A Case Study of Male Teachers in Kindergarten Classroom: Realizations of a Female Researcher

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ABSTRACT

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| **Aims:** To explore the experiences of male kindergarten teachers within a predominantly female work environment, describe how they navigated the associated challenges, and gather suggestions on how to increase their numbers in the Schools Division of Davao Occidental  **Study design:** Qualitative - case study  **Place and Duration of Study:** Public kindergarten schools in Davao Occidental, Philippines during the school year 2024-2025  **Methodology:** Five male kindergarten teachers and four school heads were purposively selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews guided by a validated semi-structured interview protocol. To protect their identities, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The gathered data were analyzed thematically to identify emerging themes, core ideas and patterns.  **Results:** The study revealed that male kindergarten teachers are faced with significant challenges rooted in societal biases, rigid gender norms and cultural expectations. Despite these obstacles, male educators demonstrated resilience, adaptability and dedication to their roles. They employed coping strategies such as community engagement, humor, self -affirmation and collaboration with female colleagues to foster acceptance and strengthened their professional identity. School heads acknowledged these efforts, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies and systemic support. The third theme highlighted how these experiences led to personal growth. By building strong relationships, demonstrating creativity, and persevering through challenges, male teachers developed a sense of belonging and confidence. Their ability to transform discomfort into innovation and leadership not only enhanced their teaching impact but also challenged traditional gender norms, contributing to a more inclusive early childhood education environment.  **Conclusion:** The experiences of male kindergarten teachers highlight the urgent need for tailored support, improved training, and better compensation. Addressing societal biases and fostering inclusive environments are crucial for attracting and retaining male educators. Promoting awareness and policy reforms can help validate their role, challenge gender norms, and ensure a more diverse, balanced, and effective early childhood education workforce. |

*Keywords: Case study, male teachers, kindergarten, realizations*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession, particularly in early childhood education, is often characterized by deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. Globally, male teachers face negative stereotyping that questions their ability to nurture young children and challenges their professional roles (Heikkilä & Hellman, 2016). This perception stems from societal norms associating care giving and teaching young children with femininity, leaving male educators marginalized and underrepresented (Moosa & Bhana, 2018; Prioletta & Davies, 2024). Such stereotypes can discourage men from entering or remaining in the field, fostering an unequal gender distribution in early education. Consequently, the absence of male educators denies children the opportunity to experience diverse teaching styles and role models, which are crucial in shaping balanced social development (Davids & Waghid, 2020; McGrath et al., 2020).

Negative stereotyping of male teachers is particularly pronounced in certain countries where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted (Gajda et al., 2022). In Western contexts, such as the United States, Xu (2019) emphasized that men in kindergarten teaching roles may face suspicions regarding their motives or capabilities. This skepticism often originates from a societal discomfort with men occupying positions traditionally deemed feminine. As a result, male educators may find their professional abilities questioned, creating a work environment fraught with implicit distrust. Meanwhile, in conservative cultures, the presence of male kindergarten teachers may be viewed as unconventional or inappropriate. In these settings, cultural norms that rigidly define masculinity often clash with the nurturing and care giving roles associated with early childhood education. These biases hinder professional acceptance and create barriers for male educators seeking to contribute meaningfully to the field. They also perpetuate the stereotype that teaching young children is an exclusively female domain, further marginalizing men and limiting their participation.

In the Philippines, Bongco and Ancho (2020) reveal that male kindergarten teachers experience similar prejudices, amplified by cultural expectations of masculinity and care giving as primarily a female domain. Male teachers are often judged as less competent or subjected to suspicions about their intentions in working with young children. Williams (2020) stated that this stereotyping is further exacerbated by societal pressures and norms that view teaching young learners as unsuitable for men, resulting in stigma and reduced professional opportunities.

Moreover, the lack of institutional support to challenge these stereotypes reinforces their prevalence, leaving male educators vulnerable to discrimination and professional isolation (McIntyre, 2021). The societal perception of teaching as a feminine profession in the Philippines reflects broader cultural narratives that associate nurturing and care giving exclusively with women, thereby discouraging men from pursuing careers in early childhood education (Cabugsa et al., 2023).

The consequences of these negative stereotypes on male kindergarten teachers are significant. They may experience lower job satisfaction, reduced self-esteem, and challenges in building trust with colleagues, parents, and students (Zhou & Nanakida, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). These challenges can erode their sense of professional identity and lead to feelings of isolation in predominantly female-dominated workplaces. Additionally, the stigma attached to male educators can discourage other men from entering the profession, perpetuating the under-representation of male educators in early childhood education. This under-representation not only reinforces the stereotype but also deprives young learners of the benefits of a diverse teaching workforce (Sanders, 2024). A balanced representation of genders in early childhood education provides children with varied perspectives, nurtures inclusive attitudes, and challenges gender biases from an early age (Thorpe, 2020).

Addressing the issue of negative stereotyping is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable teaching profession. Efforts must be made to challenge societal norms and perceptions that associate care giving solely with femininity. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, policy interventions, and fostering supportive environments for male educators. Encouragingly, some initiatives aimed at promoting gender diversity in teaching have begun to emerge, demonstrating the potential for change. By addressing the systemic biases that deter men from entering early childhood education, stakeholders can work toward a more inclusive and representative teaching workforce, ultimately benefiting both educators and learners.

**1.1 Research Objectives**

This study uncovered the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a field dominated by female teachers. Specifically, it sought answers to the following objectives:

1. To explore the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers with regard to the challenges they face in a female-saturated workplace.
2. To describe how the participants respond to the challenges associated with their work in a female-dominated work setting.
3. To gain suggestions on increasing the number of male kindergarten teachers in Davao Occidental Division.

**1.2 Theoretical Lens**

In anchoring this study on male kindergarten teachers, I turned to Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. This theory provides insight into how individuals derive their sense of self from the social groups they belong to. By applying SIT, I aimed to understand the distinct challenges and experiences these men face in a profession that is traditionally dominated by women.

The three main components of SIT, social categorization, social identification, and social comparison, shaped my approach. Social categorization revealed how male teachers are often first classified by their gender, shaped by societal views of masculinity, before being recognized as educators. Social identification helped me see how these men take ownership of their professional roles, embracing their identities and challenging gendered expectations. Social comparison illustrated how they assess themselves against their predominantly female colleagues, influencing their professional identity and sense of belonging.

By anchoring this study in SIT, I gained a deeper understanding of the ways male kindergarten teachers navigate societal stereotypes, reframe gender norms, and reshape their roles in early childhood education.

