

## Teachers' Perceived Level of Professional Development and Competencies in Handling Kindergarten Pupils: The Case of Public and Private Schools of Ozamis City Division

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### Abstract:

Despite the critical role of early childhood education and the unique challenges faced by kindergarten teachers, there exists a noticeable need for more specific professional development needs and competencies required for effective teaching. This study employed a descriptive-survey research method to determine the professional development needs and competencies of kindergarten teachers in public and private schools of the Ozamiz City Division. Findings revealed that the kindergarten teachers expressed a high level of perceived professional development needs and demonstrated a high level of competence in handling kindergarten classes. This emphasizes the dedication of teachers to ongoing growth and improvement within their field. However, there exist a significant difference on the perceived professional development needs and competencies in terms of gender. These indicated the necessity for professional development to enhance the skills of kindergarten teachers, particularly in addressing the differing competency needs of male and female pupils. Thus, continuous professional development is essential, especially for early childhood education, as teachers must effectively meet the needs of their students and provide quality education.

**Keywords:** Competencies, kindergarten teacher's professional development needs

### Introduction:

Professional development enhances teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, particularly in kindergarten education. This level of education requires specialized training to meet the unique needs of young learners, making ongoing professional development even more critical.

Therefore, it is imperative that teachers across all educational tiers, spanning from elementary to higher education, actively participate in learning endeavors to remain abreast of the latest teaching methodologies, curriculum innovations, and advancements in educational technologies.

Investments in professional development yield positive outcomes for teachers' personal growth and for enhancing the complete educational environment in schools. Dunn et al. (2018) and Kabilan & Veratharaju (2013) stress out the importance of aligning professional development with current instructional practices and teachers' needs. Fostering sustainable lifelong learning among teachers is vital for driving innovation and continual improvement in teaching practices. This aspect helps teachers as it enables them to deliver lessons that align with children's interests and effectively motivate them (Doctor & Macalisang, 2024).

Identifying competencies and professional development needs among kindergarten teachers is essential for guiding future training initiatives and improving teaching quality in early childhood education. Competencies, as described by Zamri and Hamzah (2019), are crucial standards that teachers must master to achieve educational goals effectively. These competencies are essential for ensuring the success of the teaching-learning process and meeting the evolving needs of education. In this vein, professional development programs should align with the specific competency needs of kindergarten teachers to promote effective teaching practices. Categorizing teachers based on their professional desires can aid in designing tailored professional development programs, ultimately enhancing teachers' competence in educating kindergarten learners and improving overall educational outcomes. Interactive training programs, ongoing monitoring, and personalized feedback play a pivotal role in enhancing instructional practices and overall teaching effectiveness.

Teaching kindergarten pupils presents enduring challenges for teachers as it is the foundational step in the K to 12 Basic Education system. The time that a child spends in kindergarten is of critical importance to his growth and development (Doctor & Macalisang 2024). Daily, teachers grapple with various issues and concerns unique to this critical stage of education, necessitating continuous and

pertinent training opportunities. In the present time, however, within the research context, there has been a noticeable scarcity of relevant seminars, training sessions, and workshops organized by DepEd Ozamis City Division, which the researcher and fellow kindergarten teachers could access. Despite DepEd's efforts to enhance professional development in this sector, persistent challenges persist.

This study was conducted in response to the abovementioned challenges, focusing on teachers' perceived levels of professional development and competencies in handling kindergarten pupils in public and private schools within the Ozamis City Division. The study results provide valuable insights into the areas of improvement needed to enhance teaching practices and promote better outcomes for kindergarten education in the region.

### **Theoretical Considerations:**

The theoretical framework guiding this research is rooted in Piaget's cognitive learning theory (1950), which posits that learning occurs through active participation, reflection, and interaction. According to this theory, teachers should continuously learn and reflect to enhance their knowledge, skills, and competencies. This can be facilitated through various forms of professional development, such as in-service training, coaching, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning, aligning with Piaget's emphasis on active engagement in the learning process.

Supporting Piaget's cognitive learning theory is the reflective practice model, as articulated by Schön (1992), which underscores the significance of reflective thinking and self-evaluation in fostering professional development. The model advocates for a cyclical process of reflection and action, where teachers critically assess their teaching practices, identify areas for growth, and develop new strategies to improve teaching effectiveness. This reflective approach empowers teachers to evolve and refine their instructional methods continually.

