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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSIGHTS IN CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT IN KINDERGARTEN

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing contextual performance assessment in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte. The researcher selected ten participants through purposive sampling and gathered data using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions guided by a semi-structured interview guide. Findings revealed that teachers embedded real-life skills in assessments by integrating home-based tasks and encouraging learner independence. However, they faced challenges such as limited materials, time constraints, and inconsistent understanding of contextual assessment. Despite these barriers, teachers observed increased engagement, better retention, and improved confidence among learners. To cope, they engaged in professional growth, used humor, and applied resourceful strategies like DIY materials and digital tools. They also drew strength from administrative support, collaboration with parents and peers, and structured feedback systems. These insights underline the importance of leadership, community involvement, and continuous monitoring in sustaining meaningful assessment. The study implies that aligning assessments with children's real-life experiences and supporting teachers through training and resources enhances implementation. This research provides a valuable foundation for improving early childhood assessment practices.

KEYWORDS: *Contextual Performance Assessment; Kindergarten; Phenomenological Study; Lived Experiences; Coping Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Assessing kindergarten readiness remains a complex challenge in early childhood education. Traditional tools such as standardized tests and checklists often fail to capture the full scope of young learners' capabilities, particularly in areas like creativity, social interaction, and hands-on learning. These conventional approaches may misclassify children who excel in practical or collaborative settings as unprepared for school, leading to missed opportunities for appropriate support and enrichment.

Globally and locally, there is growing concern over the limitations of these assessment practices. In many contexts, including parts of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, rigid assessments often neglect play-based, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate methods. In the Philippines, issues such as large class sizes, limited resources, and a narrow focus on academic markers further hinder meaningful readiness evaluations. In Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte, these challenges are compounded by inconsistent teacher training and a lack of contextualized assessment tools, making it difficult to accurately assess children's diverse learning profiles.

Although the benefits of performance-based assessments are widely recognized, few studies explore how kindergarten teachers themselves experience and implement contextual performance assessment (CPA), especially in rural or resource-constrained settings. This gap in literature underscores the need to understand the lived realities of educators who navigate complex classroom environments while striving to assess students holistically.

This study, therefore, employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing CPA in Sto. Tomas, Davao del Norte. It seeks to uncover how educators integrate community and home contexts into their assessments, cope with challenges, and identify strategies that support fair and meaningful evaluations. The findings aim to inform teacher training, policy reforms, and curriculum design that are responsive to the needs of early learners, particularly in marginalized settings. Ultimately, the study advocates for more equitable and context-sensitive assessment practices that honor the strengths and backgrounds of all children.

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REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

Contextual Performance Assessment (CPA) in early childhood education emphasizes real-life tasks that allow children to demonstrate learning through authentic, hands-on experiences. This approach supports the development of essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration—areas often overlooked by traditional assessments (Yan et al., 2022; Arrafii, 2023). CPA fosters inclusivity by aligning assessment with students' daily lives, cultural backgrounds, and individual learning styles.

However, effective implementation of CPA is often challenged by limited teacher training, insufficient time, and scarce resources (Elsner Twesme et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2021). Teachers may struggle to design relevant tasks without proper support, while overcrowded classrooms and lack of learning materials further hinder contextualized evaluation (Akuma & Gaigher, 2021; Ssenyonga et al., 2022).

Despite these barriers, CPA has been shown to enhance not only academic competencies but also real-life skills. Performance tasks like cleaning, organizing, and role-playing promote independence, initiative, and social development (Aydin-Ceran, 2021; Constantinou, 2024). Embedding assessment in familiar routines improves knowledge retention and prepares learners for lifelong learning (Nurmadiah & Jabu, 2022).