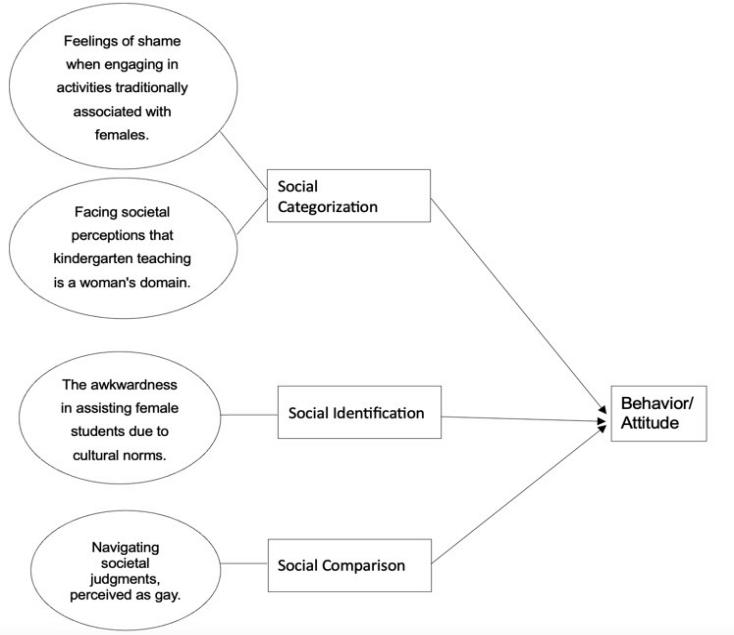


Figure 1. Emergent Themes Describing the Unique Experiences of Male Kindergarten Teachers

2. material and methods

**2.1 Research Design**

In this study, I employed a qualitative case study method to explore the collective experiences of a group of male kindergarten teachers in a female-dominated workplace. A case study approach allows for a detailed examination of this group as a unique case, providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon within its specific context (Stake, 1995). Case study explores and discover personal insights and understanding of invidivuals who lived a certain situation with emphasis on what is learned (San Jose, 2016).

This methodology is well-suited for the study as it provides the opportunity to explore the shared and individual experiences of the male teachers. Through in-depth interviews, I examine how these teachers manage gender stereotypes, build their professional identities, and interact with students, colleagues, and parents. The inductive, narrative-based analysis will help identify key themes and patterns that reflect the teachers’ collective and individual challenges, coping strategies, and development as educators. This rich, contextual understanding offers valuable insights that may not be accessible through more quantitative or standardized methods.

**2.2 Participants and Sampling**

As I delved deeper into my research, I recognized the importance of strategically selecting participants to gather the most meaningful stories. To achieve this, I first narrowed my focus to public schools in Davao Occidental, Philippines, providing a consistent environment for my study, much like setting the stage for a play. I also decided to concentrate on heterosexual male teachers. While this choice excluded some experiences, it allowed me to explore the specific challenges and triumphs faced by this particular group within a female-dominated workplace more thoroughly.

Finding the right participants was crucial. Rather than selecting randomly, I employed purposive sampling, seeking out individuals who could offer rich insights into my research question. I needed teachers who could share their experiences navigating a workplace where women are the majority.

The flexibility of purposive sampling was particularly beneficial as I analyzed the interviews; emerging themes served as signposts guiding my way. I could refine my selection criteria to understand these themes comprehensively.

Ultimately, I interviewed five male kindergarten teachers and four school heads. Including the school heads served triangulation purposes, providing a different environmental perspective. However, this might seem like a small group; such a size is typical for qualitative research. It allowed for in-depth interviews, enabling me to ask follow-up questions and better understand their lived experiences. Including school heads broadened the perspective on the workplace environment and interactions with male teachers.

This case study examined the experiences of male kindergarten teachers through the perspectives of five key participants. A unique coding system inspired by everyday classroom items was used to ensure anonymity. The male kindergarten teachers were called Teacher Eraser, Teacher Chalk, Teacher Crayon, Teacher Sharpener, and Teacher Pencil. Each code offered a glimpse into the diverse roles and tools these educators utilized within their classrooms. Their experiences were further validated by the school heads, who were coded as School Head Storybook, School Head Paintbrush, School Head Chalkboard, and School Head Playdough. These designations reflected the school head's leadership and guidance in shaping the educational environment. Through their combined insights, this case study aimed to shed light on the realities of being a male kindergarten teacher.

The five kindergarten teachers who participated in this study came from various backgrounds and experiences. The youngest, Teacher Eraser, is a 26-year-old single man with four years of experience. He holds a Bachelor of Elementary Education degree, the most relevant qualification for teaching kindergarten. Like most participants, financial security was his primary motivation for entering the profession. Teacher Chalk, another single man, has been a kindergarten teacher for five years. With a Bachelor of Secondary Education major in Filipino, his educational background is less geared towards early childhood education. Similar to Teacher Eraser, he entered the field for financial reasons. Teacher Crayon, the most experienced teacher with eight years under his belt, is married. He holds a Bachelor of Secondary Education with a major in Mathematics, another specialization not typically associated with kindergarten. Financial security was his primary motivator for choosing this career path. Teacher Sharpener, like Teacher Crayon, is a married man with five years of experience. His background in Technology and Livelihood Education, obtained through a Bachelor's degree, deviates from the standard curriculum for kindergarten teachers. Like the others, he entered the profession for financial reasons. The final participant, Teacher Pencil, is married and holds a Bachelor's degree, specifically in Elementary Education. Six years have passed since he began teaching kindergarten. He, too, was motivated by financial security when choosing this career.

The principal participants responsible for affirming the experiences of the male kindergarten teachers are the school heads. School Head Storybook is a woman with extensive experience in education. At 51 years old, she has served in the Department of Education for 18 years. Holding a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education with a major in English, she currently holds the position of Head Teacher I. School Head Paintbrush is a male school head. At 36 years old, he has eight years of experience with the Department of Education. His background lies in Secondary Education with a major in Mathematics, and his current position is Teacher-in-Charge. The remaining two school heads, School Head Chalkboard and School Head Playdough are both men with similar backgrounds. School Head Chalkboard is 48 years old and has been with the Department of Education for 15 years. School Head Playdough is 45 years old with 12 years of experience. Both hold Bachelor's degrees in Secondary Education with a major in Mathematics. Their current positions are Head Teacher 2. By carefully selecting participants who could provide valuable insights, I ensured my research would be relevant and profound. This strategic selection process was crucial for capturing the true stories of male kindergarten instructors in a world where women predominate.

**2.3 Scope and Delimitation**

This study focuses on understanding the challenges confronted by male kindergarten teachers in a workplace where women predominate within the Schools Division of Davao Occidental. Five male kindergarten teachers and four public school heads are among the study's participants. The research delves into four primary areas: the specific challenges these male teachers encounter, their responses and coping mechanisms to these challenges, their suggestions to draw in more male educators to the field of early childhood education and the unique experiences of male kindergarten teachers. By focusing on these aspects, the study seeks to offer a thorough comprehension of the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers and to inform strategies for increasing their representation in this profession.

The study was delimited to the experiences of five male kindergarten teachers and four school heads within the specified division, excluding private schools and other regions. Given the conventional qualitative method employed, the study is not directed by a specific theoretical framework. Instead, it sought to let themes and concepts emerge naturally from the data through content analysis. The approach allows me to explore the participants' lived experiences more freely and in-depth without being constrained by pre-existing theories. However, the findings may be generalizable to only some male kindergarten teachers, as they are based on a small, context-specific sample.

