

# Readiness for Formal Schooling: Reflections of Kindergarten Teachers on Learners Without Early Childhood Development Backgrounds

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**Abstract:** This study explored Kindergarten teachers' reflections on learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds and the challenges they encounter in handling them in the classroom. It examined how the lack of ECD exposure affects learners' readiness for formal schooling, particularly in cognitive, socio-emotional, language, and fine-motor development, and the strategies teachers use to address these needs. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through interviews with Kindergarten teachers from selected schools in Malungon 4 District and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that learners without ECD backgrounds commonly struggled with classroom routines, attention span, communication, fine motor skills, and social interaction. Teachers noted that these learners required more guidance, patience, and individualized support. To address these challenges, teachers employed differentiated learning and collaboration with parents. The study emphasized the importance of Early Childhood Development in preparing children for formal schooling. It highlighted the need for strengthened early childhood programs and transition support to help learners successfully adapt to Kindergarten education.

**Keywords:** Formal Schooling, Kindergarten Learners, Reflections, and Early Childhood Development Backgrounds.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the communities under Malungon 4 District, many children enter Kindergarten without prior exposure to Early Childhood Education, creating challenges both for learners and teachers in the classroom. Due to limited access to Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs, financial difficulties, and a lack of available learning centers in some barangays, many young learners begin formal schooling without essential cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and fine-motor skills. This situation affects their readiness to participate in classroom activities and adapt to structured learning environments. Consequently, Kindergarten teachers in Malungon 4 District often experience difficulties in addressing the varied developmental needs of these learners, requiring differentiated instruction, additional interventions, and more individualized support to help children cope with the demands of formal education. Through this study, insights can be drawn to enhance school readiness programs, strengthen ECD

implementation, and support teachers in fostering equitable learning opportunities for all young learners.

Across the globe, exposure to high-quality early childhood development (ECD) programs has been shown to enhance children's readiness for formal schooling significantly. A national-level study in Bangladesh by Hasan et al. (2023) found that children aged 36–59 months who were developmentally “on track” in literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional, and learning domains were much more likely to have attended early childhood programs than those who had not.

However, readiness is not determined solely by attendance in early childhood programs; quality, resources, socio-economic context, and educator capacity also play major roles. Chikwanda et al. (2022) studied community-based ECD centres in low-income areas of Gugulethu, Western Cape, South Africa, underscoring that many of these centres struggle with insufficient practitioner training, inadequate educational resources, and limited infrastructure, all of which impair their

ability to prepare children effectively for school. Likewise, Pewa and Mzimela (2024) note that educators' perceptions of readiness are influenced not only by learner development, but also by educator experience and training; children whose previous ECD exposure was in better-resourced or higher-quality environments tended to be viewed as more "ready."

In the Philippines, the importance of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) for ensuring children's readiness for formal schooling has been emphasized in policy and advocacy circles. Ulep et al. (2023) observed that low participation in pre-kindergarten, coupled with the uneven geographic distribution of ECCD facilities, is among the critical barriers to universal readiness among young learners. They highlight how many parents believe their children are "too young" to begin structured learning, and note gaps in health, nutrition, and early learning services, even when legal frameworks such as RA 10410 (the Early Years Act) are in place.

Further, Futralan et al. (2022) reported that kindergarten pupils with daycare experience demonstrate stronger acquisition of basic skills across the seven developmental domains necessary for kindergarten transition. In contrast, those without such exposure tend to lack many of the foundational skills expected at the entry level. However, Filipino authors have noted that underinvestment and institutional weaknesses impair the quality and reach of ECCD services. Ulep et al. (2024) noted the severe shortage of child development centers and the dearth of trained child development workers, which limit children's opportunities for early learning and affect their preparedness for kindergarten.

The Council for the Welfare of Children (2004) stated that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Knowledge Management Portal, Republic Act No. 8980 or the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Act, institutionalized a national ECCD system that addresses children's health, nutrition, early education, and psychosocial development during their formative years. The program ensures that Filipino children receive proper care and developmental support from birth to age five, recognizing early childhood as a critical stage for learning and growth.

