



Research Article

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN MANAGING LEARNERS' BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Article History:

Submission: April, 2026

Revised: May, 2026

Accepted: June, 2026

Published: July, 2026

Originality: 95%

Similarity Index: 10%

Grammarly Score: 95%

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Recommended Citation:

Mintallar, G. & Macalisang, D., (2026). Lived Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers in Managing Learners' Behavior. *Journal of Educational Research, Innovation, and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(5), 12-18.

<https://doi.org/10.67001/jeri.2026.05.V7Q1KN>

This study examined the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing pupils' behavior in District 10, Ozamiz City Division during the School Year 2025–2026. It aimed to identify common behavioral challenges encountered in kindergarten classrooms, the strategies teachers use to manage these behaviors, their coping mechanisms, and their recommendations for effective behavior management. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed to capture teachers' firsthand experiences and perspectives. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected kindergarten teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke. Findings revealed that teachers commonly face challenges such as inattention, hyperactivity, emotional dysregulation, social difficulties, and problems with classroom routines and transitions. Teachers addressed these concerns through preventive classroom management, calm and immediate interventions, and the integration of social-emotional learning. Coping mechanisms included patience, reflective practice, professional commitment, and support from colleagues and school leaders. The study highlights the importance of collaboration, continuous professional development, and adequate resources in promoting positive behavior management in kindergarten classrooms.

Keywords: behavior management, kindergarten teachers lived experiences, pupils' behavior, phenomenological study

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Introduction

The kindergarten classroom serves as the foundation of every child's formal education, where teachers play an important role in both academic learning and socio-emotional growth. However, managing pupils' behavior during this early stage remains one of the most challenging aspects of teaching. The transition from home or preschool to a formal learning environment often brings about behavioral difficulties such as inattentiveness, impulsivity, non-compliance, and emotional outbursts, which can disrupt the flow of instruction and affect classroom harmony (Jones et al., 2020; Denham et al., 2021). For kindergarten teachers, effectively addressing these behaviors requires not only patience and creativity but also a deep understanding of child development and contextual factors influencing learners' conduct.

Behavior management in early childhood education is more than maintaining order—it is an essential process that fosters positive relationships, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn. According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, children's behavior is shaped through observation, imitation, and reinforcement, suggesting that teachers' modeling and feedback play a critical role in shaping desirable classroom conduct. Similarly, Pianta (2021) emphasized that nurturing teacher-child relationships and consistent behavioral guidance significantly enhance young learners' socio-emotional competencies, which in turn promote engagement and self-control. Thus, kindergarten teachers serve not only as facilitators of learning but also as primary agents in guiding children's behavioral and emotional adjustment within the classroom.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) underscores the importance of positive behavior support in its Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) framework, which integrates socio-emotional learning and behavior management as key components of school readiness. Despite these policy directions, many Filipino kindergarten teachers continue to encounter daily behavioral challenges stemming from diverse home environments, limited parental support, overcrowded classrooms, and socio-economic disparities (De Guzman & Carandang, 2022; Dizon, 2023). These contextual realities demand adaptive strategies, resourcefulness, and empathy from teachers who must balance instructional demands with the responsibility of managing pupils' behavior effectively.

Existing studies have explored the behavioral adjustment and social-emotional readiness of learners; however, there remains a scarcity of research focusing on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers themselves—their perceptions, coping mechanisms, and professional reflections in handling behavioral difficulties. In particular, limited literature exists within the Division of Ozamis City, where varying classroom settings, cultural dynamics, and community factors may influence how teachers perceive and manage behavior among young learners. Understanding these lived experiences is essential in designing relevant professional development programs and support systems that reflect the real-world challenges teachers face in the field.

Hence, this study, titled “Lived Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers in Managing Pupils' Behavior,” seeks to explore and describe how kindergarten teachers in District 10, Division of Ozamis City, experience, interpret, and respond to behavioral issues in the classroom. It aims to uncover the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the meaning they ascribe to these experiences within their professional practice. Through this qualitative inquiry, the study endeavors to give voice to teachers' perspectives and highlight their critical role in fostering positive behavior and creating a conducive learning environment for young learners.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute valuable insights that can inform teacher training, classroom management practices, and school-based intervention programs. By documenting teachers' lived experiences, the study will not only enrich the local understanding of early childhood behavior management but also support the Department of Education's continuing efforts to promote inclusive, nurturing, and effective learning environments for all Filipino kindergarten pupils.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing pupils' behavior in District 10, Ozamis City Division, during the School Year 2025–2026. The phenomenological approach was selected to capture the meanings, perceptions, and lived realities of teachers as they navigated behavioral challenges in their classrooms. The study was conducted in

selected public elementary schools within District 10, with ten (10) purposively selected kindergarten teachers who had at least two years of teaching experience and direct experience in managing pupils' behavior. Data were collected using a validated semi-structured interview guide adapted from the phenomenological frameworks of Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013), which was reviewed by experts and pilot-tested to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary approvals from the Graduate School, the Department of Education, and participating school administrators, and obtained informed consent from all participants. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted, audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, review, refinement, and narrative reporting supported by participants' verbatim accounts. Throughout the research process, ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) were strictly observed to ensure the trustworthiness and integrity of the study.

