



PATIENCE AND PRACTICE: TEACHERS' INSIGHTS ON MANAGING DIFFERENT LEARNING PACES IN KINDERGARTEN OF TAGUM CITY DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the challenges, strategies, and insights of kindergarten teachers in managing diverse learning paces among pupils in public elementary schools in the Tagum North District, Tagum City Division, based on the experiences of nine (9) teacher-informants gathered through in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that teachers encountered challenges in balancing instruction between fast and slow learners, experienced heavy demands in instructional planning and classroom management, and faced emotional and behavioral classroom difficulties, all of which required continuous adjustment of lesson pacing, differentiation of activities, and increased workload. Despite these challenges, teachers employed various strategies such as differentiated and flexible instruction, interactive and child-centered teaching approaches, and collaborative, supportive, and monitoring-based practices, including small group activities, multisensory materials, individualized support, and continuous assessment to ensure learner progress. Moreover, teachers emphasized that instructional effectiveness was strengthened through ongoing observation and performance-based evaluation, which guided the refinement of teaching practices. The study further revealed that flexibility and responsiveness are essential in managing diverse learning paces, differentiated instruction and targeted support ensure inclusive learning, and engaging child-centered strategies combined with continuous monitoring sustain learning progress. It is recommended that school heads, teachers, and future researchers collaboratively strengthen support systems, enhance professional competencies in differentiated and child-centered instruction, and conduct further studies to improve evidence-based practices in managing diverse learning paces among kindergarten learners.

KEYWORDS: *Patience; practice; managing different learning pace; kindergarten*

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in kindergarten classrooms face considerable challenges in managing students with varying learning paces, a situation that often complicates the delivery of effective and inclusive instruction. The diverse developmental levels, cognitive abilities, and attention spans of young learners require teachers to continuously adjust their teaching strategies, lesson pacing, and classroom activities to meet each child's needs. Limited instructional time, large class sizes, and insufficient support resources further exacerbate these difficulties, making it challenging for educators to provide individualized attention while maintaining overall classroom engagement. These persistent challenges highlight the complexities teachers encounter in balancing curriculum requirements with the developmental readiness of their students. Key challenges related to students' diverse learning needs include varying learning styles and paces that struggle in standardized systems; large class sizes that make personalized attention nearly impossible; lack of resources and tools to support students with special needs; and limited teacher training in managing diverse classroom dynamics. Similar challenges have been reported in other countries. In Japan, teachers note the difficulty of addressing individual learning differences in high-density classrooms, requiring immense patience and consistent practice to maintain engagement and comprehension (Kawashima, 2025). In Brazil, kindergarten educators face challenges due to socio-economic disparities that affect students' prior knowledge and learning readiness, necessitating differentiated teaching strategies (Raikes et al., 2023). In South Africa, teachers report that large and multilingual classrooms often slow down lesson delivery and require adaptive pacing to ensure all students can follow along (Chimbunde, 2024).

In Tagudin District, Ilocos Sur, teachers reported difficulties in managing classroom behaviors, addressing parental attitudes, and meeting diverse learning needs. To cope, they employed strategies such as collaboration, stress management, and creating supportive learning environments (Lucero, 2023). In Cebu City, kindergarten teachers in Cebu City faced challenges in implementing the kindergarten curriculum. The study identified issues related to preparation time, development of instructional materials, and the need for teacher training. These challenges highlight the importance of patience and continuous practice in adapting to diverse learning paces and ensuring effective teaching in kindergarten classrooms (Jaca & Lopez-Baroman, 2021). The same report is given by Opingo (2023) revealing that kindergarten educators in Cebu faced challenges in effectively integrating it into their teaching practices. These challenges included managing diverse learning paces and ensuring that all students received adequate attention.



In Tagum City, it was observed that teachers encountered significant challenges in managing young learners who progressed at different learning paces, although these experiences have yet to be formally investigated. Educators appeared to struggle with addressing the diverse cognitive, developmental, and emotional needs of each student while ensuring that the overall classroom stayed on track with the curriculum. Factors such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and scarce support resources further intensify these difficulties, often requiring teachers to improvise strategies to engage and support all learners effectively. These observations underscored the practical complexities teachers face in balancing individualized instruction with general classroom management, highlighting the need for a systematic study to document and understand these experiences more comprehensively.

Although addressing diverse learning paces was widely recognized as crucial in early childhood education, most existing studies concentrated on curriculum design, child development theories, or general instructional strategies, leaving a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences of teachers managing students with varying abilities in kindergarten classrooms. Empirical evidence was limited regarding how educators perceived, responded to, and navigated the challenges associated with differing student learning speeds, particularly within Tagum City Division. This gap underscored the urgency of conducting the study which documented teachers' firsthand perspectives, strategies, and coping mechanisms. Filling this gap would not only enrich academic knowledge on differentiated instruction and classroom management but would also offer practical insights to enhance teacher support, professional development, and the overall quality of early childhood education.

