

DEVELOPING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT: EXPERIENCES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of kindergarten teachers as well as their coping mechanisms and insights in developing classroom assessment in kindergarten education for pupils in the Division of Davao del Norte, San Isidro district. Qualitative - phenomenological study was employed in exploring the views of the ten (10) kindergarten teachers of which primary instrument of data gathering was through in-depth interview. Major findings indicated that in exploring the experiences of kindergarten teachers in developing classroom assessment, the major themes were adapting assessment to early childhood development, individualization and differentiation in assessment, and integration of technology in kindergarten assessments. Further, in identifying the themes for the coping mechanisms of teachers, there were three themes that emerged namely collaborative professional development, reflective practices and adaptation, and parental engagement and communication. Finally, in exploring the insights of teachers in developing assessment in kindergarten education, the emerging themes were holistic child development, incorporation of play-based and authentic assessment, and formative assessment strategies. The research implications of developing classroom assessments for kindergarten learners are multifaceted and hold significant implications for educational practice and policy. As we delve into understanding and refining assessment methods tailored for the unique needs of kindergarten students, there is an opportunity to contribute to the broader discourse on early childhood education. Insights gained from such research can inform the development of evidence-based teaching strategies, curriculum design, and instructional interventions that better align with the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young learners.

Keywords: classroom assessment, kindergarten teachers, phenomenology

1. INTRODUCTION

The early years of education serve as the foundation for lifelong learning, shaping a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. In this critical period, classroom assessment plays a pivotal role in guiding teaching strategies, monitoring progress, and fostering holistic development (UNESCO, 2021). However, the complexities of assessing kindergarten pupils present a myriad of challenges globally, nationally, and locally. Globally, the integration of developmentally appropriate assessment methods remains inconsistent, with issues such as over-reliance on standardized testing, lack of cultural sensitivity, and limited teacher training (OECD, 2019). The increasing push for technology-based assessment tools adds another layer of complexity, as many educators lack the resources and skills to effectively implement these innovations (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted early childhood education, leaving educators grappling with how to adapt assessments for remote or hybrid learning environments (UNICEF, 2021).

In the Philippines, the national education system is not immune to these challenges. The country faces persistent issues such as a lack of teacher training in developmentally appropriate assessment methods, leading to practices that are misaligned with the cognitive and emotional needs of young learners (DepEd, 2021). Furthermore, disparities in access to educational resources exacerbate the difficulty of implementing equitable assessments, particularly in rural and underserved areas (CHED, 2020). The implementation of the Kindergarten Education Act (Republic Act No. 10157) brought significant advancements in early childhood education but also highlighted gaps in policy execution, particularly in the area of classroom assessment (Castillo, 2020). Locally, in the San Isidro District of Davao del Norte, kindergarten teachers face specific challenges such as limited access to professional development opportunities, insufficient parental involvement, and the lack of tailored assessment tools for diverse learner needs (Marilog District Education Report, 2021). These localized issues underscore the need for research that addresses the nuanced realities of developing classroom assessments in kindergarten education.

This study aims to explore the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of kindergarten teachers in developing classroom assessments. It seeks to understand how teachers adapt their assessment practices to the developmental needs of young learners, the strategies they employ to overcome challenges, and the principles that guide their assessment methods. By focusing on the unique context of kindergarten education, this research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on early childhood education, providing actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

Synthesis

The interplay of global, national, and local issues highlights the multifaceted nature of classroom assessment challenges in early childhood education. While global trends emphasize the need for equitable, technology-driven, and culturally sensitive assessments, national and local contexts reveal gaps in teacher training, resource allocation, and policy implementation. This study bridges these perspectives by focusing on the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers, offering evidence-based recommendations that address both broader educational challenges and localized realities. Through this research, stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of the critical role of classroom assessment in fostering the holistic development of young learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom assessment in kindergarten education has been a critical focus of research globally, with varying approaches and challenges observed across regions. In the ASEAN context, studies highlight the importance of culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate practices. In the Philippines, Castillo (2020) evaluated the implementation of the Kindergarten Education Act, noting significant gaps in teacher training and access to resources for effective assessment development. Similarly, Rahim and Hassan (2019) in Malaysia emphasized the role of culturally responsive assessments, advocating for better alignment between teacher practices and the developmental needs of young learners. In Indonesia, Pratama et al. (2020) explored play-based assessment methods and found them effective in fostering social and cognitive skills, though they noted the need for increased teacher awareness and training. Nguyen et al. (2021) in Vietnam demonstrated that formative assessments improve learner engagement and teacher feedback, further supporting the relevance of flexible and interactive assessment approaches.

