

Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the Utilization of Curricular Themes

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Abstract:

The study aimed to assess the problem encountered by kindergarten teachers in Ayungon, Negros Oriental during the 2022-2023 school year when using curricular themes, informing intervention strategies. Findings indicate that younger teachers (below 32 years old) encountered significant difficulties, particularly in managing student resistance. Meanwhile, teachers with over seven years of experience perceived extensive challenges across personal, familial, school-related, and community-related domains. These challenges included navigating discussions on family experiences and generating innovative teaching approaches. Age-related differences were evident in self-perception of problems, with younger teachers reporting higher levels of difficulty in managing personal challenges. However, no significant differences were found across age groups or length of service in challenges related to family, school, and community interactions, suggesting consistent issues regardless of tenure.

Keywords: Curricular Themes, Kindergarten Education, Teaching Challenges

Introduction:

Nature of the Problem

Kindergarten teachers play a vital role in early childhood education, handling tasks such as supervision, discipline, embracing cultural diversity, and fostering self-reliance through appropriate teaching strategies (McDonnell, 2014). They build strong partnerships with families and colleagues (Lundin, 2016), establish nurturing learning environments, and focus on promoting children's overall development (NAEYC, 2015). The delivery of preschool curriculum is influenced by both personal and environmental factors. As Langenbach and Neskora (2015) explain, early childhood curriculum involves both long-term planning and short-term implementation, often guided by children's interests. This requires spontaneity, flexibility, and continuous adjustment of activities and goals, all aligned with program philosophy and assessment strategies (Lawton, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated curriculum implementation, with many countries temporarily closing schools to prevent virus spread (Tria, 2020). In response, modular learning delivery (MLD) became the most feasible mode of instruction. In the Philippines, printed modules are widely used, especially in public schools, as they emerged as the most preferred method among parents during the pandemic (Bernardo, 2020). This approach also addresses the needs of learners in rural areas where internet access is limited, highlighting the challenges and adaptability required of teachers in delivering curriculum under varying and often difficult circumstances.

With the preceding roles teachers perform daily, it would be fitting to discuss the degree of adjustments or challenges experienced by science in the new normal, specifically on planning and preparations, module distribution as facilitators, and assessment of learners' performance. Intriguing questions might surface about how teachers, specifically science teachers, deliver their lessons and do the formative and summative assessments. This vital motivating factor encouraged this researcher to cite problems encountered by science teachers. As a secondary teacher, the researcher has observed that teachers must find time for the challenges they have encountered in delivering modules in far-flung areas. They analyze the challenges confronting science teachers with the modular approach.

Current State of Knowledge

Research on early childhood education highlights the critical role that kindergarten teachers play in shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of young children. According to McDonnell (2014), teachers are responsible not only for curriculum delivery but also for fostering self-reliance, managing classroom dynamics, and building strong relationships with families and the broader community. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2015) emphasizes the importance of creating nurturing learning environments that support children's growth, which requires both personal dedication and adequate environmental resources. Within this framework, effective curriculum design and implementation demand flexibility and responsiveness to children's interests, as Langenbach and Neskora (2015) argue, balancing long-term planning with short-term adaptations. Lawton (2016) further explains that curriculum delivery is an iterative process, requiring continuous assessment and adjustment to meet learners' evolving needs, underscoring the complexity and adaptability required of teachers, especially in developmental-appropriate kindergarten settings.

This adaptability became even more crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced global education systems to adopt alternative learning modalities. In the Philippines, Modular Learning Delivery emerged as the dominant method due to limited internet access and infrastructure challenges, particularly in rural areas, thereby increasing the workload for teachers in planning, distributing materials, and assessing students remotely (Tria, 2020; Bernardo, 2020). Despite these challenges, limited research exists on teachers' experiences with modular learning, especially among kindergarten educators who require greater interaction and guidance. Complementing this, Siyi et al. (2024) explored parental perspectives on preschool advanced learning classes, finding that academic, social, health, and economic factors heavily influence parental views, with economic concerns showing significant variation by sex but otherwise consistent across demographic groups.

Building on these foundational elements, Turner (2018) emphasizes the importance of intentional curriculum planning in kindergarten through the integration of themes such as self, family, school, and community. She argues that these themes foster meaningful and engaging learning experiences that support both academic and socioemotional development, helping children develop self-identity, social understanding, and community awareness. Cruz (2019) empirically supports this by demonstrating that culturally relevant curricular themes grounded in Filipino culture enhance children's cognitive development, socioemotional skills, and academic achievement while fostering cultural pride. Such contextually meaningful themes not only improve education locally but also serve as models for educators worldwide.

