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COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT OF STRUGGLING KINDERGARTEN LEARNERS: BASIS FOR LEARNING RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the level of competency development among struggling kindergarten learners, focusing on four key domains: Communicating, Collaborating, Personal Awareness, and Social Awareness. This study used the non-experimental descriptive survey research design. The respondents of this study were composed of 183 kindergarten learners in Sta Cruz North District Division of Davao del Sur using the Slovin's Formula. The data analysis utilized the mean. Using quantitative data, findings revealed that learners demonstrated a high level of competency in Communicating (mean = 3.48) and Collaborating (mean = 3.30), with indicators such as identifying shapes and colors, using simple sentences, showing kindness, and resolving conflicts ranking particularly high. Meanwhile, Personal Awareness (mean = 3.18) and Social Awareness (mean = 3.40) were rated at a moderate level, suggesting occasional manifestation of behaviors such as recognizing emotions, showing empathy, and participating enthusiastically in group activities. These results highlight the importance of structured support and targeted learning strategies in fostering holistic competency development. The findings are consistent with current literature emphasizing communication, collaboration, and social-emotional learning as essential components of early childhood education.

KEYWORDS: *Competency Development, Struggling Kindergarten Learners, Basis for Learning Resource Development Program*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education lays the foundational competencies for lifelong learning, socialization, and personal development. However, across the globe, many kindergarten learners—especially in low-income and resource-poor regions—face significant challenges in achieving developmental milestones due to the lack of adequate learning materials. These materials, including books, visual aids, manipulatives, and digital tools, are critical in nurturing cognitive, motor, language, and socio-emotional skills during the early years.

The absence of developmentally appropriate resources often results in children falling behind in essential areas such as literacy, numeracy, and communication. Struggling learners, particularly those with diverse learning needs or from marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected.

Even before the curriculum changed, elementary public school teachers had already raised several complaints about the shortage of learning materials, particularly textbooks — a predicament that still exists today. The unavailability of instructional materials, along with teachers' lack of knowledge in material development, has become a prevalent and persistent problem among educational institutions, especially in the implementation of the kindergarten curriculum. (Abbate-Vaughn, 2024).

Moreover, instructional materials (IMs) such as textbooks, workbooks, modules, et cetera are essential learning tools for they allow learners to interact with words, images and ideas in ways that develop their abilities in multiple skills such as reading, listening, speaking, writing and viewing (Salviejo, 2020).

In teaching, particularly in language instruction, instructional materials (IMs) are considered a primary source of convenience. Teachers find it easier to impart knowledge to kindergarten pupils when instructional materials (IMs) are readily available. This is essentially why the accessibility and availability of IMs are considered necessities in every classroom (National Council of Teachers of English).

Strategic Intervention Materials (SIMs) are instructional materials designed for remediation purposes and are considered one of the solutions employed by the Department of Education (DepEd) to enhance the academic performance of pupils who are performing poorly in class. They are carefully designed and developed to stimulate pupils' interest in a specific skill, thereby increasing their level of understanding and helping them master the concept or competency being taught by the teacher to preschool learners. At present, a number of Strategic Intervention Materials (SIMs) specifically designed for kindergarten learners are already accessible online and are also available in many public elementary schools. These resources aim to support teachers in addressing learning gaps and enhancing the academic performance of struggling pupils. In response to this issue, the researcher developed Strategic Intervention Materials (SIMs) for kindergarten pupils who have not yet mastered the competencies in listening, reading, speaking, and writing. (Bakkenes et. al., 2020).

In today's generation, it is undeniable that many learners, particularly those in kindergarten, experience significant difficulty in expressing their ideas both orally and in writing. These challenges greatly affect their academic performance in school and often contribute to their ongoing struggles in learning.

Educators in the local setting have expressed serious concern about the growing number of struggling learners and whether these students are able to close the learning gap during their time in kindergarten. Educators around the country are placing a renewed emphasis on education in the primary grades because early childhood education is the foundation for all future learning (Cooper et al., 2020).

