Experiences of Parents and Teachers on Kindergarten Pupils’ Readiness in the New Normal


ABSTRACT

This study built into the parents’ and teachers’ experiences regarding the Kindergarten learners’ readiness in the New Normal in the identified Kindergarten schools in Tacloban City during School Year 2020-2021. Using the descriptive phenomenology design, 10 Kindergarten teachers and 10 parents of Kindergarten learners served as respondents. The interview questionnaire served as the main instrument. Data obtained were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to determine the emerging themes and essence of the study. The results revealed that parents’ and teachers’ experiences regarding the Kindergarten learners' readiness in the new normal were teaching and learning related. They view Kindergarten learners as unprepared to enter Kindergarten education in the new educational landscape because they have not mastered the basic literacy skills as preschoolers and still have separation anxiety. Teachers have experienced exhausting all efforts to meet ideal instruction and reinforce positive guidance. These brought an impression that Kindergarten learners are unprepared to learn the learning competencies outlined for their level of education. Hence, it is recommended that the school adopt the implications and recommendations for parents and Kindergarten teachers.

Keywords: Experiences of Parents, Kindergarten Education, New Normal Education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Curricular reform is currently considered a global trend. Academic institutions carry out this activity primarily to improve the system of their educational services. Thereby ensure quality products of education. Considerably, curricula overhaul, as policy reform, are anchored on the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO)-led programs such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which direct member-states to make education accessible, inclusive, sustainable, and gender-equal (United Nations, 2017). This global outlook has prompted the Philippine government to initiate relevant reforms in its academic sectors to address changes and challenges associated with modern times' developments. As a result, in 2010, the Philippines made a significant overhaul of its education system for primary education. It was done through the institutionalization of Republic Act 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. Under the new curriculum, Kindergarten education becomes mandatory and a pre-requisite for admission to formal education ladders starting from first grade (Department of Education, 2012).

Kindergarten education is said to help improve young learners' language proficiency and numeracy skills and acquire values at a young age. Thus, preparing them for formal schooling. Arguably, people around them, including their immediate family members and teachers, play a crucial role in instilling the fundamentals of learning and foundation to adapt to the school’s systems, culture, and new environment to interact with. Therefore, it is categorical to claim that the nature of their education provides and paves the way for their cognitive, physical, moral, and social development. Specifically, Kindergarten teachers play a vital role in children's successful transition to school, and it is critical to understand their expectations about what skills, behaviors, and attributes are necessary for school outcomes. They are compelled to fully understand the readiness of young learners to get Kindergarten education in its many facets, including social, emotional, and academic dimensions.

However, the recent health crisis brought mainly by the COVID-19 outbreak has drastically changed the educational landscape of all academic institutions around the globe. Notwithstanding the need to continue education, academic leaders institutionalized substitute methods to ensure learning continuity and made schools a safe working environment (Rocamora, 2020). In the country, the Department of Education (DepEd) and Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shifted to a flexible learning modality in compliance with the IATF’s order prohibiting in-person instruction (Rocamora, 2020). In addition, Simbulan (2020) averred that flexible learning delivery needs to push through despite the challenges to remote learning modalities due to socioeconomic standing among learners.

Given the new normal norms of delivering instruction, it is thus imperative to pursue an empirical study on the experiences of parents and teachers of Kindergarten learners' readiness to embrace the current modality for delivering instruction. In this way, empirical data would be made available for various stakeholders interested in education to understand Kindergarten pupils' readiness and teachers' and parents' experiences with the adopted new learning modality. Consequently, policymakers would be guided in crafting policies towards improved delivery of Kindergarten education in the new normal educational landscape. As such, this study then built into the parents’ and teachers’ experiences regarding the Kindergarten learners’ readiness in the New Normal in the identified Kindergarten Schools in Tacloban City during School Year 2020-2021 to develop implications and practices. Specifically, it answered the participants’ views regarding the school readiness of learners’ entering the Kindergarten Curriculum, the experiences of the kindergarten teachers regarding kindergarten learners' readiness, and impressions of the kindergarten teachers regarding the learners’ readiness in this time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This study has its theoretical anchor in Montessori Education of Dr. Maria Montessori. As discussed in various literature, this type of education is characterized as self-directed, hands-on, and collaborative. Young learners exposed to this type of education enable children to make creative choices in their learning in an instructional room field with age-appropriate activities guided by trained teachers who ensure successful teaching and learning episodes. Collaboration is given primacy in Montessori education and puts a premium on knowledge discovery and exploration to optimize development. Additionally, a Montessori classroom is holistically decorated commensurate with the learning needs of the target learners. Finally, Dr. Montessori believes that experiential learning translates to in-depth knowledge in reading, writing, numeracy, sciences, music, peoples’ skills, etc. As such, instructional materials in a Montessori classroom point to a child's development (Lillard & Heise 2018).

