

Developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches among kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and classroom management approaches among kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela, and determined the relationship between these variables, as well as the challenges encountered in practice. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 30 kindergarten teachers using a validated survey. Findings revealed that teachers frequently implement child-centered learning, play-based instruction, individualized and culturally responsive teaching, and age-appropriate assessment practices. Classroom management approaches were also widely practiced, particularly in establishing routines, promoting positive behavior support, fostering nurturing teacher-child relationships, and organizing conducive learning environments. Results further showed a significant positive relationship between DAP and classroom management, indicating that developmentally aligned instruction supports effective behavior management. However, teachers reported challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, insufficient training, and time constraints. These findings imply the need for strengthened professional development, resource allocation, and supportive policies to enhance instructional quality and sustain effective early childhood practices.

Keywords: Developmentally appropriate practices, classroom management, kindergarten teachers, early childhood education, Philippines

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INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten education represents a foundational stage in the academic and developmental journey of young learners. At this critical phase, children undergo rapid growth in their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical domains. It is therefore essential that teaching strategies and classroom management practices align with the developmental characteristics of young children. In recognition of this, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has advocated the use of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), which refer to educational methods grounded in research on child development, individual learner needs, and the social and cultural contexts in which learning occurs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2019). These practices are not merely instructional techniques but represent a

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philosophical commitment to meeting children where they are, helping them achieve challenging yet attainable goals, and fostering joy in learning.

In the context of the Philippine education system, particularly under the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum, the kindergarten level has been given significant emphasis. The Department of Education mandates that teaching practices at this level must be play-based, learner-centered, and culturally sensitive to cater to the unique needs of five-year-old learners (DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016). However, the effective implementation of developmentally appropriate practices hinges on teachers' knowledge of child development, awareness of learners' backgrounds, and ability to manage the classroom environment effectively.

Classroom management in early childhood settings goes beyond maintaining order; it involves creating a positive and structured environment where children can explore, take risks, and develop self-regulation. Studies have shown that successful classroom management approaches contribute to improved learning outcomes and emotional well-being among kindergarten students (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009). These approaches include establishing routines, modeling expected behaviors, encouraging social interaction, and guiding children toward conflict resolution.

Despite global recognition of DAP and effective classroom management as cornerstones of early childhood education, the extent to which these practices are consistently implemented in local settings, such as Santo Tomas, Isabela, remains underexplored. It is essential to examine how kindergarten teachers in this locality apply developmentally appropriate principles in their classrooms and what classroom management approaches they adopt to foster conducive learning environments. Cultural influences, access to resources, training opportunities, and community expectations may shape these practices in unique ways.

Hence, this study investigates the developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches of kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela. It seeks to provide insights into how teachers align instructional strategies with their learners' developmental needs, maintain classroom order and engagement, and how these practices contribute to early childhood development in a local context. The findings aim to inform both policy and practice by identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for professional development in kindergarten education.

This study is anchored in three interrelated theoretical foundations: the NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices framework, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory as applied to classroom management.

First, the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), as proposed by Copple and Bredekamp (2019), provides the central foundation for this study. According to NAEYC, DAP is built upon three core considerations: what is known about child development and learning, what is known about each child as an individual, and what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live. This perspective promotes a holistic view of education in which teaching decisions are responsive, inclusive, and respectful of the developmental capacities of young learners. In kindergarten classrooms, this translates into hands-on learning, opportunities for play, intentional instruction, and differentiated support tailored to children's needs.

Second, Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) reinforce the role of guided participation in learning. Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning occurs best when children engage in tasks that are slightly beyond their independent ability but achievable with the assistance of a more knowledgeable person, such as a teacher. Within this framework, developmentally appropriate practices are most effective when accompanied by scaffolding, which refers to intentional support provided by teachers to gradually develop learners' independent skills. In this way, the ZPD complements DAP by

highlighting the dynamic interaction between a child's current capabilities and potential learning outcomes.

