

Challenges in teaching communication skills among kindergarten to Grade 3 learners at UMA Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills among kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga. Employing a multi-method research design, the study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Twenty-one teachers were purposively selected as participants, and data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative analysis focused on teacher profiles and the extent of challenges related to learner factors, teacher factors, instructional materials, and home or socio-environmental influences. Qualitative analysis explored strategies teachers employ to address these challenges and proposed support mechanisms to enhance instruction. Findings revealed that learner-related challenges, such as difficulty following oral instructions and low confidence, and teacher-related factors, including limited training and classroom management difficulties, were significant. Challenges in instructional resources and home support further compounded difficulties in teaching communication skills. Qualitative results indicated that teachers employed instructional adaptation, confidence-building strategies, and creative use of available resources while highlighting the need for professional development, institutional support, and home-school partnerships. The study concluded that teaching communication skills requires a holistic approach that integrates adaptive teaching, learner engagement, and systemic support. Recommendations were provided for the Department of Education, school administrators, and teachers to enhance instructional effectiveness, as well as for future researchers to investigate interventions, home and community influences, and learners' perspectives.

Keywords: Communication skills, early childhood education, teacher strategies, learner engagement, instructional challenges, Uma Cluster Schools, Kalinga.

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INTRODUCTION

The early grades, particularly Kindergarten to Grade 3, represent a critical stage in basic education during which learners are expected to develop essential communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and comprehension. These foundational skills are

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widely recognized as integral to cognitive development, academic achievement, and meaningful participation in both learning and social interactions. International education research underscores that early communication and literacy development significantly influence learners' future academic trajectories, particularly in linguistically diverse contexts (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2022). Despite this recognition, education systems worldwide continue to encounter persistent challenges in early communication instruction, especially in multilingual and rural settings. Factors such as language diversity, teacher preparedness, availability of instructional materials, and socio-economic conditions have been identified as influencing how communication skills are taught and acquired among young learners (UNICEF, 2022). These complexities highlight the need for localized investigations that account for contextual realities in early-grade classrooms.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has placed strong emphasis on strengthening foundational skills, particularly literacy and communication, through ongoing curriculum reforms and policy initiatives. Although national data indicate relatively high levels of basic literacy, functional literacy, particularly in reading comprehension and effective communication, remains an area of concern (PSA, 2024). This situation has led to renewed focus on early-grade instruction as a crucial intervention point (DepEd, 2025). In response, the Department of Education introduced the MATATAG Agenda and implemented the revised K to 10 curriculum in School Year 2024 to 2025. This reform aims to decongest the curriculum and prioritize essential competencies, including literacy and communication skills, during the early years of schooling. The MATATAG Curriculum emphasizes the importance of ensuring that learners develop adequate communication skills as preparation for more complex learning demands in higher grade levels (DepEd, 2024). Complementing this reform is Republic Act No. 12027 (2024), which amended the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 and provides for a gradual transition from the use of mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction in Kindergarten to Grade 3 toward increased use of Filipino and English, with regional languages serving as auxiliary tools. While this transition is intended to support comprehension and national readiness, it presents important considerations in linguistically diverse communities (DepEd, 2024).

In Lubuagan, Kalinga, where the Uma Cluster Schools are located, these national reforms intersect with distinct linguistic and socio-cultural conditions. Census data indicate that a significant portion of the population belongs to the early school age group, with many learners primarily exposed to Kalinga and other indigenous languages in their home environments (PSA, 2023). The transition to Filipino and English as languages of instruction therefore creates a context that warrants closer examination, particularly in relation to the development of communication skills among young learners. Within this setting, teachers encounter instructional conditions shaped by language use, availability of materials, teacher preparation, and home learning environments. Related studies have identified these factors as areas requiring further investigation in similar contexts (DepEd, 2025), yet there remains limited empirical evidence documenting how such challenges are specifically experienced and addressed within the Uma Cluster Schools. This gap underscores the importance of generating context specific insights to better understand and respond to the realities of early-grade communication instruction in multilingual rural settings.

Anchored in these considerations, this study seeks to systematically examine the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools of Lubuagan, Kalinga. The inquiry is guided by the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the extent to which teachers encounter challenges in teaching communication skills when grouped according to profile variables. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to addressing persistent challenges in early-grade communication instruction, which is central to the Department of Education's

MATATAG Curriculum and the implementation of Republic Act No. 12027. By focusing on the specific conditions within the Uma Cluster Schools, the study generates context sensitive insights that can inform instructional strategies, enhance classroom practices, and support the development of listening, speaking, reading, and comprehension skills among learners. Improved communication instruction may lead to better academic engagement, increased confidence in expressing ideas, and stronger readiness for learning in higher grade levels. For teachers, the findings provide a clearer understanding of instructional barriers and may serve as a basis for refining teaching strategies, strengthening communication focused pedagogy, and identifying areas for professional development. For school administrators, the results offer empirical evidence to support informed decision making related to instructional planning, resource allocation, and the development of school based interventions. For the Department of Education, the study contributes localized data that may inform the effective implementation of national education policies, including the development of responsive instructional materials, targeted teacher capacity building programs, and policy refinements that address the needs of linguistically diverse and rural communities. For parents and the broader community, the study highlights the importance of home school collaboration in supporting children's communication development and encourages greater involvement in reinforcing learning practices beyond the classroom.

