Assessing a Child's Readiness for Kindergarten Learners Based on Age and Skills: Views of Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study unfolded the views of teachers in assessing a child's readiness for kindergarten based on age and skills. The narratives reflected the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms and insights of the kindergarten teachers. There were eight (8) teacher-participants who have experiences kindergarten assessment, and they are purposively selected as informants. The data gathering of information in this phenomenological inquiry had employed in-depth interview of participants through virtual conference and limited face-to-face subsequently observing strict compliance of standard health protocol. Using thematic analysis, the views of the teachers in assessing a child's readiness for kindergarten based on age and skills were as follows: Diverse Developmental Levels, Social and Emotional Variances, and Language Development Evaluation. On the coping mechanisms they employed to address challenges, the following were the themes and findings of the study: Adaptability to Individual Needs, Professional Development and The importance of observation. Lastly, the following were the insights drawn from the findings of the study: Data-Informed Decision Making and Parental Involvement Strategies. The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers in terms of assessing school readiness based on age and skills. The new knowledge drawn from this study is noteworthy for quality delivery of education in school.

Keywords:- Readiness, Age, Skills, Assessiment Kindergarten Learners

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

"The beginning is the most
important part of the work."—Plato

Starting Kindergarten is a big deal not just for the learners, but even for their parent. It's exciting and at the same time, scary. Parents, teachers, and school heads all put in a lot of work to make sure that these young learners are ready for what's ahead. But the question is—How does one evaluate a child's preparedness for school? Assessing a child's readiness for kindergarten is a significant topic in early childhood education. It's about more than just age – it's about what skills these children have, too. This way, kids start school with the best chance to do well.

Different countries have their own assessment methods for kindergarten preparedness. It depends on their educational systems, cultures, and ideas about early childhood education. Despite these differences, they still share common denominators. Many places use standardized tests to see if learners are prepared. These tests check different aspects like social-emotional development, basic numeracy and literacy, motor skills, and language abilities. Some of the more well-known tests are the Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R), the Ages and Stages Questionnaires, and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment (Bieńkowska, 2023).

In the Philippines, like in many other countries, Kindergarten readiness is typically based on a combination of age and skills to determine whether a child is ready or not for formal education. The Philippine Early Childhood Care and Development (ECD) framework guides this process, making sure kids are developmentally prepared for school. According to Manuel (2011), the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act of 2000 is the national policy framework for the Philippines. ECCD services cover health, nutrition, early education, parental education, mental support, and other social assistance for families with young children (0–6).

Moreover, Age is a big factor for starting kindergarten in the Philippines. Kids usually need to be at least five years old by a certain date, often June 1st, to get in. This ensures they have the maturity and physical development needed for school. Besides age, teachers also look at developmental skills to see if a child is ready for kindergarten. This assessment encompasses various domains. In fact, some schools in the Philippines offer school readiness programs or orientations to help children transition smoothly into kindergarten. These programs often include activities and assessments to gauge a child's familiarity with the school environment and routines.

Similar to the national standards, Davao City adheres to age-based criteria for kindergarten entry. And as in other parts of the Philippines, assessing kindergarten readiness involves evaluating a child's developmental skills. Teachers and educators assess various aspects of a child's readiness for school, including cognitive, language, fine and gross motor, and social and emotional skills.

A. Purpose of the Study

For the present study, the researcher will delve into the evolving landscape of assessing a child's readiness for kindergarten, exploring the contrasting perspectives surrounding age-based and skill-based criteria. The study will base on the narratives of kindergarten teachers from public school. The findings of the study contribute to the improvement of early childhood education programs. It can help educators design curriculum and teaching methods that are developmentally appropriate, ensuring that children are neither pushed too early nor held back unnecessarily. Moreover, the findings of the study will provide valuable insights to educational authorities. It can inform decisions about age eligibility criteria for kindergarten entry and help shape policies that consider the balance between chronological age and developmental skills. This can lead to more informed decisions about when and how children should enter kindergarten.

B. Research Questions

In this study, the researcher aims to determine the balance between chronological age and developmental skills in the assessment of school readiness for Kindergarten students. Against such a backdrop, this study aims to seek answers to the following questions:

- What are the experiences of teachers on assessing readiness of kindergarten students based on age and skills?
- What are the mechanisms that kindergarten teachers employ to cope with the challenges on readiness of kindergarten learners based on age and skills?
- What educational insights can be drawn to contribute to long term academic and social outcomes associated with a child's readiness for kindergarten?

To clearly determine the outcomes of this study and to whom the findings are addressed, the following persons or agencies were the beneficiaries.

- *Department of Education Personnel*. The DepEd, particularly the District of Talomo, Davao City, may inform the development of more targeted and evidence-based kindergarten admission policies, ensuring that children enter school at an appropriate developmental stage.
- *The School Principals and Head teachers.* For the school principals and school heads to focus on targeted professional development programs for teachers, enabling them to address specific skill gaps and tailor their instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students.
- *The Teachers*. The findings of this study shall provide the teachers a deeper understanding of the diverse abilities and developmental stages of their incoming students, enabling them to design more individualized and effective instructional strategies.
- *The future researchers*. For the future researchers to use the findings as a foundation for further research in the field of early childhood education, building upon the established knowledge about the relationship between age, skills, and kindergarten readiness.

➢ *The Following Terms are Operationally Defined to make this Study More Comprehensive*

- *School Readiness Assessment* - Refers to the systematic evaluation of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills and abilities to determine their preparedness for formal education, typically at the kindergarten level. This assessment aims to identify a child's strengths and areas of development in key areas such as language, numeracy, fine motor skills, and socio-emotional competencies, providing valuable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers to make informed decisions about appropriate educational placement, support, and intervention strategies to ensure a smooth and successful transition into the school environment.
- *Developmental Skills*- also known as developmental milestones, are a set of age-appropriate physical, cognitive, social, and emotional abilities and achievements that children typically reach during various stages of their growth and maturation. These skills encompass a wide range of capabilities, including but not limited to motor skills (both gross and fine motor), language and communication skills, problem-solving and cognitive abilities, social interactions, and emotional regulation.

C. Review of Significant Literature

To describe the existing status of the study, a review of related literature is hereafter presented. This review includes studies and researches which provided insights about the veracity of the problem.

➢ *Relationship between Age and Academic Achievement*

Grissom (2004) used a regression analysis of overall reading scores against age in months to investigate the linear association between age and achievement. According to the findings, there is a robust statistical correlation between the average age of students and their academic performance. According to Grissom's research, a half-point improvement occurred in a child's average total reading score for every month when they were older. Reading test results for pupils who had a grade deducted showed a strong negative association between age and performance in school. The average cumulative reading scores of kept pupils decreased by one point for every extra month of age. According to these findings, second graders of typical age showed a positive correlation between age and academic performance, whereas detained pupils showed a negative correlation. The following stage was to find out if these trends continued as the kids moved up in grade.

In Stipek's (2004) study on kindergarten pupils, it was observed that older kindergartners achieved notably higher scores than their younger peers in reading and math examinations. However, there was no discernible difference in teacher performance evaluations among the different groups. In terms of student ratings, the only distinction observed among the groups was that the oldest pupils had more favorable sentiments towards the teacher compared to the other two groups. Stipek subsequently assessed these youngsters using the same criteria when they reached third grade, and found that the previous academic advantage of the older students in math and reading had vanished. However, the teacher ratings of the students remained similar with the earlier findings. In a subsequent examination carried out by Stipek in 2002, a comparable evaluation was completed, mirroring the aforementioned findings. Nevertheless, on this occasion, all the pupils were in the third grade, with a one-year discrepancy in age, despite being at the same grade level and having equal prior school experience. In contrast to the findings in younger pupils (first graders compared to older kindergartners), this research did not uncover any superiority in math skills. Furthermore, by the time the students reached the third grade, no noteworthy disparities were seen in any of the evaluated factors.

➢ *Academic Achievements*

Academic achievement pertains to an individual's performance in academics and can be categorized as either poor achievement or high achievement. Low achievement refers to a situation where students, even those with high intelligence, perform below the expected standard in academics. This creates a noticeable gap between the expected and the actual level of achievement. The phrase "high intelligence but low achievement" is commonly used to describe this scenario on campuses. Conversely, high achievement pertains to students who have achieved academic success that surpasses what is often anticipated. When students with moderate intellect accomplish higher academic results than anticipated, they are considered high achievers (Fan and Chen, 2001).

Various methodologies are employed in examining pupils' academic accomplishments. This study adopts the methodology used by Hijaz & Naqvi (2006) and Hake (1988) to measure students' academic achievements. Instead of using grade point averages, the study measures achievements based on the overall course marks at the end of the semester. These marks are calculated by taking into account both formative and summative assessments and are weighted accordingly.

The significance of a lecturer's effectiveness in teaching can be evaluated by scrutinizing the academic achievements of their students, as emphasized in various studies including those conducted by Starr (2002), Adediwura and Tayo (2007), Adu and Olatundun (2007), and Schacter and Thum (2004). Skilled educators are expected to contribute to elevated academic performance among students when they proficiently apply their teaching expertise and skills. This anticipation is supported by the findings of Akiri and Ugborugbo (2009), who highlight the correlation between effective teaching practices and the resulting higher levels of academic success in students. These studies highlight the importance of a lecturer's teaching ability in influencing favorable learning results for students. Poor teaching techniques are sometimes identified as the cause of low academic performance among disadvantaged students (Kang'ahi et al., 2016). Given that each student has their own distinct interpretation and response to questions (Chang, 2010), it is beneficial to connect the lecturer's teaching methods with the students' chosen learning styles in order to enhance their academic performance (Zeeb, 2004).