Third, Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory supports the classroom management aspect of the study. Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to influence student engagement, manage behavior, and implement effective instruction. High self-efficacy has been linked to consistent and proactive classroom management strategies, which are crucial in early childhood settings where behavioral issues may be frequent and unpredictable. According to Emmer and Evertson (2016), teachers who possess strong self-efficacy are more likely to implement preventive strategies, maintain classroom routines, and foster positive teacher-child relationships.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine the dual focus of this study. The DAP framework and Vygotsky's theory emphasize instructional appropriateness and the importance of tailored support for young learners, while Bandura's theory highlights the role of teachers' confidence in implementing behavior management strategies. This integrative theoretical approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how developmentally aligned teaching and effective classroom management can coexist and reinforce each other in promoting quality kindergarten education in Santo Tomas, Isabela.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the extent to which developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are implemented, and the classroom management approaches employed by kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of implementation of developmentally appropriate practices among kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela in terms of child-centered learning activities, play-based instruction, individualized and culturally responsive teaching, and age-appropriate assessment practices?
2. What classroom management approaches are commonly used by kindergarten teachers in terms of establishment of routines and structure, positive behavior support and discipline strategies, teacher-child relationships and emotional climate, and organization of physical learning environments?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of implementation of developmentally appropriate practices and the classroom management approaches used by kindergarten teachers?
4. What challenges do kindergarten teachers encounter in implementing developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a combination of descriptive and correlational research designs to examine the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices and the classroom management approaches of kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela. The descriptive approach was used to determine the extent to which these practices are implemented, identify commonly used management strategies, and describe the challenges encountered by teachers. The correlational approach was employed to determine whether a significant relationship exists between developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches, allowing for a deeper understanding of how these variables are interconnected.

The research was conducted in selected public elementary schools offering kindergarten education within the municipality of Santo Tomas, Isabela. The setting included

both central and peripheral schools, providing varied educational contexts for examining teaching practices.

The respondents consisted of 30 kindergarten teachers from public elementary schools in the municipality. Total enumeration was used to include all teachers officially assigned to kindergarten classes during the academic year covered by the study.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire aligned with the study's research questions. The instrument measured the level of implementation of developmentally appropriate practices across key instructional domains, identified the classroom management strategies employed by teachers, and determined the challenges they encountered in practice. The questionnaire underwent expert validation and pilot testing to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability.

Data collection followed formal procedures, including securing permissions from education authorities and school administrators, orienting participants on the purpose of the study and ethical considerations, administering the survey, and ensuring proper retrieval and secure storage of responses to maintain confidentiality and data integrity.

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels and patterns of practices and challenges, while correlational analysis was applied to examine the relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on data gathered from 30 kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela, using a descriptive-correlational design and a validated researcher-developed survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to determine levels and patterns of practice, while correlational analysis was applied to examine the relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches. Results are presented and interpreted in direct relation to the objectives of the study.

Level of implementation of developmentally appropriate practices

The findings show that child-centered learning activities are frequently implemented among kindergarten teachers, with an overall mean of 4.12, interpreted as Often. Teachers consistently promote learner autonomy, participation, and differentiated instruction. The highest indicators include allowing children to make choices ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.66$) and using flexible grouping strategies ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.63$), indicating strong support for agency and individualized learning. Slightly lower ratings for providing time for self-paced work ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.83$) suggest challenges in balancing curriculum demands with independent learning opportunities. Overall, the results affirm that child-centered approaches are strongly embedded in classrooms, consistent with research emphasizing autonomy and hands-on engagement as key to socio-emotional and cognitive development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2019; Julian et al., 2023).

Play-based instruction is also frequently practiced, with an overall mean of 4.02. Teachers commonly use play as a primary instructional method ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.69$) and allow both structured and unstructured play ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.72$), reflecting alignment with developmentally appropriate standards. Slightly lower scores for role-playing activities ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.82$) suggest variability possibly due to resource or space limitations. The findings confirm that play is widely recognized as a critical pathway for learning, supporting creativity, self-regulation, and foundational academic skills (Cade et al., 2022; Romstein, 2015).

Teachers frequently implement individualized and culturally responsive teaching practices, with an overall mean of 4.16. The highest indicator, addressing individual learning needs during instruction ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.62$), demonstrates strong commitment to responsive teaching. High ratings for modifying teaching strategies ($M = 4.24$) and respecting cultural differences ($M = 4.22$) further highlight inclusive practices. Slightly lower ratings for integrating local cultural stories ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.77$) suggest opportunities for deeper cultural integration. These findings align with literature emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive instruction for engagement and identity development (Ihmeideh et al., 2020; Lettington, 2018).

Age-appropriate assessment practices are frequently implemented, with an overall mean of 4.20. Teachers strongly utilize portfolios ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.63$), provide constructive feedback ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.64$), and track developmental milestones ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.66$), indicating strong adherence to authentic assessment principles. Lower ratings for involving learners in self-assessment ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.72$) suggest developmental challenges in reflective practices among young learners. The findings align with research emphasizing observation-based assessment as essential for understanding children's development (Alenezi, 2020; Franko & Zhang, 2021).

Classroom management approaches

Teachers demonstrate strong use of routines and structured classroom environments, with an overall mean of 4.17. High ratings for teaching procedures through modeling ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.63$) and reviewing routines regularly ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.66$) indicate effective reinforcement of expectations. These practices support predictability and self-regulation among young learners, consistent with research highlighting the importance of structured routines in early childhood settings (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009; Turk et al., 2019).

