

Lived Experiences of the Internship Education Students in Teaching Kindergarten

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Abstract:

Background of the Study: This study explores the lived experiences of internship education students teaching in kindergarten classrooms, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping strategies they employ, and the influence of the internship on their professional growth. Teacher internships are critical components of educator preparation, providing hands-on experience that bridges theory and practice. However, the specific challenges and opportunities within the kindergarten teaching context remain underexplored.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate how internship education students navigate their teaching roles in kindergarten and how these experiences shape their teaching skills and professional identity.

Method: Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 internship students who had taught in kindergarten classrooms. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

Findings: The findings revealed that interns face significant challenges in classroom management, curriculum planning, and emotional resilience. However, they employed various coping mechanisms, such as adaptability and support-seeking, to overcome these challenges. According to the findings, the internship experience significantly contributes to their professional growth, fostering a sense of confidence and clarity in their teaching roles.

Originality/Significance: This research provides valuable insights for teacher education programs by highlighting the need for robust support structures during internships. The findings also contribute to the theoretical understanding of teacher development and identity formation.

Keywords: Internship Education, Kindergarten Teaching, Teacher Professional Development, Coping Strategies, Early Childhood Education

1. Introduction

Intern teacher training works as a bridge linking practice and theory. Internships create meaningful exposure for pre-service teachers to apply necessary teaching skills and develop experience on some themes like lesson planning, classroom management, and communication with students (Le-van, Loginova, Shiyan, Iakshina, & Shiyan, 2021). Internships are an important component of kindergarten instruction since they prepare future teachers to meet the specific demands of teaching kindergarten, such as enhancing young children's cognitive development, socialization, and emotional development (Xue, Li, & Li, 2021). Empirical evidence attests that experiential practice helps pre-service teachers develop valuable knowledge about various teaching methods and effective communication with young children (Suryati, Ratih, & Maryadi, 2023). Despite the exact benefits, the internship also has drawbacks, including interns potentially having to deal with classroom management, adjusting to varying learning styles, and curriculum requirements (Komang Arie Suwastini, 2021). The challenges are compounded by the emotionally charged nature of kindergarten, which requires patience, flexibility, and emotional maturity (Net & Ali, 2023). The transition from theoretical studies to actual teaching is overwhelming, with interns balancing lesson delivery and behavior management with student participation (Anderson, 2024). However, assistance provided during internships, including mentorship and peer collaboration, helps interns cope with such complexities (Mouw & Fokkens-Bruinsma, 2022). Understanding pre-service teachers' lived experiences in kindergarten settings is important to improve teacher preparation programs. Qualitative research permits more in-depth inquiry into the personal and professional dilemmas that interns encounter and the coping mechanisms that they employ to navigate them (Akcem, Guney, & Cresswell, 2019). Exploration of these experiences provides useful insights that can guide the organization and support of internship programs to prepare future educators more effectively for the challenges of early childhood education (Yoong et al., 2022).

The transition from student to teacher is complex, especially in early childhood education, where future teachers must develop both teaching skills and emotional abilities. While internship programs provide an essential foundation for professional growth, interns often find classroom teaching challenging, facing unexpected problems that test their resilience and adaptability (Adams, Koster, & Brok, 2022b). Despite the increased focus on experiential learning in teacher training programs, very little research exists on the actual internship education students' experiences in kindergarten teaching, especially regarding challenges faced and coping strategies used by them (Cheng, Zhang, Cao, & Ma, 2022). The singular character of kindergarten instruction, with its need for balance between formal learning and play-based education, poses specific challenges for interns, such as classroom management, student motivation, and curriculum implementation (Yin, Keung, & Tam, 2022). Additionally, the affective conflict of teaching young children in conjunction with the need to satisfy institutional requirements can create intense stress and anxiety among pre-service teachers (Su & Yang, 2024).

It is crucial to understand how internship education students deal with these problems in order to improve teacher preparation and ensure kindergarten classrooms' future generation of teachers have the skill and coping ability to survive kindergarten classrooms. How interns deal with challenges, ask for assistance, and reflect on their teaching practices plays a huge role in their professional growth in the long run. However, there is limited literature exploring how pre-service teachers perceive their internship experiences and how these experiences shape their teaching beliefs and professional growth.

Also, examining the impact of internships on developing teaching skills and self-efficacy will be beneficial in promoting what is learned about the strengths and limitations of current teacher training programs. Addressing these research queries is particularly practical in the field of early childhood education, in which teachers have a foundational effect on creating early learners' scholarly and social roots.

The objective of this study is to explore the internship education students' lived experience of kindergarten teaching, with a focus on their professional and personal path in the internship. The internship is part of teacher training, which exposes pre-service teachers to the actual classroom situation and teaching duties. Through the study of the interns, this paper seeks to identify the broad array of issues that face them, ranging from the classroom management of little children, and disciplining students during lessons, to balancing theoretical academic underpinnings and actual classroom teaching realities. It also strives to identify coping behaviors employed by the interns to cope with such dilemmas, from mentor counsel to peer teams and adjusting pedagogical practices. Apart from problem-solving, this research also aims to investigate the effect of internship experience on the professional development of pre-service teachers, specifically on teaching competence, self-efficacy, and long-term career aspirations. Investigating such factors will make valuable information regarding the ability of teacher education programs, leading to adjusting teacher education courses and internship arrangements for facilitating better induction to pre-service teachers to permanent teachers.

