

The role of school-level support system in fostering positive teacher-learner relationships and their impact on learner outcomes

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of school-level support system in fostering positive teacher-learner relationships and promoting learner outcomes in kindergarten at Tagongtong Elementary School, Mercedes District, Schools Division of Camarines Norte. Using a qualitative descriptive case study design, data were gathered from twelve key informants composed of school administrators, kindergarten teachers, parents, and non-teaching staff who had direct knowledge and experience related to school-level support system and teacher-learner relationships. Interviews, open-ended response forms, observation, and document analysis were used, and the responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. Findings showed that kindergarten teachers needed mentoring, professional learning, instructional materials, structured programs, and strong home-school partnership to build positive relationships with learners. Leadership, professional development, and classroom environment influenced teacher-learner relationships by providing guidance, improving teacher competence, and creating organized learning conditions. Challenges included workload pressures, learner behavior and self-regulation concerns, and parent-related barriers. Based on the findings, the KINDERCARE Support Handbook was developed as a school-based guide to enhance teacher-learner relationships and promote learner outcomes in kindergarten.

Keywords: Classroom Environment; Kindergarten; Learner Outcomes; Professional Development; School-Level Support System; Teacher-Learner Relationships

1. Introduction

Education in the early years shape the holistic development of learners. In kindergarten, teacher-learner relationships serve as the foundation for children's social, emotional, and academic growth. When teachers and learners establish positive and supportive connections, children feel secure, motivated, and ready to engage in learning.

The strengthening of early childhood education and teacher competence in the Philippines is supported by Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, and DepEd Order No. 20, s. 2018, which institutionalizes policy directions for kindergarten education and teacher support. These frameworks emphasize effective teaching practices, continuous professional development, and school-based mechanisms that contribute to teacher growth and learner outcomes [1,2].

Existing literature emphasizes that positive teacher-learner relationships contribute to learner well-being, psychosocial adjustment, classroom engagement, emotional security, and readiness for learning [3-7]. However, the ability of teachers to build and sustain these relationships is shaped not only by individual teacher effort but also by institutional conditions, including leadership support, professional development, classroom environment, workload management, and home-school partnership.

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At the local level, Tagongtong Elementary School faces challenges common to many public schools, including limited resources, heavy teacher workload, behavioral concerns among young learners, and the need for continuous professional training. These conditions directly affect how teachers connect with kindergarten learners in the classroom and how school-level support system may strengthen or limit relational teaching.

This study aimed to investigate the role of school-level support system in fostering positive teacher-learner relationships and their impact on learner outcomes in kindergarten at Tagongtong Elementary School, Mercedes District, Schools Division of Camarines Norte. Specifically, it examined the school-level support system needed by teachers, the school-level system that influence teacher-learner relationships in terms of leadership, professional development, and classroom environment, the challenges encountered by teachers in fostering these relationships, and the output that may be proposed to enhance teacher-learner relationships and promote learners' outcomes in kindergarten.

2. Materials and Methods

The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design using a case study approach. This design was appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of how school-level support system influenced the quality of teacher-learner relationships and learner outcomes within the specific context of Tagongtong Elementary School.

The primary key informants were kindergarten teachers from Tagongtong Elementary School. School administrators, selected parents of kindergarten pupils, and non-teaching staff were also included to provide broader perspectives on school-level support system, classroom practices, parent involvement, and learner support. In total, twelve key informants participated in the study.

The study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involved the intentional selection of key informants based on their direct knowledge and experience related to the research objectives. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, open-ended response forms, observation, and document analysis. The interview questions were aligned with the study's objectives and were validated prior to implementation.

The responses were analyzed through thematic analysis. Interview and open-ended responses were coded to identify recurring patterns, meanings, and themes related to teacher-learner relationships, school-level support system, challenges, and the proposed output. Observation and document analysis were used to support and contextualize the participants' responses. Ethical safeguards were observed by explaining the purpose of the study, securing voluntary participation, and treating the responses with confidentiality.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. School-level support system needed by teachers

The findings reveal that kindergarten teachers need school-level support system related to mentoring and professional learning, instructional resources and structured programs, and strong home-school partnership. These supports help teachers become more confident, prepared, and responsive in managing learner behavior, sustaining engagement, and addressing the emotional and developmental needs of kindergarten learners.

