

**Personal and professional competencies and developmental challenges
among Grade One teachers**

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the competencies of teachers and the challenges they encounter in sustaining their professional growth. Although teacher competence has been widely studied, limited attention has been given to the combined personal and professional competencies of teachers in the early grades within a local public-school context. Using a descriptive survey design, the study involved 17 teacher-respondents from public elementary schools in Gamu District, Schools Division of Isabela. Data were collected through a researcher-developed questionnaire, informal interviews, and documentary analysis. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the respondents' profile, while weighted mean was employed to determine competency levels and the difficulty of setbacks encountered. The findings showed that respondents demonstrated very high personal competence ($M = 4.24$) and very high professional competence ($M = 4.23$). However, competency-development setbacks remained moderately difficult ($M = 2.70$), particularly those related to training, resources, time, workload, and administrative demands. The study recommends responsive professional development, stronger collaboration, instructional leadership, ICT-supported learning, and sustained institutional support.

Keywords: Personal competencies, professional competencies, teacher competence, professional development, elementary teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a central role in the quality of learners' educational experiences. Their work requires more than knowledge of subject matter. It involves pedagogical skills, communication, classroom management, professional judgment, personal dispositions, and the ability to respond to diverse learner needs. Darling-Hammond (2021) explained that quality teaching draws from a broad knowledge base that combines content, pedagogy, and an understanding of learners. Thus, teacher competence is multidimensional and develops continuously through practice and professional learning.

Teacher competence is also closely associated with the quality of instruction and student learning. Shulman (1987) emphasized that effective teaching requires the integration

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of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. In a similar vein, Kunter et al. (2013) found that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, professional beliefs, motivation, and self-regulation contribute to instructional quality and student development. A review by Depaepe et al. (2022) further noted that contemporary views of teacher competence extend from teachers' knowledge and dispositions to their situation-specific skills and classroom performance.

The importance of competent teachers is particularly evident in the early grades. Grade One teachers work with learners who are making the transition from early childhood education to formal schooling. At this stage, teachers need to establish routines, build positive relationships, respond to individual differences, develop foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and create a classroom environment conducive to learning. These responsibilities require both professional expertise and personal qualities such as patience, adaptability, commitment, self-regulation, and effective interpersonal relationships.

In the Philippine setting, teacher competence is framed by the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). Department of Education Order No. 42, s. 2017 formally adopted the PPST as the national framework for teacher quality and professional development. The standards emphasize seven domains: content knowledge and pedagogy; learning environment; diversity of learners; curriculum and planning; assessment and reporting; community linkages and professional engagement; and personal growth and professional development. These domains indicate that teacher competence encompasses both classroom performance and broader professional responsibilities.

According to Republic Act No. 10912, or the Continuing Professional Development Act of 2016, competence includes cognitive, functional, personal, and ethical dimensions. The law also recognizes lifelong learning as essential to the continuing development of professional competencies. Similarly, Republic Act No. 10533 emphasizes the need for teacher education and training to support the implementation of a learner-centered, developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and research-based basic education curriculum. These policies reinforce the expectation that teachers should continually strengthen their professional capabilities.

Recent Philippine studies support the need to examine teacher competence at the school level. Garing (2024), for example, found that metacognitive awareness and work-task motivation are relevant to teaching competence among public elementary school teachers. Likewise, Labrador (2023) examined teacher competence through professional advancement, classroom management, instructional competency, human relationships, and professional accountability. These dimensions suggest that teacher effectiveness cannot be adequately understood through instructional skills alone.

Other Philippine research has highlighted the role of professional learning in developing teacher competence. Conde et al. (2023) reported that Learning Action Cell activities can contribute to the professional competence of elementary teachers. Dayagbil and Alda (2024) likewise emphasized that continuing professional development provides opportunities for teachers to improve their competence, although participation may be influenced by motivation and practical constraints. More recent evidence from the Division of Isabela also indicates that professional development activities are associated with several dimensions of teaching competence, including instructional planning, classroom management, instructional skills, rapport with learners, and subject matter knowledge.

