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WHEN FOCUS WANDERS: UNDERSTANDING INATTENTION AND HYPERACTIVITY AMONG KINDERGARTEN LEARNERS THROUGH CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

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ABSTRACT
The study titled "When Focus Wanders: Understanding Inattention and Hyperactivity among Kindergarten Learners through Classroom Observation" aimed to examine how inattention and hyperactivity manifested among Kindergarten learners in their natural classroom setting at Musuan Integrated School (MIS). It sought to identify three key inquiries: (1) how children showed signs of inattention and hyperactivity; (2) the situations in which they mostly occurred; and (3) how teachers responded to or managed them. Using a qualitative descriptive design through naturalistic observation, the researchers documented real-life behaviors of 34 Kindergarten learners, with 13 learners (9 males and 4 females) identified as exhibiting frequent signs of inattention and hyperactivity. Data were collected through observation guided by the NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale and supported by informal teacher interviews, providing a detailed understanding of how these behaviors affected classroom routines. Findings revealed that inattentive behaviors were commonly observed during seatwork and writing activities, where learners often lost focus, forgot instructions, and needed frequent reminders from the teacher. Many were easily distracted by classroom noises and by people walking outside the classroom. Hyperactive behaviors were frequently seen during transitions between activities. Learners were often fidgeting, leaving their seats, or talking excessively. Some blurted out answers without waiting for their turn and interrupted their classmates during discussions. These behaviors affected task completion and disrupted classroom routines. The results indicated that inattention and hyperactivity were common yet manageable behaviors in early childhood classrooms. The findings highlighted the importance of providing structured routines, engaging and movement-based learning tasks, and consistent teacher support to help learners sustain focus and regulate energy levels.

Keywords:
Classroom Behavior, Early Childhood Behavior, Hyperactivity, Inattention, Observation

INTRODUCTION

In a Kindergarten classroom, children naturally display a wide range of behaviors as they explore, interact, and adjust to school routines. Among these behaviors, inattention and hyperactivity are frequently observed and can influence how children participate in learning activities and social interactions. From a naturalistic perspective, these behaviors are considered part of normal development, reflecting children's emerging self-regulation and their responses to environmental factors such as classroom structure, activities, and teacher interaction (Korucu et al., 2022). Young learners aged four to five are still developing their capacity to

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focus, follow directions, and sustain attention for extended periods, making this stage particularly critical for understanding attention-related behaviors.

Despite being part of normal development, inattention and hyperactivity could present challenges in classroom management and learning engagement. Children became easily distracted, moved frequently, or lost interest when tasks did not align with their immediate interests or energy levels (Glatt et al., 2025). By observing these behaviors in a natural classroom setting, the researchers identified patterns, triggers, and contexts in which inattention and hyperactivity were most likely to occur. This study focused on understanding how these behaviors manifested among the 13 identified Kindergarten learners at Musuan Integrated School (MIS) and how teachers responded or managed them, providing practical insights for improving classroom interactions and instructional strategies.

The findings of this study were significant for both teachers and early childhood education as a whole. By understanding the nature and triggers of inattention and hyperactivity, educators could develop more effective, child-centered strategies that promoted sustained attention, engagement, and positive learning experiences. Additionally, insights from this research could guide the design of classroom environments, activities, and interventions that supported learners' social, emotional, and cognitive development, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and productive early education settings.

OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to examine how inattention and hyperactivity appear in the Kindergarten classroom and how teachers respond to these behaviors.

Specifically, it aims to:

1. To identify the observable signs of inattention and hyperactivity displayed by Kindergarten learners during class activities.
2. To determine the common situations or triggers in which inattention and hyperactivity most frequently occur.
3. To describe the strategies used by teachers in managing and responding to these behaviors in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive research design, specifically employing naturalistic observation as its primary approach. This design was particularly appropriate because it enabled the researchers to observe and describe how inattention and hyperactivity naturally manifested among Kindergarten learners within their everyday classroom environment without manipulating the setting or influencing participants' behavior (Hall, 2024).

Research Locale

The study was conducted in a Kindergarten classroom setting at Musuan Integrated School during a normal class session. Observations were carried out throughout the school day, from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM, allowing the researchers to examine learners' behaviors in authentic, everyday learning experiences. The classroom provided an ideal environment to observe how inattention and hyperactivity manifested among young learners and how teachers implemented strategies to manage and support these behaviors during various activities, including structured lessons and free play.

