

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in classroom management, with particular attention to how they organized classroom behavior, addressed challenges, and employed strategies to sustain learner engagement and positive interaction. Guided by a phenomenological framework, the study sought to capture the meanings teachers attached to their daily classroom management practices within public kindergarten settings. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with selected kindergarten teachers and were analyzed using Colaizzi's method of thematic analysis to identify significant statements, formulated meanings, and emergent themes. The findings revealed that classroom management was experienced as a dynamic and emotionally grounded practice rather than a purely technical task. Teachers described managing classrooms as a balance between structure and nurturance, shaped by their teaching styles, emotional labor, and professional identities. Major challenges included managing behavioral diversity among learners, institutional and environmental constraints such as large class sizes and limited resources, and emotional strain associated with sustained classroom demands. To address these challenges, teachers employed play-based and positive strategies, inclusive and interactive practices, reflective coping mechanisms, and support systems involving colleagues and families. Overall, the study highlighted that effective classroom management in kindergarten relied on developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and relationship-centered approaches supported by teacher well-being and institutional support. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of classroom management in early childhood education and provided implications for teacher education, school leadership, and future research aimed at strengthening supportive and inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: *Classroom Management, Kindergarten Teachers, Lived Experiences, Phenomenological Study, Early Childhood Education, Teacher Well-being, Matalam South District.*

Un Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Aligned: Quality Education

INTRODUCTION

Classroom management plays a vital role in the success of teaching and learning, particularly in kindergarten where children are at an early stage of cognitive, social, and emotional development. Teachers are responsible for guiding young learners toward appropriate behavior, maintaining classroom order, and creating an environment that supports active learning. However, managing a kindergarten classroom presents unique challenges because children possess varying levels of attention, emotional control, and social skills.

Previous studies have emphasized that effective classroom management involves structured routines, positive reinforcement, and play-based learning strategies that help channel children's energy into productive participation. Teachers also utilize emotional coaching and reflective practices to guide learners in understanding their feelings and behaviors. Furthermore, collaboration among teachers, parents, and school communities plays an important role in maintaining classroom harmony and supporting children's development.

Despite the existing literature on classroom management strategies, the personal experiences of kindergarten teachers remain an important yet underexplored area of research. Teachers' lived experiences provide deeper insights into how classroom management practices are implemented in real educational settings and how educators cope with daily challenges in early childhood classrooms.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing classroom behavior and maintaining an effective learning environment. Specifically, it sought to understand the strategies, challenges, and reflections of teachers as they navigate classroom management in their professional practice.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in classroom management. Qualitative research was selected because it allows for a deeper understanding of participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. The phenomenological approach focuses on describing and interpreting individuals' lived experiences in order to uncover the essence of a particular phenomenon.

Through this design, the researcher was able to gather detailed narratives from teachers regarding their daily classroom management practices, challenges, and coping strategies.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were selected using purposive sampling. Kindergarten teachers with relevant teaching experience and willingness to participate in the study were included. Teachers who had less than one year of teaching experience or those assigned to other grade levels were excluded to ensure that the participants possessed sufficient experience in managing kindergarten classrooms.

The selected participants provided rich narratives that reflected authentic classroom experiences and professional insights.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants. The interview format allowed teachers to share their experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding classroom management. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences and describe the strategies they use in managing young learners.

The interviews were conducted at times convenient for the participants and were recorded with their consent. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted to capture actual classroom interactions, routines, and behavioral patterns among learners. Field notes were documented during these observations to support the interpretation of interview responses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The researcher carefully reviewed the interview transcripts and observational notes to identify significant statements and patterns related to classroom management experiences.