Contextualized learning environments also boost engagement and motivation. Tasks that reflect home and community experiences allow learners to build on prior knowledge and develop holistically (Țîru, 2024; Bortnik et al., 2021). Moreover, social and cognitive growth is enhanced through collaborative, real-world tasks (Samsudin et al., 2024; Jubhari et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, a lack of standardized guidelines and inconsistent understanding of CPA among educators remain major concerns. Many teachers feel unprepared to align contextual tasks with learning objectives, leading to inconsistent practices and reduced assessment reliability (Abdallah et al., 2025; Kodi & Kumar, 2021). The added workload of designing and evaluating CPA further compounds the difficulty, especially when administrative support is limited (Uslan et al., 2021; Cerit & Ekici, 2023).

In summary, while contextual performance assessment offers significant benefits in early learning, its effective use depends on adequate training, resource availability, clear policies, and institutional support. Addressing these gaps is vital to maximizing CPA's potential in developing well-rounded, school-ready learners.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions underlying the investigation in this study are as follows:

1. What are the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in implementing contextual performance assessment in their classrooms?
2. How do kindergarten teachers cope with the challenges they face while conducting contextual performance assessment?
3. What educational management insights can be drawn from teachers' experiences and coping strategies in executing contextual performance assessment?

METHODOLOGY

This section contains the philosophical assumption, qualitative assumption, research design, research participants, research ethics, role of researcher, research instrument, research procedure, data collection, data analysis, analytical framework, and trustworthiness of the study.

Research Design

I used a qualitative design following a phenomenological study. Qualitative research design is an approach that seeks to explore and understand individuals lived experiences, perspectives, and social contexts through in-depth, non-numerical data (Klopper, 2008). It emphasizes meaning-making and captures the richness and complexity of human behavior and experience. This design was appropriate for the study as it allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the authentic experiences of kindergarten teachers. Through open-ended responses and reflective narratives, the study gained insights into how these educators perceived and applied contextual performance assessment in their classrooms. The qualitative design enabled the collection of rich, detailed data that could not be captured through quantitative means alone.

Meanwhile, phenomenological research is a qualitative method focused on understanding the essence of individuals' lived experiences regarding a specific phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). It aims to describe and interpret how people make sense of a particular experience in their everyday lives. This approach was highly appropriate for the study as it centered on the lived realities of kindergarten teachers in the context of classroom assessment. It allowed the researcher to uncover the underlying meanings, challenges, and insights the teachers encountered while implementing contextual performance

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assessments. By prioritizing the teachers' personal reflections, the phenomenological approach helped illuminate the deeper essence of assessment practice from their perspective.

Research Participants

In this study, I selected a total of 10 kindergarten teachers from public schools in Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte. Out of the ten participants, five were chosen to take part in in-depth interviews (IDI), while the remaining five participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). I believed this combination allowed for both individual and collective insights, which helped enrich the understanding of their lived experiences. Each participant provided valuable perspectives that reflected their own teaching contexts and practices. The participants were all actively teaching in public kindergarten classrooms during the time of data collection.

I used purposive sampling to identify the participants for this qualitative research. This technique involves deliberately selecting individuals who possess specific knowledge or experience related to the research topic (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). I chose participants who were known to have implemented contextual performance assessments in their classrooms. I also consulted school heads and coordinators to help identify potential participants who met the criteria and were willing to contribute.

To guide my selection, I set clear inclusion criteria. Participants had to be currently employed as kindergarten teachers in a public school within Sto. Tomas East District. They were required to have at least three years of experience implementing contextual performance assessments in the classroom. I also ensured that each teacher was willing to voluntarily participate in either an interview or focus group discussion. Lastly, I confirmed that all participants had the ability to articulate their insights clearly in the language used for the interviews and discussions.

Research Instrument

To gather rich and meaningful data, I utilized a semi-structured interview guide specifically designed to explore the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers from Sto. Tomas East District, Davao del Norte in implementing contextual performance assessment in their classrooms. This type of instrument allowed for both consistency and flexibility during data collection, as it included key questions aligned with my research objectives while still providing space for participants to share their insights in their own words. I carefully crafted the questions to elicit detailed descriptions of their teaching practices, challenges, coping mechanisms, and personal reflections. This approach enabled me to capture the depth and complexity of their experiences while maintaining coherence across the interviews.

