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BURNOUT BEHIND THE SMILE: KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' STORIES IN COPING WITH STRESSORS

Nelie Ann D. Paje
Master of Arts in Educational Management, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach, using in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD), to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools, specifically focusing on their stressors, coping mechanisms, and professional needs. Findings revealed that teachers experience multiple interconnected stressors, including learner-related challenges and classroom demands, administrative workload and professional burden, parent-related and environmental pressures, and personal emotional strain, all of which significantly affect their teaching practice and well-being. Despite these challenges, teachers employ various coping mechanisms such as proactive classroom management and instructional preparedness, personal emotional regulation and self-care practices, collaboration and support systems, and strategies that help sustain professional effectiveness and well-being. Based on these findings, an Instructional Intervention Program (IIP) was developed to address gaps in instructional competence, classroom management, teacher well-being, resource limitations, and professional development. The study recommends strengthening institutional support systems through effective school leadership, mentoring, coaching, and resource provision, alongside continuous professional development and participation in professional learning communities for teachers. For learners, improved teacher support is expected to enhance classroom engagement and holistic development, while future researchers are encouraged to conduct broader, mixed-method, and longitudinal studies to further examine the effectiveness of the proposed intervention and its long-term impact on teaching quality and educational outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Burnout behind smiles teachers' stories; coping with stressors*

INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools play a crucial role in early education; however, the demands of their work often result in significant stress. This stress is commonly manifested through emotional exhaustion, detachment, and a reduced sense of accomplishment. Globally, teacher stress has become a serious concern, particularly in early childhood education. In the Philippines, especially in the Tagum City Division, this condition is intensified by factors such as large class sizes, limited instructional materials, low salaries, and the undervaluation of the teaching profession. Despite these challenges, teachers remain committed to their responsibilities while managing their stress. This study examines their lived experiences, focusing on how they cope with stress and mitigate its effects.

Teacher burnout is a global concern, with studies indicating its prevalence across various Asian countries. In Thailand, for instance, Ratanasiripong (2022) found that kindergarten, primary, and secondary teachers experience high levels of burnout, mainly due to heavy workloads and emotional demands. A comparative study between Thailand and Indonesia involving 340 teachers further revealed that, although work-life areas were similar, mental health and burnout levels differed. Teacher burnout in both countries is influenced by factors such as job stress, job security, and mental health challenges (Utami et al., 2024). In China, burnout has been associated with excessive administrative tasks and limited professional development opportunities (Prasojo, 2020). These findings highlighted the need for comprehensive strategies to support teacher well-being in the Asian context.

In the Philippines, teacher burnout has been a longstanding issue, exacerbated by systemic challenges within the education sector. Teacher burnout and stress are most prevalent in Metro Manila, Luzon, and Visayas, where educators face overlapping workloads, administrative pressures, and emotional exhaustion (Sarmiento & Tolentino, 2021; Maguate, 2024). Teachers in Manila public schools often report being overwhelmed by paperwork and class overcrowding**,** while those in the Visayas region experience financial and administrative burdens that heighten their stress levels (Pabatang et al., 2022; Dela Cruz, 2025). In Misamis Occidental, Cruz (2024) found that secondary public school teachers experience burnout, which affects their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Factors contributing to this include heavy workloads, limited resources, and insufficient administrative support. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural areas, where access to professional development opportunities is limited, and teachers often work in isolation.

Mindanao, comprising the southernmost islands of the Philippines, presents a unique set of challenges concerning teacher burnout. In Davao de Oro, Calumno et al. (2024) found that high school teachers reported low levels of burnout, attributed to strong self-efficacy and supportive school environments. However, these findings may not generalize to kindergarten

educators, who often face distinct stressors, such as managing young children's emotional needs and working with limited resources. The situation in Tagum City Division mirrored these national trends, necessitating focused research on the specific stressors faced by kindergarten teachers in this locale. Therefore, investigating the specific experiences of kindergarten teachers in Tagum City Division is crucial to understanding and addressing their unique challenges.

While existing studies have examined teacher burnout across various educational settings, there is a paucity of research on kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools, particularly in the Tagum City Division. Most studies concentrated on secondary education, neglecting the unique challenges faced by early childhood educators. Moreover, research in the Philippine context has predominantly focused on urban areas, with limited attention to rural settings such as Tagum City. This study filled this gap by exploring the specific stressors and coping mechanisms of kindergarten teachers in this locale, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of teacher burnout in the Philippines.

Addressing teacher burnout would be essential not only for educators' well-being but also for maintaining the quality of education, as it could lead to increased absenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates, which would negatively affect student learning outcomes. In the context of the Tagum City Division, where resources are limited and expectations for quality education are high, understanding and addressing teacher burnout would be especially important. This study would contribute to the body of knowledge by providing context-specific evidence on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers, particularly regarding stress and burnout in a resource-constrained setting.