The relationship between teacher competence and educational outcomes is also well established internationally. Rockoff (2004) found substantial differences among teachers in their contribution to student achievement, while Rivkin et al. (2005) demonstrated significant teacher effects on academic achievement. These findings suggest that examining teacher characteristics and professional practice is important when seeking to understand differences in educational outcomes. Kunter et al. (2013) further demonstrated that professional

competence influences instructional quality, which in turn affects student learning and motivation.

Personal competencies deserve particular attention because teachers' professional performance is influenced by their beliefs, motivation, self-regulation, and interpersonal dispositions. As explained by Bandura (1997), individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence how they approach tasks, persist in difficult situations, and regulate their behavior. In teaching, such personal resources can influence how teachers respond to classroom challenges and sustain effective practice. Early-career teachers, for instance, may require both professional knowledge and personal resilience to manage the everyday demands of teaching (Lo & Tang, 2023).

Professional competence, meanwhile, involves the knowledge and skills required to perform teaching responsibilities effectively. Shulman (1987) described teaching expertise as requiring an interaction between subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. Perrenoud (2004) similarly viewed teaching competence as the ability to mobilize knowledge and resources in complex professional situations. In contemporary education, this includes planning instruction, managing learning environments, assessing learners, collaborating with colleagues, communicating with parents and communities, and engaging in continuous professional development.

Despite the growing literature on teacher competence, many studies examine teachers in general or focus primarily on instructional competencies. Fewer studies specifically examine the combined personal and professional competencies of Grade One teachers, particularly within a local public-school district context. This gap is important because the competencies required in the early grades may differ in emphasis from those required at other levels. Grade One teachers deal with learners at a critical stage of academic and social development and therefore need competencies that address both instructional and personal demands.

The present study responds to this need by examining the personal and professional competencies of Grade One teachers in Gamu District. It determines the teachers' level of competence and identifies the difficulties or setbacks they encounter in developing these competencies. The findings may provide a basis for identifying appropriate professional development priorities and school-level interventions. More broadly, the study may contribute to the continuing discussion on teacher quality by providing localized evidence on the competencies needed by teachers working in the early grades.

This study is anchored on the view that teacher competence is a multidimensional construct involving knowledge, skills, dispositions, motivation, and professional behavior. Spencer and Spencer (1993) described competency as an underlying characteristic associated with effective or superior performance. In education, however, competence is not limited to observable teaching techniques. It also involves the personal resources that allow teachers to apply professional knowledge appropriately in varying classroom situations.

The study distinguishes between personal competencies and professional competencies. Personal competencies refer to qualities that influence how teachers conduct themselves and respond to the demands of their work. These may include self-confidence, commitment, motivation, adaptability, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, responsibility, and openness to professional growth. Professional competencies refer to the knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching, including instructional planning, classroom management, content knowledge, pedagogical practices, assessment, communication, collaboration, and professional engagement.

The distinction is consistent with contemporary models of teacher competence. Kunter et al. (2013) conceptualized professional competence through pedagogical content knowledge, professional beliefs, work-related motivation, and self-regulation. Similarly, the PPST recognizes both instructional competencies and personal growth and professional development as essential components of teacher quality.

For Grade One teachers, these competencies are particularly important because effective teaching involves responding to learners' developmental characteristics and individual differences. Teachers must translate curriculum requirements into developmentally appropriate learning experiences. They must also establish supportive learning environments and use assessment information to adjust instruction. The Philippine basic education framework likewise emphasizes learner-centered, inclusive, developmentally appropriate, contextualized, and research-based education (Republic Act No. 10533).

The framework of the present study therefore assumes that personal and professional competencies jointly influence teachers' capacity to perform their responsibilities effectively. At the same time, teachers may encounter setbacks that limit their continued development. These may include limited access to relevant training, workload, inadequate resources, technological difficulties, time constraints, classroom-management concerns, and other school-related challenges. Philippine studies have similarly identified challenges involving time, resources, accessibility, and professional development opportunities (Dayagbil & Alda, 2024; Espanto & Guillermo, 2026).