The applicability of the study is that it has the potential to contribute substantially to teacher preparation, policy formulation, and in-service teacher preparation. Through making kindergarten teaching interns' experience an epistemological priority, the study has the potential to inform developments in the curriculum that better bridge theoretical knowledge with practice teaching. Such findings can be used to guide teacher preparation programs through simplifying internship models, offering more focused support, and embedding reflective practices that promote interns' resilience and adaptability. The present study also has pragmatic implications for teacher preparation programs, including the value of official mentorship, effective support systems, and continuous professional growth for pre-service teachers. For education policymakers and mentor teachers, the findings will offer a deeper understanding of the lags in current internship models to ensure more fitting policy and mentorship approaches that enhance pre-service teachers' readiness for the profession of teaching. Finally, this study aims to fill the gap between what is learned in the classroom and real classroom experiences so that kindergarten interns will be provided with the support and guidance necessary to become effective and confident teachers.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically the phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of internship education students in kindergarten teaching. Phenomenology is most suitable for this study because it allows one to develop an intimate knowledge of how individuals experience and interpret their internship experiences (Heissenberger-Lehofer & Krammer, 2023). By using this approach, the study not only captures the factual aspect of teaching kindergarten but also the affective, cognitive, and professional aspects of the internship experience.

Since the subjective experience of participants is of central concern, semi-structured interviews serve as the principal data-gathering instrument, providing an adaptable yet structured approach to the exploration of multiple aspects of teaching internships. This method encourages open participant expression while allowing the researcher to explore specific experiences in greater depth. Additionally, the study can interview where necessary to ensure exhaustive exploration of key themes and clarify any inconsistencies in the data. The qualitative strategy of this study permits an elaborate understanding of pre-service teachers dealing with the nuances of teaching kindergarten, and also information that cannot be secured through quantitative methodologies.

2.2 Population

The participants (Table 1) of this study are internship education students who have already experienced teaching in kindergarten classrooms, as they possess firsthand experience regarding the research purposes. A purposive sampling strategy is employed to select participants meeting the inclusion criteria—students who have recently completed or are currently experiencing their internship at kindergarten levels. Such a sampling strategy enables the selection of only participants who have personal and pertinent experience with the research, thereby ensuring the utmost validity of outcomes (Hair et al., 2021). The sample size is expected to range from 10 to 15 individuals, but the final number may be adjusted based on data saturation, that is, the point at which no new themes emerge from the interviews. Participant selection is guided by pedagogical diversity in terms of settings, such as different school environments, mentorship, and levels of preparedness, to gain an overall understanding of the phenomenon in question. Participants were selected from the northeast province of China to ensure contextual relevance.

2.3 Data Collection

The primary strategy of data gathering in this study is the conducting of semi-structured interviews that allow for the combination of both structured questioning as well as open-ended exploration for new issues which emerge from responses by participants. The interview guide, developed in line with Ardiyansah, (2021), ensures consistency in the questioning process while allowing flexibility for open discussion. This approach helps uncover deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by interns, particularly in the context of pre-service teachers' readiness for online teaching during international internship programs. The interview questions pertain to the overall internship experience of the participants, problems encountered by them, coping strategies employed, and perceived impacts of the internship on their professional development as shown in Table 1. Interviews are conducted in a one-to-one setting, either in person or over an internet platform, depending on participants' convenience and availability. Follow-up interviews are occasionally carried out to clarify unclear responses or to investigate newly arising themes. All the interviews are audio-recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed for analysis. The research maintains stringent data management procedures, such as secure storage of transcripts and anonymization of personal identifiers, to ensure ethical research practice.

Table 1 presents the structured interview protocol designed to explore key aspects of the internship experience among education students teaching in kindergarten. The Lived Experiences section aims to capture the interns' overall perceptions, emotions, and significant moments that shaped their teaching

journey. The Challenges Faced section highlights the specific difficulties encountered, including classroom management struggles and feelings of unpreparedness. The Coping Strategies section focuses on the mechanisms employed by interns to handle these challenges, particularly the role of mentorship, peer support, and adaptive teaching techniques. Finally, the Professional Development section examines how the internship influenced their teaching skills, professional identity, and career aspirations, providing deeper insights into the transformative impact of the experience.