Extending the impact of these curricular themes beyond early education, Turner and Miller (2019) investigated their long-term effects on students' community engagement, revealing that early exposure to these themes encourages social responsibility and active participation well beyond academic success. Earlier, Johnson and Turner (2014) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of curricular themes in early childhood education worldwide, highlighting cultural, social, and educational variations and commonalities. Their research informs international education policies by identifying best practices and promoting culturally sensitive approaches that enrich early learning experiences globally, underscoring the broad significance of well-designed curricular themes in fostering holistic development from early childhood onward.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is anchored on the theory of Problems that Motorola developed in the 1980s. A "theory of problems" typically refers to a framework or principles that help researchers or problem solvers understand, categorize, and address various problems. The theory of problems often involves methods or guidelines for defining and framing problems effectively. It helps individuals identify the core issues and root causes of a problem, which is crucial for developing solutions. It may include a taxonomy or classification system for different types of problems. This can help individuals recognize patterns and similarities among problems and apply appropriate problem-solving techniques accordingly.

A theory of problems can provide strategies and approaches for solving different problems. It may suggest analytical, creative, or systematic methods for addressing various challenges. Also, incorporate decision-making principles to help individuals make informed choices when selecting problem-solving strategies and evaluating potential solutions. It is important to note that there is no universal "theory of problems." Instead, various theories and frameworks are tailored to specific domains or contexts. For instance, in management and business, you might encounter theories related to problem-solving, such as Root Cause Analysis (RCA) or Six Sigma, which provide structured approaches for identifying and addressing issues.

When conducting research or addressing complex issues, individuals often draw upon established theories of problems or develop their problem-solving frameworks based on the specific challenges they face. These theories help you analyze the problems encountered by kindergarten teachers and provide insights into potential solutions or improvements in curricular design and implementation.

Objectives

This study aimed to determine the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes, as basis for intervention plan in the district of Ayungon, Negros Oriental, during the School Year 2022-2023. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following: 1.) the profile of the respondents in terms of age and length of service; 2.) the degree of problems kindergarten teachers encounter in the following areas; myself, my family, my school, and my community; 3.) the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers when grouped according to variables; and 4.) the significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers when grouped and compared according to the variables? 5.) Based on the study's results, what intervention plan can be proposed.

Methodology:

This section presents the study's methodology, which includes the research design, study locale, respondents, data gathering instrument, data gathering procedure, validity of the research instrument, reliability of the data research instrument, and statistical treatment used.

Research Design

This study utilizes a descriptive research design to assess the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in District Ayungon when implementing curricular themes. Descriptive research aims to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data to understand current conditions, behaviors, and relationships among variables. It goes beyond simple data gathering by exploring connections, patterns, and cause-and-effect relationships. As supported by Best (2012), this design is appropriate for examining existing practices, attitudes, and trends, making it suitable for identifying problems and informing future strategies to enhance early childhood education.

Study Respondents

The study's respondents are the thirty-four (34) kindergarten teachers in the Ayungon District are the study's respondents using purposive sampling.

Instruments

The study utilized a two-part researcher-made questionnaire to gather data, with the first section covering respondents' profiles (age and length of service) and the second section consisting of 40 line-item questions divided into four categories: "Myself," "My Family," "My School," and "My Community." Respondents rated each item using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Always). To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on 30 teachers from the Canlaon City Division who were not part of the actual study. Using Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency, the reliability index of the instrument was found to be 0.790, which is interpreted as "Adequate," indicating that the questionnaire is reasonably reliable.

Data Gathering Procedure

To distribute the questionnaires, the researcher first obtained written permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education of Negros Occidental. After securing consent, each respondent received a questionnaire, along with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, and their voluntary participation was emphasized. The gathered data will serve as the basis for developing a proposed kindergarten teacher training curriculum. To ensure validity, the questionnaire underwent content validation by three education and research experts: a PhD holder and Principal II, and two Master Teachers I who also serve as INSET Coordinators at the secondary level. Their suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. Following the criteria of Good and Scates, the instrument received a validity score of 4.55, which is interpreted as "Excellent."

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used the descriptive analytical scheme and frequency and percentage to determine the profile of the respondents in terms of age and length of service.

Objective No. 2 utilized a descriptive-analytical scheme and mean to determine the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in myself, my family, my school, and my community.

Objective No. 3 used the descriptive analytical scheme and mean to determine the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers based on myself, my family, my school, and my community, and groupings by selected variables.

Objective No. 4 utilized a comparative analytical scheme and Mann-Whitney U test to determine the significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers based on myself, my family, my school, and my community, and groupings by selected variables.