These statements were then coded and grouped into themes that reflected common experiences among the participants. Triangulation of interview and observation data was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kindergarten Teachers' Lived Experiences in Managing Classroom Behavior and Organization

This theme reflected kindergarten teachers' shared understanding that effective classroom management required a careful balance between structure and nurturance. Teachers experienced classroom management as a process that involved establishing clear routines, rules, and expectations while simultaneously providing emotional care, patience, and reassurance. Structure was perceived as necessary for maintaining order and predictability, whereas nurturance was viewed as essential for addressing learners' emotional needs and developmental readiness. Teachers emphasized that young children responded more positively when discipline was paired with warmth, empathy, and understanding. Classroom management, therefore, was experienced as a relational practice that supported both behavioral regulation and emotional security:

"I always make sure that my routines are clear because children feel more secure when they know what will happen next. I noticed that when learners feel safe, they become calmer and misbehavior decreases." (ID11.1.1)

"I balance being firm with being kind in my classroom. I realized that discipline works better when children feel that I care about them and understand their feelings." (ID11.1.2)

"I do not see classroom management as punishment. I see it as guiding children with patience while helping them learn how to control their behavior." (ID11.1.3)

"I try to correct behavior gently because young children are still learning how to manage their emotions. When I respond calmly, they respond positively." (FGD1.1.1)

“I learned that routines alone are not enough. Children also need emotional support, especially when they feel overwhelmed or frustrated.” (FGD1.1.2)

The findings implied that kindergarten classroom management should be anchored in a developmentally appropriate balance of structure and care. Teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives needed to emphasize emotional responsiveness alongside classroom routines. School leaders were encouraged to support management approaches that recognized young learners' emotional needs rather than relying solely on compliance-based discipline. Policies and training that promoted positive discipline and emotional literacy could help teachers sustain orderly yet nurturing learning environments. This balance also had implications for learner development, as emotionally secure classrooms fostered self-regulation, cooperation, and positive attitudes toward learning.

This finding gained support from Adarlo and Basa (2022), whose study revealed that teachers' effective management of disruptive behaviors relied on empathy and consistent routines. The results corroborated with Andersson and Broström (2023), who emphasized that emotional regulation enhanced classroom management effectiveness. This theme was also congruent with Alegado (2022), who found that classroom management strategies influenced learners' emotional and social development. Additionally, Abdulrahman and Malik (2023) supported the notion that inclusive classroom management required sensitivity to learners' emotional needs and developmental stages.

Teaching Style as a Reflection of Classroom Organization

This theme described how kindergarten teachers perceived classroom organization as a direct reflection of their teaching style and pedagogical philosophy. Teachers experienced classroom management as inseparable from how they taught, interacted with learners, and structured learning activities. A child-centered teaching style was reflected in flexible seating, learning centers, and open spaces for play and movement, while a more structured approach was mirrored in defined areas, visual schedules, and orderly layouts. Classroom organization was thus experienced as an intentional pedagogical choice that reinforced teachers' instructional goals and classroom values:

“My classroom setup reflects how I teach. Since I use play-based learning, I arrange learning centers where children can move freely and explore.” (IDI1.2.1)

“When my classroom is organized, teaching becomes easier. Children know where to go and what to do, which reduces behavioral problems.” (ID1.2.2)

“My teaching style is calm and structured, so I make sure that my classroom is orderly and materials are accessible.” (ID1.2.3)

“I noticed that when my classroom layout matches my teaching approach, children become more focused and engaged.” (FGD1.2.1)

“I see classroom organization as part of my identity as a teacher. It shows my values and how I want children to learn.” (FGD1.2.2)

The findings suggested that classroom organization should be recognized as a pedagogical tool rather than a mere physical arrangement. School administrators were encouraged to allow teachers autonomy in designing classroom spaces aligned with their teaching philosophies. Professional development programs could integrate training on classroom layout, learning space design, and organization as key components of classroom management. By supporting teachers in aligning classroom organization with instructional style, schools could enhance learner engagement, reduce behavioral issues, and promote meaningful learning experiences.

This interpretation was supported by Chavez and Rivera (2021), who emphasized the role of classroom organization in learner engagement. The results aligned with Bonna (2023), who identified teaching style as a determinant of classroom management practices. This theme was also consistent with Villanueva and Bautista (2021), who found that reflective teaching practices shaped classroom organization. Moreover, Ahmed and Du Plessis (2024) highlighted that organized learning environments enhanced instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes.

