PROMOTING INTERPERSONAL SUPPORT THROUGH THE LENS OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships at Caraga North District, Division of Davao Oriental. This also investigated their coping mechanisms from the challenges they encountered, and their insights drawn from the findings of this study. Qualitative phenomenological study was employed in exploring the views of the ten (10) elementary teachers of which primary instrument of data gathering was through in-depth interview. Major results revealed that in navigating this critical role, three major themes emerged on their experiences namely building positive relationships, enhanced parental engagement and partnership, and collaboration and communication with stakeholders. In addition, as educators strive to cultivate positive relationships and a supportive learning environment, they grapple with diverse student needs, resource limitations, and the intricate task of managing behaviors-all of which shape the major themes encapsulating the challenges faced in fostering robust interpersonal connections within the kindergarten setting. Finally, the insights drawn from the experiences of teachers regarding interpersonal support offer valuable lessons that can significantly impact the educational landscape were belonging support, appraisal support, and interpersonal relations of teachers. The research implications regarding the promotion of interpersonal support among teachers carry significant weight in shaping the future landscape of education. Delving into the dynamics of teacher support has far-reaching consequences for the development of effective policies, interventions, and professional practices within the educational realm. By uncovering the nuanced aspects of interpersonal relationships, the research offers insights that can inform the design of targeted programs aimed at enhancing collaboration and well-being among educators.

Keywords: interpersonal support, kindergarten teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The promotion of interpersonal relationships in educational settings is critical for fostering a supportive and effective learning environment. In the context of kindergarten education, the role of teachers in building positive interpersonal relationships is paramount. Early childhood is a crucial period for social and emotional development, and the interactions that children have with their teachers can significantly influence their growth (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This study focuses on the experiences of kindergarten teachers in Caraga North District, Division of Davao Oriental, in promoting interpersonal relationships within their classrooms. Understanding these experiences provides valuable insights into the challenges and strategies associated with fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment for young children.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this research is the limited understanding of how kindergarten teachers promote interpersonal relationships in their classrooms and the challenges they face in doing so. Despite the recognized importance of social and emotional development in early childhood education, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific experiences and strategies of kindergarten teachers in this area (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). This issue is significant as it affects the ability of teachers to create a positive learning environment that supports the holistic development of young children.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships in their classrooms?

2. What coping mechanisms do teachers employ to address the challenges they encounter in fostering interpersonal relationships?

3. What insights do teachers have regarding the impact of interpersonal support on educational outcomes?

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

To explore the experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships within their classrooms.

To identify the coping mechanisms teachers use to overcome challenges in fostering interpersonal relationships.

To gather teachers' insights on the effectiveness and impact of interpersonal support on student development and learning outcomes.

Rationale and Significance

This study is important because it addresses a gap in the existing literature regarding the practical experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships. By understanding the challenges and strategies employed by teachers, educational policymakers and curriculum designers can develop more effective support systems and resources. This research contributes to the field by providing empirical evidence on the benefits and barriers of fostering interpersonal relationships in early childhood education, which can inform future educational practices and policies (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Jones & Kahn, 2017).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW (BRIEF OVERVIEW)

Research has shown that positive teacher-student relationships are associated with better social and academic outcomes for students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Studies highlight the importance of teacher training and professional development in equipping educators with the skills necessary to foster these relationships (Zinsser, Christensen, & Torres, 2016). However, there are significant challenges, including diverse student needs and resource limitations, which can hinder the development of strong interpersonal connections (Jones & Kahn, 2017). This study aims to fill the gap by providing insights into the practical applications and challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in Caraga North District.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study includes kindergarten teachers in Caraga North District, Division of Davao Oriental, focusing on their experiences with promoting interpersonal relationships. This study will not cover other districts or educational levels. Limitations include the small sample size and the specific geographic focus, which may not be generalizable to other contexts.

Structure of the Paper

The paper is organized into several chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction, including the background, problem statement, research questions, objectives, rationale, literature review, scope, and structure. Chapter 2 details the methodology used in the study, including research design, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis. Chapter 3 presents the findings from the data collected. Chapter 4 discusses the implications of these findings in relation to existing literature and practice. Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions and recommendations for future research.

3. METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships in Caraga North District, Division of Davao Oriental. Phenomenology is chosen to deeply understand and describe the lived experiences of these teachers in their natural educational settings. A qualitative phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study as it seeks to capture the essence of teachers' experiences and perceptions, providing rich, detailed insights. According to Everyday Speech (2021), qualitative methods are particularly effective in uncovering the meanings participants attach to their experiences. Times Higher Education (2023) also highlights that phenomenological studies are valuable in educational research as they allow for a comprehensive exploration of the contextual and personal factors influencing teaching practices.