**2.4 Research Instrument**

To understand kindergarten male teachers' experiences, I opted for face-to-face interviews with the teachers themselves. I used a semi-structured format to guide the conversations, allowing for flexibility to explore the unique experiences of each participant. These in-depth discussions delved into their daily routines, interactions with parents (often predominantly mothers), and any challenges or advantages they felt stemmed from their gender in the classroom. The face-to-face interaction fostered a trusting environment, encouraging the teachers to share openly and honestly. As the conversation flowed, I'd use probing questions to dig deeper, uncovering the "why" behind their responses and encouraging them to elaborate on their stories.

To strengthen the validity of my findings, I did not rely solely on the teachers' perspectives. I employed triangulation, a technique that involves using multiple data sources. This led me to interview the school heads of the participating teachers. These interviews provided valuable insights from a different perspective – that of the school administration. The school heads' observations about the teachers' interactions with colleagues and parents could corroborate or offer contrasting viewpoints to the teachers' experiences. This richer tapestry gave me a more nuanced understanding of the situation.

By combining these tools, I could paint a detailed picture of the lived experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a female-dominated environment. Exploring their perspectives while also considering the school administration's viewpoint allowed me to understand this unique situation comprehensively. The research journey became a process of adaptation, tailoring the interview questions as needed to ensure I captured the most insightful and relevant information.

**2.5 Data Collection**

In conducting my qualitative research on the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a workplace dominated by women, I carefully considered various data collection techniques to ensure alignment with my research questions and the nature of the study. Personal interviews emerged as the most viable method for data collection. While observing the experiences of male kindergarten teachers who provided firsthand accounts, I recognized significant limitations in scope. Observing men in their natural work environment without disrupting their typical flow of activities proved challenging. Furthermore, during the school year, I could only spend a small quantity of time in the participants' schools due to my professional commitments.

Even without these obstacles, observation provided me with only ephemeral information based on my perceptions of experiences, conversational tones, and body language. This method did not provide the depth needed to understand the internal realizations of these teachers' experiences. Consequently, I opted for personal interviews to delve into the conceptual world of the participants.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state, personal interviews enable researchers to comprehend human interactions by examining the subjective elements of how individuals behave. This approach aligns well with case studies that examine a specific situation or individual in detail to gain a deeper understanding of a particular issue or problem. My goal was to learn how the participants, who were male kindergarten instructors, interpreted their world through in-depth interviews. Intense interviews allow participants to give their ideas and insights while facilitating a thorough examination of their experiences as pointed by Charmaz (2006).

Thus, personal interviews were the cornerstone of my data collection process. This method respected the complexities of participants' experiences and provided a rich, nuanced understanding of how they navigated their roles in a predominantly female profession. Through these interviews, I saw the individuals' innermost feelings and ideas, ensuring a comprehensive and empathetic portrayal of their lived experiences.

**2.5 Data Analysis**

The study employed thematic analysis as a research of analyzing the information. Using this approach, I thoroughly examined the information to find themes, core ideas, and patterns. It was conducted using manual approaches. Manual methods involve coding and categorizing the content to extract meaningful insights (Hase, 2021; Knorr & Pentzold, 2024).

This study about the life experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a workplace dominated by women is an excellent fit for content analysis. Using a conventional content analysis approach, without using any pre-existing theories or frameworks, I methodically examined the textual material gathered from observations or interviews in order to pinpoint essential themes, patterns, and meanings that surfaced straight from the data. This inductive approach allowed me to gain rich, contextual insights into male teachers' unique challenges, perceptions, and coping strategies in this environment. By carefully coding the data and categorizing the content, I uncovered this underrepresented group's nuanced experiences and perspectives, providing valuable contributions to the literature on gender dynamics in early childhood education. This study, which examined the experiences of male kindergarten instructors in a workplace dominated by women, was well-suited for content analysis, as it allowed for a structured and rigorous analysis of their narratives and perspectives.

**2.6 Ethical Considerations**

I walked into this research project determined to give voice to the experiences of male kindergarten teachers in a world dominated by women. However, I knew ethical considerations were paramount even before I stepped into a single classroom. My focus became crystal clear: treat the subjects and the integrity of the research itself with the highest regard.

First and foremost, participation had to be voluntary. I drafted a clear and concise informed consent form that became my pledge to transparency. It explained the entire study – its purpose, how I'd collect data, the potential risks and benefits involved, and most importantly, how their privacy would be fiercely protected. Empowering them to make informed choices about their involvement was a responsibility I took seriously.

Speaking of privacy, it became a cornerstone of this entire endeavor. Every piece of data I collected – names, faces, anything remotely identifying – was meticulously anonymized, such as Teacher Eraser, Teacher Chalk, Teacher Crayon, Teacher Sharpener, and Teacher Pencil for male kindergarten participants, and School Head Storybook, School Head Paintbrush, School Head Chalkboard, and School Head Playdough for school head participants. Pseudonyms became the new order of the day, and interview transcripts were scrubbed clean of any details that could point back to a specific teacher. Data security was another non-negotiable. It was all stored under lock and key, accessible only to myself.

Recruitment was a delicate dance. The potential for social pressure within a female-dominated environment loomed large. I cast a wide net to ensure a representative sample and minimize any coercion from colleagues. Online platforms became a valuable tool, and reaching out to kindergarten teacher associations proved fruitful. It was all about getting the word out in a way that empowered teachers to participate on their terms.

Openness was vital throughout the entire process. Potential participants were aware of the potential risks and benefits. Sure, there might have been some discomfort in discussing their experiences, but I highlighted the positive aspects, too. This study could have facilitated a more excellent knowledge of male early childhood educators and even paved the way for more inclusive workplaces.

Honesty and transparency were my guiding lights. There was no room for plagiarism, fabrication, or twisting the data. I was upfront about any potential conflicts of interest, and authorship, if collaborators were involved, would be shared fairly and honestly.

Finally, trust was the bedrock upon which everything rested. Deception was never an option. The research goals and methods were explained in plain language, leaving no room for confusion. My role was clear, and participants were free to inquire about their concerns and even withdraw from participating in the study at any point.