The responses indicate that mentoring, coaching, classroom observation feedback, and professional development are necessary in strengthening teachers' competence in handling young learners. One school administrator stated that effective support includes *"mentoring and coaching especially during classroom observation, trainings for professional development and provision of instructional material."* This suggests that continuous guidance enables teachers to improve classroom management and build more positive teacher-learner relationships.

The findings also show that instructional materials and structured activities support learner engagement. One participant emphasized the need for *"mga programa o mga aktibidad na kalahok ang mga mag-aaral at guro"* (programs or activities where learners and teachers participate). This implies that school-supported activities provide opportunities for interaction, participation, and meaningful classroom engagement.

In addition, the results highlight the importance of parent partnership and a relationship-oriented school culture. One parent noted the need for *"ang pagiging maunawain at mas magkaroon ng malaking pasensya"* (being understanding and

having greater patience). This shows that positive teacher-learner relationships are strengthened when teachers, parents, and school personnel work together to support learners' behavior, adjustment, and emotional security.

Table 1 School-Level Support System that are Needed by the Teachers

Theme	General Statements
Teacher Capacity-Building Through Mentoring and Professional Learning	The key informants generally expressed that kindergarten teachers need continuous mentoring, coaching, professional development, and structured training to strengthen their competence in handling young learners. They emphasized the value of classroom observation feedback, Learning Action Cell sessions, seminars, peer mentorship, and small-group coaching focused on best practices in managing kindergarten learners, addressing behavior concerns, improving discipline, and supporting learner retention. These support system help teachers become more confident, guided, and prepared in building positive relationships with their learners.
Instructional Resources and Structured Programs Enabling Engagement	The responses revealed that teachers need adequate instructional materials, manipulatives, learning corners, classroom management resources, and play-based learning materials to make classroom activities more engaging and developmentally appropriate. Key informants also noted the importance of structured school programs that support social-emotional learning and hands-on learning experiences. These resources help teachers create meaningful activities that encourage participation, sustain learner interest, and support positive teacher-learner interaction in the kindergarten classroom.
Relational Ecology Parent Partnership and Relationship-Oriented Culture	The key informants commonly indicated that positive teacher-learner relationships are strengthened when the school promotes patience, understanding, communication, and collaboration among teachers, parents, and learners. Regular parent orientations, scheduled meetings, home-school partnerships, guidance support, and consistent classroom routines were viewed as important support system. These forms of support help teachers understand learners better, manage behavior concerns more effectively, and establish a caring classroom culture that promotes trust and emotional security among kindergarten learners.

3.2. School-level system influencing teacher-learner relationships

3.2.1. School-level system influencing teacher-learner relationships along Leadership

Leadership emerged as a school-level support system that influences the quality of teacher-learner relationships in kindergarten. The findings are organized into two themes: Supportive and Responsive School Leadership, and Administrative Guidance and Teacher Motivation.

The findings indicate that when school heads provide encouragement, recognize teachers' efforts, listen to classroom concerns, and respond promptly to teachers' needs, teachers become calmer, more motivated, patient, and responsive to learners. Leadership therefore affects teacher-learner relationships indirectly by shaping the professional and emotional conditions under which teachers perform their work.

The responses indicate that teachers are better able to build positive relationships with learners when school heads provide encouragement, recognize teachers' efforts, listen to concerns, and respond promptly to classroom needs. One teacher stated that "When leaders are visible, supportive, and fair, teachers feel secure and become more patient with children." This suggests that leadership support indirectly benefits learners by helping teachers feel valued, emotionally supported, and ready to manage classroom interactions positively.