Results and Discussion:

In this chapter, the data gathered were further treated, presented, analyzed, and interpreted to focus on the specific problems of the study. It presents the study's findings through statistical tools and treatment of descriptive and inferential data.

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1
Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Younger (below 32 years old)	15	44.1
	Older (32 years old & above)	19	55.9
Length of Service	Shorter (less than 7 years)	16	47.1
	Longer (7 years & more)	18	52.9
Total		34	100.00

As presented in Table 1, 15 or 44.1% are younger respondents (below 32 years old), while 19 or 55.9% are older respondents (32 years old and above). For variable length of service, 16 or 47.1% of the respondents had served for less than 7 years, while 18 or 52.9% had served for more than 7 years. This implies that the older group contributed a more significant number of respondents, and the majority had served for longer years. The result aligns with that of Velonta (2022), wherein most respondents are older kindergarten teachers, and Tabarranza (2021) revealed that most kindergarten teachers have longer years of service.

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the Utilization of Curricular Themes in the Areas of Myself, Family, School, and Community

Table 2
Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the Utilization of curricular themes in the area myself

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>		
1. limiting resources for the utilization of curricular themes.	4.64	Very High Degree
2. lacking adequate materials, books, and other resources.	4.73	Very High Degree
3. lacking technology to support learning that can hinder teachers in effectively integrating the themes in the lesson.	4.70	Very High Degree
4. facing limited time constraints when trying to implement curricular themes into their lesson.	4.58	Very High Degree
5. tasking to attend to throughout the day, finding the time and energy to focus on lessons.	4.50	Very High Degree
6. accessing the support they need to effectively integrate curricular themes into their classroom.	4.38	High Degree
7. lacking training or expertise needed to properly utilize curricular themes in their classroom.	4.79	Very High Degree
8. adapting the themes and make them applicable to their pupils needs.	4.67	Very High Degree
9. encountering resistance from their pupils to learn and engage with the curricular themes.	4.82	Very High Degree
10. understanding the relevance of the themes that are uninterested in learning.	4.52	Very High Degree
Mean	4.63	Very High Degree

Table 2 exposes the result of the degree of the problem encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area. This result exposed an overall mean score of 4.63, interpreted as a very high degree.

However, for further analysis, the lowest mean score of 4.38 or high degree was on item no. 6 in accessing the support they need to effectively integrate curricular themes into their classroom. On the other hand, the highest mean of 4.82, or a very high degree, was on item no. 9, which was about encountering resistance from their pupils to learn and engage with the curricular themes.

The result implies that most respondents felt pressured when the learners resisted learning and engaging in curricular activities. This is very common in public and private kindergarten schools, especially when it's their first time to go to school and their parents are not around. Teachers who often feel under enormous pressure must regain control

and patience. Entering a new environment can be scary for kindergarten learners; hence, teachers must make sure that the classroom is child-friendly and use play-based activities to stimulate the socio-emotional skills of the learners.

The result aligns with Reyes and De Chavez (2021), wherein the researchers utilized play-based learning activities for learners who resist learning and engage in classroom activities. The study also revealed that play-based activities developed pupils' socio-emotional, psychomotor, and cognitive skills to some extent.

Table 3

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my family

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>		
1. resourcing to support the implementation of curricular themes related to my family.	4.29	High Degree
2. limiting prior knowledge of diverse family which gives different views into the curriculum.	4.50	Very High Degree
3. creating a challenge for incorporating different perspective in curriculum.	4.58	Very High Degree
4. engaging in the learning of these themes which can lead to classroom disruptions of the content of some pupils.	4.47	High Degree
5. lacking understanding of the content for some pupils in the themes.	4.73	Very High Degree
6. developing age-appropriate activities to young pupils.	4.73	Very High Degree
7. ensuring the lessons that are engaging to young pupils in the themes.	4.73	Very High Degree
8. sharing to them a picture related to a family.	4.61	Very High Degree
9. sharing to the class an activity in belonging to a family.	4.76	Very High Degree
10. asking them about the experiences of a family.	4.88	Very High Degree
Mean	4.63	Very High Degree

Table 3 shows the degree of problems kindergarten teachers encountered in the utilization of curricular themes in my family. The results disclosed an overall mean score of 4.63, interpreted as a very high degree. Further, the lowest mean of 4.29, interpreted as a high degree, was on item no. 1, which is on resources to support the implementation of curricular themes related to my family. The highest mean score of 4.88, or a very high degree, was obtained by item no. 10 on asking them about the experiences of a family.