Karemera (2003) discovered a substantial correlation between students' academic performance and the quality of learning materials. This correlation is based on factors such as the design of the curriculum, the connection between topics, and the content of the concepts to be taught. The evaluation of curricular structure quality is most effectively done by assessing the readability of texts, the simplicity of concepts to promote comprehension, the comprehensiveness of content, and the logical order in which themes are presented (Pozo & Stull, 2006).

➢ *Emotional intelligence*

It has been demonstrated by Niaz and Saud (2008) that there is a favorable association between academic accomplishment and creative ability. To investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and academic achievement, they conducted a survey with 235 students who were in the first grade. The findings indicate that there is a weak connection between higher levels of emotional intelligence and advanced academic performance.

The research conducted by Zirak and Ahmadian in 2015 revealed a positive and noteworthy correlation between emotional intelligence and creativity. Additionally, experts widely acknowledge a close association between the emotional intelligence variables of both males and females across various age periods and their respective academic achievements. This suggests that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in influencing creative abilities and academic success, forming an interlinked relationship between these factors.

Singh et al. (2009) show that emotional intelligence has an effect on academic functions after controlling the smarts of university students in Shanghai. Another study from the United States shows that a student's family situation does have a big impact on how well they do in school, but it is not enough to close the performance gap between American students and students from other developed countries. Soroudi and Rahimi (2010).

➢ *Assessment*

Assessment is also used to choose, control, or motivate students, to satisfy public expectations as to standards and accountability.. So, testing has been put into two groups based on how the results are used: formative and final (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2019).

Black and William (1998) have written about the subject of formative testing. Formative assessment, according to these writers, includes all the things that teachers and/or students do that give information that can be used as feedback to change the ways that they teach and learn. Formative assessment is when teachers and students talk about students' work and decide what kind of learning is good. They also give each other feedback on how the student's current level of learning and performance fits in with standards and goals. This feedback is used to help the student learn better (Nicol, 2009). Because of this, formative feedback is experimental, temporary, and meant to get students more involved as part of a continuous conversation between and among students and teachers.

On the other hand, summative tests makes grades, academic reports, and credentials that people value greatly (Biggs, 2003). Summative assessment events, according to Awoniyi and Butakor (2021), serve several purposes: they certify performance and award a qualification, they help make decisions about entry to other learning programs, they provide information that others can use to make selection decisions, and they formally demonstrate a learner's competence. Because of this, assessment, especially final assessment, has a lot of power over education because of how the results are used. When the stakes are high for an assessment, it changes "what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned," because teachers and students will change the way they teach and learn to meet the needs of the assessment.

According to DeCesare (2002), high stakes assessments are tests that are meant to measure not only how well kids do in school, but also how well teachers and schools do. The research on assessment shows that both critics and supporters agree that high-stakes external evaluation can have a controlling effect on teaching and learning and can change the way teachers teach, even if the government guidelines say otherwise. Concerns about the quality of education aren't just about how teachers and students are taught and learned. They're also about how tests are given, especially those that are given by outside groups and have a lot of weight.

➢ *School Entry Age*

Samuels (2017) revealed that states are trying to connect early learning goals, funds, and support for local preschool to the way schools are held accountable. With more power given to states by ESSA, they are looking for ways to improve education, and they are starting with the youngest children. Putting resources into improving preschool education should, ideally, help make kids ready to learn when they start grade school. This will make it possible for early measures to lead to better test scores in the future.

Huang and Invernizzi (2012) discovered a link between the age at which a child starts kindergarten, their reading skills, and their chance of being retained. The youngest kids who had never been to preschool were most likely to fall behind and had lower scores on tests of early literacy. Students who were older and had gone to preschool had the lowest chance of failing a grade and the best marks on the emergent literacy test. It was interesting to see that students who had been to preschool did better than their students who did not but of the same age. The benefits of going to preschool are the same for all ages, according to Huang and Invernizzi (2012). In kindergarten, younger students learn to read and write faster than older students, but by second grade, there is still a difference between the two groups..

Dagli and Akyol (2021) looked at delayed entry and found that kids of different ages were not all ready for school. The best reading and math scores came from students who came later and were older for their grade. Kids who were too young for their grade level got the worst scores at first, but by the end of third grade, that gap had closed, which suggests that it wasn't because they were less smart or skilled. Huang and Invernizzi (2013) say that students who are too young for their grade are also most likely to be held back in kindergarten. These studies show that age affects how well a person does in school when they first start.

According to Mendez et al. (2015), children who started kindergarten later did as well on tests as their peers of the same age, regardless of status. Assignments to special education were the only thing that made kids different. More students who started school late were sent to special education than others of the same age who started on time. Mendez et al. (2015) said, "It is likely that the high number of students who were put into special education after being late is because of developmental concerns that led to both the decision to delay entry and the later identification for special education". The idea that parents held their kids back because they were worried about school could not be proven because the data set used did not have that information.

Pena (2017) investigated the ideas of relative age and absolute age to learn more about how age affects being ready for school. The students who were older did better on tests than the students who were younger than the average age. Younger students would do better on tests that were based on their exact age, while older students would do worse. Their reason for this might be that they spend more days in school than their older peers. This study backs up the idea that early education is important for school readiness. Pena (2017) says that because some students are younger, their skills might not be considered.

Additionally, Herbst and Strawinski (2016) found that early enrollment is beneficial when students are evaluated according to their actual age rather than at set intervals during their schooling. The large age range of children assessed at school entrance is highlighted in these two studies.

➢ *Characteristics of School Readiness*

Several important discoveries about kindergarten readiness were highlighted by Diamond et al. (2000). The majority of parents believe that their child's academic and behavioral abilities are crucial for kindergarten preparedness. There are two types of preparedness for learning, according to Diamond et al. (2000): behavioral and pre-academic. There was a strong correlation between the two categories of preparedness, according to factor analysis. Second, many parents said they did a number of things (such reading aloud or watching educational TV) to help their child learn at home every week. There was no correlation between parents' worries about their children being ready for kindergarten and the frequency of activities that took place at home, according to the researchers. Third, parents' worries about their child's readiness for school, rather than his or her behavioral issues, were the driving forces behind the decision to postpone kindergarten enrollment.

Britto (2012) offered a more comprehensive definition of school preparation, breaking it down into three parts: prepared children, prepared schools, and prepared families. Focusing on children's learning and development is the ready children dimension. Efforts to ensure that all students have a positive first school experience and that they are prepared to learn are at the heart of the 20-point ready schools concept. The prepared families component highlights the mindset of parents and guardians, along with the significance of their engagement in their child's early development and school readiness. In his work, Britto posits that being prepared for school involves more than just a child's level of development or their aptitude for learning.

According to Gaynor (2015), "a complex concept that, relates to a child's readiness as age 5 to learn in a school environment" is what school readiness is all about. A child's socioeconomic level, parental educational achievement, early healthcare, and access to non-home daycare are some of the many factors that contribute to this multi-faceted idea. School preparedness is considered to be a multi-faceted concept.

D. Theoretical Lens

This study was grounded in sociocultural theory, specifically in the work of Lev Vygotsky. When considering whether a child is ready for kindergarten, Vygotsky (1978) argues that teachers should meet their children where they are academically and guide them along a continuum that leads to a goal. Learning becomes unachievable if it is too easy, and it fails to challenge children if it is too hard (Gredler, 2012). Failure to adequately prepare six students for school and assigning them tasks that are outside of their zone of proximal development (ZPD) increases the likelihood that they will struggle academically. Because preparing all students to learn when they start school is the ultimate aim, sociocultural theory will inform our research. In order to help youngsters progress along the learning continuum, this study demonstrated the significance of meeting them where they are. We need to figure out how to get kids ready for school by improving our knowledge of what early education should include. In an effort to establish a connection between SEA and school preparedness, this study's design borrowed from Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). My research should reveal a narrowing of the readiness gap between students who may begin school with gaps by the time they reach state accountability grades, provided that school officials are making use of what they know about the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Having the chance to develop early intervention programs to help pupils close such learning gaps is a significant benefit of ZPD for school administrators and instructors.
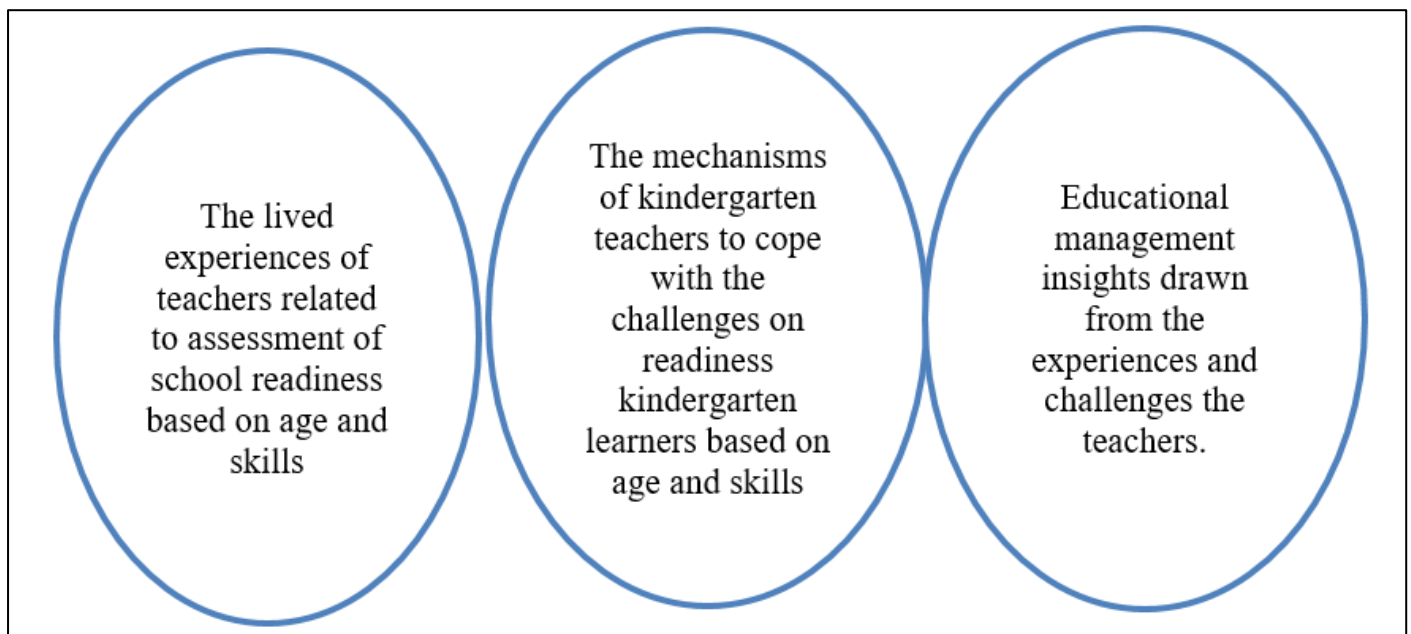

