

Developing Social Skills of Children: Blueprint of Kindergarten Teachers

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Abstract: This phenomenological study explored the strategies, challenges and coping mechanisms of kindergarten teachers in developing the social skills of young learners. Nine (9) kindergarten teachers from Compostela West District in the Davao de Oro Division were involved as participants in this study. Through thematic analysis, key strategies emerged, including role modeling, teacher demonstration, and social learning activities, which were found to be effective in fostering cooperation, communication, and empathy among children. Additionally, teachers employed coping strategies to address the challenges such as individualized support, play-based learning, and parental collaboration to address diverse social development needs. To address these concerns, the study recommends strengthening teacher training programs to equip educators with specialized techniques in social-emotional learning (SEL) and deepening parent-teacher partnerships through regular workshops and collaborative activities. These findings underscore the need for systemic support, including policy adjustments, professional development investments, and structured parent engagement programs, to institutionalize effective social skills development in early education. Adopting these measures, schools can transform sporadic efforts into sustainable practices, ensuring that both teachers and students thrive in a supportive, socially enriching learning environment.

Keywords: *Developing Social Skills of Children, Blueprint, Kindergarten, Teachers.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The current education system aims to equip young learners not only with academic knowledge but also with the social skills necessary for navigating the demands of the 21st century. These social skills are essential for fostering healthy relationships and effective communication, allowing children to interact positively with their peers and others in their environment. Kindergarten teachers recognize their key role in shaping these skills and follow a clear framework to support this developmental goal.

Highlighting the value of social development, Kuttappan (2023) explained that social skills, defined as the behaviors and abilities that help individuals interact successfully with others, are fundamental for building relationships and achieving success in various aspects of life, including school, work, and personal matters. Building these skills early on is crucial, as it helps shape a child's character and their interactions within the broader community.

Similarly, Kajal (2019) emphasized that nurturing social skills prepares children for future relationships, enabling them to form healthier connections and lasting friendships as they

grow. Rani (2019) further argued that a lack of social skills is often linked to poor academic outcomes, a concern echoed by teachers, psychologists, and education professionals who observe that some students struggle academically due to difficulties in social interaction.

Schools are seen as vital spaces for promoting social and emotional learning. Invictus International School (2022) noted that since children spend a significant amount of time in the classroom, educators play an important role in reinforcing societal values and encouraging prosocial behavior through daily routines. As students take on classroom responsibilities, they develop empathy and learn how to collaborate with their peers toward shared goals. Learning, therefore, extends beyond academic tasks and becomes a more holistic process that supports long-term success.

In the Philippines, the education system also prioritizes social and emotional development. Napa et al., 2021, citing DepEd Order No. 71, s. 2009, highlighted the integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into the basic education curriculum focuses on building self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, key competencies for academic and personal growth.

This commitment is further evident in the newly introduced MATATAG curriculum, which emphasizes SEL through Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC) and Values Education (UNICEF, 2023), promoting values-based learning from an early age.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Paroginog et al. (2018) reported that many students still exhibit poor social behavior, such as lack of focus during class, aggressive actions toward classmates and teachers, difficulty in participating in group work, and general disruptions. These behaviors often negatively affect academic performance, as reflected in quiz scores, classroom output, attendance, and the ability to form and maintain peer relationships.

Locally, Closa and Sarmiento (2023) observed that public elementary schools continue to face a range of issues, including academic struggles, behavioral concerns, emotional challenges, and social difficulties among pupils. Some students show disruptive behavior, fail to follow classroom norms, and demonstrate low self-control and self-esteem, especially when expressing ideas, completing assignments, or working with others.

As a kindergarten teacher, I personally observed these patterns. Many young learners find it difficult to make friends, often act out in class, and struggle with cooperative learning activities. These challenges underscore the importance of fostering social skills at an early stage. This study seeks to contribute meaningful insights into how these skills can be developed more effectively. By focusing on this crucial aspect of early childhood education, the research aims to support the broader goal of raising socially responsible individuals from the very start of their educational journey.

II. METHOD

For this study, a qualitative phenomenological research design was employed. The goal of phenomenology was to gather raw, unprocessed data. Phenomenology was a research design that aimed to understand the common experiences people had within particular groups and examined how a phenomenon affected people to find the meaning they assigned to it. Its main objective was to observe genuine events and characteristics. The phenomenological method in qualitative research, as noted by Flood (2010) and cited in Tomaszewski et al. (2020), focused on the essential components of a lived experience or phenomenon, which could be experienced or felt by people from a variety of viewpoints.

This study navigated the strategies that kindergarten teachers used to help students develop their social skills. Nine (9) kindergarten teachers from Compostela West District in the Davao de Oro Division participated in this study. Qualitative analyses typically required a smaller sample size in phenomenological investigations. In the selection of

participants, the study employed purposive sampling. In addition, this study adhered to the ethical norms of safeguarding the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants in research involving human subjects. To ensure that ethical standards were upheld, the study had passed the RMC Review Ethics Committee (REC) for approval. The main goal of research ethics was to ensure that researchers fulfilled their obligations to study participants and communities affected by the results.