Table 1: Interview Protocol

Variable	Interview Questions
Lived Experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe your overall experience during the kindergarten internship? 2. What were the most memorable moments during your internship? 3. How did you feel about teaching kindergarten students for the first time?
Challenges Faced	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What were the main challenges you encountered while teaching in the kindergarten? 2. How did you handle any difficulties related to classroom management or behavior? 3. Were there any specific moments where you felt unprepared or overwhelmed?
Coping Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What strategies or approaches did you use to cope with the challenges you faced? 2. Did you seek support from your mentor or colleagues? How did that support help you? 3. Were there any techniques or tools that helped you improve your teaching skills?
Professional Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you think this internship has shaped your teaching skills? 2. In what ways has your internship contributed to your growth as a future educator? 3. Has the internship experience influenced your view on teaching or your career path?

2.4 Data Analysis

For data analysis, thematic analysis is employed to identify common patterns and themes emerging from participants' narratives. This is a multi-stage process, starting with familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, followed by initial coding to group meaningful

pieces of text. The codes are then organized into more general themes that capture major elements of the internship experience, including classroom management issues, professional identity formation, and emotional resilience. This method is justified as it offers flexibility and depth, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complex experiences of internship education students in teaching kindergarten. To maximize the credibility of the findings, the study uses data triangulation by comparing responses between participants and checking for consistency in emerging themes. Thematic coding is performed manually or with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, which assists in the effective organization and grouping of themes (Figure 1). To further refine the analysis, weightage analysis is conducted to assess the relative importance of each theme. The weightage is determined based on the frequency—how often a theme appears across participants’ responses—and the significance of the theme, evaluated by the depth of the insights shared or the emotional intensity conveyed by the participants (Nowell et al., 2017). This approach ensures that the most relevant and impactful themes are emphasized, providing a balanced understanding of common and particularly meaningful experiences. Reflexivity is maintained throughout the analysis to prevent interpretations from being affected by researcher bias but instead remaining participant experience grounded. By systematic patterns and theme identification, this study aims to provide an enhanced and rich description of how internship education students negotiate the complexities of teaching kindergarten and contribute significantly to teacher education.

