

Lived experiences of the out-of-field kindergarten teachers of Sibagat II: Basis for a proposed training plan

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Abstract: This study is qualitative in nature specifically phenomenological type transcribing the explored lived experiences of 8 out-of-field kindergarten teachers at Sibagat District II. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The theories anchored on in this study were the Need Theory of Abraham Maslow, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci and Albert Bandera's Self-Efficacy Theory. Findings revealed three (3) themes that arose from the coded lived experiences of the participants in terms of joys identified as follows : (1) physiological needs; (2) love and belonging; and (3) self-actualization. The distinct experiences of the out-of-field kindergarten teachers in terms of joy were coded into affectionate gesture, the feeling of being a surrogate mother, able to witness the slow progress in his/her writing skills, support of parents, eagerness to learn, and the salary. On the other hand, K-teachers' experiences in terms of challenges were on lack of learning materials, lack of knowledge on K-curriculum, teaching strategies and classroom management and instruction. Insights gained were on teachers' resilience and efficacy, patience and adaptability. Coping mechanism runs through communicating with nature, embracing the nature of the child and seeking support from stakeholders. Thus, to be able to enhance and sustain the being of an out-of-field Kindergarten teacher, a training plan is proposed.

Keywords: lived experiences, out-of-field kindergarten teachers, thematic analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is critical for children's development since it is the first compulsory formal education stage for five-year-olds (Alot et al., 2023). Within this crucial stage, teachers play a vital role in supporting cognitive, physical, and socioemotional growth, laying the foundation for a successful life (Keung et al., 2020). However, the landscape of early childhood education often presents challenges, one of which is the phenomenon of out-of-field kindergarten teachers, in which teachers are assigned to teach subjects for which they have inadequate training and qualifications (Ingersoll, 2019). This garnered attention within the educational discourse.

"Out-of-field" teachers arise due to recurrent teacher shortages and inadequate teacher distribution. Additionally, this is considered a challenge for teachers because of their need to learn new content, which requires not only time and effort during their teaching requirements but also a profound knowledge of learning strategies (Hobbs et al., 2021). The occurrence must be considered a significant problem in teacher education, covering both the initial teacher education phase and the period of time after entering the teaching profession that gives teachers formal professional development (PD) opportunities and possibilities for continued professional learning.

Kindergarten teachers' learning and development (TLD) plays a significant role in achieving teachers' sustainable development (Liu et al., 2022). In particular, high-quality professional development (PD) for kindergarten teachers is crucial for enhancing the quality of the EC profession. Effective PD should be intensive, ongoing, and aligned with teachers' goals. Programs should work together to find PD methods that improve classroom practice and child outcomes. Program-level support should celebrate and expand on trainings, and a professional learning community should be created (Schachter et al., 1019). Hence, significant reform and public investments in TLD for early childhood educators are made globally to improve teacher professionalism (Duan et al., 2023). Caingcoy (2022), highlighted that professional development is crucial for addressing educational challenges and positively impacts teachers' beliefs, practices, students' performance, and educational improvement. Engaging in professional development activities enhances the competence of kindergarten teachers, ensuring a better education for children. Kindergarten teachers, who interact with children during their formative years, have a significant impact on their students' character.

According to Cabanero (2021) aside from professional development, kindergarten teachers must meet certain qualifications, including 18 units of Early Childhood Education or equivalent but, in the newly conducted Kindergarten Program Implementation Review (PIR) in Sibagat Districts 1 and 2, data revealed that out of 34 teachers handling kindergarten, only 2 have specialization in early childhood education, and only 10 teachers have undergone training related to teaching kindergarten. This has resulted to difficulties in accomplishing the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) checklist and other assessment to be done in kindergarten. This is very evident in Sibagat II kindergarten group chat (GC). A lot of kindergarten teachers keep on asking what to do, and what format should be followed. This pushed the researcher to explore and learn the lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers in terms of joy, challenges, insights, as well as their coping mechanisms in facing the challenges. The researcher being a kindergarten teacher was encouraged to pursue this study. Furthermore, the researcher has firsthand knowledge as a kindergarten teacher for two years and have experienced insufficient training. The results of this study were made the basis of a proposed training plan for kindergarten teachers with the aim of strengthening and improvin the delivery of quality kindergarten education.