As the researcher, I performed my crucial role. Through the research questions and probing statements, I was able to facilitate interviews. By analyzing the participants' lived-experience narrations, I thoroughly explored the schemes and difficulties kindergarten teachers faced in developing learners' social skills. Significant information from interviews and discussions was extracted using thought-provoking questions. I personally recorded participants' narratives. Audio-video recording was essential for accurate data capture. As researcher, I coded, classified, and identified themes from transcriptions. I also analyzed results to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Further, the data analysis of this study involved categorizing and coding the ideas presented in the transcriptions. At the core of data analysis is Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), which, as noted by King (2004) in Dawadi (2020), involves the identification of themes that can encapsulate the narratives present in the data sets. In addition, this study employed environmental triangulation. The findings I derived from different environments were triangulated to compare and strengthen the validity of results. As Vivek (2023) contended, environmental triangulation was a research strategy that mandated data collection from diverse contexts to bolster credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, while mitigating potential biases from studying phenomena in singular or limited environments.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on teachers' perspectives regarding the use of active learning to develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) among elementary grade learners. It includes a detailed analysis of the collected data, outlining the procedures used to identify and categorize emergent themes from in-depth interviews with teacher-participants.

On the strategies of kindergarten teachers in building the social skills of learners, the following are the themes that emerged from the narrations of the participants:

➤ *Role Modelling and Teacher Demonstration*

The teachers' narratives affirm that role modeling is a foundational strategy for fostering social skill development among kindergarten learners. This theme reveals that teacher demonstration and intentional modeling of behavior are central

to instilling essential prosocial skills such as empathy, kindness, cooperation, and respectful communication. Teachers consistently model these behaviors in daily classroom interactions and reinforce them through explicit instruction, verbal prompts, and positive feedback. Eredics (2024) emphasized that educators must “lead by example” by practicing what they teach, whether it be using an inside voice or demonstrating responsibility through classroom routines such as assigned classroom jobs. This aligns with the view that teacher behavior is a powerful vehicle for shaping children’s social learning.

➤ *Social Learning Activities*

The participants identified social learning activities as a fundamental strategy for fostering the social development of kindergarten learners. Activities such as circle time, buddy systems, and collaborative group work were frequently highlighted for promoting communication, empathy, cooperation, and relationship-building. Teachers emphasized that these structured yet flexible routines create safe, supportive environments in which children can express emotions, listen to others, and build interpersonal connections. These intentional setups allow learners to practice turn-taking, perspective-taking, and teamwork in guided but authentic contexts. Scholastic (2021) illustrated how kindergarten teachers strategically design seating arrangements and paired play tasks to encourage interaction and collaborative decision-making.

However, while teachers employed strategies developing the social skills of learners, they faced significant challenges in its implementation. In this study, the theme that emerged for the coping strategies of teachers on the challenges of building the social skills of learners are as follows:

➤ *Conduct Individualized Support*

This reflects how kindergarten teachers addressed the diverse social development needs of their learners by providing personalized guidance and interventions. Participants shared that some children require more focused attention due to shyness, difficulty in expressing emotions, or challenges in interacting with peers. To cope with these situations, teachers employ strategies such as one-on-one conversations, tailored social activities, and close monitoring to help these learners gradually build confidence and form positive relationships. By adapting their approach to each child’s unique temperament and needs, teachers create a safe and supportive environment where learners feel understood and encouraged, ultimately fostering their social growth despite the challenges encountered in the classroom.

➤ *Employ Play-Based and Experiential Learning*

The study reveals that play-based and experiential learning approaches effectively address challenges in developing social skills among kindergarten learners by transforming abstract social-emotional concepts into concrete, engaging experiences. Teachers reported utilizing techniques

such as storytelling, role-playing, and dramatic play to help children practice empathy, cooperation, and communication in low-pressure scenarios, including activities like pretending to run a restaurant or acting out emotional responses.

These methods not only captured learners’ attention but also provided structured opportunities to internalize essential social rules such as sharing, turn-taking, and patience. Consistent with these findings, the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (2024) advocated for the use of storytelling with props, role-playing, and dramatic play scenarios (e.g., grocery store or restaurant settings) as effective strategies to cultivate social-emotional learning. These interactive experiences enable children to negotiate roles, make decisions, and resolve conflicts naturally, while teachers play a guiding role by modeling prosocial behavior and facilitating peer interactions.

➤ *Engage Parents’ Collaboration*

The findings reveal that parent collaboration is a vital strategy for reinforcing the social skills of kindergarten learners. However, teachers often face challenges, such as parents prioritizing academic performance over social development or underestimating the importance of social-emotional learning at home. To address these barriers, teachers initiate active partnerships with parents through open communication, classroom observations, and practical training sessions, where they model calm-down techniques and demonstrate play-based strategies that can be easily applied at home. Successful collaboration relies on a consistent home-school partnership, wherein parents mirror classroom strategies, such as emotion regulation tools, cooperative play, and structured social routines, at home. Hattie, et.al (2023) emphasized that when parents are involved in their children’s education both at home and in school, there are notable improvements in student achievement and well-being.

Furthermore, this study has developed insightful recommendations to effectively enhance kindergarten teachers’ ability to build social skills in young learners. This study recommends to strengthen teacher training on enhancing social skills and to deepen parent-teacher partnerships. Beyond foundational skills, teacher training should incorporate ongoing mentorship and reflective practice to sustain long-term improvement. Also, schools should implement structured communication channels, such as regular parent-teacher meetings, skill-building workshops, and take-home activity kits that align with classroom social goals.

Overall, this study carries significant implications for early childhood education by highlighting the need for a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to social skills development in kindergarten learners. This study’s findings are aligned with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Vygotsky’s Cognitive Development Theory, as they collectively emphasize the importance of modeling, guided interaction, and scaffolded

learning in social skill development. Bandura's theory is reflected in the study's themes of role modeling and teacher demonstration, where children acquire prosocial behaviors through observation and imitation of educators and peers, reinforced by praise and structured activities. Vygotsky's perspective is evident in the play-based and experiential learning strategies, where social interactions (e.g., collaborative play, group tasks) serve as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), allowing teachers and peers to scaffold skills like sharing and conflict resolution

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