Participants

The participants of the study were 34 Kindergarten learners, aged 5 years, among whom 13 (9 males and 4 females) were identified as exhibiting signs of inattention and hyperactivity and were selected for closer observation in the study.

Data Collection Methods

The researchers used naturalistic observation, a rating scale (NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale), and informal teacher interviews to gather data. The naturalistic observation was guided by the NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale, which enabled the researchers to systematically identify and document signs of inattention and hyperactivity as they appeared naturally during classroom activities. The use of this validated rating scale was appropriate because it provides a structured and reliable framework for assessing hyperactivity and inattention symptoms among young learners, ensuring accuracy and consistency in behavioral observation (Musullulu, 2025). Informal interviews with the classroom teacher were also conducted to gather information

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about the learners' background and behavior, as well as to gain insights into how these behaviors were managed, including the strategies and responses used to support learners' focus and engagement. Combining these methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of the learners' behaviors in their natural classroom setting.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from the school principal and classroom teacher after they were fully informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and procedures. Participation was voluntary, and both were assured that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. To protect participants' identities, no personal information such as names was used; instead, each child was assigned a code number. All collected data were securely stored, treated with strict confidentiality, and used solely for academic and research purposes, specifically for analyzing patterns of inattention and hyperactivity among Kindergarten learners. The study strictly followed ethical guidelines for research involving young children, ensuring their rights, privacy, and well-being were prioritized at all times. Observations were conducted naturally within the classroom setting without any direct interaction with the learners to prevent influence on their behavior or learning activities. The researchers acted with professionalism and sensitivity, avoiding any form of labeling or comparison among learners. The data gathered were analyzed objectively to identify common behaviors and inform strategies for better classroom management. Findings were presented constructively, focusing on improving teaching practices rather than evaluating individual learners, ensuring that the research contributed positively to early childhood education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the study's findings on inattention and hyperactivity among Kindergarten learners and discusses their implications for classroom practice.

No.	Description	Never (0)	Occasionally (1)	Often (2)	Very Often (3)
1	Fails to give attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork		3	10	
2	Has difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or activities		5	8	
3	Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly			11	2
4	Does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand)		5	6	2
5	Has difficulty organizing tasks and activities		8	5	
6	Avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort	3	5	5	
7	Loses things necessary for tasks or activities (school assignments, pencils, or books)	3	8	2	
8	Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli			6	7
9	Is forgetful in daily activities	1	8	3	1
	TOTAL	**7**	**42**	**46**	**12**

Table 1.1 Frequency of Learners Exhibiting Inattention

Table 1.1 presented the frequency of inattentive behaviors exhibited by the learners. The most commonly observed behaviors included not listening when spoken to directly (11 Often; 2 Very Often) and being easily distracted by extraneous stimuli (6 Often; 7 Very Often). Other behaviors frequently rated as "Often" included making careless mistakes (n=10) and experiencing difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or activities (n=8). Moderate occurrences were recorded in failing to follow instructions (n=6), difficulty organizing tasks and

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activities (n=5), and reluctance to engage in mentally demanding activities (n=5), while forgetfulness in daily activities appeared least frequent (n=1 Very Often; n=3 Often).

These patterns suggested that many learners struggled to sustain focus and complete tasks accurately, possibly leading to unfinished or inaccurately completed schoolwork. The presence of disorganization and reluctance to exert mental effort indicated challenges that may have hindered learners' productivity and participation. Overall totals showed that the most frequently selected category was "Often" (n=46), followed by "Occasionally" (n=42), indicating that inattentive behaviors were consistently present, though differing in intensity across learners.

The results implied that inattention was a recurring concern in the classroom, potentially affecting learners' ability to follow instructions, stay organized, and maintain on-task behavior. These findings align with recent literature describing inattention symptoms, such as distractibility, difficulty sustaining attention, disorganization, and forgetfulness, as common factors influencing learners' academic performance (Hulsbosch et al., 2025). Support from structured routines and targeted instructional accommodations may be necessary to address these challenges and improve learners' focus and task engagement.

