

Early Childhood Education Teachers' Training Program

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Abstract. Teacher competence is a key factor in ensuring quality early childhood education; however, limited evidence exists regarding the consistency of competence across early grade-level assignments and the challenges teachers encounter in practice. This study assessed the competence of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Municipality of Maasim and determined whether significant differences existed in competence based on grade-level assignment. Using a descriptive-quantitative design supplemented by qualitative inquiry, data were collected from 124 teachers through survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Weighted mean and one-way analysis of variance were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative responses. Results showed that teachers demonstrated a high to very high level of competence across all domains, with weighted mean scores ranging from 3.93 to 4.69. The highest-rated domain was Personal and Professional Development (4.69), while Health, Safety, and Well-Being obtained the lowest mean score (3.93). Analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in competence across grade-level assignments ($F = 0.20$, $p = .920$), indicating that teachers maintained comparable competence regardless of the grade level they handled. Qualitative findings identified challenges related to learner diversity, limited resources, curriculum implementation, assessment demands, parental involvement, and workload. The study concludes that Early Childhood Education teachers possess strong professional competence and effectively adapt to contextual and instructional challenges. The findings provide empirical evidence of consistent teacher competence across early-grade levels and highlight the need for institutional support in addressing resource, workload, and instructional challenges to sustain quality early childhood education.

Keywords: Classroom Implementation; Early Childhood Education; Professional Development; Teacher Competence; Training Program

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) focuses on children from birth to eight years old, a critical stage of rapid growth and development. During this period, teachers play a vital role in shaping children's academic, social, and emotional foundations. Providing quality early education requires competent teachers who possess appropriate knowledge, skills, and specialization in child development and teaching practices. Many educational systems continue to experience teacher specialization mismatch, commonly known as out-of-field teaching, where teachers are assigned outside their area of formal training. Studies show that this practice often results from teacher shortages and staffing limitations, creating challenges in lesson preparation, content mastery, and instructional effectiveness (Roxas, 2022; Durano et al., 2023). Research further suggests that teaching outside one's specialization may affect the delivery of quality instruction, particularly in specialized areas such as early childhood education (Co et al., 2021; Caneda & Biol, 2024). While teachers trained in general primary education possess foundational pedagogical knowledge, these competencies do not automatically translate into the specialized skills required in early childhood settings. Early childhood educators are expected to implement play-based pedagogy, monitor developmental milestones, conduct age-appropriate assessments, and support children's health, safety, and well-being. Without formal preparation in these areas, teachers may experience difficulties in addressing the unique developmental needs of young learners, creating risks that may affect both learning experiences and developmental outcomes.

In the Philippines, out-of-field teaching remains evident, particularly in some schools where teachers handle grade levels that do not match their specialization. In Sarangani, some teachers assigned to primary grades are not ECE majors and may lack formal preparation in early childhood education. Although teacher

training and professional development are recognized as essential for improving instructional quality, limited studies examine how these initiatives enhance teachers' competencies, especially in rural contexts.

This study aims to determine the level of competence of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Municipality of Maasim, Sarangani Province in terms of the knowledge, skills, and practices needed in delivering quality education to young learners. Based on the findings, a proposed training program will be developed to enhance teachers' capabilities, strengthen their professional skills, and improve their effectiveness in providing quality early childhood education. The results of this study may also serve as a basis for improving teacher development initiatives in the division.

Research Questions

This study determined the competence level of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Municipality of Maasim, Sarangani Province which served as basis for the design of a training program.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What is the competence level of the teachers in terms of:
 - 1.1 Child Growth and Its Development;
 - 1.2 Health, Safety and Well-Being;
 - 1.3 Curriculum;
 - 1.4 The Learning Environment and Experiences;
 - 1.5 Assessment and Reporting;
 - 1.6 Communicating and Partnering with Families and Community Linkages; and
 - 1.7 Personal and Professional Development?
2. What are the challenges experienced by the teachers?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of competence of the teachers across grade levels?
4. What training program could be designed for the Early Childhood Education Teachers?