Positive behavior support strategies are frequently used, with an overall mean of 4.10. Teachers emphasize praise and recognition of positive behavior ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.69$) and encouraging empathy ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.68$). Slightly lower ratings for using positive reinforcement over punishment ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.80$) suggest some variability in consistent application. These findings align with literature supporting proactive and empathy-based discipline approaches to enhance self-regulation and emotional development (Mooy, 2018; Tomar & Sharma, 2022; Brown et al., 2023).

The emotional climate of classrooms is generally positive, with an overall mean of 3.96. Teachers commonly use humor and affection to build rapport ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.62$) and greet children warmly ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.64$), indicating strong relational warmth. Lower ratings for encouraging shy learners to participate ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.79$) suggest areas for improvement in inclusive engagement. These findings support research indicating that supportive relationships enhance engagement, resilience, and behavior (Shinta et al., 2021; Mooy, 2018).

Teachers effectively organize classroom environments, with an overall mean of 4.01. High indicators include maintaining a visually stimulating but orderly room ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.24$) and providing learning corners with varied materials ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.60$). Lower ratings for displaying children's work ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.34$) suggest possible space or resource constraints. The findings align with literature emphasizing that well-organized environments enhance engagement and reduce disruptive behavior (Barsness, 2017).

Relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches

The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and classroom management approaches ($r = 0.674$, $p = 0.001$). This

indicates that higher implementation of DAP is associated with more effective classroom management. The finding supports theoretical perspectives that developmentally appropriate instruction naturally promotes better behavior, engagement, and classroom climate (Bandura, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978; Julian et al., 2023; Brown et al., 2023).

Challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers

Teachers reported experiencing multiple challenges, with an overall mean of 4.06. The most prominent challenges include feeling overwhelmed when balancing DAP and structured discipline ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.66$) and managing large class sizes ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.68$). Other notable challenges include limited preparation time ($M = 4.11$), lack of parental support ($M = 4.11$), and insufficient training ($M = 4.01$). These findings align with studies identifying large class sizes, limited resources, and insufficient professional development as persistent barriers to effective DAP implementation (Ahonen, 2019).

This study examined the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), classroom management approaches, their relationship, and the challenges encountered by kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela. The findings reveal that teachers frequently implement DAP across all domains, including child-centered learning, play-based instruction, individualized and culturally responsive teaching, and age-appropriate assessment. This indicates strong alignment with principles that support holistic development and responsiveness to learners' needs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2019). Classroom management practices were also widely implemented, with teachers consistently establishing routines, promoting positive behavior support, maintaining nurturing teacher-child relationships, and organizing conducive physical environments, reflecting proactive and supportive management strategies that foster engagement and self-regulation (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009). The study further found a significant positive relationship between DAP and classroom management approaches ($r = 0.674$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that teachers who effectively implement developmentally appropriate instruction are more likely to employ responsive and effective management strategies (Bandura, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). However, teachers reported challenges such as large class sizes, limited time for preparation, insufficient training, lack of resources, and difficulty balancing individualized instruction with structured discipline (Ahonen, 2019). Overall, the findings highlight strong instructional competence alongside systemic constraints that require institutional support, and suggest that ancillary services can function as opportunities for professional development when accompanied by balanced workload distribution, supportive leadership, and continuous professional learning.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that kindergarten teachers in Santo Tomas, Isabela demonstrate strong and consistent implementation of developmentally appropriate practices across instructional and classroom management domains. Teachers effectively apply learner-centered and play-based approaches, integrate individualized and culturally responsive strategies, and utilize authentic assessment methods that support holistic child development. Classroom environments are generally structured, nurturing, and supportive, with positive behavior guidance and warm teacher-child relationships contributing to a conducive learning climate. The study also confirms a significant positive relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and effective classroom management ($r = 0.674$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that responsive teaching strengthens behavioral outcomes.

However, the findings also reveal persistent challenges, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, insufficient training, resource constraints, and varying levels of parental support, which may limit the full realization of developmentally appropriate practices.

Overcoming these barriers requires targeted institutional responses that address both structural and professional dimensions of teaching.

In response to these findings, it is recommended that schools and education authorities strengthen professional development programs focusing on child-centered pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, authentic assessment, and classroom management. Increased provision of instructional materials, play resources, and improvements in physical learning environments are also necessary. Establishing school-wide positive behavior support systems, enhancing socio-emotional learning training, and reinforcing DAP-aligned policies will further support effective practice. Additionally, addressing systemic barriers through reduced workload, increased preparation time, and stronger family-school partnerships is essential to sustain high-quality kindergarten education and support teachers' professional effectiveness. Continued research exploring the long-term outcomes of DAP implementation on student development and learning is likewise encouraged.

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