

Strategies for Kindergarten Teaching

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Kindergarten education has historically occupied a marginal position within Philippine basic education. Learners at this stage are often perceived primarily as “future elementary pupils,” rather than as young individuals with distinct developmental needs. Consequently, they are frequently taught using instructional structures and methods that mirror those of higher grade levels approaches that are often misaligned with the developmental characteristics of preschool-aged children. A strong and consistent research findings underscores that early learners progress in unique ways that differ significantly from their elementary-aged counterparts (Wang, 2024; Ansari, 2018; Bjorklund, 2022; Frogner et al., 2021).

Although learning begins in the home, it assumes a more formal structure when parents enroll their children in kindergarten. This stage represents a pivotal milestone in a child’s educational journey (López & Benner, 2025), bridging the transition from the informal learning environment of the household to the structured expectations of formal schooling. The quality of this transition exerts lasting influence on a child’s motivation, engagement, and attitudes toward future learning.

Teaching in kindergarten is therefore less a matter of rigid academic instruction than of cultivating a nurturing, supportive, and stimulating learning environment (Licardo et al., 2023). Central to this pedagogy is fostering curiosity, creativity, and confidence through developmentally appropriate, play-based approaches. Activities such as storytelling, art, music, and imaginative play not only sustain engagement but also serve as vehicles for cognitive growth, motor development, language acquisition, and socio-emotional competence.

The effectiveness of kindergarten teaching lies in striking a careful balance between enjoyment and educational value (Alotaibi, 2024; Parker et al., 2022). It is both a privilege and a challenge: a privilege because it enables teachers to establish the foundation for a lifelong love of learning, and a challenge because it requires patience, adaptability, and deep knowledge of early childhood development. Rather than functioning as a mere preparatory stage, kindergarten constitutes a critical phase in shaping resilient, capable, and well-rounded learners.

Kindergarten Teaching and Learning

Kindergarten teachers, like other educators, face a wide spectrum of professional challenges. Hegwood (2023) identifies recurring issues that include: (a) addressing diverse learning styles, (b) maintaining effective communication, (c) keeping pace with technological advances in education, (d) building constructive partnerships with parents, (e) responding to administrative pressures, (f) designing engaging yet curriculum-aligned lesson plans, (g) managing classroom behavior and development, (h) completing time-intensive administrative tasks, (i) coping with insufficient funding, and (j) preventing professional burnout. Taken together, these

challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of kindergarten teaching, which requires educators to balance pedagogical expertise with administrative efficiency, emotional resilience, and interpersonal skill.

Within this context, teaching kindergarten emerges less as a process of competitive instruction and more as an art of nurturing, support, and developmental responsiveness. Research consistently highlights that children at this stage thrive when engaged in play-based and experiential learning activities, including art, music, storytelling, and imaginative play. Such practices transform everyday play into opportunities to strengthen cognitive skills, fine and gross motor abilities, language development, and socio-emotional competence. A well-designed kindergarten program must therefore integrate varied instructional strategies to accommodate diverse learning styles and individual developmental trajectories.

The role of kindergarten teachers is thus pivotal in shaping early learning outcomes. Beyond delivering lessons, they are entrusted with fostering creativity, self-expression, and social interaction—capacities that serve as cornerstones for lifelong learning. Success in this endeavor depends on striking an appropriate balance between enjoyment and structured learning, thereby ensuring that young children not only acquire foundational academic competencies but also develop a sustained love for school. In this way, kindergarten education functions as both a developmental bridge and a catalyst for building resilient, confident, and capable learners.

Best Practices and Challenges of Kindergarten Teachers: A Case Study

This study sought to examine the best practices, challenges, and

coping mechanisms of kindergarten teachers, as well as the factors that contribute to their effectiveness in the teaching profession within the District of San Remigio, Schools Division of Antique. A pressing issue identified is that some kindergarten classes are conducted by teachers without adequate training in early childhood education, a circumstance that continues to challenge instructional quality in the district. Compounding this problem is the persistent perception of kindergarten learners as “future elementary pupils,” rather than as young children with distinct developmental needs. As a result, instruction is often delivered through formal structures more appropriate for older students, underscoring the need for kindergarten teachers to be specifically educated and trained in developmentally appropriate pedagogies.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, specifically the explanatory sequential approach. The design involved two phases: first, the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by a qualitative phase intended to elaborate on and clarify the quantitative findings. This sequential integration allowed for a deeper understanding of the challenges, coping mechanisms, and best practices of kindergarten teachers.