Moreover, I ensured the reliability and appropriateness of the instrument through a validation process. I sought the feedback of three academic experts with backgrounds in early childhood education and qualitative research to evaluate the clarity, relevance, and alignment of the questions with my study objectives. Based on their suggestions, I revised some items to improve wording, remove ambiguity, and ensure cultural and contextual appropriateness. This validation process was essential in enhancing the credibility of my data collection tool. As a result, the finalized semi-structured interview guide effectively supported the exploration of the participants' lived experiences in a respectful and insightful manner.

Data Analysis

Data Triangulation. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings, I applied data triangulation by using multiple sources of data. I gathered information through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field notes taken during the data collection process. By examining data from different sources, I was able to cross-check and validate the consistency of the participants' responses. This method helped me understand their lived experiences more clearly and avoid biased interpretations. Through triangulation, I strengthened the trustworthiness and richness of the research findings.

In addition, I compared the insights shared by individual participants during in-depth interviews with the collective views expressed in the focus group discussions. I carefully analyzed overlapping patterns and contradictions in their statements to reveal deeper meanings. This process allowed me to form a more complete understanding of how contextual performance assessments were implemented in their classrooms. Triangulation provided a clearer picture of how kindergarten teachers coped with challenges and made instructional decisions. As a result, I was able to draw meaningful conclusions grounded in multiple layers of evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data analysis presented in this chapter is the outcome of the study. In addition, discussions are provided to provide a full explanation of the themes that are generated in response to the objectives established for this study.

Lived Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers In Implementing Contextual Performance Assessment in their Classrooms

Figure 3 illustrates the implementation of kindergarten teachers of contextual performance assessment in their classrooms through their lived experiences. These experiences have been categorized into four distinct themes: Teaching real-life skills through contextual assessment, challenges in resource availability, positive impact of contextual assessment on learners,

and challenges in implementing contextual performance assessment. Each theme captures a different aspect of the financial struggles faced by teachers, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their economic challenges.

Teaching Real Life Skills through Contextual Assessment. This theme captured how kindergarten teachers framed performance tasks around children's everyday experiences. It highlighted that assessments were not isolated tests but integrated into routine activities to foster authentic learning. By embedding tasks like cleaning, dishwashing, and uniform wearing within assessment, teachers aimed to make evaluation meaningful and directly applicable to students' lives. This approach reflected a shift from paper and pencil tests toward practical demonstrations of competence.

Teachers converted commonplace chores into structured performance tasks, thereby validating children's home experiences as pedagogical resources. For example, a teacher shared:

> *"Gihimo namo og performance task ang paglimpyo sa classroom."* (We made classroom cleaning into a performance task.)
> IDI_P1

This signified that sweeping and tidying became measures of responsibility and motor coordination. Similarly, another teacher during IDI stated:

> *"Amo silang ginatudluan maghugas og plato human mokaon."* (We teach them to wash dishes after eating.)
> IDI_P3

This reframed post meal cleanup as an exercise in procedural skills and hygiene awareness. Additionally, during FGD an informer said:

> *"Apil sa performance task ang pagsul-ob og sapatos ug uniform."* (Wearing shoes and uniform is part of the performance task.)
> FGD_P5

This statement indicated that teachers turned dressing routines into assessments of sequencing and self-management. By leveraging daily chores, educators provided concrete contexts that promoted both skill mastery and intrinsic motivation.