Researchers' foci have shifted from experiential and play-based learning to a more academic model. The criteria related to kindergarten readiness are based on the academic domains of vocabulary, mathematics and print awareness skills. Because school readiness predictors are the strongest predictors of student retention, focusing on these skills during the early years can possibly help address academic issues for students (Davoudzadeh et al., 2020).

Approximately 4 million children are enrolled in public kindergarten programs across the country. Many of them enter school without the foundational skills needed for success and lack the readiness necessary for a smooth adjustment to the school environment. Students who enter school with low readiness skills are not academically successful during their schooling. Poppe and Lipkowitz (2015) reported the following: "Starting school behind sends most children on a scholastic trajectory that limits their educational choices and affects their future academic and workforce success". (Linder et. al., 2023).

In the Division of Davao del Sur, particularly at Astorga Central Elementary School in the Sta. Cruz North District, the teacher also serves as the researcher. There is clear evidence that many kindergarten learners face challenges in developing their competencies. Teachers face a dilemma in addressing this issue, as it stems from the lack of adequate resources needed to support the development of competencies among kindergarten learners. However, in order to provide a solution, the researcher initiated a competency assessment for kindergarten learners to identify areas of difficulty. The results of the assessment will help address the specific gaps in their learning. Hence, this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication skills are essential in interactions with students, as teaching itself relies heavily on effective communication. In the teacher's role, they are responsible for comprehending and breaking down complex information, conveying this information clearly to the students (both verbally and in written resources), presenting in a manner that sustains their attention, and listening to and resolving their questions or problems (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2024).

Communication is key in the classroom, as successful teaching is generally believed to require 50% knowledge and 50% communication skills. As a result, a teacher should be proficient in all four modes of communication – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – and know how to utilize this proficiency effectively in a school environment. The ability to communicate effectively has been shown to influence both students' academic success and teachers' professional growth (Haneef et al., 2024).
However, this relationship is reciprocal: poor communication skills can result in ineffective teaching methods, which in turn lower students' comprehension levels and hinder their academic progress. Consequently, students may lose motivation, develop a negative attitude toward school, and internalize a belief that they are incapable of succeeding. Such outcomes can have long-term implications that extend well into adulthood (Merhabian, 2022).

Therefore, effective communication between teachers and students is crucial. It allows the teacher to perform their job well, with positive results for their pupils. An added benefit is that their class can use the teacher as a model for improving their own communication skills, which are critical for their development and future learning (Patrichi, 2023).

Effective coaching and mentoring can help boost a teacher's communication with the students as they focus on three key areas: foundations, principles and practice. There is evidence that supportive relationships between students and teachers enhance engagement, participation, and overall academic success. It has been suggested that strong teacher-student relationships can reduce the educational disadvantages typically faced by low-income students" (White & Gardner, 2022).

The role of technology in communication has transformed over the years, influencing how people interact with one another. Recent studies highlight the significance of digital communication, especially in how it has reshaped interpersonal and organizational interactions. According to a 2023 study by Lee et al., technology has enhanced the speed and accessibility of communication still it has also introduced challenges, such as decreased face-to-face interaction and increased digital misinterpretations (Lee, A., et al., 2023). As digital communication tools evolve, new challenges, such as privacy concerns and the risk of information overload, are becoming more pronounced.
Trust remains a fundamental component in effective communication, particularly in digital interactions. A systematic review by Jones and Patel (2022) investigated the role of trust in shaping communication outcomes within online settings.According to Jones and Patel (2022), trust in virtual communication platforms plays a crucial

role in enhancing message credibility and fostering interpersonal relationships, emphasizing its relevance in both social and professional spheres.

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into communication practices has been increasingly explored. Recent studies have examined the role of AI in enhancing communication efficiency, especially in customer service, marketing, and personal assistance. A study by Williams and Kim (2024) highlights how AI is facilitates real-time communication while raising concerns about the loss of human touch in interactions. The authors argue that while AI can automate tasks and improve response times, human oversight remains essential to ensure emotional intelligence in communication (Williams & Kim, 2024).