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since the implementation of the Kindergarten Act and subsequent institutionalization of the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, several empirical studies have been conducted, and their findings have been disseminated. The concerns were focused on various issues and concerns such as those pertinent to materials development, teacher qualifications, and pedagogic practices, the impact of parental support, among other issues. The discussions that follow present the various findings of these studies.

First, Tranquilan (2020) evaluated the context of the activities provided to the Kindergarten pupils and the extent of implementation of the Kindergarten Education Program in Multicultural schools in two provinces in Mindanao. Statistically and thematically treated data proved that the implementation of the program is fair given the multicultural concepts induced to the young learners carried out conceptually, theoretically, and as processed in the teaching of multiculturalism and that the program is implemented per the policy standards of the Department of Education. On the other hand, Guanzon-Pisaras's (2020) experimental study determined the efficacy of Mathematics Manipulatives in

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developing numeracy skills of kindergarten pupils. Statistically treated data showed a significant difference in the scores obtained during pre and post-tests given. This implies that the intervention effectively improved the mathematics skills of the young learners. It was then recommended for use in the classroom and provided training to the Kindergarten teachers. In addition, Acope et al. (2018) developed a series of Cebuano music videos as an interactive learning tool that Kindergarten teachers could utilize in teaching Cebuano nursery rhymes as a learning area in Kindergarten. While Mortensen et al. (2017) recommended using a test error correction strategy and reward system as a model for teaching number quantities to preschoolers with developmental disabilities since it was proven to be effective in developing their numeracy skills.

Additionally, Rolina et al. (2014) developed an assessment matrix called PLST based on the research, development, and diffusion model of Hopkins and Clark. Said assessment tool is helpful for Kindergarten teachers in assessing and monitoring the development of Kindergarten pupils' language skills in terms of vocabulary mastery and the ability to write sentences as key measures of their language development. Similarly, Sangalla et al. (2017) determined the impact of parental involvement on the academic standing of their children enrolled in a Kindergarten. Statistically treated data showed a highly significant impact on achieving their children's learning goals. Parents' support comes in the form of aid in doing their assignments, projects, and similar supports.

Meanwhile, Mangaoil (2018) explored the challenges faced by non-early childhood graduates and how their coping mechanisms in adapting to their job. Thematically analyzed data showed that their challenges include absence or lack of proper preparation and training, children with special needs, complicated and fussy parents, physical, mental and psychological stress, difficulty with time management, muster tolerance, and composure creativity were experienced by the respondents. Among their major coping mechanisms include attending seminars and conferences to further their pedagogical knowledge and skills, establishing a good rapport with their children's parents, and looking at their job with a sense of passion and perseverance.

In like manner, Ayade et al. (2019) determined the level of implementation of Early Language Literacy and Numeracy Implementation of teachers in Kindergarten up to third grade using the descriptive method design. Findings showed that the competencies intended for these learning areas are fully implemented, as reflected in the various monitoring reports of school leaders. Also, Osea & Botor (2016) surveyed the socio-demographic profile, teaching methods and strategies employed, and the training needs of the Early Child Preschool Teachers and Daycare Workers in the Bicol region. Findings showed that most of the teachers for both groups are female, married, salaried by their respective Local Government Units, and teacher education graduates. The majority of them also employ demonstration methods and behavioral modeling in facilitating learning. Finally, their training needs are pedagogic related, including lesson planning and designing and developing instructional materials. They recommended that LGUs provide and sustain their needs to ensure these academic programs' effective and efficient implementation.

Furthermore, school readiness plays from Kindergarten to first grade, and its critical role in the child's academic development is discussed shortly (Kokkalia et al., 2019). According to Cross (2017), the variability of perspectives as regards Kindergarten learners' readiness affects public education programs and the success of learners has impact to their immediate communities. Similarly, Smith and Glass (2019) averred that education, training, and support for creating a harmonious relationship between the teachers and learners contact usually leads to optimizing Kindergarten’s academic readiness because factors like social, behavioral, cognitive, and physical domains are promoted. Boylan (2017) supports this claim and argues that independence, social skills, and fine motor skills are also important kindergarten readiness indicators and that kindergarten pupils do not need to have mastered academic skills to be ready for admission.