Meanwhile, teachers drew directly from community settings and household materials to ensure cultural relevance and student engagement. When one noted:

> *"Gibase namo ang mga buluhaton sa mga kasinatian sa balay."* (We based the activities on their home experiences.)
> IDI_P4

It reflected deliberate alignment with children's familiar home routines. Adding more, the observation of teachers illustrated how local community practices—such as marketplace simulations—became assessment scenarios. The participants narrated:

> *"Ang uban namo nga assessment kay naggikan sa barangay setup."* (Some of our assessments came from the barangay setup.)
> IDI_P5
> *"Naggamit mi og mga gamit nga makita ra nila sa ilang panimalay."* (We used materials they can see at home.)
> FGD_P2

These statements showed that readily available objects reinforced learning without added cost. This environmental congruence fostered deeper understanding by tapping into students lived contexts.

By centering assessments on everyday tasks, teachers cultivated autonomy and practical competence among learners. For instance, a participant conveyed:

> *"Mas makat-on ang bata kung buhaton gyud nila ang buluhaton."* (Children learn better when they actually do the task.)
> IDI_P2

The participant emphasized that doing—rather than simply observing—solidified learning. More so, a participant during the IDI demonstrated efforts to teach organization and self-help skills essential for classroom readiness. She said:

> *"Amo silang gitudluan unsaon pagprepara sa ilang gamit sa klase."* (We taught them how to prepare their own school things.)
> IDI_3

Further, during FGD a participant conveyed:

> *"Ang bata nga kabalo mubuhat og task sa balay, kabalo sad sa klase."* (A child who can do tasks at home can do tasks in class too.)
> FGD_P1

The statement underscored the transferability of domestic competencies to academic settings. These practices promoted self-reliance and bridged the gap between home and school learning.

Collectively, these insights align Aydin-Ceran (2021) findings which posits that knowledge is constructed through concrete experiences and active reflection. By embedding contextual performance assessments in daily routines, teachers honored the holistic development of kindergarteners, enabling them to apply skills in meaningful, real-life contexts. Moreover, grounding assessment in familiar settings mitigated anxiety and increased motivation, as students perceived tasks as

relevant rather than abstract. This approach also resonates with Nurmadiah and Jabu (2022) assertion, wherein learning emerges through socially mediated activities rooted in cultural practices. Hence, contextual performance assessment offers a powerful framework for enabling young learners to demonstrate competence in ways that mirror the demands of their everyday worlds.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This part of the paper presents the implications and future directions of the study. The discussion is supported by the literature presented in the first chapters and the implications is in accordance with research questions presented in this study.

Findings

This study explored the experiences of kindergarten teachers in Sto. Tomas East District in implementing contextual performance assessment (CPA) through a phenomenological approach using interviews and focus group discussions. Teachers integrate real-life skills into assessments by aligning tasks with students' daily lives, promoting independence and practical learning. Despite its benefits—such as improved engagement, retention, and student confidence—challenges like limited resources, time constraints, and inconsistent understanding of CPA practices hinder implementation.

Teachers cope by pursuing professional growth through workshops and self-learning, maintaining a positive mindset, and innovating with DIY materials and digital tools. They also rely on community partnerships and reflective teaching. Effective CPA implementation is supported by strong leadership, collaborative school culture, and structured monitoring systems, including data-driven decision-making and continuous feedback.

Implications

The findings highlight the value of real-life, contextualized assessments in enhancing learner engagement and independence. Addressing time and resource limitations is vital for sustainability. Professional development, reflective teaching, and resourceful strategies empower teachers to implement CPA more effectively. Moreover, administrative support, collaborative culture, and robust monitoring systems are essential for sustaining quality early childhood assessment practices.

Future Directions

The Department of Education should develop standardized CPA guidelines and provide adequate training and resources. School heads must support teacher development and foster collaboration across grade levels. Teachers are encouraged to engage in professional learning communities, apply creative, real-life-aligned assessments, and partner with families and communities. Pupils should be gradually exposed to performance tasks that nurture independence and reflection. Future researchers should conduct longitudinal and comparative studies on CPA's impact and examine how context influences assessment practices.

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