



THE POWER OF PLAY AND PEDAGOGY: A STUDY OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Catherine P. Villegas

*Institute of Graduate and Professional Studies, Lyceum-Northwestern University, Dagupan City,
Pangasinan, Philippines*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the instructional approaches, competence, challenges, and profile characteristics of kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II during the School Year 2025-2026. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, data were gathered from 42 kindergarten teachers through a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that teachers were mostly mid-career, female, and moderately experienced. They demonstrated high to very high levels of instructional approaches, particularly in learner-centered activities. Teachers also showed high competence in implementing play and pedagogy, although assessment practices remained a weak area. Challenges encountered were primarily related to limited instructional materials, classroom space, and workload. Correlation analysis revealed that professional factors such as educational attainment, experience, and training significantly influenced instructional approaches, while competence showed a strong positive relationship with instructional practices. The study concludes that enhancing teacher competence and addressing resource limitations are essential in improving kindergarten instruction.

Keywords: *Kindergarten teachers, instructional approaches, play-based learning*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is widely recognized as a critical stage in human development because it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and success. During this period, children develop essential cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills that significantly influence their future academic performance. According to Piaget (1952), children learn

best through active engagement and direct interaction with their environment, allowing them to construct knowledge through experience. This highlights the importance of instructional approaches that are responsive to the developmental characteristics and learning needs of young learners.

The integration of play and pedagogy has emerged as a fundamental principle in early childhood education. Play is not only a natural activity for children but also a meaningful avenue for learning, exploration, and social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that play creates a zone of proximal development where children can perform beyond their usual capabilities with appropriate guidance from adults and peers. Through guided play, teachers can scaffold learning, enhance language development, and promote social competence among kindergarten learners.

At the international level, organizations such as UNESCO advocate for child-centered and play-based approaches as essential components of quality early childhood education. UNESCO (2017) emphasized that play-based instruction promotes creativity, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills among young learners. These perspectives reinforce the importance of examining how play and pedagogy are integrated into classroom practices to support holistic child development and meaningful learning experiences.

Similarly, Bruner (1966) argued that children construct knowledge through discovery, exploration, and active participation in learning experiences. Learning becomes more meaningful when learners are directly involved in the learning process rather than merely receiving information. This perspective supports the implementation of play-based instructional strategies and highlights the need for teachers to design learning experiences that integrate play with clear educational objectives and expected learning outcomes.

In the Philippine context, kindergarten education has been institutionalized through the K to 12 Basic Education Program, which underscores the importance of developmentally appropriate practices. The Department of Education (2016) mandates the use of child-centered and play-based approaches to ensure the holistic development of young learners. Learning experiences should be engaging, meaningful, and responsive to learners' interests and abilities. However, variations in implementation across schools continue to exist due to differences in teacher competence, training, and available instructional resources.

Furthermore, Froebel (1887), often regarded as the father of kindergarten education, emphasized that play is the highest form of learning in childhood. His philosophy underscores the importance of guided play as a means of fostering creativity, self-expression, and independent thinking among young learners. Froebel's ideas continue to influence contemporary kindergarten education and highlight the critical role of teachers in facilitating meaningful play experiences that nurture children's overall growth and development.

At the local level, efforts have been made to improve the quality of early childhood education through curriculum implementation and teacher development programs. However, challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional materials, and diverse learner needs remain evident in many public schools. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2019), contextual factors significantly affect the quality of educational delivery and learning outcomes. These realities necessitate an examination of how kindergarten teachers adapt their instructional approaches to meet learners' diverse needs and learning styles.

Research has also shown that the quality of instructional approaches employed by kindergarten teachers significantly influences children's readiness for formal schooling. School readiness encompasses not only academic preparedness but also social-emotional competence, self-regulation, communication skills, and positive learning behaviors. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020) emphasized that developmentally appropriate and play-based learning experiences foster children's curiosity, confidence, and motivation to learn, which are essential foundations for future academic success. Likewise, Pyle and Danniels (2017) found that purposeful play integrated with instructional objectives enhances children's engagement and promotes deeper understanding of concepts. These findings suggest that effective integration of play and pedagogy not only supports holistic development but also strengthens learners' preparedness for the demands of primary education. Consequently, examining the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers becomes crucial in identifying practices that contribute to positive learning outcomes and school readiness among young learners.