The research was conducted in the District of San Remigio, Antique, Philippines, which comprises one primary school, twenty-four elementary schools, one secondary school, and three integrated schools. The respondents in the quantitative phase were all twenty-five kindergarten teachers from these institutions. For the qualitative phase, seven teacher-participants were purposively selected using the following criteria: (1) educational specialization, (2) gender, (3) years of experience in kindergarten teaching, and (4) number of relevant trainings attended. To

ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms and identified numerically from 1 to 7.

Two research instruments were utilized. The first was a structured questionnaire-checklist composed of two sections: (a) demographic characteristics of respondents and (b) items on educational specialization, gender, kindergarten teaching experience, trainings attended, teaching strategies, and instructional materials used. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview guide aligned with the research questions, which consisted of four parts: (a) demographic characteristics of respondents, (b) challenges encountered in kindergarten teaching, (c) coping mechanisms employed, and (d) best practices observed in classroom instruction.

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought formal approval from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent, the District Supervisor of San Remigio, and the respective school heads of participating teachers. Each participant received a letter of invitation outlining the purpose of the study and the scope of their participation. Informed consent was obtained through signed agreement forms.

For the qualitative phase, data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method, which involved extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering these into themes and categories. To enhance validity, member checking was conducted whereby participants reviewed the researcher's interpretations to confirm that the findings accurately represented their experiences.

Findings

With regard to strategies used in teaching kindergarten classes, respondents were asked to indicate their use of play, games, and songs. All twenty-five teachers reported employing all three approaches. This finding

aligns with the consensus in early childhood education literature that play, games, and songs constitute the most widely adopted and effective strategies for young learners. Play, often referred to as “children’s work”, is not merely a source of enjoyment but a vital pedagogical tool that supports social, emotional, cognitive, literacy, and numeracy development (UNESCO, 2020).

Table 1

Teaching strategies and materials used by kindergarten teachers

| | f | % |
|---|----------|----------|
| Strategies | | |
| Play | 25 | 100 |
| Games | 25 | 100 |
| Songs | 25 | 100 |
| Materials | | |
| ICT Tools | 7 | 28 |
| Traditional Instructional Materials | 10 | 40 |
| ICT Tools and Traditional Instructional Materials | 8 | 32 |

In terms of instructional materials, the data reveal diverse preferences among teachers. Seven respondents (28%) favored ICT-based tools, ten respondents (40%) preferred traditional materials, while eight respondents (32%) reported integrating both. These results suggest generational and experiential differences: younger teachers tend to be more comfortable and effective in incorporating digital tools, whereas those with longer service often rely on conventional materials. Increasingly, however, teachers combine both approaches to enrich learning experiences. This practice resonates with research highlighting the potential of technology to foster problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. Nonetheless, Hendricks (2016) cautions that technological interactivity does not automatically translate into improved learning

outcomes, as young children may in some cases perform more effectively under traditional, structured conditions.

Findings from face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) further underscored the complexities of kindergarten teaching. Teachers reported encountering a range of professional challenges that extend beyond instructional practices, pointing to the need for holistic support systems that address pedagogical, administrative, and emotional demands.

Managing young learners is a priority in the kindergarten classroom. Research in early childhood development consistently notes that young learners, particularly at the preschool and kindergarten levels, often display forms of misbehavior that can be challenging to manage, especially during the initial weeks of schooling. For many children, the school setting represents an unfamiliar environment, leading to feelings of discomfort and adjustment difficulties. Given their strong attachment to familiar routines and relationships, young learners may initially perceive teachers and peers as strangers, which can heighten anxiety or resistance. Compounding these challenges is the naturally short attention span of children at this stage, which necessitates the use of developmentally appropriate strategies to sustain engagement and support positive behavior.

Each child is unique in characteristics and learning ability. Developmental psychologists emphasize that no two children are alike, as their skills and struggles, preferences and dislikes, and hobbies and activities collectively shape their individuality. In the classroom, these differences manifest in how children learn, express themselves, and demonstrate their distinct talents, strengths, and areas for growth. While such individuality enriches the learning environment and fosters diversity, it also presents significant challenges for kindergarten teachers, who must

adapt instruction to meet a wide range of developmental needs.

