

NURTURING YOUNG MINDS: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MALE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN REGION III

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ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological approach explored the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a female-dominated profession within Region III, Central Luzon, Philippines. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Feminist Theory, the study employed a transcendental phenomenological design to delve into how male educators navigated societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and professional challenges. Ten (10) public male kindergarten teachers with at least two years of teaching experience were purposively selected and interviewed using semi-structured guides. Complementary data were collected through classroom observations and informal interviews with parents to triangulate findings. The study revealed six (6) major emergent themes: Unexpected beginnings and growth in passion, Recognition of Early childhood's importance and calling, learning through play, navigating gender expectations, Building emotional and supportive bonds, and emotionally supportive teaching. Despite societal skepticism and limited institutional support, participants demonstrated strong motivation, passion, and a nurturing approach to education. They emphasized the significance of emotional intelligence and inclusive pedagogy like play based learning which contributes to improved student outcomes and classroom dynamics. The study also revealed that fostering positive relationships with learners, colleagues, and parents played a crucial role in creating a more meaningful and successful learning experience. Findings underscored the importance of promoting gender inclusivity in early childhood education, not only to dismantle traditional stereotypes but also to enhance the developmental experiences of young learners. The study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity and diversity, offering practical insights for policymakers, teacher training institutions, and educational leaders to support male teachers in early childhood settings.

Keywords: Male kindergarten teachers, gender stereotypes, early childhood education, lived experiences, professional identity

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the study's basis by giving a thorough rundown of the goals, significance, and research focus. The arrangement of the framework provides a clear grasp of the context of the research, its applicability, and the theoretical foundations that support the study. The following sections are included in the chapter: Background of the study, Problem statement, Review of related literature and studies, Theoretical Framework, Purpose statement, Significance of the study, Scope and Delimitations, Definition of Terms, and Summary.

Background of the Study

The importance of early childhood education cannot be overstated on a global scale because it is directly linked to the future of both the nation and the entire world. Among preschool educators, Male kindergarten teachers is a group that is frequently disregarded. The underrepresentation of male teachers in Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been a persistent issue in many parts of the world. This statement is being supported by An and Noh (2023), who stated that globally, women are over-represented in teaching in the early years of primary school, or the Foundation Phase.

In the study conducted by Cabugsa et al. (2023), they found that male early childhood educators frequently experience a variety of challenges, including: feeling alone in their workplaces; being scrutinized more by parents and coworkers; implicit bias in hiring methods; and doubts about their capacity to provide care. These encounters may impede their ability to advance professionally and add to the general dearth of men in the field. The current study sought to explore these issues in depth, focusing on how male teachers navigate these challenges.

Population gap exists since the ECE is not adequately represented by male teachers. It also included the gap in knowledge that highlights the need for further exploration into the unique lived experiences of male teachers in kindergarten classroom for them to understand how male teachers perceive their impact on student development and how they reconcile their professional identities within the context of societal expectations.

Another aspect that has not been fully explored is the interpersonal dynamics between male teachers, their colleagues, and parents. Male educators in early childhood settings often work in environments where they are outnumbered by female counterparts, which can affect their workplace relationships and professional interactions. Additionally, some parents may express concerns or exhibit biases toward male teachers, leading to a lack of trust or support. Investigating these relational dynamics is crucial for understanding the broader impact of gender diversity in early childhood education and for identifying strategies to foster more inclusive and supportive workplaces.

This study aimed to fill the both the population gap by Robinson (2011) that refers to the issue where certain subpopulations or groups are underrepresented or inadequately studied in existing research evidence for this study its underrepresentation of male teachers in kindergarten and knowledge gap by Jacob (2011) that refers to the absence or lack of research findings on a particular subject. These were addressed by exploring the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers. By examining their personal and professional challenges and experiences, as well as on how they nurture kindergarten learners within the school setting as well as their relationship with the entire school community.

Problem Statement

The underrepresentation of male educators in early childhood education (ECE) presents a critical issue in gender diversity and equality within the education field. While previous research has explored gender biases and stereotypes in ECE, there remains a significant gap in exploring the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, particularly regarding how they navigate underlying societal expectations and professional challenges in the education sector (UNESCO, 2024).

In addition, male teachers are significantly low in number in ECE with fewer than 3% of preschool and kindergarten teachers being men, a proportion that has not improved over decades according to Reeves (2025). Mofokeng (2024) stated that the underrepresentation of male kindergarten teachers can lead to several significant issues. First, reinforcement of gender stereotypes wherein children predominantly see women in nurturing and educational roles, it can reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, suggesting that caregiving is exclusively a female domain. This lack of male presence may limit children's understanding of diverse gender roles. Next is the lack of male role models where male teachers can serve as positive role models, especially for children who may lack male figures in their lives. Also, limited diversity in perspectives and teaching style where gender-balanced teaching staff brings varied perspectives and teaching styles, enriching the learning environment. Male educators may approach classroom management and student interactions differently, offering a broader range of experiences for children. Another is workforce imbalance and bias where the scarcity of male teachers can perpetuate the notion that early childhood education is not a suitable career for men, leading to a lack of diversity in the profession. This imbalance may also discourage men from entering the field due to societal biases and stereotypes. Finally, increased scrutiny and stigmatization of male teachers where they often face heightened scrutiny and suspicion, particularly regarding physical interactions with children. This environment of mistrust can create professional challenges and deter men from pursuing or remaining in early childhood education roles.

Review of Related Literature

The literature review is presented through a thematic literature approach which categorizes the articles and studies both foreign and local into themes that offer a structured approach to identify and analyze patterns and trends across studies and literatures. This approach provides a clear and concise overview that aids the readers to understand the key discussions and developments of the study on the lived experiences of Male Kindergarten Teachers in ECE.

Underrepresentation of Men in Early Childhood Education

Mokofeng (2024) examined the difficulties male early childhood development teachers encountered, emphasizing the ways in which conventional gender norms affect their experiences and acceptance in elementary school. According to the study's findings, male instructors have difficulties because they occasionally feel unworthy in primary school settings and even compare themselves to women because they are a minority. This leads to an inferiority complex. Since they were a male teacher in school, they felt that they were not doing enough to teach the kids and were therefore compelled to use their masculinity because they were given the responsibility of disciplining the kids.

Its analysis of the professional challenges faced by male early childhood development teachers is important because it clarified how the dearth of male ECE teachers contributes to feelings of inadequacy and a changed sense of identity in an educational setting where women predominate.

Based on the findings of Pasiningsih & Pancaningrum (2023), the insights that can improve male involvement and inclusivity in the field of early childhood education is by examining the resilience elements that assist male instructors and aspiring male teachers as minorities. The results revealed a few risk factors that can hinder the development of resilience, including inadequate pay, social rejection, and the public's perception of males who choose ECE. However, their passion for

children, the support of their family, friends, and classmates, as well as religious considerations, are among protective elements that help them remain resilient. This is noteworthy because research identifies the obstacles and enabling elements that affect the resilience of male early childhood educators, which can guide tactics to promote increased male involvement and diversity in the field.

Deng et al. (2023) investigated the difficulties and experiences of male kindergarten teachers in China with the goal of reducing gender discrimination and increasing awareness of their predicament while offering recommendations for enhancing their professional growth and job happiness. The study's main conclusion was that male kindergarten instructors in China experience a number of difficulties, including low job satisfaction and gender discrimination, while offering solutions to enhance their working conditions and future employment opportunities. It emphasized how important it is to comprehend and deal with the difficulties faced by male early childhood educators in China, since doing so improved their job satisfaction and inspired more men to pursue careers in the field.

These studies revealed that male early childhood education teachers face significant challenges related to gender stereotypes, feelings of inadequacy, and low job satisfaction, which together contribute to the limited number of men in the field and underscore the need for targeted strategies to promote inclusivity and support their professional development.

Gender Inequality

Bhana's (2020) research highlighted the main gender-based barriers that male teachers encounter, namely pupils' social unease with men's nurturing conduct. Also, male kindergarten teachers frequently feel limited by stereotypes that present them as strict rather than caring, which makes it difficult for them to build strong bonds with young students. This is indicative of a larger cultural unease with men performing caregiving and emotional support tasks, which is essential to comprehending the environment in which male kindergarten functions. The study's main contribution is the identification of gender-based barriers that male early childhood educators encounter. It highlighted the social unease surrounding men's nurturing behaviors and the influence of stereotypes on their capacity to interact meaningfully with young children.

An & Noh (2023) claimed that male educators are frequently coerced into positions that prioritize discipline over nurturing. Traditional gender norms are frequently reinforced by both coworkers and children, with male teachers occasionally perceived as less competent to offer children emotional assistance. Understanding how men teachers manage their jobs in ECE requires an awareness of the conflict they experience between professional obligations and gender norms in society.

In addition, Bryan (2020) explained how male educators deal with racial biases in addition to gender-based issues. Due to their multiple duties and added cultural demands, Black male teachers are frequently seen as role models for young boys, especially those from similar ethnic origins. Because male ECE teachers face particular difficulties that affect their career paths, Bryan's research emphasized the value of intersectionality in comprehending their lived experiences. This study is significant because it highlighted intersectionality, showing how Black male early childhood educators deal with racial and gender stereotypes that influence their experiences and the expectations society has of them in their positions.

These studies collectively underscore the complex interplay of gender and racial stereotypes that male early childhood educators face, revealing the societal discomfort with nurturing behaviors and the dual expectations that hinder their ability to fully engage in their roles.

Significant Impact of Male Teachers in Early Childhood Education

The study of Arrabis and Fabella (2020) provided direct insight into the professional and personal lives of these male kindergarten instructors by outlining their emotional, social, mental, and lived experiences.

Male teachers' experiences from career exploration to classroom instruction were examined in a study. Finding the factors that motivate people to choose to teach in the field of early childhood education was one of the study's goals. The study's main conclusion is that, despite being a tiny minority, male early childhood educators make a substantial contribution to the field by acting as role models and highlighting the value of play in learning. Their main incentive to stay in the field is the influence they have on the kids they work with. They must make use of their distinct viewpoints and capacity for role modeling, which enhance the educational setting and advance a more inclusive and diverse discourse in early childhood education that emphasizes play as a crucial part of learning. The study's main relevance is the acknowledgment of male early childhood education teachers as essential role models who enhance the sector and emphasize the importance of play in learning. This emphasized the need for more men to be included in this field (Wagner-Roberts's , 2021).

Another study of Xu (2020) et al. examined how male and female educators view gender roles in early childhood education and care environments, emphasizing their knowledge of and difficulties with gender equality and its effects on instructional strategies. Male early childhood educators must play a crucial role in challenging these norms because, despite their recognition of the importance of gender equality, teachers' biological conceptions of gender and their misunderstanding of its fluidity make it difficult for them to adopt gender-flexible pedagogy. In order to improve the development of every child under their supervision, they must create a more flexible and inclusive learning environment that questions strict gender stereotypes and advances gender equality. This study is significant because it highlighted the critical role that male early childhood educators play in promoting gender equality in teaching techniques and opposing strict gender conventions, which in turn helps to create a more welcoming and encouraging learning environment for all children.

Bhana (2022) conducted a comprehensive study that analyzed how there is a gradual change in the gender dynamics in the workplace. Although there are still relatively few male teachers, the study discovered that the necessity for gender diversity in the sector is becoming more widely acknowledged. Male educators describe varying degrees of support and opposition from their peers; some schools embrace diversity, while others continue to uphold traditional gender norms. According to Bhana's research, male kindergarten instructors frequently have to strike a balance between social norms and professional standards, which is essential to comprehending their real-life experiences.

In order to create a more welcoming atmosphere for both instructors and children it is imperative that this study emphasized the changing dynamics of gender diversity in early childhood education as well as the vital roles that male teachers play in overcoming and negotiating cultural preconceptions. This study's main contribution is its examination of the changing gender dynamics

in early childhood education, highlighting the critical role male educators play in dispelling long-held myths and promoting an inclusive and varied learning environment.

All in all, these studies emphasized the critical contributions of male early childhood education teachers in enhancing gender diversity, challenging societal stereotypes, and promoting inclusive teaching practices, thereby enriching the educational experience for all children.

Driving Forces Behind Male Educators' Choice of ECE Degree

In order to promote children's growth and dispel gender stereotypes, male ECE teachers enter the sector, highlighting the importance of having a varied staff of educators. The study's main conclusion is that male ECE teachers are driven to pursue the subject in order to support kids' social and emotional growth and dispel gender stereotypes related to early childhood education. The main contribution of this study to the literature is the proof that male ECE teachers are essential in creating a diverse learning environment, which promotes children's growth and aids in the deconstruction of prevalent gender stereotypes (Reich-Shapiro, 2020).

Mofokeng (2024) examined the difficulties male early childhood educators in South Africa encounter, emphasizing how strict gender norms and expectations prevent them from being accepted and participating in the field. Due to gender preconceptions that restrict their involvement in early childhood education, male ECE teachers in South Africa have major obstacles to acceptability in the field because their roles are frequently restricted to management rather than instruction. It resides in its examination of how inflexible gender norms and expectations restrict male ECE teachers' participation and acceptance in South Africa, highlighting the necessity of more extensive cultural shifts to promote an inclusive learning environment.

Liu & Zhou (2023) explored the viewpoints and experiences of Chinese male preservice teachers who deal with infants, highlighting the necessity of efficient training initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of males in early childhood education. The study's main conclusion is that male preservice teachers' viewpoints and experiences highlight the urgent need for thorough training programs in early childhood education, which can have a big impact on their career decisions and increase their engagement in the area. the proof that creating successful preparation programs that can draw and keep men in early childhood education and eventually promote a more diverse teaching workforce requires an awareness of the viewpoints and experiences of male preservice teachers.

The studies collectively highlighted that while male ECE teachers choose the ECE degree and are motivated to support children's development and challenge gender stereotypes, they face significant barriers and cultural expectations that necessitate the implementation of effective preparation programs and broader societal changes to create a more inclusive and diverse early childhood education workforce.

Male Teachers' Firsthand Experiences in Early Childhood Education

According to the study's findings of Lunadevy and Wiroko (2024), each of the primary participants had a unique perception of the significance of their profession, particularly when it came to psychological significance. All topics may learn how to better understand themselves and their surroundings, as well as what they could do to develop their traits, in the area of meaning-making through work. This study aimed to benefit the school's stakeholders or even their own families in terms of higher good incentives. Results showed that the three primary participants' perceptions of what it meant to be a kindergarten teacher varied widely. It emphasized that early

childhood education programs are supposed to inform the public about the existence of male kindergarten teachers, the government is supposed to show greater gratitude for kindergarten teachers, and male kindergarten teachers should be able to perform better.

Furthermore, based on the article of Dasalla (2025), male kindergarten teachers can provide children with different viewpoints on gender roles and serve as diverse role models. It has been demonstrated that having male educators improves student outcomes. Fathers and male father figures who are actively involved in their children's education have been linked to improved academic performance, improved verbal and problem-solving abilities, improved achievement scores, increased stress and frustration tolerance, positive peer relationships, increased participation in extracurricular activities, and fewer discipline issues. In conclusion, there is no denying the advantages of male role models and instructors in early childhood education.

Understanding the lived experiences and challenges faced by male college students aspiring to become professional elementary teachers, while also identifying factors that encourage their participation in a predominantly female field (Cahapay, 2021). The key finding of this study highlighted that male college students aspiring to become elementary teachers face discouraging stereotypes and feelings of awkwardness in a predominantly female environment, yet they display a strong passion for educating young children and creating inclusive learning spaces. Its exploration of the lived experiences and challenges of male college students pursuing elementary education is its significance to the study, as it sheds light on the barriers they face while highlighting their passion and potential contributions, ultimately informing strategies to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

The exploration of the lived experiences and challenges faced by male educators in early childhood and elementary education reveals both their profound motivations and the societal barriers they encounter, emphasizing the need for greater support and recognition of their roles in the field.

Male Teachers in Early Childhood Development

Dasalla (2025) explored how kindergarten teachers in Ilocos Sur's early childhood care and development lived through the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular emphasis on how male instructors affected the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical requirements of their students. According to the study, male early childhood educators and care providers favorably impact students' psychological and developmental requirements, especially during trying periods like the COVID-19 pandemic. It resides in emphasizing the vital role that male educators play in meeting the many social, emotional, cognitive, and physical demands of young students—especially during the stressful COVID-19 pandemic.

Another study analyzed how kindergarten and daycare teachers' perceptions of social support and emotional intelligence affect their interactions with students, paying special attention to the role that male teachers play in early childhood education. The study's main finding, which emphasizes the critical role male teachers can play in successfully interacting with their children, is that emotional intelligence dramatically improves teacher-child relationships in early childhood education. It resides in its confirmation that developing male teachers' emotional intelligence can improve their interactions with young students, which will ultimately improve the educational experiences of young children in early childhood settings (Ban & Hwang 2024).

Yuk & Liem (2023) examined the connection between the professionalism, emotional expression, and personality of early childhood educators, with a particular focus on evaluating the

influence of these elements on the efficacy of male educators in the field. It showed that early childhood educators' professionalism and emotional expression greatly improve their personality qualities, which can have a favorable impact on how well male educators support young children's development. It resides in its illustration of how improving male teachers' professionalism and emotional expression can result in better personality traits, which will ultimately increase their efficacy in promoting young children's development in early childhood education.

All in all, the studies collectively emphasize that male teachers' positive contributions to early childhood education are significantly enhanced through their professionalism, emotional intelligence, and ability to meet the diverse needs of learners, especially during challenging periods, ultimately enriching the educational experience for young children.

Perspectives of Colleagues, Parents, and Students Towards Male Early Childhood Educators

The study discussed the wide-ranging effects on several stakeholders, such as school administrators and educational officials. The difficulties that have been discovered highlight the necessity of interventions including training in cultural sensitivity and methods to boost parental participation. Insights and coping strategies can be incorporated into teacher preparation programs and used to guide the creation of best practices for family involvement in early childhood education (Tabudlong and Gallardo 2024).

The study of Ossai (2022) examined how different stakeholders in the school system see male teachers. It was discovered that although male educators may be initially admired for their capacity to serve as role models, they frequently encounter mistrust, especially from parents. The survey also underlined that male educators still struggle with social norms and need to make a concerted effort to gain the trust of their parents and peers. This is crucial to comprehending how male kindergarten instructors view and handle their professional relationships.

Matsvange et al. (2021) explored and evaluated how parents, educators, and school officials feel about male teachers' engagement in young children's development, emphasizing both the good and the bad. It demonstrates that, despite remaining social worries and misgivings from parents, female instructors and administrators tend to perceive their engagement more positively, identifying them as qualified, whereas parents have mixed opinions about male teachers in early childhood development. It resides in its capacity to offer insightful information about how parents, educators, and administrators view male participation in early childhood development. This information can be used to guide hiring procedures and assist with projects that aim to increase gender representation and trust in educational environments.

Elisheba, Wambiri, & Begi (2020) investigated how parents in Vihiga Sub-county see the duties of male teachers in preschools and how their age affects these views. It showed that parents' opinions on the role of male preschool teachers are largely unfavorable and heavily impacted by the parents' ages. It resides in its recognition of the unfavorable opinions parents hold about male preschool teachers, especially those impacted by their age, which emphasizes the necessity of focused efforts to inform and alter attitudes toward male educators in early childhood settings.

The studies collectively highlighted that while male teachers are often recognized for their potential as role models in early childhood education, they face skepticism and negative perceptions from parents and other stakeholders, emphasizing the urgent need for initiatives aimed at fostering trust and understanding to improve their acceptance and effectiveness in educational settings.

The reviewed literature highlighted the unique challenges male kindergarten teachers face in a woman-dominated profession. These challenges include societal skepticism, gender stereotypes, and navigating professional roles traditionally associated with women. However, male teachers are also recognized for their positive impact on children's social and emotional development, serving as important role models for young boys. Despite these persistent biases and structural barriers hinder their full integration into early childhood education, revealing a need for gender-sensitive policies and supportive environments.