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

CHAPTER TWO
METHODOLOGY

The method, philosophical and qualitative assumptions, research design and process, research participants, data collecting, the researcher's role, data analysis, the validity of the study, and ethical considerations are all covered in this chapter. The study's exploration of facts and knowledge imposes the design and implementation that are detailed in this chapter.

A. Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical presumption served as a framework for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the facts in a particular field of research. It created the context for the judgments and conclusions that came after.

In qualitative research, epistemological assumptions refer to the fundamental beliefs and perspectives about knowledge, reality, and the nature of truth that guide the researcher's approach to studying and understanding the social world. These assumptions shape how researchers view the nature of knowledge itself and influence their research design, data collection methods, and data interpretation. Epistemological assumptions can fall along a spectrum, with some researchers taking a more positivist stance, emphasizing objective knowledge and observable phenomena, while others adopt a constructivist or interpretive stance, acknowledging the subjective and socially constructed nature of knowledge and reality. These assumptions are critical because they inform the researcher's worldview and affect how they generate, analyze, and interpret qualitative data in their research studies. Axiological assumption will address the students' struggles during a pandemic wherein new learning environment is adopted and whether it affects them negatively or not. This is more on the role of values in research. Consequently, the research study will be guided by these three (3) assumptions namely ontology, epistemology and axiology.

Ontology is a branch of philosophy and a concept in knowledge representation in which it refers to the study of the nature of existence, reality, and the categorization of entities and their relationships. In the context of information science and artificial intelligence, ontology refers to a formal and explicit representation of the concepts, categories, properties, and relationships that exist within a particular domain of knowledge or subject area. Ontologies are used to provide a structured and standardized way of organizing and sharing knowledge, making it easier for computers to understand and process information, and for humans to communicate and reason about complex topics across various disciplines. (Fontes et.al, 2020).

Rhetoric refers to reporting what reality was through the eyes of the research participants. This was significant for this means that I will report objectively on what was observed and heard from the participants. I will use personal voice and qualitative terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability instead of internal and external validity and objectivity.

B. Qualitative Assumptions

A qualitative research strategy based on a qualitative design is planned to be utilized in the study. Interpretivism is the guiding paradigm in this qualitative research. To better comprehend the students' actual experiences during the pandemic, this study will employ thematic content analysis in accordance with Colaizzi's phenomenological approach (Colaizzi, 1978). The philosophical phenomenology that seeks to shed light on the phenomenon's essential nature is the driving force behind this approach (Moustakas, 1994). In order to maintain this phenomenological stance throughout the study, the researcher will keep a reflective research notebook that details their thoughts and observations as they gather data. The study's focus on reality necessitates that the author refrain from bias and prior assumptions, which can be achieved through reflective thinking (Moustakas, 1994).

According to the social constructivist perspective, people should try to make sense of their everyday lives and the environment around them. They assign specific, personal interpretations to events and objects based on their subjective experiences. Due to the multiplicity of possible interpretations, scholars have sought out nuanced perspectives rather than reducing the meaning to a single concept. The point of research is to depend heavily on the participants' perspective (Mertens, 2015).

Practically speaking, it's best to ask participants open-ended questions that allow them to build their own meaning of the situation—meaning that is usually formed through conversations and interactions with other people. As the researcher pays close attention to what people say or do in their real-life context, the more open-ended the questions, the better. Therefore, the "processes" of interpersonal contact are frequently the focus of constructivist research. In order to comprehend the cultural and historical backgrounds of the individuals involved, they also center their attention on the particular surroundings in which people reside and work. It is important for researchers to "position themselves" in the research so they can realize the ways in which their own cultural, historical, and personal experiences impact their interpretation. Hence, based on their personal experiences and background, researchers interpret the findings; for instance, refer to the study motivations outlined by Brown et al. (2006). The goal of the researcher is to decipher the meanings that people attribute to various aspects of the world. Qualitative research is frequently referred to as interpretive research for this reason.

It is understood that the constructivist worldview is manifested in phenomenological studies, in which individuals describe their experiences (Moustakas, 1994), and in the grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2014), in which she grounds her theoretical orientation in the views or perspectives of individuals.

C. Design and Procedure

This study employed qualitative research methodology with a focus on phenomenology. Phenomenology can be understood as a philosophy that centers on the lived experience of human beings as the fundamental source of meaning and value. It recognizes that philosophical systems, scientific theories, and aesthetic judgments are abstractions derived from the dynamic and rich tapestry of the lived world. Utilizing phenomenology in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of the significance inherent in people's lived experiences. In the context of this research, these experiences pertained specifically to the narratives shared by teachers. As highlighted by Hitchcock and Hughes (2015), a phenomenological study seeks to explore and capture people's firsthand experiences of a particular phenomenon. The aim of employing the phenomenological approach was to shed light on the unique aspects and understand phenomena based on how they were perceived by the individuals involved in a given situation (Cohen, 2010). In the human realm, this typically involves gathering comprehensive information and perceptions through qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions, and participant observation, and presenting them from the standpoint of the research participant(s).

A group of individuals having direct knowledge with a certain topic were interviewed for this study. According to Moustakas (1994), the interviews aim to address two general inquiries. Clusters of meaning were formed by reading the data multiple times and then removing similar phrases and themes (Creswell, 2013). This is how the researcher gained a deeper comprehension of the phenomenon by building the universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience.

In this study phenomenology attempts to extract the most pure, untainted data and in some interpretations of the approach, bracketing is used by the researcher to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove him or herself from the process. One method of bracketing is memoing (Maxwell, 2013).

D. Research Participants

The participants of this study were identified through purposive sampling. There were eight (8) participants of the study coming from Catalunan Grande, Davao City. Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling.

Hence, for the purpose of the study which was to record and analyze the narratives of teachers when it comes to their experiences in the digital divide during the global crisis, the participants had the following characteristics: (1) they should be elementary teachers; (2) they should have at least three years of teaching experience; and (3) they should have experienced the academic and professional demands of teaching during pandemic. These criteria helped me ensure that I was able to get enough data that answered the research questions which I had established in the first chapter of this study.

E. Ethical Consideration

There are ethical factors I sought to keep in mind throughout the duration of this research to ensure the research's legitimacy. First and foremost, I sought the clearance and approval to perform the research from Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. and before the research was completed, I obtained voluntary, informed, written consent from the participants for the interviews, in accordance with research ethical norms. The process involving the study including the purpose and scope, the types of questions which are likely to be asked, the use to which the results will be put, the method of anonymization and the extent to which participants' utterances will be used in reports were discussed with the participants. It is important to provide participants ample time to think about participating and ask questions before obtaining their agreement to conduct the research interview. Participants were apprised of the data's intended use and recipients at this stage. I also made sure the participants knew they could stop being a part of the study whenever they wanted. Additionally, participants were encouraged to ask questions whenever they felt the need. That way, we could clear up any confusion that could emerge and keep the participants engaged throughout the study. The goal was to build trust between the participating educators and myself as the researcher.

A daunting task, which is common in qualitative research, was maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. Although descriptions of situations may reveal an individual, it was my goal as a researcher to maintain anonimity. Participants' data should be treated in a confidential and anonymous manner, according to research ethics, which was accomplished by using pseudonyms and hiding location data. It should be ensured that the research participants' names and identities were protected.

F. Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher entails attempting to delve into the thoughts and emotions of the study participants. This task is far from simple, as it involves asking individuals to discuss deeply personal matters. Researchers engaging in qualitative work need to engage in reflection, both prior to and during the research process, to provide context and comprehension for readers. Reflexivity plays a crucial role, whereby researchers do not attempt to ignore or evade their own biases (which would likely be impractical). Instead, reflexivity requires researchers to critically examine and openly express their perspectives,

subjectivities, and worldviews, enabling readers to better comprehend the lenses through which questions were posed, data were collected and analyzed, and findings were presented (Wellington, 2010). From this standpoint, bias and subjectivity are not inherently negative but rather unavoidable aspects. Consequently, I believed it was essential to upfront articulate these aspects in a clear and coherent manner for the benefit of readers.