In Malungon, 4th District of the Sarangani Division, kindergarten teachers face distinct challenges in managing learners with diverse early childhood development backgrounds. Many children in this area enter kindergarten without prior exposure to daycare or early learning centers due to limited access, economic constraints, or parents' lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood education. As a result, teachers often encounter learners with varying levels of readiness. This disparity in preparedness makes classroom instruction more demanding, as teachers must balance their time between facilitating learning for ready learners and providing additional support for those who are developmentally behind.

Recognizing these challenges, the researcher was motivated to conduct this study to gain a deeper understanding of kindergarten teachers' experiences in addressing learners' varied readiness levels. By exploring how teachers perceive, adapt to, and manage these differences, the study aims to shed light on the realities of early learning transitions in a rural setting. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights that can guide educators, school administrators, and policymakers in enhancing early childhood education programs and implementing more responsive interventions. Ultimately, the study seeks to emphasize the importance of strengthening early childhood development initiatives to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, are better prepared for formal schooling and future learning success.

## II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in handling learners who entered kindergarten without an Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) background, particularly those with no prior Day Care experience. Phenomenology was considered the most appropriate design because it seeks to describe, interpret, and uncover the meanings individuals attach to their lived experiences. Through this approach, the study examined how kindergarten teachers perceive, experience, and respond to the educational needs and challenges of learners who lack prior exposure to early childhood education. By focusing on participants' firsthand accounts, the study generated a deeper understanding of the realities encountered by teachers as they support learners transitioning directly into formal schooling.

The participants consisted of twelve (12) kindergarten teachers purposively selected from various schools within the Malungon 4 District, Division of Sarangani. They were chosen based on established inclusion criteria to ensure that they possessed direct experience and substantial knowledge related to teaching learners without ECCD backgrounds. Purposive sampling was employed because it allows researchers to intentionally select information-rich participants who can provide relevant and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Sargeant, 2012). The sample size of twelve participants was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, a point at which no new significant information emerged and recurring patterns and themes became evident across the participants' narratives.

To enhance the credibility, trustworthiness, and richness of the findings, the study incorporated environmental triangulation. Participants were drawn from schools representing diverse educational contexts within Malungon 4 District, including four (4) teachers from small schools, four (4) from medium-sized schools, and four (4) from large schools. This variation in school environments enabled the researcher to capture a broader range of perspectives shaped by differences

in school size, resource availability, community contexts, and learner characteristics. Examining experiences across multiple educational settings provided a more comprehensive understanding of how contextual factors influence kindergarten teachers' experiences in handling learners without ECCD backgrounds and strengthened the validity of the study's findings through the comparison of perspectives across different school environments.

Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to openly share their experiences, observations, coping strategies, and challenges in working with learners who had no prior ECCD exposure. The semi-structured interview format ensured consistency across participants while providing sufficient flexibility to probe emerging issues and gain deeper insights into their experiences. This approach facilitated the collection of rich, detailed, and nuanced data that reflected the complexity of the phenomenon under study.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a rigorous and systematic process involving data familiarization, coding of significant statements, identification of recurring patterns, and development of themes that captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Through this analytical process, key themes emerged that reflected the challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers, the coping strategies they employed, and the insights generated from their experiences in supporting learners without ECCD backgrounds. Consistent with Konecki (2019), thematic analysis required careful interpretation, reflection, and synthesis of participants' narratives to generate meaningful insights that served as the foundation for the study's findings, implications, and conclusions.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Kindergarten teachers encounter significant challenges when working with learners who lack Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds, particularly in readiness, foundational skills, and socio-emotional development. These conditions necessitate adjustments in classroom management and instructional strategies to address diverse learner needs effectively. The findings revealed three main themes: (1) Learners' Unpreparedness, (2) Classroom Management and Instructional Challenges, and (3) Intensive Instructional Support, which are presented below along with their corresponding sub-themes.