The result implies that most teachers had difficulties when the learners were asked to share about their families. Many learners still need to be more hesitant to talk and share their family experiences. At this age, children often lack the language, literacy, and communication skills required to communicate effectively. Hence, it is essential for educators, such as myself and my family, to provide as many opportunities as we can for learners to practice their communication skills. The result relates to Qi et al. (2020), who revealed that children with lower language skills exhibited higher behavior problems in classrooms where teachers provided lower emotional support. Hence, the researchers recommended enhancing teachers' emotional support aimed at children with lower language skills and for future research.

Table 4

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my school

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>		
1. lacking resources in utilizing curricular themes.	4.61	Very High Degree
2. resourcing materials to refresh and strengthen their curriculum.	4.73	Very High Degree
3. providing comprehensive materials on various topics as they do not have access to sufficient data.	4.62	Very High Degree
4. pressure of teaching to your pupils.	4.64	Very High Degree
5. creating new ideas to engage pupils in learning.	4.73	Very High Degree
6. collaborating with each other on developing curricular themes.	4.62	Very High Degree
7. enhancing lesson plans in curricular themes.	4.85	Very High Degree
8. supporting teachers to brainstorm new ideas and approaches to teaching.	4.91	Very High Degree
9. managing their time effectively and efficiently.	4.67	Very High Degree
10. dedicating to each curricular themes while ensuring that the pupils are getting enough instructional time.	4.82	Very High Degree
Mean	4.72	Very High Degree

Table 4 depicts the degree of problems kindergarten teachers encounter when utilizing curricular themes in the area of my school. It revealed that the respondents assessed an overall mean score of 4.72 and interpreted it as a very high degree. The lowest mean of 4.61, interpreted as a very high degree, was on item 1, needing more resources to utilize curricular themes. The highest mean score of 4.91, or a very high degree, was on item no. 8, which is on supporting teachers to brainstorm new ideas and approaches to teaching.

The result implies that most kindergarten teachers rarely received support from the school, particularly in brainstorming new ideas and approaches to teaching. They were the least priority to receive training and seminars on the latest trends and methods for teaching in kindergarten programs. However, the teachers still look at problems positively to cope with their difficulties in carrying out their everyday tasks at school. The results align with those of Cacao and Tan (2019), who revealed that although they received support from school administrators, more was needed to provide them with capable, prepared teachers. They also need access to a robust curriculum and materials to learn it: training, technology support for learning and inquiry, reasonable class sizes, safe, clean facilities, and equitable opportunities to benefit from all these.

Table 5

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my community

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>		
1. asking them about their participation in community project.	4.67	Very High Degree
2. encouraging pupils to join in any community project.	4.73	Very High Degree
3. telling them how to join in community project.	4.58	Very High Degree
4. allowing them to share their experiences in community activities.	4.50	Very High Degree
5. talking about the activities they may want to join.	4.41	High Degree
6. putting them in a situation where they can better understand about their community.	4.58	Very High Degree
7. encouraging them to visit their community teachers.	4.47	High Degree
8. helping them understand their role in the community.	4.79	Very High Degree
9. encouraging them to be participative in the community activities.	4.67	Very High Degree
10. making sure that they understand how they can contribute their ideas to the community.	4.93	Very High Degree
Mean	4.64	Very High Degree

Table 5 shows that kindergarten teachers face a very high degree of difficulty in utilizing curricular themes related to "my community," with an overall mean score of 4.64. The lowest challenge was in encouraging participation in community activities (mean 4.41), while the greatest difficulty was ensuring learners understand how to contribute ideas to the community (mean 4.93). This suggests many students resist engaging or identifying community members and places, highlighting the need for teachers to introduce socio-emotional activities that help children recognize their community, express ideas and emotions, and respond to social needs. These findings align with Almazeedi (2019), who emphasizes the crucial role of families and schools in fostering children's socio-emotional development, noting that kindergarten is an ideal stage to teach acceptable social behavior and nurture diversity, ensuring children grow into socially responsible individuals.

Table 6

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area myself When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger Mean	Interpretation	Older Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. limiting resources in the utilization of curricular themes.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
2. lacking adequate materials, books, and other resources.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.84	Very High Degree
3. lacking technology to support learning that can hinder teachers in effectively integrating the themes in the lesson.	4.53	Very High Degree	4.84	Very High Degree
4. facing limited time constraints when trying to implement curricular themes into their lesson.	4.26	High Degree	4.84	Very High Degree

5. tasking to attend to throughout the day, finding the time and energy to focus on lessons.	4.46	High Degree	4.52	Very High Degree
6. accessing the support they need to effectively integrate curricular themes into their classroom.	4.33	High Degree	4.42	High Degree
7. lacking training or expertise needed to properly utilize curricular themes in their classroom.	4.86	Very High Degree	4.73	Very High Degree
8. adapting the themes and make them applicable to their pupils needs.	4.33	High Degree	4.94	Very High Degree
9. encountering resistance from their pupils to learn and engage with the curricular themes.	4.60	Very High Degree	5.00	Very High Degree
10. understanding the relevance of the themes that are uninterested in learning.	4.33	High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
Mean	4.49	High Degree	4.75	Very High Degree

Table 6 discloses the results of the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area when grouped according to age. Younger respondents obtained an overall mean of 4.49, which is a high degree. In contrast, older respondents obtained an overall mean of 4.75, which is a very high degree.