The findings of this study would be of significant social relevance, as they aim to improve the working conditions of kindergarten teachers, thereby enhancing the quality of early childhood education. By identifying the specific stressors these educators faced and the coping strategies they employed, the study could inform the development of targeted interventions and support systems. The results would be disseminated through academic journals, conferences, and workshops, ensuring that the insights gained reach policymakers, educational administrators, and teacher training institutions. Additionally, collaborations with local government units and non-governmental organizations would be pursued to implement practical solutions.

THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVES

This study explored the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing work-related stress and challenges in public elementary schools. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the stressors encountered by kindergarten teachers in
their teaching experiences in public elementary schools;
2. examine the coping mechanisms employed by kindergarten teachers in dealing with work-related challenges, stress, and pressures; and
3. Propose an intervention program based on the findings of the study to support kindergarten teachers in managing stress and preventing burnout.

METHODOLOGY

The experiences of kindergarten teachers in coping with stress were expected to mirror those of their colleagues in comparable educational contexts. My reflections were substantiated by the narratives shared by the participants, as this section presented the philosophical assumptions, qualitative orientation, research design and procedures, ethical considerations, participants, instruments, data collection, data analysis, and strategies employed to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

Method Used

This study was anchored in qualitative research as it sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing stress in their professional practice. According to Wallwey and Kajfez (2023), qualitative research is a methodological approach that focuses on gaining an in-depth and contextualized understanding of real-world phenomena rather than relying on numerical measurement or statistical analysis. In this study, the qualitative design allowed the researcher to gather rich descriptions of teachers' experiences, particularly their stressors, coping strategies, and professional reflections. In the same way, Cena et al. (2024) emphasized that qualitative inquiry is guided by interpretive frameworks that aim to uncover the meanings individuals assign to their experiences.

Furthermore, this research was specifically grounded in phenomenology as its central design, focusing on the essence of kindergarten teachers' lived experiences in coping with stress. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) explained that phenomenology aims to uncover and interpret the meaning of lived experiences by examining how individuals perceive and make sense of a particular phenomenon. Similarly, Oluka (2025) emphasized that phenomenological inquiry focuses on understanding how experiences are lived and interpreted, rather than measuring them numerically.

The study is considered both qualitative and phenomenological because it focuses on exploring subjective experiences rather than testing variables or measuring outcomes. As a qualitative inquiry, it prioritizes rich, descriptive data and

interpretive analysis that reflects the complexity of human experiences. At the same time, as a phenomenological study, it specifically seeks to understand the essence of kindergarten teachers' lived experiences in coping with stress, emphasizing their perceptions, emotions, and interpretations. Thus, the integration of qualitative and phenomenological approaches enables a comprehensive, in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, highlighting both participants' meaning-making processes and the contextual nature of their experiences in early childhood education settings.

Philosophically, this study was grounded in constructivist and interpretivist assumptions that recognized reality as subjective and socially constructed. Ontologically, it is assumed that multiple realities exist, as each kindergarten teacher experiences and interprets stress differently based on their context, experiences, and personal dispositions. Epistemologically, knowledge was viewed as co-constructed between the researcher and participants through interaction, dialogue, and interpretation of lived experiences. Axiologically, the study acknowledged that values, beliefs, and biases inevitably influenced the research process; however, these were treated as part of the interpretive process rather than as limitations, allowing a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences. Methodologically, the study employed an inductive and flexible approach that emphasized the emergence of themes from participants' narratives rather than imposing predetermined categories. Finally, rhetorically, the findings were presented in a rich narrative form that foregrounded kindergarten teachers' voices and captured the depth and complexity of their experiences coping with stress and maintaining professional effectiveness.

Sources of Data

The primary data of this study were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools of the Tagum City Division. The study primarily used qualitative methods to explore teachers' lived experiences of coping with stress when handling Kindergarten learners. Participants answered open-ended questions that allowed them to share detailed accounts of their stressors and coping strategies. In-depth interviews provided rich individual perspectives, while focus group discussions enabled participants to share and compare experiences, further enriching the depth and credibility of the data collected.

The secondary data were obtained from the related literature, including scholarly articles, journals, books, and qualitative research on stress, coping mechanisms, and teacher well-being. These sources provided theoretical support for the study, guided the development of research tools, and helped interpret and discuss the findings by linking them to existing knowledge and concepts.