Finally, Dziuban et al. (2018) discussed that blended learning is the byword in the current learning delivery because it cannot be disentangled from the information and communication technologies which help human decision-making processes. Similarly, Garbe et al. (2020) parents agreed with the shutdown of schools and are contented with the extent of support given by school leaders notwithstanding the challenges experienced by the parents in balancing their responsibilities, sustaining learners' motivation, issues on accessibility, and even on learning outcomes. Likewise, Vallacchi (2019) suggested further examining the teaching approaches utilized in the kindergarten rooms to ensure that the learners' need is addressed. Thus, education stakeholders should view school readiness as a multifaceted process happening now. Accordingly, allow novel policies that encompass both the ideas of Kindergarten readiness and the practices commensurate to that of the academic stakeholders’ idea of readiness.

IV. Methodology

This study used descriptive phenomenology as its research design. Phenomenology is utilized as a design if the study's primary goal is to explore and create a comprehensive description of a phenomenon. Additionally, it is utilized when surmising data from one's lived experience. It is also inclined in retrieving the present condition before even giving describing the phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology attempts to show how our concepts, words, and theories could shape or distort and give structure to our experiences as we live them (Givens, 2018). As regards its locale, the study was conducted in four public elementary schools located within the city of Tacloban and utilized the parents of the Kindergarten learners and Kindergarten teachers as its respondents. Accordingly, the interview guide served as its main tool in gathering data, which, subsequently was interpreted using the 7-steps procedures of Collaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method.
V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. On Kindergarten Teachers’ and Parents’ Views Regarding the School Readiness of Learners’ Entering the Kindergarten Curriculum

One of the constructs subjected to investigations in this academic endeavor was the parents of the Kindergarten learners and the Kindergarten teachers’ perspective on learners’ readiness to enter the Kindergarten curriculum. The narratives taken from the respondents emerged a single theme: I am ready to learn more! According to Barnard (2016), parents have significant influence on the lives of their children and that parental involvement is directly correlated to learners’ success. It is not surprising therefore that academic institutions require parents to take an active role in various school activities such as those related to learners’ progresses and achievements, wellness, recognitions, and home visitation. These imply that schools must take the role of parents and that collaboration is critical in advancing learners’ welfare.

The environmentalists believe that school readiness is the stage when young children can readily respond appropriately to the school and the classroom environment. These are manifested in activities like abiding by rules and regulations, performing multiple curricular-related activities, acceptable behavior in small group activities, and following directions and instructions from teachers and other adults while in school or similar academic settings (Satterly, 1987).

Kindergarten learners’ readiness is a complex idea that is tied up to various meanings and factors including chronological age, developmental stage, specific social and academic skills, and school and home partnership. In this study, it is evident from the statements of the respondents that Kindergarten teachers and parents of Kindergarten learners perceive the Kindergarten learners’ to be ready when entering the Kindergarten curriculum as contained in this statement: “They have already prior knowledge because they have the skills in writing already, who already know how to pronounce the letters, even the initial sound of the letters, and also for those pupils really who do not have their first learning or skills in the Kindergarten or they do not have any background into whatever skills they should learn.” (Informant,10). “I believe that learners nowadays had acquired basic skills like reading, writing, social and communication skills during their Nursery foundation” (Informant,8).

Given this, it is not surprising then to note that the teacher respondents are very optimistic in narrating and sharing the idea that Kindergarten learners must have developed basic skills when they enter the Kindergarten scholastic level. As evident in the narratives above, their skills include the fundamentals of numeracy, reading, writing, and speaking or communication skills. Similarly, Kindergarten teachers and the parents of these learners. Additionally, both groups also expect that learners entering this school level must have been equipped with the aforementioned skills during their preschool education. In a similar vein, the curriculum intended for this group of learners must consider their age appropriateness because this will help teachers give developmentally appropriate experiences that will help the learners improve in different developmental areas.

Furthermore, teachers also consider parents’ involvement throughout the learning cycle of their children.

Meanwhile, the claim of the Kindergarten teachers that Kindergarten learners are ready to learn even before taking up the curriculum intended for them is supported by empirical results, which suggest that early childhood language development is a strategic business on the part of the Kindergarten educators. Also, parents play a crucial role since the nerves that connect with the language can function optimally and adequately when young children routinely hear repeated sounds (Clarke, 2005, as cited in Tranquilan, 2020). Additionally, Burnet (2006), as cited in Tranquilan (2020), claimed that Kindergarten pupils can distinguish the sound of hundreds of words and learn to get to know the repeated phoneme. Over time, the word’s pronunciation becomes true once they get corrected by the people surrounding them. With this premise, it is thus encouraged that people around young learners speak to them cautiously.