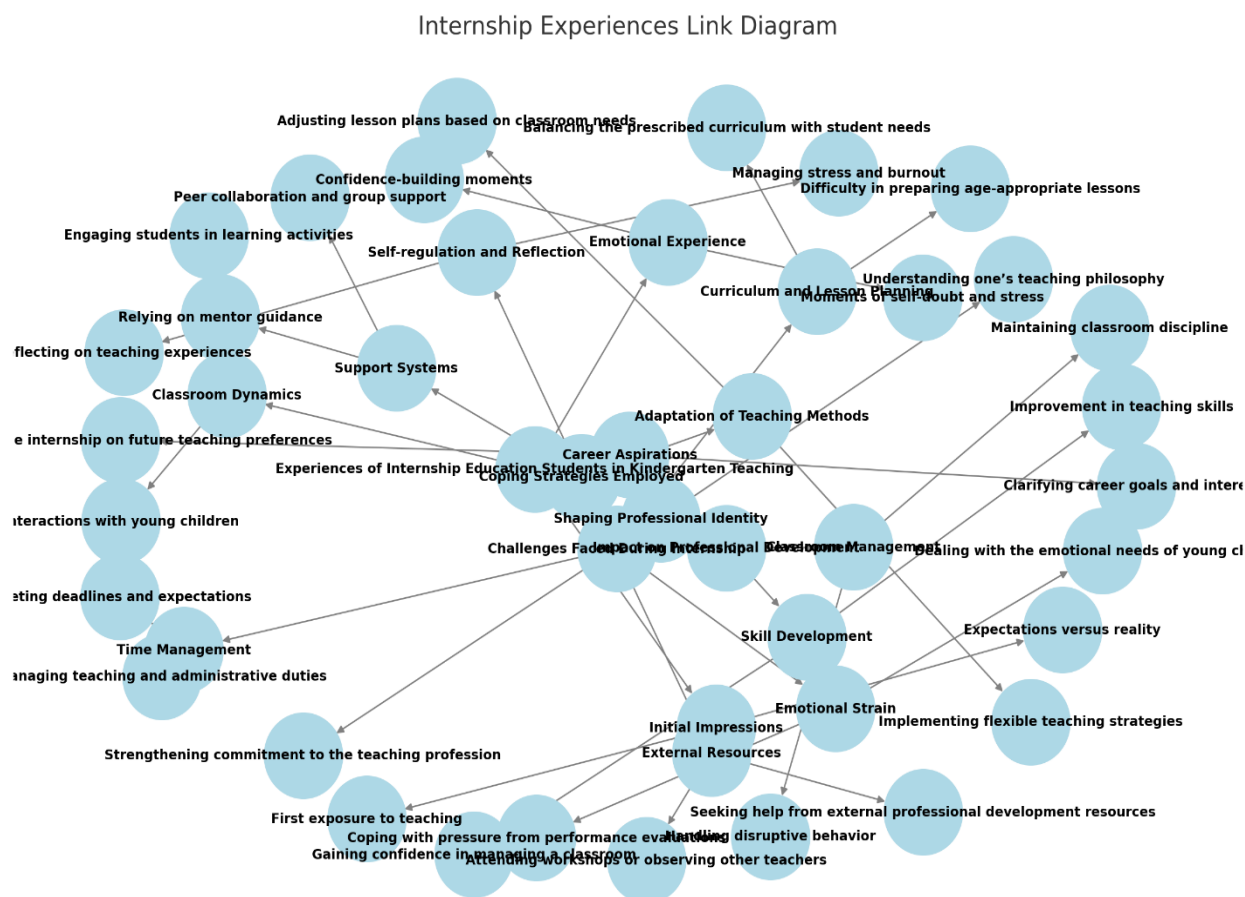


Figure 1: Themes and Sub-themes developed by Nvivo

Ethical Consideration

This study adheres to strict ethical standards by ensuring informed consent from all participants, who are made aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing personal information and securely storing data. Participants' responses are treated with respect and used solely for research purposes. Additionally, ethical approval is obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection begins.

3. Results

Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, including age, gender, internship school type, duration of internship, and previous teaching experience. The respondents range in age from 21 to 24, with a balanced representation of both male and female participants. The distribution of internship placements across public and private schools ensures diversity in experiences. Most respondents completed internships lasting between 4 to 6 months, allowing them to gain substantial exposure to kindergarten teaching. Additionally, while the majority had no prior teaching experience, a few participants had limited experience ranging from six months to one year, which may have influenced their adaptation to the internship setting.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Respondent ID	Age	Gender	Internship School Type	Duration of Internship (Months)	Previous Teaching Experience
R1	22	Female	Private	6	No
R2	23	Male	Public	5	No
R3	21	Female	Private	6	Yes (1 year)
R4	24	Male	Public	6	No
R5	22	Female	Private	5	No
R6	23	Male	Public	4.5	Yes (6 months)
R7	22	Female	Private	6	No
R8	24	Male	Public	4	No
R9	21	Female	Private	5	Yes (1 year)
R10	23	Male	Public	6	No
R11	22	Female	Private	5	No
R12	24	Male	Public	6	Yes (6 months)

4.

Theme 1: Experiences of Internship Education Students in Kindergarten Teaching

The first theme of this study talks about the internship education students' lived experiences in their kindergarten teaching. The majority of the respondents indicated their first excitement and nervousness

as they began their internship, a highlight of their teaching life. As R3 explained, *"When I first walked into the classroom, I was nervous and excited; I had so many expectations, but the reality of being in charge of a room of five-year-olds was daunting."* This concurrent experience of anticipation and shock of reality is common among teacher preparation programs. The interns quickly realized kindergarten teaching needed not just great pedagogical abilities but also inner fortitude to deal with the uncertainty of young students. Respondent 5 (R5) likewise shared similar sentiments: *"The first few weeks were trial and error. I thought I knew how to teach, but kindergarten is a whole different world."*

As the internship continued, most of the interns were reflecting on classroom dynamics and how they handled relationships with young children. *"I discovered that establishing trust with the children was important; once they trusted me, teaching was easier"* (Respondent 9, 2019). This change from focusing on lesson content to the development of strong relationships with students fits with previous research identifying social-emotional learning as a key aspect of early childhood pedagogy. Interns indicated that establishing a safe and interactive space assisted in developing both academic and emotional development in the students and consequently influenced their pedagogy. Yet, the tension between meeting individual student demands and class demands was always a learning slope. Respondent 2 (R2) said, *"Every child was different and had different needs, and it was hard to know that I was meeting them all and controlling the class overall."*

Lastly, most interns highlighted the emotional rollercoaster that they went through during their stay in the classroom. For others, pride and confidence in their students' success were interrupted by periods of self-doubt. Respondent 6 (R6) admitted, *"There were days I felt like I wasn't cut out for this; when things went wrong, I doubted myself."* This roller coaster ride is normal in the first few years of teaching, especially in early childhood settings, where emotional demands are high. However, these challenges were paralleled by deeper learning experiences that called for professional growth. Such emotional transitions on the part of these interns from joy to thoughtfulness follow from findings of studies on the emergent character of teacher education internships wherein emotional resiliency is a make-or-break quality in forging novice teachers. Through these diverse situations, the interns gained deeper insight into teaching's complex reality, which they will likely carry forward to classroom practices and professional development in the future. Table 3 highlights the emotional trajectory of internship education students as they transition into kindergarten teaching. Initially, they experience a combination of excitement and anxiety, which gradually shifts as they develop emotional resilience. Their reflections on student interactions and classroom dynamics help them refine their teaching strategies. Ultimately, their emotional journey plays a critical role in shaping their professional growth and confidence in the teaching field.

