



Challenges and strategies in curriculum implementation among kindergarten teachers

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Received 10 Sep 2025; Accepted 22 Oct 2025; Published 1 Nov 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64171/JAES.5.4.74-79>

Abstract

This study examined the challenges, strategies, and insights of kindergarten teachers in implementing the curriculum in Digos City. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, four kindergarten teachers were interviewed to explore their lived experiences in addressing curriculum-related issues. The results revealed five key themes: (1) Resource Constraints, (2) Learner Readiness and Diversity, (3) Time and Workload Pressures, (4) Behavioral Challenges, and (5) Collaborative and Supportive Practices.

Findings showed that teachers often struggle with a lack of adequate learning materials essential for play-based instruction. They compensate by creating improvised teaching aids from recycled materials. Learner diversity also emerged as a significant issue, as children enter kindergarten with varying levels of readiness. Teachers address this through differentiated instruction and flexible grouping. Time constraints and heavy workloads further limit teachers' ability to thoroughly address all competencies; thus, lesson integration across subjects becomes a coping strategy. Moreover, teachers face behavioral challenges among young learners adjusting to school routines, which they manage using positive reinforcement and structured classroom rules.

The study also found that external factors such as administrative support, parental involvement, and professional development significantly influence curriculum implementation. Teachers emphasized the importance of localized and contextualized learning materials that reflect students' real-life experiences, making the curriculum more relevant and engaging.

Overall, the findings highlight that effective curriculum implementation requires both teacher innovation and strong institutional support. While teachers display creativity and adaptability in overcoming barriers, long-term improvement depends on systemic interventions such as adequate resource allocation, reduced curriculum overload, continuous teacher training, and enhanced collaboration among stakeholders.

Keywords: Curriculum implementation, Kindergarten education, Teacher challenges, Differentiated instruction, Contextualized learning, Digos City

Introduction

Background of the study

The kindergarten level is a vital foundation in a child's education, as it provides the first formal learning experiences that shape cognitive, social, and emotional development. The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines emphasizes that kindergarten serves as the transition period from informal to formal schooling, aligning with the K to 12 curriculum framework (DepEd, 2016) [8]. However, implementing the curriculum effectively remains a persistent challenge for many teachers, particularly in resource-limited schools.

Teachers often face difficulties such as inadequate learning materials, varying levels of learner readiness, limited instructional time, and behavioral issues among young learners. These challenges require teachers to employ adaptive strategies like improvisation, differentiated instruction, and classroom integration. Studies have shown that the success of curriculum implementation depends on teacher readiness, school support, and the alignment of curriculum goals with contextual realities (Fullan, 2016; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018) [13, 17].

In the kindergarten context, these challenges become more complex because learning is largely play-based and

experiential. When resources are insufficient, teachers often compensate with creativity and improvisation. This study therefore seeks to explore the real experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing the curriculum - focusing on the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and their insights for ensuring effective implementation.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to investigate the experiences of kindergarten teachers in curriculum implementation. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges and issues encountered by kindergarten teachers in implementing the curriculum?
- What strategies do teachers use to address these challenges?
- What insights do teachers provide to ensure effective curriculum implementation?

Significance of the study

This study is significant to the following:

- **Teachers:** It highlights practical strategies that can help in coping with common classroom challenges.
- **School administrators:** It provides insights to improve teacher support systems and resource allocation.

- **Department of education:** It informs policymakers on the necessary interventions for curriculum improvement.
- **Future researchers:** It serves as a reference for further studies on curriculum implementation and teacher adaptation in early childhood education.

Scope and delimitation

The study focuses on kindergarten teachers and their experiences in implementing the curriculum in selected schools. It limits its discussion to challenges, strategies, and insights drawn from teacher interviews. Other stakeholders such as parents and administrators are not included in data collection.