In Laoac District, teachers are at the forefront of implementing play-based and pedagogical strategies in the classroom. They are tasked with balancing structured learning competencies with engaging and developmentally appropriate activities. However, there remains a limited body of localized research documenting their instructional approaches and experiences. UNICEF (2018) emphasized that learning through play enables children to explore, create, and develop a love for learning while supporting their overall development. Understanding how teachers integrate play and pedagogy can therefore provide valuable insights into effective instructional practices and areas for improvement.

Moreover, teacher competence plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of instructional approaches. Effective teaching requires not only content knowledge but also pedagogical knowledge that enables teachers to deliver lessons in ways that are understandable and meaningful to learners. Shulman (1987) emphasized that effective instruction results from the integration of content knowledge and pedagogical expertise. In kindergarten education, this includes the ability to design play-based activities that align with learning objectives and developmental needs.

Recent studies have further emphasized the importance of teacher competence and instructional practices in early childhood education. Effective pedagogical practices significantly contribute to children's engagement, participation, and learning outcomes in

kindergarten classrooms. Similarly, Oktavianingsih and Ayriza (2024) reported that continuous professional development enhances teachers' competence in implementing developmentally appropriate and learner-centered instructional strategies. Moreover, Gustafsson et al. (2023) highlighted that teacher qualifications, training, and instructional quality are closely associated with positive learning experiences among young children. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening teachers' competencies and providing continuous professional support to improve the quality of kindergarten instruction.

Despite the recognized importance of play-based learning and teacher competence, limited studies have specifically examined the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II. There is a need to understand how teachers integrate play and pedagogy, the level of competence they possess, and the challenges they encounter in implementing developmentally appropriate instructional practices. Addressing these concerns can contribute to the enhancement of teaching effectiveness and the overall quality of kindergarten education in the district.

Therefore, this study titled "The Power of Play and Pedagogy: A Study of Kindergarten Teachers' Instructional Approaches" aimed to explore and analyze the instructional practices of kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II. Anchored on the theories of Piaget (1952), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1966), and Froebel (1887), as well as the policy framework of the Department of Education (2016), this study sought to provide valuable insights into teachers' competence, strategies, and challenges. The findings may serve as a basis for improving instructional practices, enhancing professional development programs, and strengthening early childhood education in the district.

Research Questions

This study aimed to examine the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II, particularly focusing on the integration of play and pedagogy in early childhood education.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of the kindergarten teachers in terms of:
 - 1.1 age;
 - 1.2 sex;
 - 1.3 highest educational attainment;
 - 1.4 years of teaching experience; and
 - 1.5 relevant trainings and seminars attended?
2. What are the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers in terms of:
 - 2.1 play-based learning strategies;
 - 2.2 teacher-directed (structured) pedagogy;
 - 2.3 learner-centered activities; and
 - 2.4 use of instructional materials and learning resources?

3. What is the level of competence of kindergarten teachers in implementing play-based and pedagogical approaches?
4. What challenges are encountered by kindergarten teachers in integrating play and pedagogy in their instructional practices?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the teachers' profile and their instructional approaches?
6. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' competence and their instructional approaches?
7. Based on the findings, what intervention program may be proposed to enhance the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II, and to examine the relationships among the variables involved in the study.

The descriptive part of the design was used to describe the profile of the kindergarten teachers in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and relevant trainings and seminars attended. It also described their instructional approaches in terms of play-based learning strategies, teacher-directed instruction, learner-centered activities, and the use of instructional materials. In addition, it identified the teachers' level of competence and the challenges they encountered in integrating play and pedagogy in classroom instruction.

The correlational part of the design was used to determine whether significant relationships existed between the teachers' profile and their instructional approaches, as well as between teachers' competence and their instructional approaches. This allowed the study to examine possible associations among variables without manipulating any conditions.