This study is theoretically anchored on Jerome Bruner's Language Acquisition Support System theory, which posits that children develop communication skills through guided interaction and structured support from more knowledgeable individuals. Bruner emphasizes that language learning occurs within meaningful social contexts where adults scaffold children's attempts to communicate through modeling, questioning, feedback, and routine interactions. In the early grades, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating communication development by creating supportive environments that encourage listening, speaking, and comprehension. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant in the context of the Uma Cluster Schools, where learners come from linguistically diverse backgrounds and often experience differences between home and school languages. The effectiveness of communication instruction therefore depends on how teachers provide scaffolding, bridge learners' existing language knowledge, and structure classroom communication experiences. Anchoring the study in Bruner's framework provides a strong foundation for examining how instructional support influences communication development in multilingual and rural settings.

Existing literature further highlights the complexity of teaching communication skills in early-grade classrooms. Early childhood theorists emphasize that the development of oral language abilities, including listening and speaking, is a prerequisite for effective reading and writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Communication skills are closely linked to academic achievement, social interaction, and self-confidence, making them a critical focus of early education (UNESCO, 2023). However, teachers frequently encounter learner related barriers, particularly language mismatch between home and school environments. Learners who primarily speak a local dialect at home often struggle when instruction is delivered in Filipino or English, resulting in vocabulary gaps, processing difficulties, and reduced participation (Piragasam et al., 2019). Studies involving indigenous learners in the Philippines further reveal semantic and expressive difficulties that make classroom communication tasks more demanding (Abdon & Barrios, 2024). Although the Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education policy aims to address these challenges, its implementation remains uneven due to limited instructional materials, insufficient teacher training, and mismatched dialects (BilPub Group, 2023; Ramirez, 2021). Socio economic factors also contribute to disparities in communication development, as learners from low income households often have fewer opportunities for language enrichment at home (E Palli Journal, 2024; Lavador, Fernal, & Comon, 2024). These

linguistic and socio economic constraints are associated with decreased attention, comprehension, and engagement, particularly among learners who struggle to follow instructions in unfamiliar languages (Abrigo & Gallardo, 2025), and may be further compounded for learners with special needs who require individualized support (Marinduque & Marquez, 2025).

Teacher related factors also present significant barriers to effective communication instruction. Research indicates that gaps in teacher preparation, limited pedagogical knowledge, and reliance on traditional instructional methods hinder the development of learners' communication skills. While the Kindergarten curriculum emphasizes expressive skills such as speaking, it often provides less focus on receptive and interactive competencies, leading teachers to depend on rote learning and teacher centered approaches (Diaz et al., 2022). Teachers also tend to prioritize reading instruction and performance assessments over opportunities for authentic conversational interaction (Ramos & Bautista, 2021). Limited training in scaffolding strategies, responsive conversation, and oral language integration further constrains instructional effectiveness (Justice & Ezell, 2008). Even when training is provided, implementation is often challenged by large class sizes, time constraints, and the lack of appropriate assessment tools (Villanueva & Agcaoili, 2023). Resource limitations, including the absence of storybooks, visual aids, and digital tools, further restrict opportunities for meaningful communication practice (Snow, 2017; Pianta et al., 2016; Olabiyi et al., 2025). Teachers' beliefs, confidence, and preparedness significantly influence instructional outcomes, with reliance on non-interactive methods contributing to vocabulary limitations, weak comprehension, and reduced learner engagement (Azuela et al., 2023; Asumang, 2020). Professional development programs that promote culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and interactive strategies such as storytelling, role play, and peer assisted learning have been shown to enhance learners' communication skills and engagement (Tiu et al., 2023). In multilingual and resource limited contexts, teachers must also create inclusive learning environments that integrate learners' home languages, cultural practices, and prior knowledge into classroom instruction.

The home environment and level of parental engagement further shape learners' communication development. Children's exposure to language through storytelling, conversation, reading, and play strongly influences vocabulary, comprehension, and expressive abilities (Li, 2024). In rural and resource constrained settings, these opportunities may be limited due to caregivers' work demands, low literacy levels, and lack of reading materials (Encarnacion & Marquez, 2025). Parental involvement in literacy activities, such as reading together and engaging in daily conversations, has been shown to enhance learners' oral language competence, motivation, and confidence (Diaz et al., 2022; Bautista & Del Valle, 2023). Conversely, minimal parental engagement reduces opportunities for consistent language practice and feedback, leading to delayed vocabulary development and weaker expressive skills. Research indicates that supportive home literacy environments characterized by regular parent child interaction and access to reading materials contribute significantly to communication development (Chewe & Matafwali, 2024; Hart & Risley, 2003). In contrast, children with limited exposure to such environments often enter school with weaker language skills (Encarnacion & Marquez, 2021; Li, 2024). Although digital innovations offer potential support for communication development, unequal access to technology remains a challenge in many communities (EPRA Journal, 2024). Strengthening home school partnerships has therefore been identified as a key strategy in supporting communication development, as collaboration between parents and teachers extends learning opportunities beyond the classroom and reinforces instructional efforts (Lucero, 2023; Pilarz, Chun Lin & Premo, 2024; Descartin & Nemenzo, 2024; Barluado et al., 2024).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that the development of communication skills in the early grades is influenced by a complex interaction of learner related, teacher related, and home environment factors. Effective communication instruction requires not only exposure to language but also the integration of appropriate pedagogical strategies, adequate instructional resources, and strong environmental support systems. In multilingual and rural contexts such as the Uma Cluster Schools in Lubuagan, Kalinga, these factors become even more critical, reinforcing the need for context specific investigations that inform responsive and inclusive educational practices.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to examine the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga.