#### ➤ *Learners' Unpreparedness*

This theme highlights the significant challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers in handling learners who enter formal schooling without an Early Childhood Development (ECD) background. The findings indicate that these learners often demonstrate a lack of school readiness,

primarily due to limited exposure to structured learning environments prior to Kindergarten. Consequently, many of them experience difficulties adapting to classroom routines, following instructions, and meeting the behavioral and academic expectations of formal education. Teachers observed that the absence of prior early childhood experiences frequently affects learners' ability to participate effectively in classroom activities and adjust to the demands of school life. These findings underscore the critical role of early childhood experiences in preparing children for successful entry into formal education. The results are consistent with the findings of Pewa and Mzimela (2024), who emphasized that children with strong early developmental foundations exhibit higher levels of school readiness and are better equipped to engage in formal instruction. Their study further suggests that early learning experiences contribute significantly to the development of the cognitive, behavioral, and social competencies necessary for successful participation in school.

#### ➤ *Lack of Readiness*

On the sub-theme Lack of Readiness, the findings revealed that learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds commonly enter kindergarten inadequately prepared for the demands of formal schooling. Across different school environments, teachers consistently observed that these learners often have limited exposure to structured learning experiences prior to enrollment, making it difficult for them to adapt to classroom routines, follow instructions, and meet expected behavioral and academic standards. In medium-sized schools, participants particularly emphasized that the absence of prior learning experiences contributed to learners' unfamiliarity with classroom expectations and reduced their readiness to participate in organized learning activities. While teachers from small, medium, and large schools shared similar observations regarding learners' lack of readiness, variations emerged in the extent to which these challenges affected classroom instruction and management, largely influenced by differences in school context and available support mechanisms. Nevertheless, the convergence of perspectives across diverse school environments suggests that lack of readiness is a widespread concern among learners without ECD exposure. These findings support Parker (2021), who noted that children without preschool experience often enter formal schooling lacking essential school-readiness competencies, and UNICEF Philippines (2022), which emphasized that participation in early childhood programs plays a crucial role in preparing children for the academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional demands of formal education.

#### ➤ *Foundational Skill Gaps*

The findings under the sub-theme Foundational Skill Gaps reveal that learners without an Early Childhood Development (ECD) background experience considerable difficulties in both motor coordination and cognitive functioning, particularly in performing basic school-related tasks such as holding a pencil, tracing shapes, recognizing letters and numbers, and following simple instructions. Teachers observed that many of these

learners enter kindergarten without the foundational skills typically developed through early childhood learning experiences, making it challenging for them to participate effectively in classroom activities. Across small, medium, and large school contexts, there was a strong convergence in participants' perspectives, indicating that learners without ECD exposure consistently demonstrate deficits in both motor readiness and cognitive preparedness upon entry to formal schooling. These developmental gaps often require teachers to provide additional instructional support, repeated demonstrations, and individualized guidance to help learners acquire essential foundational skills. The findings are consistent with those of Ulep et al. (2023), who reported significant disparities in developmental readiness among Filipino children resulting from unequal access to early childhood education programs. Their study emphasized that children who lack quality early learning experiences are more likely to encounter challenges in developing the cognitive, language, and fine motor skills necessary for successful participation in formal education.

➤ *Emotional and Social Difficulties*

The findings under the sub-theme Emotional and Social Difficulties reveal that learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds frequently encounter challenges related to separation anxiety, low self-confidence, and limited social interaction skills upon entering kindergarten. Teachers observed that many of these learners' experience difficulty separating from parents or caregivers, participating in group activities, expressing themselves confidently, and establishing positive relationships with peers and teachers. Such challenges often hinder their ability to engage fully in classroom routines and learning experiences during the initial stages of formal schooling. Across small, medium, and large school contexts, participants consistently reported that learners who lacked prior ECD exposure entered kindergarten with insufficient emotional readiness and underdeveloped social skills, affecting both their adjustment to the school environment and their participation in collaborative learning activities. These findings are supported by UNICEF Philippines (2022), which emphasizes that early childhood programs play a vital role in fostering emotional regulation, self-confidence, and social competence among young children. The organization further notes that children who do not participate in early childhood education programs are more likely to experience adjustment difficulties when transitioning to formal schooling. Overall, the convergence of perspectives across different school environments highlights that emotional and social difficulties constitute a significant dimension of learners' unpreparedness, underscoring the important role of ECD experiences in supporting successful school transition and early educational adjustment.