Furthermore, the study is informed by the standards-based approach to professional

development, as Guskey (2009) outlined, which emphasizes aligning professional development activities with established professional standards and competencies. According to this approach, professional development initiatives should be targeted and designed to enhance teachers' proficiency in specific areas aligned with recognized professional standards. By adhering to this standards-based approach, educators can engage in meaningful and relevant professional development experiences that directly contribute to improved teaching practices and student outcomes.

In integrating these theoretical perspectives, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how teachers' professional development and competencies can be enhanced to better meet the needs of kindergarten pupils in public and private schools within the Ozamis City Division. By leveraging insights from cognitive learning theory, reflective practice models, and standards-based approaches, the research aims to contribute actionable recommendations for designing effective professional development programs tailored to the unique context of early childhood education. Ultimately, this theoretical framework underscores the importance of continuous learning, reflective practice, and alignment with professional standards in fostering ongoing professional growth and enhancing teaching quality in kindergarten settings.

### **Methods:**

The study utilized a descriptive-survey research design to systematically examine and describe the perceived level of professional development and competencies among kindergarten teachers across public and private schools within the Ozamis City Division. A total of 72 public kindergarten teachers and 32 private kindergarten teachers from the Division of Ozamis City, comprising a participant pool of 104 teachers, were included in the study during the School Year 2022-2023. Data collection employed a modified standardized tool based on previous studies, adapted explicitly from Yenen and Yontem's (2020) research on teachers' perceptions of professional development needs and

Gallego and Caingcoy's (2020) study on teachers' perceptions of the required competencies for handling kindergarten classes. Before full-scale implementation, pilot testing was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collection instruments. The pilot testing undertaken for the study's data collection instruments yielded a validation coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong reliability and validity of the tools used in assessing kindergarten teachers' perceived level of professional development and competencies across public and private schools within the Ozamis City Division.

### **Results and Discussion:**

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents' profiles regarding their age, sex, years of teaching experience, number of training attended, number of units earned, and highest educational attainment. The table revealed that in terms of age, the majority of the respondents (45%) belonged to the age range of 51-60 years, followed by 27% belonging to the age range of 41-50 years. This implies that the population comprises experienced kindergarten teachers who have been in the profession for a long time. However, it is noteworthy that only one respondent (1%) belonged to the age range of 21-30 years, which indicates that the sample does not represent the younger generation of teachers. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have reported that most teachers are in their late 40s to early 50s (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Regarding sex, the table shows that most of the respondents (98%) are female, and only two (2%) are male. This finding is consistent with the notion that kindergarten teaching is a female-dominated profession. This is consistent with the fact that the teaching profession is generally dominated by women (Aguilar & Valdivieso, 2016).

The table also indicates that the respondents had varying years of teaching experience, with the highest percentage (61%) having one to seven years of experience. This implies a relatively high turnover rate among kindergarten teachers, and there is a need to improve the retention of

experienced teachers. This finding aligns with previous studies showing a high turnover rate in the teaching profession, particularly in the early years of teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In terms of the number of trainings attended, the majority of the respondents (46%) attended school-based training, followed by Division (25%), regional (8%), national (5%), and international (2%) training. This finding suggests that the professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers varied across different levels, with school-based training being the most common. This finding is consistent with the fact that most teacher professional development opportunities are organized at the school level (OECD, 2019).

Regarding the number of units earned, most respondents (82%) earned 0-12 units, while only a

tiny percentage earned higher units. This implies a need for more opportunities for kindergarten teachers to gain higher academic units to enhance their professional growth. This suggests room for improvement in kindergarten teachers' pursuit of higher education or advanced degrees (Snyder & Dillow, 2019).