1. What is the profile of the teacher-participants in terms of gender, age, highest educational attainment, grade level handled, years of teaching, and relevant training related to communication or language instruction?
2. To what extent do the teachers encounter challenges in teaching communication skills in the areas of learner-related factors, teacher-related factors, instructional materials and resources, and home and socio-environmental factors?
3. Is there a significant difference in the extent to which teachers encounter challenges in teaching communication skills when grouped according to profile variables?
4. How do teachers address the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners?
5. What support mechanisms may be proposed to enhance the teaching of communication skills in the Uma Cluster Schools?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a multi method research design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to comprehensively examine the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga. The quantitative approach was used to address the research questions that focused on the profile of the teacher participants and the extent of the challenges they encountered in teaching communication skills. The qualitative approach complemented the quantitative data by exploring how teachers addressed these challenges and by identifying possible support mechanisms to enhance communication skills instruction. The Input Process Output Paradigm of the study served as the organizing framework of the methodology and reflected the overall flow of the inquiry from the identified inputs, through the research procedures, to the expected outcomes.

The participants of the study were teachers handling Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga. A total of 21 teacher participants were involved in the study. Of this number, 3 came from Ag agama Elementary School, 3 from Colong Elementary School, 3 from Latawan Ementary School, 3 from Mallongan Elementary School, 2 from Payao Elementary School, 3 from Roadside Elementary School, and 4 from Uma Elementary School. These participants constituted the respondents for the quantitative component of the study, while selected teachers were also included in the qualitative component to provide deeper insights into their experiences in teaching communication skills.

To gather the necessary data, both quantitative and qualitative research instruments were employed in accordance with the multi method research design. For the quantitative

component, a structured questionnaire was used to collect data on the teacher participants' profile and the extent of the challenges they encountered in teaching communication skills. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part elicited data on teacher profile, including gender, age, highest educational attainment, grade level handled, years of teaching experience, and relevant training related to communication or language instruction. The second part focused on learner related challenges, such as learners' language proficiency, attention span, and classroom participation. The third part covered teacher related challenges, including preparedness, instructional strategies, and classroom management. The fourth part addressed challenges related to instructional materials, resources, and home or socio environmental factors. The items in the questionnaire were measured using a Likert scale to determine the extent of the challenges encountered. Prior to its final administration, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a small group of teachers outside the Uma Cluster Schools in order to ensure clarity, content validity, and reliability. Necessary revisions were made before the instrument was administered to the actual participants.

For the qualitative component, semi structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with selected teacher participants. These instruments were designed to generate deeper insights into how teachers addressed the challenges encountered in teaching communication skills and to identify potential support mechanisms to enhance instruction. The interview and focus group discussion guides consisted of open ended questions related to instructional strategies, coping mechanisms, classroom experiences, use of resources, and recommendations for support from school administrators, the community, and the Department of Education. To ensure relevance, appropriateness, and cultural sensitivity, the qualitative instruments were reviewed by experts in early childhood education before their use in the actual conduct of the study.

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from the College, School Heads, and the Department of Education. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. An orientation was conducted to explain the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the responsibilities of the participants. For the quantitative data gathering phase, structured questionnaires were distributed to all selected teacher participants in the Uma Cluster Schools. The participants were given ample time to answer the questionnaire, and the researcher remained available to clarify questions whenever necessary. Completed questionnaires were collected personally in order to ensure the completeness and accuracy of responses. After collection, the quantitative data were encoded and subjected to statistical analysis.

For the qualitative phase, semi structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a purposively selected group of teachers representing different grade levels and teaching experiences. These sessions explored the strategies used by teachers in addressing the challenges they encountered and gathered their suggestions regarding possible support mechanisms. With the consent of the participants, the sessions were audio recorded and supplemented with field notes. The qualitative data were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Data collection was carried out in stages in order to minimize disruption to classroom activities. Throughout the entire research process, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained, and all information gathered was used solely for the purposes of the study. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data further enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

The analysis of data was carried out using appropriate statistical and qualitative procedures aligned with the objectives of the study. Frequency Counts and Percentage were used to describe the profile of the respondents. Weighted mean was used to determine the extent of challenges they encounter in teaching communication skills in areas such as learner factors,

teacher factors, instructional materials, and home or socio environmental factors. The interpretation of the weighted mean followed the specified mean ranges and qualitative descriptions. A mean range of 4.50 – 5.00 was interpreted as To a Very Great Extent. A mean range of 3.50 – 4.49 was interpreted as To a Great Extent. A mean range of 2.50 – 3.49 was interpreted as To a Moderate Extent. A mean range of 1.50 – 2.49 was interpreted as To A Less Extent. A mean range of 1.00 – 1.49 was interpreted as No Extent at All.

To determine whether there was a significant difference in the extent to which teachers encountered challenges in teaching communication skills when grouped according to profile variables, Test of Significant Difference was used. For the qualitative data, Thematic Analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories that reflected teachers' strategies for addressing challenges in teaching communication skills and their recommendations for support mechanisms. Themes were coded systematically, and representative quotations from participants will be used to illustrate key findings. In addition, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data will be conducted to validate and enrich the results, thereby ensuring a holistic understanding of the challenges, coping strategies, and potential interventions for enhancing communication skill instruction in the Uma Cluster Schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results and Discussion section that follows is grounded in the data gathered from 21 teachers handling Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools, Lubuagan, Kalinga. Using the study's multi method research design, the quantitative data were obtained through a structured questionnaire that captured the respondents' profile and the extent to which they encountered challenges in teaching communication skills, while the qualitative data were generated through interviews and focus group discussions with selected teacher participants. The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentage, weighted mean, and tests of significant difference, while the qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. The interpretation of the findings is presented in direct relation to the objectives of the study, specifically to describe the profile of the respondents, determine the extent of challenges encountered across learner related, teacher related, instructional materials and resources, and home and socio environmental factors, identify significant differences when grouped according to profile variables, and explore the strategies teachers use in addressing these challenges.