The literature revealed that male teachers in early childhood education encounter a complex blend of societal expectations and professional challenges. They often struggle with stereotypes that associate caregiving and nurturing with women, which complicates their roles. Additionally, while their presence is valuable in promoting gender diversity, male teachers must continuously negotiate their professional identities. Insightfully, the need for inclusive training programs, policy interventions, and cultural shifts is paramount to fostering an environment where male teachers feel fully accepted and valued in the early childhood education field.

Theoretical Framework

The lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers were well-supported by three (3) main theories: Self-Determination Theory, Social Identity Theory and Critical Theory, specifically the Feminist theory. These theories provided valuable insights into the motivations, perceptions, and challenges faced by male educators in the early childhood education (ECE) field.

Self-Determination Theory

Based on Deci & Ryan (1985), Self-determination theory, SDT states that individuals are motivated by three primary psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT suggests that satisfying an individual's basic psychological needs results in optimal functioning, and that social situations that allow individuals to feel self-determined serve as nutrients for psychological well-being.

This theory was utilized in the study of Liang (2024) where the reasons for the rise in male kindergarten teachers in China were examined. The results indicated that the instructors' "actual self" - who were born in the 1990s - is a major factor in motivating them to teach as they value uniqueness, authenticity, pursuing personal interests, and feeling a sense of purpose. The survey also emphasized how men's interest in early childhood education is expanding due to a variety of factors, including shifting social norms, more prospects for job advancement, social media recognition, and financial considerations.

Another study of Deng et. al (2023) found out the reasons for working in kindergartens, the low job satisfaction of male kindergarten teachers, the discrimination against this group based on gender, and the unique challenges experienced by international teachers in the employment market. Reducing discrimination against male kindergarten teachers in China and raising public awareness of their situation are the goals of this study. The study's recommendations for improving male kindergarten teachers' career advancement and job satisfaction include fostering a healthy social environment, improving their interpersonal skills, and increasing the number of jobs available to them. Although self-determination theory is not specifically mentioned, its emphasis

on experiences, motivation, and job satisfaction may be examined via the prism of this theory, which examines the elements that either support or contradict intrinsic motivation and wellbeing.

This theoretical framework was used to present study to offer a lens to explore the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, particularly regarding their motivation, autonomy, and well-being in a field where they are underrepresented. Given the focus on male kindergarten teachers, SDT helped explain their job satisfaction, professional development and especially in light of gender stereotypes and social marginalization. This theory was particularly relevant to male kindergarten teachers, as it explained their motivations in choosing early childhood education as a career path. Many male teachers find fulfillment in the autonomy of shaping young minds and the competence gained through their teaching experiences. A sense of relatedness is also crucial, as these teachers often seek to foster strong connections with their students, which aligns with their intrinsic motivations to provide nurturing care and positive role modeling.

SDT, while valuable in understanding motivation, had limitations when applied to specific populations or contexts. Research indicated the need to consider its limitations when studying lived experiences, particularly focusing on male kindergarten teachers. While SDT explains motivational factors, there may be specific aspects of the experiences of male kindergarten teachers that SDT does not fully address.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory stated that individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from their membership in social groups (Tajfel et.al, 1979). The theory seeks to explain the cognitive processes and social conditions underlying intergroup behaviors, especially those related to prejudice, bias, and discrimination. It suggested that individuals gain comfort, security, and self-esteem from their group affiliations. Group members often show favoritism toward their own group and may denigrate other groups to protect or enhance their group identity.

According to Zhang et al. (2024), there were several factors that affect the job satisfaction of male kindergarten teachers. The study showed the factors influencing Chinese male kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, job satisfaction is positively impacted by public attitude, pay satisfaction, work pressure, interpersonal relationships, promotion and professional development, and physical work environment. Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between work happiness and organizational commitment, which has implications for early childhood education policymakers, training providers, and the recruitment and retention of male kindergarten teachers.

Another study that utilized this theory showed the experiences of male preschool teachers in Poland with regard to their relationships with parents were investigated in a 2019–2020 study. The purpose of this study was to learn how 18 male preschool teachers view and build relationships with kindergarten parents using narrative interviews. Based on this, a welcoming learning environment for kids is enhanced when male educators actively maintain positive ties with their parents. Social constructivism was used to explain the experiences of males working in kindergartens, emphasizing the value of the physical and social settings in the classroom (Koperna, 2023).

This theory was utilized by the current study to highlight the challenges and experiences of male kindergarten teachers, often overshadowed by gender stereotypes and societal expectations. These teachers face issues like low job satisfaction, recruitment difficulties, and perceptions of their roles within a primarily female profession

Since, Male educators often face societal stigma and questioning regarding their professional choices, which can affect their sense of identity and belonging within educational spaces. This theory underscores the importance of positive social networks and support systems that these teachers may require to navigate their roles effectively and establish their professional identities (Cole et al., 2024).

When examining the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, the shortcomings of Social Identity Theory (SIT) become evident, especially with regard to its limited attention to dynamically changing social contexts and its emphasis on group identity, which may overshadow individual experiences. SIT didn't adequately address issues that male kindergarten instructors face, such as social marginalization and gender norms. These incidents demonstrated the necessity of extending SIT to take gender relations, power dynamics, and the influence of social context on identity development into consideration.

Critical Theory specifically the Feminist theory

In educational research, Feminist theory was under the umbrella of critical theory, which in general have the purpose of destabilizing systems of power and oppression. Some scholars see critical paradigms as extensions of the interpretivist, but there was also an emphasis on oppression and lived experience grounded in subjectivist epistemology. In addition, the core concepts in feminist theory are sex, gender, race, discrimination, equality, difference, and choice. There are systems and structures in place that work against individuals based on these qualities and against equality and equity. Research in critical paradigms requires the belief that, through the exploration of these existing conditions in the current social order, truths can be revealed. More important, however, this exploration can simultaneously build awareness of oppressive systems and create spaces for diverse voices to speak for themselves (Egbert & Sanden, 2020).

Many people mistakenly think that feminist thought is biased toward women and girls and that its fundamental purpose is to further the idea that women are superior than males. In reality, feminist theory has always been about viewing the social world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of equality and justice (Crossman, 2024).

In the article of Adrianly and Yulindrasari (2021), it utilized the same theory because the kindergarten in their country is one of the most gendered spaces that perpetuate the binary between femininities and masculinities. It aimed to have different perspectives from having gender blind to a more gender flexible attitude. It also demonstrates different forms of action in implementing gender flexible pedagogy. The study suggested continuous reflexivity and the possibility of translating gender flexible pedagogy into the local context were essential factors in the said action research.

Despite a wealth of study on gender stereotypes in the teaching profession, studies show that the difficulties faced by male kindergarten teachers have received less attention. In the study of Deng et.al (2023), the framework investigated the experiences of male teachers in an international kindergarten through semi-structured interviews. The findings highlighted the motivations for working in kindergartens, low job satisfaction, gender bias, and special issues experienced by foreign instructors in the employment market.

Feminist theory was applied to the present study to examine the historical, political, and social contexts that shape the experiences of male kindergarten teachers. A feminist perspective helps to explore how societal norms and expectations about gender influence their roles, interactions, and perceptions in early childhood education. Furthermore, the purpose of using a feminist theory as a framework was to enable the discovery of how male kindergarten teachers interact within systems and possibly offer solutions to confront and eradicate oppressive systems and structures. Feminist theory considered the lived experience of any person/people, not just women, with an emphasis on oppression.

When it comes to examining the experiences of male kindergarten instructors, feminist theory had limitations, despite its importance in sports sociology from the late 1970s. When examining men's health-related experiences, some scholars believe a humanistic research approach is superior to feminist research. Applying feminist theory to male experiences can be problematic because it may not fully capture the nuances of their lived realities. Feminist theory may not adequately represent the subtleties of men's lived realities, which makes it difficult when applied to their experiences.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences in nurturing pupils of male public school kindergarten teachers in Region III. The study aimed to capture the perceptions, emotions, social interactions of these teachers within their teaching environment, societal expectations, and professional challenges in early childhood education, with the purpose of providing insights into their professional identities and contributions to the field. At this stage in research, nurturing kindergarten pupils was generally defined as providing a supportive, caring, and developmentally appropriate environment that promotes their emotional, social, physical, and cognitive growth. In essence, nurturing goes beyond teaching—it involves understanding and supporting the whole child.

Specifically, the research sought to address the following sub-problems:

1. What are the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in early childhood education?
2. What are the ways in which male teachers nurture kindergarten learners within the school setting?
3. How do male kindergarten teachers view their relationships with students, parents and colleagues?

This research collected qualitative data from in-depth-interviews to address these questions. The study contributed to a better understanding of gender inclusivity in early childhood education and offered practical recommendations for improving support systems for male educators in the field.

Scope and Delimitation

This study explored the lived experiences of ten (10) male kindergarten teachers who had been teaching for at least two (2) years in public schools in different Schools Division Office within Region III - Central Luzon, Philippines. It included teachers from a variety of provinces within the region such as Pampanga, Bulacan, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Bataan and Zambales. The research was qualitative in nature, employing in-depth interviews to gather detailed narratives and insights. It only focused on the following questions: 1) What are the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in early childhood education?; 2) What are the ways in which male teachers nurture kindergarten learners within the school setting?; and 3) How do male kindergarten teachers view their relationships with students, parents and colleagues? To triangulate the result, the researcher observed the classes and interviewed the parents informally.

The delimitations of the study were the following: it did not cover male teachers from elementary or higher grade levels—only those assigned in kindergarten settings; it was limited to Region III; and did not reflect the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in other regions of the Philippines or abroad. The findings were based on personal narratives and did not aim for generalizability but rather to gain deeper understanding. It did not measure the academic performance or learning outcomes of students, focusing solely on teacher experiences.

Significance of the Study

The field of early childhood education (ECE) is predominantly associated with female educators, a trend that is evident both globally and in the Philippines. Despite efforts to promote gender diversity in various sectors, male participation in early childhood education remains low, with male teachers often facing societal expectations and stereotypes. This underrepresentation of men in ECE raises critical questions about gender roles in teaching, the challenges male educators face, and the impact of their presence in classrooms primarily dominated by women.

The rationale for this study was grounded in the need to explore the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers who are navigating their roles in a female-dominated profession. The profession's gender imbalance presents an opportunity to examine not only the personal and professional challenges these men face but also how they contribute to and perceive their roles in shaping the education and development of young children. With limited research specifically focusing on male teachers in ECE in the Philippine context, this study aims to fill a significant gap in the literature. Specifically, this study directly benefits the following sectors:

Students are given diverse role models with the presence of male school teachers, which can challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote gender equality from an early age. A more gender-diverse teaching workforce can offer a richer educational experience, as children are exposed to a variety of perspectives and teaching styles.

Parents can benefit from a better understanding of the positive impact that male teachers can have on their children's development, challenging any gender biases they might hold.

Male Kindergarten Teachers can allow the development of targeted support systems and advocacy efforts that address the unique challenges faced by male kindergarten teachers, such as gender bias and professional isolation. Furthermore, understanding the gender dynamics at play can help female teachers and administrators identify and challenge any unconscious biases, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive workplace.

School Administrators can use the findings of research to offer valuable insights into gender dynamics within early childhood education. Understanding their challenges—such as

social stigma, isolation, or role misperceptions—can help administrators create more inclusive, supportive school environments. These insights can guide professional development, mentoring programs, and hiring practices that promote gender diversity and a positive workplace culture. Ultimately, this contributes to a richer, more balanced learning experience for young children.

Policy Makers can use the findings of research to highlight the structural and societal barriers that discourage men from entering or remaining in early childhood education. By examining their perspectives, policy makers can develop more equitable education policies, support gender diversity initiatives, and create targeted strategies to recruit and retain male teachers. This helps ensure a more inclusive, representative teaching workforce that reflects broader social values and supports holistic child development.

Future Researchers can use the findings of this research by providing insights into motivations, challenges, and the impact of gender stereotypes, which can improve recruitment, retention, and educational outcomes. Understanding these experiences helps address the underrepresentation of male teachers and the challenges they face, such as microaggressions and social marginalization

Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout the study, the following key terms were defined operationally based on how they were used within the context of this research

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to the formal and informal teaching provided to children from birth to around 6 years old, with a focus in this study on the kindergarten level as defined by the Philippine Department of Education. It includes the educational practices, classroom environment, and developmental approaches used by teachers to prepare children for elementary education.

Gender stereotypes refer to the commonly held beliefs or societal expectations about the roles, traits, and behaviors considered appropriate for men and women. In this study, it specifically relates to assumptions that early childhood teaching is a "feminine" profession and how those beliefs affect male kindergarten teachers.

Lived experiences describes the firsthand, personal accounts of male kindergarten teachers in Region III as they navigate their roles within early childhood education. This includes emotional, professional, and social experiences gathered through qualitative interviews.

Male Kindergarten teachers refer to individuals who identify as male and are currently employed as full-time kindergarten teachers in public within Region III (Central Luzon), teaching two (2) years and above and handling children typically aged 5 to 6 years old.

Professional challenges refer to the difficulties or barriers male kindergarten teachers face in their work, including but not limited to: gender bias, lack of support, limited career growth, and pressure to prove competence in a female-dominated field.

Region III also known as Central Luzon, refers to the geographical area covered in this study, which includes the provinces of Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales.

Societal expectations refer to the perceived roles and responsibilities imposed by society on individuals based on their gender. In this context, it includes the public's views on male teachers working with young children and how these expectations impact their professional identity.

Teacher-Parent relationship refers to the interactions, communication, and rapport between male kindergarten teachers and the parents or guardians of their students. This includes perceptions of trust, cooperation, and any gender-related concerns or biases from parents.

Workplace dynamics refers to the social and professional interactions within the school environment, including relationships with colleagues, administrators, and staff. It explores how male teachers experience inclusion, collaboration, or marginalization in predominantly female settings.

Summary

This study dived into the real-life experiences of male kindergarten teachers in Region III, a field where they are often the minority. It explored the unique challenges they faced -navigating gender stereotypes, overcoming biases, and meeting societal expectations -all while fostering the growth and development of young learners.

Through their stories, they gained insight on how these educators-built relationships with colleagues, interacted with parents, and created meaningful connections with their students. More than just a study, this research sheds light on the joys and struggles of being a male teacher in early childhood education. It aimed to spark conversations about inclusivity, challenge traditional gender norms, and inspire policies that support and encourage more men to pursue careers in nurturing young minds.

2. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research method, research design, sampling criteria, research setting, data collection procedure, data analysis trustworthiness, reflexivity statement, and the considerations.

Research Design

According to Tenny and Brannan (2022), qualitative research was a method that explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors to answer "how" and "why" questions rather than measuring "how many" or "how much". It emphasized understanding the meaning individuals describe to their lived experiences, making it particularly suitable for studying complex, context-dependent social phenomena. This approach gathered rich, detailed data through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, which help captured the nuanced realities of participants.

Using qualitative research in this study was appropriate because it allowed in-depth exploration of teachers' personal and professional contexts, which were often shaped by societal gender norms and occupational challenges unique to the region. Given the small number of male kindergarten teachers and the complexity of their experiences—such as facing gender stereotypes and emotional burdens—qualitative methods provided rich insights that quantitative methods alone might overlook. This allowed researchers to understand how male kindergarten teachers perceived their roles, navigated social expectations, and made meaning of their work within the specific cultural and social environment of Region III.

This study employed descriptive phenomenology, also known as Husserlian or Transcendental Phenomenology Design. According to Rao (2019), Husserl established the foundations of transcendental phenomenology in 1931, and Moustakas converted them into a qualitative approach in 1994. Transcendental phenomenology was focused less on the

interpretations of the researcher and more on the description of the experiences of participants. The researcher sets aside prejudgments, presuppositions, and previous knowledge to understand the essence of the experience. Moustakas's transcendental or psychological phenomenology is more concerned with describing participant experiences than it is with the researcher's views. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on Husserl's idea of epoche, often known as bracketing. The researcher must put aside his experience, to the greatest extent feasible, and must adopt a new viewpoint on the topic being studied in light of the participant's explanation of their lived experience.

Moustakas (1994) stated that finding meaning units that offer both a textual account of the participants' experiences and an imaginative variation detailing how they were experienced was the goal of transcendental phenomenology. This condition was rarely fully attained, but the researcher must be conscious of the necessity of bracketing and focus as much as possible on the participant's account. The term "transcendental" means "in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time."

Seiler (2020) looked at the elements that Motivate people to stick with and continue participating in online mindfulness programs. Ten unconventional Convenience and snowball sampling were used to attract students, followed by deliberate sampling. A focus group, open-ended participant interviews, and a survey were used to gather data. The journal of a researcher was utilized to enclose the researcher's experience and lessen the research's biases. The study's conclusions showed that in online mindfulness programs, a number of characteristics encourage learners to persevere.

The study of Abriol et al. (2022) used a descriptive or transcendental phenomenology design, and had ten kindergarten teachers and ten kindergarten learners' parents as respondents. The survey found that kindergarten students still suffered from separation anxiety and had not acquired fundamental literacy skills, indicating that both parents and teachers believed they were not entirely prepared for kindergarten education in the new educational environment. Through qualitative research, transcendental phenomenology adds new perspectives to the study of human experiences. Because of their abstraction and complexity, its philosophical concepts—such as noema, noesis, noeses, noetic, and epoche—can be difficult to understand and use in a meaningful way.

This was the best design used by the researcher to really explored the unique perspectives of male educators, focusing on how they perceive and respond to gender stereotypes, societal expectations, and workplace dynamics. The researcher wanted to get the actual responses of the participants in which everything was perceived freshly, as if for the first time.

This design was employed by collecting detailed or in-depth descriptions through interviews, the study aimed to identify the essence of their experiences and how these shape their professional identities and interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. This design emphasized the importance of understanding the participants' viewpoints and interpretations rather than imposing preconceived theories. These interviews provided an opportunity for male kindergarten teachers to reflect on their personal journeys, the challenges they encounter, and how they navigated their roles within a female-dominated field. Through this method, the researcher aimed to uncover recurring themes and patterns that highlighted the core elements of their lived experiences.

The design also included a thematic analysis, wherein data from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify common themes and variations across participants' narratives. This process was central to phenomenology, as it seeks to reveal the shared essence of the phenomenon under study while acknowledging the unique aspects of each participant's experience. The phenomenological approach ensured that the voices of male kindergarten teachers were at the forefront, offering rich insights into their challenges and contributions to gender diversity in education.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in Region III, also known as Central Luzon, in the Philippines. This region encompasses seven provinces: Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales. Central Luzon is a vital educational hub, with a mix of urban and rural areas, making it an ideal setting to explore the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in various contexts of early childhood education (ECE). The region was home to a diverse population, providing a unique backdrop for understanding the social and cultural dynamics that influence gender roles in education.

In the context of this study, the focus was on male kindergarten teachers working in public early childhood education institutions across different provinces in Region III. Schools in this region vary in terms of size, resources, and student demographics, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences of male teachers in varying educational environments. Central Luzon has a rich cultural heritage, and the intersection of tradition and modernity in this region offers an interesting lens through which to examine societal expectations and stereotypes related to gender roles in teaching.

Region III presented a valuable setting for studying male kindergarten teachers, given the region's efforts in promoting inclusive education. However, despite these progressive initiatives, early childhood education remained a largely female-dominated field in this region, reflecting broader national and global trends according to an interview last 2024 to Ms. Rose Ibarra a former Regional Kindergarten Supervisor and currently the Curriculum and Learning Management Division (CLMD) Chief of the region. According to her, based on the data of Profiling of Kindergarten Teachers in Region III, there were some divisions that didn't have a male kindergarten teacher and all the remaining divisions would only have a minimal number of male kindergarten teachers compared to females in a ratio of 2 to 10. This disparity provided a critical context for understanding the experiences of male teachers who work in environments where they were often the minority.

By focusing on male ECE teachers in Central Luzon, the study aimed to provide insights that are regionally specific but also contribute to broader discussions on gender diversity in early childhood education across the Philippines. The findings from this region offered useful perspectives for educators and policymakers working to create more inclusive and supportive environments for male teachers in early education settings.

Sample

The participants in this study were ten (10) male kindergarten teachers from public schools of Region III- Central Luzon. It included the Schools Division Office of Angeles, Bataan, Pampanga, Mabalacat, Meycauayan, San Jose City, Tarlac City, Tarlac Province, Olongapo and

Zambales. This targeted approach allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the challenges and contributions of male educators.