Communication theory provides foundational insights into how messages are conveyed and interpreted. Keller and Larson (2023) discuss the evolution of communication theories in their work on the increasing relevance of interactivity in contemporary communication. They propose a shift toward "interactional communication theory," which integrates digital tools with traditional models to account for the interactivity of modern communication environments (Keller & Larson, 2023).

Ethical concerns in communication have garnered significant attention, especially regarding misinformation and data privacy. In a recent study, Harper and Nguyen (2024) explore the ethical challenges of communication in the age of artificial intelligence and big data. They emphasize the need for ethical guidelines that balance innovation with protecting of individual rights, suggesting that communication technologies should prioritize transparency and accountability (Harper & Nguyen, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the level of the Competency Development of Struggling Kindergarten Learners and hopefully will design a Learning Resource Development Program. Specifically, it answers the following sub-problems:

1.What is the level of the Competency Development of Struggling Kindergarten Learners in terms of:
1.1 Communicating,
1.2 Collaborating,
1.3 Personal Awareness and
1.4 Social Awareness

2.Based on the findings drawn out from this study, what Learning Resource Development Program can be designed and proposed?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a non-experimental descriptive survey research design to investigate the research problem. This study is considered descriptive because it presents quantitative data on the 'Competency Development of Struggling Kindergarten Learners: Basis for a Learning Resource Development Program. According to Good (2005), this research method involves the description of tasks and the presentation of conditions related to a group of individuals or events. It includes procedures such as analysis, classification, and measurement. It involves varied information regarding the current or present condition (Deauna, 2005).

Nonexperimental studies establishing a relationship between watching violent television and aggressive behavior have been complemented by experimental studies that confirm this relationship is causal (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001). Similarly, after his original study, Milgram conducted experiments to explore the factors that affect obedience. He manipulated several independent variables, such as the distance between the experimenter and the participant, the participant and the confederate, and the location of the study (Milgram, 1974)

Research Respondents

This study was conducted in Davao del Sur, specifically in the Sta. Cruz North District. The respondents were 183 kindergarten learners from the research locale. The sample size was determined using Slovin's Formula. Kindergarten teachers assessed their learners using a checklist based on indicators from a researcher-made questionnaire, which described the competency development of struggling kindergarten learners. Given the relatively small number of respondents in the elementary schools of Sta. Cruz North District, the study employed a universal random sampling procedure

Research Instrument

This study utilized a researcher-developed questionnaire, with items and indicators focused on the competency development of struggling kindergarten learners. The respondents' teachers provided their assessments by answering the items in the checklist. To ensure the instrument's validity and reliability, the checklist underwent pilot testing in a school outside the research locale.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used in the analysis and interpretation of the responses in this study.

The mean was used to describe the level of Competency Development among Struggling Kindergarten Learners. In statistics, the mean is a measure of central tendency that represents the average of a set of values. It provides a useful summary of data by indicating the typical or central value within a dataset. While there are various measures of central tendency—such as the median and mode—the mean is particularly effective in identifying general trends, especially when data are evenly distributed. The choice of which measure to use depends on the nature, distribution, and purpose of the data being analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

Based on the collective findings on this study, the following conclusions are drawn: The level of Competency Development of Kindergarten Learners in terms of Communicating is High, The level of Competency Development of Kindergarten Learners in terms of Collaborating, The level of Competency Development of Kindergarten Learners in terms of Personal Awareness and the level of Competency Development of Kindergarten Learners in terms of Social Awareness. Furthermore, the study revealed that the competencies of kindergarten learners need further development, particularly in areas where only a moderate level of competency was demonstrated.This indicates that the researcher must design a more intensive, school-based program aimed at further developing the competencies of struggling kindergarten learners.

The above findings align with the theory of Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory – Vygotsky that emphasized the importance of social interaction in learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that children learn most effectively when they receive guidance and support from a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher or peer. For struggling kindergarten learners, structured support and interactive learning experiences are crucial in helping them develop essential competencies. Scaffolding, or providing gradual assistance, allows children to progress from simple to complex tasks, fostering cognitive growth.

