.

The research design for this study is a qualitative research design using phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that aims to explore the essence of individuals' experiences of a phenomenon, and to identify the underlying meanings and themes that emerge from those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This design is best for the study on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families for several reasons.

The research participants for the in-depth interview and focus group discussion (FGD) in this study are kindergarten teachers from Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental. The sample size for the in-depth interview is five participants, and for the FGD, five participants were included. The sampling procedure for this study is purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific criteria (Creswell, 2013).

The inclusion criteria for the study are kindergarten teachers who have experience in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families. The participants should have at least two years of experience in teaching in kindergarten settings and have established relationships with the parents and families of their students. The participants should be willing to share their experiences and perspectives on the topic and have the ability to communicate in the language of the researcher. In this study, the researcher gathered data through in-depth interviews (IDI) followed by a focus group discussion (FGD), using an interview guide with open-ended questions.

The methodology of the study is well-defined, involving kindergarten teachers from Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental as participants. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including at least two years of teaching experience. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, both of which were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were also carefully outlined to ensure

the well-being of the participants throughout the research process.

In conclusion, this study is underpinned by qualitative assumptions that shape the construction and interpretation of knowledge. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, the researcher delved into the subjective experiences of kindergarten teachers from Sta. Maria, Davao Occidental, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). The inclusion criteria focused on teachers with demonstrated experience in fostering positive relationships with parents and families, aiming to uncover deep insights into their practices and perspectives.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of the thematic analysis was presented along with the direct quotes from interviewees to provide backbone for the themes generated. A thorough discussion was also provided to deepen knowledge in the area being studied.

The first theme presented the challenges that kindergarten teachers encounter in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families. This theme is subdivided into three key sub-themes: Managing Time Constraints and Limited Parental Involvement, 'Overcoming Financial Constraints, and Bridging Communication Gaps. Each of these sub-themes sheds light on the tangible barriers that can impede effective parent-teacher collaboration, from time limitations due to work commitments to financial constraints that affect participation in school activities.

The second theme presented the coping mechanisms kindergarten teachers use to address these challenges, and how effective are these coping mechanisms in promoting positive relationships with parents and families. This section delves into the various coping mechanisms that kindergarten teachers employ to mitigate these challenges. Through interviews and firsthand accounts, the researcher explored the effectiveness of these strategies in fostering positive relationships with parents and families.

The third theme provided insights have kindergarten teachers gained from their experiences in building relationships with parents and families, and how can these insights inform best practices for family engagement in early childhood education. The connection between kindergarten teachers and parents is a complex interplay that significantly impacts a child's educational journey. This section aims to collect key insights that teachers have gained from their experiences in building these relationships. These insights not only shed light on the challenges and triumphs of parent-teacher interactions but also offer valuable lessons for best practices in family engagement in early childhood education.

The challenges identified in the study, such as limited parental involvement and cultural barriers, suggest a need for targeted interventions. Schools and educational policymakers could develop programs aimed at increasing parental engagement, perhaps through flexible scheduling or virtual meetings to accommodate parents' time constraints. Cultural sensitivity training for teachers could also be beneficial in addressing the challenge of navigating cultural and traditional barriers.

The coping mechanisms employed by teachers, like open communication and emotional support, indicate that professional development programs could be highly effective. Training sessions that focus on enhancing communication skills and emotional intelligence could equip teachers with the tools they need to build stronger relationships with parents. Additionally, schools could implement support systems for teachers, such as peer mentoring, to share effective coping strategies.

The insights gained by teachers underscore the importance of fostering strong teacher-parent relationships for the benefit of the child's educational experience. These insights could inform the development of best practices and guidelines for family engagement in early childhood education. For example, schools could create handbooks or conduct workshops based on these insights to guide teachers and parents in establishing and maintaining effective partnerships.

Based on the implications derived from the study, the following future directions are presented. The Department of Education may benefit from incorporating the findings of this study into their teacher training and development programs. School heads may take the lead in creating an environment that fosters strong teacher-parent relationships. For Grade 1 teachers who are often the next educators that children encounter after kindergarten, understanding the importance of strong teacher-parent relationships is crucial. While the focus of this study is on teachers, students also play a role in their educational journey. Lastly, Future researchers should consider expanding on this study by exploring the experiences of teachers at different educational levels or in diverse cultural settings.

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