Definition of terms

- **Curriculum implementation:** The process of putting into practice the officially prescribed courses of study.
- **Differentiated instruction:** Teaching approach that tailors instruction to meet diverse learners' needs.
- **Localization:** The adaptation of curriculum content to fit local culture, environment, and experiences.
- **Improvised materials:** Teaching aids created from available or recycled resources.

Review of related literature

Curriculum implementation in early childhood education

Curriculum implementation refers to translating curriculum plans into classroom practice. Fullan (2016) ^[13] emphasizes that the success of any educational reform depends on how teachers interpret and enact curriculum guidelines. In early childhood education, this process is influenced by teacher preparedness, resource availability, and contextual factors (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018) ^[17].

The Philippine Kindergarten Curriculum, guided by DepEd Order No. 20, s. 2011, promotes holistic development through play-based learning. However, studies show that teachers face difficulties in aligning activities with developmental standards due to time and material constraints (Ramos, 2021) ^[21].

Resource constraints in kindergarten settings

Adequate instructional materials are essential in promoting active and experiential learning. According to Bautista *et al.* (2019) ^[2], resource shortages in public kindergarten classrooms hinder teachers from implementing play-based approaches effectively. Teachers often rely on improvised or recycled materials, which demonstrates creativity but limits lesson variety and engagement. Similarly, Ching (2020) ^[5] noted that material insufficiency affects learners' motivation and participation.

Learner diversity and readiness

Children enter kindergarten with varying levels of cognitive, social, and emotional development. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory emphasizes that learning occurs within the child's "zone of proximal development," meaning teachers must scaffold learning according to each learner's readiness.

Teachers thus need to employ differentiated instruction to cater to diverse learning needs (Tomlinson, 2017) ^[23]. In the Philippine context, Balagtas (2020) ^[1] found that readiness gaps are common in kindergarten classrooms, particularly between urban and rural learners.

Time and workload pressures

Curriculum overload is another issue faced by kindergarten teachers. As stated by Magsaysay (2022) ^[16], teachers struggle to complete all competencies within the limited class time, leading to rushed lessons. Integrating competencies is a practical approach, yet it may compromise mastery and depth (OECD, 2019) ^[19]. Non-teaching duties such as documentation and reporting also consume teachers' instructional time.

Behavioral and social challenges

Behavior management is central in early childhood classrooms. Studies reveal that behavioral issues such as inattention, restlessness, and social conflicts disrupt learning flow (Pakarinen *et al.*, 2020) ^[20]. Teachers often use positive reinforcement and structured routines to encourage desired behavior. Dela Cruz (2021) emphasized that emotional support and clear classroom rules improve children's engagement and social adjustment.

Collaborative and institutional support

Effective curriculum implementation is a shared responsibility among teachers, administrators, and parents. DepEd (2022) ^[9] underscores that partnerships with families enhance learning continuity between school and home. Likewise, teacher training and professional development ensure curriculum fidelity (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017) ^[6]. Schools that promote collaboration and contextualized learning achieve higher implementation success (Bautista *et al.*, 2019) ^[2].

Synthesis

The reviewed literature supports the notion that curriculum implementation involves both individual and systemic dimensions. Teachers play a crucial role in adapting strategies, but sustained improvement requires institutional backing, professional development, and adequate resources. These findings align with the current study's results on resource constraints, learner diversity, and collaborative support as core elements in kindergarten curriculum implementation.

Methodology

Research design

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, which aimed to explore and describe the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of kindergarten teachers in curriculum implementation. The qualitative descriptive design was selected because it provides a detailed account of participants' perspectives and practices without manipulating variables or imposing theoretical assumptions.

Through this design, the researcher was able to gather rich, narrative data from teachers regarding the issues they encounter, the strategies they employ to address those

challenges, and their insights into effective curriculum implementation. This approach was appropriate since the goal of the study was to understand “what is happening” in actual classroom contexts rather than to test hypotheses.