Table 3: Lived Experiences in Kindergarten Teaching

Theme Component	Weightage
Initial excitement and anxiety	0.30
Realization of emotional resilience in teaching	0.25
Reflection on classroom dynamics and student interactions	0.25
Emotional journey and impact on professional growth	0.20

Theme 2: Challenges Faced During Internship

The second theme of this research examines the problems that internship education students faced when teaching kindergarten classes. The most highlighted problems cited by the respondents included classroom management. Respondent 7 (R7) went on, *"It was a great deal harder than I imagined it would be to manage a room full of rowdy little children. Some days I couldn't get the children to stay focused for one or two minutes."* This is consistent with previous research that points to the challenges of novice teachers to bring discipline to early childhood classrooms where the children tend to be very active and in constant need of stimulation. The interns were taken aback by the constant necessity of attention and student spontaneity. R10 further emphasized, *"The kids were too spontaneous, and their actions sometimes would just dismantle the lesson plan. I needed to learn quickly how to improvise."* Such reflections show insight into overcoming the dilemma of matching instructional targets and the demands of being accommodating with handling inelastic classroom interactions.

In addition to classroom management, interns also struggled with lesson planning and learning the kindergarten curriculum. Respondent 4 (R4) said, *"The curriculum was well-balanced, but I fought with learning how to chunk out tough things into teachable bites so that they could be taught to little kids."* Such a problem of chunking out challenging things to learn into edible lessons is commonly cited in teacher education studies, where interns would often have tension between required content and preparedness for development of students. Some of the participants also struggled to generate age-suitable content that was interesting for children but still aligned with curricular needs. For instance, Respondent 12 (R12) commented, *"It took a lot of trial and error to find activities that worked for the kids; sometimes, what I thought would be fun just didn't connect with them."* The interns' difficulty in modifying lessons highlights the necessity for ongoing training and support in developing developmentally appropriate lessons in early childhood education.

The other major challenge for the interns was the emotional and psychological burden of the internship. The stress of performing well under the expectations of mentor teachers and schools led to stress and self-doubt. Respondent 8 (R8) revealed, *"There were moments when I was utterly overwhelmed by the pressure to excel and to make everything turn out perfectly. It was difficult to manage the balance between being a student and a teacher."* The respondent expressed a similar sentiment, describing how the pressures of the internship emotionally drained them. Respondent 11 (R11) contributed, *"At times, I felt that I was failing as I was not living up to all the demands. It got me wondering if I was supposed to be working in this career."* This is emotional stress supported by teacher training literature, as the pressure from managing various identities while interning usually results in self-doubt and exhaustion. Despite these issues, most interns felt that surmounting these problems helped them to develop as professionals and individuals because they gained practical coping strategies and resilience. As shown in Table 4, classroom management difficulties pose the most significant challenge for interns, making it difficult to maintain an engaging and structured learning environment. Struggles with curriculum planning further add to their workload, requiring continuous adaptation to meet student needs. Additionally, the emotional and mental strain of the internship experience emphasizes the demanding nature of kindergarten teaching, reinforcing the importance of support systems for interns.

Table 4: Challenges in Teaching Kindergarten

Theme Component	Weightage
Classroom management difficulties	0.35
Struggles with curriculum and lesson planning	0.30
Emotional and mental strain of the internship	0.35

Theme 3: Coping Strategies Employed

The third is the coping measures adopted by the internship education students when dealing with teaching kindergarten, a major problem for them. The most reported coping measure named by many respondents was consulting mentors and colleagues. Respondent 2 (R2) stated, *"Whenever I encountered a challenging situation in the classroom, I would turn to my mentor. Her advice was indispensable in giving me some perspective."* This dependence on mentor guidance was a recurrent theme, with interns acknowledging the value of advice and reassurance from more experienced teachers. The same results were found in past research, whereby the significance of mentor support emerged as an imperative aspect of supporting interns in navigating classroom issues and emotional stress. Peer collaboration also played a significant role, with Respondent 5 (R5) saying, *"Talking to other interns who were going through the same thing made me feel less alone. We shared ideas and strategies that made me feel more confident."* This sense of camaraderie between interns allowed them to exchange coping mechanisms and defuse some of the emotional burden they felt on their placements.

The second powerful coping mechanism that the interns highlighted was modifying their teaching styles to suit their students' needs. Respondent 3 (R3) described, *"I figured out right away that the secret to all of it was flexibility. If a lesson wasn't going so well, then I had to be flexible and do something else."* Having the ability to change and adjust lesson plans based on student needs is an extremely valuable skill that many interns learned during their internships. Flexibility is also among the most crucial qualities new teachers must develop since it enables them to adjust properly to classroom dynamics and pupil learning issues. Respondent 9 (R9) also expressed this, saying, *"I had to release the notion that each lesson would proceed as I had mapped out. Occasionally, I simply had to follow the children and observe where they took me."* This shift in perspective enabled interns to adopt more flexible, child-led methods of teaching, which in turn enabled them to engage students more effectively.