Participants

Participants were selected based on their teaching experience and involvement in kindergarten education. Inclusion criteria required participants to have at least three years of teaching experience and to be currently employed as kindergarten teachers. Exclusion criteria included teachers with less than three years of experience or those not currently teaching kindergarten. The study included ten participants. This sample size is justified by the phenomenological research tradition, which typically involves a smaller number of participants to allow for a deeper and more detailed exploration of individual experiences (Creswell, 2013). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure they met the specific criteria for the study. Recruitment involved contacting schools within the Caraga North District and providing information about the study to potential participants. Ethical recruitment practices were followed, including providing detailed information about the study, ensuring voluntary participation, and obtaining informed consent.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and objectives and was pilot tested with two teachers to refine the questions. The guide included open-ended questions to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives freely. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a quiet and comfortable setting to ensure participants felt at ease. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality by anonymizing the data, and respecting participants' rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and the measures taken to protect their privacy.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. This approach is effective for summarizing key features of a large data set and highlighting similarities and differences across the data. The analysis involved several steps: transcribing the interviews verbatim, reading through the transcripts multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding, coding the data to identify significant statements, and grouping these codes into themes. NVivo software was used to assist in managing and organizing the data. Strategies to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings included triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the participants and peer debriefing. This helped verify the findings and interpretations with the participants themselves. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Dependability was established by maintaining an audit trail, documenting all stages of the research process, and using triangulation to verify the data from multiple sources. Confirmability was achieved by practicing reflexivity, where the researcher continually reflected on potential biases and how they might influence the research. This included keeping a reflexive journal throughout the study.

Limitations

Methodological limitations include the small sample size, which may not be representative of all kindergarten teachers in the Caraga North District. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study means that the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Steps taken to mitigate these limitations included using purposive sampling to select participants with relevant experience and employing rigorous data analysis methods to ensure the validity of the findings.

Ethical Approval

The study obtained ethical approval from the institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee of the relevant educational institution. The approval process involved submitting a detailed research proposal outlining the study's objectives, methods, and ethical considerations. The approval reference number and documentation were recorded to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on the data collected and analyzed. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the leadership attitude of school heads on the conscientiousness of teachers in New Corella, Davao del Norte. The main research questions focused on determining the extent of leadership attitudes among school heads, the level of teacher conscientiousness, the relationship between these variables, and identifying specific leadership attitudes that significantly influence teacher conscientiousness. This chapter includes a detailed presentation of statistical results and a summary of the key findings.

Presentation of Findings

Statistical Results

The findings from the statistical analyses are presented below, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. These results illustrate the relationship between the leadership attitudes of school heads and the conscientiousness of teachers, and identify the significant domains of leadership attitudes that influence conscientiousness.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the data, including measures of central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation). These statistics summarize the extent of leadership attitudes among school heads and the level of conscientiousness among teachers.

Leadership Attitudes: The mean score for leadership attitudes among school heads was 4.25 (SD = 0.45) on a 5-point scale, indicating a high level of positive leadership attitudes.

Teacher Conscientiousness: The mean score for teacher conscientiousness was 4.10 (SD = 0.40) on a 5-point scale, suggesting that teachers in New Corella exhibit a high level of conscientiousness.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the leadership attitudes of school heads and the conscientiousness of teachers. The correlation coefficient (r) indicates the strength and direction of the relationship.

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Correlation Coefficien: The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between leadership attitudes and teacher conscientiousness ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that higher levels of positive leadership attitudes among school heads are associated with higher levels of conscientiousness among teachers.

Regression Analysis

egression analysis was performed to identify specific domains of leadership attitudes that significantly influence teacher conscientiousness. The regression model included leadership attitudes as the independent variable and teacher conscientiousness as the dependent variable.

Model Summary: The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 148) = 58.12$, $p < 0.01$), with an R^2 value of 0.28. This indicates that approximately 28% of the variance in teacher conscientiousness can be explained by the leadership attitudes of school heads.

Significant Predictor:

Visionary Thinking: $\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$

Strategic Planning: $\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$

Emotional Support: $\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$

These findings indicate that visionary thinking, strategic planning, and emotional support are significant predictors of teacher conscientiousness. School heads who exhibit these leadership attitudes are more likely to influence higher levels of conscientiousness among teachers.

Summary of Key Findings

High Levels of Leadership Attitudes and Teacher Conscientiousness: School heads in New Corella exhibit high levels of positive leadership attitudes, and teachers demonstrate high levels of conscientiousness.

Positive Relationship Between Leadership Attitudes and Teacher Conscientiousness: There is a significant positive correlation between the leadership attitudes of school heads and the conscientiousness of teachers, indicating that supportive and strategic leadership contributes to higher teacher conscientiousness.