Lastly, the table shows that most respondents (46%) completed a master's degree, followed by those with units in a Master's program (36%). This finding indicates that the sample population had a relatively high level of educational attainment, which may have implications for the competencies and professional development needs of kindergarten teachers. This is consistent with the fact that a master's degree is often required for teacher licensure and advancement in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

**Table 1 Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents' Profile**

<b>Age</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
61 – 65	17	16
51 – 60	47	45
41 – 50	28	27
31 – 40	11	11
21 – 30	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
Male	2	2
Female	102	98
<b>Total:</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>P</b>
22 – 28	8	8
15 – 21	13	13
8 – 14	20	19
1 – 7	63	61
<b>Total:</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>No. of Training Attended</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
International	21	2
National	52	5
Regional	78	8
Division	265	25

District	144	14
School	482	46
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1042</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No. of Units Earned</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
61 – 72	2	2
49 – 60	5	4
37 – 48	1	1
25 – 36	4	4
13 – 24	7	7
0 – 12	85	82
<b>Total:</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Highest Educational Attainment</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>p</b>
Completed the Doctorate Studies	4	4
With Units in Doctoral Studies	38	36
Completed the Master's Studies	48	46
With Units in Master's Studies	8	8
Bachelor's Degree	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 revealed a strong consensus among kindergarten teachers regarding their perceived professional development needs. Key areas such as knowledge and understanding of the field, pedagogical competencies, curriculum knowledge, pupil behavior management, and interactions with parents and stakeholders emerged as high-priority needs, with mean scores indicating a “Strongly Agree” sentiment across the board. However, there were slightly lower scores in specialized areas such as teaching pupils with special needs, multicultural or multilingual settings, and technical skills like ICT integration. Findings underscore the importance of professional development programs to address specific competencies required by kindergarten teachers, aligning with established literature on effective teaching practices in early childhood education.

This implies that institutions, policymakers, and professional development providers may design and implement training initiatives that address the identified needs, leading to improved teaching quality, enhanced student outcomes, and better overall educational experiences in kindergarten settings. Moreover, acknowledging and supporting teachers in specialized areas such as special needs

education and multicultural settings can create inclusive and effective learning environments.

The study's findings are supported by previous research, as emphasized by Hattie (2011) and Marzano et al. (2011), which underscores the essential role of subject matter expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and classroom management skills in promoting effective teaching practices. Macalisang (2023) posited that teachers should understand the value of instructional management leadership in order to promote school effectiveness, learning, and student competence. This highlights the significance of teachers' abilities to engage adeptly with diverse student populations, including those with special needs and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as noted by García & Wei (2014) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2008). These findings reaffirm the critical importance of targeted professional development programs equipping teachers with necessary competencies to excel in varied educational contexts, thereby enhancing teaching quality and fostering inclusive learning environments.



**Table 2: Level of Perceived Professional Development Needs of the Respondents**

<b>Professional Development Needs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Mastery and comprehension of the subject area.	4.61	0.510	Strongly Agree
2. Competence in teaching methodologies.	4.59	0.514	Strongly Agree
3. Familiarity with the curriculum standards.	4.61	0.419	Strongly Agree
4. Application of pupil evaluation and assessment methods.	4.59	0.514	Strongly Agree
5. Proficiency in using ICT tools for teaching purposes.	4.53	0.590	Strongly Agree
6. Management of pupil behavior and classroom dynamics.	4.63	0.504	Strongly Agree
7. Oversight of school operations and administrative tasks.	4.55	0.538	Strongly Agree
8. Engagement with parents and various stakeholders.	4.57	0.604	Strongly Agree
9. Implementation of personalized learning strategies.	4.57	0.604	Strongly Agree
10. Instructional techniques for students with special needs.	4.42	0.748	Strongly Agree
11. Teaching in diverse cultural or linguistic environments.	4.40	0.676	Strongly Agree
12. Integration of cross-disciplinary skills (e.g., problem-solving, meta-cognition).	4.50	0.608	Strongly Agree
13. Development of occupational competencies for future endeavors.	4.47	0.607	Strongly Agree
14. Incorporation of new technologies in educational settings.	4.50	0.575	Strongly Agree
15. Provision of career guidance and counseling to students.	4.48	0.574	Strongly Agree
16. Coping with stress and prioritizing mental well-being.	4.55	0.538	Strongly Agree
17. Resource allocation and financial management.	4.49	0.591	Strongly Agree
18. Execution of project-based learning initiatives.	4.55	0.622	Strongly Agree
19. Mentoring and coaching of peers or subordinates.	4.41	0.677	Strongly Agree
20. Undertaking individual or collaborative research projects.	4.40	0.646	Strongly Agree
21. Participation in teacher networks or professional communities.	4.52	0.557	Strongly Agree
22. Conducting observations and comparative studies with other institutions.	4.42	0.602	Strongly Agree
23. Exploring alternative revenue streams for educational programs.	4.43	0.604	Strongly Agree
<b>Weighted Average Mean</b>	<b>4.51</b>	<b>0.584</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Very High Level of Perceived Needs</b>		