No.	Description	Never (0)	Occasionally (1)	Often (2)	Very Often (3)
1	Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat		6	1	5
2	Leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected		1	10	2
3	Runs about or climbs excessively in situations in which remaining seated is expected	2	1	7	3
4	Has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly		5	5	3
5	Is "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"		1	5	7
6	Talks excessively		1	5	7
7	Blurts out answers before questions have been completed		4	8	1
8	Has difficulty waiting in line		2	7	4
9	Interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations/games)		2	4	7
	TOTAL	**2**	**23**	**47**	**39**

Table 1.2 ***Frequency of Learners Exhibiting Hyperactivity***

Table 1.2 presented the frequency of hyperactive behaviors among learners. Most ratings fell under "Often" (n=47) and "Very Often" (n=39), with only two responses recorded under "Never," indicating that hyperactivity was present in nearly all observed learners. The most commonly noted behaviors included leaving one's seat when remaining seated was expected (10 Often; 2 Very Often), running or climbing excessively (7 Often; 3 Very Often), talking excessively (5 Often; 7 Very Often), and acting as if "driven by a motor" (5 Often; 7 Very Often). Impulsive behaviors such as blurting out answers (8 Often; 1 Very Often) and interrupting or intruding on others (4 Often; 7 Very Often) were also frequently observed.

These results showed that many learners struggled with self-regulation, movement control, and turn-taking during classroom activities. The prevalence of restless and impulsive behaviors suggested that learners may have had difficulty following routines and maintaining appropriate behavior during instruction. Taken together, the distribution of responses indicated that hyperactivity was consistently present and posed ongoing challenges within the classroom.

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The findings implied that elevated activity levels and impulsivity likely disrupted learning activities and routines, affecting both individual and group participation. These results reflected the patterns discussed in recent studies, which describe hyperactivity as characterized by restlessness, excessive movement, impulsiveness, and difficulty waiting, all of which may interfere with classroom functioning (Kates & LaFreniere, 2025). These behaviors indicated a need for structured behavioral strategies, movement-inclusive routines, and supportive classroom practices to help learners regulate their energy levels and improve engagement.

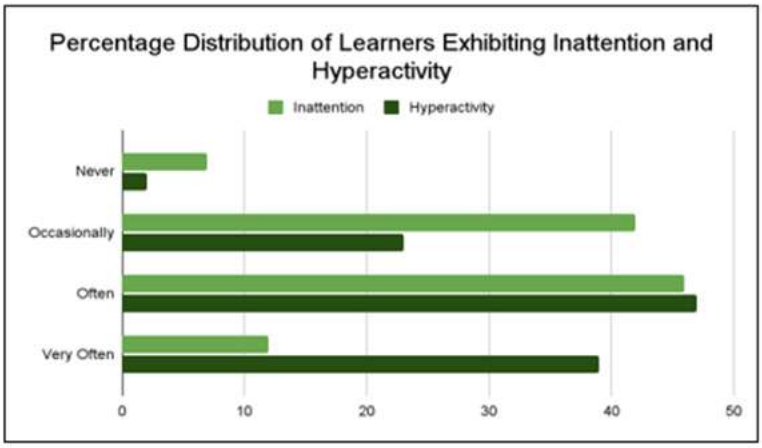

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Learners Exhibiting Inattention and Hyperactivity

Figure 1 presented the percentage distribution of Kindergarten learners exhibiting inattention and hyperactivity based on classroom observations. The data showed that inattention occurred at varying frequencies, with 6.5 % of learners categorized as "never," 39.3 % as "occasional," 43.0 % as "often," and 11.2 % as "very often." Hyperactivity was also observed at different levels: 1.8 % were in the "never" category, 20.7 % "occasional," 42.3 % "often," and 35.1 % "very often." Analysis of the data revealed that inattention was most frequently observed on an occasional basis, whereas hyperactivity appeared more prominently in the often and very often categories, indicating that while some learners experienced occasional lapses in focus, a significant number displayed higher energy or restlessness during classroom activities. This pattern suggested that young learners were still developing attention regulation and self-control skills, which are essential for effective learning (Granziera et al., 2021). These findings underscored the importance of structured routines, engaging activities, and strategies that promoted focus and positive energy management in the classroom. By fostering self-regulation and attentional control skills, teachers could create a learning environment that was developmentally appropriate and supportive of early childhood learning outcomes.