Furthermore, in qualitative research, the researcher had the challenging but important task of trying to tap into the emotions and ideas of the people who participated in the study. This task required individuals to open up on matters that might be deeply intimate with them. Reliving old memories can be challenging at times, but other times the experiences being studied were very recent in the participant's thoughts. My main concern was making sure that the participants and their data were protected while the data was being collected. I made sure to explain to the attendees how the data would be protected. Last but not least, before beginning my study, I sought assistance from seasoned qualitative researchers since I was a novice in the field.

G. Data Collection

In this study, individual interviews were conducted to gather data while simultaneously treading through ethical norms. I interviewed eight (8) school teachers. According to Pring (2014), individual interviews allowed researchers to probe their attitudes, beliefs, desires, and experiences to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. These interviews could take place face-to-face, by phone or video conference, or via instant messaging system. However, for this study in particular, a face-to-face interview with each of the participants took place.

Creswell (2013) highlighted an important step in the process which is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data. Keeping this in mind, a light atmosphere was maintained during the interview which was encouraged by the moderator by closely monitoring the participants' habits, convictions, opinions, preferences, tastes, associations, etc. It revealed mental maps, stream of consciousness, latent demands. Quantitative parameters were not applied for focus group discussion. Representativeness was not required, as well as the error of the results are not estimated. The depth of the content, particularity and interpretation, but not statistical analysis, were most important in gathering qualitative data (Crotty, 2013).

H. Data Analysis

To analyze my data, I performed thematic analysis. The goal of the thematic analysis was to achieve an understanding of patterns of meanings from data on lived experiences. My analysis began by examining my data for patterns and then broad themes. I started by transcribing the audio data to text. After which I grouped together significant statements of the same meaning. While conducting the analysis, I strived to understand meanings embedded in the patterns and in the themes. Wellington (2010) emphasized that through the analysis, details and aspects of meaning were explored, requiring reading and a reflective writing. Parts of the text need to be understood in terms of the reflective whole in terms of its parts. However, the researcher also needed to move between being close to and distant from the data. Overall, the process of analysis was complex and therefore I needed to be flexible.
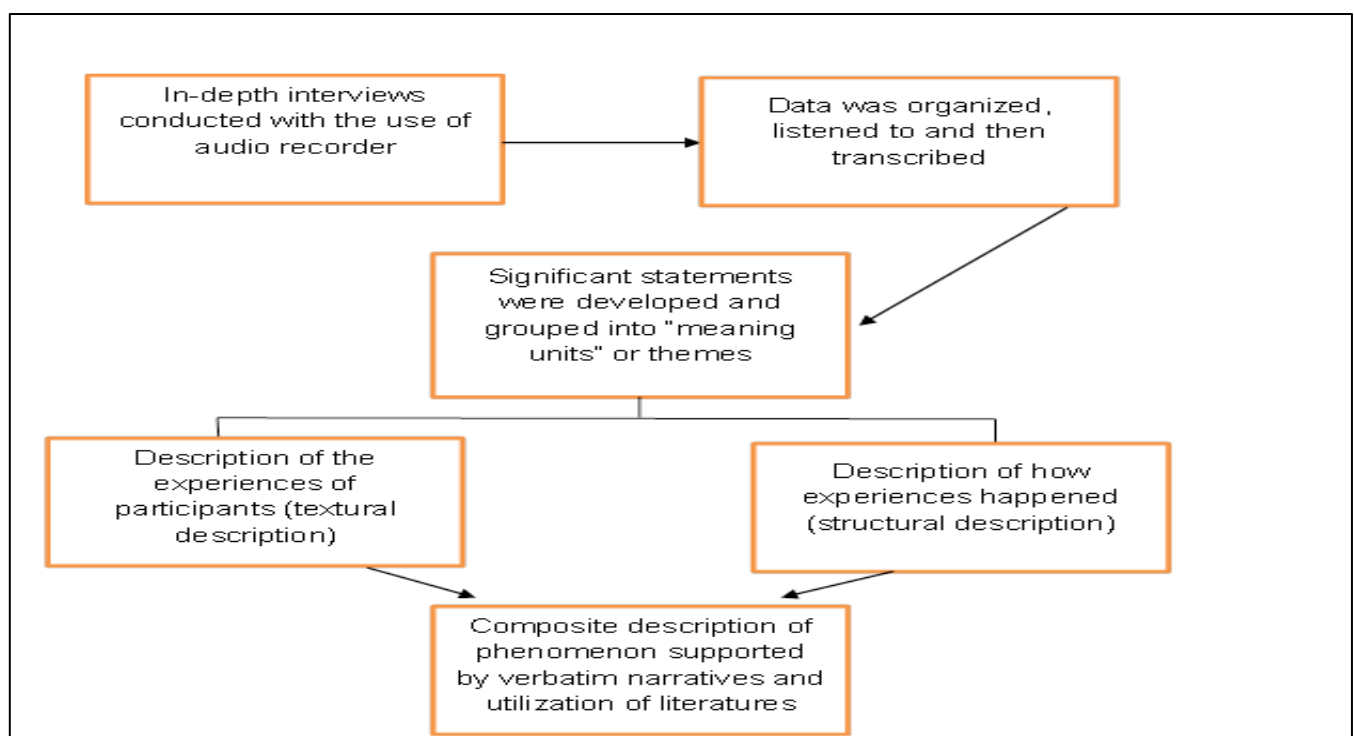

Fig 2: Analytical Framework of the Study

I. Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative researchers have established four aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

- Credibility asks the question, "How congruent are the results with reality? It aimed to establish confidence that the results (from the perspective of the participants) were true, credible and believable (Crotty, 2013). To achieve this in my study, I ensured that I had a healthy two-way communication with the interviewees. I also ensured that I adhere to the interview protocol.
- Dependability aimed to ensure that findings of this qualitative inquiry were repeatable if the inquiry occurred within the same cohort of participants, coders and context. To do this, I provided a rich description of my study methods. I also developed a details of track record of the data collection process.
- Confirmability aimed to extend the confidence that the results would be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. To make sure this paper can be confirmed and is as close to reality as one can get, I applied a triangulation technique which was the focus group discussion. This helped confirm the result of the study.
- Transferability aimed to extend the degree to which the results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Just as it is valid and important to seek understanding from others' systematic qualitative inquiry. Particularly in this research, I applied data saturation and employed purposeful sampling.

CHAPTER THREE
RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, the results of the thematic analysis are presented. It is followed by discussions arranged according to themes and subthemes that were generated. This part of the study dealt with the research questions and its answers based on the responses of the participants of the study. The participants unfolded their experiences in assessing readiness of kindergarten students based on age and skills. This study also scrutinized the coping mechanisms and insights of the teachers particularly those from Talomo District, Davao City.

A. Assessing Readiness of Kindergarten Students Based on Age and Skills

Assessing the readiness of kindergarten students involves considering both age-related milestones and a range of developmental skills. It's important to remember that children develop at different rates, so a holistic approach is often more effective than relying solely on age-based criteria. Additionally, assessing readiness requires a comprehensive understanding of various domains, including social, emotional, cognitive, and motor skills, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive.

➢ *Diverse Developmental Levels*

Kindergarten classrooms often include children with diverse developmental levels. Teachers must navigate a range of abilities, including differences in fine and gross motor skills, language development, social skills, and cognitive readiness. Assessing readiness involves recognizing and accommodating these variations.

Some of the participants' responses were noted as follows:

One notable experience for us teachers is how diverse students truly are. Their development can be significantly different from when they first attend school so it's important to monitor their levels throughout the year. (T1)

My students are very different from each other. I can definitely tell that knowing and understanding their differences to the core is a must in order to accurately assess their readiness. This also allows for possible intervention whenever needed in hopes to aid them be more ready to take their next step. (T3)

Variations in cognitive abilities and physical development are common. Some students may have learning disabilities, while others may excel in certain areas. Us teachers must be prepared to identify and accommodate diverse cognitive and physical needs through individualized support and accommodations. (T7)

The participants, represented by Teachers T1, T3, and T7, collectively emphasize the profound diversity among students and the necessity for continuous monitoring of their development. T1 underscores the dynamic nature of students' development, emphasizing the importance of ongoing assessment throughout the academic year. T3 acknowledges the significant differences among their students, stressing the crucial role of understanding these disparities at a profound level to accurately assess readiness and facilitate timely interventions. Meanwhile, T7 highlights the prevalence of variations in cognitive abilities and physical development, emphasizing the teacher's responsibility to identify and accommodate diverse needs through individualized support and accommodations. Overall, the responses reflect a shared recognition among teachers of the diverse nature of students and the critical role of understanding, monitoring, and adapting to their individual developmental trajectories.

Odom et al., (2004) highlighted how understanding kindergarten teachers' views and experiences is vital because they are a key factor in the student's transition from a preschool program to a more formal general education class and curriculum. Gay (2003) supported and noted that teachers have always needed to address the diverse learning needs of their students; current and projected demographic trends prompt many educators to believe that awareness of and sensitivity to diverse learners have become even more pressing needs. He refers to this as pedagogical content knowledge, that is, an understanding of how particular teaching, subjects, topics, problems, or issues are organized, presented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction.