This qualitative study sought to address this gap by delving into the lived experiences of out-of-field kindergarten teachers. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this research aimed to explore the challenges, motivations, and coping mechanisms of these educators within the unique context of early childhood classrooms.

Problem Statement

The main objective of this study was to determine the lived experiences of the out-of-field kindergarten teachers of Sibagat District II, Division of Agusan del Sur, Caraga Region. In pursuance of this objective, this study sought answers to the following questions: `

1. What are the lived experiences of the out-of-field teachers in kindergarten in terms of:

- 1.1. joys;
 - 1.2. challenges; and
 - 1.3 insights?
2. What coping mechanisms are employed by the out-of-field teachers in dealing with the challenges?
 3. Based on the findings of the study, what training plan may be proposed?

Theoretical framework

Though various theories regarding early childhood education have been developed in recent years, Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) motivation theory, Albert Bandura's self-efficacy developed in 1994, and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, which Deci and Ryan developed in 1977 are still regarded as the most appropriate theories, continuously useful throughout the various classrooms of teachers and caregivers of young children who are the primary focus of this study. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, also known as Maslow's Motivation Theory is a framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. It categorized human motives into five levels: physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization. It implies that human beings are motivated by a hierarchy of demands, the most fundamental of which are physiological. It is needed for physical survival, which can be provided by family, community, and the government. Next in importance are requirements for security and safety. The third category of requirements for humans consists of social needs, which include love, acceptance, companionship, closeness, and trust.

Additionally, two categories of needs related to esteem include self-esteem and the need for recognition or respect from others. Esteem needs include things like independence, mastery, dignity, and accomplishment. Maslow thought that everyone had temporary periods of self-actualization, which are hard to attain and keep up over time.

Maslow believed that humans possess a constantly growing inner drive with great potential. This implies that, a human must satisfy each previous step in order for motivation to emerge at the subsequent stage. In the context of human behavior, the hierarchy has been used to describe the relationship between motivation and effort. The objective of Maslow's hierarchy is to reach the level or stage of self-actualization. Each of these distinct levels has a specific quantity of internal sensation that must be satisfied in order for an individual to finish their hierarchy.

The second theory anchored of this study is the self-efficacy theory. The concept of this theory lies on Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. He defines self-efficacy as an individual's beliefs and thoughts about how well they can demonstrate the behaviors and efforts necessary to cope with their situation. Self-efficacy has garnered substantial attention in the educational sector and is often associated with teachers and their efforts to succeed in classroom practice. Self-efficacy is an individual's evaluation of their ability to perform successfully in a given situation. It is based on beliefs about one's perceived skills or inability to complete a task rather than actual capabilities. Bandura's research on self-efficacy emerged with social cognitive theories, focusing on how beliefs influence one's choice of activities, effort, and persistence, especially in challenging situations. Self-efficacy beliefs emerge from four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states.

Additionally, the notion of self-efficacy highlights the significance of individuals and their self-perceptions of their skills as critical factors in achieving favorable results. Therefore, it is evident that self-efficacy theory and the larger social cognitive theory supports a democratic ideal

that holds that everyone is competent to succeed as long as he/she has the opportunities and self-efficacy needed to pursue their objectives. The stated focus of self-efficacy theory is on empowering individuals and groups to feel responsible for achieving their goals. This is significant because self-efficacy theory rejects the idea that those who are successful right now are intrinsically superior to those who are not. Instead, according to self-efficacy theory, those having difficulties right now might not have had the chance to get the mastery experiences or role modeling that they need to grow to high levels of self-efficacy. Therefore, according to self-efficacy theory, the state and society must ensure that everyone has enough opportunities to participate in mastery experiences, experience persuasive social interactions, and see models that positively reinforce one another, all of which will contribute to the development of a strong sense of self-efficacy.