This implies that the older respondents had faced greater problems using curricular themes, particularly in the area of myself, than younger respondents. This is because older respondents look at the problem very seriously. Hence, they feel exhausted throughout the day. At the same time, younger respondents are just calm and relaxed as they look at it positively to plan ahead of the learning activities on my teaching theme that integrates the concepts and skills of the seven developmental domains. The result relates to that of Velonta (2022), who found that kindergarten teachers encountered difficulty when preparing individual learning plans using the thematic approach and seven (7) developmental domains in the kindergarten curriculum.

Table 7

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area myself When Grouped According to Length of Service

Items	Shorter Mean	Interpretation	Longer Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. limiting resources in the utilization of curricular themes.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.61	Very High Degree
2. lacking adequate materials, books, and other resources.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
3. lacking technology to support learning that can hinder teachers in effectively integrating the themes in the lesson.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.66	Very High Degree
4. facing limited time constraints when trying to implement curricular themes into their lesson.	4.43	High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
5. tasking to attend to throughout the day, finding the time and energy to focus on lessons.	4.31	High Degree	4.66	Very High Degree
6. accessing the support they need to effectively integrate curricular themes into their classroom.	4.31	High Degree	4.44	High Degree
7. lacking training or expertise needed to properly utilize curricular themes in their classroom.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.83	Very High Degree
8. adapting the themes and make them applicable to their pupils needs.	4.56	Very High Degree	4.77	Very High Degree
9. encountering resistance from their pupils to learn and engage with the curricular themes.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.88	Very High Degree
10. understanding the relevance of the themes that are uninterested in learning.	4.50	Very High Degree	4.55	Very High Degree
Mean	4.58	Very High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree

Table 7 shows that kindergarten teachers face a very high degree of difficulty in utilizing curricular themes based on length of service, with longer-serving teachers reporting slightly higher challenges (mean 4.68) compared to those with shorter service (mean 4.58). Notably, longer-serving teachers found it more difficult to manage class attention and focus, as learners' diverse backgrounds, behaviors, and learning styles require greater preparation and creativity. This aligns with Daas (2019), who identified that teachers often struggle to maintain student attention amid classroom disruptions, leading to rushed lessons that prioritize curriculum completion over deep understanding, ultimately hindering student learning.

Table 8

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my family When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger Mean	Interpretation	Older Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. resourcing to support the implementation of curricular themes related to my family.	4.40	High Degree	4.21	High Degree
2. limiting prior knowledge of diverse family which gives different views into the curriculum.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.42	High Degree
3. creating a challenge for incorporating different perspective in curriculum.	4.46	High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
4. engaging in the learning of these themes which can lead to classroom disruptions of the content of some pupils.	4.20	High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
5. lacking understanding of the content for some pupils in the themes.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.84	Very High Degree
6. developing age-appropriate activities to young pupils.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.73	Very High Degree
7. ensuring the lessons that are engaging to young pupils in the themes.	4.80	Very High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
8. sharing to them a picture related to a family.	4.66	Very High Degree	4.57	Very High Degree
9. sharing to the class an activity in belonging to a family.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.78	Very High Degree
10. asking them about the experiences of a family.	4.86	Very High Degree	4.89	Very High Degree
Mean	4.60	Very High Degree	4.65	Very High Degree

Table 8 reveals the problems kindergarten teachers encountered in using curricular themes in my school's area when grouped according to age. Younger respondents obtained an overall mean of 4.60, while older respondents obtained an overall mean of 4.65, both interpreted to a very high degree.

Analyzing each item's result, it can be noticed that it is in item no.4 where the mean results vary greatly: 4.20 or a high degree for the younger group but 4.68 or a very high degree for the older group. This is because engaging in learning these themes can lead to classroom disruptions of the content of some pupils. The result entails that younger respondent experience lighter problems than older respondents in utilizing my family thematic approach without class disruptions. This is because younger respondents were much more dedicated amidst the challenging profession. They can enforce behavioral rules and handle the stress and disorder that accompany learners' behavioral problems. The finding relates with that of Larawan (2023), who revealed that often reported issues by the kindergarten teachers were encouraging children's active involvement, lack of workbooks for every pupil, and pupils' talkativeness.