Finally, theories about parental involvement are categorized as either school-based involvement or home-based involvement. Examples of the former include participation in parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in school activities and joining student government. On the other hand, the latter may include assisting the child in various school activities, initiating and facilitating reviews and making assignments, and even extending help to the parents. These activities optimize parent and siblings’ relationships, which, in turn, create a positive impact on their children’s academic standing. Additionally, the idea of parental involvement is highly associated with parenting styles. Factors like communication, support, bonding, interaction, material rewards, monitoring, and affection determine parenting styles. These factors are also aggravated by support factors like authoritarianism, psychological control, behavior control, autonomy, authority, and discipline. These social factors outline specific socializing activities that could ultimately guide parents in helping their children do academic activities. Additionally, an upbeat parenting style is manifested through constant communication and the creation of a warm emotional climate (Orillosa & Magno, 2013).

B. On Experiences of the Kindergarten Teachers Regarding Kindergarten Learners’ Readiness

The second construct subjected to investigations in this study was the experiences of the Kindergarten teachers regarding Kindergarten learners’ readiness. Learning Uncertainty in a Novel Teaching Modality! is the lone theme generated from the narratives shared by the respondents and were subjected to analysis. This theme echoed the Kindergarten learners’ hesitation about their children’s readiness given the public health crisis and the new learning modalities employed in response to the current crisis the world is experiencing. It is evident in the statement: “I am worried if my child can adapt to teaching-learning situation under the new setup” (Informant,5). From hesitancy, Kindergarten teachers also experienced that some parents are worrisome about the number of learnings their children will acquire, especially fundamental skills like reading, writing, and numeracy.
On a lighter note, parents are optimistic that their child's nursery foundation's training, routines, and learnings have prepared them to enter Kindergarten. On the other hand, parents noticed that they struggle to adapt to the new learning setup. They also noticed that learners lack focus and eagerness to learn due to the learning setup. “I am afraid that they will not behave well because they are not in the proper venue for learning. They are only staying home due to the pandemic.” (Informant, 7).

The respondents' narratives proved a need for the teachers to reinforce positive guidance strategies to mitigate uncertain thinking and behaviors on the part of the parents of the Kindergarten parents and the learners. This brings us to the notion that Kindergarten teachers must have a solid knowledge of theories relative to positive reinforcement for this group of young learners. Among the popular strategies commonly used for this purpose include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Conscious Discipline. Academic people know about this area in Kindergarten education underscored the importance of these theories. They claimed that implementing positive behavior in the classroom is to retain or keep young learners for this program and develop their social- emotional skills to lay the foundation they need to succeed in school. Studies showed that social and emotional skills contribute to the utmost holistic development of the learners. On the other side, Kindergarten learners tend to view themselves negatively and believe they are incapable of learning when they experience adverse treatment in the classroom. (National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, 2021).

Arguably, for educators to be able to mitigate display of classroom misbehaviors, they must disregard the conventional practices and adopt positive guidance strategies. Positive guidance is an approach teachers utilize by employing a series of strategies such as giving choices, negotiation, problem-solving, and redirection when managing a child’s behavior. Its basic tenet is to help learners learn from their mistakes instead of getting punished for the mistakes committed (National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, 2021).

Among the many strategies Kindergarten teachers can utilize Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Conscious Discipline. Challenging behaviors include difficulty concentrating, avoiding activities, being socially withdrawn, crying, or hiding. External challenging behaviors include hitting, spitting, destruction of property, running away, and screaming. Another strategy is the behaviorist approach. The behaviorist approach looks at children as empty slates who need external guidance or a model who will direct their behavior. As an adult-directed process, mature individuals take responsibility for developing their appropriate behavior (Kaur, 2016).

Additionally, Kindergarten teachers could also adhere to the cognitive-constructivist approach. This approach focuses on mental processes instead of overt behavior displayed by children. Advocates of this approach believe that knowledge and behavior come from within the child and that such is associated with the stage of cognitive development. Additionally, learning and behavior are embedded in experiences which ultimately are refined through testing in social situations. Considerably, children are responsible for their behavior, and adults only serve as role models and guides. Finally, the social-constructivist approach. This approach looks at the child as a communicative being capable of building relationships. It thus views learning and development as two-way processes of knowledge building through social and cultural environment interactions (Gartrell, 2020).