Data Gathering Instrument

Qualitative data could be collected through various approaches, including interviews, observations, and audio-visual documentation. In line with these approaches, this study used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the primary methods to investigate teachers' experiences of coping with stress while teaching Kindergarten learners (Dye, 2023). Participants responded to carefully designed open-ended questions, allowing them to provide detailed accounts of their experiences, reflections, and perceptions. These narratives facilitated a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

In-depth interviews are a central method in qualitative research, enabling researchers to gather rich, nuanced information directly from participants. This approach is particularly effective for exploring individuals' experiences, beliefs, perspectives, and coping strategies related to stress management in teaching. Clearly defined research objectives guide interviews to ensure purposeful engagement (Xu et al., 2025). Participants were acknowledged as experts of their own lived experiences, while the researcher assumed the role of an attentive learner. Thoughtfully crafted open-ended questions encouraged participants to provide reflective and comprehensive responses.

In this phenomenological study, participants from Kindergarten classes in public elementary schools in the Tagum City Division conveyed their experiences in their own words through in-depth interviews. The researcher adjusted the question order or introduced additional prompts to elicit more thorough and meaningful responses, ensuring clarity and depth in participants' reflections. This method was intended to capture the essence of teachers' lived experiences in navigating stress while delivering instruction, highlighting both the difficulties encountered and the coping strategies employed. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher maintained neutrality, refraining from verbal or non-verbal cues that might influence responses.

Focus group discussions included five kindergarten teachers from public elementary schools in the Tagum City Division, each with at least 3 years of teaching experience. This method provided a structured environment for gathering both collective and individual perspectives on their experiences managing stress and supporting learners' socio-emotional needs. Focus group discussions allow participants to reflect, clarify, and expand upon their individual experiences while engaging with others' perspectives, enhancing the richness and credibility of the data (Ning et al., 2024). Teachers were encouraged to share ideas openly, discuss professional practices, and collaboratively examine the challenges and strategies involved in coping with classroom stress. Follow-up questions were used as needed to deepen the discussion and support the identification and validation of emerging themes.

Data collection took place in settings that were convenient and comfortable for participants, including their actual classrooms or other accessible venues within the schools. The study gathered information through ten in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions. To strengthen the depth, credibility, and contextual understanding of the findings, supplementary sources such as scholarly articles, journals, and books were also consulted, providing diverse perspectives, empirical evidence, and theoretical frameworks.

Sampling Technique

This phenomenological study involved 15 participants who met the criteria established for the research objectives. Among these, ten participants engaged in in-depth interviews (IDIs), while five participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). The selected sample size aligned with the guidance of Bekele and Ago (2022), which indicated that phenomenological research typically included three to fifteen participants, providing sufficient depth to capture rich and meaningful insights. The number of participants was considered adequate to achieve data saturation, ensuring that the lived experiences of teachers were thoroughly explored and faithfully represented.

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants, as this strategy offered the most suitable and effective approach for qualitative inquiry. Also referred to as judgmental sampling, this method involves the intentional selection of individuals with specific characteristics or qualifications relevant to the research focus. As a non-random technique, purposive sampling does not rely on a predetermined theoretical framework or a fixed number of participants (Bisht, 2024), allowing the researcher to identify teachers whose experiences can provide rich, contextually grounded insights.

Participants were Kindergarten teachers currently assigned to public elementary schools within the Tagum City Division, each with at least 3 years of teaching experience. This focus ensured that the study captured the lived experiences of educators who engaged directly with young learners and navigated the unique socio-emotional and instructional demands of early childhood education. Teachers who did not meet these criteria, such as those teaching higher grade levels, with less than three years of experience, or working outside the Tagum City Division, were excluded. Furthermore, participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence, safeguarding their autonomy.

Procedure of the Study

The research data were collected in multiple stages to ensure systematic and comprehensive documentation of participants' experiences. As noted by Arifin (2023), qualitative data may be gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation of participants' teaching environments, and review of supplementary materials such as video recordings.

At the outset of data gathering, I obtained authorization from the Ethics Review Committee to ensure that the research complies with established ethical principles. This process included submitting a detailed proposal describing the study's purpose, research design, and any potential risks to participants. The committee evaluated the proposal to verify that participants' rights, privacy, and welfare were adequately protected. After securing ethical clearance, I moved forward with the subsequent phases of data collection.

After obtaining clearance from the Ethics Review Committee last October 11, 2025 as shown in Appendix A, I sought official endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School of Rizal Memorial Colleges (RMC) last November 22, 2025, as shown in Appendix B and requested an authorization letter from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of the Tagum City Division last January 13, 2026 the approved letter is included in Appendix C. This authorization served as formal permission to conduct the research within the designated educational setting. I provided a written request detailing the study's objectives, target participants, and the methods to be employed. The endorsement and approval from these key authorities ensured institutional support. The approved letter is included in Appendix D.