According to Crandell et al. (2012), it has become clear that development is contextual. Even though the passage of time has traditionally been synonymous with chronological age, social and behavioral psychologists have begun to consider the many other changes occurring over time that affect the dynamic relationship between a human's biological makeup and the environment. It is now understood that three important contextual influences act on and interact with the individual to produce development. Musinski (1999) previously described three phases of learning: dependence, independence, and interdependence. These passages of learning ability from childhood to adulthood, labeled by Covey (1990) as the "maturity continuum.

Although teaching activities primarily are directed to the main caregiver(s), children at this developmental stage in life have a great capacity for learning. Toddlers are capable of some degree of understanding procedures and interventions that they may experience. Because of the young child's natural tendency to be intimidated by unfamiliar people, it is imperative that a primary

nurse is assigned and time is taken to establish a relationship with the child and parents. This approach not only provides consistency in the teaching-learning process but also helps to reduce the child's fear of strangers. Parents should be present whenever possible during formal and informal teaching and learning activities to allay stress, which could be compounded by separation anxiety (London et al., 2011).

Brightwheel (2023) discussed that early childhood is when children have the opportunity to experience a melting pot of different cultures, genders, religions, physical abilities, and more. Children are impacted by these areas in their formative years and are more aware than one may think when it comes to bias and stereotyping. Parents often assume their children are too young to learn or understand race and diversity. However, research shows that toddlers and children under five can understand messages and ideas about race, while infants as young as six months see the differences in skin color. Therefore, when it comes to early childhood education, it's important to promote diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environments to combat the racism and bias that are prevalent and to better prepare them for their future.

➤ *Social and Emotional Variances*
Teachers frequently assess students' social and emotional readiness for kindergarten. This involves observing how well children interact with peers, follow classroom rules, manage emotions, and navigate social situations. Teachers may encounter varying levels of social readiness, with some students demonstrating strong interpersonal skills while others may need additional support.

Some of the participants responses were noted as follows.

In my experience, assessing kindergarten readiness involves more than just *academic skills. Social and emotional development plays a crucial role. I've noticed that some children, despite being academically prepared, may face challenges in social interactions. It's important to consider each child's unique emotional needs and provide a supportive environment for them to thrive socially. (T4)*

I've noticed that age doesn't always correlate with emotional maturity. Some older students may struggle with separation anxiety, while younger ones demonstrate remarkable independence. It's crucial to approach each child as an individual, considering their unique emotional needs alongside academic skills. (T5)

Creating a classroom environment that values emotional well-being as much as academic achievement has been key in ensuring a holistic approach to kindergarten readiness for me personally. (T8)

Participant T4 stressed the importance of recognizing challenges in social interactions, even among academically prepared children, highlighting the need to address individual emotional needs for social thriving. T5 challenged the assumption that age determines emotional maturity, advocating for an individualized approach that considers unique emotional needs alongside academic skills. T8 underscored the significance of creating a classroom environment that values emotional well-being on par with academic achievement, emphasizing a holistic perspective in preparing kindergarten students. Together, these responses underscore a shared commitment among teachers to consider the interplay of academic, social, and emotional dimensions in assessing and fostering kindergarten readiness.

Entwisle and Alexander (1988) supported these findings. They stated that a kid who readily assumes the position of a student benefits from this role model, which in turn increases the likelihood that the young learner will fit in socially and academically. It was a "series of rituals to help the children shed their external home roles, make the transition to their school roles, and reaggregate as students," according to McCadden (1997), who detailed the method used to acquaint kindergarten pupils with expectations of primary students. In a similar way, Puleo (1988) said that the key to success in school is maintaining focus while doing academically relevant activities. The importance of unstructured class time in helping students achieve their social and emotional goals was also hinted at by him. Research suggests that a child's social role is positively impacted by the transition to full-day schooling, even if the No Child Left Behind educational policy prioritizes academic goals over social and emotional ones.

When thinking about whether or not a child is ready for preschool, Farran (2011) argued that social-emotional development should be given more weight. To better understand this aspect of maturation, temperament theory offers a helpful framework. Individual differences in temperament have an impact on how kids learn, grow, and engage with their environment. Finding out why some kids are naturally more suited to school than others requires an understanding of early temperament. Children with different temperaments should have an equal opportunity to succeed academically in the early grades, and teachers can help make that happen by taking temperament theory into account when they implement interventions and tactics for classroom management. Although chronological age and cognitive skill mastery are the most common ways to measure readiness, there are other expectations about what a child should have when they start school that also contribute to their performance. Teachers' social and behavioral views of students' readiness do not coincide fully with skill-focused evaluations.

➢ *Language Development Evaluation*

Kindergarten teachers highlight how assessing language development, including vocabulary, communication skills, and the ability to follow verbal instructions is vital in assessing readiness of learners. Students may enter kindergarten with diverse language backgrounds and proficiency levels, influencing how teachers tailor their instruction and support language development.

Some of the participants responses were noted as follows.

Conducting language assessments helps me identify areas of growth and provides a foundation for implementing targeted interventions, such as language-focused activities and communication strategies that support each child's unique developmental stage. (T2)

I direct a lot of focus onto my students' communication skills. It's not just about vocabulary; it's about understanding and effective communication. I adjust my teaching methods to accommodate language levels and to promote language enrichment and communication skills development for all students.. (T3)

I use assessments to identify specific language areas that require attention and implement targeted strategies to ensure that all students can effectively engage in the learning process. This is vital for me because no matter how ready they are to take next steps, if they can't express and can't understand simple instructions then that makes my evaluation very different. (T7)

T2 emphasizes the utility of language assessments in pinpointing areas of growth, providing a foundational framework for tailored interventions that align with each child's developmental stage. T3 underscores the importance of focusing on communication skills beyond vocabulary, adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse language levels, and fostering language enrichment for all students. T7 echoes this sentiment, emphasizing the critical connection between effective communication and readiness for the next steps in learning. The responses collectively emphasize the significance of targeted language assessments and interventions in ensuring that students can express themselves and comprehend instructions, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience.

Given the importance of language to human behavior, it is not surprising to find that language difficulties are a risk factor for associated difficulties in other aspects of children's lives. For example, research indicates developmental interactions between language impairments and difficulties acquiring literacy skills, the development of memory skills and more general nonverbal abilities throughout middle childhood, adolescence and beyond. These children are more vulnerable to academic failure, social exclusion, behavioural and emotional difficulties, and to being bullied. Within this context, the assessment of preschool children's language skills is of crucial importance. It enables us to identify accurately difficulties and guide appropriate management of interventions and support for children and their families – ideally, from an early age. In this review, we summarise briefly the key developmental milestones of language development in the preschool years as a backdrop for understanding difficulties with language learning, including what specific language impairment entails.

Hoff (2010) noted that the brief summary of language development has to be qualified by the very important fact that there are substantial individual differences in the timing of the course of language acquisition within the population of typically developing children. Professionals working with children in diverse contexts may have varied goals: to assess timeliness of language development, to provide a thorough profile of developmental abilities, to inform a therapeutic programme, to assess readiness for a developmental or educational opportunity or for specific research goals.

Conti-Ramsden et al. (2012) posits that language assessment aims to provide a profile of a child's language difficulties. In order to achieve this aim, practitioners need to establish the nature and extent of a child's language abilities in relation to the child's age and developmental expectations. In the case of the preschool child, expertise in obtaining representative behaviors from young children and in interpreting different sources of information is of particular relevance. Early identification, in addition to providing information and support to adults who are concerned about a preschool child's language development, affords the opportunity for early intervention. Language intervention with preschool children has the potential to change the developmental course of their language difficulties and improve long-term outcomes. Evidence suggests that there is more fluidity in language growth in the preschool and early school years: some young children with language impairment experience accelerated growth during this early period of development.
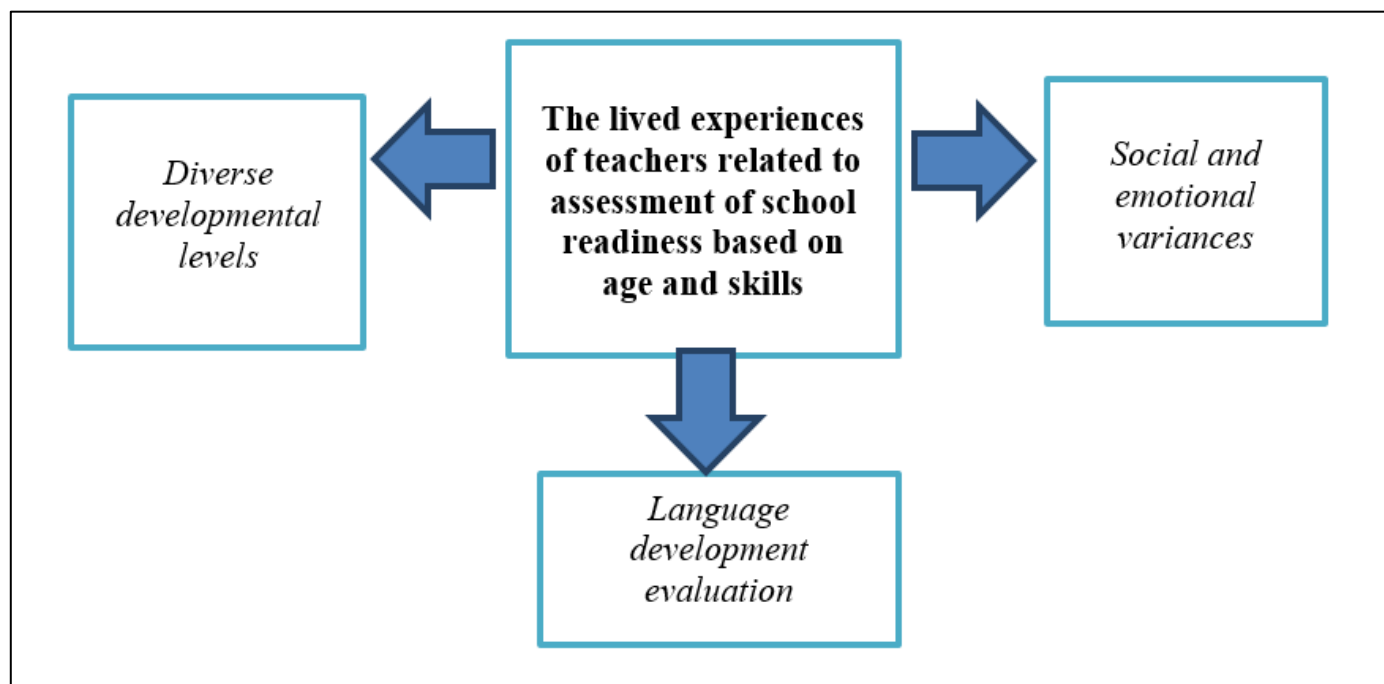
Fig 3: The Lived Experiences of Teachers Related to Assessment of School Readiness Based on Age and Skills