C. On Impressions of the Kindergarten Teachers Regarding the Learners’ Readiness in This Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The third construct subjected to investigations in this study was the impressions of the Kindergarten teachers regarding Kindergarten learners’ readiness at this time when the country is grappling with the pandemic. Based on the analyses made on the vignettes this theme: Recalibrating the Fundamentals of Learning! had emerged. Theme three was the impressions of the Kindergarten teachers regarding Kindergarten learners’ readiness during this time of the pandemic. The narratives above showed that among the impressions of the Kindergarten teachers is that their learners are seemingly unprepared to learn the learning competencies spelled out for Kindergarten education in the country; even the fundamentals, as echoed in this statement: pupils do not know how to write, read & count. Some of the learners also are experiencing separation anxiety” (Informant, 4).

Similarly, the significant statements reflect that learners entering Kindergarten education have poor letter and sound recognition. Moreover, the informants also have the impression that some learners tend to have a hard time communicating with their teachers and classmates and difficulty learning MTB-MLE and Filipino. They concluded that social and communication skills had not been developed during preschool, not to mention their short attention span to academic activities as stated in this statement from one of the informants: attention span is minimal, and they have difficulty learning Mother Tongue Based and Math subjects” (Informant, 7).

Considerably, the impressions of the informants mentioned above can be explained in Arnold Gesell's maturation theory which posits that physical and mental development is sequential in nature, but each child has a distinct stage of development. In other words, the ability to learn varies. Therefore, it would be presumed that Kindergarten teachers would have varied experiences regarding Kindergarten learners’ readiness.

In a similar vein, Cariaga (2015) explained that language plays an important role in the entire teaching and learning episodes because it provides concrete foundations for comprehending and developing foundational knowledge. Studies showed that young learners entering school must be taught using their first language to ensure educational success. Using the mother tongue as a medium for teaching at the basic education level is a global practice because the language that the children know and fluently speak when they begin school is their mother tongue which allows them to continuously develop their critical thinking skills in the entirety of the learning processes.
Additionally, the findings of various studies also revealed that using the mother tongue in the classroom results in a sense of pride, boosts self-esteem, and at the same time, eliminates fears. As such, it is necessary to use this language for a deeper understanding, analysis, and comprehension of the learning competencies outlined for Kindergarten education, especially in reading, writing, and counting. Meanwhile, Domingo (2015) claimed that reports of the findings of the studies conducted showed that classroom instruction delivered using the national language results in children’s disinterest in school because they find lessons too challenging to understand, making them realize and ultimately feel that they are weak because they perceive themselves to be incapable of doing academic activities.

Finally, among the impressions of the Kindergarten teachers is the poor foundational knowledge of the learners admitted to the Kindergarten program as contained in this statement: “Parents are not oriented on how to teach their child, and pupils do not know how to write, read & count. Some of the learners also are experiencing separation anxiety” (Informant, 4). This concern needs immediate attention. Literature suggests that school failures usually commence in the early grades. The study’s findings suggest that poor academic skills in the three essential skills are the strongest predictors of grade retention and later academic success. Arguably, underperformer Kindergarten learners on these skills are likely to remain behind their peers throughout the education cycle (Copple & Bredenkamp, 2016).

Thus, it is imperative to have high-quality childhood education programs if the country wants to have Filipino young learners with solid foundational knowledge who would eventually enter formal education. One of the ways to do this is to ensure that Kindergarten teachers are aware and able to practice tested instructional strategies and environmental characteristics to ensure that they are teaching these three essential skills effectively. These may come in a literacy-rich classroom environment, instruction that builds upon children’s natural curiosity in these three skills, extensive professional development for teachers, and opportunities for social collaboration among learners (Davoudzadeh et al., 2015).

VI. DISCUSSIONS

The results revealed that parents’ and teachers’ experiences regarding the Kindergarten learners’ readiness in the new normal in the identified Kindergarten schools were teaching and learning related. Both participants view Kindergarten learners as unprepared to enter Kindergarten education in the new educational landscape because they have not mastered the basic literacy skills as preschoolers and still have separation anxiety. Teachers have experienced exhausting all efforts to meet ideal instruction and reinforce positive guidance. These brought an impression that Kindergarten teachers are unprepared to learn the learning competencies outlined for their level of education.

Given these, parents and teachers of Kindergarten learners need to collaborate to strengthen and ensure an ideal instructional delivery of the learning competencies intended for kindergarten education in the country amidst the global health crisis and sudden shift to flexible learning modalities in the new normal educational landscape. Collaboration is the key to ensuring learning continuity despite the challenges and issues inherent to the present situation that academic institutions have to hurdle.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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