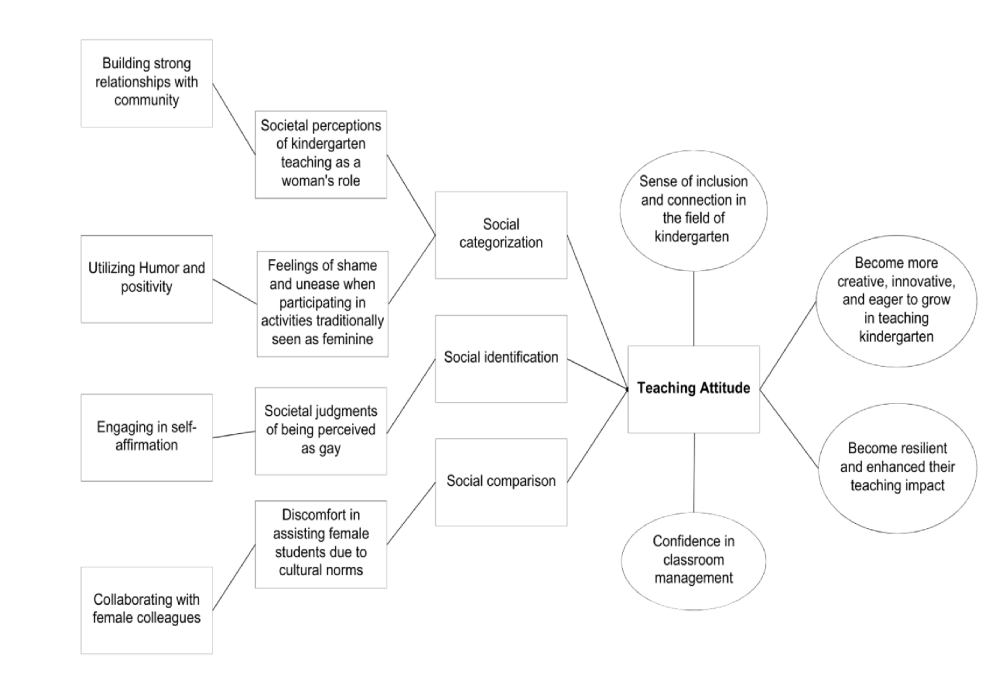
By upholding these ethical principles, I did not just conduct a research project; I built a bridge of understanding. The insights gained into the experiences of male kindergarten teachers were valuable, but the valid reward was knowing that their voices were heard, respected, and protected.

3. results and discussion

**3.1 The Difficulties of Male Kindergarten Teachers**

The analysis and interpretation of qualitative data revealed key themes from participants' responses. The first theme highlighted the challenges male kindergarten teachers faced. The second examined the coping mechanisms they employed, while the third reflected on the insights they gained and how these shaped their attitudes in overcoming difficulties. The first central theme, The Difficulties of Male Kindergarten Teachers, explored the challenges these educators faced in a female-dominated profession. Their experiences highlighted societal biases that questioned their suitability for the role, influencing their interactions with students, parents, and colleagues. Many struggled with perceptions of reduced masculinity and discomfort in gendered interactions, particularly when assisting female students.

Figure 2 Presentation of Clustered Themes and Emergent Themes



## A key sub-theme, Societal Perceptions of Kindergarten Teaching as a Woman's Role, emphasized how rigid gender norms framed early childhood education as a female domain. Male teachers encountered skepticism, ridicule, and judgment, with their nurturing abilities often seen as contradicting traditional masculinity. These perceptions created barriers to acceptance and discouraged other men from pursuing careers in early childhood education.

As I listen to their stories, I realize that these gendered assumptions are not just limiting for male teachers; they also reinforce a broader societal divide between caregiving and masculinity, making it even more difficult to challenge outdated norms. The kindergarten teachers conveyed that:

“Whenever I tell my friends that I'm a kindergarten teacher, they laugh and say, ‘That's too much for a man!’ Ahh..They just don’t get it, like teaching little kids is only something a woman should do.” Teacher Eraser (L10-L11)

“Oh! I remember one of my classmates telling me, ‘Good luck finding a wife with that job.’ It stings because it feels like my career choice is being judged as unmanly, as if being a teacher for young kids makes me less attractive or capable of having a family.” Teacher Chalk (L9-L10)

“People always make jokes about why I ended up as a kindergarten teacher when I’m built like a bodybuilder. They mock me just because my physique doesn’t fit the ‘nurturing’ job.” Teacher Crayon (L11-L12)

Male kindergarten teachers faced societal biases that questioned their masculinity and career choice. Stereotypes framed nurturing as a feminine trait, leading to mockery and marginalization. Teachers shared experiences of being ridiculed by peers, seen as less masculine, or judged based on their physical appearance. These perceptions not only created professional challenges but also reinforced rigid gender roles, limiting diversity and inclusion in early childhood education. School heads highlighted how societal biases affect male kindergarten teachers and the broader educational environment.

“Yes, it’s true! This societal perception still exists Ma’am, and I really hope that one day this notion will disappear. It’s such a pity.” School Head Paintbrush (L12-L13)

“Sir \*\*\* feels the weight of the pressure. Some mothers have suggested swapping the female Grade 4 teacher with Sir \*\*\*, but I explained that it’s not possible because his Item Plantilla is specifically designated for Kindergarten.” School Head Chalkboard (L9-L10)

“Some of our learners, upon learning that their teacher is male, initially hesitated to enter the classroom. They were accustomed to seeing a female figure during their time in Day Care.” School Head Storybook (L10-L11)

School heads acknowledged persistent gender stereotypes in early childhood education, highlighting societal biases that male kindergarten teachers face. School Head Chalkboard shared a case where parents requested a male teacher be replaced by a female, reflecting lingering prejudices. School Head Storybook noted children's initial hesitation toward male teachers, emphasizing the impact of early socialization. These narratives reinforced the resilience required of male educators and echoed Su’s (2017) findings on societal beliefs that associate early education with femininity, prompting reflection on the need for redefining gender roles in teaching.

The second sub-theme, Feelings of Shame and Unease when Participating in Activities Traditionally Seen as Feminine highlighted the discomfort male kindergarten teachers experienced when engaging in tasks like storytelling and dancing. Their unease stemmed not from the activities themselves but from the fear of judgment by peers, parents, and students. This self-censorship reflected the broader issue of gendered expectations in early childhood education, placing an emotional burden on male educators. Their experiences emphasized the need for a more inclusive teaching environment where they could fully embrace their roles without fear of scrutiny.

“It’s quite embarrassing, Ma’am. There are times when I have to teach students to dance, especially movements that involve swaying hips. I feel awkward and uncomfortable, and some of the kids even laugh at me.” Teacher Crayon (L16-L17)

“Uhmm... During storytelling time, when I have to change my voice to portray female characters, I feel a bit uneasy.” Teacher Pencil (L9-L10)

“I feel a bit strange, Ma’am, or maybe it’s just not my thing to do tasks like fixing the hair of female students. Hahaha. I’m sure it’s not just me who feels this way.” Teacher Sharpener (L8-L9)

Male early childhood educators balanced vulnerability with humor as they navigated a profession still closely tied to femininity. Teacher Crayon’s awkwardness in teaching dance moves, Teacher Pencil’s hesitation in altering his voice for storytelling, and Teacher Sharpener’s discomfort with fixing female students' hair highlighted the subtle yet persistent challenges they faced. These experiences, though sometimes framed humorously, reflected deeper struggles with societal expectations of masculinity. Despite their unease, they showed resilience, recognizing these tasks as part of their role. School heads also acknowledged these difficulties, reinforcing how ingrained gender norms shaped male teachers' experiences in early childhood education.