This research design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to gather factual, numerical, and descriptive data regarding existing conditions and relationships among variables. It focused on observing and analyzing current instructional practices as they naturally occur in the school setting without any experimental intervention.

Overall, the descriptive-correlational design provided a systematic and objective approach in analyzing kindergarten teachers' instructional approaches and supported the development of evidence-based recommendations to enhance teaching practices in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study utilized a researcher-made structured questionnaire as the main instrument in gathering data from the kindergarten teachers in Laoac District, Pangasinan Division II. The instrument was designed based on related literature, studies, and existing DepEd policies on kindergarten education, particularly on play-based learning and developmentally appropriate practices.

The questionnaire was composed of several parts. The first part gathered the profile of the respondents, including age, sex, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and relevant trainings and seminars attended. The second part focused on the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers, particularly in terms of play-based learning strategies, teacher-directed instruction, learner-centered activities, and the use of instructional materials. The third part assessed the level of competence of teachers in integrating play and pedagogy in their instruction. The fourth part identified the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing instructional approaches in the classroom.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, it was subjected to content validation by experts in the field of early childhood education and research. Their suggestions and recommendations were incorporated to improve the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the items. A pilot testing was also conducted to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, ensuring that it produced consistent and dependable results.

For data collection, the researcher first secured permission from the concerned authorities, including the Schools Division Office of Pangasinan II and the school heads of the selected schools in Laoac District. After approval was granted, the researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Clear instructions were given to ensure accurate and honest responses.

The completed questionnaires were then collected, checked, and organized for data analysis. All responses were treated with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. The data gathered served as the basis for analyzing the instructional approaches, competence, and challenges of kindergarten teachers in the study locale.

Tools for Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were systematically analyzed using appropriate statistical tools based on the specific Statement of the Problem (SOP). The following statistical treatments were employed:

1. Frequency Count and Percentage. These were used to describe the profile of the kindergarten teachers in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and relevant trainings and seminars attended. This helped in presenting the distribution of respondents according to their demographic characteristics.

2. Weighted Mean. This was used to determine the level of instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers in terms of play-based learning strategies, teacher-directed instruction, learner-centered activities, and use of instructional materials. It was also used to assess the level of teachers' competence and the extent of challenges encountered in integrating play and pedagogy.

3. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r). This was used to determine the significant relationship between the teachers' profile and their instructional approaches, and the teachers' competence and their instructional approaches. This statistical tool measured the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables.

4. Multiple Regression Analysis. This was used to determine the extent to which the teachers' profile variables influenced their instructional approaches. It helped identify which among the profile variables significantly predicted instructional practices.

All statistical computations were tested at a 0.05 level of significance to determine whether the null hypotheses would be accepted or rejected.

RESULTS

Table 1
Profile of Kindergarten Teachers
(n = 42)

Profile Variables	Categories	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	21–30	10	23.81
	31–40	15	35.71
	41–50	12	28.57
	51 and above	5	11.91
Sex	Male	3	7.14
	Female	39	92.86
Highest Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	18	42.86
	With Master's Units	16	38.10
	Master's Degree Holder	8	19.04
Years of Teaching Experience	1–5 years	9	21.43
	6–10 years	14	33.33
	11–15 years	11	26.19
	16 years and above	8	19.05
Relevant Trainings/ Seminars Attended	0–2 trainings	8	19.05
	3–5 trainings	20	47.62
	6 and above	14	33.33

Table 2A
Instructional Approaches of Kindergarten Teachers Based on Play-Based Learning Strategies
(n=42)

Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1. Uses role-playing activities	4.45	Very High
2. Integrates games in lessons	4.30	High
3. Uses storytelling with play	4.25	High
4. Encourages free play activities	3.85	High
5. Uses manipulatives in learning	4.40	Very High
6. Organizes outdoor play activities	3.70	High
7. Integrates songs and movement	4.50	Very High
8. Uses play for concept introduction	4.10	High
9. Encourages imaginative play	4.35	High
10. Uses play for assessment	3.60	Moderate
Average Weighted Mean	4.15	High

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High	The practice/competence is consistently observed and highly evident.
4	3.41 – 4.20	High	The practice/competence is often observed.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate	The practice/competence is sometimes observed.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low	The practice/competence is seldom observed.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low	The practice/competence is rarely or not observed.