Classroom Management as a Balance of Structure and Nurture (Ongoing and Adaptive Practice)

While the first theme emphasized balance as a principle, this theme highlighted classroom management as an ongoing, adaptive process. Teachers experienced classroom management not as a fixed set of strategies but as a continuous adjustment of structure and care based on learners' responses and daily classroom realities. Teachers described modifying routines, expectations, and approaches as learners' needs evolved. This theme reflected classroom management as a dynamic practice requiring flexibility, attentiveness, and responsiveness to changing classroom conditions:

"I adjust my routines depending on how my learners behave each day. Some days require more structure, while others need more emotional support." (ID11.3.1)

"I learned that what works today may not work tomorrow. Classroom management requires constant adjustment." (ID11.3.2)

"I change my approach when I see that children are tired or overstimulated. I become more flexible with activities." (ID11.3.3)

"I observe my pupils closely and adjust my strategies based on their reactions." (FGD1.3.1)

"Classroom management is a daily process of balancing rules and understanding." (FGD1.3.2)

The findings implied that classroom management training should emphasize adaptability and reflective practice. Teachers needed opportunities to reflect on classroom experiences and adjust strategies accordingly. School systems could support this by encouraging reflective dialogue, mentoring, and professional learning communities. Recognizing classroom management as an evolving process reduced unrealistic expectations of uniform strategies and empowered teachers to respond authentically to learners' needs.

This theme was supported by Delgado and Samson (2022), who emphasized reflective classroom management practices. The findings corroborated Cahapay (2022), who highlighted teachers' adaptive strategies in managing behavior during changing learning conditions. This was also congruent with Baladjay and Barrios (2023), who identified flexibility as essential in post-pandemic classroom management.

Emotional Labor and Professional Identity

This theme captured how classroom management experiences shaped teachers' emotional labor and professional identity. Teachers described managing behavior as emotionally demanding work that required patience, resilience, and self-regulation. Over time, these experiences contributed to teachers' sense of self as educators. Classroom management challenges became opportunities for growth, reflection, and identity formation. Teachers experienced themselves not merely as instructors but as emotional guides, mentors, and role models for young learners.

“I became more patient and confident through managing classroom behavior. These experiences shaped who I am as a teacher.” (ID11.4.1)

“I realized that classroom management is emotionally draining, but it also helps me grow professionally.” (ID11.4.2)

“I learned to regulate my emotions because my reactions affect how children behave.” (ID11.4.3)

“Managing young children taught me resilience and empathy.” (FGD1.4.1)

“My classroom experiences helped define my identity as a caring and reflective teacher.” (FGD1.4.2)

The findings suggested that emotional labor should be recognized as an integral part of classroom management. Teacher support programs should address emotional well-being, resilience, and reflective practice. Mentoring systems and wellness initiatives could help teachers sustain their professional identity and commitment. Recognizing emotional labor validated teachers' experiences and reinforced the importance of supporting their holistic development.

This theme aligned with Lopez and Manalo (2023), who highlighted emotional labor as a contributor to teacher burnout and identity formation. The results were congruent with Smith and Riley (2023), who found that emotional demands influenced classroom management effectiveness. This was also supported by Padilla (2024), who emphasized the role of classroom experiences in shaping teachers' professional identity, and Gonzales and Rueda (2024), who underscored the relationship between teacher personality and classroom management efficacy.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Kindergarten Teachers' Lived Experiences in Managing Classroom Behavior and Organization

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Classroom routines and structure	Clear routines, visual schedules, consistency	“Clear routines help learners feel secure and reduce misbehavior.” (ID11.3); “When	Classroom Management as a Balance of Structure and Nurturance	Teachers experienced classroom management as establishing predictable