#### IV. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES

Another main theme is Inadequate Learning Resources. The study's findings reveal that Classroom Management and Instructional Challenges are prominent among kindergarten teachers working with learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Teachers experience difficulty managing learners' behavior, attention, and engagement, as many learners demonstrate short attention spans, distractibility, and unfamiliarity with classroom routines. These conditions require teachers to exert additional effort to maintain order and sustain participation during lessons. Below are the sub-themes.

➤ *Attention and Behavior Issues*

On this sub-theme, the findings reveal that kindergarten learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds commonly exhibit short attention spans, high distractibility, and difficulty sustaining focus during classroom activities. Teachers across different school environments consistently observed that these learners often struggle to remain engaged in structured lessons, frequently requiring repeated instructions, redirection, and close teacher supervision to complete tasks. The convergence of perspectives across small, medium, and large school contexts indicates that the absence of ECD exposure is strongly associated with weak attentional control and persistent classroom behavior challenges. These findings align with UNICEF Philippines (2022), which emphasizes that early childhood programs play a vital role in developing children's self-regulation, attention control, and readiness for formal schooling, as well as Parker (2021), who found that children without preschool experience often experience difficulties in sustaining attention and adjusting to structured classroom environments. Overall, the triangulated findings across school contexts highlight that attention and behavior difficulties represent a consistent and significant challenge in classrooms with learners lacking ECD exposure, thereby necessitating sustained teacher intervention and the use of adaptive instructional strategies to support learner engagement and participation.

➤ *Instructional Difficulties*

The findings under the sub-theme Instructional Difficulties reveal that kindergarten teachers encounter significant challenges in selecting, designing, and implementing appropriate instructional strategies for learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Teachers reported that the wide variation in learners' readiness levels requires continuous adjustment of teaching approaches, often making it difficult to deliver lessons as planned. Across small, medium, and large school contexts, there is clear triangulation indicating that instructional difficulties are consistently experienced regardless of school size, as teachers are compelled to modify instruction to accommodate diverse learner needs within the same classroom. These challenges are further intensified by the necessity of providing repeated

explanations, continuous scaffolding, and individualized support, which collectively increase instructional workload and complexity. The findings are supported by Abriol (2022), who emphasized that implementing differentiated instruction is often constrained by large class sizes, limited instructional resources, and varying learner abilities, making consistent delivery of responsive teaching strategies difficult. Overall, the findings demonstrate that instructional difficulties remain a persistent and shared challenge among kindergarten teachers, necessitating flexible, differentiated, and highly responsive instructional practices to effectively support learners without ECD backgrounds.

## V. INTENSIVE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

On the main theme Intensive Instructional Support, teachers working with learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds emphasized the need for sustained, intentional, and highly adaptive instructional practices to address significant developmental and learning gaps. Participants highlighted that many learners require continuous guidance, repeated instruction, and individualized attention to successfully engage with classroom activities and meet basic learning expectations. This demonstrates that standard instructional approaches are often insufficient in addressing the diverse needs of learners who lack prior early childhood educational experiences. The literature strongly supports the need for intensified instructional support in early education contexts, particularly where learners enter kindergarten with uneven foundational skills in cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional domains. Such findings underscore the importance of responsive teaching practices that are flexible, differentiated, and learner-centered in order to promote equitable learning opportunities and support successful school adjustment. The following sub-themes further elaborate on the specific forms of instructional support employed by teachers in response to these challenges.