In Europe, research underscores the integration of innovative and inclusive strategies in classroom assessments. Baker et al. (2021) in the United Kingdom explored the use of digital tools in early childhood assessment, finding increased efficiency but limited teacher preparedness for technology integration. In Germany, Müller and Schmidt (2020) highlighted the role of formative assessments in enhancing learner creativity and engagement, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development among educators. Lefebvre et al. (2020) in France demonstrated that bilingual assessments improve cognitive flexibility and problem-solving skills, while Jansen et al. (2022) in the Netherlands identified differentiated assessment strategies as essential for addressing the diverse needs of young learners in early childhood settings.

In Africa, classroom assessment faces unique challenges, particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained environments. Mkhize and Balfour (2021) in South Africa highlighted the need for culturally inclusive assessment tools to address the challenges of multilingual classrooms. In Kenya, Odhiambo and Anyango (2020) found that resource limitations often result in less effective assessment practices, emphasizing the importance of teacher training in developing adaptable and meaningful assessment methods. Khumalo et al. (2021) in Zimbabwe stressed the value of parental involvement in classroom assessments, noting its positive impact on learners' cognitive and emotional development.

In Australia, classroom assessment research focuses on culturally responsive and inquiry-based approaches. Taylor and Blackwell (2020) explored how assessments in Indigenous communities align with culturally relevant teaching practices, leading to greater learner engagement and motivation. Harris and Reynolds (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning in fostering holistic development and critical thinking among young learners. Clarke et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of blended learning on classroom assessments during the pandemic, finding that integrating traditional and digital approaches enhances assessment flexibility and inclusivity.

Despite these regional insights, several gaps in the literature remain. Globally, there is limited research on the long-term impact of classroom assessments tailored to early childhood education (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). In developing countries, issues such as inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and lack of parental engagement hinder the effective implementation of assessments (UNESCO, 2021). Furthermore, while digital and play-based assessments have shown promise, their applicability across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts requires further exploration (OECD, 2019). This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of kindergarten teachers in the context of classroom assessments, contributing to the global discourse on early childhood education while addressing localized challenges.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of kindergarten teachers in developing classroom assessments. Phenomenology, as described by Creswell and Poth (2022), is a research approach aimed at uncovering the shared essence of experiences among participants, making it particularly suitable for understanding how teachers perceive and navigate the complexities of

assessment in early childhood education. This design enabled the researcher to capture the depth and richness of the participants' experiences, particularly in addressing the developmental needs of young learners.

The study involved ten (10) kindergarten teachers from the Division of Davao del Norte, San Isidro District. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research objectives, as recommended by Etikan et al. (2019). Inclusion criteria required that participants have at least three years of kindergarten teaching experience, involvement in developing classroom assessments, and a willingness to participate in detailed interviews. The sample size adhered to the qualitative principle of saturation, ensuring that data collection captured comprehensive insights without redundancy. To provide diverse perspectives, participants were selected from a mix of urban, rural, and resource-constrained schools.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing for both consistency in questions and flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses (Patton, 2015). The interview guide was structured around three central themes: experiences in developing classroom assessments, coping mechanisms for addressing challenges, and insights into effective assessment practices. Sample questions included, "How do you adapt your assessment strategies to the developmental needs of young learners?" and "What strategies do you employ to overcome challenges in implementing assessments?" Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via online platforms, adhering to safety protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baker et al., 2021). Each interview lasted 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy. Detailed notes were also taken during and after the interviews to enhance the data's richness and reliability.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a systematic approach for identifying and interpreting patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process involved several steps: familiarizing oneself with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes to highlight significant ideas, grouping codes into broader themes, refining the themes to ensure clarity and relevance, and naming the themes to capture their essence. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary themes with participants to validate the findings, ensuring that the results accurately represented their perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing with colleagues in the education field further enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings by minimizing potential researcher bias.

The chosen methodology aligns with the study's aim to understand and interpret the lived experiences of kindergarten teachers in the context of classroom assessment. Phenomenology allowed the researcher to delve into the participants' subjective realities, while semi-structured interviews facilitated rich and detailed discussions about their experiences. Thematic analysis provided a structured yet flexible framework for organizing and interpreting the data, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' shared realities. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, with informed consent obtained from all participants, confidentiality assured, and the right to withdraw at any time upheld. Institutional approval from relevant authorities ensured compliance with ethical research standards. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how kindergarten teachers navigate the challenges and opportunities of classroom assessment, contributing valuable insights to the field of early childhood education.