The selection criteria were as follows: (a) the teacher must be working in early childhood education settings in public schools; (b) the teacher must be specifically located in Region III of the Philippines; (c) the teachers should have a minimum of two (2) years' experience in the field. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences of male teachers, capturing insights from different career stages and perspectives.

Sampling Procedure

This research utilized the purposive sampling method, a non-probability sampling technique in which the participants were selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Bisht, 2024). In this study, the sample consisted of ten (10) male kindergarten teachers working in early childhood education (ECE) institutions across Region III (Central Luzon), Philippines in public schools. The region's educational institutions were varied, covered both urban and rural settings, ensured diversity in the types of schools and student populations. This sample size was sufficient for phenomenological studies, where the emphasis was on the depth of data rather than breadth. The demographic profile, included age, teaching experience, educational background, and school location, collected as part of the data-gathering process to provide context to their lived experiences. These characteristics helped identify potential factors that influence their experiences and perspectives in the workplace.

The purposive sampling technique was utilized due to the specific criteria required for participants—namely, male kindergarten teachers with at least two years of teaching experience. This criterion ensured that participants have had enough time in the profession to reflect meaningfully on their experiences. However, it is important to note that bias may arise in this sampling method, as certain factors, such as the participants' openness to sharing sensitive information and their personal backgrounds, cannot be controlled. Additionally, the relatively small sample size limited the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of male teachers.

Potential participants were identified by the list provided by the Regional Supervisor in Region III. Professional networks and relevant organizational institutions were contacted in order to form a pool of qualified candidates who meet the established criteria of the study. The candidates were contacted and informed about the study, providing them with detailed information and inviting their willingness to participate. After confirmation, the final selection of participants was made, prioritizing diversity in subject assignments and geographical distribution in order to directly align with the study's objectives.

Upon obtaining informed consent, data collection techniques were applied to gather rich data. In-depth interviews served as the primary technique, capturing participants lived experiences and insights regarding the challenges and experiences that they have had in their respective educational institutions.

The findings were meticulously documented to facilitate a rigorous analysis, employing qualitative techniques to identify similar or recurrent themes and patterns with their responses. This rigorous analysis utilized MAXQDA, allowing for thematic analysis of the transcription of the in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher. This process also allowed the determination of the major emergent themes.

Data Collection Methods

In qualitative research focusing on the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, a combination of data collection methods were recommended to capture the depth and complexity of their experiences. Suitable methodology included in-depth semi-structured interviews and triangulation procedures to enhance the credibility, validity, and reliability of findings using multiple data sources or methods to study a phenomenon comprehensively, such as combined class observation and informal interviews with parents and responses through google forms if parents were unavailable. This approach allowed the researcher to cross-verify data, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding and increasing confidence in the research outcomes.

Phenomenological In-Depth Interviews

The interview process followed a semi-structured format. Interviews were conducted personally to be able to get more detailed responses from the participants. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of male Early Childhood Education teachers while maintaining flexibility in the conversation. The semi-structured interview was utilized and consisted of a set of pre-determined, open-ended questions designed to guide the discussion around specific themes, such as their experiences as a male kindergarten teachers, how they nurture their learners in school setting and their relationship with colleagues and parents.

This format provided the benefit of consistency across interviews, as all participants responded to the same core questions. However, it also allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions based on the participants' responses, encouraging deeper exploration of topics that arise organically. The semi-structured nature of the interview enabled the researcher to adapt to each participant's unique experiences while still ensuring the data collected aligned with the study's objectives.

To ensure the content validity and reliability of the interview guide, it was reviewed by experts in early childhood education and gender studies. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the questions and ensured they were appropriate for exploring the relevant themes with male ECE teachers. A pilot test was conducted following the same qualification of the actual participants in different regions to assess whether the questions were clear and relevant. Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to ensure the interview questions were suitable for the target participants.

The interviews were conducted with the selected participants, allowed for detailed insights into their experiences. The semi-structured format enabled the collection of qualitative data, which then analyzed using thematic analysis. This method identified recurring themes and patterns in the teachers' responses, providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in the ECE field.

Participants' Class Observations

Participant observations allowed the researcher to immerse himself in the setting and experiences of male kindergarten teachers. It was conducted via face-to-face class observation from the beginning till the end of the sessions to investigate complex phenomena within the real-life contexts. This method provided first-hand insights into daily practices, interactions, and the educational environment. Observational data can supplement interview and feedbacking, and responses through google forms from parents

revealing patterns of behavior and contextual factors that influence the male kindergarten teachers' experiences.

Informal Interview/Feedbacking to Parents

Informal interviews with parents were conducted face-to-face after the class observation. The researcher asked how they perceived the male kindergarten teacher of their child, their experiences and how their relationship was. If face-to-face informal interview was not applicable, the researcher sent a google form for the parents to be able to give feedback on the participants.

Data Collection Procedure

Since the coverage of the study were participants in the entire Region III, the researcher requested permission from DepEd Regional Office- III (RO-III) for the approval to conduct the study within the region. He sent the approved documents and communicated with the Regional Kindergarten Supervisor to ask for the official list of Male Kindergarten teachers in the Region. He purposively identified the participants of the study.

Then, he sent an e-mail containing the approved documents from the RO-III to all the Schools Division Office (SDO) where the participants were located. The Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) of the ten (10) SDO of the participants endorsed it to the Division Kindergarten Supervisor and to the School Head then informed the participants.

For the in-depth interview, upon the approval of the participants, the researcher communicated with them and scheduled a face-to-face interview based on their availability. The researcher went to the hometown of each participant to conduct the interview, most of it lasted for an hour. While conducting the interview, the researcher recorded it using his mobile phone and jot down important details in his log book. After the interview, the researcher asked permission to the school heads to conduct class observation to the teacher-participant and scheduled it.

For the scheduled class observation, upon the approval, the researcher revisited the participants and conducted thirty (30) to forty-five (45) minutes class observations using a modified classroom observation tool (*See Appendix E*).

For the informal interview/feedback to parents, it was conducted right after the class observation to those parents who were present in the school and for some that were not available in person, they answered a google form.

Data Analysis

After data collection, analysis was conducted with a focus on thematic content analysis following Moustaka's (1994) process of phenomenological reduction to analyze the data. These following steps outlined his phenomenological model using phenomenological reduction: (a) Bracketing the topic: focus on the participants experience by setting aside the researcher's own biases, judgements or assumptions; (b) Horizontalization: go through the transcripts line by line and highlight significant statements; (c) Reduction and Elimination: remove statements that are not essential; (d) Clustering into Themes: Group similar statements together; (e) Textural Description of the Experience (What was experienced): using the themes and significant statements, write a narrative description of what the participant experienced; (f) Structural Descriptions of the Experience (How it was experienced); analyze the underlying conditions, context, and structures that shaped the experience; and (g) Textural-Structural Synthesis, combine the textural and structural descriptions to write a composite essence of the experience.

The process of analyzing the data involved multiple stages, during the initial phase of data analysis, the researcher read the interview transcripts multiple times and recorded the gist of their

responses on his notes. In the second stage, he returned to the transcripts in order to code the data into emerging themes. Then in the third stage of the analysis the themes were clustered together based on similarities, yielding a structure that was useful for emphasizing ideas about the topic being studied. In the final stage of the analysis, the researcher created a table of themes and quotes to illustrate the lived experiences of the participants. He then identified how each theme can be categorized. The results of the semi-structured interview were supported by data gathered from classroom observation, parents' feedback/informal interview and responses from google forms.

The use of qualitative analysis software facilitated the coding process, enabling researchers to systematically interpret the data and draw meaningful conclusions about the experiences of male kindergarten teachers. To assist in the analysis and organization of qualitative data, the software MAXQDA was utilized. MAXQDA is a powerful qualitative data analysis software that is widely used for coding, sorting, and managing large sets of qualitative data, making it easier for the researcher to conduct systematic thematic analysis.

Its ability to manage complex data sets, particularly interview transcripts, was crucial in ensuring a rigorous analysis process. It was crosschecked using manual coding.

By employing these methodologies and considering ethical implications, researchers effectively studied the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, contributing to a deeper understanding of their roles and challenges within the educational system.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) groundbreaking overview and organizational structure served as the primary focus, with the work of others on trustworthiness was synthesized and then integrated into the mix. They base their assessment of trustworthiness on four broad characteristics which were credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability.

Trustworthiness in this qualitative study was paramount, reflecting the rigorous and truthful nature of qualitative research. It encompassed several key elements, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ensuring trustworthiness was essential for establishing the credibility and reliability of the findings, which were inherently subjective (Ahmed, 2024). In addition, Stahl and King (2020), said that trustworthiness of the research was one of those shared realities, albeit a subjective one, wherein readers and writers might find commonality in their constructive processes.

Extended interactions with participants foster strong connections and enhance credibility through in-depth insights, while reflexivity mitigates biases, ensuring a more objective analysis. Transparent contextual descriptions and thorough sampling procedures improve transferability by allowing findings to be applicable in various settings (Ahmed, 2024).

Credibility. Credibility was the confidence in the 'truth' of the findings. Techniques for establishing credibility were as follows: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy and member-checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In this study it was established by ensuring that the findings genuinely reflect the realities experienced by the participants, which was a critical aspect of qualitative research. To enhance credibility, the researcher engaged in Triangulation that involved using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding like class observation and informal interviews/feedback to parents via face-to-face or google forms, whichever was applicable. Furthermore, triangulation—by integrating various data sources, such as interviews and contextual observations—served to

validate the findings and bolster the overall credibility of the research. Collectively, these strategies ensured that the results accurately capture the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers within the context of early childhood education.

Transferability. Transferability showed that the findings have applicability in other contexts. The technique of doing it was by thick description. It is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people.

In this study this was utilized by providing detailed and nuanced descriptions of the research environment, participants, and methodologies. Transferability referred to the extent to which the findings of a study were applied to other contexts or situations (Ahmed, 2024). In qualitative research, the goal was to present comprehensive accounts that enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar circumstances, thereby enhancing transferability.

By offering rich contextual information, this study allowed other researchers and practitioners to consider how the findings were applicable in different educational settings, particularly regarding the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in diverse contexts.

Dependability. Dependability showed that the findings were consistent and could be repeated. In this study, dependability was established through detailed documentation of the research processes. Dependability referred to the consistency of findings over time, which was achieved by rigorously recording methodologies, data collection techniques, and analysis procedures (Ahmed, 2024). An audit trail was created, providing a comprehensive log of decisions made throughout the research process, allowing for reproducibility and enhancing the reliability of the results. This thorough documentation clarified the research process and strengthened the overall dependability of the findings. By systematically recording each step, from participant selection to data analysis, the study established a transparent framework that others can follow, reinforcing the reliability of the conclusions drawn in the study.

Confirmability. Confirmability was a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study were shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. In this study it was achieved through several methods designed to uphold the impartiality and objectivity of the findings, ensuring they were not influenced by researcher biases. It encompassed the processes that validate the integrity of the data, and the interpretations made from it. To enhance confirmability, methods such as confirmability audit, audit trail, triangulation and reflexivity.

Peer debriefing involved obtaining feedback from colleagues to validate interpretations and counter biases, fostering alternative perspectives on the data. Member checking permits participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the findings, ensuring their experiences are authentically represented. Furthermore, reflexive journaling allowed researchers to document their thoughts, biases, and reflections throughout the research process, promoting transparency and reducing subjectivity. These strategies collectively contribute to the confirmability of the research findings (Ahmed, 2024).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in this study was rooted in the researcher's extensive experience in Early Childhood Education. This background had provided the researcher with firsthand insight into the

lived experiences of Male Kindergarten Teachers, ignited a passion for understanding their implications on teachers' roles and responsibilities. Through interactions and observations, the researcher recognized that these discrepancies were not just operational issues; they were intricately linked to broader educational practices and the professional development of teachers.

Believing that gender significantly affects teachers' quality of teaching and relationship with students and faculty, the researcher aimed to explore the emotional and professional dimensions involved.

Adopting a transcendental phenomenological perspective, the researcher valued the subjective experiences of participants and acknowledged that their background and beliefs influenced the research process. This approach provided an opportunity for meaningful dialogue with participants. By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers, the researcher sought to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of Male Teachers in Kindergarten classrooms ultimately aimed to inform educational practices and policies that support teacher development in Region III.

Ethical Consideration

In this study, according to Bhandari (2024), several ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure respect, protection, and fairness for participants while maintaining research integrity and these are the following.

First, **Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent** wherein participants voluntarily agreed to participate with full understanding of the research purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Given the sensitive nature of lived experience research, informed consent was emphasized to reflect the evolving nature of qualitative studies. They received a clear explanation (written and verbal) and voluntarily signed a consent form indicating their understanding and agreement.

Second, **Confidentiality and Privacy** wherein the researcher safeguarded participants' identities and personal information by maintaining strict confidentiality through methods like anonymization or pseudonymization. Extra care was taken in small or identifiable communities to prevent indirect identification. Used pseudonyms and removed any details that could reveal the identity of the teachers or the schools they work in. Secure all data (recordings, transcripts) with passwords or locked storage and only accessible to the researcher involved in the study.

Third, **Respect for Participants and Cultural Sensitivity** wherein researchers honored and valued participants' perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences, approaching them with humility and awareness of potential biases. Researcher was sensitive to gender-related issues, societal stereotypes, and power dynamics affecting male kindergarten teachers in a largely female-dominated field. Recognized that male teachers in early childhood settings navigated complex social expectations. Used language that was inclusive, respectful, and non-judgmental throughout the research process.

Fourth, **Minimizing Potential for Harm or Respect and Non-maleficence (Do No Harm)** wherein the researcher identified and mitigated any physical, psychological, social, or legal harm risks. This included attending to emotional discomfort arising from discussing lived experiences, managing sensitive topics with care, and having support resources available if needed. Since male kindergarten teachers discussed sensitive topics like gender stereotypes or workplace bias, it ensured that interviews were conducted respectfully, in private, and with emotional sensitivity.

Fifth, **Ethical Data Collection and Analysis Methods** that were ethically sound and appropriate, with transparency on how data were collected and interpreted. Researchers avoid bias and ensure authenticity in presenting participants' experiences, acknowledging limitations and avoiding overgeneralization. Clearly communicated that the purpose was to understand their lived experiences—not to evaluate job performance or report to school administrators.

Finally, **Ethical Use of Findings and Responsible Communication** wherein the reported findings were accurate, honest, and free from plagiarism or misconduct. The researcher communicated results in accessible language, contextualized findings to prevent stigmatization, and respect participant dignity throughout dissemination.

Summary

This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a female-dominated field. The research focused on how these educators navigated societal expectations, gender stereotypes, and their professional roles in early childhood education. A purposive sampling method was used to select 10 male kindergarten teachers from Region III, Philippines. Data were

collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for an in-depth examination of the participants' insights and experiences and participant observations.

The thematic analysis method, supported by MAXQDA software, was used to analyze the data. The software facilitated the organization and coding of interview transcripts, helping to identify recurring themes and patterns that address the research questions.

Furthermore, trustworthiness in this qualitative study was paramount, reflecting the rigorous and truthful nature of qualitative research. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed and nuanced descriptions of the research environment, participants, and methodologies. Dependability was established through detailed documentation of the research processes, and Confirmability was achieved through several methods designed to uphold the impartiality and objectivity of the findings, ensuring they are not influenced by researcher biases. Reflexivity in this study was rooted in the researcher's extensive experience in Early Childhood Education.

The data would be disposed of since it is no longer of value or to meet ethical requirements. The data were destroyed in a way that it is irreversible with no chance of recovery. Paper documents were shredded using an office shredder. Extra care was taken with sensitive or confidential information and a secure paper destruction service bin used. Digital data were destroyed by deleting or overwriting information and recordings, purging magnetic media through degaussing (exposure to a strong magnetic field), or destroying the physical media like flash drives.

3. RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings derived from the data collected through in-depth interviews, class observations, and other relevant sources such as informal interviews with parents, feedback and gathering responses through google forms. It includes the following sections: Operational data collection, Operational data analysis, Participants' Demographic Profile, Discussion and Presentation, Structural Description, Essence and Summary.

Operational Data Collection

The researcher conducted a face-to face interview to the ten (10) identified and qualified participants across Region-III Central Luzon to determine the Lived Experiences of Male Kindergarten Teachers.

The researcher sought permission from the Department of Education (DepEd) Regional Office -III by submitting necessary pertinent documents prior to the conduct of research. Once approved, the approval letter along with other documents were submitted to the Schools Division Office (SDO) where the participants are located, then the Kindergarten Supervisors per SDO were informed and requested the endorsement of the School Principals' and Heads' approval to interview the participants.

A structured transcript questionnaire as a tool of the study was validated by the research adviser and other experts. Necessary suggestions and changes in the tool were incorporated. Next, the researcher conducted a pilot testing of the tool by utilizing it to two (2) male kindergarten teachers in other regions such as in Region IV-A and National Capital Region (NCR). After ensuring that the tool is effective in getting the data needed for the study, it was now administered to the participants.

Before the interview, the participants were given a consent form, informed about the goal of the research and the necessity of their honesty in answering the questions since their responses were the main source of the data. They were also informed about the Data Privacy Act and followed the necessary Ethical Considerations to them as written in the previous Chapter. Upon their approval, the researcher utilized an audio recording to fully document the entire interview process along with taking down notes and asking follow-up questions to clarify the answers of the participants.

Operational Data Analysis

This study employed Descriptive Phenomenology, also known as Husserlian or Transcendental Phenomenology Design based on Hessel's (1931) concepts which Moustakas (1994) turned into qualitative technique.

After the conduct of the interview and gathering the necessary data, it was now transcribed using a software (Turboscribe) and manually reviewed by the researcher via relistening to audio recording again to double check if the transcribed data were accurate. Before analyzing the data, a triangulation method was employed to cross-check the data gathered. For the eight (8) participants, it was conducted through a classroom observation using a modified Classroom Observation Tool (COT) that fitted to the need of the study. Also, informal interviews with the parents of the kindergarten pupils were employed. For one (1) participant classroom observation was not possible due to the location of his school in a far-flung area. He was also teaching in a tribal village where parents did not have access to phones and the internet. That's why they would not answer the google forms, therefore the colleagues and the Teacher-in-charge in his school were the ones who answered the google forms for their feedback. The remaining participant was not observed due to his busy schedule. The parents just answered the google forms for the feedback. Then, the researcher highlights "significant statements," which are phrases or quotations that shed light on the participants' experiences with the subject being studied. Then, the researcher used a powerful software tool (MAXQDA) to assist in analyzing, organizing and interpreting non-numeric data analysis. It helped in managing large volumes of qualitative data, identifying

patterns, and drawing meaningful insights. Also, the gathered data was tabulated to the MS Excel and manually coded, categorized, themed and universally structured for cross checking.

For the manual coding, the transcribed data were organized with noteworthy statement codes, meaning clusters into themes. Then, the universal structure was the participants' shared experiences demonstrating that all experiences had an underlying pattern for the phenomena. The resulting summary of themes and codes were found in the Book of Themes, among these themes there were major emergent themes that arose and interpreted.

For the interpretation part, the six (6) emergent themes were interpreted one by one including their specific codes. Those exact lines and responses of the participants that support or align with the themes and codes were extracted and used as a supporting proof to the themes that arise. It also had literature to support the statements.

Participants' Demographic Profile

Participant 1 was a seasoned Kindergarten teacher from Northville 15 Integrated School under the Schools Division of Angeles City. With 12 years of teaching experience, he currently serves as a Master Teacher I. He holds a Doctor of Education degree and has completed units in Early Childhood Education, reflecting a strong alignment between his academic qualifications and teaching specialization.

Throughout the interview and observed interactions with learners, his passion for teaching young children was evident. P1 said:

"give the best learning experience for young learners especially in their foundational years."

His professional journey was largely shaped by witnessing the profound impact of early childhood education, P1 expressed:

"seeing the smiles on my learners' faces every day is a reward in itself."

He also underscored the unique contribution of male educators in early childhood settings. P1 explained:

"Being a male Kindergarten teacher breaks the stereotype and opens new perspectives in nurturing children,".