The profile of the respondents shows a highly specific composition of early grade teachers in the Uma Cluster Schools. In terms of sex, all 21 respondents were female, representing 100.00%, while male respondents accounted for 0 or .00. In terms of age, 3 respondents or 14.30% were 30 years old and below, 9 respondents or 42.90% were 31 – 40 years old, 6 respondents or 28.60% were 41 – 50 years old, and 3 respondents or 14.30% were 51 years old and above. This indicates that the largest proportion of teachers belonged to the 31 – 40 years old age range, followed by those aged 41 – 50 years old, while the smallest groups were those 30 years old and below and those 51 years old and above, both with the same percentage. In terms of highest educational attainment, 2 respondents or 9.50% held a Bachelor's Degree, 5 respondents or 23.80% had MA/MS Units, 12 respondents or 57.10% had a master's Degree, and 2 respondents or 9.50% had Doctoral Units. This distribution indicates that most respondents had already attained graduate level academic preparation, with the majority having completed a master's Degree. In relation to grade level handled, 15 respondents or 71.40% handled One Grade Level, while 6 respondents or 28.60% handled Two and More Grade Levels. Regarding number of years in teaching, 10 respondents or 47.60% had 10 years and below, 6 respondents or 28.60% had 11-20 years, and 5 respondents or 23.80%

had 21 years and above. In terms of number of relevant training related to Communication for the past three years, 5 respondents or 23.81% had attended None, 10 respondents or 47.62% had attended 1-2, 5 respondents or 23.81% had attended 3-4, and 1 respondent or 4.76% had attended More than 5. Taken together, these figures suggest that the respondents were largely female, professionally experienced, academically qualified, and variably exposed to communication related training, thereby providing a meaningful basis for examining how their profile characteristics may relate to the challenges they encounter in teaching communication skills.

With respect to learner related factors, the findings reveal that teachers encountered challenges to a moderate extent, with a Category Mean of 2.79 interpreted as To a moderate extent. Among the specific indicators, learners struggle to follow oral instructions obtained a mean of 3.15 and learners have difficulty pronouncing words correctly also obtained a mean of 3.15, both interpreted as To a moderate extent, making them among the highest reported learner related concerns. Learners have low confidence to participate in class discussions recorded a mean of 3.00, while learners' socio-emotional factors affect participation in communication tasks had a mean of 2.95, learners show limited attention span during oral activities had a mean of 2.80, learners have difficulty understanding story content had a mean of 2.70, learners' prior knowledge or home language limits comprehension also had a mean of 2.70, learners are hesitant to ask questions or seek clarification had a mean of 2.55, and learners have difficulty expressing ideas verbally had a mean of 2.50. All of these were interpreted as To a moderate extent. In contrast, learners have limited vocabulary in the language of instruction had the lowest mean of 2.40 and was interpreted as To a less extent. These results indicate that the primary learner related challenges are not merely lexical in nature but are more strongly associated with oral comprehension, speech production, confidence, and participation. The fact that learners struggle to follow oral instructions and have difficulty pronouncing words correctly points to the importance of receptive and expressive oral language as central dimensions of communication development in the early grades. This pattern is consistent with Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), who argued that oral comprehension in young children is constrained by still developing listening processes, attention, and working memory, particularly when instructions are complex or unfamiliar. Similarly, Goh (2007) emphasized that phonological development in early childhood remains in progress and that limited exposure to the language of instruction may hinder accurate articulation. The finding that low confidence to participate in class discussions was also among the more salient challenges reinforces the view that communication development is deeply social and affective. Vygotsky's (1978) perspective on social interaction highlights that language develops through guided participation, and when learners experience fear of error or uncertainty, they may become less willing to engage in communicative exchanges. Armstrong (2010) likewise emphasized that supportive teacher responses and a psychologically safe classroom are essential for increasing oral participation. By contrast, the comparatively lower mean for limited vocabulary in the language of instruction suggests that while vocabulary remains a concern, it may be partly mitigated by the teachers' use of contextualized instruction, modeling, and concrete teaching supports, consistent with Nation's (2001) view that vocabulary growth can be strengthened through repeated exposure and meaningful use. Overall, the learner related findings show that the most pressing obstacles lie in helping young learners process spoken language, articulate speech, and participate with confidence, all of which are foundational for communication skill development.

The findings on teacher related factors likewise show that these challenges were experienced to a moderate extent overall, with a Category Mean of 3.25 interpreted as To a moderate extent. Among the ten indicators, limited collaboration with colleagues for instructional improvement had the highest mean of 3.75 and was interpreted as To a great