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study assessed the competencies of 124 Early Childhood Education teachers in Maasim, Sarangani Province for the Academic Year 2025–2026. It evaluated performance based on the Competency Standards for Child Development Teachers and Workers across key areas of teaching and development. The study also examined competency differences across grade levels to identify strengths and gaps. It was conducted in ten schools across Maasim 1, 2, and 3 districts. Findings will be used as a basis for developing a targeted training program to improve teachers' skills and early childhood education quality.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a critical stage that supports children's holistic development by strengthening their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language abilities through meaningful learning experiences. It provides the foundation for future academic achievement, school readiness, and lifelong development by introducing children to essential skills in literacy, numeracy, creativity, problem-solving, and social interaction. High-quality ECE is globally recognized for its long-term contributions to children's educational attainment, health outcomes, and social development (OECD, 2020). Teachers serve as key facilitators in this developmental process by creating supportive learning environments, designing appropriate activities, and responding to children's individual needs. Their responsibilities extend beyond classroom instruction, as they are expected to promote children's overall well-being, monitor development, and establish relationships that support children's growth (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2020). Therefore, the quality of early childhood education is strongly influenced by teachers' knowledge, skills, and ability to address the diverse demands of young learners.

ECE Teacher Competence

Teacher competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and professional dispositions required for effective teaching. In early childhood settings, teacher competence involves understanding child development, implementing appropriate teaching strategies, conducting assessments, engaging families, and maintaining professional responsibilities. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2024) emphasizes that effective early childhood educators must possess competencies related to child development, teaching practices, assessment, family engagement, and ethical professional practice. Research indicates that continuous and structured professional development enhances teachers' instructional quality, confidence, and ability to respond to children's developmental needs (Pinya-Medina et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, frameworks such as the Philippine Professional Standards for

Teachers (PPST) and the K to 12 Basic Education Program emphasize continuous teacher growth and quality improvement. These standards highlight that competent teachers are essential in ensuring meaningful learning experiences and achieving quality early childhood education outcomes. While teacher competence provides the foundation for effective ECE implementation, these competencies must be applied across different developmental areas that address children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs. Understanding child growth and development is therefore necessary in examining how teachers translate professional knowledge into appropriate practices.

Child Growth and Development

Child growth, development, and learning are interconnected processes shaped by biological factors, experiences, family relationships, and socio-cultural contexts (Siraj, Kingston, & Melhuish, 2020). Early childhood education supports these processes through developmentally appropriate experiences that promote exploration, creativity, communication, and self-regulation. Play-based learning is essential in developing children's cognitive, language, social, and emotional skills (OECD, 2020). Teachers support children's development by recognizing individual differences and using strategies such as storytelling, visual aids, guided activities, observation, and scaffolding to monitor progress and adjust instruction (Early et al., 2017; Pinya-Medina et al., 2024). These responsibilities require specialized knowledge of child development, which may be challenging for teachers without formal ECE training. Thus, understanding child development is essential in examining teachers' competence in addressing children's diverse needs.

Health, Safety and Well-Being

Health, safety, and well-being are essential components of early childhood education because teachers are responsible for creating environments where children are protected, supported, and able to participate fully in learning experiences. However, these responsibilities extend beyond classroom instruction and require teachers to manage health-related monitoring, safety procedures, and documentation practices. Early childhood educators are often expected to observe children's physical conditions, recognize possible health concerns, maintain attendance and health-related records, and communicate with families regarding children's needs (OECD, 2020). These responsibilities require attention to detail, accurate record keeping, and collaboration with parents and other stakeholders. Teachers must also implement safety practices, respond to emergencies, and maintain classroom conditions that reduce risks to children's health and protection (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2023). In rural and resource-limited school settings, these responsibilities may become more challenging due to limited access to health services, insufficient materials, and lack of specialized support. Teachers may experience difficulty balancing instructional responsibilities with administrative and caregiving tasks, particularly when they have limited preparation in early childhood education. Therefore, competence in health, safety, and well-being reflects not only teachers' ability to protect children but also their capacity to manage additional responsibilities required in early childhood classrooms.

Curriculum

The early childhood curriculum emphasizes meaningful experiences, exploration, play, and developmentally appropriate learning activities designed to support children's holistic growth (OECD, 2020; Pinya-Medina et al., 2024). Effective curriculum implementation requires teachers to understand children's developmental stages and translate learning standards into appropriate classroom practices. Teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and pedagogical skills influence how curriculum objectives are planned, delivered, and assessed. Intentional lesson planning, reflective practice, and selection of appropriate learning resources allow teachers to provide experiences suited to children's interests and abilities (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2023; Early et al., 2018). However, teachers assigned outside their specialization may encounter challenges in interpreting curriculum expectations and selecting suitable strategies for young learners.