Before initiating data collection, I designed an interview protocol that served as the primary tool for obtaining information. This protocol consisted of open-ended questions intended to examine kindergarten teachers' experiences in managing challenges related to their stressors. I made sure that each question was concise, appropriate, and considerate of the participants' perspectives. After drafting the instrument, I sought feedback from subject matter experts to assess its validity on September 22, 25, and 29, 2025, and to confirm that it adequately captured the information required for the study, as shown in Appendix E.

Before the interview sessions, I obtained the participants' informed consent as shown in Appendix F. This process included giving them comprehensive details about the study's purpose, goals, and the extent of their involvement. I clearly communicated that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could discontinue their involvement at any time without repercussions.

After obtaining informed consent, I administered the interview guide to the selected participants. I conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the kindergarten teachers, allowing them to share their experiences, coping

mechanisms, and insights into managing their stressors. I ensured that the interviews were conducted in a comfortable, confidential setting to promote open and honest communication. The interviews were audio-recorded to capture the responses accurately for later analysis.

After completing the interviews, I produced verbatim transcripts of all audio recordings to capture the participants' statements accurately. When some responses were expressed in the local language, I translated them into English to facilitate clearer interpretation and analysis. Once transcription and translation were finalized, I proceeded with data analysis using a phenomenological approach, carefully examining recurring ideas and themes reflecting the participants' shared experiences. The analysis was guided by an emphasis on understanding the authentic, lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers.

After completing the transcription and initial analysis of the data, I requested a review and endorsement from a competent data analyst. The analyst examined the results to verify that the interpretation was comprehensive, consistent, and accurately reflected the collected data. This process was vital to strengthening the reliability and trustworthiness of the study's outcomes. Upon receiving the analyst's feedback, I incorporated the necessary revisions and finalized the analysis in preparation for presenting the research findings.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I took strict measures to protect the confidentiality of all participants. All audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in a password-protected file to prevent unauthorized access. Any identifying details remained confidential, and pseudonyms were used in place of participants' real names to preserve anonymity. Furthermore, the collected data were used solely for this research and were permanently deleted upon study completion to ensure continued protection of participants' privacy.

Data Analysis

Kiger and Varpio (2020) identified five essential steps in the analysis of qualitative data, including data logging, anecdotes, vignettes, coding, and thematic analysis. Within this study, particular attention was given to data coding and thematic analysis, as these procedures support the systematic organization and interpretation of teachers' narratives.

Data coding involves organizing qualitative information by condensing extensive raw material into smaller, meaningful units relevant to the research objectives. This procedure allows the data to be segmented into manageable portions from which salient themes can emerge. As highlighted by Christou (2023), codes that consistently appear across multiple participants' accounts are likely to evolve into significant themes. In this study, the researcher used color-coded highlighters and pens to identify recurring and noteworthy ideas in transcripts of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Segments marked with the same color were clustered together and labeled with concise phrases or terms to represent the emerging thematic categories.

Thematic analysis, in turn, was employed to detect patterns, identify themes, and differentiate distinct content into meaningful categories during qualitative interpretation. The researcher evaluated which data segments qualified as themes or categories prior to deeper interpretation, thereby enabling a thorough understanding of participants' experiences (Jones, 2022). In this study, thematic analysis followed the coding process, with teachers' responses systematically organized and examined from broader concepts to more specific details. Responses conveying similar underlying meanings were grouped into coherent, comprehensive themes, each requiring at least three core ideas for validation. Unique identifiers were assigned to participants to maintain data organization and safeguard confidentiality, ensuring that the analysis faithfully represented the lived experiences of Kindergarten teachers coping with stress in their professional practice.

Santos et al. (2020) emphasized that environmental triangulation in qualitative research involves collecting data from diverse contextual settings to explore participants' subjective experiences across different conditions. By incorporating multiple environments, researchers could assess the consistency of their findings, enhancing the study's credibility and relevance. This approach helped minimize biases that might arise from relying on a single context, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Environmental triangulation was particularly useful in educational research, where the influence of different settings could significantly shape participants' perspectives and behaviors.

In my research on the experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing stressors in selected public elementary schools within the Tagum City Division, I employed environmental triangulation to collect data from multiple contextual settings. By examining teachers' experiences across different schools, I was able to compare and analyze how factors such as the school environment, community context, and available resources affect their coping processes. This method promoted a holistic understanding of the phenomenon and enabled an evaluation of both the commonalities and differences in teachers' experiences across diverse environments. Utilizing environmental triangulation enhanced the study's credibility by offering a more comprehensive perspective on how distinct contexts shape teachers' adaptive responses.