For Table 3, data reveals mean scores ranging from 4.60 to 4.69, indicating a high level of perceived competence across various aspects of pedagogical competencies and classroom management. These include effectively using teaching strategies to enhance literacy and numeracy skills, fostering critical and creative thinking, managing classroom structure for meaningful engagement, and utilizing differentiated learning experiences to meet diverse learner needs.

Significant implications for enhancing teaching quality and student engagement in kindergarten settings, such as effective pedagogical strategies, classroom management techniques, and communication practices with stakeholders, can lead to positive learning outcomes. Moreover, the demonstrated competence in assessment strategies

underscores teachers' abilities to monitor student progress effectively and make informed instructional decisions, aligning with effective teaching and learning (Stiggins, 2015).

Research by Tomlinson (2014) and Farivar et al. (2018) emphasizes the role of differentiated instruction and hands-on activities in improving student learning outcomes. Similarly, works by Freiberg et al. (2009) highlight the importance of positive classroom management strategies in creating conducive learning environments. These findings collectively highlight that integrating differentiated instruction, hands-on activities, and effective classroom management practices significantly optimizes students' learning experiences and academic achievements.

**Table 3 Level of Perceived Competence in Handling Kindergarten**

<b>Perceived Needs for Competencies</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Applied knowledge across different teaching areas within the curriculum.	4.65	0.499	Strongly Agree
2. Employed diverse teaching strategies aimed at improving literacy and numeracy skills among learners.	4.69	0.486	Strongly Agree
3. Implemented a range of teaching techniques to foster critical thinking, creativity, and higher-order cognitive skills.	4.66	0.496	Strongly Agree
4. Organized classroom dynamics to encourage meaningful exploration, discovery, and hands-on learning experiences in various physical environments.	4.68	0.509	Strongly Agree
5. Utilized tailored learning experiences that consider learners' gender, preferences, strengths, interests, and backgrounds.	4.66	0.554	Strongly Agree
6. Managed learner behavior positively and non-violently, ensuring an environment focused on learning.	4.60	0.513	Strongly Agree
7. Engaged in collaborative discussions to incorporate feedback from both teachers and learners, enhancing teaching methods.	4.61	0.511	Strongly Agree

8. Identified, created, structured, and utilized suitable teaching resources, including technology, to meet learning objectives effectively.	4.64	0.502	Strongly Agree
9. Strategized, organized, and executed teaching processes in alignment with curriculum standards and diverse educational settings.	4.66	0.516	Strongly Agree
10. Maintained transparent communication with stakeholders, promptly sharing learners' progress, needs, and accomplishments, including parents or guardians.	4.66	0.516	Strongly Agree
11. Monitored and assessed learner progress and achievements through data-driven insights.	4.68	0.489	Strongly Agree
12. Developed, implemented, and adapted diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies consistent with curriculum guidelines.	4.66	0.498	Strongly Agree
<b>Weighted Average Mean</b>	<b>4.65</b>	<b>0.507</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

In Table 4, the profile factors, including age, sex, years of teaching, number of training attended, units earned, and highest educational attainment, were not significant in influencing the level of perceived professional development of kindergarten teachers, as indicated by the p-values greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected for all profile factors. These results imply that regardless of the teacher's age, sex, years of teaching, number of training attended, units earned, and highest educational attainment, their level of perceived professional development remained relatively the same. The findings are consistent with previous research on professional development, which suggests that the impact of professional development programs on teachers' perceived professional development is not necessarily dependent on their demographic and professional characteristics (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Table 4 provides evidence that there was no significant association between the profile factors

and the level of perceived professional development of kindergarten teachers. These results suggest that professional development programs should be designed to cater to the diverse needs of teachers, regardless of their demographic and professional characteristics.