His classroom demeanor and engagement with students demonstrated a nurturing and patient approach. P1 remarked:

"In this profession, you don't just teach—you guide, care, and nurture,".

Participant 2, a seasoned Kindergarten educator with almost 12 years of experience, exemplifies a nurturing and student-centered teaching philosophy. His commitment to early childhood education is not only evident in his academic and professional credentials but also in the way he creates a warm, inclusive, and responsive classroom environment.

During the classroom visit, the participant was observed engaging with his pupils through songs, storytelling, and interactive games—strategies that captured the children's attention and promoted holistic development. His demeanor was calm yet enthusiastic, reflecting a deep sense of care and dedication. He approached each child with patience, ensuring that even the shyest learners participated and felt valued.

His interactions were laced with affirming language and encouraging feedback, such as gentle claps, smiles, and verbal praises like "Very good!" and "*Kaya mo 'yan!*" This constant reinforcement fosters self-confidence among his pupils. The physical setup of his classroom also reflected his nurturing style—learning corners were neatly arranged and filled with age-appropriate, colorful materials that stimulate exploration and creativity.

He emphasized the importance of routines and structure, but not at the expense of fun and flexibility. Participant 2 described his teaching as play-based but purposeful, highlighting his belief that nurturing involves balancing care with intentional instruction.

Participant 3 exemplified a deeply nurturing and reflective approach to early childhood education. His classroom environment is structured yet engaging, with colorful visuals and interactive materials that support the holistic development of his learners. During classroom visits, he was observed using gentle, affirming language and maintaining a patient demeanor even in moments of classroom restlessness—traits that reflect a deep understanding of the developmental needs of young children.

He regularly integrates play-based learning, evident in the variety of manipulative materials and learning centers. His interactions are filled with encouragement and positive reinforcement, such as "*Kaya mo 'yan anak!*" and "Good Job" which visibly boost the learners' confidence. He maintains eye-level contact when speaking with the children, emphasizing mutual respect and attentiveness.

In interviews, Participant 3 emphasized the importance of emotional security in the classroom. He shared how he ensures that each child feels "seen and valued" through daily check-ins and personalized greetings. His passion for teaching shines through his statements about striving to be a father figure for his learners—providing not just instruction but also guidance, comfort, and love.

Participant 4 has dedicated over a decade (10 years and 3 months) to the field of early childhood education. Holding a Master of Arts in Education major in Early Childhood Education (academic requirements completed), he currently serves as a Master Teacher I.

His years of service have not only honed his teaching practices but have also deepened his philosophy of nurturing young learners.

During the classroom visit, it became apparent that Participant 4 fosters a learning environment filled with warmth, structure, and attentiveness. His classroom was adorned with colorful and engaging learning materials that encouraged curiosity and independent exploration. He communicated with his pupils in a nurturing tone, frequently offering praise and encouragement. P4 Phrases such as:

"Ang galing mo, subukan pa natin!" ("You did great, let's try some more!") and *"Ano kaya ang kasunod nito? Sige, isipin muna natin."* ("What do you think comes next? Let's think first.")

When asked about his perspective on teaching kindergarten, he shared:

"Importante sa akin na maramdaman ng bata na mahalaga sila sa loob ng silid-aralan." ("It's important to me that each child feels valued inside the classroom.")

This statement reflects his deep commitment to ensuring that every child not only learns but also feels a strong sense of belonging. He further emphasized:

"Kapag nakikita kong natututo sila kahit sa simpleng paraan, doon ako lalo

ginaganahang magturo.” (“When I see them learning, even in the simplest ways, that’s when I feel even more motivated to teach.”)

His nurturing role transcends academics. For him, teaching is a relational endeavor. He remarked:

“Hindi sapat na magturo ka lang ng ABC at Numbers; kailangan mong maramdaman ng bata na nandiyan ka para sa kanila.” (“It’s not enough to just teach ABCs and numbers; the children must feel that you’re truly there for them.”)

This holistic view of teaching reflects his genuine care, patience, and consistency—cornerstones of nurturing young learners. His lived experience reveals a pedagogy rooted in emotional connection, positive reinforcement, and thoughtful scaffolding, creating an environment where children are not only taught but are truly seen and valued.

Participant 5 currently serves as a Teacher III at San Roque Elementary School – Magalang North District under SDO Pampanga. With over ten years of experience teaching kindergarten, he stands out not only for his tenure but also for his academic qualifications, holding a Doctor of Education degree with a specialization in Early Childhood Education. His depth of knowledge and strong commitment to early childhood development were evident throughout both the interview and classroom observation.

During the classroom visit, Participant 5 created a learning atmosphere that was both structured and joyful. He employed a play-based approach that included singing, storytelling, and educational games, effectively keeping the young learners engaged. His teaching style reflected an intentional effort to balance academic instruction with emotional support. The classroom environment was rich in visual stimuli—colorful posters, student artworks, and interactive learning corners—all contributing to an inviting and developmentally appropriate space.

What made Participant 5 particularly noteworthy was his ability to connect with children on an emotional level. He consistently used affirming language, demonstrated patience, and took time to listen to each child’s stories, no matter how repetitive they might be. P5 emphasized:

“Lagi kong pinapakinggan ang kwento nila kahit paulit-ulit, kasi doon mo makikita kung anong mahalaga sa kanila.” (“I always listen to their stories, even if they’re repeated, because that’s how you see what’s important to them.”)

His nurturing presence was further highlighted in his classroom management philosophy. P5 remarked:

“Ang disiplina sa bata, dapat may kasamang pang-unawa at pagmamahal,”
 (“Disciplining a child should come with understanding and love.”)

expressing his view that discipline should be rooted in empathy and care. He avoided punitive approaches and instead guided behavior with kindness and clear expectations.

As a male educator in a field often dominated by women, Participant 5 offered a unique model of positive masculinity. P5 shared:

“Bilang lalaki sa kindergarten, ipinapakita ko sa kanila na ang pagiging maalaga ay hindi lang para sa babae,” (“As a man in kindergarten, I show them that being caring is not just for women.”)

A statement that underscores his role in reshaping gender norms and showing young learners that care and compassion are human qualities—not gender-bound.

His reflections during the interview revealed a deeply held belief in the transformative power of joy in education:

“Kapag ang bata ay masaya, mas madali siyang matuto.” (“When a child is happy, it’s easier for them to learn.”)

For Participant 5, nurturing is not just a teaching strategy—it is the foundation of effective early childhood education.

Participant 6, with over 8 years of kindergarten teaching experience, demonstrates a strong and inspiring presence both in the classroom and the broader school community. Holding a Doctor of Education degree and additional units in Early Childhood Education, his teaching is grounded in deep academic knowledge and a sincere passion for early childhood development. His teacher III designation underscores his competence and professional recognition.

During classroom visits, Participant 6 showed warmth and patience. His interactions with the children were filled with encouragement, gentle redirection, and intentional teaching moments. He emphasized the importance of routine, play-based learning, and emotional support. One notable practice was his use of songs and storytelling to teach values and concepts, helping children grasp lessons in a joyful, memorable way.

“Dapat makuha mo ang loob ng bata para siya ay matuto. Hindi mo siya matuturuan kung hindi ka niya gusto o hindi siya komportable.” (You have to win the child’s trust so they can learn. You can’t teach them if they don’t like you or aren’t comfortable with you.)

This insight reflects his emphasis on building a strong emotional connection with learners—a foundational principle in early childhood education. He believes that learning begins with trust, and his classroom management shows this philosophy in action.

He also mentioned how he regularly communicates with parents, recognizing the critical role of home-school collaboration. He encourages parents to support their children’s learning at home through small, consistent practices like storytelling, identifying colors and shapes during daily activities, and positive reinforcement.

During an opportunity to talk to some parents, they described Participant 6 as caring, hardworking, and like a father inside the classroom. One parent shared:

“Ramdam namin ang malasakit niya. Minsan tatawag siya para lang magbigay ng update o magtanong kung okay lang ang anak namin.”

(We feel his genuine concern. Sometimes he calls just to give an update or ask if our child is doing okay.)

This reinforces how his role extends beyond academics—he is viewed as a mentor and advocate for the children’s overall well-being.

Participant 7, a seasoned Kindergarten teacher with nearly eleven years of service, displays a calm and patient demeanor that immediately resonates in his classroom environment. His background—holding a Master of Arts in Education with completed academic requirements and units in Early Childhood Education—clearly informs his practice. During our interview and classroom observation, it became evident that

Participant 7 is deeply intentional in how he nurtures his young learners, placing emphasis on routine, empathy, and developmentally appropriate instruction.

He sets a warm and welcoming tone from the start of the day, ensuring each child is greeted individually, often by name and with a smile. This simple act, though subtle, reinforces each child’s sense of identity and belonging.

“Mahalaga po sa bata na maramdaman niyang siya ay ligtas at tinatanggap sa klase. Kapag komportable siya, mas madali siyang matututo.”

("It's important for a child to feel safe and accepted in class. When they are comfortable, they learn more easily.")

His classroom management style is built on consistency and kindness. The learning environment is structured yet flexible—giving children the space to explore while maintaining clear expectations. He artfully uses songs, chants, and visual aids to reinforce routines and learning objectives.

During the classroom visit, it was observable how well the students responded to him. There was minimal need for correction, as students appeared self-regulated and engaged. He explained this was a result of slowly building habits with the children.

“Hindi minamadali ang disiplina. Dapat dinadaan sa modeling at paulit-ulit na pagpapakita ng tamang asal.” ("Discipline should not be rushed. It must be modeled and repeatedly shown to the children.")

Another notable strength was his strong rapport with parents. A short but meaningful conversation with a few guardians revealed their deep appreciation for his teaching style. One parent shared:

*“Si Sir *****, parang second parent talaga ng anak ko. Hindi lang siya nagtuturo ng pagbasa at pagsulat, tinuturuan din niya paano maging mabuting bata.”*

("Sir ***** is like a second parent to my child. He doesn't just teach how to read and write; he teaches them how to be good children.")

He maintains open communication with parents through consistent updates and even offers simple parenting tips to help reinforce learning at home. His collaborative approach has helped foster a holistic support system around each learner.

In the interview, he spoke about the need for male role models in the early years, especially for children who may not have consistent father figures.

“May mga batang walang tatay o hindi madalas nakikita ang ama. Sa akin nila nakikita kung paano ang isang lalaking may malasakit.”

("Some children don't have a father or rarely see their dads. Through me, they see a man who shows care.")

With seven years of experience in teaching Kindergarten, **Participant 8** serves as a Teacher III at Tibag Elementary School. He holds a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education, which reflects his solid academic grounding and deep commitment to nurturing early learners.

During our interview session, Participant 8 showed a calm and thoughtful character. He spoke with clarity and conviction, showcasing his genuine passion for early childhood education. He shared insights into his teaching practices with a sense of pride and humility, often emphasizing the importance of play-based learning, child-centered approaches, and the integration of values in daily classroom interactions. His responses were rich with specific examples of how he engages learners through songs, storytelling, and structured routines that promote independence and social skills among young children.

Participant 8's approach is deeply rooted in understanding the developmental needs of his pupils. He highlighted the importance of empathy, patience, and consistency in handling children

at the kindergarten level. His thoughtful reflections during the interview demonstrated a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

The feedback from parents, gathered through Google Forms, echoed the positive impression he made during the interview. Many parents expressed high regard for his ability to connect with their children and create a nurturing learning environment. They appreciated how he fosters not only academic growth but also emotional and social development. Parents noted improvements in their children's confidence, communication skills, and love for learning under his care. One parent mentioned how their child often speaks about "Sir PJ" with admiration, describing classroom activities with enthusiasm and joy.

These testimonials affirm that Participant 8 is not only a competent educator but also a trusted partner in the children's formative years. His professional competence, compassionate approach, and collaborative spirit make him an exemplary model of a male kindergarten teacher who positively impacts young learners and gains the confidence of the school community.

Participant 9 is a relatively new teacher with 3 years of kindergarten teaching experience. He is currently designated as Teacher I at Sapang Biabas Resettlement Elementary School, SDO Mabalacat City. Holding a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education, he represents the younger generation of male Kindergarten educators in the region.

Participant 9, despite being relatively new in the field, demonstrates an evolving yet strong commitment to nurturing the holistic development of his learners. His classroom displays a sense of structure blended with warmth, a testament to his understanding of young children's emotional and cognitive needs. His approach combines play-based learning with clear guidance, offering a safe and engaging environment for exploration and growth.

During the classroom visit, Participant 9 was observed using a gentle tone and approachable behavior, which made his learners comfortable and responsive. He patiently repeated instructions and gave individualized attention to those struggling with tasks. This reflects his attunement to each child's pace of learning—a critical aspect of nurturing in early childhood education.

Though still growing in experience, he has adopted best practices from his academic training, effectively applying strategies learned during his Early Childhood Education degree. His desire to continuously improve and deepen his bond with his students was evident in his reflective comments.

Participant 10, assigned at Nacolcol Integrated School, a far-flung institution within an Indigenous Peoples Education (IPED) community in SDO Zambales, Participant 10 brings a unique energy to his Kindergarten teaching role. With two years of teaching experience and a Bachelor's Degree in General Education, he serves as a Teacher I, navigating the challenges of teaching in an underserved area with enthusiasm and resilience.

During our interview sessions, Participant 10 expressed a profound sense of purpose and empathy in nurturing young learners. His calm behavior and genuine connection with the children were evident in his reflective responses, often highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity and individualized care. His voice carried the weight of both advocacy and compassion as he shared his experiences integrating IPED principles into early childhood education.

Feedback from his colleagues and school heads, collected via online Google Forms, painted a consistent picture of a teacher who is deeply committed and highly regarded within the school community. Many described him as a "natural nurturer," someone who patiently guides learners through early developmental milestones with creativity and care. His ability to adapt

lessons to fit the cultural context of the learners, using storytelling and play-based approaches rooted in the community's heritage, was frequently praised.

Peers also noted that despite being relatively new to the profession, Participant 10 demonstrates maturity and confidence in managing his classroom. His use of local language to connect with learners, combined with a strong grasp of foundational education practices, allows him to bridge educational content with cultural relevance effectively. School heads commended his openness to continuous learning and his positive influence on the school's early education program.

His work in a geographically isolated, multicultural context underscores his flexibility and dedication, making him an essential figure in shaping the early educational experiences of indigenous children. Participant 10 not only nurtures academic skills but also instills a sense of identity and belonging among his young learners.

Discussion and Presentation

This section presented and discussed the findings derived from the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in Region III. Through a rigorous phenomenological analysis, the data was distilled into 72 codes, grouped into 43 categories, and further synthesized into 6 overarching themes. These themes encapsulate the core experiences, challenges, and insights shared by the participants. The discussion integrates these findings with existing literature, including actual statements from the participants highlighting both convergences and unique contributions to understanding the roles, perceptions, and realities faced by male educators in early childhood education.

1. Experiences of Male Kindergarten Teachers in Early Childhood Education

Through in-depth analysis of participants' narratives, the researcher identified two significant emergent themes that encapsulate their professional journeys and personal insights: "Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion" and "Recognition of Early Childhood's Importance and Calling." These themes reflect the teachers' initial entry into the field, their evolving sense of purpose, and their deepening commitment to early childhood education.

Theme 1. Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion

This theme comprised three (3) categories—Entry into the Profession, Motivations and Realizations, and Adaptation and Growth. It explored the often-unplanned pathways through which male educators enter the field of kindergarten teaching, and how they gradually develop a strong sense of commitment and passion for the profession.

Category 1. Entry into the Profession

Many participants described entering kindergarten teaching by chance or through external influence such as parental influence, course availability, and passion for children.

According to Participant 1,

"It is an accident na maging kinder teacher ako. Noon, hindi ko nakita yung sarili ko na maging kindergarten teacher..." ("It was an accident that I became a kindergarten teacher. Before, I never saw myself as someone who would become a kindergarten teacher.") It is a challenging and demanding profession."...L5&6, P208.

Two of the ten participants shared that they had chosen the profession because of parental influence. Participant 3 recalled,

“My parents advised me to choose the path of becoming a teacher. At that moment, I decided to become a preschool teacher.” ...L7&8, P217. Participant 9 also did not like teaching at first, “I just wanted to be in front of a computer because my first choice was IT.”...L10&11, P245. However, his mother, sister, and aunt are all kindergarten teachers which eventually influenced him to follow a similar path.

Participant 5 also described a lack of direction upon entering college, stating, “When I started college, I didn’t know any course. In elementary, there was only one major – preschool. And then eventually, one of my classmates from high school said, let’s try to do education.”...L8&9, P226.

These findings aligned with the study conducted by Wang (2024) which revealed that job security and family members’ wishes were major factors influencing the first career choice of public-funded male kindergarten teachers. Supporting this, Pepito et al. (2024) found that students focus on career outcomes and personal interests when choosing their courses, while external forces like peer and institutional factors being less important suggesting that job opportunities and financial stability, course availability, and perceived career outcomes are important factors in career choices.

Category 2. Motivations and Realizations

Through their teaching experiences, several participants came to realize the intrinsic fulfillment and significance of their role as kindergarten teachers.

Participant 2 recalled that after volunteering in a community-based kindergarten program, he found himself asking,

“Why did I become a Kindergarten teacher? Maybe, I found the love in preschool education.”...L8&9, P212.

For Participants 3 and 9, their passion for children is what inspired and motivated them in their teaching careers. Participant 10 echoed this statement, expressing how his fondness for children became a driving force,

“Siguro yung pagkahilig ko sa bata, yung magiging daan din, nag pag-inspiration ko na ako, sabi ko na parang ako yung magiging simula. Ako yung magiging simula ng pagkamulat nila. Nasa akin ang unang pagkatulong nila, nasa akin ang unang akap, unang pagsulat, unang pagbasa. Parang yung inspiration ko na sa paglaban nito, pag nagawa po ito, siguro naka nakatuwa.” (“Maybe my fondness for children became the path, my inspiration. I thought, it’s like I will be the beginning. I will be the starting point of their awakening. I will be the one to give them their first help, their first hug, their first writing, their first reading. That became my inspiration in this fight—if I succeed in doing this, I think it would be truly fulfilling”)...L24-27, P251.

Kim (2023) studied how motivation and passion influence pre-service early childhood teachers’ perceptions of the profession. The study revealed that altruism and meaningful interactions with children were the most perceived motivations. This supports the idea that when teachers find intrinsic value in their roles, it leads to a more positive and

desirable view of the teaching profession, reinforcing their sense of identity and commitment as educators.

Category 3. Adaptation and Growth

Many participants emphasized their efforts to learn and adjust to the demands of kindergarten education. They described a period of adjustment marked by both personal and professional growth.

Participant 4, for instance, showed a proactive approach pursuing professional growth (graduate studies) with the desire to support his students effectively while teaching at the same time,

“I volunteered at this school for a year and a half. I didn’t know what to do...so I studied to meet the needs of the kids.”...L7-8, 12-13, P221.

Similarly, Participant 6, who held a degree in General Studies with no formal training in Early Child Education, found his teaching journey difficult but very fulfilling.

“I didn’t have a background in ECE. I didn’t expect to become a kindergarten teacher. My first year was difficult because I had zero background. The journey is hard and it’s so difficult but very fulfilling.”...L5-9, P230.

Participant 7 then emphasized a gradual, self-motivated learning journey,

“As a kindergarten teacher, I tried to study. Little by little, I learned how to teacher and love my children.”...L6&8, P236.

Meanwhile, Participant 8, who initially wanted to be an engineer recalled,

“I went to a private school. In my first year, I was not used to it. But as time went by, I became used to it. I said, “It is good to be a teacher.”...L8&9, P242.

According to Armoza-Levi (2023), mental resilience and well-being of kindergarten teachers are important in managing classroom dynamics and responding effectively to children’s emotional and developmental needs. This emphasizes the need for kindergarten teachers to develop social-emotional skills and resilience, reflecting their ongoing learning and adjustment to modern educational demands and changes. Similarly, Lucero (2023) reported that Kindergarten teachers respond to various challenges through coping strategies such as collaboration, stress management, embracing challenges, creating supportive environments, and building school-home partnerships which require continuous learning and professional development.