Table 2.1 Summary of Learners Exhibiting Inattention

Theme	Description	Representative Behaviors
Difficulty Sustaining Focus	Short attention span, forgets tasks	Needs reminders
Low Task Engagement	Limited participation	Minimal response
Task Avoidance	Appears disengaged or distracted	Stares off, avoids tasks

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Table 2.1 presented the themes identified among learners who exhibited inattentive behaviors. Three major themes emerged: difficulty sustaining focus, low task engagement, and task avoidance. Learners with difficulty sustaining focus often showed short attention spans, frequently forgot tasks, and required constant reminders. Learners with low task engagement participated minimally in class activities, while those demonstrating task avoidance tended to stare off or avoid completing their tasks. These behaviors are consistent with the description of inattentive symptoms outlined by the American Psychiatric Association (2013), which included challenges in maintaining attention, following through on instructions, and avoiding tasks that required sustained mental effort. Similarly, Barkley (2015) emphasized that inattention in children often leads to low classroom productivity and poor task completion.

Difficulty Sustaining Focus

Learners who exhibited difficulty sustaining focus demonstrated short attention spans, frequent forgetfulness of instructions, and a consistent need for reminders from their teachers. These behaviors were particularly evident during structured and cognitively demanding tasks such as writing exercises or seatwork

Such patterns suggested challenges in maintaining goal-directed behavior and cognitive persistence, especially when tasks required prolonged concentration. The observed lapses in attention often resulted in incomplete work and limited task accomplishment, indicating deficits in sustained mental effort.

Barkley's Executive Function Theory posited that inattention stemmed from the lack of self-regulation and working memory. These functions were governed by inhibitory control, the capacity to resist distractions and maintain focus on relevant stimuli (Diamond, 2013). From a Vygotskian perspective, attention developed through social mediation within the zone of proximal development, where learners internalized self-regulatory behaviors through guided participation. Teaching strategies such as modeling, feedback, questioning, and cognitive structuring provided scaffolding that supported learners who struggle to sustain focus (Sanders & Welk, 2005). The frequent need for teacher reminders in this study implied that the learners were still in the process of internalizing these cognitive controls and required continuous scaffolding to sustain attention.

The comparison between DSM-IV and DSM-5 presented by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016) further highlighted that inattentive behaviors must be developmentally inappropriate and evident across multiple settings. This distinction reinforced that young children's inattention should be understood as part of their developmental process rather than as a pathological condition. Therefore, consistent adult guidance, visual prompts, and structured routines support the gradual development of sustained attention among early learners.

Low Task Engagement

Several learners displayed low levels of engagement in classroom activities. Learners participated minimally, appeared passive, and seldom responded during teacher-led discussions or collaborative tasks.

Low engagement reflected limited intrinsic motivation or a lack of connection between the learners and the activities presented. This behavior might have arisen when instructional methods failed to spark curiosity, autonomy, or a sense of competence, resulting in disengagement and reduced learning participation.

In Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children's engagement was influenced by observational learning–learners were more likely to participate when they observed peers being rewarded for active involvement. When positive reinforcement is absent, disengagement can persist. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) asserted that motivation flourished when learners experienced autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When classroom environments limit these psychological needs, students lose intrinsic motivation and exhibit passive behavior (Manninen, 2022).

Creating a need-supportive learning environment that valued autonomy, social connection, and hands-on exploration enhanced engagement in early childhood classrooms. Play-based and collaborative activities, consistent with Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), promoted self-motivation and deeper learning involvement.

Task Avoidance

Several learners demonstrated task-avoidant behaviors, such as daydreaming, staring off, or refusing to engage in cognitively demanding classroom activities.

Task avoidance serves as an adaptive response to frustration or perceived difficulty. Learners tended to disengage when the cognitive or emotional demands of a task exceeded their developmental readiness, or when prior experiences with academic challenges led to anxiety and self-doubt.

The Commonwealth Centre for Connected Health and Care (n.d.) described a persistent drive for autonomy or demand avoidance as a resistance to tasks, even preferred ones, when they were externally

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imposed. This pattern emerges as a protective mechanism against repeated failure or negative feedback. Consistent with Vygotsky's theory, such avoidance behaviors diminish when learners were supported through scaffolding that matched their current developmental level and emotional state.