Other than adapting their pedagogical methods, the majority of interns also reported using self-regulation and reflection as coping mechanisms. Respondent 8 (R8) said, *"Whenever I'd feel overwhelmed, I'd retreat and consider what did and did not work and how I might improve. Looking back helped me get stronger."* Reflective practice has been singled out as the central strategy to assist teachers to improve their practice and deal with the emotional stress of teaching over several decades. Some of the interviewees mentioned that experiencing self-reflection assisted them in identifying areas of improvement and in feeling more responsible for their teaching experience. Respondent 6 (R6) went

on to say, *"Reflection became a daily habit for me. It kept me focused and upbeat, even on bad days."* With this practice of self-reflection, combined with outside help and changing their strategy, interns built emotional resilience to thrive in the challenging kindergarten teaching environment. In the end, these coping strategies enabled the interns to professionalize and deal with the highs and lows of the internship experience. Table 5 illustrates that interns rely on various coping mechanisms to navigate the complexities of kindergarten teaching. Seeking guidance from mentors and peers proves to be the most effective strategy, followed by adapting their teaching methods to better suit student learning needs. Self-regulation and reflective practices also play a crucial role in helping interns manage stress and refine their instructional approaches.

Table 5: Coping Strategies Employed by Interns

Theme Component	Weightage
Seeking support from mentors and peers	0.40
Adapting teaching methods to student needs	0.35
Self-regulation and reflective practice	0.25

Theme 4: Impact on Professional Development

The fourth theme of the research explores how the internship influenced the professional growth of education students. Several of the respondents mentioned considerable development in their teaching ability, especially in classroom management and planning lessons. Respondent 4 (R4) stated, *"Before the internship, I knew the basics of teaching, but now I feel much more confident in managing a room full of kids."* Improved confidence was a prevailing theme, where interns mentioned that their experiential learning allowed them the opportunity to develop teaching skills in real-world settings. This is also supported by research that has demonstrated that the intern has an opportunity to develop key skills through experiential training, which they could not obtain easily through lectures. This was attested by R7 who averred, *"I learned to think on my feet, particularly when plans went awry. These are things that no textbook could ever teach me."*

Besides the strengthening of professional competence, most of the participants indicated that the internship had played an important role in the professional construction of their teacher identity. Respondent 10 (R10) explained, *"I came to realize I was making a real difference in the children's lives. It made me more passionate about teaching and it reinforced my commitment to the profession."* This professional identity shift, where interns began to believe they were effective teachers, was a component of their formation. The evidence suggests that the development of teacher identity is a process of growth shaped by the success and failure of the internship. Respondent 5 (R5) also stated, *"I didn't know where I was at in terms of my teaching philosophy when I came into this internship, but now I am more confident in my teaching style with young children."* Becoming more professional in identity was important to most of the interns because it allowed them to have a better sense of their values and beliefs regarding education, which will most likely inform their future practice.

Lastly, the internship influenced the career ambition of the interns directly. It confirmed and stated the majority of the interns' career ambitions as well as entrenched them in education as a prospective field of vocation. Respondent 3 (R3) also said, *"When I first began my internship, I was not sure if I wanted to teach or not, but after having the children in front of me every day, I knew that this is what I am meant to do."* This career redirection is in line with findings from similar studies, where internships played a significant role in confirming or re-directing participants' career paths. Respondent 6 (R6) also explained, *"I feel like I've learned so much about myself and what kind of teacher I want to be. This internship has set the foundation for my future career."* Through such experiences, the interns not only acquired valuable teaching competencies and professional identity clarity but also purpose clarity in terms of long-term occupational goals, which will guide their subsequent practice in education. Table 6 demonstrates the profound impact of the internship experience on interns' professional growth. Their teaching skills and classroom management abilities improve significantly, reinforcing their confidence in handling young learners. The development of a professional identity becomes a key outcome, shaping their perceptions of teaching as a long-term career. Additionally, the internship provides clarity on career aspirations, allowing interns to make well-informed decisions regarding their future in education.

Table 6: Impact on Professional Development

Theme Component	Weightage
Growth in teaching skills and classroom management	0.30
Development of professional identity	0.35
Clarity on career aspirations and goals	0.35

5. Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of internship students teaching kindergarten, with a particular focus on the challenges they faced, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the impact of the internship on their professional development. The findings provide valuable insights into these key areas, contributing to a deeper understanding of the internship experience in early childhood education. In response to the first research question, which examined the lived experiences of kindergarten internship students, the results revealed that most interns approached their teaching placements with a combination of hope and apprehension (García Rivero, 2023). The transition from theory to practice was often difficult since few students had very limited experience with the realities of teaching young children before their internships. This resonates with findings from other studies, which underscore the gap between theoretical training and the everyday dilemmas faced by teachers in real classroom realities (Michos et al., 2022). Except for one participant, all the others mentioned experiencing a steep learning curve, quickly realizing that classroom teaching involved much more than simply delivering lessons. They had to manage student behavior, engage the children, and continually adjust their teaching methods. Although this realization was challenging, it played a crucial role in their professional development, helping them understand the complexities of teaching kindergarten. Furthermore, while some interns initially struggled with self-doubt, they found that their

confidence grew with experience. This aligns with the positive outcomes described in the literature on teacher education, as highlighted by Tri Yuli Ardiyansah, (2021), who emphasizes that experiential teaching enhances practical skills, boosts confidence, and fosters professional growth among pre-service teachers.