The findings also show that administrative guidance strengthens teacher motivation through clear direction, fair supervision, program implementation, and shared responsibility. One participant stated, "*Ang pamunuan ng paaralan ang gagawa ng programa o aktibidad at sila din magpapatupad nito katulong ang mga guro*" (*The school leadership creates programs or activities and implements them together with the teachers*). This implies that when school leaders involve teachers in school initiatives, teachers become more motivated and committed to sustaining positive interactions with learners.

Table 2 Key School-level system that influence Teacher-learner Relationship along with Leadership

Theme	General Statements
Supportive and Responsive School Leadership	The key informants generally expressed that supportive and responsive school leadership strengthens teacher-learner relationships by making teachers feel guided, valued, secure, and emotionally supported. They emphasized that when school heads provide encouragement, recognize teachers' efforts, listen to classroom concerns, and respond quickly to needs related to materials, schedules, and learner welfare, teachers become calmer, more focused, patient, and responsive to kindergarten learners.
Administrative Guidance and Teacher Motivation	The key informants indicated that leadership influences teacher motivation through clear direction, fair supervision, program implementation, and shared responsibility between administrators and teachers. They viewed school leaders as important in creating and implementing programs and activities that support teachers in performing their roles. When administrators provide proper guidance and involve teachers in school initiatives, teachers become more motivated and committed to sustaining positive interactions with learners.

The findings suggest that leadership affects teacher-learner relationships by shaping teachers' motivation, emotional readiness, and sense of support. When school heads provide guidance, recognition, and collaborative leadership, teachers are more capable of maintaining caring, patient, and responsive relationships with kindergarten learners.

3.2.2. School-level system influencing teacher-learner relationships along professional development

Professional development functions as a capacity-building support that strengthens teachers' relational competence in kindergarten classrooms. The findings are organized into two themes: Training on Positive Discipline and Child Development, and Inclusive, Trauma-Sensitive, and Differentiated Teaching Practices.

Table 3 Key School-level system that influence Teacher-learner Relationship along with Professional Development

Theme	General Statements
Training on Positive Discipline and Child Development	The key informants generally expressed that training on child development and positive discipline helps kindergarten teachers respond calmly and appropriately to learners' behavior. These trainings guide teachers in managing tantrums, separation anxiety, and classroom behavior without using shouting, threats, or fear-based discipline. Through these professional development activities, teachers become more capable of creating a safe and caring classroom atmosphere where learners feel comfortable approaching them and expressing their concerns.
Inclusive, Trauma-Sensitive, and Differentiated Teaching Practices	The key informants indicated that professional development on trauma-sensitive teaching, inclusive practices, differentiated instruction, and communication strategies helps teachers understand learner behavior more deeply and respond according to learners' individual needs and abilities. Instead of immediately labeling learners as difficult, teachers learn to consider unmet needs, varied readiness levels, and behavioral differences. These supports also help teachers use simple language, reassurance, sincere praise, and individualized activities that strengthen trust, encouragement, and positive teacher-learner interaction.

The responses indicate that training on child development and positive discipline helps teachers manage learner behavior calmly and respectfully. One teacher stated that *"Trainings on child development and positive discipline help me respond calmly to tantrums and separation anxiety."* This suggests that professional development enables teachers to handle behavior concerns without shouting, threats, or fear-based discipline. As a result, learners feel safer, more understood, and more willing to approach their teachers.

The findings also show that inclusive, trauma-sensitive, and differentiated practices help teachers understand learners as individuals with varied needs and abilities. One teacher explained, *"Instead of labeling a child as 'makulit,' I look for unmet needs and respond more gently."* This means that teachers become more reflective and responsive in interpreting learner behavior. Another participant stated that teachers need to learn *"kung paano pakitunguhan ang mga mag-aaral"*

na mag-ayon sa kakayan ng mag-aaral" (how to deal with learners according to their abilities). This highlights the need for differentiated and individualized support in kindergarten.

Overall, the findings suggest that professional development improves teacher-learner relationships by helping teachers respond with patience, respect, reassurance, and flexibility. When teachers are trained in child development, positive discipline, inclusive education, and differentiated instruction, they become more capable of building trust, encouraging participation, and sustaining caring relationships with kindergarten learners.