This study would highlight the strategies and experiences of teachers in addressing the diverse learning needs of young children, which would be essential for promoting equitable and effective early childhood education. By understanding how educators managed varied learning paces, the research could inform teacher training programs, classroom management practices, and curriculum planning, ultimately supporting better learning outcomes and holistic development for kindergarten students. To ensure the findings reach relevant stakeholders, the results would be disseminated through educational workshops and seminars for teachers and school leaders, publications in peer-reviewed journals, policy briefs for local education authorities, and online platforms such as academic repositories and educational blogs. This dissemination approach ensured that both practitioners and policymakers could access and apply the insights, fostering improved teaching strategies, targeted professional development, and enhanced support for young learners in Tagum City Division.

THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing the different learning paces of kindergarten pupils using a phenomenological approach. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Determine the challenges encountered by teachers in managing the varied learning paces among kindergarten pupils;
2. Identify the strategies employed by teachers to address the diverse learning paces of their pupils; and
3. Draw insights from the teachers' practices in handling the different learning paces of kindergarten pupils.

METHODOLOGY

The experiences of teachers in addressing different learning paces in kindergarten were expected to reflect the realities encountered by their counterparts in similar public elementary school settings. The researcher's understanding was validated through the participants' shared perspectives, as this section presented the foundational assumptions of the study, the qualitative approach guiding the inquiry, the selected research design and procedures, the ethical standards upheld, the profile of participants, the instruments employed, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the strategies implemented to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Method Used

This study employed a qualitative research design, which is an approach that seeks to explore and understand complex social and educational phenomena through rich, detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences. Grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, qualitative research assumes that meaning is socially constructed and developed through interaction between the researcher and participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). In this study, qualitative inquiry provided an appropriate framework for examining how kindergarten teachers experience and make sense of managing different learning paces among pupils in real classroom contexts.

In addition, this study was specifically anchored on a phenomenological approach, which focuses on describing and interpreting the essence of lived experiences of individuals who have directly encountered a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology seeks to uncover how individuals perceive, understand, and give meaning to their experiences as they naturally occur in their environment (Finlay, 2021). In this study, the phenomenological design was used to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers as they navigate diverse learning paces, highlighting their challenges, strategies, and insights within the teaching-learning process.



The use of qualitative research and phenomenology was justified by the nature of the problem being investigated, which required an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences rather than numerical measurement or statistical analysis. Since the study aimed to understand teachers' challenges, coping strategies, and insights in managing varied learning paces, a qualitative phenomenological design allowed for the emergence of rich, contextualized, and meaningful data. This approach was most appropriate because it captured the complexity of classroom realities and provided a deeper understanding of how teachers interpreted and responded to diverse learner needs.

The philosophical assumptions underpinning this study included ontology, epistemology, axiology, methodology, and rhetoric. Ontologically, reality was viewed as multiple and subjective, shaped by teachers' individual classroom experiences and contexts. Epistemologically, knowledge was co-constructed through participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretation of their lived experiences. Axiologically, the study acknowledged that values, beliefs, and researcher subjectivity influence the research process, and these are treated as integral rather than biases. Methodologically, the study followed an inductive, flexible, and interpretive process of data gathering and thematic analysis that allows meanings to emerge from participants' accounts. Finally, rhetorically, findings were presented using rich, descriptive, and narrative language that gives voice to participants and communicates the depth and complexity of their experiences.

Sources of Data

The sources of data in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. The primary source of data was the in-depth interview, which served as the main method of data collection. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher gathered rich, detailed, and first-hand accounts from the selected informants regarding their lived experiences in managing different learning paces among kindergarten pupils. This method allowed the informants to freely express their thoughts, feelings, challenges, strategies, and insights in their own words, thereby providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The use of in-depth interviews was essential in capturing the complexity and depth of teachers' experiences within their natural classroom contexts.

The secondary sources of data included journals, documents, articles, and related literature and studies. These materials were used to support, contextualize, and triangulate the findings obtained from the primary data gathered from the informants. Review of related literature and studies provided theoretical and empirical foundations that helped in interpreting the informants' narratives and situating the findings within existing scholarly discussions. In addition, published articles and documents contributed to a broader understanding of classroom management practices and differentiated instruction, ensuring that the study was grounded in established research and current academic perspectives.

Data Gathering Instrument

Qualitative data can be collected through various approaches, such as interviews, observations, and audio-visual documentation. In line with these methods, this study employed in-depth interviews as the primary strategies for exploring the phenomenon of managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms and for generating rich, contextually grounded insights from participants (Radu, 2025). Using pre-designed open-ended questions, participants provided detailed narratives of their experiences and perspectives. These accounts informed the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the topic, enabling the researcher to identify recurring patterns and emergent themes that reflected teachers' lived realities.

In qualitative research, individual interviews served as a central means of collecting data, allowing the researcher to access information directly from participants. This technique is particularly effective for examining personal insights, lived experiences, beliefs, and other dimensions relevant to the research focus. Each interview is guided by clearly defined objectives and a purposeful line of inquiry (Dunwoodie et al., 2025). Participants were regarded as authoritative sources of their own experiences, while the researcher assumes the role of an active and reflective listener. Through carefully crafted open-ended questions, participants were encouraged to provide comprehensive and meaningful accounts, producing narratives that illuminated the phenomenon under investigation.