### ➤ *Constant Guidance*

Across all school contexts, the findings reveal a strong convergence among teachers in recognizing constant guidance as a crucial strategy in supporting learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Participants consistently emphasized that continuous teacher presence, step-by-step instruction, and repeated explanations are necessary to help learners understand tasks, follow classroom routines, and remain engaged in learning activities. However, a subtle variation emerged in the degree of dependency observed among learners, as some teachers noted that not all children without ECD require the same level of intensive support. This suggests that individual differences in learner readiness, prior informal learning experiences, and home support systems may influence the extent of guidance needed in the classroom. While some learners demonstrate persistent reliance on teacher assistance, others gradually develop independence after initial scaffolding and structured support. These findings are supported by existing literature emphasizing the importance of scaffolding and guided

instruction in early childhood education. Chen (2022) explains that scaffolding provides temporary, structured support that enables learners with limited prior exposure to gradually develop independence and competence in learning tasks. Similarly, Stein (2022) highlights that consistent guidance, coupled with structured classroom routines, enhances learners' self-regulation, confidence, and ability to transition toward independent learning. While the literature strongly aligns with the overall findings, it also acknowledges variability among learners, which supports the observed contradiction in this study, that not all children without ECD backgrounds require the same intensity of constant guidance. This underscores the importance of flexible, responsive, and differentiated instructional support based on individual learner needs.

### ➤ *Adapted Teaching Strategies*

The findings show a clear convergence in the use of adapted teaching strategies as a core response to the diverse learning needs of kindergarten learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Teachers consistently reported adjusting their instructional approaches to ensure that learners are able to understand lessons, participate meaningfully, and gradually develop foundational skills. However, a notable variation emerged in the specific strategies emphasized by teachers. While some participants prioritized play-based and interactive approaches to sustain attention and engagement, others leaned more toward structured, differentiated instructional designs that focused on step-by-step skill development and targeted support. This variation suggests differences in pedagogical preferences, classroom realities, and contextual constraints such as class size, learner readiness, and available resources, which influence how adaptation is implemented in practice. These findings are strongly supported by literature on differentiated and responsive teaching in early childhood education. Chen (2022) emphasizes that play-based and scaffolded instruction enhances learner engagement and promotes developmental readiness, especially among children with limited prior exposure to formal learning environments. The literature further acknowledges the importance of structured and differentiated approaches in ensuring that instruction remains responsive to varying learner abilities. While existing studies support both play-based and structured instructional strategies, they also reflect the contextual variability observed in this study. This reinforces the finding that teachers operationalize adapted teaching strategies differently depending on their classroom conditions, thereby highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of instructional decision-making in early childhood education.

Meanwhile, based on the second research question, kindergarten teachers employed a range of coping strategies to effectively address the diverse needs of learners who enter school without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. These strategies are primarily focused on enhancing engagement, bridging developmental gaps, and supporting learners' cognitive, social, and emotional growth within the classroom. Below are the main themes and their

respective sub-themes on the coping mechanisms of participants:

## VI. UTILIZING PLAY-BASED AND ENGAGING STRATEGIES

Kindergarten teachers employ play-based and engaging strategies as a primary coping mechanism in addressing the diverse needs of learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. These strategies make use of games, songs, dance, and hands-on activities to capture learners' attention and sustain their participation in classroom learning. Through play, teachers are able to transform abstract lessons into enjoyable and meaningful experiences that encourage active involvement and reduce learning anxiety. This approach creates a more interactive and motivating learning environment that supports early skill development among young learners. Below are the sub-themes of this main theme.

### ➤ *Play-Based Learning*

In this sub-theme, kindergarten teachers widely utilize play as a primary instructional and coping strategy to engage learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. The study reveals that play-based learning is not merely an instructional technique but a critical coping mechanism that supports learners' cognitive, emotional, and social development, particularly for those without prior ECD exposure. Teachers consistently observed that play enhances attention, participation, and confidence, as learners become more willing to engage when learning is embedded in enjoyable activities. These findings align with UNICEF (2022), which emphasizes that play-based early childhood programs promote socio-emotional development and school readiness, and Engle et al. (2022), who highlight that structured play fosters holistic development including cognitive and communication skills. Across school environments, triangulation shows shared agreement that play-based learning is essential, although teachers in larger schools tend to combine it with structured grouping and assessment-informed play, while those in smaller schools emphasize contextualized and resource-based play, and medium schools focus on flexible, interactive play strategies.