Results and Discussions

Behavioral Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers

The findings reveal that kindergarten teachers encounter a wide range of behavioral challenges that influence classroom instruction and the overall learning environment. Participants consistently described pupils as demonstrating inattentiveness, hyperactive behaviors, emotional outbursts, difficulties in interacting with peers, and challenges in following classroom rules and routines. Although teachers recognized that these behaviors are developmentally common among young children, they emphasized that such behaviors frequently interrupt lesson delivery, reduce learners' engagement, and require continuous classroom monitoring. Participants further explained that behavioral concerns become more evident during classroom transitions, collaborative activities, and situations requiring sustained attention or emotional regulation, making effective classroom management an essential component of early childhood instruction.

Teachers likewise viewed these behavioral concerns as opportunities to better understand individual learner needs rather than merely disciplinary problems. They emphasized that managing young children's behavior requires patience, consistency, and developmentally appropriate instructional practices that support children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Rather than relying solely on corrective measures, participants highlighted the importance of creating structured classroom environments where learners feel secure, supported, and motivated to participate positively in classroom activities.

The findings suggest that behavioral challenges among kindergarten learners are closely associated with children's ongoing development of executive functioning, self-regulation, and social competence. According to Papalia and Martorell (2022), young children's developing attention span, emotional control, and interpersonal skills often manifest through distractibility, impulsive behaviors, and emotional reactions as they learn to navigate formal classroom environments. Similarly, Bronson (2021) explained that self-regulation develops progressively through consistent adult guidance, structured routines, and meaningful learning experiences that promote independence and responsible behavior.

The findings are further supported by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which posits that children's behavioral development occurs through guided interaction with more knowledgeable adults who provide appropriate scaffolding as learners gradually acquire self-control and socially acceptable behaviors. Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) emphasizes that children's behavior is shaped by continuous interactions among the family, school, and broader social environment. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of developmentally appropriate classroom management, positive teacher-child relationships, and collaborative support systems in addressing behavioral concerns among kindergarten learners.

Strategies in Managing Pupils' Behavioral Concerns

The findings indicate that kindergarten teachers employ diverse and proactive strategies to effectively manage pupils' behavioral concerns within the classroom. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of establishing clear classroom routines, implementing preventive classroom management practices, providing

immediate behavioral interventions, integrating social-emotional learning into daily instruction, and collaborating closely with parents and school personnel. Rather than relying on punitive disciplinary measures, teachers described using positive reinforcement, redirection, modeling appropriate behavior, and consistent communication to encourage desirable behaviors while maintaining a supportive learning environment.

Participants further highlighted that successful behavior management requires flexibility and responsiveness to children's individual needs. Teachers recognized that every learner responds differently to behavioral interventions; therefore, they intentionally modified instructional approaches, provided emotional support, and strengthened home-school partnerships to ensure that behavioral concerns were addressed consistently. These strategies enabled teachers to promote self-discipline, encourage positive peer relationships, and maintain productive classroom environments conducive to learning.

The findings demonstrate that proactive classroom management plays a significant role in promoting positive learner behavior and minimizing classroom disruptions. Emmer and Sabornie (2015) emphasized that preventive classroom management establishes clear behavioral expectations and creates learning environments that encourage student engagement and cooperation. Similarly, Jones and Bouffard (2012) argued that integrating social-emotional learning and positive behavior supports enhances children's self-regulation, interpersonal skills, and overall classroom behavior.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which explains that children acquire appropriate behaviors through observation, modeling, and reinforcement from significant adults, particularly teachers. Likewise, Positive Behavior Support (Sugai & Horner, 2002) highlights that preventive, instructional, and collaborative behavioral interventions are more effective than punitive approaches in fostering long-term positive behavior. The findings therefore emphasize the importance of child-centered behavior management strategies that promote both academic engagement and socio-emotional development.