School-level system influencing teacher-learner relationships along classroom environment. The classroom environment refers to the physical, emotional, and organizational conditions that affect the quality and frequency of teacher-learner interaction. The findings are organized into two themes: Safe, Organized, and Child-Friendly Classroom Environment, and Predictable Routines and Play-Based Learning Spaces.

The responses indicate that clean, spacious, well-ventilated, and orderly classrooms support positive interaction between teachers and learners. One teacher stated that *"A spacious, organized room with clear learning corners makes it easier to circulate and give individual attention; overcrowding limits this."* This suggests that adequate space and proper classroom arrangement allow teachers to monitor learners, provide individual guidance, and sustain meaningful interaction. In contrast, crowded or disorganized classrooms may increase restlessness, conflict, and teacher stress.

The findings also show that predictable routines and play-based learning areas help learners become more focused and emotionally regulated. One teacher explained that *"If the room has clear routines, labeled areas, and enough chairs, children feel secure; disorganized spaces lead to constant redirection."* A parent also stated, *"Magiging komportable ang bawat mag-aaral at gagaan ba silang mag-aral"* (Each learner will be comfortable, and studying will become easier for them). These responses indicate that routines and organized learning spaces help reduce confusion and create more opportunities for calm communication and participation.

Overall, the findings suggest that the classroom environment supports teacher-learner relationships by promoting comfort, order, safety, and engagement. When classrooms are clean, organized, developmentally appropriate, and supported by clear routines and play-based spaces, teachers can interact with learners more calmly and effectively, thereby strengthening positive relationships and learner outcomes.

Table 4 Key School-level system that influence Teacher-learner Relationship along with Classroom Environment

Theme	General Statements
Safe, Organized, and Child-Friendly Classroom Environment	The key informants generally expressed that a clean, spacious, well-ventilated, and orderly classroom helps teachers and learners feel comfortable, calm, and motivated. They emphasized that adequate classroom space, child-friendly seating, labeled materials, good ventilation, and enough chairs allow teachers to move around, monitor learners, provide individual attention, and sustain positive interaction. In contrast, overcrowded, noisy, cramped, and poorly organized spaces may increase learner restlessness, irritability, and conflict, which can weaken the quality of teacher-learner relationships.
Predictable Routines and Play-Based Learning Spaces	The key informants indicated that clear routines, organized learning corners, labeled areas, and accessible learning materials help kindergarten learners feel secure, engaged, and regulated. They emphasized that when classroom areas are properly arranged and materials are visible and available, learners become more focused, calmer, and more willing to participate. These conditions help teachers reduce constant redirection, manage behavior more effectively, and create more opportunities for calm conversations and meaningful teacher-learner interaction.

3.3. Challenges encountered by teachers in fostering teacher-learner relationships

The challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers are directly connected to the school-level support system identified in the study. The findings are organized into three themes: Administrative and Workload Pressures Limiting Individualized Interaction, Learner Behavior and Self-Regulation Challenges Disrupting Classroom Connection, and Parent-Related Barriers Affecting Classroom Relationship Building.

The responses indicate that administrative tasks and workload pressures limit teachers' opportunity for individualized interaction. One teacher stated that *"Large class size and constant paperwork are my main challenges, especially during*

reporting and documentation weeks.” Another teacher added that “*I lose time for one-on-one check-ins, so some learners only get brief interactions during activities and transitions.*” These responses suggest that heavy workload and large class size reduce the teacher’s capacity to provide close guidance, emotional support, and consistent attention to learners.

The findings also show that learner behavior and self-regulation difficulties disrupt classroom connection. One teacher identified “unruly behavior of the learner” as a challenge, while a parent stated, “*Nahihirapan ang isang guro na kunin ang atensyon ng bata at pati na rin ang ibang mag-aaral ay nawawala sa pokus*” (*A teacher finds it difficult to get the child’s attention, and the other learners also lose focus*). This indicates that behavior concerns affect not only the individual learner but also the flow of classroom interaction and participation.