The Learning Environment and Experiences

A quality early childhood learning environment should be safe, inclusive, stimulating, and responsive to children's developmental needs. Such environments encourage exploration, social interaction, independence, and engagement in learning activities (OECD, 2020). Teachers contribute to this environment by organizing classroom spaces, preparing learning materials, and establishing routines that support children's development. Teachers also promote curiosity, cooperation, and problem-solving through play-based and child-centered approaches (Siraj, Kingston, & Melhuish, 2020). Effective classroom management, positive behavior guidance, and responsive interactions help create supportive spaces where children feel secure and motivated to learn (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2023). These practices require specialized early childhood knowledge and skills, making teacher preparation an important factor in successful ECE implementation.

Assessment and Reporting

Assessment and reporting are essential practices in early childhood education because they allow teachers to understand children's progress and provide appropriate support. Unlike traditional assessment approaches, ECE assessment focuses on continuous observation, documentation, and interpretation of children's development across multiple domains (Early et al., 2017; Siraj et al., 2020). Teachers use formative assessment to monitor learning progress and modify instruction, while reporting practices help communicate children's development with families and stakeholders (Harper & Pelletier, 2022). Effective assessment requires skills in observation, documentation, communication, and reflection. Teachers without specialized ECE preparation may experience difficulties in identifying developmental indicators and preparing appropriate assessment records.

Family Involvement and Community Linkages

Partnerships between teachers, families, and communities are essential in supporting children's holistic development. Early childhood educators are expected to communicate with families, understand children's backgrounds, and collaborate with stakeholders to address children's educational and developmental needs. Research shows that family involvement contributes positively to children's academic achievement, social adjustment, and emotional development (OECD, 2020; Siraj, Kingston, & Melhuish, 2020). Strong partnerships also provide additional support for teachers, especially when addressing children's diverse needs and challenges. In communities with limited resources, collaboration between schools and families becomes an important strategy for sustaining effective early childhood education.

Issues and Challenges in ECE

Despite the importance of early childhood education, teachers continue to experience challenges related to workload, resource limitations, diverse learner needs, and multiple professional responsibilities. Early childhood educators often perform various roles as instructors, caregivers, planners, record keepers, and child advocates, increasing their responsibilities beyond classroom teaching (Pinya-Medina et al., 2024). Challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional materials, administrative tasks, and insufficient training may affect teachers' ability to provide individualized and developmentally appropriate instruction (OECD, 2020). These difficulties may become more evident among teachers assigned outside their field of specialization, as they must develop competencies in areas where they may have limited formal preparation.

Grade Level Differences in Teacher Competence

Teacher competencies differ across educational levels because each grade level requires specific knowledge and teaching approaches. Early childhood educators focus on child development, foundational skills, play-based learning, and socio-emotional support, while teachers in higher grade levels often emphasize subject specialization and advanced academic skills (OECD, 2020; Siraj, Kingston, & Melhuish, 2020). Because of these differences, teachers assigned to early childhood classrooms without specialized preparation may encounter difficulties adapting their knowledge and practices to meet the developmental needs of young learners. This highlights the importance of targeted professional development programs that address the specific demands of early childhood education.

Training Programs for Early Childhood Education Teachers

Professional development programs are essential in preparing teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective early childhood education. Research shows that quality training improves teachers' classroom practices, confidence, and ability to support children's development (Pinya-Medina et al., 2024; OECD, 2020). Effective training programs focus on child development, classroom management, assessment strategies, play-based teaching, and inclusive practices (Hemphill & Hargreaves, 2023). Continuous professional learning that combines theoretical knowledge with practical classroom application is particularly beneficial in improving teacher competence (Early et al., 2017). For teachers assigned outside their specialization, contextualized training programs are necessary to help them develop the competencies required in early childhood classrooms. Although previous studies have extensively examined early childhood education, teacher competence, curriculum implementation, assessment, and professional development, limited research has explored the experiences of out-of-field primary teachers assigned to early childhood classrooms. Existing literature largely focuses on formally trained early childhood educators and provides limited understanding of how teachers without specialized ECE backgrounds manage the complex responsibilities associated with child development, health and safety monitoring, assessment, classroom management, and family engagement. Furthermore, there is limited evidence on how out-of-field teachers in rural and resource-constrained public schools successfully adapt to early childhood teaching demands. These contexts present unique challenges, including limited access to training, inadequate resources, and increased responsibilities in managing multiple developmental domains. Therefore, this study addresses the gap by