In this phenomenological inquiry, participants articulated their experiences through individual in-depth interviews, expressing their perspectives in their own words. The researcher adjusted the sequence of questions and used follow-up prompts when necessary to elicit richer narratives and clarify participants' viewpoints. This process was designed to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences and to generate insights that contributed to the identification of significant themes. Throughout the interviews, the researcher maintained an impartial stance, avoiding verbal or non-verbal cues that could influence participants' responses, thus preserving the credibility and authenticity of the data collected.

Data collection took place in accessible and comfortable locations, preferably within classrooms or other suitable workspaces. The study generated information through in-depth interviews with public elementary school teachers who actively manage different learning paces in kindergarten. To enhance the richness and credibility of the findings, supplementary references such as scholarly articles, books, and peer-reviewed journals were consulted. These sources provided additional perspectives, empirical evidence, and theoretical foundations that deepened the understanding of teachers' experiences in adapting instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

Sampling Technique

This phenomenological inquiry included nine participants who met the criteria established in alignment with the objectives of the study. They took part in in-depth interviews. The selected sample size aligns with the recommendations of Hossain



and Alam (2024), who noted that phenomenological studies typically involve three to fifteen participants, allowing for the collection of rich and meaningful insights. This number was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, ensuring that the lived experiences of teachers are comprehensively explored and accurately represented.

The study employed purposive sampling for participant selection, as this approach was deemed most suitable for the research objectives. This technique involved the deliberate inclusion of individuals who possessed specific attributes or qualifications directly related to the phenomenon under investigation. As a non-random method, it does not rely on a fixed theoretical model or a predetermined participant count but focuses on identifying those whose experiences can provide the most relevant and insightful information (Stantcheva, 2022).

Participants in this study consisted of public elementary school teachers who completed at least five years of teaching service and actively involved in managing different learning paces within kindergarten classrooms in the Tagum North District of Tagum City Division. Educators who did not meet these qualifications, including those with less than five years of teaching experience, those not directly engaged in supporting learners with diverse learning paces, or those assigned outside the district, were not included. Participation was voluntary, and teachers might withdraw at any stage without negative consequences. This provision ensured respect for their autonomy, comfort, and well-being throughout the research process.

Procedure of the Study

The process of collecting research data from participants was conducted in several stages. According to Bazen et al. (2021), valuable insights can be gathered through focus group discussions, careful observation within participants' natural classroom settings, and the review of recorded visual materials. These methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences in managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms.

The initial phase of data collection involved obtaining clearance from the Ethics Committee to guarantee that the study complied with established ethical guidelines. This process required submitting a detailed research proposal that describes the study's objectives, methodology, and any potential risks to participants. The committee evaluated the proposal to ensure that the rights, safety, and welfare of the participants were adequately protected. Upon receiving approval, I moved forward with subsequent data collection activities, maintaining ethical standards and integrity at every stage of the study.

After obtaining approval from the Ethics Committee last November 11, 2025, as shown in Appendix A, I sought formal endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School at 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 Tagum City last January 27, 2026, the approved letter is included in Appendix C. This authorization was essential for conducting the study within the local educational setting. I submitted a formal request detailing the research objectives, the participants involved, and the procedures to be followed. Securing the support and approval of these authorities provided the necessary institutional clearance to carry out the study which was made possible last February 10, 12, 13, and 23, 2026. The approved letter is included in Appendix D.

In preparation for data collection, I created an interview guide that served as the main instrument for gathering information. The guide consisted of open-ended questions aimed at exploring the experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing pupils with different learning paces in the Tagum City Division. I ensured that the questions were clear, relevant, and respectful of the teachers' perspectives and experiences. After drafting the guide, I consulted with experts in early childhood education last October 7, 8, and 10, 2025 to validate its content and confirm that it effectively captured the insights necessary for the study as shown in Appendix E.

Before conducting the interviews, I sought informed consent from all participants. This involved providing them with detailed information about the study, its objectives, and their role in the research. I explained that the participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. I ensured that they understood the process and obtained their written consent before proceeding with the interviews, as shown in Appendix F.

After obtaining informed consent, I proceeded to administer the interview guide to the selected participants. I conducted one-on-one interview with the teachers, allowing them to share their experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights related to coping with inadequate school facilities. 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 conducting the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings word for word to accurately capture the participants' responses. If any responses were given in the local dialect, I translated them into English to facilitate analysis. Once transcription and translation were complete, I analyzed the data using a phenomenological approach, identifying key themes and patterns that emerged from the teachers' experiences. The analysis emphasized understanding the lived experiences of the participants in managing different learning paces in kindergarten.

When the data was transcribed and analyzed, I sought endorsement from a qualified data analyst. The analyst reviewed the findings to ensure that the analysis was thorough and accurately represented the data. This step was essential in confirming



the reliability and credibility of the research findings. After the endorsement, I incorporated any feedback and finalized the analysis to prepare for the final presentation of the study.

