Qualitative Research in Early Childhood Education
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Title: Concise, Specific, and Qualitative-Oriented Title (12–15 Words).

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ABSTRACT

The abstract is a concise and comprehensive summary of the entire article written in a single paragraph of approximately 150–250 words without referring to tables, figures, or cited literature. It should be structured into four sentences covering: the background, which briefly presents the research context, significance, and identified gap; the purpose, which clearly states the objective of the study in a precise and focused manner; the methods, which describe the qualitative approach, research design, participants or context, data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, as well as the data analysis method; and the findings and conclusion, which summarize the main results in the form of key themes or insights and highlight the contribution and implications of the study for theory, practice, or policy, particularly in early childhood education. Keywords should consist of 3–6 relevant terms or phrases, separated by semicolons, and should not repeat words used in the title.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction should provide a strong conceptual and empirical foundation for the study and clearly explain why the research is necessary. Authors are expected to begin by outlining the major global challenges in Early Childhood Education (ECE), such as unequal access to quality education, teacher preparedness, cultural diversity, inclusion, rapid technological change, and shifting social conditions. This global perspective helps position the study within broader international educational discourses and demonstrates the relevance of the research beyond a local context.

The introduction should then emphasize the importance of understanding experiences, meanings, and contexts in early childhood education. As ECE practices are deeply embedded in social, cultural, and institutional settings, qualitative research plays a crucial role in capturing teachers', children's, and families' lived experiences and interpretations. Authors should explain why a qualitative approach is appropriate for exploring complex educational phenomena that cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures alone.

Next, authors should provide a concise review of recent international qualitative studies in early childhood education, preferably from the last five to ten years. This review should not merely summarize previous research but critically engage with key findings, methodological approaches, and research contexts. By doing so, authors can demonstrate how their study is informed by and connected to existing international scholarship.

Based on this review, authors must clearly identify the research gaps that their study seeks to address. These gaps may relate to underexplored contexts, limited perspectives, methodological shortcomings, or inconsistencies in previous findings. Explicitly articulating the research gap is essential for establishing the novelty and significance of the study.

Finally, the introduction should conclude with a clear statement of the research purpose and the guiding research questions. These questions should align with the qualitative research design and directly respond to the identified research gaps, providing a focused direction for the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Early Childhood Education Context

This subsection should describe the broader context of Early Childhood Education relevant to the study. Authors are expected to discuss key characteristics of ECE, including child-centered pedagogy, developmental appropriateness, and the role of social, cultural, and institutional environments in shaping early learning experiences. The discussion should highlight how early childhood education is influenced by curriculum frameworks, teacher practices, family involvement, and community values. Authors may also address contemporary issues in ECE, such as inclusivity, diversity, digital transformation, and equity, to situate the study within current educational contexts. The purpose of this subsection is to provide readers with a clear understanding of the educational setting in which the research is located.

2.2 Review of International Qualitative Studies

This subsection should present a critical review of relevant international qualitative studies related to the research topic. Authors should focus on recent peer-reviewed studies, preferably published within the last five to ten years, and discuss their main findings, research contexts, and methodological approaches. Rather than simply summarizing previous research, authors are encouraged to compare and contrast studies, identify recurring themes, and highlight differences in perspectives or results across contexts. This review should demonstrate how existing qualitative research has contributed to understanding early childhood education practices while also revealing limitations or areas that remain underexplored.

2.3 Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

In this subsection, authors should explain the conceptual or theoretical framework that guides the study. This includes identifying key theories, concepts, or models relevant to the research focus, such as sociocultural theory, constructivism, or phenomenological perspectives. Authors should clearly define central concepts and explain how they inform the research questions, data collection, and analysis. The framework should help readers understand how the study interprets participants' experiences and how theoretical perspectives are used to make sense of the findings. This subsection establishes the intellectual foundation of the study and clarifies its contribution to theoretical discourse in early childhood education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This subsection should describe the qualitative research design adopted in the study and provide a clear rationale for its selection. Authors should specify the type of qualitative approach used, such as case study, phenomenology, ethnography, narrative inquiry, or qualitative descriptive research. The explanation should clarify how the chosen design aligns with the research purpose and questions, particularly in capturing participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings within early childhood education contexts. Authors should also briefly explain the scope of the study and how the design enables an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the research phenomenon.

3.2 Participants and Research Context

This subsection should present detailed information about the research participants and the context in which the study was conducted. Authors are expected to describe the educational setting (e.g., early childhood centers, kindergartens, or community-based programs), the characteristics of participants (such as teachers, parents, or administrators), and the sampling strategy used (e.g., purposive or snowball sampling). The rationale for participant selection should be clearly explained to demonstrate their relevance to the research focus. Providing contextual details helps readers understand the social and institutional environment influencing the participants' experiences.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

In this subsection, authors should explain the methods used to collect qualitative data, such as in-depth interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The

description should include how the data were collected, the duration of data collection, and the role of the researcher in the field. Authors should also clarify how the data collection methods support the research questions and allow for a rich and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. The explanation should remain concise while providing sufficient detail to ensure transparency.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

This subsection should describe the procedures used to analyze the qualitative data. Authors should specify the analytical approach, such as thematic analysis, content analysis, or grounded theory coding, and outline the key steps involved, including data familiarization, coding, categorization, and theme development. The use of qualitative analysis software (if any) may also be mentioned. Authors should explain how the analysis process ensured rigor and credibility, for example through triangulation, peer debriefing, or member checking, to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This subsection should address the ethical aspects of the research. Authors must explain how informed consent was obtained from participants and how confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the research process. Additional ethical considerations may include voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and the secure storage of data. If applicable, authors should mention approval from an institutional ethics committee. Clearly addressing ethical considerations demonstrates the researchers' commitment to ethical standards and responsible qualitative research practice.