Table 9

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my family When Grouped According to Length of Service

Items	Shorter Mean	Interpretation	Longer Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. resourcing to support the implementation of curricular themes related to my family.	4.43	High Degree	4.16	High Degree
2. limiting prior knowledge of diverse family which gives different views into the curriculum.	4.50	Very High Degree	4.50	Very High Degree

3. creating a challenge for incorporating different perspective in curriculum.	4.56	Very High Degree	4.61	Very High Degree
4. engaging in the learning of these themes which can lead to classroom disruptions of the content of some pupils.	4.43	High Degree	4.50	Very High Degree
5. lacking understanding of the content for some pupils in the themes.	4.81	Very High Degree	4.66	Very High Degree
6. developing age-appropriate activities to young pupils.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.77	Very High Degree
7. ensuring the lessons that are engaging to young pupils in the themes.	4.62	Very High Degree	4.83	Very High Degree
8. sharing to them a picture related to a family.	4.50	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
9. sharing to the class an activity in belonging to a family.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.83	Very High Degree
10. asking them about the experiences of a family.	4.81	Very High Degree	4.94	Very High Degree
Mean	4.60	Very High Degree	4.65	Very High Degree

Table 9 reveals that kindergarten teachers, regardless of length of service, experience a very high degree of difficulty in using curricular themes related to "my family," with longer-serving teachers reporting slightly greater challenges (mean 4.65) than those with shorter service (mean 4.60). The biggest difference appears in managing classroom disruptions during family-themed lessons, where longer-serving teachers face more difficulty maintaining order and feel more exhausted after teaching. This aligns with Botoy (2020), who found that kindergarten teachers face significant challenges in addressing children's unique needs, classroom management, instructional resources, parental involvement, and support systems within the kindergarten program.

Table 10

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my school When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger Mean	Interpretation	Older Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. lacking resources in utilizing curricular themes.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree
2. resourcing materials to refresh and strengthen their curriculum.	4.66	Very High Degree	4.78	Very High Degree
3. providing comprehensive materials on various topics as they do not have access to sufficient data.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree
4. pressure of teaching to your pupils.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
5. creating new ideas to engage pupils in learning.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.73	Very High Degree
6. collaborating with each other on developing curricular themes.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.52	Very High Degree
7. enhancing lesson plans in curricular themes.	4.80	Very High Degree	4.89	Very High Degree
8. supporting teachers to brainstorm new ideas and approaches to teaching.	4.86	Very High Degree	4.94	Very High Degree
9. managing their time effectively and efficiently.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree
10. dedicating to each curricular themes while ensuring that the pupils are getting enough instructional time.	4.86	Very High Degree	4.78	Very High Degree
Mean	4.72	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree

Table 10 shows that both younger and older kindergarten teachers face a very high degree of difficulty in utilizing curricular themes related to "my school," with identical overall mean scores of 4.72. However, a notable difference appears in collaboration on developing curricular themes, where younger teachers (mean 4.73) find it easier than older teachers (mean 4.52), as many older teachers hesitate to seek collaboration, feeling more capable than their younger colleagues. This highlights the importance of collaborative planning to ensure effective thematic learning. This finding aligns with Zisopouloun (2019), who noted that collaborative learning is widely used in kindergarten despite many teachers lacking formal training, and that it significantly benefits social and cognitive skills development.

Table 11

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my school When Grouped According to Length of Service

Items	Shorter Mean	Interpretation	Longer Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. lacking resources in utilizing curricular themes.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.55	Very High Degree
2. resourcing materials to refresh and strengthen their curriculum.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.77	Very High Degree
3. providing comprehensive materials on various topics as they do not have access to sufficient data.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.52	Very High Degree
4. pressure of teaching to your pupils.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.55	Very High Degree
5. creating new ideas to engage pupils in learning.	4.68	Very High Degree	4.77	Very High Degree
6. collaborating with each other on developing curricular themes.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.50	Very High Degree
7. enhancing lesson plans in curricular themes.	4.81	Very High Degree	4.88	Very High Degree
8. supporting teachers to brainstorm new ideas and approaches to teaching.	4.87	Very High Degree	4.94	Very High Degree
9. managing their time effectively and efficiently.	4.62	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
10. dedicating to each curricular themes while ensuring that the pupils are getting enough instructional time.	4.87	Very High Degree	4.77	Very High Degree
Mean	4.75	Very High Degree	4.70	Very High Degree

Table 11 shows that kindergarten teachers, regardless of length of service, encounter a very high degree of difficulty in utilizing curricular themes related to "my school," with shorter-serving teachers scoring slightly higher overall (4.75) than longer-serving teachers (4.70). The greatest difference appears in collaboration on developing curricular themes, where those with shorter service find it more challenging (4.75) compared to their more experienced counterparts (4.50), often due to hesitancy to share ideas or avoid conflicts. This underscores the need for teachers to openly collaborate and share knowledge to enhance thematic learning, aligning with Besi and Sakellariou (2019), who noted that collaboration is often hindered by limited time, physical distance, differing goals, and personal biases among teachers.