Ensuring Data Privacy

Throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, I ensured that participants' privacy was protected. I stored all recorded and transcribed data in a secure, password-protected location. Identifiable information was kept confidential, and participants were assigned pseudonyms to safeguard their identities. I also ensured that the data were used only for the purposes of this research and was destroyed after the study was completed to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Hayes (2023) identified five essential stages in qualitative data analysis, including data logging, anecdotes, vignettes, data coding, and thematic analysis. In this study, particular focus was given to data coding and thematic analysis, as these processes allowed for the systematic organization, interpretation, and synthesis of participants' responses, facilitating the identification of meaningful patterns and insights related to managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms.

Data coding is a structured method for organizing qualitative information, reducing large volumes of raw data into smaller, meaningful segments aligned with the research questions. This approach allows the data to be divided into manageable units from which key themes can emerge. According to Coates et al. (2021), codes that appear frequently across the dataset are more likely to develop into significant themes. In this study, the researcher used highlighters and colored pens to identify important and recurring ideas within the transcripts of in-depth interviews. Segments marked with the same color were grouped together and assigned concise labels or phrases that captured the emerging themes.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach used to detect recurring patterns as themes and to distinguish unique content as categories within the data. The researcher determines which segments constitute themes or categories before engaging in deeper interpretation, ensuring a thorough understanding of the information (McLeod, 2024). In this study, thematic analysis followed the initial coding process. Participants' responses were systematically organized and examined, moving from broader concepts to finer details. Responses that shared similar core meanings were grouped together to form coherent and comprehensive themes. Each theme required a minimum of three core ideas to be considered valid. Unique code identifiers were assigned to participants to maintain structure and protect confidentiality throughout the analysis.

In analyzing data, the researcher made use of triangulation. It involved utilizing multiple research methods to study the same phenomenon, enhancing the credibility and depth of qualitative research. By integrating diverse approaches, researcher could cross-verify findings, minimized biases, and achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. In the context of the study, methodological triangulation was particularly beneficial. For instance, combining in-depth interviews with observations and document analysis allowed for a multifaceted exploration of how kindergarten teachers adapted to varying learning paces. This approach did not only enrich the data but also provided a robust framework for analyzing the complexities of teaching strategies and student engagement in early childhood education.

The analytical framework proposed by Colaizzi (1978), as cited in Praveena and Sasikumar (2021), offered a structured approach for analyzing qualitative data, focusing on identifying the essential elements of participants' lived experiences. The method involved several steps, such as thoroughly reviewing interview transcripts, highlighting significant statements, interpreting their meanings, and organizing related ideas into themes. Colaizzi's approach prioritizes preserving the authenticity of participants' narratives while capturing the richness of their experiences.

This method was particularly suitable for phenomenological research, providing a systematic way to uncover meaningful insights and achieve a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, Colaizzi's analytical framework was applied to systematically examine the in-depth interviews conducted with kindergarten teachers in the Tagum City Division about their experiences in managing different learning paces. This approach enabled the extraction of rich, detailed insights from the qualitative data collected. By adhering to Colaizzi's step-by-step procedure, the analysis remained grounded in the teachers' own words, effectively capturing the essence of their lived experiences while ensuring methodological rigor.

Analyzing the Interviews. The initial stage of Colaizzi's analytical framework involved a comprehensive examination of the interview data. For this study, I started by carefully reviewing the transcripts of the interviews with kindergarten teachers, fully immersing myself in their accounts to understand their lived experiences in managing different learning paces. Each transcript was read multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with the details and to develop an overall understanding of the context. This process enabled me to appreciate the depth of each teacher's perspective and laid the groundwork for a more detailed analysis. By attending closely to the richness of the data, I ensured that all significant insights were captured and none were overlooked.

Identifying Key Phrases. After completing the initial review of the interview transcripts, I extracted key phrases and significant statements from the data. These statements represented the essential experiences and perspectives of kindergarten teachers regarding the management of different learning paces in their classrooms. I highlighted expressions that effectively conveyed the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed to support students with varied



learning speeds. By pinpointing these critical phrases, I captured the most meaningful portions of the data that directly related to the research questions.

Identifying Meanings and Coding. Once the key phrases have been identified, I proceeded to interpret their meanings and assigned appropriate codes. These codes served as labels that captured the underlying concepts and themes presented in the data. This step was essential for organizing and categorizing the information, making it more manageable for detailed analysis. Through the coding process, I started to recognize patterns and recurring ideas across the interviews, allowing for a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences in managing different learning paces in kindergarten.

Organizing Codes into Groups. After coding the data, I organized the codes into categories based on their similarities or connections. This process helped in identifying broader themes that reflected the different aspects of the kindergarten teachers' experiences in managing pupils with varied learning paces. Grouping the codes in this way facilitated a structured analysis and highlighted the main factors influencing how teachers adapted their strategies to accommodate diverse learning speeds. It also ensured that all significant elements of the data were considered, providing a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Describing the Phenomenon. In this stage, I provided a comprehensive description of the phenomenon as experienced by the kindergarten teachers. I integrated the themes and key insights identified from the earlier steps to construct a detailed narrative. This account encompassed both the challenges teachers encountered in managing different learning paces and the strategies they employed to support their pupils. By presenting this cohesive narrative, I offered a holistic understanding of the teachers' experiences and how they navigated the complexities of diverse learning speeds in the classroom.