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
		children know what to expect, they behave better." (IDDI9)		structures that provide emotional security and behavioral stability for young learners.
Classroom organization	Learning centers, accessible materials, defined spaces	"My classroom setup reflects how I teach." (IDDI2); "Organized spaces reduce confusion." (IDDI14)	Teaching Style as a Reflection of Classroom Organization	Teachers perceived classroom organization as a physical manifestation of their teaching philosophy and instructional identity.
Emotional role of teachers	Nurturing role, patience, empathy	"I see myself not just as a teacher but as a nurturer." (IDDI1); "Emotional safety is as important as discipline." (FGD2)	Classroom Management as a Balance of Structure and Nurturance	Classroom management was experienced as both instructional and emotional work that required care, patience, and guidance.
Professional growth	Reflection, confidence, identity formation	"Managing behavior helped me grow more confident." (IDDI9); "Classroom management shaped who I am as a teacher." (IDDI18)	Emotional Labor and Professional Identity	Teachers' experiences in managing classrooms contributed to personal growth, resilience, and a strengthened professional identity.

Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Classroom Management

Table 2 presented the thematic analysis addressing the second research question. The analysis revealed three major, non-overlapping themes: **Managing Behavioral Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms**, **Institutional and Environmental Constraints on Classroom Management**, and **Emotional Labor and Teacher Well-Being Challenges**. These themes illustrated that classroom management challenges were multi-layered, emerging from learner diversity, systemic and contextual limitations, and the emotional demands placed on teachers. The table highlighted that kindergarten teachers' difficulties in managing classrooms extended beyond individual teaching competence and were deeply embedded in developmental, institutional, and emotional realities of early childhood education.

Managing Behavioral Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms

The theme *Managing Behavioral Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms* captured teachers' experiences of handling wide variations in learners' behavior, emotional regulation, and developmental readiness. Kindergarten teachers described classrooms composed of children with differing temperaments, attention spans, emotional needs, and social skills. These differences required teachers to constantly adjust expectations, strategies, and responses. Classroom management was not experienced as applying uniform rules but as a process of responding to individual learner needs while maintaining group order. Teachers emphasized that young learners were still developing self-regulation skills, making behavioral inconsistency a normal yet challenging aspect of classroom life. This diversity demanded patience, sensitivity, and differentiated management approaches, which intensified the complexity of daily classroom management:

"I experience different behaviors every day in my classroom, and no single strategy works for all learners. Some children need gentle reminders, while others need more guidance and reassurance before they can follow routines." (IDI2.1.1)

"I see that children come to school with different emotional needs, and this affects how they behave in class. I have to adjust how I manage each child without neglecting the rest." (IDI2.1.2)

"I often deal with learners who have difficulty controlling their emotions, and this makes classroom management more challenging than simply enforcing rules." (IDI2.1.3)

"I noticed that some pupils need more time to understand expectations, while others can follow routines easily. Managing these differences requires flexibility." (FGD2.1.1)
"I learned that behavior problems are not always intentional. Many times, children act out because they are still learning how to express themselves." (FGD2.1.2)

The implications of this theme underscored the need for developmentally responsive classroom management approaches in kindergarten settings. Teacher training and professional development programs needed to emphasize differentiated behavior management strategies that account for learners' emotional and developmental diversity. Schools were encouraged to provide teachers with tools and frameworks that support individualized guidance rather than rigid discipline models. Recognizing behavioral diversity as a developmental reality rather than a disciplinary failure could foster more inclusive and supportive classroom environments. Additionally, this theme highlighted the importance of collaboration with parents and specialists to address learners' behavioral needs holistically.

This finding gained support from the study of Adarlo and Basa (2022), who reported that teachers managing disruptive behaviors relied heavily on understanding learners' emotional and developmental differences. The results corroborated the findings of Abdulrahman and Malik (2023), who emphasized that inclusive classroom management required flexible strategies tailored to individual learners. This was also congruent with Bautista and Pineda (2021), who found that behavioral diversity in classrooms demanded culturally and developmentally sensitive management practices.