extent, while difficulty providing individual support to struggling learners had a mean of 3.50 and was also interpreted as To a great extent. The remaining items were all interpreted as To a moderate extent, including lack of confidence in implementing communication-focused activities with a mean of 3.45, limited knowledge in scaffolding and interactive teaching with a mean of 3.40, difficulty managing large or diverse classrooms with a mean of 3.30, difficulty adapting lessons to learners' linguistic backgrounds with a mean of 3.30, limited exposure to modern teaching strategies for communication skills with a mean of 3.15, lack of training in oral language or communication strategies with a mean of 3.05, time constraints prevent sufficient oral-language practice with a mean of 3.05, and heavy workload reduces time for oral-language activities with the lowest mean of 2.50. These results suggest that while teachers experience a broad range of instructional and professional challenges, the most acute concerns center on individualized learner support and professional collaboration. The difficulty of providing individual support to struggling learners reflects the reality that communication skill development in early childhood is highly variable and often requires differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and sustained feedback. Tomlinson and Jarvis (2023) underscored that differentiated instruction is necessary for responding to diverse needs but becomes increasingly difficult without sufficient time, planning, and classroom supports. The very high mean for limited collaboration with colleagues for instructional improvement further implies that teachers may be navigating these demands with insufficient collegial exchange, mentoring, or shared problem solving. Lenning et al. (2023) pointed out that collaborative professional cultures significantly improve teaching quality and language related outcomes, especially when educators have opportunities to share strategies and reflect on practice. The moderately elevated mean for lack of confidence in implementing communication-focused activities also suggests that self-efficacy plays an important role in the enactment of communication instruction. This aligns with Bandura's concept of self-efficacy as applied in Basckin et al. (2021) and Li and Ma (2025), which suggests that teachers who perceive themselves as capable are more likely to implement varied and interactive teaching practices. Although heavy workload reduces time for oral-language activities had the lowest mean at 2.50, it still fell within the interpretation To a moderate extent, indicating that workload cannot be dismissed entirely. Instead, the results imply that workload may be less prominent than the more specialized demands of individualized instruction, collaborative learning, and pedagogical confidence. In general, the teacher related findings demonstrate that the capacity to teach communication skills effectively depends not only on personal competence but also on the professional ecosystem in which teachers work.

Challenges related to instructional materials and resources were also encountered to a moderate extent, as reflected in the Category Mean of 3.10 interpreted as To a moderate extent. The highest means were recorded by insufficient storybooks or reading materials and limited budget or resources from school, both at 3.35 and both interpreted as To a moderate extent. Learning materials are not age-appropriate followed with a mean of 3.25, limited access to technology or digital tools had a mean of 3.15, limited access to visual aids or manipulatives had a mean of 3.05, difficulty integrating supplementary materials into lessons had a mean of 3.05, inadequate oral-assessment tools had a mean of 3.00, materials do not address the learners' home language needs also had a mean of 3.00, and both lack of culturally relevant instructional resources and lack of training in using instructional materials effectively had the lowest mean of 2.90, though both still fell under To a moderate extent. The pattern of responses indicates that the challenge is not confined to a single type of material but rather concerns the broader adequacy, relevance, appropriateness, and usability of available resources. The prominence of insufficient storybooks or reading materials highlights the importance of print rich environments in communication and literacy instruction. Buckingham et al. (2023)

emphasized that early language development is strongly supported by access to diverse and high quality reading materials that promote vocabulary growth, comprehension, and oral interaction. Similarly, the mean of 3.35 for limited budget or resources from school points to structural constraints that can restrict teachers' ability to obtain or create supplementary materials necessary for effective instruction. Teale et al. (2020) observed that resource limitations reduce the range and quality of literacy experiences that can be offered in schools, especially in underserved contexts. The finding that learning materials are not age-appropriate, with a mean of 3.25, is also particularly significant because developmentally mismatched materials may diminish engagement and hinder comprehension. Hwa et al. (2020), Chisunum and Nwadiokwu (2024), and Haas et al. (2021) all stressed that instructional resources must align with learners' developmental level to facilitate meaningful participation and language use. Moreover, the moderate concerns regarding digital tools, oral-assessment tools, and the integration of supplementary materials suggest that teachers are managing instructional environments that require both material access and pedagogical skill in resource utilization. Hadjer (2024) noted that when teachers are able to integrate digital and supplementary resources effectively, communication learning can become more varied, responsive, and engaging. Thus, the findings on instructional materials and resources point to the persistent challenge of ensuring that early grade teachers have sufficient, relevant, and developmentally appropriate materials to support communication skills instruction in ways that are both accessible and contextually suitable.

The results for home and socio-environmental factors indicate that these challenges were likewise encountered to a moderate extent overall, with a Category Mean of 2.64 interpreted as To a Moderate Extent. The highest mean among the indicators was minimal parent-teacher communication on learners' progress at 3.95, interpreted in the table as To a Moderate Extent. This was followed by cultural norms discourage verbal participation at home with a mean of 3.10 interpreted as To a Moderate Extent. Socio-economic factors limit access to books and literacy materials had a mean of 2.70, limited community literacy programs or support had a mean of 2.70, and lack of exposure to digital storytelling or language resources at home also had a mean of 2.70, all interpreted as To a Moderate Extent. Learners' home language differs from the medium of instruction had a mean of 2.55 and was interpreted as To a Moderate Extent. On the lower end, learners have limited support for communication practice at home had a mean of 2.45 interpreted as To A Less Extent, family routines do not include oral-language activities had a mean of 2.25 interpreted as To A Less Extent, low parental literacy affects learners' language development had a mean of 2.15 interpreted as To A Less Extent, and parents have limited time for storytelling or reading had the lowest mean of 1.80 interpreted as To A Less Extent. These results indicate that among the home and socio-environmental concerns, the most salient issue lies in the weak link between school and home, particularly in terms of communication about learners' progress. Walker and Bond (2025) argued that effective home-school partnerships enhance both academic and language development because parents are better able to reinforce learning when they are informed and engaged. The high mean of 3.95 for minimal parent-teacher communication on learners' progress suggests that opportunities for coordinated support may be limited, thereby reducing continuity between classroom instruction and home reinforcement. The finding that cultural norms discourage verbal participation at home, with a mean of 3.10, also points to the role of socialization patterns in language use. James (2022) noted that children's opportunities to speak, question, and narrate are often shaped by cultural expectations, and when verbal expressiveness is not strongly encouraged at home, learners may participate less confidently in classroom communication tasks. The moderate rating for socio-economic factors limit access to books and literacy materials at 2.70 further indicates that material deprivation remains a meaningful constraint on language development, in line with Merz et al. (2020), who showed