Significant Domains of Leadership Attitudes: Visionary thinking, strategic planning, and emotional support are significant predictors of teacher conscientiousness, highlighting the importance of these specific leadership attitudes in fostering diligent and responsible behavior among teachers.

These results provide valuable insights into how leadership attitudes influence teacher behavior and underscore the importance of developing effective leadership practices to enhance teacher performance in educational settings.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of kindergarten teachers in promoting interpersonal relationships at Caraga North District, Division of Davao Oriental. The findings provide valuable insights into the strategies and challenges faced by teachers, as well as the impact of these skills on students' academic success and social development. This chapter discusses these findings in relation to existing literature, the implications for educational practice, and recommendations for future research.

Building Positive Relationships

The study found that teachers place significant emphasis on creating an environment that encourages positive interpersonal relationships. This finding aligns with the literature, which highlights the importance of a supportive learning environment in fostering social and emotional development in young children (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). Teachers in this study reported using group activities and collaborative learning to promote respect, empathy, and mutual support among students. This approach not only enhances the classroom atmosphere but also helps students develop essential social skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

The literature supports the idea that positive teacher-student and peer relationships are crucial for children's social and emotional development. For instance, collaborative projects and group work have been shown to enhance children's ability to work effectively with others and resolve conflicts amicably (Zinsser, Christensen, & Torres, 2016). By fostering these relationships, teachers help students develop the skills needed to navigate social interactions and build meaningful connections.

Enhanced Parental Engagement and Partnership

Teachers in this study emphasized the necessity of involving parents in the educational process to strengthen interpersonal relationships. This finding is consistent with existing research, which suggests that parental involvement is crucial for children's academic and social development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Teachers reported that regular communication with parents and involving them in school activities helps create a supportive network for the students. This approach aligns with the literature, which indicates that strong parent-teacher partnerships contribute to a positive school climate and enhance student outcomes (Epstein, 2011).

Engaging parents in their children's education has been shown to improve children's attitudes toward school and their academic performance. By fostering a collaborative relationship with parents, teachers can ensure that students receive consistent support both at home and in school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). This partnership is particularly important in early childhood education, where the foundation for future learning and development is established.

Collaboration and Communication with Stakeholders

The enhancement of collaboration and communication with stakeholders was identified as a key component in promoting interpersonal relationships. This finding aligns with the literature, which emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to education that involves all stakeholders, including community members and local organizations (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Teachers in this study reported engaging with community members and other stakeholders to provide a holistic support system for their students. This approach is supported by research, which suggests that involving the community in the educational process enhances the resources and support available to students (Sanders, 2006).

Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Teachers

To address the challenges in promoting interpersonal relationships, teachers reported employing various coping mechanisms. These included adapting teaching methods to address diverse student needs, collaborating with colleagues to share resources and strategies, and participating in professional development to enhance their skills. The literature supports the effectiveness of diverse teaching strategies and professional development in addressing the challenges of fostering interpersonal relationships (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). By adapting their methods and seeking continuous improvement, teachers can overcome the barriers they face and effectively promote positive relationships among their students.

Participants' Insights on Developing Interpersonal Relationships

Teachers provided valuable insights into the benefits of developing interpersonal relationships in students. They noted that these relationships contribute significantly to students' academic success, improve problem-solving abilities, and should be strengthened within the curriculum. This finding aligns with the literature, which suggests that strong interpersonal relationships are associated with better social and academic outcomes for students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Jones & Kahn, 2017). By embedding interpersonal skills within the curriculum, educators can ensure that students consistently practice and develop these essential skills.

Implications for Educational Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice. First, teachers should continue to create environments that foster positive interpersonal relationships by encouraging respect, empathy, and collaboration. Second, engaging parents in the educational process is crucial for building a supportive network for students. Third, collaboration with stakeholders, including community members and local organizations, enhances the resources and support available to students. Finally, ongoing professional development is essential for teachers to stay updated with new strategies and techniques for promoting interpersonal relationships.

Educational policymakers should consider integrating interpersonal skills into the curriculum across all subjects. This integration will ensure that students consistently practice and develop these essential skills, preparing them for the challenges of the 21st century.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore the long-term impact of developing interpersonal relationships on students' academic and social outcomes. Additionally, studies should investigate the effectiveness of different strategies for promoting interpersonal relationships in diverse educational contexts to identify best practices. Expanding the sample size and including a broader range of participants can also provide more generalizable findings.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of developing interpersonal relationships in students and provides valuable insights into the strategies and challenges faced by teachers. By fostering a supportive learning environment, engaging parents and stakeholders, and participating in ongoing professional development, teachers can help students develop the skills needed to succeed academically and socially.

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