The Human Capital Theory posits an individual's performance and productivity are shaped by their investments in human capital, such as training, education, skills, and experiences. Maringe (2015) highlighted certain discrepancies and disparities related to human capital concerning gender, educational degrees, fields of study, and academic qualifications. Maringe's findings indicated that there is no significant disparity based solely on demographics; rather, it is a combination of various factors that influences human capital. For example, a younger educator with more credits in early childhood education might exhibit higher levels of professional growth compared to an older educator with fewer early childhood education credits.



**Table 4: Test of Significant Difference in the Level of Perceived Professional Development of the Kindergarten Teachers When Grouped According to the Profile of the Respondents**

Areas	Chi-Square Value	P-Value	Interpretation	Decision on $H_o$
Age	4.162	.385	Not Significant	Do not reject
Sex	2.511	.113	Not Significant	Do not reject
Years of Teaching	1.644	.649	Not Significant	Do not reject
No. of Training Attended	.999	.963	Not Significant	Do not reject
Units Earned	2.976	.704	Not Significant	Do not reject
Highest Educational Attainment	3.190	.527	Not Significant	Do not reject

\*. Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$

Similarly, table 5 exhibits all profile factors except for sex, which did not have a significant association with the level of competency needs of kindergarten teachers. The p-values for age, years of teaching, number of training attended, units earned, and highest educational attainment were more significant than 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis is not rejected for these factors. Therefore, the competency needs of kindergarten teachers did not significantly vary based on their age, years of teaching, number of training attended, units earned, and highest educational attainment.

However, the p-value for sex was less than 0.05, indicating a significant association between sex and the level of competency needs of kindergarten teachers. The null hypothesis is rejected for this factor, which implies that the competency needs of male and female kindergarten teachers were significantly different. The results suggest that sex is essential to kindergarten teachers' competency

needs. The differences in the competency needs of male and female teachers may be attributed to the different teaching styles, instructional strategies, and classroom management techniques used by each group. Previous research showed that male and female teachers used various teaching methods. Male teachers focus more on discipline and control, while female teachers prioritize creating a supportive and nurturing classroom environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; King, 2014).

In conclusion, Table 5 provides evidence that sex is the only profile factor that has a significant association with the level of competency needs of kindergarten teachers. These findings suggest that teacher education programs and professional development initiatives should consider the differences in competency needs between male and female teachers to cater to their unique needs and enhance their teaching effectiveness.

**Table 5 Significant Difference in the Level of Competency Needs of the Kindergarten Teachers when Grouped According to the Profile of the Respondents**

Areas	Chi-Square Value	P-Value	Interpretation	Decision on $H_0$
Age	6.312	.176	Not Significant	Do not reject
Sex	5.760	.016	Significant	Reject
Years of Teaching	3.211	.360	Not Significant	Do not reject
No. of Training Attended	4.066	.540	Not Significant	Do not reject
Units Earned	4.911	.427	Not Significant	Do not reject
Highest Educational Attainment	1.896	.760	Not Significant	Do not reject

\*. Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$

**Conclusion and Recommendations:**

Based on the findings, teachers had a very high level of perceived professional development needs and a very high level of competence in handling kindergarten classes. There was no significant difference in the level of perceived professional development needs and competency when grouped according to various profile factors, except for sex, which significantly affected the level of competency needed. These results suggest that the kindergarten teachers in the Division require professional development to improve their skills, particularly in addressing the differing competency needs of male and female competency needs of male and female pupils. Generally, the study emphasized the importance of continuous professional development for teachers, especially those in the early childhood education sector, to meet the needs of their pupils and provide quality education.

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**Compliance with Ethical Standards:**

This study adhered to the ethical standards set forth by the SCC Review Board at Southern Capital Colleges and followed the guidelines outlined in the Declaration of the Institution. Prior to participating in the study, all participants provided informed consent after receiving a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, risks, and benefits. Participant privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process, and all data collected were used solely for research purposes. Any identifying information was anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy. This study was carried out with utmost respect for the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants. The research process strictly followed the ethical guidelines outlined in the Graduate School Manual of Southern Capital Colleges.

### Conflicts of Interest:

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this paper.

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