Identifying the Fundamental Structure. At this stage, I determined the essential structure of the phenomenon by identifying the core elements that defined the experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing pupils with different learning paces. I examined the themes that emerged from the analysis and highlight the most significant factors influencing how teachers adapted their instructional strategies. This process enabled me to draw conclusions about the key components of the teachers' experiences. By identifying the fundamental structure, I provided a clear and concise explanation of what shaped these experiences and emphasized the factors most critical for effectively supporting diverse learning speeds in the classroom.

Validating the Findings. Finally, I validated the findings by seeking feedback from the participants and other experts in the field. I shared the themes and descriptions with the research participants to ensure that my interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. Additionally, I consulted with a panel of experts or colleagues to check the validity and rigor of the analysis. This step helped me to ensure that my findings were credible and grounded in the participants' actual experiences. By engaging in this validation process, I strengthened the reliability of the results and confirmed that the study's conclusions were well-supported by the data.

By applying Colaizzi's framework, I systematically examined the interview data to uncover meaningful insights and developed a comprehensive understanding of how kindergarten teachers in the Tagum City Division managed pupils with varying learning paces. Figure 2 illustrates the steps of Colaizzi's thematic analysis as applied in this study. It demonstrates how the qualitative data collected from participants were methodically analyzed to identify patterns and extract key insights. The process began with careful reading and re-reading of the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the teachers' experiences. Significant statements related to the research focus were then identified and interpreted to derive their underlying meanings. These meanings were organized into themes that reflected the core aspects of the participants' experiences. Finally, the themes were reviewed and validated to ensure that the analysis accurately represented the perspectives of the teachers.

Ethical Consideration

This study emphasized strict compliance with ethical standards to ensure that the research was conducted with integrity, respect, and sincere consideration for all participants, while maintaining their confidentiality and anonymity. In qualitative research, ethical practices were integrated throughout every phase of the study, with clearly defined boundaries and limitations to promote transparency and accountability. These commitments were closely aligned with the chosen methodological approach, highlighting the importance of protecting the personal experiences and narratives shared by participants. Accordingly, the research adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the Rizal Memorial Colleges Ethics Review Committee, with particular focus on safeguarding participants' rights and ensuring the responsible management of data, which included, but was not limited to, the following measures:

Social Value. This study held significant social relevance as it highlighted the essential role of instructional adaptation in addressing the varied learning paces of kindergarten learners. It emphasized how continuous and responsive teaching practices not only supported academic progress but also fostered learners' confidence, engagement, and motivation within the classroom. The perspectives shared through teachers' narratives provided valuable guidance for designing school-based interventions, professional development programs, and community initiatives that focus on meeting individual learning needs. Furthermore, the study illustrated the transformative effects of attentive and flexible teaching, contributing to the broader goal of promoting educational equity and enhancing the quality of early childhood education in Tagum City Division.



Informed Consent Form. In this study, the researcher upheld the ethical principle of informed consent by providing teachers with a comprehensive explanation of the research on managing different learning paces, including its objectives, procedures, potential challenges, and expected benefits. Participants were given sufficient time to review the details and were encouraged to ask questions to ensure their decision to participate was fully informed. Their consent was formally recorded through signed agreements, with the understanding that they might withdraw at any time without negative consequences. This process protected teachers' autonomy, demonstrated respect for their professional and personal decisions, and reflected the researcher's commitment to conducting the study with transparency, integrity, and ethical responsibility.

Vulnerability of Research Participants. In this phenomenological inquiry, the researcher ensured the protection of participants' well-being by implementing protocols that prioritized their emotional, social, and professional safety. Teachers were assured that the experiences they shared regarding managing different learning paces remained strictly confidential, with all personal identifiers removed to prevent any risk of disclosure or negative consequences. Sensitive topics were approached with care, and participants were given the freedom to decline answering certain questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. These ethical measures create a safe and respectful environment, allowing teachers to share their experiences openly and honestly while safeguarding their dignity, rights, and comfort throughout the research process.

Benefits, Risk, and Safety. The researcher carefully evaluated the benefits, risks, and overall well-being of participants through clearly defined ethical practices. Teachers were informed of the potential value of the study, including opportunities to reflect on their experiences in managing different learning paces and to provide insights that may enhance professional growth and instructional strategies. Possible risks, such as discomfort when recalling challenges, were addressed with sensitivity through respectful dialogue and supportive interactions. Protective measures, which included maintaining confidentiality, ensuring voluntary participation, and allowing withdrawal at any stage, safeguarded participants' welfare. These procedures established a safe and respectful environment in which teachers shared their experiences openly while preserving their dignity, rights, and professional identity.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. In this study, the principle of privacy and confidentiality was maintained through strict ethical safeguards. Information collected from teachers was treated with the highest level of confidentiality, with all personal identifiers removed and replaced with codes to prevent recognition. Records were securely stored, with access limited exclusively to the researcher, and both digital and physical files were protected through appropriate security measures. Participants were assured that their experiences were reported only in aggregated or anonymized form, preserving the protection of individual identities. These measures created a safe and respectful environment in which teachers shared their experiences in managing different learning paces with confidence.