Theme 2. Recognition of Early Childhood’s Importance and Calling

This theme composed of three (3) categories—Values and Reflections, Personal Experiences, and Belief and Passion. It reflected the participants’ growing appreciation for the role early childhood education plays in laying the foundation for a child’s overall development. Through their interactions with young learners, many have realized that their responsibilities extended beyond delivering lessons – they were helping to mold attitudes, habits, and lifelong learning skills.

Category 1. Values and Reflections

Participants expressed their sense of responsibility in shaping children’s early experiences. Their reflections revealed a commitment to nurturing not only academic skills but also values, confidence, and emotional well-being in young learners.

Participant 1 initially didn’t see himself in the role of a kindergarten teacher but later realized and understood the weight of the responsibility it carried. He shared,

“Sabi ko, okay na ako sa kindergarten na ipagpatuloy ko na ito dahil tayo yung mga

nagmomold sa kanila.” (“I told myself, I’m okay with staying in kindergarten — I’ll continue with this because we are the ones who mold them.”)...L13-14, P208.

Participant 4 recounted his struggle of transitioning from teaching higher grades to working in early childhood education. Despite the challenges, he grew to appreciate its importance, “I also liked the kids. But at first, it was really hard to teach kindergarten... I didn’t know what to do, ...so I study to meet the needs of the kids.”...L11-13, P221.

Similarly, Participant 10 has also revealed that his fondness for children played a major role in his decision to pursue the profession.

“Siguro yung pagkahilig ko sa bata yung naging daan din... Parang ako yung magiging simula.”. (“Maybe my fondness for children is what led me here. It’s like I’m going to be the starting point of their learning.”)...L24&25, P251.

Rafiyya et al. (2024) emphasized the impact that social-emotional development in early childhood has on a child’s overall well-being and success. The study revealed critical policies and strategies to support early childhood development which include early childhood education and care programs, increased family engagement, accessible mental health support, and assessment and monitoring systems, and enhanced professional development and support for educators, all of which contribute to the nurturing of emotional well-being in young learners.

Category 2. Personal Experiences

Some participants shared that their personal experiences—whether through volunteer work, family influence, or unexpected opportunities—played a key role in guiding them toward early childhood education. These experiences made them realize their purpose and a clearer understanding of their calling as kindergarten teachers.

For both Participants 2 and 5, the enjoyment they found in teaching children is what inspired them. Participant 2, who had teaching experience in both kindergarten and secondary levels, reflected,

“When I volunteered as a kindergarten teacher, the joy and fulfillment was different,” ...L19&20, P212, which sparked his interest to continue along that path.

Participant 6 shared that aside from his parents, it was his former students who inspired him further to pursue being a kindergarten teacher. He recalled,

“They (students) would call me, ‘Teacher, I miss you,’ ‘Teacher I hope I can go (back) to Kindergarten again.’”...L15, P230.

Participant 7 described how caring for his nephews and nieces allowed him to apply the same into his teaching practice.

Similarly, Participant 8 recalled his time teaching in a private school where the enjoyment and sweetness of his students inspired and reinforced his passion for teaching at the early childhood level.

Cahapay (2021) revealed in his study that despite the various challenges encountered – ranging from differing personal interests and career aspirations to the persistence of negative stereotypes - participants chose to remain in the field of elementary teacher education because of a shared passion for educating the young. This passion was shaped from the positive educational experiences early in their lives.

Category 3. Belief and Passion

Participants consistently expressed their passion for teaching in the kindergarten setting, often describing it as both joyful and fulfilling. This was evident in their dedication to meeting young children's needs and in the sense of fulfillment they felt while witnessing their students' growth, development, and small everyday achievements.

Participant 3 reflected that his enthusiasm for playful interactions with children inspired him to pursue the profession. He claimed that,

"My passion of being playful with kids and enjoying their company and the biblical relevance of how important the children are is what inspired me to become a kindergarten teacher."...L12&13, P217.

For Participant 6, both his family background and his students serve as his inspiration. With both parents being educators, and former students expressing affirmation and appreciation, he found a deeper sense of purpose. He recalled that his students would call him and would say,

"Teacher, I miss you," "Teacher I hope I can go back to kindergarten again."...L15-16, P230.

Participant 9 initially entered the field through the encouragement of his mother and peer influence who were also pursuing kindergarten education. While he admitted experiencing self-doubt early on, he shared,

"At first, I doubted myself if I could do it... It was okay," ...L25&26, P245 suggesting that his initial uncertainty gave way to acceptance and eventual self-discovery.

The reflections shared by the participants align with the findings of Wang (2024) which highlights that nurturing a strong sense of self-belief and confidence among kindergarten teachers positively impacts classroom dynamics, increasing student engagement, and enhancing overall teaching effectiveness. This underscores how personal commitment and enthusiasm, as demonstrated by the participants, are essential in creating an effective and supportive learning environment for young children.

The researcher found out that these themes reflected how many male educators entered the field unintentionally or due to external influences (e.g., family, course availability), but over time, developed a deep commitment and intrinsic motivation for the profession and how male educators came to appreciate the foundational role they play in children's development and how they embraced their role as both teachers and emotional nurturers. All in all, these findings are evidence of a transformative journey: from reluctant or accidental entry to a strong sense of professional identity and calling. Male kindergarten teachers not only adapt to their roles but also develop deep emotional and pedagogical connections that define their professional growth and purpose.

2. Ways on how male teachers nurture kindergarten learners within the school setting.

Based on the analysis of the participants' shared experiences, two key emergent themes were identified: "Emotionally Supportive Teaching" and "Learning Through Play." These themes highlighted the strategies and approaches male teachers use to create a nurturing atmosphere—fostering emotional security, building meaningful relationships, and promoting holistic development through playful, engaging, and child-centered learning experiences.

Theme 3. Emotionally Supportive Teaching

This theme centers on six (6) key categories that focused on the participants' actions in creating a safe and nurturing emotional environment for kindergarten learners: Individualized Support, Play as Social Development, Validation and Care, Social-Emotional Coaching,

Observation-Based Care, and Mood Assessment Tools. These categories reflect strategies used to understand, guide, and support children's emotional needs within the classroom.

Category 1. Individualized Support

Participants provided personalized attention to students, addressing their individual needs and strengths. This is consistent with some of the participants' responses.

Participant 7 utilized traditional and modern tools. He shared, "Aside from visual aids, we also have technology – technology boards and sometimes play".L118&119, P237.

Similarly, Participant 8 also used play, stating, "After teaching, we just play. When they enjoy it, they become more active."...L76&77, P243.

Additionally, Participant 9 used a combination of strategies like a mix of storytelling, visual aids, role-playing, and songs to make learning fun and engaging. He also ensures that the classroom is welcoming by consistently recognizing positive behavior and by encouraging collaboration.

The idea of giving individualized support to young learners is supported through Reich-Shapiro's (2020) study. The male early childhood teachers that were interviewed talked about how important it is to connect with each child on a personal level. For them, it was not just about teaching content—it was about building a warm and responsive classroom environment where every child feels seen and supported. Wagner-Roberts (2021) also noted that many male teachers in early education showed their dedication by using strategies that catered to each student's unique learning style. Whether through play, careful observation, or adjusting their methods to fit the classroom dynamic, these teachers made it a point to meet their students where they were.

Likewise, in the work of Mokofeng (2024), the teachers shared stories of how they used child-centered approaches—like creative play and tailored classroom activities—to better connect with their learners. They emphasized how paying close attention to children's personalities helped them adjust their teaching in meaningful ways.

Category 2. Play as Social Development

Play is being used by kindergarten teachers to facilitate social interaction and teach children how to engage with others.

As stated by Participant 7,

"In play, kids learn somehow. Kindergarten is play-based." ...L19&21, P237.

This is further supported by the claim of Participant 10 where he uses different strategies for a positive, supportive, and interactive classroom atmosphere.

"Matutuwa sila kapag yung magkakaroon tayo ng paired yung group by group activity, gano'n, mag-explore, meron silang explorations..." ("They enjoy it when there are paired and group activities. They get to explore — they have their own explorations.")...L41-42, P253.

These aligned with the Wagner-Roberts (2021) study where it was found that play serves a meaningful role in early childhood classrooms, not only as a learning method but as a way for children to build relationships and practice important social skills. The participants in this study viewed play as a natural context for children to express themselves, form friendships, and learn how to collaborate with others.

Reich-Shapiro (2020) also described how male educators saw their teaching as deeply rooted in connection and interaction. Through both structured and open-ended play, they were able to support children's development of empathy, communication, and cooperation—skills that are essential for social growth in the early years.

Dasalla's (2025) research further affirms the importance of play in fostering social development. Teachers in this study emphasized how opportunities for exploration and interaction during play created an environment where children could develop a sense of independence while also learning to engage respectfully and meaningfully with their peers.

Category 3. Validation and Care

This focuses on how kindergarten teachers create a safe space where children feel heard, valued, and cared for.

Participant 1 stated he talked to them one by one when there's a problem. Empathy and understanding are needed. He's not just a teacher but also the second parent.

Participant 4's response is also relevant.

"As for the teacher, you really need to encourage them to boost their confidence. It's important for a kindergarten to be patient. You need to understand them." ...L93&94, P222.

Lunadevy and Wiroko (2024), emphasized that male kindergarten teachers often found deep meaning in their work through the emotional connections they formed with their students. Their sense of purpose was rooted in creating a space where children felt seen, safe, and supported—directly echoing the care and empathy described by Participant 1.

Furthermore, Bhana (2020) examined how male teachers in early childhood education manage the balance between care and authority. Their focus on supporting emotional development while also maintaining structure and respect mirrors Participant 4's observation about the importance of patience and confidence-building in early childhood settings.

Category 4. Social-Emotional Coaching

This category shows how teachers guide children in understanding and managing their emotions.

Participant 2 thought that communication was very important. He then shared, "I talk to them in private. When you talk to them, they could share anything that they feel." ...L115 P213.. By talking to them, the participant can also understand the child's behavior in the class.

Also, both Participant 2 and Participant 6 made sure that every child feels valued and heard by talking to them.

"If a student is feeling down or struggling, I take time to talk to them and reassure them," ...L160, P214 said Participant 2.

Mokofeng (2024), emphasized the importance of one-on-one communication in early childhood settings, where male teachers used private discussions to address children's emotional states. This aligned with Participant 2's practice of engaging with students in private, allowing them to express their feelings and understand their behavior better. Through these conversations, teachers build trust and provide emotional coaching that aids in emotional regulation.

Bhana (2020) also explored how male educators guide children's emotional development by actively listening and responding to their emotional needs. By creating a space for children to share their feelings, these educators help young learners understand and manage their emotions, a core aspect of social-emotional coaching seen in Participant 2's and Participant 5's approaches.

Category 5. Observation-based Care

In the classroom, teachers closely observe children's behavior to identify their needs and provide appropriate support.

Participant 3 recalled,

"I listen to their problems. I also act as a father to them. If they need something, I provide it to them. If they need someone to play with, I play with them. I also give them advice whenever they do something wrong." ...L72&73, P218.

Lunadevy and Wiroko (2024) discussed how male kindergarten teachers, particularly in culturally diverse settings, use careful observation to assess the emotional and developmental needs of each child. These teachers tailor their responses based on the unique behaviors and signals children exhibit, much like Participant 3's approach of offering personalized care and guidance based on the child's behavior.

Ossai (2022) also examined how male teachers in early grades in Nigeria monitor and respond to children's behaviors. The teachers in his study closely observed signs of distress or discomfort and intervened with guidance and emotional support, similar to Participant 3's practice of offering advice or play as a form of care when children need it.

Category 6. Mood Assessment Tools

Some of the participants utilized techniques to assess children's emotional states and determine appropriate actions.

Participant 6 recounted,

"I listen to them, encourage them to express their feelings, and teach them how to interact positively with others." ...L202, P233.

Participant 8 also claimed,

"I check in on their mood every day. I talk to them gently when they are upset and provide comfort when needed. I also teach them to express their feelings in words."

Participant 10 have also reflected on his practice,

"Bago simulan ang classes, kapag alam ko po ang bata malungkot at hindi nakikisalamuha, kakausapin ko. Gumagamit ako ng different activity. Tatanungin ko sila kung ano pakiramdam nila sa araw na ito. Kinakausap ko sila para alam ko kung ano ang gagawin ko." ("Before starting classes, if I notice that a child is sad or not interacting with others, I talk to them. I use different activities and ask them how they're feeling that day. I talk to them so I'll know what I need to do.")...L164-166, P253.

Mokofeng (2024), emphasized that male early childhood educators use intentional communication and emotional check-ins to assess the emotional well-being of their students. This includes observing changes in behavior and engaging in conversation to gauge how children feel. Participant 6's focus on listening and encouraging emotional

expression aligns with the strategies described in their study for understanding and addressing children's emotional needs.

Bhana (2020) highlighted how male teachers focus on emotionally supporting children by checking in with them regularly. These teachers understand the importance of early emotional assessments and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly, similar to Participant 8's practice of checking on students' moods daily and providing comfort when they are upset.

Theme 4. Learning Through Play

This theme is captured through ten (10) categories that illustrate how male kindergarten teachers use play to support learning and use it as a fundamental tool for learning and development in kindergarten: Learning as Play, Play as a Universal Language, Play as a Teaching Tool, and Play Enhances Engagement highlight play's role in making learning enjoyable. Holistic Learning, Rules and Freedom in Play, and Self-Directed Discovery emphasize balanced development and autonomy. Tech-Supported Play, Designing Playful Lessons, and Social Learning Through Play show how play is planned, supported by technology, and fosters social growth.

Category 1. Learning as Play

Most participants saw play as an integral part of the learning process, especially in kindergarten. This was supported by the responses of participants:

Participants 3 and 4 have both stated that they always utilize play-based activities. They have respectively stated,

"I always do play-based teaching because children often find it fascinating and engaging," "I always use the play-based activity. I see that kids learn more when they play."...L68, P218.

According to Participant 7,

"In play, kids learn somehow. Kindergarten is play-based." ...L119-121, P237. Moreover, Participants 5, 6 and 8 also employ play in their teaching strategies.

Ossai (2022) emphasized the role of play in early childhood classrooms, noting that male teachers, especially those in early grades, rely heavily on play to facilitate learning. The study found that play-based activities are instrumental in keeping children engaged and helping them grasp educational concepts more effectively, echoing the views expressed by Participants 3, 4, and 7.

Dasalla (2025) highlighted the growing importance of play as a learning tool in early childhood education. In her research, teachers noted that children often learn best through interactive play-based activities, which allow them to engage more deeply with the content. This matches the views of Participants 3 and 4, who feel that play makes learning more engaging and effective.

Category 2. Play as Universal Language

Participants recognized play to connect with children and facilitate understanding.

According to Participant 2,

"If you are having play-based, that's where they all understand each other. That's the language they all understand even though they have different levels of competence." ...L119-121, P213.

In addition, Participant 9 stated

"It's through play that children express themselves and learn effectively." ...L167-168,

P247.

Wagner-Roberts (2021) highlighted how male educators use play to bridge communication gaps, especially in diverse classrooms where children may have varying levels of verbal and social skills.

Lunadevy and Wiroko (2024) also emphasized that children of different backgrounds and abilities find common ground through play-based activities, making it a shared language that promotes understanding and connection. This supports Participant 2's idea that play helps children understand each other, regardless of differences in competence.

Category 3. Play as a Teaching Tool

Most participants used play to teach specific concepts and skills.

As Participant 5 explained,

"It plays a huge role. Through play, children learn important life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity"...L76&77, P227.

This is further supported by Participant 10's statement that play is the most essential in kindergarten.

"Kasi naniniwala ako na ang bata ay mas natututo kapag play-based learning. May mga batang sa una ayaw makisalamuha pero kapag may mga group activities. We play, but we learn." ("Because I believe that children learn better through play-based learning. There are children who, at first, don't want to interact, but when there are group activities, they begin to engage. We play, but we learn.") ...L137&138, P253.

Reich-Shapiro (2020) supported the notion that play is central to teaching in early childhood. In the study, male educators conceptualize their roles through interaction and play, viewing it as the primary tool for engaging children and teaching both academic and social skills. This aligned with Participant 10's belief that children learn better through play-based activities, even when they are initially reluctant to participate in group interactions.

Cahapay (2021) discussed how male teachers perceive play as a teaching method that enhances learning in early childhood education. It highlights how these educators use play to connect with children and teach key concepts, aligning with the statements of Participants 5 and 10 that play is an effective tool for promoting learning and development.

Category 4. Play Enhances Engagement

Teachers found that play captures children's attention and keeps them motivated. This was supported by the participants' statements.

According to Participant 1,

"Kailangan yung activities natin are play-based. Naglalaro sila at natututo at the same time." ("Our activities need to be play-based. They are playing and learning at the same time.") ...L98&99, P209.

Participant 4 reflected,

"Sometimes when I teach the traditional way, I noticed that they don't get excited because their (attention) span is really short," ...L101&102, P222 implying that play has a major effect in the learning of the pupils.

Participant 6 said

"I used play-based learning, group activities, and storytelling to make lessons more engaging and interactive." ...L129&130, P232.

Participant 8 then stated,

“It’s like enjoyment. When they enjoy it, they become more active.” ...L76, P243.

Wagner-Roberts (2021) showed that male early childhood teachers recognize the benefits of play in capturing children’s attention, sustaining their interest, and increasing their participation in the learning process. Play enhances child engagement by tapping into natural curiosity and enthusiasm. Teachers in the study mentioned that children remain engaged for longer periods during play-based lessons than during traditional, more passive forms of teaching. This aligns well with Participant 6’s use of play-based learning to make lessons engaging and interactive.

Category 5. Holistic Learning

Participants use varied techniques to promote children’s physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Participant 1 stated that assessment comes first.

“We need to start by assessing the weaknesses and strengths of our learners. *Alam natin kung saan tayo magpo-focus. Alam natin yung mga activities natin for their holistic development.*” (“We need to start by assessing the weaknesses and strengths of our learners. This helps us know where to focus. It guides us in planning activities for their holistic development.”) ...L87-88 & 90, P209.

According to both Participants 3 and 8, they cater students’ cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development to meet the needs of the learners. Participant 3 further explained,

“It’s through integrating a differentiated teaching approach so we can satisfy the learners’ educational demand.” ...L65-66, P218.

Both Participant 7 and Participant 10 utilize ECCD to assess the students’ needs and materials to provide.

Wagner-Roberts’ study acknowledged the importance of assessing children’s individual needs in various developmental domains—cognitive, physical, emotional, and social. These teachers emphasize the necessity of using a multifaceted approach to education that includes assessing children’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as providing tailored learning experiences that cater to their developmental needs. This aligns with Participant 1’s statement that assessment is the first step in understanding children’s needs, which helps in creating activities that promote their holistic development. The study reinforces that assessing children’s progress across different areas ensures that teaching strategies can be adapted to meet all developmental needs.

Category 6. Rules and Freedom in Play

Participants balance structured play with opportunities for free exploration.

Participant 6 shared

“*Magulo po talaga mag-conduct ng play-based learning lalo na po kung wala po kayong rules sa classroom. Yung rules ko po is, tatlo lang naman, stop, look, and listen.*” (“It’s really chaotic to conduct play-based learning, especially if there are no rules in the classroom. My rules are simple: just three — stop, look, and listen.”) ...L130-132, P232.

Participant 10 further described that child would find it more fun if teachers would employ activities where students are given the chance to explore.

Mofokeng (2024) study discusses how male teachers use structured play to promote learning while maintaining a balance between freedom and rules. Teachers recognize that play is

a vital part of early childhood education, but they emphasize the need to have some rules to create a safe environment. Teachers use flexible guidelines that encourage free exploration but ensure that children are engaged in purposeful learning. Mofokeng's study highlights that freedom during play enhances creativity, but teachers also enforce rules to ensure that children understand boundaries and appropriate behavior. This study supports Participant 6's view that having rules such as

"stop, look, and listen" ...L131-132, P232 is important to maintain order during play. Mofokeng highlights how rules help guide play while still allowing freedom for children to explore and learn on their own.

Category 7. Self-directed Discovery

Most participants encourage children to learn through their own play experiences.