Institutional and Environmental Constraints on Classroom Management

The theme *Institutional and Environmental Constraints on Classroom Management* reflected challenges arising from conditions beyond teachers' immediate control. Kindergarten teachers described large class sizes, limited classroom space, insufficient learning materials, noise, and rigid institutional demands as significant barriers to effective classroom management. These constraints limited teachers' ability to monitor learners closely, implement individualized strategies, and create optimal learning environments. Teachers expressed frustration that even well-planned management strategies became difficult to sustain when structural conditions were unfavorable. Classroom management was thus experienced not only as a pedagogical task but also as a struggle against systemic limitations:

"I find it very difficult to monitor all pupils because my class is large, and the space is limited. Even when I want to give attention to

everyone, it is not always possible.” (IDI2.2.1)
“I notice that when the classroom is noisy or crowded, children become restless, and managing behavior becomes more challenging.” (IDI2.2.2)
“I want to implement engaging activities, but the lack of materials sometimes limits what I can do, which affects children’s behavior.” (IDI2.2.3)
“I feel that institutional demands, such as paperwork and schedules, reduce the time I can focus on managing my classroom effectively.” (FGD2.2.1)
“I try my best to organize my classroom, but the physical limitations make it hard to create an ideal learning environment.” (FGD2.2.2)

This theme pointed to the need for systemic support to improve classroom management conditions. Reducing class sizes, improving classroom infrastructure, and ensuring adequate learning resources could significantly ease teachers’ management challenges. School leaders and policymakers were encouraged to consider classroom management as a shared institutional responsibility rather than solely a teacher’s burden. Addressing environmental and structural barriers could enhance teachers’ capacity to implement positive and effective management strategies, ultimately benefiting learner engagement and behavior.

This theme was supported by Alvarez and Dela Cruz (2021), who found that large class sizes and limited resources negatively affected learner engagement and classroom control. The results were consistent with Castillo and Ronquillo (2024), who emphasized that institutional conditions influenced teachers’ ability to maintain discipline in public schools. This finding also aligned with Impuesto (2024), who highlighted how teachers’ work conditions shaped classroom management practices.

Emotional Labor and Teacher Well-Being Challenges

The theme *Emotional Labor and Teacher Well-Being Challenges* highlighted the emotional demands inherent in managing kindergarten classrooms. Teachers described classroom management as emotionally taxing, requiring constant patience, self-regulation, and resilience. Stress, fatigue, self-doubt, and emotional exhaustion affected how teachers responded to behavioral challenges. Teachers acknowledged that their emotional state directly influenced classroom atmosphere and learner behavior. Managing young children required teachers to regulate their own emotions before addressing learners’ actions, making emotional labor a central component of classroom management:

“I realized that when I am stressed or tired, my patience becomes shorter, and it becomes harder to manage behavior calmly.” (IDI2.3.1)

“I feel emotionally drained at times because managing young children requires constant attention and emotional control.” (IDI2.3.2)

“I try to stay calm, but there are days when emotional exhaustion affects how I respond to misbehavior.” (IDI2.3.3)

“I learned that my emotions affect the classroom. When I am calm, the children are calmer too.” (FGD2.3.1)

“I sometimes doubt myself when strategies do not work immediately, and this affects my confidence as a teacher.” (FGD2.3.2)

This theme emphasized the importance of supporting teachers' emotional well-being as part of classroom management. Teacher support programs needed to incorporate wellness initiatives, counseling, mentoring, and opportunities for reflection. Recognizing emotional labor as a legitimate aspect of teaching could reduce stigma and encourage teachers to seek support. Strengthening teacher well-being could enhance classroom management effectiveness, reduce burnout, and promote long-term teacher retention.