Justice. In this inquiry, the principle of justice was upheld through the fair and equitable treatment of all participating teachers, ensuring that each had an equal opportunity to share their experiences in managing different learning paces. Participant selection was based solely on the relevance of their experiences to the study, eliminating personal bias and valuing every contribution with respect and consideration. The research process was conducted with transparency, as teachers were fully informed of their rights, the objectives of the study, and the ways their insights were utilized. Benefits, such as opportunities for professional reflection and the potential to improve instructional practices, were made accessible to all participants, while measures were implemented to prevent any form of harm or disadvantage. These practices ensured that the study maintained ethical fairness, integrity, and respect for the voices of kindergarten teachers.

Transparency. In this study, transparency was maintained through ongoing communication and openness throughout all stages of the research on managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms. Teachers were fully informed of the study's purpose, scope, and procedures, including how their narratives were collected, interpreted, and presented. The research design, methods of data collection, and analytical processes were clearly described to provide clarity and allow for careful evaluation. Continuous reflection and systematic documentation of the researcher's decisions reinforced accountability, ensuring that the foundations for interpretations and conclusions were traced and examined. These measures upheld clarity, honesty, and openness in both the conduct and reporting of the study.

Conflict of Interest. In this study, conflict of interest was avoided through strict adherence to ethical standards that protect the impartiality of the research process. The selection of participants, as well as the collection and interpretation of data, was conducted fairly and guided solely by the objectives of exploring teachers' experiences in managing different learning paces in kindergarten. Transparency was maintained in all interactions with participants, while any factors that could influence the outcomes were acknowledged and addressed to preserve the trustworthiness of the findings. These practices safeguarded the integrity and credibility of the study, ensuring that the insights accurately reflected the lived experiences of teachers in supporting learners' diverse learning needs.

Qualification of the Researcher. The researcher's qualifications were fundamental to the effective execution of this study, providing the knowledge, skills, and professional experience necessary to engage with participants and interpret their narratives accurately and sensitively. Academic training in educational management, along with expertise in qualitative research methods, enables the researcher to develop relevant instruments, conduct thorough interviews, and analyze accounts with precision and rigor. Experience and familiarity with the context of kindergarten classrooms in Tagum City enhance the researcher's ability to understand the complexities of managing different learning paces and the challenges



teachers encounter in supporting learners' diverse needs. These qualifications strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, ensuring that the findings offered an ethically sound and well-informed account of teachers' lived experiences.

Adequacy of Facilities. The researcher ensured the adequacy of facilities for this study through careful preparation and thoughtful organization of the research setting. Spaces used for interviews and other data collection activities were arranged to provide a safe, comfortable, and focused environment, allowing participants to share their experiences without distraction or discomfort. Necessary resources, including audio recorders, writing materials, and secure systems for storing collected data, were prepared in advance to ensure accurate documentation and protection of information. These arrangements enabled the study to proceed smoothly while maintaining participants' well-being and supporting the integrity and credibility of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Kakar et al. (2024) emphasized that the reliability of a research study is measured by how credible and persuasive its findings are to readers. In qualitative research, achieving trustworthiness requires the careful application of key criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, to ensure that the study authentically reflects participants' experiences and generates meaningful, verifiable insights.

In qualitative research, *credibility* pertains to the extent to which the findings genuinely reflect the experiences and viewpoints of participants, analogous to internal validity in quantitative studies (Arslan, 2025). In this study, credibility was ensured through the meticulous documentation of the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in Tagum North, each possessing at least five years of teaching experience and actively facilitating the management of different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms. The researcher maintained sustained engagement with participants to foster trust and gain an in-depth understanding of their perspectives. Triangulation was implemented by incorporating multiple data sources, including in-depth interviews and relevant school documents, to enhance the accuracy of the findings. Furthermore, member checking allowed participants to verify the interpretations, ensuring that the results authentically represented their lived experiences.

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of research findings, ensuring that the results remain trustworthy and can be replicated or verified over time (Janis, 2022). In this study, dependability was achieved through the systematic use of multiple data sources, including in-depth interviews with public elementary school teachers coming from different school categories in Tagum City Division, each with at least five years of teaching experience and actively managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms. Furthermore, peer review was conducted through consultations with research advisers and expert panelists, providing an external check to confirm that the interpretations and conclusions were coherent, accurate, and faithfully represented the teachers' experiences.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied or related to other educational contexts, allowing readers to evaluate their relevance in different settings (Drisko, 2024). Achieving transferability required the provision of rich and detailed descriptions of participants, the research environment, and the procedures used for data collection. In this study, comprehensive documentation of the methodology was provided to ensure transparency and clarity. Detailed profiles of public elementary school teachers in Tagum North, each with at least five years of teaching experience and actively managing different learning paces in kindergarten classrooms, were presented alongside thorough accounts of the research context and data collection processes. All transcripts and analyses were included in the appendix to serve as references for future studies and to support accurate interpretation. Both digital and printed versions of the materials were systematically organized and securely stored to maintain integrity and accessibility.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings and interpretations are grounded in the participants' experiences and the data itself rather than influenced by the researcher's personal beliefs, assumptions, or perspectives (Ayton, 2024). Ensuring confirmability involves maintaining a thorough audit trail that documents each step of the research process, from data collection through analysis and reporting. In this study, the audit trail consisted of carefully organized raw data, including transcripts from in-depth interviews with all the informants. All materials were securely stored to promote transparency and allowed for verification if needed. This detailed documentation allowed the researcher to track all decisions made during the study, strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