Table 5 Challenges Encountered by the Teachers in Fostering Teacher-Learner Relationships

Theme	General Statements
Administrative and Workload Pressures Limiting Individualized Interaction	The key informants generally expressed that heavy paperwork, reporting requirements, ancillary tasks, meetings, large class size, and limited staff support reduce the time and energy of teachers for individualized interaction with learners. These workload-related pressures make it difficult for teachers to provide one-on-one check-ins, respond to learners’ emotional needs, and sustain meaningful teacher-learner relationships during daily classroom activities.
Learner Behavior and Self-Regulation Challenges Disrupting Classroom Connection	The key informants indicated that unruly behavior, attention difficulties, behavior issues during arrival time, and learners’ difficulty in maintaining focus create challenges for teachers in sustaining positive classroom interaction. These concerns affect the teacher’s ability to attend to every child, manage routines smoothly, and maintain a calm classroom environment. Without sufficient professional support, guidance, and classroom assistance, behavior and self-regulation challenges may interrupt teacher-learner connection.
Parent-Related Barriers Affecting Classroom Relationship Building	The key informants generally expressed that parent-related concerns, such as parents’ presence inside or near the classroom, low attendance in meetings, weak communication, and negative parental responses, create difficulties in fostering teacher-learner relationships. These barriers may distract learners, weaken coordination between home and school, and limit teachers’ understanding of learners’ needs. Stronger parent-school communication and clearer school guidelines are needed to support consistent relationship-building in kindergarten.

Parent-related barriers also affect relationship-building in the classroom. One parent stated, “*Isang hamon sa isang guro ang presensya ng magulang habang nagtuturo dahil ang atensyon ng bata ay nakatuon sa magulang na malapit o na nasa loob ng silid-aralan*” (*The presence of a parent while teaching is a challenge for a teacher because the child’s attention is focused on the parent who is nearby or inside the classroom*). This suggests that unclear parent-school boundaries may affect learner independence, classroom routines, and teacher-learner bonding.

Finally, the findings suggest that workload pressures, learner behavior concerns, and parent-related barriers weaken teachers’ ability to provide consistent emotional support and individualized attention. Addressing these challenges requires stronger workload management, professional development on behavior support, and clearer home-school communication system.

3.4. Proposed output to enhance teacher-learner relationships and promote learner outcomes in kindergarten

Based on the findings, the proposed output of the study is the KINDERCARE Support Handbook, a school-based support guide designed to enhance teacher-learner relationships and promote learner outcomes in kindergarten. It was developed based on the findings that teachers need mentoring, professional development, instructional resources, structured classroom routines, and strong home-school partnership to build positive relationships with young learners.

The handbook focuses on key areas identified in the study, namely leadership, professional development, classroom environment, learner self-regulation, and parent partnership. It includes support practices such as trust-based leadership, coaching and mentoring, teacher learning sessions, positive discipline, organized classroom routines, play-based learning spaces, and parent communication protocols. It also provides ready-to-use tools such as coaching

templates, observation forms, classroom checklists, and communication guides that may help translate the findings into practical classroom application.

The output is intended to serve as a continuing school-based reference that may be reviewed, adapted, and improved according to the needs of kindergarten teachers and learners. Since the study emphasizes that teacher-learner relationships are influenced by school-level support system, the handbook may help school stakeholders create a more consistent and coordinated approach to learner support.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that kindergarten teachers need mentoring, training, instructional materials, structured programs, and home-school partnership to help them build positive teacher-learner relationships.

Leadership, professional development, and classroom environment influence the quality of teacher-learner relationships by providing guidance, improving teacher competence, and creating organized learning conditions. These system help teachers become more responsive, patient, and emotionally prepared in addressing the needs of kindergarten learners.

Workload pressures, learner behavior concerns, and parent-related barriers hinder teachers' ability to provide enough time, attention, and emotional support to learners. These challenges show that positive teacher-learner relationships require coordinated school support rather than teacher effort alone.

The KINDERCARE Support Handbook is an appropriate proposed output because it provides school-based guidance for strengthening support system, improving classroom practices, enhancing parent partnership, and promoting learner outcomes in kindergarten.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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