“When I observed Sir \*\*\* in the classroom, I noticed he seemed uncomfortable with activities typically associated with femininity, which I completely understand.” School Head Paintbrush (L16-L17)

“I remember, Ma’am, Sir \*\*\* was asking us for the names of Disney Princesses so he could relate to his class. He mentioned feeling awkward about asking the group about it.” School Head Playdough (L9-L10)

“There was a dance activity, and Sir \*\*\* led his students. He seemed a bit ashamed as he was in front, dancing and swaying his hips.” School Head Chalkboard (L19-L20)

School heads recognized the unspoken pressures male kindergarten teachers faced when engaging in tasks traditionally seen as feminine. School Head Paintbrush highlighted how societal norms shaped even small classroom interactions, often leaving male educators feeling uneasy. School Head Playdough recalled a teacher’s hesitation in discussing Disney Princesses, revealing deeper discomfort with gender expectations. School Head Chalkboard described a male teacher’s embarrassment while leading a dance, underscoring the struggle to balance professional duties with masculinity norms. These insights aligned with Fitriani and Ilyas (2022), reinforcing how societal perceptions create an invisible burden, making male educators question their legitimacy in early childhood education.

In exploring the third sub-theme, Societal Judgments of Being Perceived as Gay, I felt deep empathy for the male kindergarten teachers navigating these assumptions. Their narratives revealed frustration over being labeled based on their profession rather than their passion for teaching. One respondent expressed the constant invalidation he faced, as others dismissed his role as something "for women." These experiences underscored how societal stereotypes not only challenge their professional identity but also place an emotional burden on their dedication to early childhood education.

“Sometimes, people assume I’m gay just because I teach kindergarten. What mindset is that? It’s frustrating because my passion for teaching has nothing to do with my sexual orientation.” Teacher Eraser (L16-L17)

“When I tell others about my job, they either laugh or say, ‘Oh, that’s for women. You seem like you’re gay. It makes me question why society can’t just appreciate male teachers for their dedication.” Teacher Pencil (L15-L16)

“There’s this unspoken pressure to act extra ‘masculine’ around my peers to prove a point. I hate that I feel the need to defend my career choice all the time because I believe they perceive me as feminine.” Teacher Crayon (L24L25)

The narratives of male kindergarten teachers revealed the emotional burden of societal judgments linking their profession to assumptions about their sexuality. Teacher Eraser’s frustration stemmed from being reduced to a stereotype rather than recognized for his dedication to teaching. Teacher Pencil shared similar dismay, facing dismissive laughter and assumptions that early childhood education was “for women,” highlighting society’s failure to appreciate male educators’ contributions. Teacher Crayon described the pressure to assert his masculinity, constantly defending his career choice against outdated gender norms. These experiences underscored the deep conflict between their passion for teaching and the societal expectations that constrained them.

School heads echoed these concerns, acknowledging the biases that made it difficult for male educators to gain acceptance in a female-dominated field. They emphasized the need for systemic change to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment where male kindergarten teachers could thrive without fear of judgment.

“That perception is only at the beginning. Some parents are not familiar with the DepEd system and assume that male kindergarten teachers specifically chose this role, which leads them to question their sexuality.” School Head Paintbrush (L24-L25)

“You know the toxic culture among some Pinoys, Ma’am—quick to judge without evidence. We can’t entirely blame them, as formal early childhood education (ECE) in the Philippines is relatively new. That’s why, when they find out the new kindergarten teacher is male, they often assume he is gay.” School Head Chalkboard (L14-L16)

“In the old days, men were typically associated with labor-intensive jobs, not teaching. That might be why some people assume male kindergarten teachers have feminine traits.” School Head Storybook (L24-L25)

The school heads highlighted the societal biases male kindergarten teachers face, including parental skepticism and assumptions about their sexuality. They emphasized how traditional gender roles reinforce the belief that nurturing professions are feminine, making it harder for male educators to gain acceptance.

McDowell’s (2023) research echoed these challenges, showing how male teachers in early childhood education face scrutiny for engaging in caregiving and emotional support. Assumptions about their masculinity and sexuality further complicate their professional identity, underscoring the need for a more inclusive perspective on gender in education.

The fourth sub-theme, Discomfort in Assisting Female Students Due to Cultural Norms, highlighted the challenges male kindergarten teachers faced in navigating gendered interactions. Cultural expectations often made tasks like helping with personal hygiene or addressing emotional needs feel awkward or scrutinized. These pressures affected their confidence and professional identity, shaping both their interactions with students and their perception of their role as educators.

"Actually Ma’am, when a female student asks for help to go to the restroom, I feel uneasy. I immediately looked for a female teacher because I know it’s something I shouldn’t handle directly.” Teacher Chalk (L16-L17)

"When a female student needs help adjusting her uniform, I hesitate because I don’t want anyone to misinterpret my actions. I usually call a female teacher to assist, even if it delays things.” Teacher Sharpener (L17-L18)

"Sometimes, a little girl will cry and ask for a hug, but I’m cautious about how I respond. I have to balance comforting the child while respecting cultural boundaries.” Teacher Eraser (L26-L27)

Male kindergarten teachers faced significant challenges when assisting female students due to deeply ingrained cultural norms. Teacher Chalk hesitated when asked for restroom assistance, reflecting societal expectations that caregiving tasks should be handled by women. Teacher Sharpener’s discomfort in adjusting a student’s uniform highlighted concerns about physical boundaries and misjudgment. Similarly, Teacher Eraser was cautious when comforting a crying student, fearing his actions might be misinterpreted. These experiences underscored how gender stereotypes shaped their interactions, adding emotional and professional burdens. School heads also recognized this discomfort, emphasizing how cultural norms intensified the scrutiny male educators faced in performing routine caregiving tasks.

“Sir \*\*\* mentioned how he always looks for a female staff member to handle situations like assisting female students because he fears it may be misinterpreted.” School Head Chalkboard (L23-L24)

“He explained that while he wants to assist, he’s concerned and awkward about how others might perceive his actions.” School Head Playdough (L16-L17)

“There are interactions often complicated by cultural norms that dictate certain tasks are more suitable for female teachers, creating a sense of unease for the men involved.” School Head Paintbrush (L33-L34)

Cultural norms significantly impact male kindergarten teachers' interactions with female students, leading to hesitation and discomfort. School heads shared accounts of teachers avoiding certain situations out of fear of misinterpretation, highlighting the anxiety surrounding gendered expectations. Research by Alharahsheh et al. (2021) further supports these findings, emphasizing how societal biases force male teachers to second-guess themselves or rely on female colleagues. This constant scrutiny undermines their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. Addressing these biases is crucial to creating a more inclusive environment where male educators can fully engage without fear of judgment.

**3.2 Coping Mechanisms of Male Kindergarten Teachers in Responding to the Challenges**

The second central theme, Coping Mechanisms of Male Kindergarten Teachers in Responding to the Challenges highlighted how they built trust, used humor, practiced self-affirmation, and collaborated with female colleagues to navigate societal biases. These strategies helped them manage challenges and gradually reshape perceptions of gender roles in early childhood education.