The study consequently examines three interconnected areas: (1) the respondents' personal and professional profile, (2) their personal and professional competencies, and (3) the setbacks encountered in developing these competencies. The results are intended to provide an empirical basis for identifying areas requiring strengthening and for designing appropriate professional development interventions.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the personal and professional competencies of Grade One teachers in Gamu District. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the Grade One teacher respondents in terms of age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, latest performance rating, present position, number of years in teaching, and extent of participation in seminars and training related to their functions?
2. What is the level of personal and professional competencies of the Grade One teachers?
3. What setbacks do Grade One teachers encounter in developing their personal and professional competencies?
4. What professional development priorities may be proposed based on the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the personal and professional competencies of teachers. This design was appropriate because it describes existing conditions, identifies patterns among variables, and provides information about current practices and experiences. As noted by Padua (1995), descriptive research involves the collection, classification, analysis, and interpretation of survey data to describe prevailing conditions and relationships. Debold and Meyer (1999) likewise explained that descriptive research can be used to determine relationships between and among variables.

The study was conducted in the public elementary schools of Gamu District, Schools Division of Isabela, during School Year 2025–2026. The respondents were 17 Grade 4 teachers teaching Mathematics from 16 public elementary schools in the district. The participating schools were Barcolan Elementary School, Buenavista Elementary School, Camp Melchor Elementary School, Dammao Elementary School, Furao Elementary School, Gamu Central School, Guibang Elementary School, Lenzon Elementary School, Linglingay Elementary School, Mabini Elementary School, Pintor Elementary School, Rizal Primary School, Sta. Rosa Elementary School, Union Elementary School, UPI Elementary School, and Song Song Elementary School. Gamu Central School had two respondents, while each of the other schools had one respondent.

Thus, the study had a total of 17 teacher-respondents.

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire, unstructured interview, and documentary analysis. The questionnaire was developed after reviewing related literature and studies and examining existing models relevant to the research. It consisted of three parts: the respondents' profile, the extent of proficiency in personal and professional competencies, and the setbacks encountered in developing these competencies.

Before administration, the questionnaire underwent a try-out involving teachers from other districts. Their comments and suggestions were considered in revising the instrument. The revised questionnaire was subsequently presented to the research adviser and the Dean of Graduate Studies for review and final approval.

An informal interview was also conducted to obtain additional information and to check the responses gathered through the questionnaire. Selected respondents were interviewed during the retrieval of the questionnaire and, when necessary, through Google Meet. The interview provided supplementary information for interpreting the survey responses.

Data gathering began after permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Schools Division of Isabela. The questionnaire was distributed electronically through a link sent to the school heads, who informed the teacher-respondents about the study. The respondents accessed the questionnaire through the provided link and answered it according to the accompanying instructions. Selected respondents were subsequently invited to participate in an informal interview through Google Meet.

For statistical treatment, frequency and percentage were used to summarize the respondents' profiles in terms of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, latest performance rating, present position, teaching experience, and participation in relevant in-service training. Weighted mean was used to determine the respondents' level of personal and professional competencies and the extent of setbacks encountered in developing these competencies. The collected data were tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 17 teacher-respondents. Overall, the findings indicate a high level of perceived competence in both personal and professional domains. At the same time, the respondents identified several institutional and work-related barriers that moderately affected their competency development.

The respondents demonstrated a very high level of personal competence, with an overall weighted mean of 4.24. Among the four dimensions, personality obtained the highest rating ($M = 4.30$), followed by emotional competence ($M = 4.26$) and managerial competence

($M = 4.23$). Communication received the lowest rating ($M = 4.18$), although it remained within the proficient range. The results suggest that the teachers generally viewed themselves as resilient, open-minded, patient, enthusiastic, and capable of managing their professional responsibilities. In particular, openness ($M = 4.37$) and patience ($M = 4.35$) were among the strongest personal attributes reported.