that disparities in access to literacy resources contribute to unequal language and literacy outcomes. Likewise, the mean of 2.55 for learners' home language differs from the medium of instruction reflects the continuing influence of language mismatch between home and school. Sorenson Duncan and Paradis (2020) emphasized that children's oral and academic language development is shaped by the relationship between home language experiences and school language expectations. Although several home factors such as low parental literacy and limited time for storytelling were rated To A Less Extent, the overall pattern still points to a home environment that may not consistently provide the communicative reinforcement, literacy exposure, or institutional connection needed to fully support communication development. Collectively, these findings underscore that communication skill development in the early grades cannot be understood solely as an in-school concern but must also be interpreted within the broader socio-cultural and home contexts in which learners are embedded.

When the extent to which teachers encountered challenges in teaching communication skills was examined according to profile variables, the results showed that most profile characteristics did not produce statistically significant differences across the four categories of challenge. For learner-related challenges, the p-values were .804 for Age, .916 for Highest Educational Attainment, .749 for Grade Level Handled, .211 for Years of Teaching, and .520 for No. of Relevant Trainings Attended. All of these values are greater than the .05 level, indicating that there was no significant difference in learner-related challenges when respondents were grouped according to these profile variables. For teacher-related challenges, the p-values were .026* for Age, .067 for Highest Educational Attainment, .069 for Grade Level Handled, .067 for Years of Teaching, and .258 for No. of Relevant Trainings Attended. Since .026* is significant at .05 level, Age was found to have a significant effect on teacher-related challenges, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis for this specific comparison. By contrast, the remaining p-values are all greater than .05, indicating no significant difference for Highest Educational Attainment, Grade Level Handled, Years of Teaching, and No. of Relevant Trainings Attended in relation to teacher-related challenges. For instructional materials and resources, the p-values were .094 for Age, .620 for Highest Educational Attainment, .029* for Grade Level Handled, .119 for Years of Teaching, and .669 for No. of Relevant Trainings Attended. Here, only Grade Level Handled yielded a statistically significant result because .029* is less than .05, which means there was a significant difference in challenges related to instructional materials and resources when grouped according to grade level handled. For home and socio-environmental challenges, the p-values were .937 for Age, .989 for Highest Educational Attainment, .586 for Grade Level Handled, .520 for Years of Teaching, and .350 for No. of Relevant Trainings Attended, all of which are greater than .05 and therefore indicate no significant differences. Overall, these findings show that only two profile based comparisons reached significance at the .05 level, namely Age in relation to teacher-related challenges and Grade Level Handled in relation to instructional materials and resources, while all other comparisons supported the null hypothesis. This suggests that teachers' perceptions of challenges in teaching communication skills are generally stable across educational attainment, years of teaching, and training exposure, but may vary depending on age and teaching assignment context. Wang et al. (2024) observed that teacher age and related professional experience can influence instructional confidence and adaptability, especially in language teaching, while Smith and Gillespie (2023) noted that formal qualifications and training attendance alone do not always predict differences in how teachers perceive classroom challenges because contextual supports and everyday teaching realities often play a more decisive role.

The post-hoc analysis reported for age groups in relation to instructional materials and resources further elaborates how perceived difficulties varied across age categories as

presented in Table 3a. The mean for teachers 30 years and below was 2.83, the mean for those aged 31-40 was 2.99, the mean for those aged 41-50 was 3.58, and the mean for those 51 years and above was 2.83. In the pairwise comparisons, the p-value between 30 years and below and 31-40 was .520, between 30 years and below and 41-50 was .000, between 30 years and below and 51 years and above was .602, between 31-40 and 41-50 was .000, between 31-40 and 51 years and above was .525, and between 41-50 and 51 years and above was .000. These values indicate that the 41-50 age group differed significantly from all other age groups because each of the comparisons involving 41-50 yielded .000, whereas the comparisons among 30 years and below, 31-40, and 51 years and above were not significant. As reported, teachers in the 41-50 age group registered the highest mean of 3.58, suggesting that they experienced greater challenges in relation to instructional materials and resources than younger and older groups. This pattern may point to the specific pressures faced by mid-career teachers who are balancing instructional expectations, material limitations, and adaptation to newer resources or approaches. Wilcox (2025) noted that mid-career teachers may occupy a demanding professional space in which they are expected to sustain established instructional routines while also responding to innovations in materials and pedagogy. Luo et al. (2020), Ajani (2024), and Ellorin et al. (2024) likewise emphasized that effective use of instructional resources requires not only experience but also flexibility and familiarity with evolving classroom tools. The lower means reported by teachers 30 years and below and those 51 years and above, both at 2.83, and by teachers aged 31-40 at 2.99, may suggest somewhat lower perceived difficulty in this domain among those groups, whether due to greater comfort with newer tools among younger teachers or reliance on established routines among older teachers. As presented in the study, these post-hoc results point to age related variation in how instructional materials and resources are experienced in communication instruction.