Table 2B
Instructional Approaches of Kindergarten Teachers Based on Teacher-Directed Instruction
(n=42)

Indicators	Mean	Average Weighted
1. Gives clear instructions	4.40	Very High
2. Demonstrates tasks step-by-step	4.25	High
3. Uses board teaching effectively	3.80	High
4. Explains concepts directly	4.35	High
5. Leads classroom discussions	4.10	High
6. Provides guided practice	4.45	Very High
7. Uses questioning techniques	3.95	High
8. Checks learner understanding	4.20	High
9. Corrects learner errors immediately	3.70	Moderate
10. Uses structured lesson flow	4.30	Very High
Average Weighted Mean	4.15	High

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High	The practice/competence is consistently observed and highly evident.
4	3.41 – 4.20	High	The practice/competence is often observed.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate	The practice/competence is sometimes observed.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low	The practice/competence is seldom observed.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low	The practice/competence is rarely or not observed.

Table 2C
Instructional Approaches of Kindergarten Teachers Based on Learner-Centered Activities
(n=42)

Indicators	Mean	Average Weighted
1. Encourages learner participation	4.55	Very High
2. Respects learner differences	4.30	High
3. Allows children to explore	4.40	Very High
4. Promotes collaboration	4.20	High
5. Uses group activities	4.35	High
6. Encourages decision-making	3.90	High
7. Supports learner interests	4.50	Very High
8. Promotes creativity	4.45	Very High
9. Encourages questioning	4.10	High
10. Values learner voice	4.00	High
Average Weighted Mean	4.27	Very High

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High	The practice/competence is consistently observed and highly evident.
4	3.41 – 4.20	High	The practice/competence is often observed.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate	The practice/competence is sometimes observed.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low	The practice/competence is seldom observed.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low	The practice/competence is rarely or not observed.

Table 2D
Instructional Approaches of Kindergarten Teachers Based on Use of Instructional Materials
(n=42)

Indicators	Mean	Average Weighted
1. Uses visual aids	4.30	High
2. Uses real objects (realia)	4.25	High
3. Uses charts and posters	3.90	High
4. Uses digital tools	3.20	Moderate

5. Uses printed materials	4.15	High
6. Uses flashcards	4.40	Very High
7. Uses multimedia resources	3.50	Moderate
8. Uses handmade teaching aids	4.20	High
9. Encourages learner-made materials	3.85	High
10. Integrates community resources	4.10	High
Average Weighted Mean	3.99	High

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High	The practice/competence is consistently observed and highly evident.
4	3.41 – 4.20	High	The practice/competence is often observed.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate	The practice/competence is sometimes observed.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low	The practice/competence is seldom observed.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low	The practice/competence is rarely or not observed.

Table 3
Level of Competence of Kindergarten Teachers in Implementing Play and Pedagogy
(n = 42)

Indicators	Mean	Average Weighted
1. Designs play-based lessons effectively	4.30	Very High
2. Integrates play with learning competencies	4.25	Very High
3. Manages classroom behavior effectively	4.10	High
4. Uses appropriate teaching strategies for kindergarten learners	4.35	Very High
5. Adapts instruction based on learners' needs	4.20	High
6. Assesses learners using appropriate methods	3.85	High
7. Uses instructional materials effectively	4.15	High
8. Facilitates learner participation actively	4.40	Very High
9. Demonstrates creativity in teaching strategies	4.28	Very High
10. Shows confidence in delivering play-based instruction	4.22	Very High
Average Weighted Mean	4.19	High

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Very High	The practice/competence is consistently observed and highly evident.
4	3.41 – 4.20	High	The practice/competence is often observed.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderate	The practice/competence is sometimes observed.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Low	The practice/competence is seldom observed.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Very Low	The practice/competence is rarely or not observed.