### ➤ *Engagement Through Music and Activities*

The findings of the study under the sub-theme "Engagement through Music and Activities" show that kindergarten teachers effectively use songs, singing, dancing, and rhythmic activities to sustain learners' attention and participation, particularly among those without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Triangulation across school contexts shows a shared recognition that music and activity-based engagement is essential, although small schools tend to emphasize simplicity and familiarity, medium schools integrate music as a direct instructional bridge, and large schools combine music with structured instructional and differentiated strategies. The findings also indicate that engagement through music and structured activities plays a vital role in improving learners' attention span, emotional

readiness, and participation, especially for those who have not undergone ECD exposure. Teachers observed that learners become more responsive, motivated, and less anxious when lessons are embedded in songs and movement-based activities.

## VII. IMPLEMENTING DIFFERENTIATED AND SCAFFOLDED STRATEGIES

This second main theme highlights how kindergarten teachers intentionally adjust instruction to address the wide variation in readiness among learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Teachers consistently emphasized assessing learners' initial skills, identifying gaps, and then providing tiered support through individualized tasks, scaffolded instruction, and differentiated activities that match learners' developmental levels. This is evident in strategies such as breaking down tasks into manageable steps, providing one-on-one guidance, and designing varied activities based on learner ability and interest. The following are the subthemes;

### ➤ *Learner-Centered Differentiation*

This sub-theme reveals that kindergarten teachers intentionally adapt instruction based on learners' individual needs, interests, and developmental levels, particularly for those without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. The findings indicate that learner-centered differentiation is a critical coping strategy that enables teachers to address diverse readiness levels while maintaining engagement and learning progress. Teachers observed that learners without ECD backgrounds require more personalized instruction, slower pacing, and flexible grouping strategies to help them succeed in foundational skills. Across school environments, triangulation shows consistent reliance on learner-centered differentiation, with variations in intensity and structure depending on school size, but with a shared goal of meeting individual learner needs effectively. Murphy (2023) highlights that learner-centered strategies are crucial in addressing developmental gaps among children without prior ECD exposure, as these approaches promote inclusivity and gradual skill acquisition.

### ➤ *Assessment-Informed Instruction and Intervention*

The findings reveal that kindergarten teachers consistently rely on assessment results as the foundation for planning instruction, identifying learning gaps, and implementing targeted interventions for learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Across school contexts, triangulation shows strong similarity in the use of assessment as a starting point for instruction, although small and medium schools rely more on ongoing informal observation, while large schools tend to use more structured tools such as diagnostic tests and checklists. The findings indicate that assessment-informed instruction and intervention are essential coping strategies that allow teachers to systematically respond to learners' developmental gaps and adjust teaching approaches accordingly. Teachers consistently reported that assessment enables them to provide appropriate scaffolding, pacing, and

individualized support, ensuring that learners progress according to their readiness levels. Davidson et al. (2023) further highlight that early identification of learning needs supports cognitive and academic development by enabling timely intervention.

### VIII. ESTABLISHING A STRUCTURED SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

The theme Establishing a Structured Supportive Environment underscores how kindergarten teachers create organized, predictable, and emotionally safe classroom settings to help learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds adjust to formal schooling demands. Teachers emphasized the importance of establishing clear routines, consistent classroom rules, and a nurturing atmosphere that promotes security, engagement, and behavioral regulation. This theme illustrates that structure and emotional support work together as a coping strategy that enables teachers to manage diverse learner readiness effectively while promoting inclusion and stability in the classroom.

#### ➤ *Routine-Based Learning*

The sub-theme reveal that kindergarten teachers establish consistent daily routines to help learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds adjust to the structure and expectations of formal schooling. The findings indicate that routine-based learning serves as a critical coping strategy that supports learners' emotional security, behavioral regulation, and academic adjustment, particularly for those lacking prior ECD exposure. Teachers observed that predictable routines reduce confusion, improve attention, and help learners internalize classroom expectations over time. These findings align with Stein (2022), who emphasizes that structured and repetitive routines help young learners develop self-regulation and reduce anxiety in learning environments. From different school environments, triangulation reveals consistent agreement on the importance of routines, with minor variation in implementation intensity, small schools prioritize personalized routine-building, medium schools emphasize consistency across classroom management, while large schools rely on standardized routines to maintain order in more complex classroom settings.