examining how out-of-field primary teachers navigate, develop strategies, and sustain effective practices while handling specialized early childhood education responsibilities.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed an ****Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Design**** (QUAN → QUAL), wherein quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by a qualitative phase to explain and provide deeper understanding of the quantitative findings. The quantitative phase utilized an administrative assessment survey to determine the level of competence of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers handling Kindergarten to Grade Three pupils. Data were gathered through an adopted questionnaire based on established competency standards. Following the quantitative phase, a qualitative inquiry was conducted through individual interviews with selected participants to explore the challenges and experiences encountered by ECE teachers. The interview questions were structured based on the quantitative findings, focusing on areas that required further explanation, including teachers' experiences, difficulties, coping strategies, and contextual factors affecting their teaching practices. Qualitative interview narratives were transcribed and coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The identified themes were used to explain and complement the quantitative results, providing a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' competence and challenges in early childhood education.

Sampling Design

The study utilized purposive sampling to select participants who were Early Childhood Education teachers handling Kindergarten to Grade Three in the Municipality of Maasim. For the quantitative phase, 124 teachers from ten public elementary schools participated in the study. Schools with fewer than seven ECE teachers and those implementing multi-grade classes were excluded to ensure consistency and relevance of the data. For the qualitative phase, 10% of the total respondents were selected through purposive criteria. Participants were chosen based on their experience as DepEd public ECE teachers, district assignment, and a minimum of five years of teaching experience. This approach allowed the researcher to obtain both broad quantitative data and detailed qualitative insights from experienced teachers.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in the Municipality of Maasim, Sarangani Province, Philippines. The municipality consists of three educational districts—Maasim 1, Maasim 2, and Maasim 3—with ten public elementary schools offering Early Childhood Education from Kindergarten to Grade Three. These schools serve learners from diverse backgrounds, including rural and coastal communities with varying socio-economic conditions. The locale was selected because it includes teachers handling different early grade levels, including instances of teachers assigned outside their field of specialization. This setting provided an appropriate context for examining teacher competence, identifying challenges, and determining areas for professional development in early childhood education.

Research Participants

The participants were 124 Early Childhood Education teachers from ten public elementary schools in the Municipality of Maasim, Sarangani Province. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in teaching Kindergarten to Grade Three learners. For the qualitative phase, selected teachers representing 10% of the total respondents participated in interviews based on predetermined criteria such as teaching experience and district assignment.

Research Instrument

The quantitative instrument was an adapted questionnaire based on the Competency Standards for Child Development Teachers (CDTs) and Child Development Workers (CDWs) Manual. The questionnaire was reviewed and validated by three curriculum experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the study. It measured the competence of ECE teachers across identified teaching and professional domains. For the qualitative phase, a validated semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore teachers' experiences, challenges, and strategies in handling early childhood education responsibilities. The interview questions were aligned with the quantitative findings to provide deeper explanations of the identified results. The instrument underwent expert validation through the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) method and was proofread by a grammarian. A pilot test involving 10 ECE teachers from Kiamba was conducted, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.77, indicating acceptable reliability.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing the validity and reliability of the research instruments, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent. Approval letters were then submitted to the three District Supervisors and school administrators of the participating schools in the Municipality of Maasim. For the quantitative phase, the validated survey questionnaire was administered to gather data regarding the competence level of ECE teachers. The collected data were analyzed to determine the overall findings and identify areas requiring further exploration. For the qualitative phase, selected participants were invited for individual interviews after obtaining informed consent. The interviews explored teachers' experiences, challenges, and practices related to early childhood teaching. The interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The emerging themes were then integrated with the quantitative results to provide a deeper interpretation of the findings.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the competence level of the teachers in terms of child growth and its development, health, safety and well-being, curriculum, the learning environment and experiences, assessment and reporting, communicating and partnering with families and community linkages, and personal and professional development?