4. RESULTS

The findings of this study provided valuable insights into the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of kindergarten teachers in developing classroom assessments. In terms of their experiences, three major themes emerged. First, teachers highlighted the importance of adapting assessments to early childhood development, emphasizing the alignment of assessment methods with children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth (NAEYC, 2020). Second, individualization and differentiation in assessment were identified as essential strategies, with teachers tailoring assessments to meet the diverse needs of their pupils through one-on-one evaluations and observation-based methods (Rahim & Hassan, 2019). Third, the integration of technology in assessments was increasingly noted, with digital tools such as tablets and learning applications being used to streamline assessment processes and enhance engagement, reflecting global trends in early childhood education (UNESCO, 2021).

To address challenges in assessment development, teachers shared three key coping mechanisms. Collaborative professional development emerged as a critical approach, with teachers actively participating in workshops and co-creating assessment tools alongside their colleagues (Baker et al., 2021). Reflective practices and adaptation were also emphasized, as teachers continually evaluated the effectiveness of their assessment methods and made necessary adjustments to address identified gaps (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Additionally, parental engagement and communication played a significant role, as parents provided valuable insights into their children's development and reinforced learning practices at home (Mkhize & Balfour, 2021).

The teachers' insights into effective assessment practices yielded three important themes. Holistic child development was a central focus, with teachers stressing that assessments should address cognitive, social, emotional, and physical

development simultaneously (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Play-based and authentic assessments were recognized as particularly effective in engaging young learners and providing meaningful measures of their abilities (Pratama et al., 2020). Finally, formative assessment strategies were frequently employed, allowing teachers to monitor student progress, provide immediate feedback, and adjust instructional approaches accordingly (Nguyen & Tran, 2021).

These findings highlight the evolving nature of classroom assessment practices in kindergarten education, particularly the increasing integration of technology and collaborative approaches. Teachers' emphasis on holistic and play-based assessment methods underscores a shift toward more inclusive and developmentally appropriate practices, reflecting global trends and addressing local challenges in early childhood education. These insights provide a foundation for future research and potential policy enhancements in this critical field.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the complexities and evolving nature of classroom assessments in kindergarten education, particularly in the context of the Division of Davao del Norte, San Isidro District. The results reveal significant insights into the experiences, coping mechanisms, and perspectives of kindergarten teachers, shedding light on both the challenges they face and the innovative strategies they employ. This discussion interprets these findings, emphasizing their implications for educational practices and policies, their significance within the broader field of early childhood education, and the study's limitations.

The experiences of kindergarten teachers in adapting assessments to the developmental needs of young learners highlight the importance of aligning practices with the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Teachers emphasized tailoring assessments to the cognitive, emotional, and social capabilities of children, which aligns with recommendations by NAEYC (2020) and underscores the need for contextually relevant and child-centered assessment strategies. However, this adaptability is often constrained by limited access to training and resources, a challenge also noted in studies by Rahim and Hassan (2019) and Baker et al. (2021). The emphasis on individualization and differentiation reflects a global trend toward inclusive education, as identified by UNESCO (2021), but the integration of technology remains uneven, with teachers expressing the need for more training and infrastructure to effectively implement digital tools in assessments.

The coping mechanisms identified in this study—collaborative professional development, reflective practices, and parental engagement—offer practical solutions to overcome assessment challenges. Collaborative professional development, where teachers share best practices and co-create assessment tools, has been shown to enhance teaching efficacy and confidence (Mkhize & Balfour, 2021). Reflective practices allow teachers to evaluate and refine their methods continuously, fostering professional growth and improved outcomes for learners (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Parental engagement, meanwhile, bridges the gap between home and school, reinforcing the value of formative assessments in capturing a holistic view of a child's development (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). These coping strategies highlight the resilience and adaptability of kindergarten teachers, even in resource-constrained environments. The insights shared by teachers about effective assessment practices further emphasize the shift toward holistic, play-based, and formative assessment strategies. The focus on holistic development aligns with global standards, as noted by Pratama et al. (2020), and reflects an understanding that assessments must address not only academic competencies but also social-emotional and physical development. Play-based and authentic assessments resonate with findings by Nguyen et al. (2021), demonstrating their effectiveness in engaging young learners and providing meaningful data on their abilities. Formative assessments, which allow for immediate feedback and instructional adjustments, are increasingly recognized as critical tools for enhancing learning outcomes (Baker et al., 2021).