To address task avoidance, teachers applied positive reinforcement, provided specific feedback, and broke complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps. Ensuring that activities were developmentally appropriate and emotionally supportive helped learners experience success and build persistence, transforming avoidance into productive engagement.

Theme	Description	Representative Behaviors
Restlessness and Physical Activity	Difficulty staying seated, continuous movement	Moves constantly, fidgets
Impulsive Expression	Blurting out, interrupting others	Interrupts, talks out of turn

Table 2.2 Summary of Learners Exhibiting Hyperactivity

Table 2.2 summarized the behaviors of learners exhibiting hyperactivity. Two key themes had been identified: restlessness and physical activity, and impulsive expression. Learners who were restless displayed continuous movement, fidgeting, and difficulty remaining seated. Meanwhile, those who exhibited impulsive expression frequently interrupted others or talked out of turn. These findings aligned with the behavioral indicators of hyperactivity noted by DuPaul and Stoner (2014), who described hyperactive children as constantly in motion and struggling with impulse control. Similarly, Zentall (2017) highlighted that hyperactive behaviors often interfered with social interactions and classroom learning routines.

Restlessness and Physical Activity

Many learners displayed restlessness and continuous physical activity, frequently fidgeting, leaving their seats, or moving around during class activities. This behavior was identified as one of the most common forms of hyperactivity observed.

These actions interfered with learners' ability to maintain focus and complete tasks. Restless behaviors were especially evident during structured lessons requiring seated attention and limited movement, suggesting difficulty in external behavioral regulation.

From the perspective of Executive Dysfunction Theory, restlessness reflected a lack of behavioral inhibition and immature prefrontal cortex development (Diamond, 2013). In Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, learners required scaffolding through adult guidance, verbal cues, and structured routines to internalize self-regulation and control their energy. Movement breaks and kinesthetic activities were recommended to help channel this energy constructively.

DuPaul and Stoner (2014) noted that hyperactive children often struggled with constant motion, which disrupted classroom engagement. Providing scaffolded strategies and structured physical opportunities aligned with developmentally appropriate practices to improve focus and task participation (Diamond, 2013; McLeod, 2025).

Impulsive Expression

Impulsive expression had been observed when learners had frequently blurted out answers, had interrupted classmates, or had spoken out of turn during lessons. Those behaviors had disrupted the flow of classroom activities and had affected peer interactions, indicating challenges with impulse control. Unlike restlessness, impulsive expression had reflected difficulties in regulating verbal responses rather than physical activity.

Impulsive expression was linked to underdeveloped executive function, specifically inhibitory control (Diamond, 2013). In Kohlberg's Pre-conventional Stage of moral development, children acted according to

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immediate desires rather than social rules, highlighting the need for guidance in turn-taking, patience, and empathy. Scaffolding through verbal prompts, guided practice, and modeling appropriate social behaviors helped learners gradually internalize self-control. Research by Zentall (2017) emphasized that impulsive behaviors interfered with classroom learning and peer relationships. Structured interventions, positive reinforcement, and consistent teacher guidance fostered improved behavioral regulation and cooperation among hyperactive learners (McLeod, 2025).

Corresponding to the goal of the study, in concern about how Kindergarten learners became inattentive and hyperactive during classroom activities, the data showed observable behavioral patterns, such as forgetfulness, minimal engagement, and impulsive expression, which clearly illustrated these tendencies. Frequencies of eleven learners "often" did not listen when spoken to directly, and seven "very often" talked excessively, supported these qualitative observations.

In relation to the situations in which inattention and hyperactivity had most often occurred, it had been found that both behaviors had been more likely to take place within structured, teacher-directed, and cognitively demanding tasks, whereas playful and interactive activities had diminished such behaviors. This had pointed toward the importance of matching the demands in the classroom to children's readiness.

As the researchers compared the two groups, it could be observed that inattentive learners had struggled more with internal regulation (for example, focus, task completion), whereas hyperactive learners had exhibited difficulties with external regulation (for example, body control).