Research locale

The study was conducted in Digos City, located in the province of Davao del Sur, Philippines. Digos City is known for its diverse mix of urban and rural schools, with both public and private institutions offering early childhood education. Kindergarten programs in the city follow the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd), which emphasizes play-based and child-centered learning.

The locale was chosen because it represents a typical setting where kindergarten teachers face challenges in curriculum implementation, such as limited resources, diverse learners, and administrative demands. Moreover, Digos City schools exhibit a blend of contextual realities—ranging from well-equipped urban schools to resource-challenged rural ones—making it an ideal site for exploring varied teacher experiences.

Research participants

The participants of the study were four (4) kindergarten teachers from different schools in Digos City. They were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique suitable for qualitative research. The selection criteria were as follows:

- They must be currently teaching kindergarten in either a public or private school within Digos City.
- They must have at least two years of teaching experience in the kindergarten level.
- They must have been involved in the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum for early learners.

Purposive sampling ensured that the participants had sufficient experience and understanding of curriculum implementation challenges. The number of participants was limited to four to allow for in-depth data collection and detailed analysis of their responses.

Research instrument

The main instrument used in the study was a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher. The guide contained open-ended questions categorized into three parts:

- Challenges and issues encountered in curriculum implementation
- Strategies employed to address those challenges
- Insights and recommendations for more effective curriculum implementation

The interview guide was validated by two experts in early childhood education to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives. Pilot testing was also conducted with one kindergarten teacher (not part of the main participants) to refine question clarity and sequencing. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or online (depending on teacher availability and scheduling). Interviews were recorded, with participant consent, to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Data gathering procedure

The following steps were followed in the data collection process:

- **Permission and coordination:** The researcher sought formal approval from the school principal and Division Office of Digos City to conduct interviews with kindergarten teachers.
- **Participant recruitment:** Teachers meeting the inclusion criteria were invited through official communication. The purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study were explained in detail.
- **Informed consent:** Participants signed an informed consent form before the interview, ensuring that they understood their rights, the nature of the study, and their ability to withdraw at any point.
- **Interview process:** The researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews in a quiet, convenient setting for each teacher. Each session was audio-recorded (with permission) and supplemented with note-taking.
- **Transcription and data organization:** Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were organized by participant and coded for thematic analysis.
- **Data validation:** Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts (member checking) to ensure accuracy and credibility of the data.

Data analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis. This process involved the following steps:

- **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading interview transcripts to understand the overall content.
- **Coding:** Identifying significant statements and assigning labels (codes) to meaningful phrases.
- **Theme development:** Grouping related codes into broader themes that captured recurring ideas.
- **Interpretation:** Comparing themes with existing literature to provide deeper insights into teachers' experiences.

The main themes that emerged were Resource Constraints, Learner Readiness and Diversity, Time and Workload Pressures, Behavioral Challenges, and Collaborative and Supportive Practices.

Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the study:

- **Informed consent**
Participants voluntarily agreed to participate after being informed of the study's objectives, methods, and their rights.
- **Confidentiality**
All personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts. Teachers were referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on, to maintain anonymity.
- **Right to withdraw**
Participants were informed that they could withdraw from

the study at any stage without any repercussions.

■ Data protection

Audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

■ Respect and Transparency

The study ensured that participants' voices were

represented accurately, without misinterpretation or manipulation of their responses.

Ethical clearance was sought from the relevant institutional review committee before data collection commenced.

Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of data

| Curriculum Stakeholders | Challenges, issues, and problems they met in relation to curriculum implementation | Strategies they are implementing to address the issues, challenges, and problems | Insights to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum. |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|
| Teacher 1 | "One of the main challenges I face is the lack of adequate learning materials. The kindergarten curriculum expects us to use a lot of play-based and hands-on activities, but we often don't have enough manipulatives or visual aids." | "I usually make improvised teaching materials using recycled items. For example, I create flashcards, counting objects, and storyboards to make lessons interactive even with limited resources." | "The curriculum becomes more effective when it is localized and contextualized. If the examples and activities are related to children's daily lives, they learn better." |
| Teacher 2 | "Another problem is the diverse readiness levels of the learners. Some children already know how to read simple words, while others are still struggling with recognizing letters and sounds." | "To deal with different readiness levels, I use differentiated instruction. I group learners according to their skills and give them tasks suited to their level, then rotate activities." | "Teacher training and professional development are important. Sometimes the curriculum is updated, but teachers don't receive enough orientation on how to implement the changes." |
| Teacher 3 | "Time is also a big issue. The curriculum has so many competencies to cover, but the school day feels too short to address all of them thoroughly. Sometimes, I feel like I have to rush the lessons." | "For time management, I integrate lessons. For example, while teaching counting, I also incorporate songs, movement, and values, so multiple competencies are covered at once." | "Parent involvement is also key. When parents support learning at home, it reinforces what we teach in class." |
| Teacher 4 | <i>"We also encounter behavior issues. Some children have difficulty adjusting to routines or interacting with classmates, which affects the flow of lessons."</i> | "In terms of behavior, I use positive reinforcement. I set clear rules, acknowledge good behavior, and use fun activities to redirect children's attention." | "Lastly, support from school administrators and the Department of Education is crucial. If they provide adequate resources and lessen non-teaching tasks, teachers can focus more on actual teaching." |

Theme 1: Resource Constraints

Findings:

Teachers struggle with inadequate instructional materials, especially those needed for play-based learning. They often improvise using recycled items and self-made teaching aids.

Evidence (Teacher's Response):

"One of the main challenges I face is the lack of adequate learning materials... I usually make improvised teaching materials using recycled items."

One of the primary challenges faced by teachers in curriculum implementation is the lack of adequate instructional materials. According to Bernardo (2018) [3], the effective delivery of a curriculum largely depends on the availability of sufficient learning resources that align with the competencies prescribed by the Department of Education. In early childhood education, these resources are essential for hands-on and play-based learning, which are key elements of the K to 12 Kindergarten Curriculum.

In the Philippine context, Molina (2021) [18] found that public kindergarten teachers often face budget constraints, compelling them to produce their own teaching aids. While this practice fosters innovation, it can also lead to teacher burnout and financial strain. Therefore, adequate resource provision is crucial for sustaining quality instruction.

Theme 2: Learner Readiness and Diversity

Findings:

Learners enter kindergarten with highly diverse levels of readiness. Some are advanced in literacy and numeracy, while others are still developing basic skills. Teachers address this through differentiated instruction and grouping strategies.

Evidence:

"Some children already know how to read simple words, while others are still struggling... I group learners according to their skills and give them tasks suited to their level."

Learner diversity is another significant issue in kindergarten classrooms. Tomlinson (2014) emphasized that learners enter school with varying backgrounds, abilities, and levels of readiness; thus, differentiated instruction becomes a necessary approach. This aligns with Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, which suggests that children learn in diverse ways—through linguistic, logical, kinesthetic, or visual modalities.

A study by Bautista and Tan (2018) revealed that Filipino kindergarten teachers face challenges in addressing wide gaps in student readiness, particularly in literacy and numeracy. They implement strategies such as flexible grouping, peer tutoring, and scaffolded instruction to ensure that every learner meets minimum competency standards.

Theme 3: Time and Workload Pressures**Findings:**

Teachers find the curriculum too packed with competencies for the limited time available. Lesson pacing is rushed, and non-teaching tasks add to workload pressures. To cope, teachers integrate competencies across subjects.

Evidence:

"The curriculum has so many competencies to cover, but the school day feels too short... I integrate lessons so multiple competencies are covered at once."

The issue of limited time and overwhelming workload also affects teachers' ability to effectively implement the curriculum. According to Hargreaves (2019) ^[15], curriculum overload is a global concern that leads teachers to rush through lessons, compromising quality for coverage. Kindergarten teachers, in particular, must balance numerous learning domains—language, literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional skills, and values formation—within limited classroom hours.