A further analysis of instructional materials and resources by grade level handled showed a statistically significant difference between teachers who handled one grade level and those who handled two or more grade levels. Teachers handling One Grade Level obtained a mean of 3.29, whereas those handling Two or more Grade Levels obtained a mean of 2.68. The test yielded $df = 19$, $t\text{-value} = 6.650$, and $p\text{-value} = .029$. Since .029 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that grade level handled significantly influenced the extent to which teachers encountered challenges related to instructional materials and resources. The direction of the result shows that teachers handling one grade level experienced a significantly higher extent of challenges than teachers handling two or more grade levels. This suggests that those assigned to a single grade may perceive greater pressure to secure, align, and utilize grade specific materials that match the curriculum and developmental needs of learners. Yasinli and Jafarova (2026) emphasized that developing and selecting instructional materials that are appropriately aligned with learners' developmental and linguistic needs requires both adequate resources and careful pedagogical judgment. Cayabas and Sumeg-ang (2023) similarly pointed out that instructional challenges are shaped not only by availability of materials but also by the teaching context itself, including how demands are distributed across assignments. In this case, single grade teachers may be working under a more focused expectation to address all communication skill targets within one grade with limited materials, whereas teachers assigned to multiple grade levels may become more accustomed to adapting or reusing materials across different levels, thereby reducing their perceived difficulty. This result deepens the quantitative analysis by showing that the context of grade assignment matters significantly in how instructional resource challenges are experienced.

The qualitative phase of the study further enriched the quantitative findings by revealing how teachers actively cope with the challenges of teaching communication skills in the early grades. Through interviews and focus group discussions, three major themes emerged,

namely Instructional Adaptation, Learner Engagement and Confidence Building, and Professional and Institutional Support. These themes provide a grounded explanation of how teachers respond to the learner related, teacher related, and resource related challenges identified in the quantitative results.

The first theme, Instructional Adaptation, reflects teachers' efforts to modify instruction in response to learners' diverse language abilities, attention spans, and prior knowledge. Teachers described using repetition, visual aids, gestures, scaffolding, and improvised materials to increase comprehension and participation. One teacher explained, "I repeat instructions several times and use gestures or pictures so learners can understand." (T01). Another shared, "When storybooks are limited, I create flashcards and use household objects to illustrate vocabulary." (T04). Additional responses included, "I break lessons into small steps and model sentences so learners can follow along more easily." (T07), "I modify activities based on the learners' abilities, sometimes pairing advanced learners with beginners to support each other." (T09), and "I use songs and rhymes to help learners remember vocabulary and practice speaking." (T12). These responses directly correspond with the earlier quantitative findings that learners struggle to follow oral instructions, have difficulty pronouncing words correctly, and display moderate limitations in confidence, comprehension, and participation. The strategies described by teachers function as practical scaffolds that attempt to address those specific weaknesses. The use of repetition and gestures, for example, responds to the mean of 3.15 for learners struggle to follow oral instructions, while modeling, songs, and rhymes respond to the pronunciation and verbal expression difficulties reflected in the learner related category. The teachers' improvisation of materials also resonates with the instructional resource findings, especially the moderate challenges related to insufficient storybooks or reading materials and limited budget or resources from school. These qualitative accounts align with Vygotsky's theory of guided participation, which views learning as supported through assisted interaction, and with Woode-Eshun et al. (2024), who stressed that teachers' creative use of available materials can improve literacy and communication learning in resource constrained settings. Thus, Instructional Adaptation demonstrates that teachers are not passive recipients of contextual limitations but are actively restructuring lessons to preserve learner participation and comprehension.

The second theme, Learner Engagement and Confidence Building, highlights the socio-emotional dimension of communication teaching and supports the quantitative result that learners have low confidence to participate in class discussions, with a mean of 3.00, and that learners' socio-emotional factors affect participation in communication tasks, with a mean of 2.95. Teachers described the need to create a classroom climate where learners feel safe to speak, make mistakes, and gradually develop oral confidence. One teacher noted, "I praise even small attempts to speak, so learners feel confident to share their ideas." (T02). Another explained, "I encourage group storytelling and pair learners together, so they can practice speaking without feeling nervous." (T05). Similar responses included, "I make activities fun, like using songs and role-playing, to get learners actively involved in speaking." (T08), "I make sure learners know it's okay to make mistakes and that everyone's contribution matters." (T11), and "I provide opportunities for learners to present in front of the class gradually, starting with small groups." (T14). These responses show that teachers recognize communication teaching not only as a matter of language instruction but also as a process of confidence formation and emotional support. By using praise, peer interaction, role play, and staged presentation tasks, teachers attempt to reduce anxiety and build self-efficacy in learners who might otherwise remain silent or hesitant. This is consistent with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which suggests that confidence strongly shapes willingness to undertake challenging tasks, and with Azizah et al. (2023), who found that teacher support can counter social and cultural barriers to

oral participation. The strategies described here also speak to the earlier finding that cultural norms discourage verbal participation at home, with a mean of 3.10, because the classroom becomes an alternative social space where teachers can intentionally model and reinforce communicative participation. Consequently, Learner Engagement and Confidence Building represents a critical mediating process through which teachers address the affective barriers that limit oral language growth.