B. The Coping Mechanisms of Kindergarten Teachers to Cope with the Challenges on Readiness Kindergarten Learners Based on Age and Skills

It is crucial for teachers to adeptly cope with the challenges associated with assessing and addressing the readiness of kindergarten learners based on age and skills to ensure an inclusive and effective learning environment. Kindergarten marks a foundational stage in a child's education, where diverse readiness levels among students necessitate tailored approaches. Teachers must adapt their instructional methods to accommodate varying ages, developmental stages, and skills, fostering an environment that supports each child's unique learning trajectory. By addressing these challenges, teachers contribute to the holistic development of young learners, laying the groundwork for academic success, social-emotional growth, and a positive attitude towards education. Proactively navigating these readiness challenges ensures that every child receives the support and guidance needed to thrive in their early educational experiences.

➢ *Adaptability to Individual Needs*

Adaptability is a crucial trait for kindergarten teachers, especially when coping with the challenges of assessing and addressing the readiness of learners based on age and skills. Teachers need to be flexible and open to adjusting their instructional strategies, approaches, and resources to meet the diverse needs of their students. This adaptability allows them to tailor instruction to meet the individual needs. This might involve modifying lesson plans, providing additional support or challenges as needed, and adjusting teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles.

Some of the participants' comments were as follows:

Adaptability is at the core of my teaching philosophy, especially when assessing kindergarten readiness. I recognize that age doesn't always align with developmental stages, and students enter with differing skills. This flexibility allows me to adjust my lesson plans, activities, and assessments to accommodate individual readiness levels. (T3)

One way to cope and I say this not just to this particular struggle but in all of the challenges I face in my profession as a teacher is to always be flexible and ready for changes. By being adaptable, I can create a responsive and engaging classroom that supports the growth and development of each child. (T5)

I often encounter students entering with diverse ages and skills. Being quick to adapt to changes allows me to modify my teaching strategies to meet each child where they are. Whether a student needs extra support or is ready for more advanced challenges, adapting my approach ensures that every child receives the personalized guidance necessary for a successful start in kindergarten (T6)

Participant T3 highlighted the recognition that age does not necessarily align with developmental stages, advocating for a flexible approach that allows for adjustments in lesson plans, activities, and assessments to accommodate individual readiness levels. T5 extends this perspective, highlighting adaptability as a coping mechanism in navigating the various challenges in teaching, fostering a responsive and engaging classroom environment conducive to the growth and development of each child. T6 reinforces the theme, emphasizing the prevalence of diverse ages and skills among students and the need to swiftly adapt teaching strategies to meet individual needs, ensuring personalized guidance for a successful start in kindergarten. The collective responses emphasize the shared commitment to adaptability as a cornerstone in addressing the diverse needs of students and creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Collie & Martin (2015) contend that adaptability is highly relevant to teachers given that teaching work involves responding to and managing constant change. The capacity to adapt in order to effectively manage these changes is crucial for teachers' work in the classroom, staff room, and beyond. Teachers must respond to the different and changing needs of students by adjusting the lesson pace, adapting activities for different students, or seeking out different resources to better explain or illustrate key points. Additionally, teachers must also effectively interact with colleagues under shifting conditions, such as when there is a change in job role, they require resources to teach a new part of the curriculum or when massive changes are being implemented on the medium-such as the changes made under the new normal. being able to effectively respond to the inherent novelty, change, and uncertainty that characterizes teaching work is a highly important capacity for teachers.

Evers and Vermeulen (2015) explained a related concept that sheds further light on the importance of this topic is innovative teacher behavior. Innovative behavior is used by teachers to improve their teaching practice. Of note, there is some overlap between innovative behavior and adaptability in that they both involve adjusting or modifying thoughts, behaviors, or actions. However, a key difference in the concepts is that adaptability occurs in response to a new, changing, or uncertain situation, whereas innovative behavior involves a planned process with a central aim of improving performance.

Corno (2008) highlights the importance of adaptive teaching practices to meet the needs of students who may have diverse developmental levels, cognitive abilities, language and cultural backgrounds, social-emotional competencies, and socio-economic backgrounds. Researchers have also considered the role of adaptability more broadly—that is, beyond instructional adaptation and with respect to teachers' functioning at work. Researchers also examined descriptions from early career teachers of what it means to be a resilient teacher and demonstrated that being adaptable and flexible was a central theme in their responses.

➢ *Professional Development*
Teachers actively seek professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in assessing and addressing kindergarten readiness challenges. Staying informed about the latest research, educational strategies, and best practices allows teachers to refine their approaches and adapt to evolving student needs.

Some of the personal comments of the participants were as follows:

Workshops and training sessions keep me updated on the latest research in early childhood education, allowing me to refine my assessment strategies. Learning about age-appropriate milestones and effective ways to address diverse skill levels helps me adapt my teaching methods to better meet the individual needs of each child, fostering a more comprehensive and informed approach to kindergarten readiness assessments. (T2)

By participating in targeted professional development programs, I gain insights and the tools needed to create a more dynamic and responsive learning environment for my students. (T3)

Training sessions provide me with a deeper understanding of child development, enabling me to discern age-appropriate behaviors and skills so I really good coping mechanism to the challenges I faced. (T7)

Participant T2 highlights the impact of workshops and training sessions in keeping abreast of the latest research in early childhood education, allowing for the refinement of assessment strategies. The emphasis on age-appropriate milestones and addressing diverse skill levels enables T2 to adapt teaching methods to meet individual needs. T3 emphasizes the role of targeted professional development in gaining insights and tools for creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment. Finally, T7 underlines how training sessions contribute to a deeper understanding of child development, aiding in the discernment of age-appropriate behaviors and skills as a coping mechanism for the challenges faced. Together, these responses underscore the shared commitment among teachers to ongoing professional development, enabling them to implement informed and comprehensive approaches to kindergarten readiness assessments that cater to the individual needs of their students.

The importance of professional development for educators has long been established in the field of educational research (Guskey, 2013). In order to tackle the problems that modern education presents, professional development is essential. As a result, educational improvement, student achievement, and instructors' own attitudes and practices were all positively impacted by professional development programs. Tanang and Abu (2014) added that professional development is the center of lifelong learning and has a huge impact on teaching practice and achieving students' needs.

One group that has an impact on children's education is kindergarten instructors, according to the Board on Children, Youth, and Families (2015). During their formative years, they work with kindergarteners. They spend a lot of time with these kids, thus their character shaping experiences could be either beneficial or detrimental. The calibre of the instructors has a significant impact on the success of this formative stage. Consequently, kindergarten teachers' competence is substantially improved by participation in a variety of professional development programs.

According to Allan (2008), to enhance instructional practice in the classroom, teachers require interactive professional development training programs that allow for continuous monitoring and feedback on observed teaching methods. It was also suggested that elementary principals and the kindergarten coordinator for the division work together to offer professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers. These should focus on guiding them to teach social and personal skills alongside academic content. A crucial tool for administrators to examine instructors' professional development courses and create professional development programs that meet their needs can be the categorization of the teaching staff according to individuals' professional desires. Teachers of young children are required to be well-versed in both the classroom setting and the wide range of students they teach. Having this skill allows kindergarten teachers to have a positive impact on their students' learning. The responsibility of instructors in creating a classroom climate that is free from disruptions, equitable in distribution of resources, and encouraging of student initiative and success is the subject of this skill.

➢ *Importance of Observation*

Observational assessments play a crucial role in evaluating the readiness of kindergarten students as they provide valuable insights into various aspects of a child's development that may not be fully captured by standardized tests. These assessments involve systematically observing and documenting a child's behaviors, interactions, and responses in natural settings. The participants agree that this approach recognizes the uniqueness of each child's developmental journey, accounting for variations in learning styles and rates of progress. Moreover, observational assessments facilitate a more authentic and child-centered evaluation, enabling teachers to tailor their instructional strategies to meet individual needs, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment in the crucial early stages of a child's education.

Some of the participants responses were noted as follows.