This was supported by the observation of Participant 2 where the learning of his students extends beyond the classroom, specifically during experimentation. He shared,

"We do experimentations in concepts related to Science. I saw how interested the kids were." ...L106&109, P213.

According to Participant 7, he employed guided exploration where students discover spaces themselves.

"I tour the kids. Show them the principal's office, the library, the clinic," ...L108, P237 a form of guided exploration.

According to Liu and Zou (2020) male teachers fostered student independence by offering exploratory activities where children can make their own decisions and learn through hands-on experiences. The study underscores the importance of guiding children through activities that allow for experimentation and personal reflection, which in turn promotes the development of independent learning and curiosity. Liu and Zou's findings connect with Participant 2's focus on experimentations and the exploration of scientific concepts. The study suggests that these types of hands-on, self-directed activities are essential in cultivating a child's curiosity, much like Participant 2's strategy of fostering learning beyond the classroom through exploration.

Category 8. Tech-supported Play

Aside from the conventional teaching strategies, several participants utilize and incorporate technology into their classes.

Participant 3 revealed,

"I use interactive apps like Lumi, wherein I am able to craft mini games. It is a really great way to catch their attention and help them stay focused for a long period of time." ...L68-70, P218.

This is further supported by Participant 7,

"Aside from visual aids, we also have technology. I use technology boards." ...L118, P237.

Mokofeng (2024), study highlighted how teachers use interactive digital tools and learning apps to support both play-based learning and cognitive development. By integrating technology, teachers are able to cater to different learning styles, engage students with interactive content, and create fun, immersive educational experiences that hold the students' attention. This study supports Participant 3's use of interactive apps and mini games to maintain student focus.

The use of technology to support play-based learning is in line with Participant 7's integration of technology boards to enhance engagement through modern tools.

Bhana et al. (2020) also revealed that teachers are using digital resources, such as educational apps and interactive technology, to make learning more interactive and engaging. The integration of technology allowed for greater flexibility in teaching, creating a dynamic environment where children can interact with both traditional and digital learning materials. The study's findings were consistent with Participant 3's use of interactive apps like Lumi to enhance student engagement. Similarly, Participant 7's use of technology boards aligns with the study's observation that technology enhances engagement and provides a more dynamic learning experience.

Category 9. Designing Playful Lessons

Like any other educators, kindergarten teachers carefully planned activities that were both educational and fun.

Participant 1 claimed that most of the learners are active and playful, thus, the need to integrate fun activities. He added,

"Kailangan yung activities natin are play-based. Kasi yun yung gusto ng mga learners natin. Naglalaro sila at natututo sila at the same time." ("Our activities need to be play-based because that's what our learners enjoy. They play and learn at the same time.") ...L98&99, P209.

"I incorporate interactive activities, play-based learning, and storytelling. I also use positive reinforcement to build their confidence," ...L70-71, P227, said Participant 5.

Participant 9 have also shared,

"I design learning experiences that look like play to them, such as educational games and hands-on activities." ...L166-167, P247.

Dasalla (2025) study described that play-based learning is a crucial method for teachers to facilitate not only cognitive development but also social and emotional growth in children. Teachers in this study emphasized creating playful learning environments where structured play and interactive games were integrated into the lesson plans to support students' curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This design was found to engage children and allow them to learn in an enjoyable, less formal environment.

In addition, Liu & Zou's (2020) study emphasized that male preservice teachers often design their lessons with a focus on interactive learning and play-based activities. This points to the importance of engaging children through games, creative activities, and storytelling to help young learners grasp educational content in a fun and accessible way. The findings are reflected in Participant 5's use of interactive activities, play-based learning, and storytelling as methods to enhance engagement.

Category 10. Social Learning Through Play

Teachers used play to promote cooperation, communication, and other social skills.

Participant 4 stated,

"One of the things I focus on is the play-based environment. It's a factor that the

classroom is good,” ...L79-80& 84, P222, this implied that play-based set up encourages children to interact and build confidence. He added,

“If your instruction is more on play, they will develop their social skills and emotional skills.” ..L92&93, P222.

Moreover, this was also supported by Participant 5,

“Through play, children learn important life skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity.” ...L76, P227.

Participant 9 said,

“I facilitate group activities that promote sharing and turn-taking... resolve issues in a peaceful and respectful way.”...L238, P248.

Participant 10 also shared that he encourages paired and by group activities, allowing students to explore.

“May mga bata sa una ayaw makisalamuha pero kapag may group activities, nakikisalamuha na sila.” (“There are children who, at first, don’t want to interact, but when there are group activities, they start to engage.”) ...L137-138, P253.

Bhana et al. (2020) emphasized the role of play-based interactions in helping children develop key social competencies like sharing, communication, and teamwork. The research highlighted those men in early childhood education often use playful, cooperative activities to model positive social behaviors, encouraging children to resolve conflicts, cooperate, and communicate effectively with peers. The findings directly related to Participant 4’s statement about using play-based environments to encourage social interaction and confidence-building. The emphasis on teamwork and communication in the study also supports Participant 5’s assertion that play fosters teamwork, problem-solving, and creativity among children. Additionally, the study’s focus on group activities resonates

with Participant 9’s and Participant 10’s experiences of using group work to promote socialization and conflict resolution.

The researcher found out that Male teachers are redefining the care role in early childhood education, integrating emotional sensitivity, individualized attention, and psychological insight. They are active nurturers, not passive instructors, challenging gendered assumptions in teaching. Male teachers do not just “allow” play—they engineer it as a teaching strategy. Their pedagogical approach treats play as a form of language, socialization, therapy, and instruction. It reflects a sophisticated understanding of child development. Collectively, male kindergarten teachers play dual roles: they are both emotional caregivers and creative facilitators of learning. Their methods are grounded in empathy, responsiveness, and innovation. These men: Challenge gender norms by embracing nurturing roles traditionally associated with women. Also, they demonstrate emotional intelligence and adaptive pedagogy, often built from personal, observational, and experiential insights and finally, they use play not just as fun, but as an intentional educational strategy that integrates academic learning with emotional and social development. In doing so, they show that male educators are not only capable, but uniquely positioned to support young learners through meaningful relationships and engaging learning environments.

3. Relationship of male kindergarten teachers with students, parents and colleagues.

This section explored the relationships male kindergarten teachers build within the school community—specifically with students, parents, and colleagues. From the data, two key themes

emerged: “Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds” and “Navigating Gender Expectations.” These themes reflected how male teachers established trust and connection in their interactions while also managing the unique perceptions and challenges tied to their gender in a predominantly female field.

Theme 5: Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds

This theme explored how male kindergarten teachers foster strong relationships through ten (10) categories: Teacher as a Role Model, Teacher as a Father Figure, and Emotional Support emphasize guidance and care. Professional Boundaries and Collaborative Teaching highlight the balance between maintaining roles and teamwork. Categories like Holistic Development, Teacher Reputation, Positive Feedback and Development, Support and Recognition, and Mutual Support and Learning reflect how teachers promote growth and strengthen connections within the school community.

Category 1: Teacher as a Role Model

In this category, male teachers acted as role models who influence students' behaviors and attitudes. Their leadership, emotional maturity, and responsibility are key to shaping how students perceive themselves and others, especially in a predominantly female profession (Pasiningsih & Pancaningrum, 2023; Bhana, 2020).

P7 shared, "Maybe I was able to break their perception that male kindergarten teachers are incapable? I was able to prove to them that it doesn't mean that the kinder teacher is male, he can't be a good teacher." ...L283-285, P240.

This illustrated the teacher's role in challenging stereotypes and serving as a positive example for both students and colleagues. By proving his competence and dedication, he shows that male teachers can excel in early childhood education, defying societal expectations (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

Category 2. Teacher as a Father Figure

This category highlighted how male educators take on roles that resemble a father figure, offering both academic and emotional guidance. They provided students with a sense of protection, security, and support, much like a father would in a family setting (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

P4 said, "I take care of them at home and in my classroom as a kindergarten teacher. It's natural to take care of the kids. But it's natural for the kids to trust you as a father and a brother." ...L158-159, P223.

This quote emphasized the nurturing aspect of being a male teacher in early childhood education (Bhana, 2022). The teacher acknowledges that his role goes beyond teaching to include providing emotional support, much like a father figure would do (Cahapay, 2021; Reich-Shapiro, 2020).

P6 mentioned, "I follow up on their current events at home or in their life. I talk to them." ...L224, P233.

This further illustrated the nurturing aspect of the teacher's role. By taking the time to follow up with students about their personal lives, the teacher ensures that they feel supported both in and out of the classroom.

Category 3. Professional Boundaries

Maintaining professional boundaries is crucial for male teachers in early childhood education. They must find the right balance between being approachable and maintaining authority to ensure mutual respect in the classroom (Mokofeng, 2024).

P6 remarked, "There's a higher expectation. You're being seen. There's a lot of things you shouldn't do.. it's like they're waiting for you to make a mistake"..L272-273, P234..

This quote highlighted the pressure that male teachers face in ensuring they adhere to professional boundaries, as their behavior is scrutinized more closely due to their gender in a predominantly female field (Bhana, 2020). There is a fine line between being approachable and maintaining the respect necessary to preserve authority in the classroom. Male teachers must strike a balance between being supportive and ensuring they maintain respect and professionalism in the classroom. This balance is necessary for creating a positive, effective learning environment.

P5 explained, "*Siguro, ano yan, yan talagang male teacher talaga yan, hanggang meron palang issue sa male teacher... pero nasa sayo how to handle it.*" ("Maybe, you know, that's really a male teacher, especially since there's an issue involving a male teacher... but it's up to you how to handle it.") L164-165 & 167, P228.

This reflected the challenge of navigating societal perceptions about male teachers. The quote showed how a male teacher must manage external perceptions and maintain professionalism to ensure respect from both students and colleagues (Pasiningsih & Pancaningrum, 2023).

Category 4. Collaborative Teaching

Collaborative teaching highlighted the importance of teamwork within the school environment. Male teachers often work closely with their colleagues to share best practices, improve teaching methods, and ensure that students receive a well-rounded education (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

P2 shared, "You are an effective kindergarten teacher not because you are a male kindergarten teacher or a female teacher but because you are making sure that the students in the classroom, they experience what a kindergartener should experience." ...L228-229, P215.

This speaks to the teacher's collaborative mindset, emphasizing that gender is secondary to the commitment to fostering an effective learning experience. It shows that working with colleagues and being effective in the classroom is about shared dedication and goals, rather than personal characteristics like gender (Bhana, 2022).

Category 5. Emotional Support

This category focused on how male teachers offer emotional support, not only to their students but also to their colleagues. They contributed to a positive and nurturing school environment through their care and concern.

P8 explained, "I make them feel that they are safe with me. That they can tell anything from me without hesitations. I love them genuinely." ...L104&105, P243.

This showed how emotional support goes beyond just teaching; it's about creating an environment where students feel valued, heard, and cared for. The teacher's genuine affection for his students creates a foundation of trust (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2022). Male teachers' ability to provide emotional support plays a crucial role in fostering a nurturing classroom atmosphere,

benefiting not just students but also colleagues who share in the emotionally supportive environment.

Category 6. Holistic Development

Male teachers contributed to their students' holistic development, supporting both their academic and personal growth to ensure they are well-rounded individuals (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2022).

P10 shared, "When I teach, I show that to them. I help them to change their stereotypes.

And to show that there should be no gender bias." ...L248-249, P254-260.

This highlighted the role male teachers play in shaping students' understanding of the world and helping them grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially, emphasizing the importance of breaking stereotypes to foster inclusive growth (Cahapay, 2021).

Category 7. Teacher Reputation

The reputation of male teachers was largely built on the foundation of care, trust, and respect. Positive relationships with students and colleagues contribute to a teacher's credibility and influence in the school community (Bhana, 2020; Mofokeng, 2024).

P7 said, "I was able to prove to them that it doesn't mean that the kinder teacher is male, he can't be a good teacher. I showed that to the students." ...L245-246, P239.

This demonstrated how male teachers build trust and a positive reputation by showing their capabilities and dedication, thus earning the respect of their students and peers (Bhana, 2020; Yuk & Lim, 2023).

Category 8. Positive Feedback and Development

Feedback played a crucial role in the development of male teachers. Positive feedback allows them to refine their teaching methods, helping them grow professionally while also benefiting their students' learning experiences (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

P9 mentioned, "But when you show them what you've got eventually you'll gain their trust and everything will go smoothly." ...L274-275, P249.

This speaks to the importance of trust and feedback, where male teachers' efforts are validated and appreciated, helping them improve their practices (Pasiningsih & Pancaningrum, 2023). Additionally, ongoing professional development helps male teachers enhance their skills and stay current with the latest teaching strategies, ensuring that they continue to provide high-quality education (Wagner-Roberts, 2021).

P6 shared, "We go out, we run, we play dodgeball... we even play P.E. outdoor. That's what we look forward to playing with the kids." ...L278-279, P234.

This quote reflects how male teachers not only engage in professional development but also invest time in activities that promote physical, emotional, and social growth, reinforcing their role as holistic educators (Culhane et al., 2019; Reich-Shapiro, 2020).

Category 9. Support and Recognition

Male teachers often received validation and recognition from their peers and administrators, which helps them continue to thrive professionally and contribute meaningfully to the school community (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

P4 mentioned, "I can prove that we can also do that because we can prove that when \ there are Search for Best Kindergarten Implementer in the Region, most of the time we get the title." ...L210-211, P224.

This highlights the recognition that male teachers earn for their hard work and dedication, reinforcing their professional standing within the school (Reich-Shapiro, 2020).

Category 10. Mutual Support and Learning

Teaching is a reciprocal process. Both male teachers and their students learn from each other, creating an environment of continuous growth and development for everyone involved (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

P2 shared, "The students in the classroom they experience what a kindergartener should experience which is happiness in the classroom and learning." ...L230, P215.

This quote emphasized the mutual learning that occurred when male teachers create an environment of happiness and growth, benefiting both themselves and their students (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020). These explanations and the accompanying quotations demonstrate the multifaceted roles male teachers play in fostering a supportive and nurturing educational environment.

Theme 6. Navigating Gender Expectations

This theme reflected how male kindergarten teachers manage societal and professional perceptions. Categories such as Societal Perception and Acceptance, First Impressions and Adjustment, and Gendered Expectations show initial challenges, while Overcoming Gender Bias, Changing Perceptions, and Promoting Gender Equality highlight efforts to break stereotypes. Teacher as a Father Figure and Teacher Perception further illustrate evolving roles and identities in a female-dominated field.

Category 1. Societal Perception and Acceptance

Societal Perception and Acceptance focused on how male teachers are initially perceived by society and how this perception changes over time.

Participant 3 shared: "When I started, people would question why I chose this path.

'Shouldn't you be teaching older kids?' ...L128, P219 they'd ask. "It was hard to convince them that I could offer what the students need." .L128-129, P219.

This quotation illustrates the societal skepticism male teachers often face when entering early childhood education. The assumption that only women are fit to teach young children is a clear reflection of deeply ingrained gender stereotypes (Mokofeng, 2024). Participant 3 had to challenge these preconceptions and assert his capabilities, not just as an educator but as someone who could effectively contribute to the development of young children. The questioning of his choice reflects the broader societal expectation that men should avoid fields that require perceived nurturing qualities.

As Participant 4 reflected:

"It took a few months, but eventually, my students started seeing me as their teacher, not just 'the man teacher.' It felt like a breakthrough when they finally trusted me."...L168&169, P223.

This quote emphasized the shift from gender-based expectations to a more nuanced understanding of the teacher's role. Over time, students learned to view the male teacher as an educator first, recognizing his skills and nurturing abilities rather than being focused solely on his gender. This transition marks the slow but steady process of acceptance and normalization in society, where male teachers are recognized for their professional contributions rather than their gender (Bhana, 2020).

Category 2. First Impressions and Adjustment

Male teachers often face initial reactions of fear or wariness from students, particularly due to traditional associations of masculinity with authority or distance (Bhana, 2020). Participant 1 explained:

"When I first started, I noticed some of the younger students were afraid of me. I wasn't sure if it was because I was a man or because I was new. But it was clear I had to adjust and build trust."...L137&138, P210.

This quote speaks to the initial challenge male teachers face: students may be afraid of them not just because of their gender but because they are unfamiliar figures in early childhood education (Deng et al., 2024). Participant 1 recognized the need for

adjustment—proving to students that they are a trustworthy and caring figure, despite the initial fear (Mokofeng, 2024).

Category 3. Teacher as a Father Figure

The role of male teachers as Father Figures in the classroom is vital for emotional security and positive connections with students.

Participant 3 shared: "I try to be that protective and caring figure for my students. It's important for me to show them they can rely on me, just like they would a father."

L146&147, P210. This statement emphasizes the nurturing role male teachers adopt, one that goes beyond typical authority. By positioning themselves as father figures, male teachers offer students not only guidance but also a sense of security and emotional care, which is essential in early childhood development (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020). Male teachers are often tasked with balancing societal expectations of masculinity with the emotional needs of their students, but they play a crucial role in shaping positive teacher-student relationships (Mofokeng, 2024).

Category 4. Teacher Perception

The category of Teacher Perception explored how male teachers are viewed by their students and colleagues, with a focus on the influence of gender on engagement, attendance, and overall classroom dynamics. Male teachers often experience unique challenges regarding how they are perceived, which can shape their ability to connect with students. According to Bhana (2020), male teachers face societal discomfort and gender

based expectations that complicate their professional relationships, particularly in early childhood settings.

Participant 1 stated: "At first, the students were a bit hesitant around me. I think they were unsure of how to approach me because they weren't used to having a male teacher in the class."...L117&118, P209. This quote highlights the initial discomfort that male teachers often face, as students may not have previous experiences with male educators in early childhood settings (Mokofeng, 2024). It reflects the subtle but important influence of gender on teacher-student relationships.

Participant 2 also shared: "I had to work harder to build rapport with the students. They initially thought I was just a substitute teacher because it's so rare to have a male in this role." L191&192, P215.

This quote underscores how gender influences perceptions of authority and legitimacy. Male teachers are sometimes viewed as temporary or out of place, which adds an extra layer of difficulty to building trust and rapport with students. Bhana (2020), note that such stereotypes contribute to a perception of male teachers as outsiders in early childhood education, further complicating their ability to establish their role as permanent educators.

Category 5. Gendered Expectations

Gendered Expectations explored the pressures and limitations male teachers experience because of societal views on masculinity. These pressures can dictate how male teachers are expected to behave and perform in the classroom, often leading to higher expectations and scrutiny (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

Participant 3 reflected: "I feel like there's an added pressure on me to show that I'm competent and capable in this field. Sometimes, it feels like I have to do more just to be accepted."...L130&131, P219.

This statement revealed the subtle but pervasive expectations placed on male teachers. While their competence is often assumed to be tied to their gender, they still feel the pressure to prove themselves repeatedly, especially in a profession traditionally seen as more suited for women (Bhana, 2022).

Participant 8 shared: "I think society expects men to be more authoritative. So when I first started teaching, I tried to assert more control, but I realized it wasn't necessary. \ The kids just needed to know I cared." ...L46&47, P242.

This quote underscores how societal expectations shape male teachers' approaches to classroom management. The assumption that men must be more authoritative can lead to initial misunderstandings in how to connect with students, as they focus more on asserting control rather than nurturing (Bhana, 2020).

Category 6. Overcoming Gender Bias

Overcoming Gender Bias examined how male teachers work to confront and challenge the biases against them in early childhood education. These biases often manifest in the form of stereotypes about their ability to be nurturing, competent, and emotionally available for young students.

Participant 7 explained: "There's always this underlying assumption that I'm not as nurturing as a female teacher. But I think it's important to show that my gender doesn't define my ability to connect with the kids." ...L282-283, P240.

This quotation highlights the challenge of overcoming stereotypes about nurturing, which are often unfairly applied to male teachers. The participant emphasizes the need to break down these stereotypes through actions and interactions with students, demonstrating that care and competence are not gendered traits.

Participant 8 shared: "I try to challenge those stereotypes by being present and engaged. I don't just sit back and let the kids do their thing. I'm actively involved, just like any teacher should be." ...L42&43, P242.