This finding was strongly supported by Lopez and Manalo (2023), who identified emotional labor as a key factor in teacher burnout related to classroom management. The results corroborated Andersson and Broström (2023), who found that teachers' emotional regulation significantly influenced management effectiveness. This theme was also consistent with Smith and Riley (2023), who emphasized the long-term impact of stress on classroom management outcomes.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Classroom Management

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Learner-related challenges	Diverse behaviors, emotional regulation, developmental differences, attention span	“Learners differ in behavior and emotional regulation.” (IDI7); “Some children need more guidance and reassurance.” (IDI17)	Managing Behavioral Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms	Teachers experienced classroom management difficulties due to wide variations in learners' behavior, emotional maturity, and developmental

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Structural and contextual barriers	Large class size, limited space, insufficient materials, noise, institutional demands	“Large class size makes it hard to monitor all pupils.” (ID11); “Noise and limited space affect children’s behavior.” (ID14)	Institutional and Environmental Constraints on Classroom Management	readiness, requiring constant differentiation and flexibility. Classroom management was constrained by systemic and environmental conditions beyond teachers’ control, limiting their ability to implement ideal management practices. Managing classrooms required significant emotional labor, and teachers’ well-being directly influenced their patience, consistency, and effectiveness in handling behavior.
Teacher-related emotional challenges	Stress, fatigue, burnout, self-doubt, emotional regulation	“My emotional state affects how I manage behavior.” (ID12); “Teaching kindergarten is emotionally draining.” (ID11)	Emotional Labor and Teacher Well-Being Challenges	

Strategies Used by Kindergarten Teachers to Maintain Learner Engagement and Promote Positive Classroom Interaction

Table 3 presented the thematic analysis that addressed the third research question. The table revealed four interrelated yet distinct themes: **Play-Based and Positive Strategies as Core Management Practices, Inclusive and Interactive Classroom Practices, Coping, Reflection, and Support as Survival Mechanisms,** and **Inclusive Practices in Managing Learner Diversity.** Together, these themes

demonstrated that kindergarten teachers' classroom management strategies extended beyond instructional techniques and encompassed emotional, social, and reflective dimensions of teaching. The findings highlighted that effective classroom management in early childhood settings was grounded in developmentally appropriate engagement strategies, inclusive social interaction, and sustained teacher well-being.

Play-Based and Positive Strategies as Core Management Practices

The theme *Play-Based and Positive Strategies as Core Management Practices* captured teachers' shared experiences of using play as the foundation of classroom management and learner engagement. Kindergarten teachers consistently described play-based activities such as games, songs, storytelling, movement, and learning centers as essential tools for sustaining attention, regulating behavior, and fostering enjoyment in learning. Rather than viewing play as separate from discipline, teachers experienced it as a primary mechanism through which behavior was guided and engagement was maintained. Positive reinforcement, encouragement, and gentle redirection were embedded within play-based activities, allowing children to learn expected behaviors in a natural and non-threatening manner. Teachers emphasized that young learners were more cooperative and attentive when learning activities aligned with their developmental needs and interests:

Teachers' lived experiences illustrated how play transformed classroom management from a reactive process into a proactive and engaging practice.

"I use play-based activities every day because children learn best when they enjoy what they are doing. I noticed that when lessons feel like play, learners participate more and misbehavior decreases."
(IDI3.1.1)

"I integrate songs and movement because sitting for long periods makes children restless. When I allow them to move, they stay focused longer." (IDI3.1.2)

"I choose to praise children when they follow rules instead of focusing on misbehavior. This positive approach motivates them to cooperate." (IDI3.1.3)

"I redirect behavior gently through games and activities instead of scolding. Children respond better when discipline is part of learning."
(FGD3.1.1)

"I observed that playful routines make transitions smoother and reduce disruptions in the classroom." (FGD3.1.2)

The implications of this theme underscored the importance of play-based pedagogy as a central classroom management strategy in kindergarten. Teacher education programs and in-service training needed to emphasize the integration of play and positive discipline as core management approaches

rather than optional techniques. School leaders were encouraged to support instructional flexibility that allowed teachers to design engaging, play-oriented lessons. Policies that prioritized academic rigor at the expense of play risked undermining effective behavior management in early childhood classrooms. Recognizing play as a legitimate and powerful management tool could enhance learner engagement, emotional regulation, and long-term learning dispositions.