The analytical approach proposed by Colaizzi (1978), as referenced in Praveena and Sasikumar (2021), provides a structured, systematic process for examining qualitative data, emphasizing the extraction of essential meanings from participants' lived experiences. This method entailed several stages, including an in-depth examination of interview transcripts, the identification of significant statements, the formulation of meanings, and the organization of these into

thematic clusters. Colaizzi's framework highlighted the importance of preserving the authenticity of participants' narratives while revealing the richness of their experiences. It served as an effective strategy in phenomenological research, providing a clear and methodical way to derive insightful interpretations and achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In this study, I applied Colaizzi's analytical framework to systematically examine in-depth interview data from kindergarten teachers regarding their experiences managing stressors. This method enabled the extraction of comprehensive and meaningful insights from the qualitative responses. By adhering to Colaizzi's structured process, I ensured that the analysis stays true to the participants' narratives, faithfully reflecting the core of their lived experiences while upholding analytical precision and methodological soundness. Data analysis was done manually with the help of experts for peer review.

Analyzing the Interviews. The initial phase of Colaizzi's analytical framework entails an in-depth examination of the interview data. In this study, I started by thoroughly reviewing the transcribed interviews, immersing myself in the participants' narratives to comprehend their lived experiences. Each transcript was read several times to become familiar with the content and develop an overall understanding of the context. This careful, repeated reading helped me capture the nuances of each participant's perspective and establish a strong foundation for subsequent analysis. I ensured that all meaningful insights were recognized and retained throughout the analytical process.

Identifying Key Phrases. After completing the initial review of the interview data, I pinpointed essential phrases and noteworthy statements embedded in the transcripts. These excerpts captured the central experiences and insights of kindergarten teachers as they navigated various stressors. Particular attention was given to expressions that vividly described the difficulties encountered and the coping mechanisms employed in relation to limited school facilities. Through this process, I extracted the most relevant and meaningful portions of the data that directly corresponded to the research objectives.

Identifying Meanings and Coding. Once the essential statements had been pinpointed, I interpreted their meanings and assigned appropriate labels that captured the central ideas conveyed in the participants' responses. These labels served as markers, organizing the data into conceptual categories and helping structure the information for detailed examination. This phase played a vital role in systematically grouping related insights and identifying emerging patterns across the collected narratives. Through this process, I gained a more refined comprehension of the recurring themes and shared experiences.

Organizing Codes into Groups. After completing the coding process, I grouped the generated codes into clusters based on their commonalities and connections. This stage helped reveal overarching themes that encapsulated the different dimensions of the participants' experiences. Grouping the codes in this manner aided in structuring the analysis and highlighting the major elements that shaped the teachers' coping processes. Through this organization, I captured all pertinent details from the data, offering a holistic and coherent understanding of the participants' viewpoints.

Describing the Phenomenon. At this stage, my goal was to present a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon as lived by the teachers. I integrated the themes and essential insights derived from the earlier stages to construct a detailed account of their experiences. This account encompassed the difficulties teachers encountered, as well as the strategies they employed to manage various stressors. Through this synthesized narrative, I intended to provide a well-rounded and meaningful depiction of how teachers navigated and responded to these challenges.

Identifying the Fundamental Structure. In this phase, I extracted the essential structure of the phenomenon by pinpointing the key components that characterized kindergarten teachers' experiences managing stressors. I reviewed the themes that surfaced during the analysis and emphasized the most influential elements that shaped their coping processes. This step enabled me to formulate conclusions about the core aspects of the teachers' lived experiences. By identifying this underlying structure, I presented a clear, focused interpretation of the factors that shape their adjustment and resilience within the school environment.

Validating the Findings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, I conducted a validation process by obtaining feedback from both the participants and experts in the field. I presented the identified themes and descriptions to the teachers involved in the study to confirm that my interpretations genuinely represented their lived experiences. Furthermore, I sought the insights of a panel of experts or academic colleagues to assess the accuracy, consistency, and rigor of the analysis. This validation phase confirmed that the findings were credible and firmly rooted in the participants' perspectives. Engaging in this process strengthened the study's overall reliability and authenticity. Through the systematic application of Colaizzi's analytical framework, I derived meaningful interpretations from the interview data. I developed a holistic understanding of how kindergarten teachers in the Tagum City Division managed and adapted to various stressors.

Figure 2 presents the stages of Colaizzi's thematic analysis as applied in this research study. This visual representation illustrated how the data were systematically examined, beginning with a thorough reading of participants' responses, followed by the extraction of significant statements, the formulation of meanings, and the clustering into emergent themes.