This statement emphasizes the proactive role male teachers take in challenging gendered assumptions. By engaging with students and showing commitment to their educational growth, male teachers can work to overcome gender biases that question their nurturing capacity.

Category 7. Changing Perceptions

The category of Changing Perceptions reflects the gradual shift in how male teachers are perceived by their students, colleagues, and society. As male teachers continue to perform their roles effectively, their gendered perceptions evolve, leading to a broader acceptance of male educators in traditionally female-dominated fields (Bhana, 2020).

Participant 9 shared: "At first, parents were skeptical. They wondered if I could connect with their kids. But over time, as they saw how well the children responded to me, their perceptions started to shift". ...L246-247, P248.

This quote highlights the transformation in parental perception. Initially, parents may have had reservations about a male teacher in early childhood education, but as they witnessed his ability to foster positive relationships with the students, their views began to change (Ossai, 2022).

Participant 10 commented: "It's been a slow process, but I've seen the students and teachers grow more comfortable with me being here. I think it's because they see me as an educator, not just a man." ...L206&207, P254.

This statement underscores the slow but steady progress in changing societal views about male teachers. The quote shows how time and consistent performance lead to a shift from gender-based perceptions to a more professional understanding of the educator's role (Bhana, 2022; Liu & Zhou, 2023).

Category 8. Promoting Gender Equality

Promoting Gender Equality explored how male teachers actively work to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment by challenging traditional gender norms in the classroom. They encourage students to embrace gender equality and foster an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding (Mokofeng, 2024; Bhana, 2020).

Participant 1 explained: "In my classroom, I make it a point to challenge traditional gender roles. I encourage my students to pursue whatever interests them, whether it's science, art, or anything in between, regardless of their gender"...L182-183, P210.

This quote highlights how male teachers use their position to promote gender equality in their classrooms. By encouraging students to explore interests and careers outside of traditional gender expectations, male teachers help foster a more inclusive environment (Deng et al., 2023; Bryan, 2020).

Participant 2 shared: "I try to model positive behavior and show my students that being

respectful and inclusive is the way to go. I'm not just teaching them subjects, but also how to treat others equally". ...L66-67, P213.

This statement emphasizes the role of male teachers as role models for inclusivity. Their actions and behavior can profoundly impact students' understanding of gender equality, promoting a culture of respect and mutual understanding (Reich-Shapiro, 2020; Liu & Zhou, 2023). Each of these articles highlights the ongoing challenges and efforts of male teachers in early childhood education, underscoring how societal norms, expectations, and biases intersect with their professional roles. Through these quotes, male educators continue to demonstrate resilience, pushing (Wagner-Roberts, 2021).

The researcher found out that Male kindergarten teachers see their relationships as multifaceted and transformative. They are reshaping what it means to be a male educator by nurturing with authority, teaching with empathy, and leading with inclusivity. Their commitment is not only pedagogical but also relational and societal, acting as agents of both care and change. Also, they experience teaching as both a professional commitment and a social negotiation. Their careers are shaped by constant boundary work—defying stereotypes while nurturing young minds. Through perseverance, emotional intelligence, and advocacy, they redefine the narrative of masculinity in education and help cultivate a more inclusive school culture. Furthermore, having a great relationship with the colleagues was contributory to the success of teaching though they experience to be doubted by the parents at the beginning, in the end they were able to prove themselves and got their trust and confidence that contributed more to the success of learning.

Structural Description

This part of the paper is meticulously structured in alignment with the conventions of transcendental phenomenological qualitative research. It provided an in-depth view of how the study was conducted and how the data were interpreted to uncover the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers.

The structural essence of the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in Region III was characterized by an evolving interplay of personal transformation, pedagogical commitment, and the negotiation of gendered professional identities. Through in-depth exploration, six central themes emerged: *Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion*, *Recognition of Early Childhood's Importance and Calling*, *Emotionally Supportive Teaching*, *learning through Play*, *Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds*, and *Navigating Gender Expectations*. These themes collectively represent the complex and meaningful ways in which the participants experienced their roles within the early childhood education landscape.

Many participants recounted that their entry into the profession was unplanned or circumstantial, often influenced by employment opportunities or academic redirection. However, through continued engagement with their learners and immersion in the classroom setting, there was a notable growth in passion for early childhood education. This theme of *Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion* reflects a transformative journey wherein initial hesitation evolved into a strong sense of vocational purpose and fulfillment.

Central to this transformation was the *Recognition of Early Childhood's Importance and Calling*. Participants increasingly acknowledged the critical developmental stage represented by

early childhood and came to view their roles not merely as instructors but as foundational figures in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and social trajectories. This recognition reinforced their professional identity and deepened their commitment to their pedagogical responsibilities.

The theme of *Emotionally Supportive Teaching* emerged as a core characteristic of participants' instructional approach. Male kindergarten teachers emphasized the importance of empathy, patience, and responsiveness in managing the emotional needs of their students. Their narratives revealed a strong alignment with nurturing practices, challenging the prevailing societal notion that emotional caregiving is inherently feminine. This theme highlights the participants' ability to create emotionally safe and inclusive classroom environments that promote holistic development.

Complementing this was the emphasis on *Learning through Play*, which the participants recognized as a central and effective pedagogical strategy. Teachers described play-based learning as both developmentally appropriate and engaging for young learners. They valued its capacity to foster curiosity, creativity, and meaningful exploration, thus reinforcing its role as a vital tool in their instructional practices.

Another significant theme, *Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds*, encapsulated the deep connections formed between the male teachers and their students. These relationships were often characterized by trust, mutual respect, and emotional reciprocity. Participants viewed these bonds not only as integral to effective teaching but also as personally rewarding experiences that contributed to their own growth and fulfillment as educators.

The final theme, *Navigating Gender Expectations*, represented a persistent and complex dimension of the participants' professional lives. As males in a predominantly female profession, they often encountered societal skepticism, bias, and at times, overt scrutiny. Participants described the need to continuously assert their legitimacy and professionalism in the face of gendered assumptions. Despite these challenges, many perceived their roles as opportunities to advocate for greater gender diversity in early childhood education and to serve as positive male role models for young learners.

In summary, the structural description of the participants lived experiences reflected a multidimensional process shaped by personal development, pedagogical innovation, and the ongoing negotiation of gender roles. The six themes identified articulated how these male kindergarten teachers constructed meaning in their professional journeys—balancing passion with societal pressures, and emotional labor with the pursuit of equity and inclusion in early learning environments.

In phenomenological research, lived experiences were understood through fundamental dimensions known as universal structures or existential themes. These included time, space, bodily concerns, materials, causality, and relations to self and others. They served as lenses through which individuals perceived and make meaning of their everyday lives.

Time

Lived time refers to the subjective experience of time, not clock time. It was not just measured in minutes or hours; it was felt and lived. People experience time as fast, slow, remembered (past), felt (present), or anticipated (future). It shaped how the participants reflected on the experiences and plan for what's ahead. How they experience the rhythm of the day or school year. How long-term career trajectories feel (e.g., time needed to gain trust in a female-dominated field), how and when they responded to their pupils' needs, and how they entered the Early childhood Education profession.

Participant 1 stated: *"Kinausap ko sila isa-isa kapag may problema. May mga bata na umiiyak, kaya kailangan ng empathy at understanding. Hindi lang basta teacher — kailangan ding maging second parent."* ("I talked to them one by one when there were problems. Some children were crying, so they needed empathy and understanding. Being a teacher isn't enough — you also have to be a second parent.")

Participant 1 emphasized the need for empathy and personal attention, describing how he spoke individually with children in distress and acted not just as a teacher, but as a "second parent." This highlighted how emotional support deepens through repeated, consistent interactions over time.

Another statement from Participant 9:

"Maybe at first, since I'm a male, they thought I hurt their children... but as time goes by I already gained their trust."

In addition, "They had a wrong perception that male teachers can't handle their classes... eventually, you'll gain their trust." Participant 9 shared that early in his teaching experience, some parents were hesitant due to his gender, fearing he might not be suitable for the role. However, with time and demonstrated care, he was able to gain their trust and challenge initial biases. His experience reveals a gradual shift in perception, both from parents and the school community, showing that acceptance and strong relationships are not immediate but develop through sustained presence, behavior, and professional integrity.

Together, these narratives underscore how time plays a critical role in overcoming stereotypes, building emotional bonds, and establishing the teacher's identity as both an educator and a caregiver in early childhood settings.

Space

Lived space related to how physical or social spaces are experienced. Space which was more than physical location—it was the emotional and psychological feeling of being in a place. A space can feel safe, warm, uncomfortable, or even isolating depending on how it was experienced. It involved how they feel in classrooms or faculty rooms (e.g., welcomed, isolated). Whether they feel spatially constrained or free to move and express themselves. How physical classroom design influences their role or interactions.

Participant 4's statement,

"For me, it's not about gender. They also treat me as a brother..." reflected the relational and emotional space created within the kindergarten environment. This sense of space goes beyond the physical classroom—it represents a supportive, inclusive atmosphere where the participant is accepted not based on gender, but on his role and presence in the children's and colleagues' lives. Being treated "as a brother" suggests a familial, respectful connection that contributes to a sense of belonging and emotional safety within the school community. This highlighted how the social

and emotional space male teachers occupy can be warm, relational, and affirming, despite traditional gender expectations.

Bodily Concerns

Lived body focuses on embodiment—how one experiences their body in context. This structure is related to how they experience the world physically, emotionally, and socially through our bodily presence. It included feelings of comfort, fatigue, self-awareness, and how others perceive this. Also, awareness of their physical presence among children (e.g., being conscious of size, touch, or voice tone). Navigating perceptions around appropriate behavior, especially with physical affection or discipline. Feeling hyper-visible due to being a minority gender in the field.

The participants' statements illustrate how bodily engagement is central to learning in early childhood education, reflecting the existential element of bodily concerns. Participant 6 shared,

“Had a BA in General Studies... no background in ECE... found it fulfilling despite difficulty,” indicating how he physically and mentally adjusted to the demands of teaching young learners through active, play-based methods. Participant 8 stated,

“After teaching, we just play... When they enjoy it, they become more active... That’s what they learn when they play,” emphasizing that children learn best through physical activity and enjoyment. Participant 4 noted,

“Emotional and social needs are still on the play-based... they will develop their social skills... teach them the term... boost their confidence... behaviors...” showing how children’s bodily interactions in play foster social growth and emotional regulation.

Supporting this, Participant 1 explained,

“Yun nga, as I mentioned earlier, kailangan yung activities natin are play-based. Kasi yun yung gusto na yung mundo ng mga learners natin. Playful sila. So, yun nga, dual na yun. Naglalaro sila at natututo sila in the same time,” (“As I mentioned earlier, our activities need to be play-based because that's what fits the world of our learners. They are playful. So, it's twofold — they are playing and learning at the same time.”) emphasizing that learning happens through play and physical engagement, which matches children's natural behavior. Participant 4 added,

“It has a big effect... they are more open, interactive, manipulative, visual... play-based is our major way...” highlighting the sensory and physical nature of young learners. Finally, Participant 6 affirmed,

“Play-based learning is effective... *may rules ako... stop, look, and listen... malaking impak...*” (“Play-based learning is effective... I have rules like 'stop, look, and listen'... it has a big impact.”) describing how structured movement and physical cues are effective for classroom management and learning.

Collectively, these statements show that children's bodies are central to their learning—through movement, manipulation, sensory play, and structured interaction—which makes bodily experience a core dimension of their educational development.

Materiality

Materials wherein objects and tools in our environment have meaning beyond their use. Things like classroom materials, furniture, toys, or clothing influence how we interact, feel, and perform tasks in everyday life. It included how male teachers relate to classroom materials (toys, books, furniture) that may reflect gendered assumptions, their interaction with material spaces

(e.g., how they decorate, arrange learning tools) and how uniforms or clothing choices affect their self-expression or comfort.

The participants' experiences highlighted the importance of materials and tools in shaping their teaching practices and in responding to the developmental needs of kindergarten learners. Participant 4 shared,

"I volunteered... pursued kinder teaching while studying... to meet the needs of children," and later added, "Struggled with transition from upper grades... learned more to meet children's needs... I started appreciating the foundation."

These statements reflect his growing recognition of the material demands in early childhood education—specifically, the need to adapt resources and approaches appropriate for young learners, such as visual and interactive materials. Participant 7 provided a direct reference to materials used in the classroom:

"We use visual aids and technology. I use technology boards and sometimes, play..." This statement underscores how tangible tools—like visual aids and tech-based platforms—enhance engagement and learning. These accounts illustrate how the material environment (including teaching aids, digital tools, and play-based resources) played a vital role in supporting both the educator's adjustment and the children's learning, showing that materials are not just supplementary, but central to effective kindergarten teaching.

Causality

Causality is how they make sense of why things happen. It's about understanding the links between actions and results, and interpreting the reasons behind events or behaviors. It involved why they entered the profession (personal history, calling, defiance of norms), how they interpret societal reactions to their role and how specific events (e.g., accusations, praise, or exclusion) shaped their career path or identity.

The participants' journeys into kindergarten teaching reveal various causal factors—both external influences and internal realizations—that led them to embrace the profession. Participant 1 admitted,

"It is an accident na maging kinder teacher ako... I had to continue the units to be permanent," ("Becoming a kindergarten teacher was an accident... I had to continue the units to become permanent.") suggesting that circumstance initially dictated his path. Similarly, Participant 5 shared,

"Didn't know what course to take... only preschool was offered... Later, found love for children," showing how limited options eventually led to personal passion.

Participant 9 reflected,

"Didn't want to teach... preferred IT... mother encouraged me to take education," and later added, "I was influenced by a friend... At first I doubted it... but eventually appreciated teaching kindergarten."

These statements reveal how family and peer influence, rather than initial intention, shaped their career direction.

Over time, many developed a sense of purpose, as Participant 1 further reflected,

"At first, I couldn't see myself as a kindergarten teacher. But later I realized that we are molding the first learners—it's a big responsibility."

This growing awareness of impact shows how causality evolved, with deeper meaning emerging through experience. In practice, their motivations also drive specific teaching strategies. Participant 10 explained,

"I use different strategies... paired and group activities... explorations... for an engaging atmosphere," and added, "*Kinakausap ko kapag malungkot... ginagamit ko yung face activities... tatanungin kung masaya ba o malungkot... para alam ko kung ano ang gagawin ko,*" ("I talk to them when they're sad... I use face activities... I ask if they're happy or sad... so I know what to do.")

showing how concern for learners' emotions and engagement influences day-to-day decisions.

Collectively, these experiences demonstrate how both initial circumstances and growing commitment shape the male teachers' sense of calling and influence their pedagogical choices.

Relationships to Self and Others

This element explored how these personal and social connections influence one's behavior, actions, and perceptions in a given context. They shape experiences, such as how individuals understand and navigate their roles in different settings, manage conflicts, and build meaningful connections with others. It included navigating relationships with female colleagues, parents, and children, developing a professional identity in tension with social expectations, and the inner dialogue between one's private identity and public role.

The participants' statements revealed the complex dynamics of relationships to self and others in their teaching experiences. Participant 2 shared,

"I volunteered as a kindergarten teacher... found love in teaching... joy in working with children,"

reflecting how his relationship with himself evolved through his role, leading to a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment. Participant 7 echoed this growth, stating,

"Suddenly got a kinder item... questioned if I could handle kids... learned to love teaching,"

which shows how self-doubt transformed into a positive connection with the children. Participant 8 similarly remarked,

"I questioned my ability to handle kids... eventually learned to love my students," demonstrating how early insecurities gave way to a strong bond with the children they teach. These narratives speak to how the teachers' relationship to themselves developed through their experiences, as they found joy, confidence, and fulfillment in their work.

Moreover, their relationships with others—especially with their students, parents, and colleagues—are equally central to their experience. Participant 5 emphasized the importance of validation, stating,

"I make sure every child feels valued and heard... I take time to talk to them and reassure them,"

showing how his interactions with students foster trust and emotional connection. Participant 9 also highlighted the significance of nurturing social skills, sharing,

"I validate their emotions... promote sharing and turn-taking... guide them through resolving issues,"

reflecting his role in helping students develop emotional intelligence through interactions. Participant 6 pointed to the impact of family relationships, sharing,

“My parents were teachers... Former students appreciated me... That inspired me,” indicating how familial bonds and positive feedback from past students shaped his identity and motivation.

The interactions with colleagues were also significant, as Participant 7 expressed, “We have a culture of friendly competition... we help each other to come up with an activity,” showing how teamwork and mutual support among colleagues contribute to a positive, collaborative environment. Lastly, Participant 10 reflected on cultural influences by stating,

“Cultural attitudes towards gender have a bigger impact on my work... I show them that there should be no gender bias,” revealing how broader societal expectations affect how male teachers relate to others in the school environment. Together, these experiences highlighted the central role of relationships—to oneself, to students, and to colleagues—in shaping their experiences as male kindergarten teachers.

Essence

The essence of being a male kindergarten teacher in Region III is marked by an evolving journey of transformation, from unexpected entry into the field to a profound and personal discovery of purpose. Despite initial doubts and societal skepticism, these educators emerge as nurturing figures—guiding, inspiring, and caring for young learners in deeply emotional and individualized ways.

Their presence challenges gender norms, portraying nurturing and emotional care as human, not gendered, qualities. Through intentional relationship-building, emotional coaching, and play-based learning, these men foster holistic child development. Their commitment not only shapes the lives of children but also reshapes public perceptions of masculinity in early childhood education.

Summary

There were six (6) major emergent themes with forty-one (41) categories that arise in the findings of the study. For the first research question the themes and categories that were formed are: Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion (Entry to the Profession, Motivations and Realizations, Adaptation and Growth) and Recognition of Early Childhood’s Importance and Calling (Values and Reflections, Personal Experiences, Belief and Passion).

The next research question formed the themes and categories of Emotionally Supportive Teaching (Individualized Support, Play as Social Development, Validation and Care, Social-emotional Coaching, Observation Based-Care, Mood Assessment Tools) next is Learning through Play (Learning as Play, Play as Universal Language, Play as a Teaching Tool, Play Enhances Engagement, Holistic Learning, Rules and Freedom to Play, Self-Directed Discovery, Tech-Supported Play, Designing Playful Lessons, Social Learning through Play).

For the last research question the themes and categories are: Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds (Teacher as a role model, Teacher as a father figure, Professional Boundaries, Collaborative Teaching, Emotional Support, Holistic Development, Teacher Reputation, Positive Feedback and Development, Support and Recognition, Mutual support and Learning) the next theme is Navigating Gender Expectations (Societal Perception and Acceptance, First Impressions and Adjustment, Teacher as a Father Figure, Teacher Perception, Gendered Expectations, Societal

Pressure on Male Teachers, Overcoming Gender Bias, Changing Perceptions and Promoting Gender Equality).

Throughout these themes, male kindergarten teachers reveal their resilience, emotional intelligence, and dedication. They redefine the contours of early childhood teaching, fostering learning spaces that are inclusive, safe, and developmentally responsive. Their experiences highlight not only the unique challenges of their roles but also the immense rewards of guiding children through their foundational years.

4. DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the key findings from the study, connecting them to the research questions, existing literature, HAP and the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The goal is to interpret the results within a broader context, offering insights into their meaning, relevance, and implications.

To effectively present the summary of findings, data collected through triangulation—comprising informal interviews with parents, responses via Google Forms, and direct face-to-face classroom observations—were thoroughly analyzed. The consistency across these multiple sources confirmed that participants' statements regarding their relationships with parents, classroom management strategies, and student interactions were aligned with the observed and reported data. This convergence of findings strongly supports the validity and reliability of the data gathered, thereby affirming the accuracy of the overall results.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Experiences of male kindergarten teachers in early childhood education.

