

# Least Mastered Competencies of Kindergarten Learners: A Basis for the Development of Lesson Exemplars

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## Abstract

Early childhood education is a critical period for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and success. Recognizing the importance of inclusive and developmentally appropriate education, this study focuses on identifying the least mastered competencies of kindergarten learners to better support their holistic growth.

This study aimed to identify the competencies least mastered by kindergarten learners in the Solana North District for the School Year 2023-2024. Grounded in the principles of inclusion and the mandates of Republic Act 8980 (Early Childhood Care and Development Act of 2000), the research sought to provide a foundation for developing targeted lesson exemplars to enhance early childhood education.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were gathered through the ECCD Checklist, which assessed learners across seven developmental domains: gross motor, fine motor, self-help, receptive language, expressive language, cognitive, and social-emotional. Qualitative insights were obtained via focus group discussions with kindergarten teachers, exploring issues and concerns encountered in teaching.

Findings revealed that the least mastered competencies varied across domains. In gross motor skills, difficulties were observed in group movement activities; in fine motor skills, drawing a human figure was challenging; and in self-help, preparing meals independently was least mastered. Language domains highlighted struggles in following two-step instructions and recounting experiences using past tense. Cognitively, matching uppercase and lowercase letters posed significant difficulty, while in the social-emotional domain, persistence in the face of obstacles was least developed.

Teachers reported challenges such as addressing diverse learning needs, creating positive classroom environments, supporting transitions from home to school, managing behavioral issues, and integrating play-based learning. Concerns also included fostering early literacy and numeracy, utilizing technology, accommodating varied learning styles, and implementing authentic assessment methods.



The study concludes that targeted interventions and lesson exemplars, informed by the identified least mastered competencies, are essential for supporting holistic development in kindergarten learners. Recommendations include prioritizing these competencies in curriculum planning, providing teacher training, and conducting further research to continually improve early childhood education practices.

**Keywords:** *Kindergarten, Least Mastered Competencies, Early Childhood Education, Lesson Exemplars, ECCD, Inclusion, Mixed Method Approach*



## INTRODUCTION

Inclusion represents a commitment to educate every child, with the Department of Education (DepEd) emphasizing that its educational objective is to meet the needs of all young learners. Over recent decades, global educators have explored various approaches to realize inclusion through research and practical application in school programs. Kindergartens, compared to primary or senior schools, offer a more flexible and potentially more successful environment for inclusion.

Early childhood education, or pre-primary education, is the foundation of basic education and an ideal setting not only for fostering early childhood development but also for nurturing children's emotional values, including inclusion.

To address challenges in education, the Department of Education developed the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) through the Curriculum Standards Development Division. Early childhood learners are particularly vulnerable to disruptions caused by reduced school years, limited face-to-face interactions, and other instructional challenges. Effective teaching in early childhood requires extensive knowledge, skills, and competencies in content, classroom management, and pedagogical methods. Teachers in the Solana North District play a vital role in children's academic and social success, especially during early childhood when children experience schooling most frequently. Consequently, teachers' educational practices and approaches are central to the early childhood education process. While teaching methods evolve over time, university training programs remain the primary source of foundational competencies for educators.

Instructional techniques employed by early childhood teachers can be categorized as developmentally appropriate or inappropriate, child-centered or teacher-centered, and academic or play-based. These distinctions arise from how teachers differentiate their teaching strategies and activities.

Educational practices grounded in constructivist theory, influenced by Piaget's cognitive development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural development theories, view children as active constructors of knowledge. Teachers adopting a constructivist approach guide learning by organizing developmentally appropriate settings and activities, motivating children, and encouraging active participation through first-hand experiences. According to Vygotsky, teachers bear responsibility for designing educational processes centered on children's interests and needs.

Research by Pianta, Le Paro, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2020) supports this view, highlighting that constructivist teachers consider children active learners and provide effective educational activities that encourage independence. Responsive teaching that aligns with children's developmental levels and interests enables constructive feedback and enhances learning. Similarly, Zimmerman et al. (2022) found that child-centered teaching methods increase children's enthusiasm, foster active learning skills, and improve their ability to initiate, sustain, and complete tasks. Effective early childhood education requires developmentally appropriate activities that support holistic development-including social and language domains-along with warm, sensitive teacher-child interactions and a stimulating classroom environment.