This finding gained strong support from Alegado (2022), who emphasized that classroom management strategies influenced learners' social and emotional development. The results corroborated Ahmed and Du Plessis (2024), who found that engaging instructional approaches enhanced both learner participation and academic outcomes. This was also congruent with Baladjay and Barrios (2023), who identified play-based strategies as effective management practices in post-pandemic classrooms.

Inclusive and Interactive Classroom Practices

The theme *Inclusive and Interactive Classroom Practices* reflected teachers' deliberate efforts to promote communication, collaboration, and positive peer interaction as part of classroom management. Teachers experienced classroom interaction not merely as a byproduct of instruction but as a strategic avenue for guiding behavior and building social skills. Activities such as circle time, group work, storytelling, and cooperative games were intentionally used to encourage children to express themselves, listen to others, and practice cooperation. Teachers emphasized that interactive practices helped create a sense of belonging and mutual respect, which in turn reduced behavioral problems:

Teachers' narratives highlighted how interaction and communication shaped classroom dynamics.

"I encourage children to talk during circle time because it helps them express their feelings and learn to listen to others." (IDI3.2.1)

"I use group activities so learners can practice sharing and working together. This improves their behavior and relationships." (IDI3.2.2)

"I noticed that when children feel heard, they are more willing to follow classroom rules." (IDI3.2.3)

"I design activities where children collaborate because it teaches them cooperation and respect." (FGD3.2.1)

"I allow children to share their ideas because it builds confidence and positive interaction." (FGD3.2.2)

The theme emphasized that classroom management was deeply connected to social learning. Teachers who fostered interactive environments created classrooms where learners were active participants rather than passive

recipients of rules. Schools were encouraged to support collaborative learning structures that promoted communication and peer interaction. Teacher training programs could further strengthen teachers' skills in facilitating dialogue, cooperation, and conflict resolution among young learners. By embedding interaction into classroom management, teachers cultivated positive classroom climates that supported both behavior and learning.

This theme was supported by Chavez and Rivera (2021), who found that interactive classroom organization enhanced learner engagement. The findings aligned with Nkhata et al. (2023), who reported that learners responded positively to collaborative management practices. This was also consistent with Bautista and Pineda (2021), who emphasized the role of communication and interaction in managing multicultural classrooms.

Coping, Reflection, and Support as Survival Mechanisms

The theme *Coping, Reflection, and Support as Survival Mechanisms* highlighted how teachers sustained effective classroom management through personal and professional coping strategies. Teachers described reflection, self-care, prayer, mindfulness, journaling, and seeking peer support as essential practices that helped them manage stress and maintain effectiveness. Classroom management was experienced as emotionally demanding, and teachers relied on reflective practices to evaluate what worked, adjust strategies, and regain emotional balance. Support from colleagues and professional development opportunities further strengthened teachers' confidence and resilience.

Teachers articulated how coping strategies supported their daily practice:

"I reflect on my day after class to understand what worked and what did not. This helps me improve my strategies." (IDI3.3.1)

"I practice self-care because managing a kindergarten class is emotionally exhausting. Rest helps me remain patient." (IDI3.3.2)

"I seek advice from my colleagues when I feel overwhelmed. Their support gives me new ideas." (IDI3.3.3)

"I pray and journal to release stress and remind myself of my purpose as a teacher." (FGD3.3.1)

"I attend trainings to build my confidence and learn better classroom management strategies." (FGD3.3.2)

This theme pointed to the need for systemic support for teachers' well-being. Classroom management effectiveness depended not only on skills but also on teachers' emotional resilience. Schools were encouraged to foster supportive cultures where reflection, mentoring, and collaboration were valued. Wellness programs, peer learning communities, and accessible professional development could help teachers sustain positive management practices and reduce burnout. This finding was supported by Lopez and Manalo (2023), who emphasized the role of emotional labor in teacher burnout. The results corroborated Smith and Riley

(2023), who found that teacher stress affected management effectiveness. This was also consistent with Tan and Cabello (2024), who highlighted the value of teacher collaboration in maintaining classroom discipline.