Table 1. Competence Level in Domain A: Child Growth and Development

Indicators		Mean	Description
1.	Explains the different developmental domains of a child	4.43	Very High Level
2.	Describes the different developmental characteristics of a child	4.41	Very High Level
3.	Recognizes that a child develops along a continuum that is unique to each individual	4.43	Very High Level
4.	Applies knowledge of child development in determining children at-risk for delays	4.32	Very High Level
5.	Employs principles of child growth and development	4.42	Very High Level
6.	Uses play as a vehicle for learning the physical, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and creative and aesthetic domains	4.28	Very High Level
7.	Acknowledges that learning progresses when a child is given several opportunities to practice newly learned abilities	4.49	Very High Level
8.	Accepts each child as a unique individual, including his/her diverse linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds	4.45	Very High Level
Over-all Mean		4.40	Very High Level

Table 1 shows that although all indicators were rated at a Very High Level, the lowest mean scores were using play as a vehicle for learning ($\bar{x} = 4.28$) and applying knowledge of child development to identify at-risk learners ($\bar{x} = 4.32$), indicating areas for further improvement. This suggests that while Early Childhood Education teachers demonstrate strong overall competence, there is still a need to strengthen the intentional use of play-based pedagogy and early identification of developmental delays. Enhancing these skills through targeted professional development is important, as purposeful play supports holistic child development, while accurate identification ensures timely intervention and support for learners with special needs (Bodrova & Leong, 2019; Snow, 2018). Overall, continuous training and support can further improve instructional practices, classroom engagement, and the delivery of developmentally appropriate and inclusive early childhood education. Strengthening these competencies will also help teachers better respond to diverse learner needs in the classroom. Ultimately, this contributes to more effective and responsive early childhood education outcomes.

Table 2. Competence Level in Domain B: Health, Safety and Well-Being

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. Maintains a current medical history and record for every child	3.43	High Level
2. Uses nutritional status, log of injuries/illness, and medication as intervention	3.77	High Level
3. Implements policies and regulations regarding health and safety	3.55	High Level
4. Keeps a pleasant, clean, and safe environment	4.34	Very High Level
5. Shows alertness to refer infants and toddlers for other health and nutrition services such as vaccines, oral health care, and micronutrient supplementation	4.23	Very High Level
6. Shows proficiency in basic first aid as well as readiness for any emergency	4.26	Very High Level
Over-all Mean	3.93	High Level

Table 2 shows the competence level of Early Childhood Education teachers in Domain B: Health, Safety, and Well-Being, with an overall mean of 3.93 indicating a High Level of competence. The highest-rated indicators are maintaining a clean and safe environment ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), referring children to health services ($\bar{x} = 4.23$), and demonstrating first aid readiness ($\bar{x} = 4.26$), showing strong skills in ensuring children's safety and well-being. Meanwhile, the lowest-rated indicators are maintaining updated medical records ($\bar{x} = 3.43$), using health and nutrition data for intervention ($\bar{x} = 3.77$), and implementing health and safety policies ($\bar{x} = 3.65$). Although still at a High Level, these suggest areas for improvement in documentation and policy implementation. Strengthening these areas through training can improve monitoring, intervention, and overall health and safety practices in early childhood settings.

Table 3. Competence Level in Domain C: Curriculum

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. Explains essential concepts, content areas, or domains in early childhood curriculum	4.53	Very High Level
2. Shows readiness in implementing the intended curriculum which is age-appropriate, informal, and play-based	4.62	Very High Level
3. Sets goals and outcomes for individual children, including children with special needs	4.12	High Level
4. Plans and implements an integrated curriculum that focuses on children's development and interests, using their language, experiences, and cultural values	4.61	Very High Level
5. Implements the intended curriculum for infants, toddlers, and pre-K learners in one's locality/community (localization/contextualization)	4.17	High Level
6. Utilizes bias-free (gender, culture, religion, etc.) materials, stories, and experiences in all domains/contents	4.19	High Level
7. Provides ample time for manipulation and exploration of materials	4.54	Very High Level
8. Designs activities which show interconnectedness by giving opportunities for children to create, discover, and act out with self-confidence	4.66	Very High Level
Over-all Mean	4.43	Very High Level

Table 3 shows the competence level of Early Childhood Education teachers in Domain C: Curriculum, with an overall mean of 4.45 indicating a Very High Level of competence. The highest-rated indicator is designing interconnected, play-based activities that promote creativity and confidence ($\bar{x} = 4.66$), followed by implementing age-appropriate, play-based curriculum ($\bar{x} = 4.62$) and integrating children's interests in planning ($\bar{x} = 4.61$), showing strong curriculum delivery skills. Lower-rated indicators include setting individualized goals for learners with special needs ($\bar{x} = 4.12$), contextualizing curriculum in the local community ($\bar{x} = 4.17$), and using bias-free materials ($\bar{x} = 4.19$). Although still at a High Level, these suggest areas for improvement in differentiation, inclusivity, and contextualization. Strengthening these areas can further improve equitable and responsive curriculum implementation.