The third and last theory anchored on this study is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, developed by Deci and Ryan. They disproved the conventional wisdom that said rewarding behavior was the most effective approach to motivate people to complete tasks. Self-determination theory (SDT) is a widely influential theory that focuses on various forms of motivation, from autonomous to controlled, to predict outcomes like performance, engagement, and psychological health. It distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivations, with autonomous motivation involving volition and choice, and controlled motivation involving external pressure. Studies show that autonomously motivated individuals display higher interest, excitement, vitality, and confidence, leading to better performance, creativity, persistence, and overall well-being. SDT also postulates that basic psychological needs, such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, are universally necessary for growth, integrity, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Additionally, SDT posits that basic psychological needs, such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness, are universally necessary for growth, integrity, and wellness. Social environments that support these needs promote self-regulation, relationships, and well-being, while those that hinder them lead to impoverished outcomes. SDT is applied in various fields like education, work, religion, sports, health care, parenting, video games, and psychopathology. Research shows that autonomy-supportive environments enhance persistence, performance, social functioning, and wellness. Relational and competence supports interact with autonomy to foster engagement and value.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study used a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of the essence of the lived experiences from the teachers' own perspectives. These experiences are the joys, insights, challenges, and coping mechanisms personally encountered by the kindergarten teachers.

Locale of Study

As shown in Figure 2, this study was conducted in the selected schools of Sibagat District II, namely: Afga Central Elementary School, Tabon-tabon Elementary School, Magkalape Elementary School, Bagumbayan Elementary School, Banagbanag Elementary School, and Anahawan Elementary School. The district office of the above-mentioned schools is located at Afga Central Elementary School, Afga, Sibagat Agusan del Sur, which is about 135 kilometers from Barangay Patin-ay, the seat of the office of the Division of Agusan del Sur.

Respondents of the study

The study focused particularly on the eight (8) out-of-field kindergarten teachers of Sibagat District II.

Selection and Description of Respondents

A letter of permission was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Agusan del Sur to conduct the study. This letter was signed by the researcher and the adviser. Also, the researcher sought permission from the District Supervisor of Sibagat District to conduct the study. After the approval by the District Supervisor, the researcher asked permission from the school heads of the different schools through a letter to conduct the study in their schools and help identify the key stakeholders to be interviewed on the agreed schedule. The researcher invited the participants through a letter to conduct the one-on-one interview.

On the scheduled date, the researcher visited each school to meet the participants. The researcher selected one room in the school to conduct the one-on-one interview to observe the privacy and ethical considerations of the participants. During the one-on-one interview, the researcher first read the purpose and extent of the study and then proceeded to the questions from the interview schedule. Only the researcher and the participant were in the designated room for the interview. The researcher then asked permission to do an audio recording of the conversation that would be transcribed for documentation and reference purposes.

Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, the researcher used an interview schedule validated by three (3) experts. The interview questions were explicitly made for the participants based on their involvement and experiences in teaching kindergarten.

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher used thematic analysis in organizing and interpreting textual data to uncover meaningful themes that captured the essence of the data. It involved several key steps, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching, reviewing, defining and naming the themes. After analyzing the themes, the data were interpreted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Lived Experiences of the Out-of-Field Kindergarten Teachers

The lived experiences of the eight out-of-field kindergarten teachers in Sibagat District II reveal a rich tapestry of joys, challenges, and insights that reflect the emotional and professional realities of teaching young children outside one's area of specialization. Their narratives underscore not only their dedication to their roles but also the developmental, social, and institutional factors that shape their daily experiences.