Results

This section presents the results and discussion of the study based on the three research questions. The thematic analysis generated three major areas: challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers, strategies used to address varied learning paces, and insights drawn from teachers' practices in managing diverse learners. The findings show that managing different learning paces requires flexible instruction, differentiated support, continuous monitoring, and emotionally responsive classroom practices.

Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers

The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers experienced three main challenges in managing different learning paces among pupils: balancing instruction between fast and slow learners, heavy demands in instructional planning and classroom management, and emotional and behavioral classroom challenges.



Teachers found it difficult to give equal attention to learners who progressed at different speeds. Fast learners often finished tasks early and became bored, restless, or disengaged, while slow learners needed more time, repeated explanations, and closer guidance. This affected lesson flow because teachers had to slow down, repeat instructions, or prioritize learners who required more support. This result shows that varied learning pace creates an instructional imbalance in kindergarten classrooms.

Teachers also experienced increased workload in lesson preparation. Since one activity could not address all learners' needs, teachers had to prepare different tasks, materials, and strategies for fast and slow learners. Limited class time further intensified this challenge because teachers had to complete lessons while ensuring that struggling pupils were not left behind. This finding implies that managing diverse learning paces requires not only teaching skill but also additional planning time and classroom support.

Another major challenge involved classroom behavior and learner emotions. When some pupils finished earlier than others, classroom noise, off-task behavior, and distraction often occurred. Slow learners also experienced pressure, frustration, fear, and reduced confidence when they saw their classmates finish ahead of them. At the same time, teachers experienced stress and fatigue because they had to manage instruction, behavior, and emotional support simultaneously. These findings suggest that varied learning pace affects both academic engagement and the emotional climate of the classroom.

Strategies Employed by Kindergarten Teachers

The findings showed that teachers used differentiated, flexible, interactive, and monitoring-based strategies to address varied learning paces. These strategies helped them provide more appropriate support to pupils with different learning needs.

First, teachers applied differentiated and flexible instruction. They adjusted activities based on learners' abilities, modified lesson pacing, and provided individualized support to pupils who needed additional help. This strategy allowed fast learners to receive more challenging tasks while slow learners were given clearer instructions, repeated explanations, and one-on-one guidance. This supports the idea that differentiated instruction is necessary in classrooms where pupils do not learn at the same speed.

Second, teachers used interactive and child-centered strategies. Hands-on activities, manipulatives, songs, games, storytelling, flashcards, pictures, and charts were used to make lessons more engaging and easier to understand. These approaches helped sustain attention and supported learners who needed concrete and visual learning experiences. In kindergarten, such strategies are important because young learners understand concepts better when they can see, hear, touch, and experience the lesson directly.

Third, teachers used small group instruction, continuous monitoring, and positive reinforcement. Small groups allowed teachers to focus more closely on struggling learners and monitor pupils' progress. Regular observation, checking of outputs, and classroom assessment helped teachers identify who understood the lesson and who still needed support. Praise and encouragement also helped improve learners' confidence and motivation. These findings show that effective management of varied learning paces requires both instructional adjustment and emotional support.

Insights Derived from Teachers' Practices

The study generated three major insights from teachers' practices. First, flexibility and responsiveness are essential in managing diverse learning paces. Teachers recognized that lesson plans cannot remain fixed because pupils differ in readiness, behavior, and daily classroom responses. Adjusting lesson flow, pacing, and teaching strategies helps prevent pupils from being left behind.

Second, differentiated instruction and targeted support promote inclusive learning. Teachers emphasized that one activity is not enough for all learners because pupils have different abilities and levels of understanding. Level-based tasks, individualized assistance, and small group instruction allow learners to receive support that matches their needs. This finding highlights that inclusion in kindergarten requires instruction that is responsive to each child's learning pace.

Third, engaging strategies and continuous monitoring sustain learning progress. Teachers learned that pupils become more focused and motivated when lessons are interactive, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate. At the same time, continuous monitoring helps teachers immediately adjust their strategies when learners struggle. This shows that effective kindergarten teaching depends on both engagement and assessment.

Overall, the results indicate that managing varied learning paces among kindergarten pupils is a complex classroom responsibility. Teachers must balance the needs of fast and slow learners, prepare differentiated activities, manage behavior, and support learners emotionally. The findings suggest that flexible instruction, child-centered strategies, individualized support, small group teaching, and continuous assessment are essential in creating an inclusive and responsive kindergarten classroom.