“I always make it a point to actively participate in school activities like Parents’ Day and PTA meetings. Being present and engaging with parents helps me show that I’m invested in their children’s growth and learning.” Teacher Eraser (L35-L36)

“Home visitations are a great way for me to connect with families on a deeper level. When parents see my genuine interest in showing my care to their child, I feel they start to trust and respect me more as a teacher.” Teacher Chalk (L26-L27)

“Try to build friendships with parents by casually chatting with them during drop-offs or pickups and getting involved in community events. These small interactions go a long way in breaking stereotypes and building trust." Teacher Crayon (L39L40)

Male kindergarten teachers used community engagement as a coping mechanism to counter biases. Teacher Eraser joined school events, Teacher Chalk conducted home visitations, and Teacher Crayon fostered informal connections with parents. These proactive efforts built trust, challenged stereotypes, and strengthened their professional acceptance. School heads also recognized their dedication to overcoming challenges through meaningful relationships.

“In all fairness, Ma’am, Sir \*\*\* actively participates in community programs, showcasing his teaching skills and earning the respect of parents. He is consistent and diligent in showing his love and care for the children.” School Head Storybook (L36-L37)

“Oh, you know what, Ma’am, he builds strong relationships by engaging parents through regular updates and classroom activities. He often talks with parents, and I’ve noticed that some have even formed friendships with him, which makes me really happy for him.” School Head Paintbrush (L42-L43)

"As I observe, he actively reaches out to the community. Since we live in a bunkhouse near the school, he plays basketball in the barangay every afternoon or has friendly chats at the sari-sari store.” School Head Playdough (L27-L28)

School heads recognized male kindergarten teachers’ dedication to community engagement as a key factor in gaining trust and respect. School Head Storybook highlighted their consistency in showing care for children, while School Head Paintbrush noted how regular updates and parent involvement fostered friendships. School Head Playdough emphasized their outreach beyond school, strengthening ties through casual interactions in the community. These efforts aligned with Robert and Kwon (2021) study, showing that strong relationships helped male teachers counter biases, reduce isolation, and navigate societal perceptions more effectively.

The second sub-theme, Utilizing Humor and Positivity, highlighted how male kindergarten teachers managed discomfort in activities traditionally seen as feminine.

Singing, storytelling, and imaginative play often triggered unease due to societal stereotypes, yet they used humor to normalize their participation and ease tensions. This approach not only helped them cope but also fostered a welcoming and engaging classroom environment. By embracing humor and positivity, they subtly challenged gender norms while strengthening their connections with students and the school community.

“I’ve learned to embrace the activities and just have fun with them. If I’m confident and make a joke about how I can rock a girly action song session, it helps me and everyone else feel at ease.” Teacher Pencil (L24-L25)

“Instead of feeling awkward, I laugh with the kids. If I can show them it’s okay to enjoy these things no matter who you are, it becomes a positive experience for all of us.” Teacher Sharpener (L28-L29)

“I tell myself that my joy and enthusiasm are what matter most to the children. Sometimes I’ll even joke with my parents about how my female-voice skills are improving because of the story telling everyday, it lightens the mood and shows I’m comfortable in my role.” Teacher Eraser (L44-L45)

Male kindergarten teachers used humor and positivity to navigate discomfort in activities traditionally seen as feminine. Teacher Pencil embraced action songs, using playful remarks to create a relaxed atmosphere. Teacher Sharpener highlighted how laughter helped normalize participation, fostering inclusivity. Teacher Eraser lightened the mood with jokes, making storytelling more engaging. Their strategies not only eased personal discomfort but also challenged gender norms, creating a more accepting classroom. School heads reinforced how humor played a key role in helping these teachers confidently engage in their roles.

“Sir \*\*\* uses humor during storytelling and role-playing activities, making these tasks enjoyable for both children and parents. Even though some of the activities are typically associated with women, he makes the classes so much fun.” School Head Storybook (L46-L47)

“He often jokes about his dancing or singing during performances, which creates a positive atmosphere. Uhmm… all the kids really enjoy his classes.” School Head Paintbrush (L53-L54)

“He makes jokes often and has fully embraced the nature of kindergarten teaching. That’s why, even though it was challenging for him at first, it has now become so much easier.” School Head Chalkboard (L36-L37)

School heads highlighted how humor and positivity helped male kindergarten teachers navigate gender biases, build connections, and create joyful classrooms. Aligned with McDowell’s (2023) study, these strategies eased discomfort, fostered inclusivity, and reshaped perceptions of gender in early childhood education.

The third sub-theme, Engaging in Self-Affirmation, revealed how male kindergarten teachers used self-affirmation to counter societal judgments, particularly stereotypes about their sexual orientation. By reinforcing their self-worth and commitment to teaching, they maintained resilience, strengthened their professional identity, and remained dedicated to their role despite external criticism.

“I remind myself every day why I chose this profession. I love working with children and helping them grow. Through mindful reflection, I focus on my passion rather than worrying about what others might think.” Teacher Chalk (L34-L35)

“When negative thoughts creep in, I practice positive self-talk, telling myself that my value as a teacher isn’t defined by stereotypes. It’s about my skills and the difference I make in the children’s lives.” Teacher Sharpener (L34-L35)

“I’ve built resilience by learning to let go of societal judgments. Instead of dwelling on negative perceptions, I focus on the joy and fulfillment this work brings me and the positive feedback I receive from parents and colleagues.” Teacher Crayon (L49-L50)

Male kindergarten teachers emphasized self-affirmation as a key strategy for overcoming societal judgments, particularly stereotypes linking men in early childhood education to being gay. Teacher Chalk practiced mindful reflection, grounding himself in his passion for teaching. Teacher Sharpener used positive self-talk to reinforce his value as an educator. Teacher Crayon built resilience by focusing on the joy of his work and positive feedback. Their experiences highlighted how self-affirmation helped them stay confident and committed despite societal stigma. School heads also played a role in supporting these teachers through these challenges.

“Sadly, he once confided in me that he was struggling because a parent jokingly questioned why he chose this profession or implied he might be gay. I advised him to not let such comments bother him and to focus on staying unaffected by negativity.” School Head Playdough (L34L35)

“I encouraged him to steer clear of negative thoughts and bad vibes, so he can teach in a stress-free and fulfilling manner.” School Head Storybook (L52-L53)

“I always remind all my teachers to focus on the positive, stay mindful, and use meditation as a tool to handle negative remarks or challenges effectively.” School Head Chalkboard (L39-L40)

School heads emphasized resilience, positivity, and mindfulness in supporting male kindergarten teachers facing societal biases. Aligned with Moosa et al. (2024), self-affirmation helped these teachers counter stereotypes, reinforcing their confidence and commitment.

The fourth sub-theme, Collaborating with Female Colleagues emerged as a key coping mechanism for male kindergarten teachers. By working closely with their female counterparts, they navigated cultural norms and eased discomfort when assisting female students. These partnerships provided guidance, fostered professional growth, and ensured students’ needs were met while maintaining cultural harmony. Beyond practical support, collaboration also created an inclusive and supportive environment, helping to challenge traditional gender roles in early childhood education.