In relation to behaviors like movement and impulsive behavior, both sets of behaviors had affected learning outcomes and peer relationships. As had been noted by Barkley (2015), inattention and hyperactivity had been interconnected dimensions of attention-deficit/hyperactivity behaviors that had required differentiated classroom strategies. Effective interventions had included structured routines, visual cues, and opportunities for movement, which had helped children self-regulate and stay engaged (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; DuPaul & Stoner, 2014).

Referring to how teachers had responded and managed these behaviors, the study had consistently observed teachers using corrective feedback, verbal redirection, physical proximity, and positive reinforcement. Teachers had also used proactive strategies like movement breaks and group participation to keep students focused. It had been consistent with the emphasis that Bandura had made on modeling and reinforcement and had reflected a developmentally appropriate practice aligned with Piaget's and Kohlberg's stages of moral development in which young children had relied on external guidance to internalize behavior norms.

These findings had great implications for early childhood education. Teachers were considered the first facilitators in developing children’s behavioral self-regulation and moral reasoning. Learning and self-regulation were socially mediated processes; therefore, children internalized behavioral conduct through guided interaction with adults. Consistent modeling by teachers through calm, patient, and attentive behavior scaffolded learners to regulate their attention and impulses.

The study showed that positive reinforcement, verbal encouragement, and opportunities for social collaboration effectively enhanced children’s focus and cooperation. Teachers who incorporated play-based and movement-oriented activities into their teaching styles developed learning environments that allowed learners to direct energy constructively. In line with Bandura’s principle of modeling, learners were most likely to imitate prosocial behavior when the teacher in view demonstrated empathy, patience, and cooperation. Moreover, behavioral interventions for learners with inattentive or hyperactive behaviors were found to be more effective when they were understanding-oriented rather than punitive. The role of teachers was to help children recognize and validate their emotions and respond to them appropriately, thereby providing them with relevant emotional regulation skills that reduced impulsive outbursts. Preestablished routines, visual reminders, and task division also helped learners maintain their attention. Additionally, close collaboration between teachers and parents ensured continuity of behavioral expectations at home and school, thus reinforcing consistency of moral and social learning.

The study was limited by its small sample size and short observation period, which restricted the generalization of findings. In relying on naturalistic observation, there was a risk of possible observer bias since observers might have interpreted behavior differently. Moreover, contextual factors—home environment, relationships with peers, or temperament—were not comprehensively addressed and might have affected the way behavior was manifested.

For future observation, it was recommended that researchers observe spaces where teachers provided predictable routines and opportunities for physical activities to stimulate learning, and where teachers also used

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positive reinforcement in the classroom to enhance focused attention and behavior. Parents were encouraged to provide consistent expectations at home and foster attention-promoting routines. Future studies were suggested to investigate long-term trajectories of attention and hyperactivity, and to examine their relations to socioemotional and executive functioning in broader samples.

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CONCLUSION

Using the study's data, these conclusions were drawn:

- Kindergarten learners expressed inattention by not listening when spoken to, being easily distracted, forgetting, and avoiding activities that required sustained effort. Hyperactivity manifested itself as talking excessively, constant movement, fidgeting, leaving seats, and interrupting others. Such conduct suggested that most learners frequently failed to sustain focus and inhibit impulses, reflecting the developing attention and self-regulation skills typical of early childhood.
- The study revealed that inattention and hyperactivity most frequently occurred during structured lessons, whole-group discussions, and transitional periods between activities. These situations often required higher levels of sustained attention, limited movement, and adherence to routines, making them more challenging for young learners. Meanwhile, fewer signs of inattention and hyperactivity were observed during hands-on tasks, outdoor play, and free-choice activities, suggesting that environments allowing movement and autonomy supported better engagement and behavioral regulation.
- Based on the informal interview, the teacher shared that she managed inattention and hyperactivity among Kindergarten learners through verbal redirection, positive reinforcement, and the use of engaging, movement-based activities. She explained that gentle cues, reminders, and proximity helped refocus learners' attention during moments of distraction or impulsivity. To maintain engagement, she incorporated short breaks, interactive games, and group tasks that allowed children to release energy in a positive way. These insights revealed that the teacher valued supportive and developmentally appropriate approaches that nurtured young children's focus, self-regulation, and positive classroom behavior.

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