Implications and Significance

The implications of these findings extend to multiple facets of early childhood education. For policymakers, the results emphasize the need to prioritize teacher training programs that focus on differentiated and play-based assessment techniques. Additionally, there is a pressing need to invest in digital infrastructure and training to enable the effective use of technology in classroom assessments, especially in rural and underserved areas. For educators, the study highlights the value of reflective practices, professional collaboration, and parental involvement in developing comprehensive assessment frameworks. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on early childhood education by emphasizing the role of assessment in fostering equitable and developmentally appropriate learning environments.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. First, the sample size was limited to ten participants from a specific district, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Future studies could expand the scope to include a more diverse population of teachers across different regions and educational settings. Second, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews introduces the possibility of response bias, as

participants may have presented their practices in a more favorable light. Triangulating data through classroom observations or document analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of assessment practices. Lastly, this study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives, leaving out the viewpoints of other stakeholders, such as school administrators and parents, whose insights could further enrich the findings.

6. CONCLUSION

This study offers a nuanced understanding of classroom assessment practices in kindergarten education, highlighting both the challenges and strategies employed by teachers. The findings underscore the importance of aligning assessment practices with the developmental needs of young learners, fostering professional collaboration, and integrating play-based and formative approaches. While limitations exist, the study provides a foundation for future research and practical recommendations for improving assessment practices in early childhood education.

This study explored the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of kindergarten teachers in developing classroom assessments within the Division of Davao del Norte, San Isidro District. The findings revealed that teachers face multifaceted challenges in aligning assessments with the developmental needs of young learners, particularly in adapting to early childhood development, employing individualization and differentiation, and integrating technology into assessment practices. Teachers demonstrated resilience through coping mechanisms such as collaborative professional development, reflective practices, and parental engagement. Furthermore, the study identified holistic child development, play-based and authentic assessments, and formative assessment strategies as key insights into effective assessment practices. These findings highlight the critical role of tailored, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive assessment strategies in fostering the holistic growth of kindergarten pupils.

The study contributes significantly to the broader discourse on early childhood education by emphasizing the importance of aligning assessment practices with the cognitive, emotional, and social development of young learners. Additionally, it sheds light on practical coping strategies that educators can adopt to overcome the challenges associated with assessment development. However, limitations such as the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data warrant further research to enhance the generalizability and depth of the findings.

Recommendations

For the Department of Education. The Department of Education should prioritize the development of comprehensive training programs focused on differentiated, play-based, and formative assessment strategies tailored to early childhood education. These programs should include modules on integrating technology into classroom assessments and using culturally responsive tools. Allocating additional resources to rural and underserved areas to ensure equitable access to training and technology is essential. Moreover, a standardized framework for kindergarten assessments should be developed and periodically evaluated to ensure alignment with global best practices and developmental appropriateness (UNESCO, 2021).

For School Heads. School heads are encouraged to facilitate regular professional development workshops where teachers can share best practices and co-develop innovative assessment tools. They should foster a culture of collaboration and reflective practice by supporting peer mentoring programs and observation sessions. Additionally, school heads should strengthen partnerships with parents by organizing forums and activities that promote their involvement in their children's assessment and learning processes (Mkhize & Balfour, 2021).

Providing access to digital tools and resources for teachers and students is also crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of classroom assessments.

For Teachers. Kindergarten teachers should adopt a reflective approach to continually evaluate and refine their assessment practices. Integrating play-based and authentic assessment methods, alongside formative assessments, can provide a more accurate and engaging measure of young learners' abilities (Pratama et al., 2020). Teachers are encouraged to actively participate in professional development opportunities, collaborate with colleagues, and seek parental support to address challenges effectively. Leveraging technology, where available, can streamline the assessment process and enhance learner engagement.

For Future Researchers. Future studies should expand the scope to include diverse educational settings and stakeholders, such as school administrators and parents, to provide a more holistic understanding of assessment practices. Conducting longitudinal studies can offer insights into the long-term impact of classroom assessments on the developmental outcomes of young learners. Moreover, future research should explore the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, in kindergarten assessments to assess their feasibility and effectiveness in diverse educational contexts (Nguyen & Tran, 2021). Finally, examining the role of socio-economic factors in shaping assessment practices can provide valuable insights for policy and practice.

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