Ethical Consideration

This study upheld rigorous ethical standards to ensure that the research was conducted with integrity, respect, and care for all participants, while maintaining their confidentiality and anonymity. Within the framework of qualitative inquiry, ethical considerations were embedded throughout each stage of the study, with clear articulation of the scope and limitations to promote transparency and accountability. These responsibilities aligned closely with the chosen phenomenological methodology, emphasizing the protection of participants' personal narratives and lived experiences. Accordingly, the research adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee, particularly in safeguarding participants' rights and ensuring the careful management, storage, and use of all data, including, but not limited to, the following measures:

Social Value. The study would hold substantial social value, as it would highlight the experiences of Kindergarten teachers managing stress while providing socio-emotional support to learners. Examining how teachers navigated the emotional and professional challenges inherent in early childhood education underscored the connection between teacher well-being and student development, emphasizing the importance of fostering supportive, empathetic learning environments. The findings could guide school administrators, policymakers, and educational stakeholders in developing context-sensitive interventions, professional development programs, and mental health initiatives that address teacher stress and enhance classroom interactions. In addition, the study highlighted the critical role teachers play in fostering learners' emotional resilience, social skills, and overall engagement.

Informed Consent Form. The researcher ensured that informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Each Kindergarten teacher was provided with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, scope, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits, allowing them to make an informed decision regarding participation. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to decline to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. A written consent form was presented, outlining confidentiality measures, data handling, and assurances of anonymity, and teachers were given sufficient time to review the document, ask questions, and provide voluntary consent by signing. This process guaranteed that participation was fully informed, ethically grounded, and respected the autonomy and rights of all individuals involved.

Vulnerability of Research Participants. To protect participants' vulnerability in the study, the researcher carefully implemented measures to minimize potential psychological, emotional, or social risks. The participants were informed about the nature, purpose, and possible emotional challenges of the study before their involvement. The researcher emphasized voluntary participation and assured participants that they might withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing all data, preventing the identification of individual participants. Additionally, sensitive topics were approached with empathy and respect, and participants were provided with appropriate support resources if discussing stress triggers discomfort, thereby safeguarding their well-being.

Benefits, Risks, and Safety. In conducting the study, the researcher ensured that the benefits, risks, and safety of participants were carefully considered and communicated in accordance with the outlined ethical guidance. Participants were clearly informed about the potential benefits of the study, such as contributing to a deeper understanding of stress management strategies and promoting teacher well-being. At the same time, potential risks, including emotional discomfort when discussing stressful experiences, were disclosed, and steps were taken to minimize them through supportive, empathetic interviewing techniques. The researcher guaranteed participants' safety by maintaining strict confidentiality, anonymizing responses, and providing options to pause or withdraw from the study at any point.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of study participants, the researcher implemented strict measures in accordance with ethical practices. Participants' identities were safeguarded through pseudonyms and coding systems, ensuring that no personal information was linked to their responses. All data collected, including interview transcripts and notes, were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Additionally, any information shared during the study was treated with the utmost discretion, and findings were reported in aggregated form to prevent identification of individual participants. The researcher ensured that participants' privacy was respected and their personal experiences remained confidential.

Justice. In this study, the researcher upheld justice by ensuring fair and equitable treatment of all participants and providing every teacher with an equal opportunity to share their experiences. Participant selection was guided solely by relevance to the study, not by personal preference or bias, and all contributions were acknowledged with respect. The research was conducted transparently, with participants fully informed of their rights, the study's purpose, and how their responses would be used. Benefits, such as opportunities for professional reflection and the potential enhancement of classroom practices, were made accessible to all participants. At the same time, careful measures were taken to prevent any harm or disadvantage. Through these practices, the study maintained ethical fairness and integrity throughout the research process.

Transparency. The researcher ensured transparency by maintaining clear communication and openness throughout every phase of the research. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and scope, including how their responses were collected, analyzed, and reported. The research design, data collection strategies, and methods of analysis were explained in detail to allow for understanding and evaluation by others.

Conflict of Interest. The researcher ensured transparency by maintaining clear communication and openness throughout every phase of the research. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and scope, including how their responses were collected, analyzed, and reported. The research design, data collection strategies, and methods of analysis were explained in detail to allow for understanding and evaluation by others.

Qualification of the Researcher. The researcher is qualified to conduct this study, having completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education (Generalist) and earned 21 units in the Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Pre-School Education, which provided a strong academic foundation in early childhood education. This was further supported by the researcher's position as Teacher VI and extensive teaching experience of 10 years and 10 months as a kindergarten teacher in a public elementary school in the Tagum City Division. This long-term classroom exposure had provided direct experience with the challenges, stressors, and instructional demands faced by kindergarten teachers, making the researcher well-grounded in the study's context. The combination of relevant academic preparation, professional advancement, and substantial teaching experience demonstrates the researcher's strong capacity to conduct a credible, contextually informed study.