The third theme, Professional and Institutional Support, reflects teachers' awareness that the effective teaching of communication skills cannot rest on individual effort alone but depends on training, materials, administrative support, and collaboration. Teachers articulated the need for stronger systems of professional development and school level assistance. One participant stated, "It would be helpful to have workshops on interactive teaching methods and strategies for learners with limited language skills." (T03). Another said, "Having more storybooks, visual aids, and oral-assessment tools would make teaching communication skills easier." (T06). A third participant observed, "I appreciate when colleagues share strategies, and mentoring programs help me improve my lessons." (T09). Additional responses included, "Support from the school administration, like providing time for planning and resources, makes a big difference." (T13), and "Training on digital tools for storytelling and interactive lessons would enhance learners' engagement." (T15). These statements strongly reinforce the quantitative findings that limited collaboration with colleagues for instructional improvement had a mean of 3.75 and was interpreted as To a great extent, difficulty providing individual support to struggling learners had a mean of 3.50 and was interpreted as To a great extent, and multiple items related to materials and training were experienced to a moderate extent. The qualitative data reveal that teachers themselves view professional learning, mentoring, and material provision as essential responses to these constraints. Haider et al. (2025) emphasized that professional development and institutional support are major determinants of instructional effectiveness, particularly where resource limitations are pronounced. Alghamdy (2022) similarly argued that administrative support and professional networks enhance teachers' ability to implement language and communication instruction successfully. The theme therefore extends the quantitative results by showing that teachers perceive communication teaching as a shared institutional responsibility rather than an isolated classroom task.

Viewed together, the quantitative and qualitative findings present a coherent picture of the realities of teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners in the Uma Cluster Schools. The quantitative data established that learner related, teacher related, instructional materials and resources, and home and socio-environmental challenges were all experienced overall To a moderate extent, with Category Means of 2.79, 3.25, 3.10, and 2.64, respectively. Within these categories, oral instruction following, pronunciation, confidence, individualized support, collaboration, insufficient reading materials, limited school resources, and minimal parent-teacher communication emerged as particularly salient concerns. The inferential analysis further showed that most profile variables did not significantly differentiate these experiences, except for Age in relation to teacher-related challenges with $p = .026^*$ and Grade Level Handled in relation to instructional materials and resources with $p = .029^*$. The post-hoc and t-test analyses provided additional precision by identifying the groups for which these differences were most apparent. The qualitative themes of Instructional Adaptation, Learner Engagement and Confidence Building, and Professional and Institutional Support then deepened these results by revealing the practical strategies and support needs that underlie teachers' day to day responses to these challenges. Altogether, the findings address the objectives of the study by showing that the teaching of communication skills in early grade classrooms is shaped by an interdependent set of learner, teacher, material, and environmental conditions. They also contribute to the field by demonstrating that in multilingual and resource constrained settings, effective communication instruction depends not only on teacher effort

but also on scaffolding practices, affective classroom support, resource provision, collaboration, and stronger school to home connections. These insights provide a strong empirical basis for the next section of the manuscript, particularly in formulating conclusions, implications, and recommendations for strengthening communication skill instruction in similar educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that teaching communication skills among Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners is a complex and multifaceted process shaped by a convergence of learner related, teacher related, and environmental factors within and beyond the classroom. The results demonstrate that teachers encounter varying levels of challenges associated with learners' language proficiency, attention span, and participation, as well as constraints related to instructional preparedness, classroom management, availability of materials, and socio environmental influences. These challenges are further intensified in multilingual and resource limited contexts such as the Uma Cluster Schools in Lubuagan, Kalinga, where differences between home and school languages and limited access to instructional resources affect the development of learners' communication skills. The study also reveals that while teachers employ strategies to address these difficulties, their effectiveness is often influenced by the level of institutional support, access to appropriate materials, and opportunities for professional development.

Moreover, the findings highlight that communication skill development is not solely dependent on classroom instruction but is also closely linked to the broader learning environment, including home support and community involvement. The results underscore the importance of fostering learner engagement through interactive and contextually relevant teaching approaches, while also strengthening teacher capacity through continuous training and support. The qualitative insights further emphasize the need for adaptive instructional practices, as teachers navigate diverse classroom conditions and respond to the varying needs of learners. Taken together, these findings confirm that effective communication instruction requires a holistic approach that integrates teacher competence, learner participation, and the availability of adequate resources within a supportive educational framework.

In light of these conclusions, the study recommends several measures to enhance the teaching of communication skills in early grade classrooms. It is essential for the Department of Education in the Kalinga Division to organize regular training workshops that focus on communication oriented instructional strategies, scaffolding techniques, and the integration of interactive and digital teaching tools. At the school level, administrators should ensure that classrooms are equipped with sufficient instructional materials, including storybooks, visual aids, oral assessment tools, and relevant digital resources, to support effective communication instruction. Teachers are encouraged to design and implement activities that promote active learner participation, such as group storytelling, peer discussions, and dramatization exercises, which can enhance learners' confidence and engagement in communication tasks.

Furthermore, the establishment of mentoring programs is recommended to allow experienced teachers to guide those who are new or less experienced in planning and implementing communication focused activities. School administrators are also advised to manage teaching assignments in a manner that minimizes excessive workload, particularly by reducing the number of grade levels handled by individual teachers when feasible. These measures are expected to support teachers in delivering more focused and effective instruction. In addition, future researchers are encouraged to extend the scope of this study by exploring other dimensions of communication skill instruction in early education. Further investigations

may examine home and community factors in greater depth, including parental literacy, socio economic conditions, and cultural practices, to better understand their influence on learners' communication development. Future studies may also incorporate learners' perspectives in order to capture how children perceive communication activities, what motivates their participation, and what challenges they encounter in developing communication skills.

Overall, the study concludes that the success of early communication instruction depends on the integration of responsive teaching practices, supportive learning environments, and collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommended strategies, schools can create more inclusive and effective conditions that empower teachers and enhance learners' communication abilities. Such efforts are essential in strengthening foundational skills and preparing learners for future academic demands, thereby contributing to sustained educational development and improved learning outcomes.

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