In my experience, thoroughly observing my students allow me to see beyond the confines of standard tests and understand the whole child. By observing how students engage with peers, approach problem-solving, and handle various tasks, I can better gauge their social, emotional, and cognitive readiness. (T5)

Observational assessments are a cornerstone of my assessment strategy. I'm able to see firsthand what their needs are or what areas need improvement. These are things that regular assessments can't catch. (T6)

I identify developmental milestones and areas that may require additional attention through being hands on with my students. This real-time feedback informs my teaching strategies, enabling me to create a more responsive and engaging educational experience tailored to the unique needs of each of my students. (T8)

Observational assessments are highlighted as a fundamental aspect of these participants. The emphasis is on going beyond standardized tests to comprehend the complete child. By actively observing students' social interactions, problem-solving approaches, and task management, these educators gain valuable insights into their social, emotional, and cognitive readiness. Furthermore, T5, T6 and T8 collectively stress the significance of firsthand observations in identifying students' specific needs and areas that demand improvement, which may not be evident through conventional assessments. This hands-on approach aids in recognizing developmental milestones and areas requiring additional attention, allowing for real-time feedback that directly influences their teaching strategies.

Every day, in early childhood classrooms, observations are carried out, according to Peterson (2020). He elaborated by saying that educators are always taking stock of their classrooms and doing safety inspections to guarantee that their students aren't putting themselves in harm's way. To make sure that students are healthy enough to take part in the program, teachers check their vitals every day. In order to keep their classrooms safe and healthy for their students, teachers have a lot on their plates beyond the usual health and safety checks. Teachers who put in the time and effort to observe their students in action are better able to prepare lessons, create stimulating classroom environments, keep tabs on students' social interactions and behavior, keep parents and guardians informed, and evaluate students' growth and development. Teachers might be held more responsible through observations.

The OECD (2013) states that, in many countries, teacher performance evaluation systems rely on observations made by instructors themselves (Isoré, 2009; UNESCO, 2007). Teacher observations are the main tool for assessing several aspects of classroom quality in the US. This encompasses assessing a teacher's pedagogical skills, lesson planning, delivery, and the overall effectiveness of their teaching methods. Observations provide concrete evidence of how well teachers translate educational theory into practice in the classroom. Teacher observations extend beyond evaluating the teaching itself; they also focus on the classroom environment. This involves assessing how conducive the physical and emotional setting is for learning. Observers may look at factors such as classroom management, organization, and the use of resources to create an environment that supports effective teaching and learning.
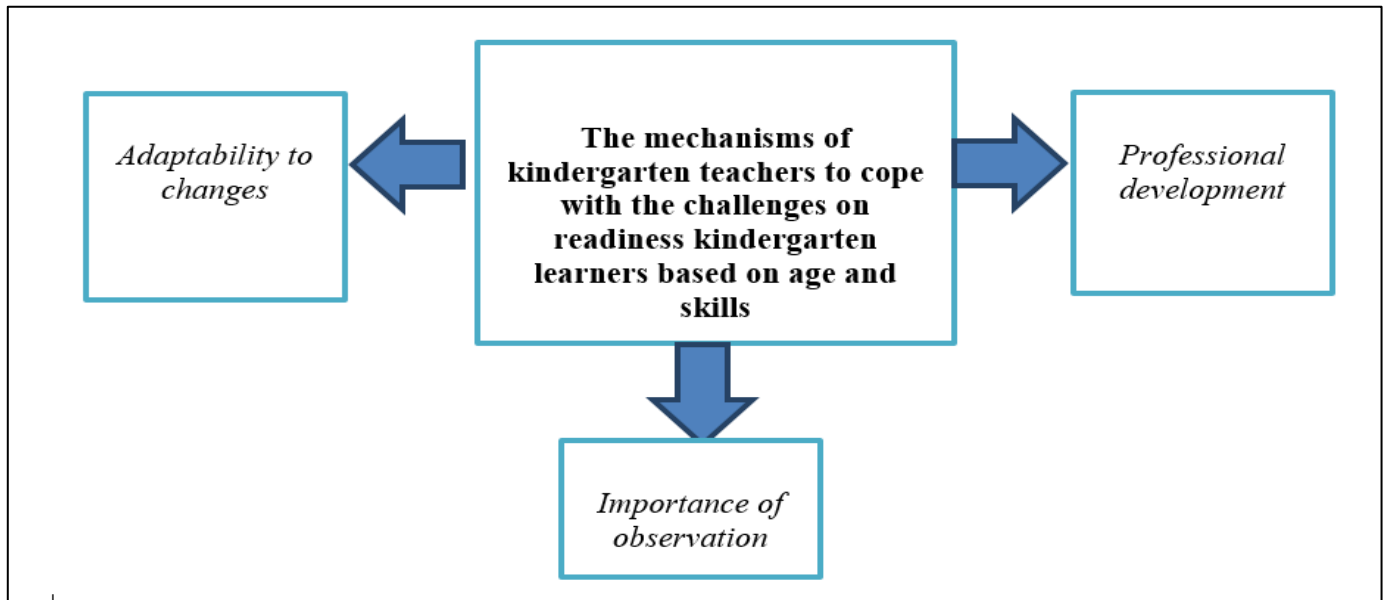

Fig 4: The Coping Mechanisms of Kindergarten Teachers to Cope with the Challenges on Readiness Kindergarten Learners based on Age and Skills

C. Educational Management Insights Drawn from the Experiences and Challenges of the Teachers

The experiences and challenges faced by kindergarten teachers on the assessment of readiness based on age and skills provide valuable insights for educational management. By addressing issues surrounding assessments of the learners' readiness, educational institutions can effectively mitigate the challenges and provide a better platform for teachers and students alike.

Some of the participants responses as pertains to their insights about their experiences were noted as follows.

➢ *Data-Informed Decision Making*

Educational managers can encourage a data-informed approach to decision-making. Insights from teachers' assessments can be used to establish a systematic process for collecting and analyzing data on kindergarten readiness. This data-driven approach allows educational managers to identify trends, challenges, and successes, enabling them to make informed decisions that positively impact teaching and learning in kindergarten.

Some of the participants' comments were as follows:

Leaders should prioritize regularly analyzing data on age-related milestones and skill development, teachers can identify patterns, areas of strength, and potential challenges. This information guides our instructional strategies, enabling us to tailor our approaches to better meet the individual needs of each child and ensuring a more accurate and nuanced assessment of their readiness for kindergarten. (T3)

Institutions should identify trends and variations among students. This insight allows us to differentiate our instruction, providing targeted support for students who may need additional help or challenges. It ensures that our assessments are not only based on intuition but are grounded in concrete evidence, leading to more effective and informed decision-making in the classroom. (T5)

DepEd and educational managers must contribute to a more evidence-based and responsive teaching environment that will ultimately benefit both teachers and students (T6)

The participants, T3, T5, and T6, collectively emphasize the importance of data analysis and evidence-based approaches in educational leadership. T3 advocates for leaders prioritizing the regular analysis of data related to age-related milestones and skill development, enabling teachers to identify patterns, strengths, and potential challenges. This, in turn, guides instructional strategies tailored to meet individual needs for a more accurate assessment of kindergarten readiness. T5 extends this perspective, emphasizing the role of institutions in identifying trends and variations among students, differentiating instruction, and providing targeted support based on concrete evidence. T6 broadens the scope, calling for the Department of Education (DepEd) and educational managers to contribute to an evidence-based and responsive teaching environment, benefiting both teachers and students. Together, these responses underscore the collaborative effort needed at the leadership level to ensure effective, data-driven decision-making that enhances the quality of education and assessments in kindergarten classrooms.

Educators have access to a wealth of data, including student work, results from district interim and state standardized assessments, formative classroom, common grade, and student assessments, as well as observations of teacher instruction (Olah et al., 2010). However, not all educators know how to effectively use this data to make significant changes to their teaching and improve student outcomes. It is possible that administrators and teachers may not have the necessary training to ask the right questions, choose the right indications, and find the right solutions. As an example, according to Cosner (2011), principals have a hard time helping instructors make good use of data, either because they give too broad of instructions or because they focus too much on looking at how classes will respond in the future rather than how they will really teach.

District and school administrators have reportedly spent a lot of money on a variety of interventions—from broad reform programs to more targeted seminars, tools, and technology—to increase teachers' ability to participate in system-level reform efforts (Marsh, 2012). Unfortunately, there is a lack of information on what makes capacity development effective and under what conditions it happens due to the fact that most research on these interventions is theoretical and incomplete. Data utilization is anticipated to endure for the foreseeable future due to the ongoing emphasis on student outcomes. However, in light of the present economic situation, administrators at all levels must make tough decisions about how to allocate limited resources to encourage data use. Once these investments are made, the next challenge is to guarantee that instructors acquire and maintain the necessary skills even if the supports are eliminated.

➢ *Parental Involvement Strategies*
Educational managers can draw insights to develop strategies that engage parents in their child's education, particularly in preparing children for kindergarten. This might include workshops, informational sessions, or resource materials that help parents understand the age and skill-related expectations for their child's entry into kindergarten.

The participants of this study narrated as follows:

Collaborative partnerships with parents can provide us with a deeper understanding of a child's background, experiences, and development at home. This insight allows us to align our assessments more closely with a child's individual needs, especially regarding age-appropriate behaviors and emerging skills. I think school heads must focus on setting up more opportunities for parents to be involved at school. (T5)

Parental involvement becomes a bridge between home and school, enriching our understanding and contributing to a more holistic and accurate assessment of a child's readiness for kindergarten. Our head must realize this mindset so more strategies can be employed on an institutional level. (T8)

As a kindergarten teacher, I always make time to get inputs from my students' parents. It would be nice to see if this kind of effort is implemented and supported by school heads and the Department of Education. (T7)

T5, T8, and T7 stress the importance of collaborative partnerships with parents in enhancing the assessment of kindergarten readiness. T5 emphasizes that understanding a child's background and experiences at home through collaboration with parents allows for more aligned assessments that cater to individual needs. T8 builds on this, viewing parental involvement as a crucial bridge between home and school, contributing to a holistic and accurate assessment of a child's readiness for kindergarten. T7, as a kindergarten teacher, actively seeks input from students' parents, expressing the desire to see such efforts supported by school heads and the Department of Education. Together, these responses underscore the pivotal role of parental collaboration in achieving a comprehensive understanding of a child's readiness for kindergarten and advocate for institutional support to facilitate and encourage such partnerships.