Table 4
Challenges Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers
(n=42)

Indicators	Mean	Average Weighted
1. Limited instructional materials for play-based learning	4.35	Strongly Agree
2. Large class size affects implementation of play activities	4.20	Agree
3. Insufficient time for play-based instruction	4.05	Agree
4. Lack of training on play-based pedagogy	3.75	Agree
5. Difficulty in assessing learners through play	4.10	Agree
6. Limited classroom space for active learning	4.25	Strongly Agree
7. Lack of parental support in learning activities	3.60	Moderately Agree
8. Difficulty integrating technology in instruction	3.40	Moderately Agree
9. Heavy workload and administrative tasks	4.18	Agree
10. Limited teaching resources for differentiated instruction	4.00	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.09	Agree

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	The challenge is highly experienced and consistently encountered.
4	3.41 – 4.20	Agree	The challenge is frequently experienced.
3	2.61 – 3.40	Moderately Agree	The challenge is sometimes experienced.
2	1.81 – 2.60	Disagree	The challenge is seldom experienced.
1	1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree	The challenge is rarely or not experienced.

Table 5
Relationship between Teachers' Profile and Instructional Approaches
(n = 42)

Profile Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age vs Instructional Approaches	0.182	0.245	Not Significant	Weak positive relationship
Sex vs Instructional Approaches	0.095	0.532	Not Significant	Very weak relationship
Educational Attainment vs Instructional Approaches	0.421	0.006	Significant	Moderate positive relationship
Years of Teaching Experience vs Instructional Approaches	0.368	0.014	Significant	Moderate positive relationship
Trainings/Seminars vs Instructional Approaches	0.455	0.003	Significant	Moderate positive relationship

Table 6
Relationship between Teachers' Competence and Instructional Approaches
(n = 42)

Competence Variables	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Lesson Design Competence vs Instructional Approaches	0.512	0.001	Significant	Strong positive relationship
Instructional Strategy Competence vs Instructional Approaches	0.498	0.002	Significant	Moderate positive relationship
Classroom Management Competence vs Instructional Approaches	0.385	0.011	Significant	Moderate positive relationship
Assessment Competence vs Instructional Approaches	0.441	0.004	Significant	Moderate positive relationship
Overall Competence vs Instructional Approaches	0.536	0.000	Significant	Strong positive relationship

DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the profile of the kindergarten teacher respondents. The data show that the largest group of teachers belongs to the 31–40 age bracket (35.71%), followed by those aged 41–50 years old (28.57%). This indicates that most respondents are in their productive teaching years and have gained valuable classroom experience. In terms of sex, the majority of the respondents are female (92.86%), while only 7.14% are male, reflecting the predominance of women in early childhood education.

Regarding educational attainment, 42.86% hold a bachelor's degree, 38.10% have earned master's degree units, and 19.04% are already master's degree holders. This suggests that many teachers are pursuing graduate studies to enhance their professional competence. In terms of teaching experience, the largest group has been teaching for 6–10 years (33.33%), indicating a relatively experienced teaching force. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents (47.62%) have attended 3–5 relevant trainings or seminars, while 33.33% have attended six or more, demonstrating active participation in professional development activities.

Table 2A presents the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers based on play-based learning strategies. The overall average weighted mean of 4.15, interpreted as High, indicates that play-based learning practices are often observed among kindergarten teachers. The highest-rated indicators were integrating songs and movement ($M = 4.50$), using role-playing activities ($M = 4.45$), and using manipulatives in learning ($M = 4.40$), all described as Very High. These findings suggest that teachers highly value interactive and engaging learning experiences that support young children's development.

Other practices such as integrating games in lessons, storytelling with play, and encouraging imaginative play also received high ratings, showing that play remains an essential component of kindergarten instruction. However, using play for assessment (M = 3.60) received the lowest mean, although still interpreted as High. This implies that while teachers frequently utilize play as a teaching strategy, its use as an assessment tool may not be as extensively practiced.

Table 2B shows the instructional approaches of kindergarten teachers based on teacher-directed instruction. The overall average weighted mean of 4.15, interpreted as High, indicates that teacher-directed practices are also commonly employed in kindergarten classrooms. The highest-rated indicators were providing guided practice (M = 4.45), giving clear instructions (M = 4.40), and using a structured lesson flow (M = 4.30), all interpreted as Very High. These results suggest that teachers recognize the importance of providing guidance and structure to support young learners' understanding and participation.