The need for varied and diverse instructional materials. Such materials serve as vital supports for lesson delivery, enabling children to grasp new concepts while also providing opportunities for practice and reinforcement. Incorporating a range of resources particularly those that integrate educational technology can reduce monotony, stimulate curiosity, sustain engagement, and make learning experiences more interactive. Nonetheless, the development and adoption of instructional materials that are both developmentally appropriate and pedagogically effective for young learners continue to pose significant challenges for kindergarten teachers.

Patience as a virtue in kindergarten teaching. Young learners are highly sensitive to the emotional states of adults; when teachers display agitation or frustration, children may experience stress, which can negatively affect their engagement and performance. Effective kindergarten instruction therefore requires teachers to maintain composure and exhibit calmness even in challenging situations. Like all adults, teachers may encounter minor irritations such as loud scraping of chairs, frequent bathroom requests, disruptive behavior, or unreasonable demands that test their patience. Managing these situations with equanimity is an ongoing professional challenge, yet it is essential for fostering a supportive and emotionally safe learning environment.

Acquiring and maintaining new technology requires investment. The integration of technology has the potential to make kindergarten classrooms more engaging and productive. Nevertheless, in many public schools, the acquisition and use of educational technology remain low priorities. Modern devices are often sensitive, costly, and challenging to maintain, particularly in environments with young children who may inadvertently damage them. Consequently, teachers must exercise vigilance

to safeguard both the equipment and the children, while ensuring that technological tools function effectively to support learning.

Classroom management remains one of the foremost challenges for kindergarten teachers, necessitating ongoing development of skills in this domain. This aligns with Hegwood's (2023) observation that educators at this level devote substantial time to managing behavior and maintaining classroom order, a task made complex by the diverse abilities, personalities, and developmental needs of young learners. Equally critical are the effective use of high-quality instructional materials (Theme 3) and the cultivation of emotional regulation (Theme 4), both of which support a positive and productive learning environment. Furthermore, the imperative to integrate technology in education (Theme 5) is reinforced by Hegwood (2023), who highlights the importance of remaining current with evolving learning technologies.

Across all professions, the ability to cope effectively is essential for sustained productivity, professional growth, and overall well-being. Coping mechanisms encompass strategies employed to manage stress and regulate difficult emotions. For kindergarten teachers, stressors are frequently job-related and are intensified by the demands of addressing the unique characteristics, developmental trajectories, and diverse learning needs of very young learners.

Building positive relationships with learners. The school environment is often regarded as a child's second home, with teachers serving as surrogate parents. Approaching children with the care and attention afforded to one's own child enables teachers to more effectively understand and respond to their developmental and emotional needs. Research indicates that positive teacher–learner relationships enhance motivation, sustain engagement, and reduce behavioral challenges an effect

that is particularly significant for young learners who continue to require strong parental support and guidance.

Improving classroom management skills. Effective classroom management is a cornerstone of successful kindergarten teaching. Traditional approaches often emphasize control rather than connection, relying on reactive strategies such as threats or extrinsic rewards. In contrast, sustainable classroom management prioritizes proactive and developmentally appropriate strategies. These include establishing clear rules, explicitly teaching and practicing routines, using visual and auditory signals, maintaining visual schedules, observing and responding to classroom dynamics, varying instructional approaches, providing behavior-specific praise, responding consistently to disruptions, and implementing fair and predictable consequences. Such strategies foster a positive, structured, and supportive learning environment that promotes engagement and reduces behavioral challenges among young learners.

Pursuing continuous professional growth and development. Professional development programs play a critical role in expanding teachers' knowledge and ensuring their skills remain current. While some veteran educators may initially resist change, continuous learning introduces new teaching techniques tailored to today's learners, enhances confidence, fosters creativity, and prepares teachers for expanded professional responsibilities.

Theme 1 highlights the importance of nurturing strong personal relationships with learners, emphasizing that being valued and appreciated by students serves as a powerful motivator for teachers. This aligns with O'Bryan (2019), who describes early childhood education as a rewarding and fulfilling profession and underscores the significance of a supportive work environment. Theme 2 reflects teachers' confidence in their classroom

management capabilities, consistent with Valente et al. (2024), who identify effective time management and prioritization as essential skills for educators. Theme 3 underscores the value teachers place on professional growth, corroborating O'Bryan's (2019) assertion that staying abreast of industry developments equips educators to navigate emerging challenges.