Adequacy of Facilities. The researcher ensured the adequacy of facilities by carefully preparing and organizing the research environment. Spaces used for interviews and data collection were secure, comfortable, and designed to promote open, focused discussions, enabling participants to share their experiences freely and without distraction. All necessary materials and equipment, such as recording devices, note-taking tools, and secure data storage, were arranged in advance to facilitate accurate and efficient documentation. These preparations helped ensure a smooth research process, maintaining data integrity while fostering participants' comfort, safety, and active engagement throughout the study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Johnson et al. (2020) asserted that the strength of a study is reflected in how credible and persuasive its findings appear to readers. Within qualitative research, establishing trustworthiness involves the careful application of essential criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, each of which contributes to the rigor and integrity of the inquiry. In the context of this study, these standards guide the investigation, ensuring that the findings accurately represent participants' lived experiences, remain consistent across analyses, are applicable in comparable educational settings, and are grounded in authentic data.

Credibility corresponds to the concept of internal validity in quantitative studies, emphasizing the accuracy, trustworthiness, and authenticity of findings. It assessed whether the results genuinely reflect participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Riazi et al., 2023). Within this study, the researcher documented the authentic experiences of Kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools in the Tagum City Division, each with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Prolonged engagement enabled the researcher to build rapport and gain a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences. Triangulation drew upon multiple sources, including interviews with participants from different school contexts, and triangulated with responses from participants in the focus group discussion, and member checking provided participants with the opportunity to verify the accuracy of interpretations. These strategies ensured that the study accurately captured the teachers' voices and their efforts in coping with stress.

Dependability pertains to the consistency and stability of research findings over time, ensuring that results can be regarded as reliable and verifiable upon re-examination (McLeod, 2024). It emphasizes producing findings that are coherent, systematic, and defensible. In this study, dependability was maintained through triangulation, using multiple data sources, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with Kindergarten teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience. Additionally, peer review was conducted through consultations with research advisers and expert panelists to verify that interpretations and conclusions remained consistent.

Transferability concerns the extent to which research findings can be applied or deemed relevant across contexts, enabling readers to assess their applicability to other educational settings (Stalmeijer et al., 2024). Establishing transferability required presenting rich, detailed descriptions of participants, the research context, and the procedures employed. In this study, thorough documentation of the methodology was provided to ensure clarity and transparency. This included detailed accounts of the research setting, profiles of Kindergarten teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience, and the specific procedures used during data collection. All interview transcripts and analyzed data were included in the appendix to serve as references for future research and to minimize potential bias. Collected materials were systematically organized and securely stored in both digital and printed formats, ensuring accessibility and preservation of the research data.

Confirmability pertains to the extent to which research findings and interpretations are rooted in participants' experiences and the collected data rather than shaped by the researcher's personal biases, assumptions, or perspectives (Lee, 2025). Establishing confirmability involves maintaining a detailed audit trail that documents each phase of the research process, from data collection through analysis to reporting. In this study, an audit trail was carefully preserved through the systematic organization of raw data, including transcripts of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with participants, as well as other materials gathered during the investigation. All records were securely stored to ensure transparency and facilitate external verification if required. This rigorous documentation allowed the researcher to track decisions throughout the

study, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings and supporting precise coding and the identification of significant themes during data analysis.

RESULTS

This study examined stressors, coping mechanisms, and an intervention program for kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools. Teachers experienced significant stressors grouped into **learner-related challenges**, **administrative workload**, **parental and environmental pressures**, and **personal/emotional strain**. Classroom challenges included diverse learner needs, behavioral issues, and large class sizes, which required continuous adjustment of instructional strategies and emotional regulation. Administrative burdens encompassed excessive paperwork, coordinatorship responsibilities, and time pressures, leading to work-life imbalance. Parent-related stressors involved limited support, complaints, and unrealistic expectations, while personal strain included physical and emotional exhaustion, family responsibilities, and workplace conflicts.

Teachers employed multiple **coping mechanisms**:

1. **Proactive classroom management and instructional preparedness** – structured routines, time management, positive behavior strategies, and flexible teaching approaches.
2. **Personal emotional regulation and self-care** – maintaining a positive mindset, wellness activities, and personal outlets for emotional release.
3. **Collaboration and support systems** – peer mentoring, family support, and parent/administrative assistance.
4. **Maintaining professional effectiveness** – reflection, continuous professional growth, sustaining teaching quality, and outcome-based recognition.

The findings highlight that both internal strategies (self-care, emotional regulation) and external supports (collaboration, resources) are critical in sustaining teacher well-being and instructional effectiveness.

Proposed Instructional Intervention Program (IIP)

To address persistent stressors and promote professional resilience, the study proposes a structured intervention program with six components:

1. **Instructional Capacity Enhancement** – training in child-centered and differentiated instruction, peer observation, and lesson planning.
2. **Classroom Management Support** – seminars, simulations, and sharing best practices to improve learner behavior management.
3. **Stress Management and Wellness** – mental health sessions, mindfulness workshops, reflective practices, and peer support groups.
4. **Instructional Resource Support** – development of low-cost teaching aids, shared resource banks, and material reproduction assistance.
5. **Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)** – collaborative lesson planning, mentoring, and continuous professional growth.
6. **Monitoring and Feedback** – classroom observation, teacher reflection journals, and quarterly evaluations to ensure program effectiveness.