Table 4. Competence Level in Domain D: The Learning Environment and Experiences

	Indicators	Mean	Description
1.	Provides space for physical movements (i.e., walking, tiptoeing, jumping, dancing, and other play-based activities and areas of interest)	4.60	Very High Level
2.	Designs a responsive, inclusive, gender-fair environment and makes use of community and indigenous resources where learners initiate and extend learning through play	4.56	Very High Level
3.	Creates a learning environment for children that is clean, safe, comfortable, and conducive to developmental activities (e.g., activity/interest areas)	4.57	Very High Level
4.	Provides ample time for manipulation/hands-on and exploration of materials with support from parents (as needed)	4.33	High Level
5.	Carries out activities which will provide opportunities for children to practice self-help skills (e.g., washing hands, toileting, eating, putting on socks, etc.)	4.54	Very High Level
6.	Utilizes learning centers/interest areas to encourage learning, development of values (e.g., self-worth, self-confidence, independence, good manners, and right conduct) and communication (either orally or through gestures)	4.44	Very High Level
7.	Implements activities efficiently and with flexibility according to needs (i.e., indoor/outdoor activities, quieting time/rest/sleep, storytelling time, etc.)	4.18	High Level
	Over-all Mean	4.46	Very High Level

Table 4 shows a Very High Level of competence (overall mean = 4.46), indicating that teachers are effective in creating learning environments that support children's holistic development, including physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth. The highest-rated indicator is providing space for physical movement and play ($\bar{x} = 4.60$), showing strong emphasis on active learning, while high scores were also noted in creating safe, inclusive environments ($\bar{x} = 4.57$) and designing culturally responsive and gender-fair settings ($\bar{x} = 4.56$). Lower-rated indicators include providing ample hands-on learning opportunities ($\bar{x} = 4.33$) and implementing flexible, responsive activities ($\bar{x} = 4.18$). Although still at a High Level, these suggest areas for improvement in experiential learning and instructional flexibility. Strengthening these aspects can further enhance engagement, independence, and overall learning outcomes in early childhood classrooms.

Table 5. Competence Level in Domain E: Assessment and Reporting

	Indicators	Mean	Description
1.	Shows mastery in conducting the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist and other assessment tools in determining the child's development	4.70	Very High Level
2.	Observes the children daily in a variety of situations using different techniques (i.e., child health records, running/physical motor records, samples of child's work, etc.)	4.25	Very High Level
3.	Evaluates child's progress or lack thereof using the assessment results	4.39	Very High Level
4.	Interprets and uses all data of assessment results maximally for decision-making and providing appropriate intervention	4.38	Very High Level
5.	Identifies if a child is developing adequately	4.55	Very High Level
6.	Distinguishes if a child is gifted (gifted if the mental age is above the chronological age or has advanced developmental milestones)	4.43	Very High Level
7.	Implements appropriate intervention to enhance growth and development and helps address developmental delays	4.25	Very High Level
8.	Reports the information about child's progress and developmental milestones to families and service providers	4.41	Very High Level
	Over-all Mean	4.42	Very High Level

Table 5 presents the competence level of Early Childhood Education teachers in Domain E: Assessment and Reporting, with an overall mean of 4.42 indicating a Very High Level of competence. The highest-rated indicators are conducting the ECCD Checklist and assessment tools ($\bar{x} = 4.70$) and identifying if a child is developing adequately ($\bar{x} = 4.55$), showing strong ability in using standardized tools and monitoring child development. Teachers also demonstrated high competence in reporting children's progress to families and service providers ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) and identifying gifted learners ($\bar{x} = 4.43$), reflecting awareness of individual differences and effective communication. Slightly lower indicators include daily observation using multiple techniques ($\bar{x} = 4.25$) and implementing appropriate interventions ($\bar{x} = 4.25$), which suggest areas for improvement in continuous observation and intervention planning. Overall, results indicate strong assessment competence with opportunities for further enhancement through targeted training.