Joys were prominently rooted in the teachers' emotional connection with their learners and the milestones the children achieved. Three overarching themes emerged in alignment with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: *physiological needs*, *love and belonging*, and *self-actualization*. The affective dimension was particularly dominant—teachers derived great satisfaction from receiving affectionate gestures, being perceived as surrogate mothers, and building rapport with the children. These daily interactions gave them a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment. Teachers also found joy in witnessing cognitive and psychomotor development, such as when

learners learned to read, write, or count. Parental support during school activities and the learners' enthusiasm for classroom routines further contributed to this sense of joy. Despite being out-of-field, the support from more experienced colleagues and the small wins in student progress strengthened their professional identity and personal growth.

Challenges, however, cast a different light on their journey. The most pressing issues included a lack of adequate learning materials, insufficient training specific to the kindergarten curriculum, and the learners' unreadiness—such as inattentiveness or sleepiness during class. Teachers also reported difficulty managing unruly behavior and cited the diverse family backgrounds and limited parental support as additional hurdles. The challenge of integrating technology into their instruction was exacerbated by a lack of resources and technical support. These obstacles were compounded by the teachers' limited orientation and training in early childhood education, making the demands of the kindergarten classroom particularly strenuous. Insights gained through these experiences were deeply reflective and emotionally grounded. Patience emerged as a core value, as teachers learned to align their behavior and expectations with the developmental stage of their learners. Many described the need for adaptability and the importance of forging emotional connections, suggesting that early childhood teaching is less about rigid instruction and more about cultivating trust and responsiveness. There was also a notable awareness of evolving learner behavior—teachers observed that children today tend to be more assertive and diverse in their attitudes, requiring flexible classroom strategies and greater emotional intelligence. These insights point to the critical need for ongoing professional development, especially in socio-emotional learning and child psychology.

Overall, the lived experiences of these out-of-field kindergarten teachers reveal that despite the lack of formal training in early childhood education, their work is driven by passion, resilience, and a commitment to their learners' holistic development. Their narratives highlight the value of supportive mentoring, the importance of addressing systemic gaps in training and resources, and the profound emotional labor involved in nurturing the foundational years of a child's education. These findings reinforce the call for comprehensive support systems that address both the professional and personal needs of educators working outside their areas of expertise.

Coping Mechanisms Employed by the Out-of-Field Teachers in Dealing with Challenges

Despite ongoing efforts toward teacher professionalization in both theory and practice, significant gaps remain in enhancing the overall quality of teachers' professional lives. As Demirkasimolu and Takin (2019) point out, these reforms have not meaningfully improved teachers' happiness, nor have they elevated public recognition of teaching as a profession. This disconnect is echoed in the experiences of out-of-field kindergarten teachers who face numerous day-to-day challenges that remain inadequately addressed.

Participant narratives reflect a consistent struggle with insufficient learning materials, unprepared or inattentive learners, and behavioral issues in the classroom. The lack of formal training specific to the kindergarten curriculum further compounds these difficulties, leaving teachers without the necessary pedagogical tools to navigate early childhood education effectively. Additional barriers such as minimal parental involvement, parents' limited educational backgrounds, and difficulty integrating technology into instruction highlight systemic weaknesses in teacher support and preparation.

In response, the study proposes a targeted training plan to address these recurring issues. Such a program should include capacity-building workshops on developmentally appropriate practices, behavior management strategies, curriculum orientation specific to early childhood

education, and the effective use of instructional materials and educational technology. By grounding professional development initiatives in the lived realities of teachers, especially those working outside their specialization, the proposed plan aims to foster not only teacher competence but also a renewed sense of professional fulfillment and public respect for the teaching profession.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, several key conclusions were drawn regarding the experiences of out-of-field kindergarten teachers. First, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs serves as a foundational framework in understanding the motivations and emotional resilience of these teachers. Their capacity for adaptability, flexibility, and perseverance was shaped by the various challenges they encountered in managing kindergarten learners. Despite lacking formal training in early childhood education, the teachers demonstrated a commendable ability to equip themselves with coping strategies and resourcefulness to manage their roles effectively. Lastly, the proposed training program emerges as a vital intervention to address their professional gaps. It is expected to enhance their teaching efficacy and effectiveness by introducing developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, thereby supporting both their professional growth and the quality of early childhood education they provide.

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