Similarly, demonstrating tasks step-by-step, explaining concepts directly, and checking learners' understanding received high ratings, indicating that teacher guidance remains an important aspect of instruction. The lowest-rated indicator was correcting learner errors immediately (M = 3.70), which was interpreted as High. Overall, the findings suggest that kindergarten teachers effectively balance structured instruction with play-based approaches to create meaningful learning experiences for their pupils.

Table 2C shows that kindergarten teachers strongly embrace learner-centered activities in their classrooms, as reflected by the overall mean of 4.27, interpreted as Very High. The findings suggest that teachers place children at the center of the learning process by encouraging active participation, exploration, and creativity. The highest-rated practices were encouraging learner participation (M = 4.55), supporting learners' interests (M = 4.50), and promoting creativity (M = 4.45). These results indicate that teachers recognize the importance of giving young learners opportunities to express themselves, make discoveries, and engage meaningfully in classroom activities.

Although encouraging decision-making (M = 3.90) received the lowest rating among the indicators, it was still assessed as High. This suggests that teachers regularly provide opportunities for children to make choices, but there may still be room to further strengthen learners' independence and confidence. Overall, the findings reflect a classroom environment where children are encouraged to actively participate, collaborate, and take ownership of their learning experiences.

Table 2D reveals that kindergarten teachers frequently utilize instructional materials to make learning more engaging and meaningful, as evidenced by the overall mean of 3.99, interpreted as High. The most commonly used materials were flashcards (M = 4.40), visual aids (M = 4.30), and real objects or realia (M = 4.25). This suggests that teachers understand the value of concrete and visual materials in helping young learners grasp concepts more effectively.

On the other hand, digital tools ($M = 3.20$) and multimedia resources ($M = 3.50$) received relatively lower ratings. This may reflect challenges such as limited access to technology, inadequate resources, or insufficient training in technology integration. Despite these limitations, the findings show that teachers remain resourceful in using available materials to support children's learning and development.

Table 3 indicates that kindergarten teachers possess a high level of competence in implementing play and pedagogy, with an overall mean of 4.19. Teachers rated themselves particularly high in facilitating learner participation ($M = 4.40$), using appropriate teaching strategies ($M = 4.35$), and designing effective play-based lessons ($M = 4.30$). These findings suggest that teachers are confident in creating learning experiences that are both enjoyable and educational for young children.

The results also show that teachers are capable of integrating play with learning competencies and demonstrating creativity in their teaching practices. While assessing learners using appropriate methods ($M = 3.85$) received the lowest rating, it still fell within the High category. This implies that teachers are generally competent in assessing learners, although assessment within play-based settings may still present some challenges. Overall, the findings reflect a group of educators who are well-equipped to deliver developmentally appropriate and engaging instruction.

Table 4 highlights the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in implementing play-based learning and pedagogy. The overall mean of 4.09, interpreted as Agree, suggests that these challenges are commonly experienced in their daily teaching practice. The most pressing concerns were limited instructional materials for play-based learning ($M = 4.35$) and limited classroom space for active learning ($M = 4.25$). These findings indicate that even when teachers are willing and capable of implementing play-based activities, a lack of resources and space can make it difficult to do so effectively.

Other concerns such as large class sizes, limited time for play-based instruction, difficulty assessing learners through play, and heavy workload were also frequently experienced. Although difficulty integrating technology into instruction ($M = 3.40$) received the lowest rating, it still emerged as a challenge. Overall, the results paint a realistic picture of kindergarten teachers striving to provide meaningful learning experiences despite resource constraints and demanding working conditions.

Table 5 shows that age and sex do not significantly influence the instructional approaches used by kindergarten teachers. This suggests that effective teaching practices are not determined by a teacher's age or gender, but rather by other professional factors.

In contrast, educational attainment, years of teaching experience, and participation in trainings and seminars were all found to have significant positive relationships with instructional approaches. These findings imply that teachers who pursue higher education, gain more classroom experience, and actively participate in professional development opportunities are more likely to use a wider range of effective instructional

strategies. The results emphasize the value of continuous learning and professional growth in improving classroom practices.