4. FINDINGS

In the findings section, authors should present the results of the qualitative analysis in a thematic structure. This means organizing the findings around key themes or patterns that emerged from the data analysis, rather than presenting individual cases or participants separately. Each theme should be clearly titled and directly related to the research questions, allowing readers to easily understand the main insights generated by the study.

For each theme, authors should provide a concise narrative explanation that describes the core meaning of the theme and how it represents participants' shared experiences or perspectives. This narrative should be grounded in the data and written in an objective and descriptive manner, avoiding interpretation or theoretical discussion, which should be reserved for the discussion section.

Participant quotations should be used strategically to support and illustrate each theme. Quotes should be carefully selected to represent the essence of the theme and to give voice to participants' lived experiences. Authors should ensure that quotations are clearly attributed using

pseudonyms or participant codes (e.g., Teacher 1, Parent A) to maintain confidentiality. Quotations should be integrated smoothly into the text and not presented excessively.

Authors are encouraged to balance narrative explanation and quotations, ensuring that the findings section remains coherent and focused. The purpose of this section is to transparently present what was found in the data, allowing readers to see how the themes are grounded in participants' own words, while maintaining clarity, rigor, and ethical responsibility.

5. DISCUSSION

In the discussion section, authors should interpret the research findings by linking them directly to the research purpose and guiding questions. This interpretation goes beyond restating the results and aims to explain the meanings, significance, and underlying reasons behind the findings within the specific early childhood education context. Authors should reflect on how participants' experiences and perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Authors are also expected to compare their findings with relevant international studies, particularly qualitative research in early childhood education. This comparison helps position the study within the broader body of international scholarship by identifying similarities, differences, or extensions of previous research. Authors should discuss whether their findings confirm, expand, or challenge existing studies and provide contextual explanations for any divergences, such as cultural, institutional, or policy-related factors.

In addition, the discussion should clearly explain the implications of the findings. These implications may be theoretical, practical, or policy-oriented. Theoretical implications address how the findings contribute to or refine existing theories, while practical implications highlight recommendations for educators, teacher education, or early childhood practice. Policy implications may include considerations for curriculum development or educational decision-making. Authors should ensure that all implications are grounded in the study's findings and avoid overgeneralization.

Overall, the discussion section serves as the primary analytical space where authors demonstrate the scholarly contribution, international relevance, and practical value of their qualitative research in early childhood education.

6. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion section, authors should provide a concise summary of the key findings of the study. This summary should highlight the most important insights that emerged from the qualitative analysis and directly address the research purpose and guiding questions. The conclusion should not introduce new data or detailed interpretations but should synthesize the main results presented earlier in the article. Authors should then clearly articulate the contributions of the study. These contributions may be theoretical, methodological, or practical. Theoretical contributions explain how the study extends or deepens existing knowledge in early childhood education, while methodological contributions may highlight the use of specific qualitative approaches or innovative data collection methods. Practical contributions should emphasize the relevance of the findings for educators, practitioners, or policymakers in early childhood education contexts. The conclusion should also acknowledge the limitations of the study in a transparent and reflective manner. Limitations may relate to the research design, sample size, research context, or scope of the study. Acknowledging limitations demonstrates academic rigor and helps readers understand the boundaries of the findings. Finally, authors should offer directions for future research. These suggestions should logically stem from the study's findings and limitations and may include recommendations for exploring different contexts, participant groups, or methodological approaches. This final component reinforces the study's relevance and encourages continued scholarly inquiry in early childhood education.

7. **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** (Optional)

The acknowledgments section is used to formally recognize individuals, institutions, or organizations that contributed to the research but do not meet the criteria for authorship. Authors should acknowledge sources of financial support, institutional assistance, or professional contributions that facilitated the completion of the study. This may include funding agencies, research grants, universities, schools, or early childhood education centers that provided access to the research setting. Authors may also express appreciation to participants, such as teachers, parents, or administrators, whose time and cooperation made the study possible. When acknowledging individuals, authors should avoid using full names unless permission has been granted and should maintain professional and respectful language. The acknowledgments section should be concise and transparent. Authors should clearly distinguish between contributions that warrant authorship and those that are appropriately recognized in this section. Any potential conflicts of interest or funding-related disclosures required by the journal may also be included here, following the journal's specific guidelines.

8. REFERENCES

The references section must follow the **APA (American Psychological Association) 7th edition citation style**. In APA style, sources are cited in the text using the **author–date format**, such as (Ferawati, 2026) or (Maisyaroh, 2026), and these citations correspond to the full reference entries listed in the reference list at the end of the manuscript. All references should be arranged

alphabetically by the last name of the first author, not numerically. Each reference entry must include complete and accurate bibliographic information to enable readers to locate the cited source. For journal articles, references should include the author(s), year of publication in parentheses, article title in sentence case, journal title in italics and title case, volume number (italicized), issue number (if available), page range, and DOI (if available). For books, references should include the author(s), year of publication, book title in italics (sentence case), edition (if applicable), publisher, and DOI or URL if available. Authors are encouraged to prioritize **recent and peer-reviewed international journal articles** to enhance the academic rigor and credibility of the manuscript. Consistency in formatting, punctuation, and capitalization must be strictly maintained throughout the reference list. Authors must ensure that **all in-text citations are included in the reference list and that all references listed are cited in the manuscript**. The use of reference management software that supports APA 7th edition is strongly recommended to minimize formatting errors and ensure compliance with journal standards.

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