The second question investigated the problems encountered by the interns during the internship. Participants nominated classroom management as a big problem. Many of the interns grappled with maintaining a kindergarten classroom in their place, which has energetic children who have varied levels of attention and participation. This aligns with previous research that has shown classroom management to be one of the most common issues that beginning teachers face (Yin et al., 2022). The interns reported many times that they were under pressure from having to keep children engaged while trying to fit into the curriculum (Hu & Zheng, 2024). For some, the unreliability of the behavior of young children was an additional stress factor because they had to adjust their style continually to suit the different needs of their students (Michailidi & Stavrou, 2021). This is reflected well in the literature, where teachers in early childhood education report not being properly prepared to handle the behavioral problems that they experience (Liu & Birkeland, 2022). Besides classroom management, some of the interns also struggled with curriculum planning. Many of them were not able to easily break difficult topics into simple, kid-friendly lessons that would educate as much as stimulate little children (Álvarez Rojas, 2022). This is a prevalent problem with teacher preparation research today, which requires early childhood education to require teachers with a robust foundation in developmental stages and the ability to adapt pedagogical interventions to accommodate the individual needs of children (Zoupidis et al., 2022).

The third research question asked for information on what coping strategies were used by the interns when working on taking care of the kindergarten kids. Findings from data reveal that support networks in the guise of mentors or fellow interns were of assistance to the respondents in adapting to the challenges faced. Mentors played a crucial role in offering advice, and they imparted valuable advice on classroom management, lesson planning, and coping with the needs of children, which were diverse (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020). This is in agreement with previous study that authenticated the importance of mentorship in preparing teachers (Mushtaque et al., 2022). Research has determined that mentoring influences the confidence, pedagogical skill, and work satisfaction of beginning teachers considerably (Moeckel, Oxford, & Cooper, 2025). Peer support was also a key element, where the interns shared techniques, experiences, and emotional support, which left them feeling less isolated in their quest. This is consistent with the general trend in education research in teacher education, highlighting the advantage of professional communities and collaborative learning in teaching (Cheng et al., 2022).

The coping strategy found in the current research was the interns' capacity to tailor their pedagogy to respond to the student's diverse demands. Flexibility and responsiveness were essential, as interns in this study also observed that well-planned lessons did not always unfold as expected in the classroom. This aligns with the findings of Xin & Wang, (2023), who highlighted similar challenges faced by interns when translating lesson plans into practice. This improvisation of their teaching style at the moment was considered a plus skill acquired during the internship period. It allowed them to be more adaptable in the flexible classroom setup and reach their students more effectively. Empirical evidence

supports the effectiveness of flexibility in learning, especially among early childhood students, where the teacher has to adapt her/his teaching approach to meet the early childhood learners' learning and emotional development needs (Adams, Koster, & Brok, 2022a). This ability to adapt to the teaching context not only helped the interns manage classroom dynamics but also helped prepare them as teachers.

Besides flexibility, most interns also reported that they employed self-reflection as a strategy for coping with the stresses of their internships. Through self-reflection, they could detect areas that needed improvement and see their achievement. This self-regulation practice helped interns maintain stress levels and kept them oriented towards their career development. Evidence from previous research supports the role of reflective practice in pre-service teacher training, suggesting that it enhances critical thinking, emotional regulation, and professional development. (Michos et al., 2022). For this study, the interns stated that they have learned more about their philosophy of teaching and become more proficient at managing classroom difficulties after reflecting on their experience. This strategy helped them manage much and contributed to their professional growth and resistance while completing their internships.

The fourth question examined how the internship affected interns' professional growth and teaching proficiency. Data showed that the internship had a significant role in participants' development, from both in-practice pedagogical competence and professional selves. The majority of the interns observed significant improvement in their classroom management, lesson preparation, and working with children's skills. The practical experience allowed them to apply theoretical learning to a classroom setting, which is generally accepted as one of the most effective ways of developing teaching skills. Having direct contact with children, interns could hone their instructional practice and develop a more instinctive understanding of how to teach diverse learners.

In addition, the internship experience influenced the interns' professional identities as teachers. Participants reported a change in their sense of self from one of being unsure if they could teach to one of believing in themselves as educators. Teacher identity is developed through both formal education and practice (Moorhouse, Li, & Walsh, 2023). While interns encountered and overcame difficulties in the classroom, they started viewing themselves as competent teachers, thereby motivating them towards the profession. The professional identity building was further supported by mentor teachers' feedback and encouragement that helped them fine-tune their teaching style and philosophy (Maready, Cheng, & Bunch, 2021). This professional growth process, by way of practice and reflection, is essential in the development of good teachers. Classroom management, curriculum planning, and emotional stress are recurring themes in teacher preparation literature (Wei, Zhou, Hu, Zhou, & Chen, 2021). Yet the coping mechanisms used by the interns in this research, specifically the use of peer support and self-reflection, shed more light on how interns deal with these challenges (Ersin & Atay, 2021). Although earlier studies have indicated the significance of mentorship, the results of this research highlight the significance of peer networks, indicating that interns gain a lot from exchanging experiences and learning from each other (Yan, 2021). This is a potential extension of the support structures that are typically part of teacher education programs.