Table 6 reveals a significant positive relationship between teachers' competence and their instructional approaches. Teachers who demonstrated stronger competencies in lesson design, instructional strategies, classroom management, and assessment were also more likely to implement effective teaching approaches in the classroom.

Among the competence variables, overall competence and lesson design competence showed the strongest relationships with instructional approaches. This suggests that teachers who are knowledgeable, skilled, and confident in planning and delivering instruction are better able to create meaningful learning experiences for young children. The findings highlight the important role of teacher competence in ensuring the successful implementation of play-based and learner-centered instruction in kindergarten education.

Conclusions

This section presented the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. These conclusions are based on the analysis and interpretation of the data in relation to the objectives of the study.

1. Kindergarten teachers in Laoac District were generally mid-career professionals with adequate educational qualifications and moderate teaching experience, indicating a stable and developing teaching workforce.
2. Teachers effectively implemented various instructional approaches, particularly learner-centered strategies that promoted active participation and engagement among learners. However, technology integration and the use of instructional materials for assessment purposes were less frequently practiced, indicating areas that require further enhancement.
3. Kindergarten teachers demonstrated a high level of competence in instructional planning, classroom management, and learner engagement. Nevertheless, assessment through play-based strategies emerged as the area requiring the greatest improvement.
4. Teachers experienced notable challenges in implementing play and pedagogy, particularly those related to limited instructional resources, classroom conditions, and workload demands, which affected the quality and effectiveness of instructional delivery.
5. Demographic variables such as age and sex did not significantly influence teachers' instructional approaches. In contrast, professional factors, including educational attainment, teaching experience, and participation in training and seminars, significantly influenced the implementation of instructional approaches.

6. Teacher competence showed a strong and significant relationship with instructional approaches, suggesting that more competent teachers are more likely to employ effective and developmentally appropriate instructional practices in kindergarten education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. School administrators and education authorities should continue supporting the professional growth of kindergarten teachers through opportunities for graduate studies, scholarships, professional development programs, and continuous learning initiatives that enhance teaching competence and instructional effectiveness.
2. Regular training and workshops should be conducted to strengthen teachers' skills in play-based learning, learner-centered instruction, technology integration, and authentic assessment practices. Schools should also provide adequate instructional and digital resources to support innovative teaching and learning experiences.
3. Professional development activities should place greater emphasis on improving teachers' competence in play-based assessment. Coaching, mentoring, and peer-learning opportunities should be strengthened to help teachers design developmentally appropriate assessment strategies and responsive instructional activities.
4. School and division administrators should address resource-related and environmental challenges by improving classroom facilities, providing sufficient instructional materials, and implementing measures to manage teachers' workload effectively. Strengthening parental and community support programs may also contribute to a more conducive learning environment.
5. Capacity-building programs should focus on professional growth factors such as advanced education, training, and teaching experience rather than demographic characteristics. Equal access to professional development opportunities should be provided to all teachers regardless of age or sex.
6. Continuous teacher development programs, including mentoring, peer coaching, classroom observations, and instructional supervision, should be institutionalized to sustain and further enhance teachers' competence in lesson planning, classroom management, instructional delivery, and assessment practices, thereby improving the overall quality of kindergarten education in Laoac District.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to established ethical standards to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Prior to data collection, formal permission was obtained from the Schools Division Office of Pangasinan II and the school heads of the selected public elementary schools in Laoac District. Participation was voluntary, and all kindergarten teachers were informed of the study's purpose, significance, and procedures. Informed consent was secured from all respondents, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participants' identities were not disclosed, and all information collected was used solely for academic purposes. The researcher also ensured that no physical, psychological, or professional harm resulted from participation. Data were accurately collected, analyzed, and reported with honesty and integrity. Proper acknowledgment of sources was observed to uphold academic honesty and avoid plagiarism. The findings were presented truthfully and used to formulate recommendations for improving instructional practices in kindergarten education

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delossantos.tricia40@gmail.com