Lived Experiences of Preschool Educators Teaching Early Mathematics in Multilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

Early Mathematics provides an important foundation for children's mathematical thinking and later learning yet teaching it in multilingual preschool classrooms presents instructional and communication challenges. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of preschool educators teaching Early Mathematics in multilingual classrooms in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Specifically, it examined educators' experiences, the challenges they encountered, the themes emerging from their narratives, and the Language-Responsive Early Mathematics Teaching Guide developed from the findings. Thirteen preschool educators who met the established inclusion criteria participated through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a validated semi-structured interview guide and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teaching Early Mathematics in multilingual preschool classrooms was both rewarding and challenging. Participants emphasized language-responsive instruction, hands-on and play-based learning, concrete materials, visual supports, and instructional adaptation to promote children's mathematical understanding and participation. They also identified language barriers, difficulties in teaching abstract mathematical concepts, and the need for professional development and institutional support. Six interconnected themes emerged, reflecting the relationships among language, pedagogy, instructional practices, and professional growth. Based on these findings, a Language-Responsive Early Mathematics Teaching Guide was developed to support preschool educators in implementing inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and meaningful Early Mathematics instruction. The study concluded that responsive and flexible teaching practices are important in addressing the linguistic and instructional realities of multilingual preschool classrooms.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education; Early Mathematics, multilingual preschool classrooms, language-responsive teaching; phenomenological research, purposive sampling, thematic analysis; Vietnam