Table 12

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area my community When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger Mean	Interpretation	Older Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. asking them about their participation in community project.	4.60	Very High Degree	4.73	Very High Degree
2. encouraging pupils to join in any community project.	4.73	Very High Degree	4.73	Very High Degree
3. telling them how to join in community project.	4.20	High Degree	4.89	Very High Degree
4. allowing them to share their experiences on community activities.	4.33	High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree
5. talking about the activities they may want to join.	4.33	High Degree	4.47	High Degree
6. putting them in a situation where they can better understand about their community.	4.46	High Degree	4.68	Very High Degree
7. encouraging them to visit their community teachers.	4.66	Very High Degree	4.31	High Degree
8. helping them understand their role in community.	5.00	Very High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree
9. encouraging them to be participative in the community activities.	4.80	Very High Degree	4.57	Very High Degree

10. making sure that they understand how they can contribute their ideas in the community.	5.00	Very High Degree	4.88	Very High Degree
Mean	4.61	Very High Degree	4.67	Very High Degree

Table 12 reveals that both younger and older kindergarten teachers face a very high degree of difficulty in utilizing curricular themes related to "my community," with older teachers scoring slightly higher overall (4.67) than younger ones (4.61). A notable difference is seen in explaining how learners can join community projects, where older teachers find it more challenging (4.89) compared to younger teachers (4.20). This highlights the importance of providing equal opportunities for children to develop socially, culturally, and intellectually within their communities, fostering values and understanding of the wider society. The findings support DepEd Order No. 047, series of 2016, which emphasizes the critical role of kindergarten education in nurturing Filipino children through developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive practices tailored to learners' diverse needs.

Table 13

Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my community When Grouped According to Length of Service

Items	Shorter Mean	Interpretation	Longer Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a kindergarten teacher, I encountered problems in...</i>				
1. asking them about their participation in community project.	4.62	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
2. encouraging pupils to join in any community project.	4.62	Very High Degree	4.83	Very High Degree
3. telling them how to join in community project.	4.50	Very High Degree	4.66	Very High Degree
4. allowing them to share their experiences on community activities.	4.62	Very High Degree	4.38	High Degree
5. talking about the activities they may want to join.	4.43	High Degree	4.38	High Degree
6. putting them in a situation where they can better understand about their community.	4.43	High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
7. encouraging them to visit their community teachers.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.22	High Degree
8. helping them understand their role in community.	4.87	Very High Degree	4.72	Very High Degree
9. encouraging them to be participative in the community activities.	4.75	Very High Degree	4.61	Very High Degree
10. making sure that they understand how they can contribute their ideas in the community.	4.93	Very High Degree	4.94	Very High Degree
Mean	4.65	Very High Degree	4.63	Very High Degree

Table 13 presents the results on the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my community when grouped according to the length of service. Respondents with a shorter length of service obtained an overall mean score of 4.65, interpreted as a very high degree, whereas respondents with a longer length of service obtained an overall mean score of 4.63 interpreted as a very high degree. When paying close attention to the findings of each item, it becomes clear that item No. 6 has the largest variance in mean scores, with the shorter category scoring at 4.43 while the longer category scoring higher at 4.73. This puts them in a situation where they can better understand their community. This shows that most of the respondents with longer years in the service find it difficult to create activities wherein the learners can better understand their community and environment than respondents with shorter years of service. Every child is unique. Growth and development vary from child to child. Children have an innate desire to learn, and this is best done through meaningful and real experiences. Hence, teachers may develop activities that can help kindergarten learners acquire the essential skills and sustain their natural curiosity in their immediate environment and community through exploration, discovery, observation, and relating their everyday experiences using their senses (touch, sight, smell, taste, and hearing).

The results align with that of Almaras (2023) wherein there a great difficulty in managing the socio-emotional development of the learners particularly in identifying people and places in the community. Most of the learners cannot recognize people and places, express and manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and respond adequately to the social needs of the community.

Comparative Analysis in the Degree of Problems Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in the Utilization of Curricular Themes in the Areas of Myself, Family, School, and Community When Grouped and Compared According to the Aforementioned Variables

Table 14

Difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the area of myself When Grouped and Compared According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	15	11.63	54.50	0.002	0.05	Significant
	Older	19	22.13				
Length of service	Shorter	16	15.44	111.00	0.247		Not Significant
	Longer	18	19.33				

As reflected in Table 14, for variable age, the computed U is 54.50 with a p-value of 0.002 which is less than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of myself when they are grouped and compared according to age" is rejected.