In addition, the development of professional identity reported by these interns aligns with existing research on teacher identity formation, which suggests that practical teaching experiences, such as internships, play a crucial role in shaping educators' sense of self, confidence, and teaching philosophy (Lazarides, Watt, & Richardson, 2020). However, the findings indicate that the internship experience can expedite this process considerably so that interns develop confidence and definition in their role as teachers more rapidly than may be anticipated. The influence on career ambitions by the internship also aligns with other studies conducted by other research studies, which confirm that practical classroom teaching practice experience will most likely provide interns with career ambitions clarity as well as increase their commitment to becoming teachers as a vocation.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research explores the lived experiences of internship education students in kindergarten, highlighting their challenges, coping strategies, and professional growth. The research identifies practical training as critical in developing teaching skills, with classroom management, curriculum planning, and emotional stability being key challenges for interns. The research also highlights the contribution of peer and mentor support groups in enabling the coping of interns with these issues. Secondly, the internship process plays a crucial role in the construction of professional identity because the interns develop confidence and clarity about professional identity as teachers. These results highlight the potential of experiential learning as a component of teacher preparation and infer that improving support systems within internships will increase the overall quality of teacher prep programs.

6. Implications

6.1 Practical Implications

The implications of this study are pragmatic and reality-based, having direct application to teacher education programs, especially those specializing in early childhood education. The results point to the necessity of the provision of comprehensive support systems for internship students that can maximize their learning experience and foster their professional development. Mentorship, peer support, and emotional preparedness address the coping strategies and struggles reported by participants. In addition, the research highlights the importance of mentoring systems and peer networks and stipulates that promoting a culture of collaborative learning is likely to impart emotional support as well as down-to-earth assistance to the interns in overcoming any difficulties in kindergarten teaching. Strengthening support systems, thereby, can make teacher education programs assist the interns in becoming stronger and more resilient, which is essential for the success of their teaching in kindergarten classrooms. The results also indicate that interns should be prepared for the emotional demands of teaching since a high percentage of students said they were bowled over by the amount of work. Training that takes account of these emotional factors, perhaps through counselling or reflective practice exercises, can best prepare interns to cope with the stress and adversity that they will face on placement.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical significance of this research is to add to the literature base of teacher education, specifically within the context of early childhood education internships. Through an exploration of interns' lived experiences, this research enhances the knowledge about how internships influence professional identity and teaching practices. The results attest to the validity that experiential learning plays an important role in establishing productive pedagogies as theories of reflective practice and teacher identity construction argue. The research also sustains the essence of mentoring and peer support as being a part of teacher professional development and socialization. In addition, coping mechanisms that the interns used, including flexibility and self-exploration, create interesting understandings of how beginner teachers overcome obstacles in the classroom and aid theoretical constructs of professional development and resiliency within education. As such, this research implies internships should serve not only as opportunities to practice teaching but also as crucial spaces for transformational personal and professional growth. Through the incorporation of these findings into teacher education programs, educators and policymakers can enhance the preparation of prospective teachers to better serve the needs of teaching in diverse and dynamic classrooms.

7. Limitations and Future Direction

7.1 Limitations

A limitation of the present study is that the sample size is somewhat small, so this could impair the generalizability of results to a wide population of students on internship placements. The present study was focused on one sub-group of interns working in kindergartens, and the findings are highly detailed and may not represent adequately the range of experiences in educational contexts or parts of the world. Moreover, the data collection process, which is mainly based on semi-structured interviews, is also prone to biases in participants' interpretation and expression of their experiences. Although the research took care to provide depth and validity, the results are constrained by the self-reported nature of the data, which might not always capture the entire gamut of problems and coping strategies faced by the interns. Subsequent research might seek to increase the sample size and cover a broader variety of educational institutions to offer a more general picture of the internship experience in teacher training.

7.2 Future Direction

The long-term effects of kindergarten teaching internships on teachers' professional growth beyond the internship period could be a focus of future research. That is, studies could investigate the extent to which the skills and experiences acquired through the internship shape career paths, teaching quality, and job satisfaction in the longer term. Furthermore, it would be valuable to study the function of certain support structures, including peer networks and mentor-teacher relationships, in contributing to positive internship outcomes. The research could also investigate the crossroads of interns' traits, including resilience or teaching philosophy, and their capacity to resolve obstacles during the internship. Another key area for future research is comparing the intern experiences in various educational environments, e.g., urban vs. rural, to determine the impact of different amounts of resources, populations of students, and support from the community on influencing the internship experience. By looking at these issues, future research can help to further develop teacher education programs to better serve a variety of populations of prospective teachers.

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