Table 6. Competence Level in Domain F: Communicating and Partnering with Families and Community Linkages

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. Recognizes and respects each child's family as first teacher	4.78	Very High Level
2. Exhibits positive relationship with families and maintains open communication	4.72	Very High Level
3. Involves families and communities in various activities	4.76	Very High Level
4. Partners with parents in monitoring the developmental milestones of the child	4.75	Very High Level
5. Makes use of the community facilities, especially the parks, playground, and nutrition centers, as a laboratory for development and care	4.25	Very High Level
6. Recognizes and appreciates the support of the community	4.68	Very High Level
7. Involves community in sharing accountability for the children's development, progress, and welfare	4.71	Very High Level
8. Advocates in the involvement of parents/families and community in protecting children from abuse and other man-made hazards	4.75	Very High Level
Over-all Mean	4.67	Very High Level

Table 6 presents the competence level of Early Childhood Education teachers in Domain F: Communicating and Partnering with Families and Community Linkages, with an overall mean of 4.67 indicating a Very High Level of competence. This shows that teachers strongly value and actively engage families and communities as partners in supporting children's development. The highest-rated indicators include recognizing families as the child's first teacher ($\bar{x} = 4.78$), involving families and communities in school activities ($\bar{x} = 4.76$), and advocating for child protection through family and community involvement ($\bar{x} = 4.75$), reflecting strong family-centered practices. The lowest-rated indicator is using community facilities such as parks and nutrition centers for learning experiences ($\bar{x} = 4.25$), although still at a Very High Level, suggesting room for improvement in maximizing community resources for experiential learning. Overall, the findings indicate strong teacher competence in building family and community partnerships. Strengthening the use of community-based learning opportunities can further enhance children's holistic development and deepen collaboration among schools, families, and stakeholders.

Table 7. Competence Level in Domain G: Personal and Professional Development

Indicators	Mean	Description
1. Is sensitive to the needs, interests, and holistic development of children	4.72	Very High Level
2. Is creative, innovative, and resourceful	4.71	Very High Level
3. Is patient, flexible, and adaptable to change	4.68	Very High Level
4. Loves and cares for infants and toddlers	4.75	Very High Level
5. Has the ability to sing, dance, move, and tell stories with emotions to promote communication, social, and aesthetic skills	4.58	Very High Level
6. Communicates well in both oral and written form using English, Filipino, and Mother Tongue in the community served	4.65	Very High Level
7. Knows by heart and abides by the professional and ethical standards	4.67	Very High Level
8. Shows willingness to engage in continuous learning and upgrade profession to better fulfill one's mission as an Early Childhood Education teacher	4.73	Very High Level
Over-all Mean	4.69	Very High Level

Table 7 shows that Early Childhood Education teachers demonstrate a Very High Level of competence in Domain G: Personal and Professional Development, with an overall mean of 4.69. This indicates strong commitment to ethical practice, continuous learning, sensitivity, and creativity in supporting children's holistic development. The highest-rated indicators are showing love and care for children ($\bar{x} = 4.75$), willingness to engage in continuous learning ($\bar{x} = 4.73$), and sensitivity to children's needs ($\bar{x} = 4.72$), reflecting strong dedication to both learners and the profession. Relatively lower, though still Very High, scores were noted in using expressive skills such as singing, dancing, storytelling ($\bar{x} = 4.58$) and communicating effectively in multilingual contexts ($\bar{x} = 4.65$). These suggest areas for further enhancement in expressive and language-rich teaching strategies. Overall, the results indicate strong professional competence, with opportunities to further strengthen communication and expressive skills to enrich children's learning experiences.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges experienced by the teachers?

Table 8. Clustered and Emergent Themes of Issues and Challenges confronting Early Childhood Education Teachers

Clustered Theme	Emergent Theme
Classroom Management and Learner Diversity	Managing Diverse Abilities and Learning Paces
Health, Safety & Well-being	
Curriculum Implementation and Lesson Planning	
Assessment & Documentation	Classroom Practices, Teacher Professional Growth, and Stakeholder Engagement
Parental Involvement & Family Partnership	
Resources, Facilities & Materials	
Professional Development & Workload	

Early childhood educators in the Municipality of Maasim demonstrate high competence in key domains such as classroom management, curriculum implementation, assessment, family engagement, and professional development. However, despite this strong professional capability, they continue to face interconnected challenges in handling diverse learners, ensuring health and safety, implementing curriculum effectively, conducting assessment and documentation, and managing limited resources, heavy workload, and varying levels of parental and community support. These challenges often require teachers to constantly adjust instructional strategies, create improvised materials, extend working hours for documentation, and balance multiple roles within and beyond the classroom. While teachers remain committed to inclusive and developmentally appropriate practices, systemic constraints such as insufficient materials, limited training opportunities, and inadequate facilities affect the full realization of quality early childhood education. The findings highlight that improving early childhood education requires both strengthening teacher support systems and addressing structural gaps in schools. Targeted interventions such as sustained professional development, mentoring programs, improved access to instructional resources, and stronger school-home-community partnerships are essential to enhance teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes. By addressing these needs, educators can be better supported in managing diverse classrooms, implementing inclusive and play-based learning, and sustaining high-quality instructional practices. Ultimately, reinforcing these areas will help ensure that early childhood education in the municipality becomes more responsive, equitable, and conducive to the holistic development of every child.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the level of competence of the teachers across grade levels?