However, for variable length of service, the computed U is 111.00 with a p-value of 0.247 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of myself when they are grouped and compared according to length of service" is accepted.

The result implies the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of myself when grouped and compared according to age varies, while, on length of service varies. This shows that respondents' age is an influencing factor in varying their problems encountered in the utilization of curricular themes particularly on myself thematic approach. Older respondents may experience more problems than their counterparts or vice versa. As people get older, their abilities, endurance, and memorization will decrease as time goes by. Without the equipment of self-development through training, learning, and experiences, their quality will not improve.

The finding relates to that of Almutahar, Wardhani, and Rafie (2015), who revealed age also affects the teachers' experiences. Junior kindergarten teachers tend to have less experience compared to the senior kindergarten teachers. Moreover, senior teachers are considered more mature and stable with a more qualified and balanced perspective, so they are not vulnerable to undergoing mental pressure at work.

Table 15

Difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the area of my family When Grouped and Compared According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	15	16.30	124.50	0.524	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	19	18.45				
Length of service	Shorter	16	16.31	125.00	0.503		Not Significant
	Longer	18	18.56				

As depicted in Table 15, for variable age, the computed U is 124.50 with a p-value of 0.525 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my family when they are grouped and compared according to age" is accepted.

Similarly, for variable length of service, the computed U is 125.00 with a p-value of 0.503 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my family when they are grouped and compared according to length of service" is accepted.

The result implies that the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my family do not differ when compared according to age and length of service. This shows that the age and length of service of kindergarten teachers have nothing to do with the problems they encountered in the utilization of my family thematic learning activities.

The result is supported by Pranoto et al. (2020) wherein concluded that the range of ages and years of teaching experiences of kindergarten teachers has nothing to do with the quality of their teaching performance. Their study suggests improving teaching performance through the provision of support in the form of professional learning for all teachers, such as teacher training and workshops. The government should seriously consider the welfare of kindergarten teachers as well.

Table 16

Difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the area of my school When Grouped and Compared According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	15	17.43	141.50	0.971	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	19	17.55				
Length of service	Shorter	16	18.75	124.00	0.475		Not Significant
	Longer	18	16.39				

As presented in Table 16, for variable age, the computed U is 141.50 with a p-value of 0.971 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my school when they are grouped and compared according to age" is accepted. In the same manner, for variable length of service, the computed U is 124.00 with a p-value of 0.475 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my school when they are grouped and compared according to length of service" is accepted.

The result implies the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my school do not vary when grouped and compared according to age and length of service. This shows that most of the teachers encountered the same degree of problems in the utilization of my school's thematic learning activities for the kindergarten learners regardless of their age profile background. The results are supported by Velonta (2022) wherein there was no significant difference in the degree of problems of kindergarten teachers when grouped and compared according to their profile variables.

Table 17

Difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the area of my community When Grouped and Compared According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	15	15.93	119.00	0.559	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	18	17.89				
Length of service	Shorter	16	17.19	133.00	0.913		Not Significant
	Longer	17	16.82				

As divulged in Table 18, for variable age, the computed U is 119.50 with a p-value of 0.559 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my community when they are grouped and compared according to age" is accepted.

In the same manner, for variable length of service, the computed U is 133.00 with a p-value of 0.913 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes in the area of my community when they are grouped and compared according to length of service" is accepted.

The finding entails that the degree of problems encountered by kindergarten teachers in the utilization of curricular themes particularly in the area of my community do not vary when compared according to their ages and length of service. This shows that regardless of their ages and length of service they encountered the same problems using my community thematic learning activities to kindergarten learners. The finding relates with that of Mirasol (2019) wherein there was no significant existed in the degree of challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers when compared according to age, length of service, and highest educational attainment.

Conclusions:

The study found that kindergarten teachers, especially those under 32, face significant challenges using curricular themes like "myself," "my family," "my school," and "my community," with younger teachers reporting more difficulty in the "myself" category due to student resistance. Despite over half of respondents being older and experienced, issues with discussing family experiences, developing teaching strategies, and helping students understand their community roles were widespread and consistent across age and experience, except for self-related challenges which varied by age. To address these, the study recommends targeted professional development for younger teachers in classroom management and identity discussions, family engagement training for all, collaborative innovation workshops, stronger community partnerships, and ongoing mentoring, diversity training, and evaluation to support continuous improvement and more effective teaching of these themes.

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