The study revealed two overarching themes derived from eleven sub-themes reflecting the unique journeys, motivations, and realizations of male kindergarten teachers in the field of Early Childhood Education. For Theme 1: Unexpected Beginnings and Growth in Passion it illustrated how many male educators entered the profession unintentionally but gradually developed a strong passion for early childhood teaching. For the categories, Entry into the Profession most participants did not initially plan to become kindergarten teachers. Influences included parental advice, limited course availability, and initial disinterest in teaching. According to Participant 1: “It is an accident na maging kinder teacher ako... It is a challenging and demanding profession.” It aligns with Wang (2024) who emphasized job security and family influence as key motivators. Next is, Motivations and Realizations wherein, teachers reported a growing sense of fulfillment and love for their roles after entering the classroom. Based on Participant 2: “Maybe, I found love in preschool education.” and Participant 10 expressed inspiration in shaping children’s first learning experiences. It is supported by Kim (2023), who identified altruism and meaningful interactions as intrinsic motivators. Another is Adaptation and Growth, participants emphasized the need for continuous learning, professional development, and personal growth. According to Participant 6: “My first year was difficult because I had zero background... but very fulfilling.” It is related that Armoza-Levi (2023) and Lucero (2023) support the role of mental resilience, stress management, and skill adaptation in effective kindergarten teaching.

For Theme 2 on Recognition of Early Childhood’s Importance and Calling participants grew to appreciate the foundational role of early childhood education in shaping a child’s future.

For the category on Values and Reflections, teachers embraced their role in nurturing not just academic skills, but values, emotional well-being, and confidence. Participant 1: “Ipagpatuloy ko na ito dahil tayo yung mga nagmomold sa kanila.” It is reflected in Rafiyya et al. (2024) who emphasized policies supporting early childhood development and teacher support systems. Another is Personal Experiences, many shared how volunteer work, family ties, or early exposure to children led them to discover their passion. Participant 2: “The joy and fulfillment was different” when teaching kindergarten. These stories echo Cahapay (2021), who noted that early positive experiences can shape a lasting commitment to teaching. Next is Belief and Passion, participants described the profession as joyful and deeply fulfilling, often driven by a mix of family influence, spirituality, and student affirmation Participant 3: “My passion of being playful with kids... is what inspired me.” It is Reinforced by Wang (2024), who highlighted the power of confidence and commitment in enhancing teaching effectiveness.

Despite initial uncertainty, male kindergarten teachers developed a strong professional identity and emotional connection to early childhood education. Their stories reveal a deep commitment to growth, adaptation, and a sense of purpose, challenging traditional gender norms and enriching the early learning environment.

2. Ways on how male teachers nurture kindergarten learners within the school setting.

The study highlighted two central themes that illustrate how male kindergarten teachers nurture their learners: Emotionally Supportive Teaching and Learning Through Play.

Under Emotionally Supportive Teaching, male educators emphasized the need to foster an emotionally nurturing and responsive environment. Teachers such as Participants 7, 8, and 9 tailored learning to each child's individual needs using a mix of storytelling, visual aids, role-play, technology, and play-based strategies. This approach mirrors the findings of Reich-Shapiro (2020) and Wagner-Roberts (2021), who emphasized that male educators often use adaptive methods to form personal connections with each child. Additionally, play was utilized as a tool for social development. Participants 7 and 10 engaged children in group play activities, allowing them to build friendships and learn collaboration—an approach also supported by studies from Dasalla (2025) and Reich-Shapiro (2020), who recognized play as a foundation for developing empathy and communication skills.

Validation and care were also central to their teaching practices. Participant 1 described his role as a “second parent,” offering emotional support, while Participant 4 highlighted the importance of patience and confidence-building. Bhana (2020) supported these observations, noting that male teachers often balance care with authority to maintain structure and emotional stability in the classroom. Moreover, Participants 2, 5, and 6 engaged in private conversations with students to help them express and regulate their emotions, which aligns with Mokofeng and Ndlovu’s (2024) findings on the role of one-on-one emotional coaching. Participant 3, through careful observation, offered guidance based on children's behavior, a practice reflected in Ossai’s (2022) work on responsive observation. Furthermore, Participants 6, 8, and 10 regularly conducted mood assessments and used tools like face activities to check on students’ emotional well-being and respond accordingly.

The second theme, Learning Through Play, emerged as a dominant strategy in the participants’ teaching methods. Play was not only a means of instruction but a language through which learning and connection flourished. Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 integrated play-based learning to make lessons more engaging and meaningful. This method aligns with Dasalla (2025)

and Ossai (2022), who emphasized play's critical role in deep, active learning. Participant 2 described play as a universal language that transcends individual differences, an idea reinforced by Wagner-Roberts (2021) and Lunadevy et al. (2024), who found that play promotes inclusivity among diverse learners. Participants 5 and 10 utilized play to teach life skills like teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving—especially effective for shy or hesitant children.

To enhance engagement, Participants 1, 4, 6, and 8 found that children were more focused and motivated when lessons were play-based. In support of holistic development, Participants 1, 3, 7, 8, and 10 conducted assessments to understand learners' needs and designed activities that addressed their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. Balancing freedom and structure during play was also essential. Participant 6 emphasized classroom rules such as "Stop, Look, and Listen" to maintain order, while Participant 10 encouraged exploratory freedom to foster creativity. Self-directed discovery was another strategy embraced by Participants 2 and 7, who facilitated experiments and guided tours to encourage independent exploration—echoing Liu and Zou's (2020) findings on curiosity-driven learning.

Incorporating technology also played a role in engaging students. Participants 3 and 7 used interactive apps like Lumi and digital boards to support attention and learning retention. Lesson planning was intentional and playful, as seen with Participants 1, 5, and 9, who designed activities using storytelling, games, and hands-on experiences that matched children's interests. Lastly, social learning through play was widely practiced. Participants 4, 5, 9, and 10 used group activities and role-play to teach sharing, turn-taking, empathy, and teamwork, supporting Bhana et al. (2020)'s findings on the social benefits of cooperative play in early childhood education.

Overall, the findings show that male kindergarten teachers nurture their students through a blend of emotional support and dynamic, play-based learning experiences. Their strategies prioritize holistic development, making learning both meaningful and joyful, while also helping children develop foundational social and emotional skills.

3. Relationship of male kindergarten teachers with students, parents and colleagues.

The findings for Research Question 3, which explored how male kindergarten teachers view their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, revealed two major emergent themes: Building Emotional and Supportive Bonds and Navigating Gender Expectations. Under the first theme, participants emphasized their role in establishing meaningful emotional connections with students. Many saw themselves as role models and father figures, with Participant 7 noting how he broke stereotypes about male teachers by proving his competence, while Participant 4 shared how students naturally trusted him "as a father and a brother." Participant 6 reinforced this by saying he followed up on students' lives, further demonstrating a nurturing role. These interactions highlight how male teachers create emotionally safe environments where students feel supported both academically and personally.

Moreover, male teachers noted the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, especially within a profession traditionally dominated by women. Participant 6 shared the pressure of being constantly observed and judged more critically, while Participant 5 acknowledged societal skepticism about male teachers, emphasizing the need to handle perceptions carefully. Participants also valued collaborative teaching, focusing on effective teamwork with colleagues. Participant 2 underscored that being a good teacher is not about gender but about ensuring students receive a meaningful kindergarten experience. In addition to student-focused relationships, participants

highlighted their roles in offering emotional support to both students and colleagues, as expressed by Participant 8, who made students feel safe and loved.

Male teachers also significantly contribute to holistic development, supporting students' growth intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Participant 10, for instance, intentionally worked to break gender stereotypes in his teaching. The positive feedback and development category revealed how teachers gain confidence and credibility as they receive trust and validation from their students and peers, as expressed by Participant 9. Recognition from colleagues and administrators, as shared by Participant 4, also bolstered their professional standing. Additionally, mutual support and learning were essential in the classroom; Participant 2 noted that both students and teachers learn from each other, fostering a joyful and engaging learning atmosphere.

The second major theme, Navigating Gender Expectations, brought attention to the societal pressures male kindergarten teachers face. Participant 3 revealed that people initially questioned his decision to teach young children, suggesting that this role was better suited for women. However, over time, both students and parents began to accept and respect his role, as seen in Participant 4's experience of gradually earning students' trust. Teachers often encountered initial hesitation or fear from students, but through consistent interaction and care, they were able to build trust and rapport—Participant 1 acknowledged having to adjust his approach to gain student comfort.

Participants also discussed the challenges of societal gendered expectations, where they were expected to be more authoritative simply because they were male. Participant 3 felt pressure to constantly prove his competence, while Participant 4 shared that he initially emphasized control due to gender expectations but later realized that compassion was more impactful. The findings also revealed the intense societal pressure male teachers face. Participant 5 highlighted the burden of having to "perform perfectly," while Participant 6 recalled being told that working with young children wasn't a "man's job."

Despite these challenges, male teachers actively work to overcome gender bias. Participant 7 explained how he disproved assumptions that male teachers lack nurturing qualities, and Participant 8 emphasized being present and engaged with students to break stereotypes. Over time, perceptions began to shift. As Participant 9 shared, skeptical parents eventually grew supportive after witnessing his positive impact. Participant 10 noted a gradual acceptance among staff and students, who began seeing him as an educator, not just a "male teacher."

Finally, male kindergarten teachers play a critical role in promoting gender equality. Participant 1 described encouraging students to explore all interests regardless of gender, while Participant 2 modeled inclusive behavior to instill respect and equality among learners. Through their efforts, male teachers not only nurture their students but also challenge societal norms, foster inclusive classrooms, and reshape public perceptions of gender roles in early childhood education.

6. IMPLICATIONS

This section outlined the key implications drawn from the study on the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers. The findings offer both practical and theoretical contributions. Practically, the insights highlight strategies to better support male educators in early childhood settings, inform policy improvements, and guide teacher training programs toward fostering inclusive and emotionally responsive teaching environments. Theoretically, the study adds to the growing body of literature on gender roles in education by deepening the understanding of how male teachers navigate their identities, relationships, and professional practices within a

predominantly female domain. These implications aim to inform future research, educational practice, and policy development.

Practical Implication

The study underscores the importance of diversifying the early childhood education (ECE) workforce by highlighting the unique perspectives and experiences male teachers bring into the classroom. Their presence enriches learning environments and supports efforts to promote gender diversity, which helps challenge societal stereotypes and provides young learners with a broader range of role models. This calls for intentional recruitment initiatives that encourage more men to enter and stay in the field.

Many male educators entered the profession unintentionally and often without formal preparation in early childhood education. However, they gradually grew into their roles through ongoing learning and mentorship. This highlights the need for institutions to implement structured onboarding processes, continuous professional development programs, and supportive peer networks—especially to assist male teachers in adapting to a predominantly female profession.

Male kindergarten teachers also emphasize emotionally supportive, nurturing, and play-based teaching methods. Their focus on individual attention and student-centered learning highlights the necessity for schools to value and cultivate emotional intelligence among all educators. Training programs in emotional literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) should be prioritized, ensuring all teachers—regardless of gender—can foster a responsive and inclusive classroom environment.

The findings also reveal the societal pressures and gender biases male teachers often face, including doubts about their suitability for working with young children. These challenges point to the need for institutional policies and public awareness efforts aimed at reducing gender stereotypes, normalizing male roles in early childhood settings, and fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect within schools.

Trust-building with parents emerged as another key theme. Male teachers often had to overcome skepticism and gradually earn the confidence of families. Schools can facilitate this process by actively engaging parents, sharing the successes of male educators, and creating visibility through events, communications, and leadership roles that reflect the value of male contributions to ECE.

Additionally, male kindergarten teachers serve as vital role models and mentors for their students. In many cases, they fill emotional and developmental gaps—especially in communities where male presence may be limited. Their influence supports children's social learning, emotional development, and helps break rigid gender norms, offering children broader perspectives on relationships and roles.

Over time, male teachers develop a strong professional identity and sense of purpose, which significantly contributes to their effectiveness and job satisfaction. It is essential for schools to nurture this identity through consistent recognition, leadership opportunities, and access to mental health resources. These efforts not only affirm their value but also help retain dedicated and passionate educators in the profession.

Theoretical Implications

The lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, as shown in the study, have significant theoretical implications when aligned with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), and Critical Feminist Theory.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the intrinsic motivation and gradual development of passion observed among participants highlight the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Many male teachers entered the field unintentionally or due to external influence but developed a deep internal drive and fulfillment through their interactions with children. As they adapted and grew within their roles, they began to perceive themselves as competent, valued educators, demonstrating how self-determined motivation can flourish in supportive environments. Their commitment to holistic child development, play-based learning, and emotional coaching shows a high level of internalization of professional identity, which SDT identifies as essential to sustained engagement and well-being.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) helps explain how these male teachers navigate and reconstruct their professional identities in a predominantly female-dominated domain. Their journey involves challenging societal stereotypes and negotiating their place within early childhood education (ECE). The participants often expressed initial feelings of misfit, followed by eventual acceptance as they redefined what it means to be a male in a nurturing role. Their ability to influence perceptions—both among students and within the broader school community—demonstrates the dynamic nature of identity construction. As they gained acceptance and recognition, they formed a new in-group identity as male educators who could be nurturing, emotionally connected, and professionally competent, thereby reshaping social norms within the ECE landscape.

As seen through the lens of Critical Feminist Theory, the participants' narratives reflect a confrontation with gendered power structures and cultural expectations. While they encounter skepticism, heightened scrutiny, and pressure to overperform due to their gender, many also use their positions to challenge traditional gender roles and promote equality. Their stories reveal a complex negotiation of masculinity and care, where nurturing is reclaimed as a human—not exclusively feminine—trait. This aligns with feminist critiques that seek to dismantle binary gender assumptions and broaden the space for inclusive, equitable roles in caregiving professions. Moreover, by acting as role models and advocating for gender-neutral educational practices, male teachers contribute to the feminist project of disrupting patriarchal structures in early education settings.

Together, these theoretical lenses deepen our understanding of male kindergarten teachers' experiences as not only personal journeys but also acts of identity reconstruction, resistance, and transformation within broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts.

7. CONCLUSION

To wrap up the key findings and reflect on the objectives of this study, the following conclusion provides a summary of the research outcomes, their implications, and potential directions for future work.

The following are the conclusions of the study.

1. It reveals journey marked by unplanned beginnings, gradual adaptation, and deep personal and professional growth. Initially entering the field through various circumstances—such as family influence, volunteer work, or unexpected opportunities—these educators developed a strong sense

of purpose and commitment as they engaged more deeply with the role. It highlights the evolving understanding of their responsibilities—not only as academic instructors but also as key figures in shaping children's values, emotional well-being, and lifelong learning habits. The participants demonstrated resilience and a clear appreciation for the unique impact they have on early learners. The fulfillment they derived from witnessing the progress and joy of their students further reinforced their passion for the profession.

2. Teachers employ a range of strategies centered on individual attention, emotional guidance, and the intentional use of play. Personalized support and close observation allow them to address the unique needs of each child, ensuring they feel safe, valued, and understood. Play based learning emerges as a central tool not only for cognitive development but also for fostering social interaction, communication, and emotional well-being. Teachers strategically balance structured activities with free exploration, encouraging curiosity and engagement. Furthermore, the integration of technology and well-planned, interactive lessons reflect their commitment to making learning both effective and enjoyable.

3. For students, Male Kindergarten Teachers see themselves not only as instructors but also, as role models and, in many cases, father figures—providing emotional security, guidance, and support to young learners. These teachers actively build strong, respectful connections that foster holistic development, demonstrating leadership, empathy, and emotional maturity in their daily interactions. With colleagues, they contribute to a nurturing and supportive work environment, offering emotional support and reinforcing a culture of collaboration. They also place a strong emphasis on maintaining professional boundaries, ensuring mutual respect while remaining approachable and effective. The relationship for parents reflects both challenges and growth. While initial societal perceptions and gender biases may lead to skepticism, consistent demonstration of care and competence gradually earns the trust and respect of families. They actively work to challenge stereotypes about nurturing and masculinity in early childhood education, showing through their actions that emotional sensitivity and effective teaching are not bound by gender.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to address the identified issues and enhance future outcomes. By implementing these recommendations, it is hoped that the challenges highlighted in the study can be mitigated and the overall effectiveness of the subject area can be improved.

The following are the recommendations of the study.

1. For Pupils, initiatives should be developed to cultivate a school culture where students are encouraged to form positive perceptions of educators regardless of gender, thereby promoting equity and reducing gender-based biases in the learning environment.
2. Parents and Families should have an implementation of community outreach programs and parent-teacher forums aimed at fostering understanding and dismantling stereotypes surrounding male educators. Enhanced parental awareness and acceptance can contribute to a more supportive atmosphere for male teachers and reinforce trust in their professional capacity to nurture and educate young children.

3. Male Kindergarten Teachers are advised to continue embracing their roles with confidence and professionalism despite the societal challenges they may encounter. They need to seek peer support networks and professional development opportunities to enhance resilience and teaching effectiveness. The establishment of mentoring programs for new and aspiring male teachers can also serve as a platform for shared experiences, mutual encouragement, and collective advocacy within the educational community.

4. School Administrators should actively work to promote a balanced representation of male and female educators through equitable hiring practices and supportive workplace policies. They should also prioritize the creation of inclusive environments where male teachers feel valued and protected from gender-based discrimination or stigma, thereby encouraging retention and long-term career development.

5. Policy makers are encouraged to review and revise existing educational policies to ensure they are inclusive and supportive of gender diversity in early childhood education. They should develop targeted recruitment campaigns, scholarships, and incentives specifically aimed at increasing the number of male teachers in kindergarten settings. Additionally, comprehensive gender-sensitivity training should be mandated for all stakeholders to foster a more equitable and respectful educational system.

6. Future Researchers are encouraged to expand on this study by exploring the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in other regions or comparative international contexts. Longitudinal studies examining the career trajectories of male early childhood educators and the long-term impact of gender-diverse teaching staff on student development are also recommended. Such inquiries can provide a deeper understanding of the systemic factors influencing male participation in early childhood education and inform future policy and practice.

9. REFLECTION

This study revealed a compelling narrative of transformation, resilience, and quiet revolution as told through the experiences of male kindergarten teachers. Initially drawn into early childhood education by circumstance rather than intention, these educators discovered a deep and unexpected passion for teaching young children. Their journeys are marked by personal growth, the development of emotional intelligence, and a commitment to shaping young minds with care and creativity.

One of the most striking reflections was the realization that effective teaching is less about gender and more about dedication, empathy, and connection. These men redefined traditional notions of masculinity by embracing nurturing roles often associated with women. In doing so, they challenge gender stereotypes and offer diverse role models to children in their formative years. Their work in fostering emotionally safe, engaging, and inclusive classrooms is not only pedagogically sound but emotionally resonant. Through play, storytelling, emotional coaching, and individualized attention, they support holistic child development while also growing professionally and personally. Their ability to blend structure with warmth, and authority with compassion, enriches the learning environment in unique ways.

Moreover, their reflections on relationships—with students, parents, and colleagues—highlight the importance of trust, consistency, and emotional presence. They serve not only as educators but also as second parents, role models, and agents of change within the school setting.

However, this journey is not without its challenges. These teachers must navigate societal biases, skepticism, and heightened scrutiny. Yet, through perseverance and positive impact, they gradually shift perceptions—proving that nurturing knows no gender. Ultimately, the study reflects a hopeful and powerful message: male kindergarten teachers are not anomalies but pioneers helping to shape a more inclusive, empathetic, and equitable landscape in early childhood education. Their stories inspire a reevaluation of gender roles and affirm the value of diverse voices in the education of our youngest learners.

10. SUMMARY

This Chapter offers a rich and insightful discussion of the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers, highlighting their personal journeys, teaching practices, and the broader implications of their roles in early childhood education. Initially entering the profession unintentionally, many developed a deep passion for nurturing young learners, finding fulfillment in shaping children's foundational development. The study revealed how these teachers nurtured their students through emotionally supportive teaching and dynamic, play-based learning strategies that prioritized holistic development. Their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues are built on emotional bonds, trust, and a continuous effort to challenge gender stereotypes, often navigating societal expectations and scrutiny.

Despite these pressures, male educators emerged as role models and advocated for inclusivity, reshaping perceptions of caregiving and teaching roles. The findings emphasized the need for targeted institutional support, professional development, and public awareness to retain and empower male teachers. The chapter concluded by aligning these experiences with theoretical frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Critical Feminist Theory, showcasing how male kindergarten teachers redefined masculinity in nurturing roles and contributed to a more inclusive and empathetic educational landscape.

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