The transition to kindergarten is a critical developmental milestone, as noted by Parker et al. (2021). Early childhood education (ECE) is widely regarded as a vital investment in the nation's future, promoting equitable learning outcomes, reducing poverty, and enhancing social mobility (OECD, 2012). Sims et al. (2020) emphasize that quality ECE lays the foundation for schooling, preparing children to become employable, responsible citizens. Benefits include improved school readiness, academic achievement, and lifelong well-being, with studies showing significant long-term academic impacts in reading and math.

In the Philippines, the Early Years Act and the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council underscore the importance of ECCD programs, especially for children under four years old. The establishment of National Child Development Centers (NCDCs) and related training initiatives has increased focus on childcare services. However, quality varies widely across local government units due to decentralization and resource constraints. Poor working conditions and job insecurity hinder consistent positive impacts on child development. Leadership in early childhood education is shared between the ECCD Council and the Department of Education.

Key data on participation rates, teacher-to-pupil ratios, curriculum components, and the National Early Learning Framework are provided, alongside discussions of challenges in finance, equity, governance, access, and quality. The ECCD Checklist serves as a valuable tool for monitoring child growth and development, aiding parents and kindergarten teachers in identifying areas needing support and fostering progress.

Republic Act 8980 establishes a comprehensive, integrative, and sustainable national system for ECCD in the Philippines, aimed at advancing children's rights to survival, development, and special protection. This system involves collaboration among public and private sectors, government agencies, service providers, families, communities, NGOs, professional associations, and educational institutions. It respects ethnic diversity and includes children with special needs.

Hence, this study aimed to identify the Least Mastered Competencies of Kindergarten learners as a basis for developing lesson exemplars for the School Year 2023-2024.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to determine the least mastered competencies of the kindergarten learners of Solana North District, as a basis for the development of lesson exemplars for the School Year 2024-2025.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the least mastered competencies of the kindergarten learners of the seven domains as regards:
  - 1.1 Gross Motor
  - 1.2 Fine Motor
  - 1.3 Self-Help
  - 1.4 Receptive Language
  - 1.5 Expressive Language



- 1.6 Cognitive
- 1.7 Social-Emotional
2. What are the issues and concerns encountered by the teachers in teaching kindergarten learners?
3. What lesson examples can be developed to address the least mastered skills of the learners and sustain the well-mastered skills?

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, specifically a parallel explanatory sequential design, to comprehensively assess the least mastered competencies of kindergarten learners across the seven domains. In the first phase, the quantitative method was used, where participants' scores were collected and analyzed using numerical data from the ECCD Checklist Check and Dash. The second phase involved a qualitative approach, gathering participants' responses to provide personal and detailed insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

### Participants of the Study

The study involved a total of two hundred forty-one (241) participants from Solana North District, comprising fifteen (15) kindergarten teachers and two hundred twenty-six (226) kindergarten pupils. The participants were selected using simple random sampling.

The table below shows the distribution of the respondents.

Table 1

Distribution of Respondents

Respondents	Population (N)	Sample (n)
Kindergarten Teachers	15	15
Kindergarten Pupils	547	226
Total	515	241

### Data Gathering Tool

The researcher gathered the necessary data using the ECCD Checklist, marking a (√) check if the competency was observed and a (–) dash if it was not. The researcher directly observed each child performing specific tasks or activities related to the seven domains and asked the child to demonstrate particular skills.

Additionally, the researcher consulted parents or caregivers regarding the child's development and behavior at home, as outlined in the checklist. To gather teachers' insights on issues and concerns, a Focus Group Discussion Guide was also utilized.



## Data Gathering Procedure

The study followed a series of carefully planned procedures to ensure ethical compliance and the integrity of the research process.

First, the researcher sought Ethics Clearance through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. This clearance served as an official assessment of the study's adherence to ethical standards, ensuring that the research was conducted with integrity, honesty, and fairness. Approval from the Ethics Committee was required before any data collection began, in accordance with established guidelines to protect the rights and welfare of participants.

Second, the researcher sent a formal letter to the School Head of Solana North District and the appropriate respondents to obtain permission to conduct the study within the district.

Third, the researcher administered the ECCD Checklist to the kindergarten learners at scheduled times. Prior to this, consent and assent forms were obtained from the parents of the respondents to reinforce adherence to ethical principles in data collection.

Lastly, for the teachers' Focus Group Discussion, the researcher first secured the consent of the participants. Only those teachers who voluntarily agreed to participate were included in this qualitative phase of the study.