According to research on the correlation between parental participation and students' academic performance that was conducted by Bower & Griffin in 2011, parental involvement, which can manifest in several ways, is a powerful tool for raising academic achievement. According to the research, parents are more likely to be involved at home rather than at school when their children are in pre-kindergarten. Early literacy skills and positive educational results for preschoolers may result from parental involvement at home, such as sharing books and engaging in other forms of connection with their children.

The research conducted by Ramani and Siegler in 2008 sheds light on the relationship between low-income preschool children's experiences with board games associated with numbers at home and their mathematical knowledge. This study emphasizes the significance of early childhood experiences in shaping a child's mathematical abilities, particularly within the home environment. The mention of board games associated with numbers highlights the potential educational impact of informal, yet purposeful, activities that parents engage in with their preschoolers. The researchers posit that these home-based experiences may contribute to the development of mathematical knowledge in young children. The reference to "meaningful interactions in home environments at the preschool level" underscores the importance of considering the quality and depth of parent-child interactions in early learning. This insight into the connection between home experiences and academic outcomes underscores the need for more research and attention to parent involvement, particularly in the context of preschool education, where the influence of home environments plays a crucial role in shaping foundational skills. Overall, the study suggests that exploring and understanding these interactions can offer valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting early mathematical development, especially among low-income preschool children.

Hill and Craft (2003) state that more parental involvement is directly associated with children's social competence, and Brody, Flor, and Gibson (1999) found that students' social skills and capacity to self-regulate were both enhanced by more parental involvement. Additional research, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, has demonstrated that children whose parents are actively involved in their education have a leg up when it comes to language acquisition and other skills necessary for later academic achievement.

Moreover, Larocque, Kleiman & Darling (2011) postulated that involvement in school is equally beneficial for parents as well; they are more aware of the educational needs of their children, develop more positive relationships and attitudes towards teachers, and seek higher educational opportunities for their children. They added that because the demand for parent accountability is greater than ever in the realm of education, it is vital that schools and families share the responsibility and create partnerships to ensure that every child is successful.

In addition, Larocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) posited that parents also benefit from school involvement. They become more cognizant of their children's educational needs, form better relationships with teachers, and strive to provide their children with better educational opportunities. In addition, they emphasized the need of schools and families working together as a team to guarantee every student succeeds, citing the rising tide of parent accountability as a driving force.
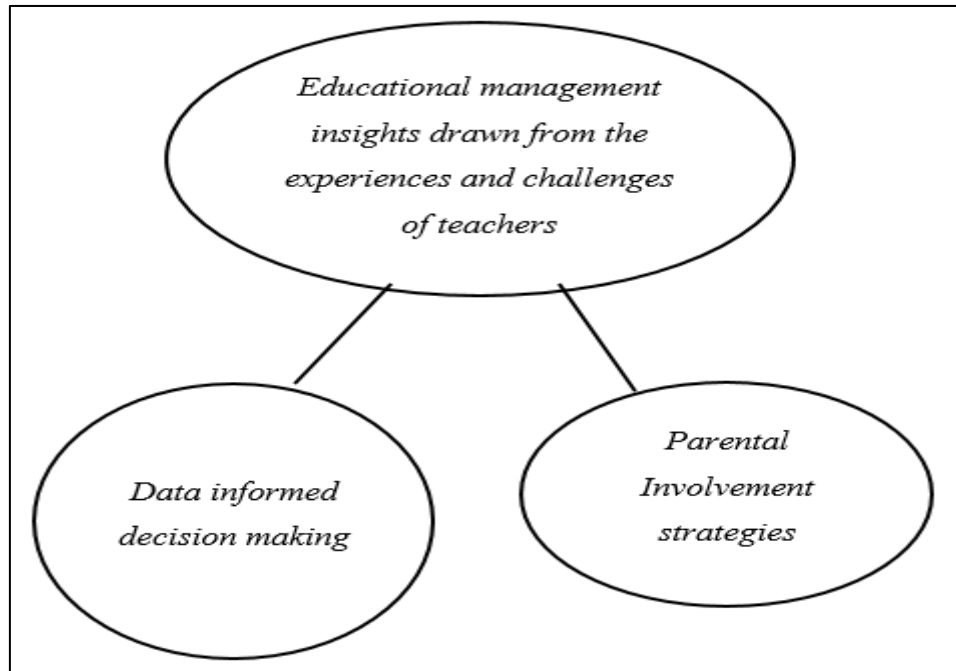

Fig 5: Educational Management Insights Drawn from the Experiences and Challenges of Teachers

CHAPTER FOUR
IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this chapter, the implications that were derived from the results and discussions in the previous chapter are presented. Future directions are also forwarded. The purpose of my study was to find out the experiences, coping mechanisms and insights of teachers on the Assessment of a child's readiness based on age and skills. The participants were coming from Talomo District, Davao City.

To achieve the research objectives, this study employed non-experimental qualitative-phenomenological approach using an interview guide. In adherence to Cresswell's (2006) guidelines in which open ended questions for interview were applied to get authentic understanding of people's experiences. Furthermore, through this interview approach, I encouraged my participants to fully and openly discuss their own definition or meaning of the phenomenon being explored.

A. Conclusions

Based on the results of the thematic analysis of the responses from the participants of the study, the following findings and their corresponding themes were revealed: The experiences of teachers on assessment of child readiness based on age and skills were mainly: Diverse Developmental Levels, Social and Emotional Variances, and Language Development Evaluation. The coping mechanisms of teacher participants on the challenges they faced were the following: Adaptability to Individual Needs, Professional Development and The importance of observation. Lastly, the educational management insights of the participants were mainly: Data-Informed Decision Making and Parental Involvement Strategies.

B. Implications

This section of the research discuss the experiences of teachers at Talomo District, Davao City on the Assessment of Child's Readiness that is based on age and abilities. When the study's participants' replies were analyzed, the following themes emerged.

The findings of the study shed light on the experiences of teachers. One prominent theme that emerged was recognition of Diverse Developmental Levels. Children in their classrooms are at different stages of development, and teachers should be aware of this and work to accommodate them. This understanding should guide the creation of evaluations and instructional methods that cater to different stages of development. Another significant theme was understanding Social and Emotional Variances. It shows how important it is for teachers to consider their learners' unique social and emotional backgrounds. To foster a welcoming and inclusive classroom, it is important to provide educators with the tools they need to properly manage these differences. Emphasis on Language Development Evaluation was another theme that emerged from the study. Given the importance of language development, educators should prioritize assessment tools and strategies that evaluate language skills. This finding suggests a potential need for language-focused professional development opportunities for teachers.

In terms of coping mechanisms, teachers displayed adaptability to changes, highlighting their ability to adjust their teaching methods and practices to accommodate diverse needs. Teachers should be encouraged to adapt their teaching methods to cater to individual students' needs. This flexibility could be further supported through professional development programs that focus on personalized learning strategies which is another highlighted theme. Schools and educational institutions should prioritize investing in ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers. These opportunities should cover a range of topics, including child development, assessment strategies, and methods for adapting to diverse student needs. The third coping mechanism revealed the Importance of Observation in Assessment. Teachers should be trained to recognize the significance of observation as a valuable assessment tool. Schools might consider incorporating observation skills into teacher training programs and promoting its use as an integral part of the assessment process.

Additionally, educators should be encouraged to use data as a basis for decision-making in the assessment process. This may involve training teachers in data analysis and interpretation to make informed choices about instructional strategies and interventions. The insights provided by the study participants emphasized the the role of parents in a child's development, schools should focus on enhancing strategies for involving parents in the assessment process. This could include regular communication, workshops, and collaborative initiatives that engage parents in their child's educational journey.

Overall, these findings highlight the experiences of teachers in assessing child's readiness for Kindergarten learners based on age and skills. The identified coping mechanisms and insights provide valuable guidance for educational institutions and policymakers to address the challenges of teachers effectively. These findings suggest a need for a comprehensive approach to teacher training and professional development that addresses the diverse developmental needs of students, promotes adaptability in teaching, emphasizes the importance of observational skills, and encourages the integration of data and parental involvement in the assessment process.

C. Future Directions

Based on the findings of the study, it is important that the findings are properly relayed and used by the significant people whom this research was intended for.

For the principals or school heads to regularly review and adapt the kindergarten curriculum to align with the findings of the study. Ensure that it accommodates diverse developmental levels, social and emotional variances, and emphasizes language development.

For the teachers to engage in ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on child development, diverse assessment strategies, and personalized teaching methods. They may also stay updated on the latest research and best practices in early childhood education.

For the learners to actively participate in their own learning journey. Foster a sense of autonomy and self-awareness, allowing children to take ownership of their developmental progress.

For the future researchers, they may conduct longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of varied readiness levels on academic performance and social-emotional well-being throughout a child's educational journey.

By addressing these future directions, school heads, teachers, learners, and researchers can contribute to the ongoing improvement of kindergarten readiness assessment practices and ensure a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for young learners.

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