"I make it a point to ask for help from my female colleagues when a situation involves assisting female students in a way that could be culturally sensitive. They’re always understanding and ready to step in, which makes things easier.” Teacher Pencil (L36-L37)

“I maintain open communication with the school administration and co-teachers about these challenges. By being transparent, I ensure that we can work together to find the best way to support the students while respecting cultural norms.” Teacher Chalk (L42-L43)

“I collaborate closely with my female colleagues, especially during activities where I feel cultural norms might create discomfort. They appreciate my openness and help ensure the students’ needs are met without crossing any boundaries.” Teacher Sharpener (L43-L44)

Male kindergarten teachers relied on female colleagues to navigate cultural norms, ensuring student needs were met while maintaining sensitivity. Their support fostered collaboration, eased tensions, and created a positive teaching environment.

“It’s funny that sometimes I hear Mr. \*\*\*\* hurriedly call for help to Mrs. \*\*\*\* when situations like changing a girl’s clothes arise. This teamwork creates a supportive environment, easing his discomfort while ensuring the children are properly cared for.” School Head Chalkboard (L47-L48)

“I observe Sir \*\*\* openly shares his need to collaborate with female colleagues when tasks like assisting female students feel culturally sensitive. His transparency fosters trust and ensures the students’ needs are met without hesitation.” School Head Playdough (L39-L40)

“Of course, there are awkward moments, especially in our culture where such situations can be misinterpreted. By relying on his female co-teachers for assistance, he avoids misunderstandings while building strong collaborative relationships.” School Head Storybook (L59-L50)

School heads emphasized that collaboration with female colleagues is crucial for male kindergarten teachers in navigating culturally sensitive tasks. Male teachers openly sought support, fostering trust and teamwork while ensuring student care. These partnerships not only helped them manage discomfort but also strengthened professional relationships, creating a more inclusive and supportive teaching environment. The findings align with Morgan (2023), highlighting how such collaborations empower male educators and enhance their confidence, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

**3.3. Insights Learned as Internalized and Shown in the Attitude of Male Kindergarten Teachers**

The third central theme, Insights Learned as Internalized and Shown in the Attitude of Male Kindergarten Teachers, highlights how male educators navigate societal skepticism, personal discomfort, and cultural sensitivities in a female-dominated profession. They develop coping mechanisms such as building community relationships, using humor, engaging in self-affirmation, and collaborating with female colleagues. These strategies foster resilience, creativity, and professional growth, allowing them to find fulfillment and belonging. Their perseverance not only strengthens their teaching but also challenges traditional gender norms, reshaping perceptions of male educators in early childhood education.

The first sub-theme, Sense of Inclusion and Connection in the Field of Kindergarten, highlights how male teachers build relationships with parents, colleagues, and the community to gain validation in a female-dominated field. These connections strengthen their confidence, deepen their commitment, and affirm their role, helping them navigate societal biases while fostering a sense of belonging.

“Even though teaching kindergarten wasn’t my first choice, I’ve grown to feel a sense of belonging through the support of colleagues and the trust of parents. By proving my dedication to the learners, I’ve helped change perceptions in the community.” Teacher Eraser (L52L53)

“Being a minority in this field makes it challenging, but I feel included when I actively engage with parents and community activities. My presence and efforts help break down stereotypes about men in early childhood education.” Teacher Chalk (L50L51)

“I feel deeply connected to my work, my learners, and the community, which helps me address societal biases. Building strong relationships through open communication and collaboration has fostered respect and acceptance.” Teacher Crayon (L59-L60)

Male kindergarten teachers develop a sense of belonging through relationships with colleagues, parents, and the community, actively challenging gender biases in education. Teacher Eraser found inclusion through support despite not initially choosing the field, Teacher Chalk used community engagement to break stereotypes, and Teacher Crayon emphasized communication in earning respect. Their experiences illustrate how persistence and meaningful connections foster acceptance, contributing to a broader cultural shift in early childhood education. School heads further highlight how these educators navigate challenges and gain trust, shaping a more inclusive teaching environment.

“Initially, I observed that Sir \*\*\* was a bit shy, but over time, he has grown confident and has received strong support.” School Head Paintbrush (L66-L67)

“I don't think it's difficult for Sir \*\*\* to adjust. With his positive attitude, I believe he has a natural ability to connect with parents.” School Head Chalkboard (L56L57)

“I’ve experienced similar challenges before, so I know it’s not impossible for Sir \*\*\*. I can see that he genuinely enjoys spending time in the community.” School Head Playdough (L47-L48)

Male kindergarten teachers demonstrate significant growth and adaptability, gradually building confidence with support from mentors, colleagues, and communities. School heads highlight how a positive attitude, resilience, and community engagement help them overcome initial hesitations and societal biases. Their ability to foster trust with parents and challenge stereotypes reinforces their essential role in early childhood education. Reflecting on their experiences, I saw how inclusion is shaped not just by acceptance but by actively nurturing strengths and redefining traditional narratives. Their persistence enriches learning environments, promoting gender equity and fostering a sense of belonging in the profession.

The second sub-theme, Becoming More Creative, Innovative, and Eager to Grow in Teaching Kindergarten, highlights how challenges drive male kindergarten teachers to develop new strategies, refine their skills, and embrace continuous learning. Their resilience fuels creativity, adaptability, and a commitment to growth, transforming adversity into opportunities for innovation.

“I use humor to lighten the mood and make activities feel more natural, even when they are seen as traditionally feminine. By laughing with my learners and embracing the fun, I’ve found joy and confidence in what I do.” Teacher Sharpener (L52L53)

“Being enthusiastic allows me to approach these activities with energy and positivity, which helps overcome any feelings of unease. I focus on how these moments contribute to my growth and the happiness of my learners.” Teacher Pencil (L48-L49)

“I feel happy teaching kindergarten because I’ve learned to embrace these activities with creativity and an open mind. Humor and positivity help me connect with my learners and turn challenges into opportunities for growth.” Teacher Eraser (L64-L65)

Male kindergarten teachers use humor and positivity to navigate activities perceived as feminine, fostering creativity, confidence, and connection with students. Teacher Sharpener’s humor lightens the mood, Teacher Pencil’s enthusiasm transforms discomfort into growth, and Teacher Eraser’s open-minded approach turns challenges into learning opportunities. School heads recognize their resilience, highlighting how these educators redefine male roles in early childhood education through dedication and innovation.

“Hahaha! Through his humor, he has mastered being creative and imaginative. I really admire him for being brave.” School Head Storybook (L68-L69)

“Yes, he is truly enjoying it. As he continues to mature in his craft, he’s becoming increasingly innovative and resilient.” School Head Paintbrush (L78-L69)

“I agree! We all need to adapt, and Sir \*\*\* has managed to adjust remarkably well, showing great willingness to grow as an early childhood educator.” School Head Chalkboard (L65-L66)

School heads admire how male kindergarten teachers use humor, creativity, and adaptability to connect with students and grow in their roles. School Head Storybook highlights humor as a tool for building relationships, while School Head Paintbrush emphasizes the teacher’s maturity and resilience. School Head Chalkboard underscores the importance of adaptability in early childhood education. Their reflections align with Rohrmann’s (2020) work on coping strategies for male educators, emphasizing mentorship, support networks, and reflection. Humor and positivity not only help male teachers navigate gender biases but also foster inclusive learning environments. These insights reinforce the need for tailored support systems to empower male educators and promote gender balance in early childhood education.