#### ➤ *Supportive and Safe Classroom Climate*

This sub-theme reveals that establishing a supportive and safe classroom climate is a critical coping strategy among kindergarten teachers handling learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds. Across small, medium, and large school environments, teachers consistently emphasized the importance of emotional warmth, trust, structured routines, and responsiveness to learners' needs. The triangulated perspectives show strong convergence across school contexts, indicating that regardless of school size, emotional safety is central in managing learners with limited early learning exposure. This finding aligns with recent research emphasizing that classroom emotional climate and

teacher-child relationships significantly influence children's readiness, engagement, and behavioral regulation. Khalfaoui, García-Carrión, and Villardón-Gallego (2020) found that positive classroom climate is strongly associated with increased teacher-child supportive interactions, emotional belonging, and peer engagement, all of which are essential in early childhood settings where learners require foundational security for learning.

#### ➤ *Social and Emotional Support*

The findings of this study reveal that social and emotional support is a central coping strategy used by kindergarten teachers to help learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds adjust to school demands. Across all school contexts, triangulation shows strong similarity: learners without ECD require emotional reassurance, attachment-based support, and consistent teacher responsiveness. However, a slight contradiction appears in implementation intensity, small schools emphasize individualized emotional guidance, while larger schools rely more on structured emotional climate strategies due to class size constraints. These findings align with recent research emphasizing that emotional and social support in early childhood classrooms is essential for learning readiness and behavioral adjustment.

Subsequently, the third research question which focuses on innovations to strengthening Early Childhood Education. This present study has developed the following actionable themes:

### IX. INNOVATION ON STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Strengthening early childhood education is essential to ensuring a smooth and successful transition of learners into formal schooling. The insights drawn from the study highlight the importance of early developmental exposure in building foundational literacy, numeracy, attention, and socio-emotional skills, which are critical for Kindergarten readiness. When learners enter school without adequate Early Childhood Development (ECD) experiences, they often struggle with basic academic tasks, behavior regulation, and social interaction, requiring teachers to provide intensive instructional support. These challenges underscore the need for stronger early childhood systems, structured transition programs, and collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities. Below are the sub-themes on the innovations to strengthening early childhood education.

#### ➤ *Strengthen Universal and Quality ECCD Participation*

Strengthening universal and quality participation in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) emerged as a key actionable insight in this study due to the consistent evidence of learners' unpreparedness in foundational skills, attention regulation, and socio-emotional development. The findings reveal that children without ECD exposure experience significant difficulties in basic classroom tasks such as holding

a pencil, following instructions, sustaining attention, and engaging socially, which consequently increases the instructional burden on kindergarten teachers. These gaps indicate that early developmental exposure plays a crucial role in preparing learners for the demands of formal schooling. This aligns with the OECD (2025), which emphasizes that high-quality early childhood education is fundamental to cognitive and socio-emotional development and is strongly associated with improved readiness for formal education and reduced learning inequalities.

➤ *Institutionalize Transition and Early Intervention Support*

Institutionalizing transition and early intervention support are a crucial actionable insight derived from the findings of this study, particularly in relation to learners' unpreparedness and classroom adjustment difficulties. The results show that many kindergarten learners without Early Childhood Development (ECD) backgrounds struggle with foundational skills, attention regulation, and social adaptation, which makes their entry into formal schooling challenging. These difficulties highlight the need for structured systems that ensure a smooth transition from early childhood settings to kindergarten. Institutionalizing transition and early intervention programs require coordinated action among schools, families, and early childhood service providers. This includes readiness assessments before school entry, bridging or orientation programs, and continuous monitoring of learners who show developmental delays.

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