The IIP aims to enhance instructional competence, classroom management, emotional well-being, resource access, and professional collaboration, fostering sustainable teaching practices and improved learner outcomes for kindergarten teachers.

Summary

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of kindergarten teachers' lived experiences. The following summarizes the key findings.

1) The findings of the study revealed that kindergarten teachers in public elementary schools experience multiple interconnected stressors, including learner-related challenges and classroom demands, administrative workload and professional burden, parent-related and environmental pressures, and personal emotional strain that collectively affect their teaching practice and well-being.
2) The findings revealed that Kindergarten teachers manage work-related stress through proactive classroom management and instructional preparedness, personal emotional regulation and self-care practices, collaboration and support systems, and strategies that help sustain their professional effectiveness and overall well-being.
3) From these findings, an instructional intervention program was crafted which was designed to address the multifaceted challenges faced by teachers in delivering quality instruction, particularly in relation to instructional competence, classroom management, well-being, resource limitations, and professional development.

The findings of the study strongly support Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, which explains that stress results from the interaction between the individual and the environment, and is shaped by how situations are interpreted and managed. In this study, kindergarten teachers encountered various stressors such as heavy workload, diverse learner needs, and limited resources. These experiences reflect the person–environment transaction, where stress arises when job demands are perceived to exceed available resources.

Consistent with the theory, the teachers demonstrated primary appraisal by recognizing classroom challenges and work-related pressures as stressful. They also engaged in secondary appraisal by assessing their ability to cope, such as relying

on personal resilience, support from colleagues, or available teaching strategies. These appraisal processes influenced the coping mechanisms they adopted, including emotional regulation, time management, and seeking social support.

Implications

In the light of the analysis and discussion of the result of the study, the following implications are drawn:

1) The findings imply that the multiple stressors experienced by kindergarten teachers, including workload, administrative demands, and limited support, call for improvements in school policies and management practices. School heads and administrators need to reduce excessive non teaching tasks, provide sufficient instructional resources, and create a more supportive working environment. Addressing these concerns can help teachers focus more on teaching and reduce the likelihood of stress and burnout.
2) The coping mechanisms identified in the study suggest the importance of strengthening teachers' skills in managing stress and maintaining well being. This highlights the need for regular training and professional development programs that focus on stress management, emotional regulation, and effective classroom practices. Providing access to mentoring and support systems can further enhance teachers' ability to cope with challenges while maintaining their teaching effectiveness.
3) The findings implied that kindergarten teachers experienced varying levels of stress due to classroom demands, workload, and limited resources, yet they continued to cope through personal resilience, collaboration with colleagues, and adaptive teaching strategies. These coping mechanisms suggested that teachers' ability to manage stress was influenced by both individual and contextual factors. In relation to practice, the results implied the need for stronger institutional support systems that would help reduce workload pressures and promote teacher well-being. Furthermore, the study implied the importance of developing an instructional intervention program that would address identified challenges in classroom management, resource limitations, and instructional support. Such a program would help strengthen teachers' coping capacity, improve instructional practices, and enhance overall teaching effectiveness in kindergarten education.

Future Directions

Based on the findings of this study, several future research directions are suggested to further deepen understanding of the experiences of kindergarten teachers and enhance support for their professional practice.

1) For school heads, it is recommended that they strengthen institutional support systems by prioritizing teacher well-being, instructional supervision, and resource allocation. School leaders may consider implementing structured mentoring programs, regular coaching sessions, and responsive monitoring and feedback mechanisms to address teachers' instructional challenges, classroom management needs, and emotional stress. Creating a supportive and collaborative school culture can significantly enhance teacher effectiveness and reduce burnout.
2) For kindergarten teachers, continuous professional development is encouraged, particularly in areas of instructional preparedness, classroom management, and emotional regulation. Teachers may further enhance their coping strategies through reflective practice, peer collaboration, and active participation in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Sustaining self-care practices and maintaining a balance between personal well-being and professional responsibilities are also essential in ensuring long-term teaching effectiveness.
3) For learners, the findings imply the importance of providing a stable, engaging, and supportive classroom environment that fosters holistic development. Strengthened teacher support systems and improved instructional practices will directly contribute to enhanced learner engagement, foundational skill development, and positive socio-emotional growth.
4) For future researchers, it is recommended to conduct expanded studies involving larger and more diverse populations across different educational levels and contexts. Further research may also explore the effectiveness of the proposed Instructional Intervention Program (IIP) through quantitative, mixed-method, or action research designs. Longitudinal studies are also encouraged to examine the sustained impact of teacher support programs on instructional quality, stress management, and educational outcomes.

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