Inclusive Practices in Managing Learner Diversity

The theme *Inclusive Practices in Managing Learner Diversity* reflected teachers' strategies in adapting classroom management to accommodate learners' diverse abilities, backgrounds, and emotional needs. Teachers experienced inclusivity as central to effective management, emphasizing differentiated tasks, flexible routines, respectful communication, and collaboration with parents. Rather than enforcing uniform expectations, teachers adjusted strategies to ensure that all learners felt valued and capable. Inclusivity was thus experienced as both a moral responsibility and a practical necessity in managing behavior and engagement.

Teachers' accounts illustrated inclusive management in action:

"I adjust my strategies depending on each learner's needs because children learn and behave differently." (IDI3.4.1)

"I involve parents so we can support the child both at home and in school." (IDI3.4.2)

"I use simple language and visual aids to help all children understand expectations." (IDI3.4.3)

"I encourage respect for differences so children feel accepted in the classroom." (FGD3.4.1)

"I provide extra guidance to learners who need more support instead of punishing them." (FGD3.4.2)

The implications of this theme emphasized the importance of inclusive classroom management practices in early childhood education. Teacher training and school policies needed to support differentiation and culturally responsive practices. Collaboration with families and stakeholders strengthened behavior support systems and ensured continuity of guidance. Inclusive management practices not only addressed behavioral challenges but also promoted equity, confidence, and participation among young learners.

This theme gained support from Abdulrahman and Malik (2023), who highlighted inclusive classroom management practices in early education. The findings were congruent with Garcia and Pantao (2021), who emphasized cultural sensitivity in classroom management. This was also supported by Owusu-Addo (2022), who underscored the role of inclusive strategies in teacher education and classroom practice.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis of Strategies Used by Kindergarten Teachers to Maintain Learner Engagement and Promote Positive Classroom Interaction

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Engagement strategies	Play-based learning, movement, songs	"Play-based activities keep children engaged." (IDD11); "Movement helps sustain attention." (IDD11)	Play-Based and Positive Strategies as Core Management Practices	Play was central to maintaining attention, regulating behavior, and fostering enjoyment in learning.
Positive discipline	Praise, reinforcement, gentle redirection	"Positive reinforcement encourages cooperation." (IDD13); "I redirect instead of punishing." (IDD19)	Play-Based and Positive Strategies as Core Management Practices	Teachers favored constructive, non-punitive approaches to guide behavior and promote cooperation.
Communication and collaboration	Group work, circle time, storytelling	"Circle time helps children communicate." (IDD11); "Group activities teach cooperation." (IDD13)	Inclusive and Interactive Classroom Practices	Social interaction was intentionally used to develop communication skills and positive peer relationships.
Coping and self-care	Reflection, prayer, peer support	"Self-care helps me cope with classroom stress." (IDD11); "Support from colleagues helps me continue." (IDD16)	Coping, Reflection, and Support as Survival Mechanisms	Sustained classroom management depended on teachers' reflective practices and emotional support systems.
Inclusive practices	Differentiation, parental collaboration,	"I adjust strategies to fit each learner."	Inclusive Practices in Managing	Effective classroom management

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
	respect for diversity	(IDD12); “Involving parents helps support behavior.” (IDD18)	Learner Diversity	required inclusive, culturally responsive, and collaborative strategies.

CONCLUSION

1. This study explored the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in managing classroom behavior and learning environments. The findings revealed that effective classroom management involves structured routines, positive reinforcement, play-based learning strategies, and emotional support for learners.
2. Teachers highlighted the importance of empathy, patience, and reflective teaching practices in addressing classroom challenges. Collaboration with parents, colleagues, and school administrators also plays a significant role in maintaining classroom harmony.
3. The study concludes that classroom management in kindergarten extends beyond maintaining discipline. It involves building meaningful relationships with learners, creating supportive learning environments, and adapting teaching strategies to meet children's developmental needs.
4. The insights gained from this research may contribute to improving teacher training programs, strengthening school support systems, and guiding future research in early childhood education.

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