The third sub-theme, Becoming Resilient and Enhancing Their Teaching Impact, highlights how resilience emerges as a crucial outcome of the coping strategies male kindergarten teachers use, such as self-affirmation, humor, and collaboration. More than just a response to adversity, resilience strengthens their professional identity, fosters deeper student connections, and creates dynamic learning environments. Their ability to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth allows them not just to persist but to thrive. This insight underscores resilience as a driving force behind their teaching impact and reinforces the need for support systems that empower male educators in early childhood education.

“Through self-affirmation, I’ve become resilient, learning to focus on my strengths as an educator rather than societal judgments. This has helped me grow emotionally mature and confident in my role.” Teacher Chalk (L62-L63)

“I’ve learned to be strong yet gentle, showing that kindness in teaching doesn’t diminish my masculinity. Affirming my purpose helps me rise above stereotypes and give my best to my learners.” Teacher Crayon (L68-L69)

“I’ve adopted a bamboo mindset, flexible enough to adapt to judgments but strong enough not to break. Self-affirmation reminds me of my value and helps me keep growing in this profession.” Teacher Pencil (L63-L64)

The experiences of male kindergarten teachers highlight the crucial role of self-affirmation in strengthening their resilience and teaching impact. Through self-affirmation, they overcome societal biases related to gender and masculinity, allowing them to focus on their strengths as educators. Teacher Chalk emphasizes how this practice builds emotional maturity and confidence, while Teacher Crayon challenges traditional gender norms by embracing both strength and gentleness in teaching. Teacher Pencil’s "bamboo mindset" metaphor underscores adaptability and resilience in the face of judgment. Additionally, school heads’ support plays a key role in fostering these teachers' growth and effectiveness, demonstrating how self-affirmation, resilience, and leadership collectively shape their success.

“You know, Ma’am, maintaining a positive mindset helps us stay strong and mature. That is what I appreciate with Sir \*\*\*.” School Head Playdough (L71-L72)

“In challenging situations, we must rely on ourselves. With a fighting spirit to push forward, we can build resilience and overcome stress." School Head Storybook (L84-L85)

“One great things about being a teacher is the respect you earn, especially in our school community. I told Sir \*\*\*, if you manage your thoughts well, never given in to stress, you can grow as a person and make a positive impact on your teaching profession.” School Head Paintbrush (L93-L94)

The reflections of school heads emphasize resilience, personal growth, and self-affirmation as essential for male kindergarten teachers in overcoming societal biases. School Head Playdough highlights the impact of a positive mindset, while School Head Storybook stresses self-reliance and perseverance in facing challenges. School Head Paintbrush underscores the role of mental discipline in fostering both personal and professional growth. These insights reveal that inner strength and resilience not only benefit educators but also positively influence students and the school community.

The study aligns with Bhana et al. (2021), showing that male early childhood educators use self-affirmation to navigate societal pressures related to masculinity and sexuality. By affirming their value, they create inclusive learning environments and challenge traditional gender norms, reshaping perceptions of male teachers in early childhood education. Their strategies do more than aid coping; they enhance teaching impact, foster meaningful connections with students, and contribute to a more equitable educational landscape. Ultimately, self-affirmation and critical reflection emerge as transformative forces in both personal development and early childhood education.

The fourth sub-theme that emerged from the study is *Confidence in Classroom Management.* Male kindergarten teachers navigate gender biases to strengthen their self-assurance. By building community relationships and collaborating with colleagues, they create supportive learning environments that foster student engagement and positive behavior. Their resilience turns challenges into strengths, showing that classroom management success comes from both experience and overcoming societal pressures.

“Collaborating with my female colleagues has helped me learn strategies for assisting female students. I am more comfortable, and more confident in myself. They helped me a lot and greatly improved my classroom management skills.” Teacher Eraser (L88-L89)

“Ayy! By working closely with my female colleagues, I’ve gained confidence in addressing cultural norms. Their guidance has strengthened my ability to manage the classroom effectively.” Teacher Sharpener (L73-L74)

“I’ve honed my classroom management skills by learning techniques from my female colleagues. They helped me strengthen my classroom management. Their rich experiences as seasoned teachers has helped me create a more inclusive and respectful learning environment for kids.” Teacher Crayon (L80-L82)

Male kindergarten teachers found that collaborating with female colleagues boosted their confidence in classroom management, especially in navigating cultural norms when assisting female students. This teamwork provided them with strategies, personal growth, and a deeper understanding of gender expectations. Teachers like Eraser, Sharpener, and Crayon shared how these exchanges helped them create inclusive, respectful classrooms. Their experiences highlight how collaboration not only enhances teaching skills but also breaks down cultural barriers. School heads echoed this, attributing male teachers’ confidence growth to perseverance and teamwork.

“From Sir \*\*\*'s experience, I can see that nothing is impossible. He has grown noticeably more confident compared to before.” School Head Chalkboard (L80-L81)

“Managing a kindergarten class is not easy, but their collaboration helped him overcome challenges and become a well-equipped kindergarten teacher.” School Head Playdough (L92-L93)

“I am always willing to support Sir \*\*\*, and so are our female co-teachers. As his school head, I can see how much he has improved, gaining more confidence in handling situations he once found difficult.” School Head Storybook (L101-L102)

School heads highlighted how male kindergarten teachers' confidence grew through perseverance, collaboration, and peer guidance. School Head Chalkboard emphasized how overcoming challenges fostered personal growth, while School Head Playdough credited teamwork with female colleagues for equipping teachers with essential skills. School Head Storybook noted how peer support helped teachers develop self-assurance in handling difficult situations. These insights aligned with Cruickshank et al. (2020), emphasizing collaboration as both a coping strategy and a means of challenging traditional gender roles. Ultimately, working with female colleagues not only strengthened classroom management but also fostered inclusivity and professional growth.

4. Conclusion

This study highlights the multifaceted challenges male kindergarten teachers face in a predominantly female profession, including behavioral management, language and cultural barriers, societal expectations and gender role stereotypes. Despite these difficulties, the participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability, embracing traditionally feminine teaching practices and striving to provide quality early childhood education. Their ability to navigate internal and external conflicts underscores the need for tailored support systems and professional development opportunities. Addressing issues such as inadequate compensation, limited training and societal bias is essential to attracting and retaining male teachers in early education. By fostering a more inclusive environment and challenging existing stereotypes, male educators can significantly contribute to the diversity and quality of early childhood teaching. These findings emphasize the importance of policy reforms and awareness initiatives that validate and support the role of male kindergarten teachers, ultimately encouraging a more balanced representation in the early childhood education workforce.

**DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)**

Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies was only used in the editing of the manuscripts for unity, coherence and consistency of tone. All ideas were of originally of the authors.

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