Best practices in teaching extend beyond effective instructional strategies to encompass a broader set of considerations, including access, equity, quality, governance, and measures promoting learner safety and well-being. Stakeholder engagement and support further reinforce these practices. For kindergarten teachers, best practices can be developed in targeted areas to optimize learner outcomes and achievement.

In particular, kindergarten educators can focus on creating adaptive and individualized learning materials, designing innovations that cultivate foundational literacy and numeracy skills, fostering values formation and discipline, and supporting children's social and emotional development. While instilling a love of learning at an early age is essential, it is equally important to ensure that children continue to enjoy their childhood. Consequently, best practices should contribute to holistic development, addressing both scholastic growth and overall well-being.

Analysis of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed five overarching themes that capture the experiences, strategies, and perspectives of kindergarten teachers.

Building a child-centered classroom environment. Learner-centered education is fundamental in early childhood pedagogy, as it prioritizes individual student needs, diverse learning styles, and active engagement in the learning process. By tailoring instruction to these needs, children can progress at their own pace and make pedagogical choices that align with their strengths and interests. Research indicates that learners in such

environments tend to demonstrate greater confidence, improved communication skills, enhanced leadership capacities, and a stronger enjoyment of self-directed learning. Beyond academic outcomes, this approach promotes holistic development by fostering independence, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging within a collaborative classroom community, where all participants contribute to shared learning goals.

Institutionalized reward and recognition system. A classroom reward system serves to acknowledge and reinforce learner achievement and positive behavior. When implemented consistently, such systems motivate students and encourage them to perform to the best of their abilities. Rewards may take the form of privileges, such as sitting beside a friend for a day, or tangible recognition, such as stars on a behavior chart. By recognizing students' efforts, educators communicate appreciation for their hard work, fostering pride, satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation. Recognition can also highlight attributes such as persistence, improvement, and cooperation, which enhance self-confidence, cultivate a sense of accomplishment, and promote respect among peers. Even simple reward systems contribute to creating a positive learning environment, strengthening engagement, and improving overall learning outcomes.

Adopting the principles of inclusive education. Addressing individual learner needs is essential for cultivating an inclusive classroom, where every student has equitable opportunities to succeed. Inclusive education emphasizes the participation of all learners, framing differences in ability not as obstacles but as opportunities that enhance the educational experience for the entire class. By recognizing and valuing diverse strengths and learning profiles, educators can foster a supportive environment that promotes engagement, equity, and holistic development.

Collaborating with parents/guardians. Research demonstrates that

collaboration between parents and teachers positively influences children's academic achievement, work habits, social skills, and emotional well-being. Active parental involvement enables teachers to focus more effectively on instruction, while students whose parents are engaged are more likely to succeed academically and develop stronger social and emotional competencies. Moreover, such collaboration strengthens the relationships among parents, teachers, and the broader school community.

Theme 1 reinforces that the learner is the central focus of every classroom. This is supported by UNESCO (2020), which advocates learner-centered strategies, including cooperative learning, hands-on teaching, and play-based methods, emphasizing that “the art of teaching kindergarten children includes different instructional designs to help them learn at their own pace within a social and collaborative environment.” Theme 2 highlights the effectiveness of acknowledging positive behavior and learning accomplishments as a pedagogical strategy. Theme 3 underscores the importance of recognizing each learner's individuality, while Theme 4 emphasizes the critical role of parents in the teaching–learning process. Research by Popovska et al. (2021) and Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020) suggests that teachers should consistently communicate and collaborate with parents, providing updates on progress, sharing classroom activities, and addressing concerns. Yulianti et al. (2020) further note that strong teacher–parent partnerships are key contributors to children's academic and developmental success.

Recommendations

Teachers have successfully implemented a range of best practices that have significantly enhanced kindergarten teaching within their schools, particularly in areas such as child-centered instruction, classroom-based

reward systems, inclusive education, the promotion of equity and diversity, and active collaboration with parents and other stakeholders. These practices reflect a strong commitment to fostering the holistic development of learners, addressing not only cognitive growth but also social, emotional, and moral development.

To further advance kindergarten teaching, it is recommended that schools provide ongoing professional development focused on innovative pedagogical strategies, differentiated instruction, and the effective integration of technology. Strengthening communication channels among teachers, parents, and the broader community can also reinforce learning support, ensure continuity between home and school, and create a more nurturing and responsive learning environment. By continuously refining these practices and promoting reflective teaching, schools can maximize learner engagement, motivation, and overall development, ensuring that children thrive both academically and personally.

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