This is supported by Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, which proposes that children progress through distinct stages of cognitive development. During the preoperational stage (ages 2–7), children use symbolic thinking and engage in play-based learning to make sense of the world around them and understand basic concepts. For struggling kindergarten learners, hands-on activities and experiential learning are effective in helping them grasp foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving. Piaget believed that children construct knowledge through active exploration, making play-based learning an effective strategy for competency development. These theories highlight the importance of tailored instruction and interactive learning environments in supporting young learners' competency development.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings drawn out by the researcher in this study, the following recommendations are offered:

It is recommended that DepEd officials prioritize early intervention programs and implement tailored learning strategies to address the specific needs of struggling kindergarten learners, thereby fostering their overall development and readiness for formal education. Implementing targeted support, such as remedial sessions and play-based learning activities, can help address specific skill gaps. Strengthening teacher training programs to equip educators with innovative teaching approaches, including differentiated instruction and multisensory techniques, will foster an engaging learning environment. Additionally, collaboration with parents through structured home-learning initiatives ensures that children receive consistent reinforcement of foundational skills beyond the classroom.

DepEd can also invest in resources that support individualized learning, such as adaptive educational technologies and well-designed assessment tools to monitor student progress effectively. Providing adequate learning materials, enhancing classroom environments, and ensuring smaller teacher-student ratios will help struggling learners receive more focused instruction. Furthermore, establishing partnerships with child development experts and psychologists can contribute to a holistic support system, addressing cognitive and socio-emotional challenges. A comprehensive approach will empower young learners to build confidence and achieve their developmental milestones successfully.

To the School heads may implement structured intervention programs that address individual learning needs. Ensuring teachers have access to professional development in early childhood education, including training on differentiated instruction and inclusive teaching strategies, can significantly enhance classroom engagement. Additionally, school leaders should facilitate integrating play-based and multisensory activities in the curriculum, fostering a stimulating environment where young learners can develop foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social interaction. Strengthening partnerships with parents and guardians through regular workshops and guidance sessions will also provide learners with continuous support at home. School heads must prioritize the availability of quality learning materials and resources tailored to early childhood development. Investing in interactive learning tools, such as visual aids and digital programs, can make lessons more engaging and effective. Moreover, maintaining smaller class sizes and optimizing teacher-student ratios ensures that struggling learners receive attention and guidance. School heads may also establish collaborations with specialists, such as child psychologists and language development experts, to provide comprehensive support. By fostering an inclusive and nurturing

educational environment, schools can empower kindergarten learners to progress confidently and develop essential competencies for future academic success.

The teachers may implement differentiated instruction strategies tailored to individual learning needs. Utilizing play-based and multisensory learning approaches can make lessons more engaging and accessible, helping young learners grasp foundational concepts in literacy and numeracy. Providing structured yet flexible interventions, such as small-group activities and personalized learning support, ensures that struggling students receive adequate guidance. Additionally, creating a nurturing and supportive classroom environment can enhance children's confidence and motivation, making learning more enjoyable and effective. Teachers may also collaborate closely with parents and guardians to create a consistent support system for learners at home. Sharing effective teaching strategies, educational activities, and progress updates with families can help reinforce classroom learning beyond school hours. Moreover, integrating technology and interactive learning materials can supplement traditional methods, making instruction more dynamic and stimulating. Continuous professional development through workshops and peer collaboration will equip teachers with innovative techniques for addressing learning gaps. By adopting a holistic approach, educators can support struggling kindergarten learners in developing essential skills, enabling them to thrive both academically and personally.

Future researchers should explore evidence-based strategies that enhance the competencies of struggling kindergarten learners, focusing on innovative teaching methodologies, early intervention programs, and the impact of socio-emotional support on learning outcomes. Conducting longitudinal studies to examine the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, play-based learning, and multisensory approaches can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers. Additionally, researchers should investigate the role of parental involvement and technology in early childhood education, identifying best practices that teachers can actively apply in the classroom. By contributing to a growing body of research, future scholars can help shape policies and develop practical solutions to ensure that all young learners receive the foundational skills necessary for academic success.

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