Summary

This study focused on the challenges teachers encounter in managing different learning paces among kindergarten pupils, the strategies they employ to address these varied learning needs, and the insights drawn from their classroom practices in handling learner diversity. Below were the summarized key findings.



- 1) The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers encountered challenges in managing different learning paces among pupils, particularly in balancing instruction between fast and slow learners, experiencing heavy demands in instructional planning and classroom management, and facing emotional and behavioral classroom challenges.
- 2) Furthermore, the findings revealed that kindergarten teachers addressed the varied learning paces of their pupils by employing differentiated and flexible instruction, using interactive, child-centered, and engaging teaching strategies, and applying collaborative, supportive, and monitoring-based strategies to ensure learning progress.
- 3) Additionally, the findings revealed that teachers' practices in managing diverse learning paces among kindergarten pupils highlighted that flexibility and responsiveness are essential, differentiated instruction and targeted support ensure inclusive learning, and engaging child-centered strategies combined with continuous monitoring sustain learning progress.

Implications

The findings of the study present several important implications which are beneficial to school heads, and teachers in strengthening instructional practices for diverse kindergarten learners.

- 1) The findings imply that kindergarten teachers require stronger institutional and instructional support to effectively manage diverse learning paces among pupils. The challenges identified, particularly balancing instruction between fast and slow learners, heavy demands in lesson preparation and classroom management, and emotional-behavioral difficulties, suggest the need for reduced workload pressures, provision of adequate teaching materials, and continuous professional development focused on classroom differentiation and behavior management. School leaders and policymakers should consider strengthening support systems such as teaching assistants, structured lesson guides, and manageable class sizes to help teachers sustain effective instruction in diverse classrooms.
- 2) Moreover, the strategies employed by teachers imply that differentiated instruction, child-centered pedagogy, and continuous monitoring should be systematically strengthened and institutionalized in early childhood education practice. Schools should provide regular training on flexible lesson design, interactive teaching methods, and assessment-based instruction to enhance teachers' capacity to respond to varied learner needs. The use of collaborative strategies also suggests the importance of promoting peer learning among pupils and strengthening teacher collaboration through mentoring and sharing of best practices.
- 3) Finally, the insights highlight that flexibility, responsiveness, targeted support, and continuous monitoring are essential principles that should guide kindergarten instruction. This implies that curriculum implementation should allow adaptive pacing and learner-centered approaches rather than rigid instruction. Teachers should be supported in developing reflective practices and data-informed decision-making to continuously improve instruction. Overall, the findings call for a more responsive, inclusive, and well-supported early childhood education system that ensures all learners progress according to their individual learning pace.
- 4) The findings of this study affirm the Differentiated Instruction Theory of Tomlinson (2001, as cited in Langelaan et al., 2024), which emphasized that effective teaching must be responsive to learner differences through the adjustment of content, process, and learning outcomes. As supported by Graham et al. (2021), differentiated instruction has evolved into a mainstream approach that promotes inclusive learning by addressing the varied abilities and needs of students. In relation to the present study, kindergarten teachers consistently employed flexible strategies such as modifying activities, adjusting lesson pacing, and providing varied levels of support to accommodate diverse learning paces among pupils. The findings confirm that differentiated instruction is essential in creating an inclusive and responsive classroom environment where learners can progress at their own pace. Teachers' practices reflect the core principles of the theory, as they tailor instruction to individual needs and ensure meaningful engagement for all learners. This alignment demonstrates that differentiated instruction is not only theoretical but also practically applied in managing diverse learning paces in kindergarten classrooms, thereby supporting optimal learning and reducing learner disengagement.

Future Directions

The findings of the study suggest several meaningful directions for improving instruction for diverse kindergarten learners.

- 1) School heads may strengthen instructional support systems by providing structured programs that assist kindergarten teachers in managing diverse learning paces, including regular training on differentiated instruction, classroom management, and child-centered pedagogy. They may also consider reducing teacher workload through the provision of instructional materials, learning support aides, and manageable class sizes. In addition, fostering a supportive school climate that promotes collaboration, mentoring, and sharing of best practices among teachers may further enhance instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes.
- 2) Kindergarten teachers may continue to enhance their competencies in differentiated instruction, flexible lesson planning, and child-centered teaching strategies to better respond to learners' varying needs. They are encouraged to strengthen the use of formative assessment and continuous monitoring to guide instructional adjustments and ensure learner progress. Furthermore, teachers may engage in reflective practice and professional learning communities to share experiences, refine strategies, and develop more effective approaches in managing diverse learning paces in the classroom.



- 3) Future researchers may conduct similar studies in broader or different educational contexts, such as private schools or other grade levels, to compare findings and expand understanding of diverse learning pace management. Further studies may also explore the perspectives of parents, school heads, or learners themselves to provide a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon. Additionally, quantitative or mixed-method research designs may be used to measure the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies identified in this study and to develop evidence-based interventions for improving inclusive classroom practices.

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