Coping Mechanisms Employed by Kindergarten Teachers

The findings reveal that kindergarten teachers employ various coping mechanisms to manage the demands associated with addressing pupils' behavioral concerns. Participants described maintaining emotional composure, redirecting pupils toward appropriate behaviors, fostering supportive teacher–pupil relationships, and seeking assistance from colleagues, school administrators, and parents as essential practices in managing challenging classroom situations. Teachers acknowledged that behavioral concerns can be emotionally demanding; however, they emphasized the importance of remaining patient, calm, and professionally committed to supporting every learner's growth and development.

Participants also viewed collaboration and professional support as valuable sources of resilience. They explained that sharing experiences with colleagues, consulting school leaders, and maintaining open communication with parents strengthened their confidence in handling behavioral challenges. These coping practices not only reduced workplace stress but also enabled teachers to sustain positive classroom environments while maintaining their emotional well-being.

The findings suggest that teachers' emotional competence and professional resilience significantly influence their ability to manage challenging classroom behaviors effectively. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) emphasized that teachers' social and emotional competence contributes to positive classroom climates, improved learner behavior, and greater instructional effectiveness. Similarly, Pianta et al. (2012) found that nurturing teacher–child relationships strengthen children's emotional security and promote more positive behavioral outcomes in early childhood classrooms.

The findings are likewise supported by Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory (1984), which explains that individuals employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies when responding to stressful situations. Participants' experiences demonstrate that emotional regulation, collaborative support, and reflective professional practice enable teachers to effectively manage classroom challenges while maintaining their own well-being. These findings underscore the importance of institutional support systems, continuous professional development, and collaborative school cultures in promoting teacher resilience.

Recommendations for Managing Pupils' Behavior

The findings reveal that kindergarten teachers recommend strengthening collaborative partnerships among schools, families, and communities to improve the management of pupils' behavioral concerns. Participants emphasized the need for continuous professional development on positive classroom management, greater parental involvement in reinforcing appropriate behaviors at home, and the integration of social-emotional learning into everyday classroom instruction. They likewise recommended maintaining consistent classroom routines, utilizing engaging and developmentally appropriate learning activities, and implementing early interventions for pupils exhibiting persistent behavioral concerns.

Teachers further suggested that school administrators provide adequate instructional resources, mentoring opportunities, and institutional support to strengthen teachers' capacity in addressing diverse behavioral needs. Participants believed that successful behavior management extends beyond the classroom and requires collective efforts from teachers, parents, and school leaders to create nurturing learning environments where children can develop positive behaviors alongside academic competencies.

These recommendations are consistent with Epstein's Framework of School, Family, and Community Partnerships (2018), which emphasizes that collaborative relationships among schools, families, and communities contribute significantly to children's academic achievement and behavioral development. Likewise, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2023) highlights that integrating social-emotional learning into classroom instruction enhances children's self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and emotional regulation.

The findings further reinforce Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which recognizes that children's behavior is shaped through interconnected relationships across multiple environments. Consequently, effective behavior management requires coordinated efforts among educators, families, and educational institutions to ensure that children receive consistent guidance, meaningful support, and positive learning experiences that foster holistic development.

Conclusions

This study concludes that managing pupils' behavior in kindergarten classrooms is a complex, multifaceted process that requires patience, intentional strategies, and strong support systems. The lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in District 10, Ozamiz City Division reveal that behavioral challenges such as inattention, hyperactivity, emotional dysregulation, social difficulties, and problems with routines are common and developmentally rooted among young learners. These behaviors significantly influence classroom dynamics and learning, requiring teachers to respond with sensitivity, adaptability, and consistency. The study further concludes that effective behavior management is best achieved through proactive and child-centered approaches. Teachers rely on preventive classroom management, calm and immediate interventions, behavior-specific techniques, and the integration of social-emotional learning to guide pupils toward positive behavior. These strategies not only address behavioral concerns but also support pupils' emotional regulation, social skills, and overall development. Additionally, teachers' ability to cope with behavioral challenges is strengthened by professional commitment, reflective practice, and emotional resilience. Finally, the study underscores the importance of collaboration and external support in sustaining effective behavior management. Strong partnerships with parents, support from school leaders and colleagues, access to professional development, and the use of instructional and technological resources are essential in creating a consistent and supportive learning environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that kindergarten teachers continuously strengthen their classroom behavior management practices through the integration of preventive strategies, behavior-specific interventions, and socio-emotional learning activities. School administrators should provide sustained professional development, adequate instructional resources, and supportive mentoring programs to enhance teachers' capacity in managing behavioral concerns. The Department of Education may further strengthen policies and teacher training initiatives that address the realities of kindergarten classrooms, while parents are encouraged to maintain active collaboration with teachers in reinforcing positive behavior at home.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to extend this study by exploring behavior management practices in different contexts and developing evidence-based intervention programs to improve pupils' behavioral and learning outcomes.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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