The relatively lower rating for communication deserves attention. Although 4.18 still indicates proficiency, its position below the other personal competency dimensions suggests an area where further development may be useful. Effective communication is particularly important for teachers because their work involves continuous interaction with learners, colleagues, parents, and school leaders. A teacher may possess strong personal qualities yet still encounter difficulties when communicating expectations, responding to concerns, or collaborating with others. Thus, professional development should not focus only on strengthening existing competencies but should also address comparatively weaker areas.

Professional competencies were likewise rated highly. The respondents obtained a grand weighted mean of 4.23, interpreted as very proficient. Teaching and mentoring ranked first ($M = 4.30$), followed by professionalism ($M = 4.25$). Career development obtained $M = 4.20$, while diversity, equity, and inclusion received the lowest rating ($M = 4.17$). Although all four areas reflected strong competence, the differences suggest that respondents were more confident in direct teaching and mentoring than in competencies involving broader professional and diversity-related concerns.

Teaching and mentoring emerged as a particular strength. The highest-rated practice was developing content and instructional approaches aligned with learning goals ($M = 4.37$), followed by using strategies responsive to diverse learners ($M = 4.35$) and implementing teaching techniques appropriate to learning goals ($M = 4.33$). The teachers also rated their use of educational and collaborative technologies highly ($M = 4.32$). These findings indicate that the respondents perceived themselves as capable of translating instructional goals into classroom practice. Their high rating in responding to learner diversity is also encouraging because effective teaching requires teachers to adjust instruction to differences in learners' needs and characteristics.

Professionalism also received a strong rating ($M = 4.25$). The highest-rated competency was understanding academic integrity, including honesty, authorship, collaboration, and proper attribution ($M = 4.35$). Managing stress and maintaining healthy strategies for dealing with challenging experiences followed closely ($M = 4.33$). Understanding ethical issues in contemporary professional settings received $M = 4.32$. These results suggest that professional competence was understood not simply as technical teaching ability but also as ethical conduct, self-management, and responsible professional behavior. The comparatively lower ratings for systems thinking ($M = 4.10$) and professional planning ($M = 4.12$) point to opportunities for further development in more analytical and career-oriented aspects of professional practice.

The results for diversity, equity, and inclusion were positive but comparatively lower. The dimension obtained $M = 4.17$, with lifelong learning about different perspectives and issues in diversity, equity, and inclusion receiving the highest rating ($M = 4.30$). Applying awareness of differences in culture, identity, personality, and other factors to build positive relationships followed at $M = 4.27$. However, engaging tools for difficult conversations obtained only $M = 4.00$, the lowest rating within the dimension. This difference is meaningful. It may indicate that teachers are generally comfortable recognizing and appreciating diversity but may need greater preparation in handling sensitive or challenging situations involving differences among learners and other members of the school community.

Career development produced an overall mean of 4.20. Taking personal ownership of educational and career goals was the strongest indicator ($M = 4.30$), followed by developing professional relationships ($M = 4.29$) and articulating professional competencies through

resumes, curriculum vitae, and digital platforms ($M = 4.27$). The lowest-rated practices were conducting informational interviews ($M = 4.03$) and interviewing to communicate technical and professional competencies ($M = 4.07$). This pattern suggests that respondents were relatively confident in managing their career goals and professional relationships but less confident in activities that require deliberate external career exploration and presentation.

Despite these high self-ratings, the teachers reported moderate difficulty in developing their competencies. Personal competency setbacks produced an average weighted mean of 2.68, while professional competency setbacks obtained a slightly higher mean of 2.72. The overall weighted mean of 2.70 indicates that competency-development setbacks were moderately difficult.

For personal competencies, the most significant concern was lack of funding and resources ($M = 2.77$). This was followed by time constraints ($M = 2.75$), poorly designed professional development activities ($M = 2.73$), and challenges involving student behavior, diverse learning styles, and communication with parents ($M = 2.72$). Technological limitations and perceived weaknesses in professional development programs each obtained $M = 2.70$. The least difficult concern was lack of creativity or awareness of social issues ($M = 2.62$).

These findings point to an important distinction between competence and the conditions under which competence is developed. The teachers considered themselves highly competent, yet they experienced moderate barriers to sustaining or improving that competence. Limited resources and time appear particularly important. High self-perceived competence does not necessarily mean that teachers have sufficient opportunities to participate in meaningful professional learning. Development can be constrained when training, technology, materials, funding, and time are limited.