## Statistical Tool

The data gathered were analyzed using the following tools:

The ECCD Checklist Check and Dash was utilized to identify the least mastered competencies of kindergarten learners across the seven domains: gross motor, fine motor, self-help, receptive language, expressive language, cognitive, and social-emotional. The results were analyzed using frequency and percentage to determine which specific domains had the highest number of learners struggling with particular competencies.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted by first securing the consent of the participants, ensuring that only those willing to share their experiences and insights should take part. During the FGD, the researcher facilitated guided discussions to gather detailed information on the issues and concerns in which participants encountered while teaching kindergarten learners. The discussions were recorded and transcribed for thematic approach using QDA Miner Lite Software to identify recurring patterns and themes from the participants' responses.

## Summary of Findings

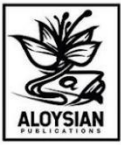
1. Least Mastered Competencies of the Kindergarten Learners of the seven (7) domains as regards:
  - 1.1 Gross Domain
    - Majority of the participants assessed the skill, "Dances patterns/joins group movement activities."



- 1.2 Fine Motor Domain
  - Majority of the participants evaluated the skill, “Draws a human figure (head, eyes, trunk, arms, hands/fingers).”
- 1.3 Self-Help Domain
  - Majority of the participants assessed the skill, “Prepares meals for younger siblings/family members when no adult is around.”
- 1.4 Receptive Language
  - Majority of the participants assessed the skill, “Follows two-step instructions that include simple prepositions.”
- 1.5 Expensive Language
  - Majority of the participants evaluated the skill, “Gives account of recent experiences (with prompting) in order of occurrence using past tense.”
- 1.6 Cognitive Domain
  - Majority of the participants evaluated the skill, “Matches uppercase letters and matches lowercase letters.”
- 1.7 Social- Emotional
  - Majority of the participants assessed “Persists when faced with a problem or obstacle to his wants.”
2. Issues and Concerns Encountered by the Teachers in Teaching Kindergarten Learners
  - 2.1 Issues
    - Majority of the participants encountered differentiated Instruction for Diverse Learners, making a Positive Learning Environment, Supporting Transition from Home to Kindergarten, Handling Behavioral Issues, and Incorporating Play into Teaching
  - 2.2 Concerns
    - Majority of the participants are concerned on Strategies to Encourage Early Literacy and Numeracy Skills, Utilization and Role of Technology in the Classroom, Handling Diverse Learning Styles and Abilities, Classroom Management Style and Implementation, and Measuring Student Progress Beyond Traditional Testing and Grading

## Conclusion

The assessment of kindergarten learners across the seven developmental domains revealed specific competencies that are least mastered, highlighting areas requiring focused instructional support. In the Gross Motor Domain, many learners struggle with dancing patterns and participating in group movement activities. The Fine Motor Domain shows challenges in drawing a complete human figure, while in the Self-Help Domain, preparing meals independently remains a significant difficulty for most children. Language development areas also present hurdles: learners find it challenging to follow two-step instructions involving prepositions in the Receptive Language Domain and to recount recent experiences using past tense in the Expressive Language Domain. Cognitively, matching uppercase and lowercase



letters is notably difficult, and socially, persistence when facing problems or obstacles is the least mastered skill.

Parallel to these learner challenges, kindergarten teachers face multiple issues and concerns in delivering effective instruction. Key issues include adapting teaching to diverse learners, creating positive and supportive learning environments, facilitating smooth transitions from home to school, managing behavioral concerns empathetically, and integrating play as a core teaching strategy. Teachers are also concerned about effectively promoting early literacy and numeracy, integrating technology thoughtfully, addressing diverse learning styles, managing classrooms with balance and engagement, and employing authentic, developmentally appropriate assessments beyond traditional testing.

Hence, these findings show the importance of focusing on both the children's learning needs and the teachers' challenges. Supporting teachers with training in flexible teaching, classroom management, and assessment, along with using fun, inclusive, and age-appropriate activities, will help children grow and succeed in kindergarten.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are derived based on the results of the study:

1. School administrators should prioritize identifying and addressing the least mastered competencies of kindergarten learners to ensure effective early childhood education.
2. Kindergarten teachers must focus on the least mastered competencies to support strong foundational skill development. By designing lesson exemplars tailored to learners' needs, teachers can enhance engagement, promote mastery, and foster holistic growth.
3. To help kindergarten learners improve their least mastered skills, lessons should be fun, interactive, and supportive of individual growth. Through play, creativity, and hands-on experiences, pupils can develop strong foundational abilities while enjoying the learning process.
4. Future researchers may conduct parallel studies to analyze the least mastered competencies of kindergarten learners and provide evidence-based solutions for curriculum improvement.

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