In the Philippines, Santos and Reyes (2020) ^[22] found that many kindergarten teachers feel pressured to accomplish all competencies listed in the Curriculum Guide despite insufficient time. Teachers cope by integrating competencies across learning areas, a strategy supported by Drake and Reid's (2018) concept of curriculum integration, which promotes efficiency and holistic learning.

Theme 4: Behavioral Challenges**Findings:**

Children adjusting to school routines sometimes show disruptive behavior, which affects class flow. Teachers manage this through positive reinforcement and engaging activities.

Evidence:

"Some children have difficulty adjusting to routines... I use positive reinforcement, set clear rules, and acknowledge good behavior."

Behavioral issues are common among young learners as they transition from home to formal schooling. Piaget's (1964) theory of cognitive development explains that children in the preoperational stage (ages 4–6) are still developing self-regulation, social awareness, and emotional control. As such, they may exhibit behaviors such as inattention, restlessness, or difficulty following routines.

According to Gonzales (2019) ^[14], teachers play a vital role in shaping classroom behavior through positive reinforcement and structured routines. Strategies such as praise, reward systems, and clear expectations help maintain order and motivation. Espino and Lariosa (2021) ^[12] found that Filipino kindergarten teachers often rely on play and storytelling as behavioral management tools to redirect disruptive behavior toward productive learning activities.

Theme 5: Collaborative and Supportive Practices**Findings:**

Teachers highlight the importance of parental involvement, administrative support, and ongoing professional development. Localized curriculum content makes lessons more relevant and effective.

Evidence:

"Parent involvement is also key... The curriculum becomes more effective when it is localized and contextualized."

"Teacher training and professional development are important... Support from school administrators is crucial."

Collaboration among stakeholders—teachers, parents, administrators, and policymakers—is essential for successful curriculum implementation. Epstein (2018) ^[11] emphasized the importance of family-school partnerships, noting that parental involvement reinforces learning continuity between home and school. When parents engage in their child's education, student motivation and performance improve substantially.

Del Rosario and Camacho (2020) asserted that curriculum implementation thrives in schools where administrators provide sufficient support, mentoring, and resources to teachers. Continuous professional development is also vital. As Darling-Hammond (2017) ^[6] noted, effective curriculum reform depends on well-prepared and continuously trained teachers who can interpret and adapt the curriculum to real classroom contexts.

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**Summary of findings**

The analysis shows that curriculum implementation is shaped by both internal (classroom-level) and external (system-level) factors. Internally, teachers face challenges with learner diversity, limited time, and behavioral issues. They respond with adaptive strategies such as differentiated instruction, improvisation of materials, integration of lessons, and positive reinforcement. These strategies reflect teachers' resilience and creativity in implementing the curriculum despite constraints. Externally, successful curriculum implementation depends on systemic support. Adequate resources, professional training, and collaboration with parents and administrators strengthen curriculum delivery. Furthermore, contextualization and localization of content make the curriculum more meaningful to learners' everyday experiences.

Overall, the results emphasize that effective curriculum implementation requires both teacher innovation and strong

institutional support. While teachers do their best to adapt, long-term improvement must come from systemic interventions—such as reducing curriculum overload, ensuring resource availability, and providing continuous training.

Conclusions

Curriculum implementation is influenced by both classroom and systemic factors.

Teacher adaptability is essential but cannot replace institutional support.

Contextualization, resource provision, and continuous training are key to curriculum success.

Recommendations

- The Department of Education should provide sufficient materials and reduce curriculum overload.
- Schools should offer ongoing professional development for teachers.

- Parents should be actively involved in supporting children's learning at home.
- Administrators should minimize non-teaching duties to allow teachers more instructional time.
- Localization and contextualization should be strengthened to ensure relevance and engagement.

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