Professional competency development showed a similar pattern but with slightly greater difficulty. Inadequate training was the most prominent setback ($M = 2.82$), followed by curriculum management ($M = 2.80$) and administrative burdens ($M = 2.78$). Heavy workload and resource constraints both obtained $M = 2.77$, while lack of modern equipment or facilities received $M = 2.75$. At the lower end, mastering subject matter obtained $M = 2.62$.

The results suggest that the major challenges are largely structural rather than purely individual. The teachers did not identify mastery of subject matter as their principal difficulty. Instead, inadequate training, administrative responsibilities, workload, resources, and curriculum-related demands were more prominent. This is significant for school leaders because competency gaps cannot always be addressed by asking teachers to exert more effort. Some require organizational responses, particularly in the areas of professional development, workload management, resource provision, and instructional support.

Overall, the study presents a seemingly contrasting but important finding: the teachers reported very high personal and professional competence ($M = 4.24$ and $M = 4.23$, respectively), while competency-development setbacks remained moderately difficult (overall $M = 2.70$). The findings therefore suggest that the teachers possess a strong competency base but continue to operate within conditions that may limit further professional growth. Professional development initiatives should consequently move beyond generic training. They should be responsive to identified needs, adequately resourced, practical, and supported by school leadership. Particular attention may be given to communication, diversity and inclusion, systems thinking, career development, technology integration, and the provision of time and resources for continuing professional learning.

CONCLUSION

Personal and professional competencies are closely connected and are fundamental to effective teaching and professional growth. Professional competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable teachers to perform their responsibilities effectively and manage their professional careers. These include technical skills as well as communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and other skills needed for quality service delivery. Such competencies can be strengthened through education, training, practice, and work experience.

Personal competencies, on the other hand, provide the qualities that allow teachers to apply their professional skills effectively. Adaptability, resilience, self-motivation, responsibility, and the ability to manage challenges influence how teachers perform their duties and respond to changing demands. These qualities are also developed through experience, education, reflection, and continuous practice. Personal and professional competencies should therefore not be viewed as separate areas. They complement each other in shaping effective and responsive teachers.

The findings of the study indicate that the teachers generally possess strong personal and professional competencies. However, the presence of competency does not eliminate the challenges associated with its continued development. Concerns related to resources, time, training, workload, administrative responsibilities, and other professional demands may limit teachers' opportunities to improve their practice. Sustaining teacher competence therefore requires not only individual effort but also appropriate institutional support.

In view of these findings, teacher professional development should be treated as a continuing process rather than a one-time activity. Schools and educational leaders should develop, implement, and regularly assess clear standards for professional development. Training opportunities should respond to teachers' actual needs and should provide practical opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and application. Teachers should likewise be given continuing support as they develop their professional and personal capabilities.

Professional learning should be strengthened through collaboration. Teachers can learn from one another through professional learning communities, mentoring, peer support, and other forms of collegial engagement. Instructional leadership should also be strengthened at different levels of the educational system. School leaders have an important role in creating conditions where teachers can improve their practice, access appropriate resources, and receive meaningful feedback.

Information and communication technology should be used strategically to expand access to instructional materials, professional development programs, and professional learning communities. At the same time, teachers should manage their time effectively and prioritize activities that contribute directly to their professional growth and instructional responsibilities. Building strong professional networks can also provide opportunities for sharing practices, resources, and experiences beyond the individual school.

Teachers should be encouraged to pursue further education and other forms of continuing professional development. Such opportunities can broaden their knowledge, strengthen their skills, and prepare them for changing demands in education. Particular attention should be given to teachers working in low-income and crisis-affected contexts because their professional needs may be compounded by limited resources and difficult working conditions.

Finally, similar studies may be conducted in other schools, districts, and educational contexts to further examine personal and professional competencies. Future research may also consider larger samples and additional factors that influence competency development. Such studies can provide a broader basis for designing responsive professional development programs and strengthening teacher quality.

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