Table 9. The significant difference in the level of competence of the teachers across grade levels?

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	0.05	3	0.02	0.20	0.920399	2.680168
Within Groups	11.61	120	0.10			
Total	11.66	123				

The analysis of variance was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in the level of competence of Early Childhood Education teachers when grouped according to grade level (Kindergarten to Grade 3). The results show very minimal differences in mean competence scores across groups, ranging from 4.41 to 4.46, indicating that teachers consistently demonstrate a high level of competence regardless of grade assignment. This is further supported by the ANOVA results, where the computed F-value (0.20) is lower than the critical value (2.68) and the p-value (0.92) is greater than 0.05, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis. This means that there is no statistically significant difference in teacher competence across grade levels, suggesting a uniform standard of teaching quality in early childhood education. Overall, the findings imply that existing training programs, professional development initiatives, and curriculum guidelines are effective in maintaining consistent teacher competence, although continuous support is still needed to further strengthen areas such as play-based instruction and early identification of learners needing additional assistance.

Research Question 4: What training program could be designed for the Early Childhood Education Teachers?

Professional Development Training Program for Early Childhood Education Teachers

The proposed training program is designed to enhance and sustain the competencies of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Municipality of Maasim by addressing identified areas for improvement while strengthening existing strengths. Although teachers demonstrated a very high level of competence across major domains, the study revealed challenges in play-based instruction, early identification and intervention, health and safety documentation, inclusive curriculum practices, assessment and documentation, and family and community engagement. The program responds to these needs through a two-day training composed of six integrated modules delivered via workshops, hands-on activities, mentoring, and reflective sessions. It aims to provide practical, classroom-based strategies that are responsive to real teaching conditions such as limited resources, workload demands, and diverse learner needs. Specifically, the program seeks to improve teachers' skills in designing purposeful play-based and differentiated activities, strengthening assessment and intervention practices, ensuring proper health and safety documentation, developing inclusive and localized lesson plans, and enhancing collaboration with families and communities. It also aims to provide contextualized support for teachers, particularly those handling early childhood classes without specialized ECE preparation, by strengthening peer learning and practical classroom strategies. Overall, the training program focuses on continuous professional growth, enabling teachers to become more effective, reflective, and responsive in delivering quality early childhood education that supports the holistic development of young learners.

Table 10. Training Program Matrix for Early Childhood Education Teachers

Program Objectives	Key Activities	Persons Involved	Time Frame	Expected Outputs	Monitoring and Evaluation
Improve teachers' use of purposeful play-based and differentiated instruction to manage diverse learners	- In-service training on purposeful play and differentiated strategies - Demonstration teaching and lesson sharing - Classroom application with coaching	ECE Teachers School Heads Master Teachers	1st–2nd Month of Implementation	- At least 2 play-based lesson plans per teacher - Improved classroom engagement	- Classroom observation checklist - Review of lesson plans - Post-training reflection notes
Strengthen teachers' skills in observation, assessment, and early intervention	- Workshop on ECCD checklist and observation techniques - Case discussion on at-risk and gifted learners - Guided intervention planning	ECE Teachers Guidance Personnel Supervisors	Throughout the School Term	- Completed observation records - At least 1 intervention plan per teacher	- Review of assessment records - Monitoring of intervention implementation - Supervisor feedback
Improve health, safety, and documentation practices in the learning environment	- Orientation on health and safety policies - Training on record-keeping (medical, nutrition, incidents) - Emergency preparedness drills	ECE Teachers School Nurse School Heads	Within 2 Weeks After Training	- Updated health and safety records - Conducted emergency drill	- Records audit - Drill evaluation checklist - Incident report review



Enhance teachers' capacity to develop inclusive, localized, and bias-free curriculum plans	• Lesson planning workshop focusing on localization and inclusion • Peer review of lesson plans • Development of low-cost, contextualized materials	ECE Teachers Curriculum Coordinators Master Teachers	Within 1 Month After Training	• At least 1 localized and inclusive lesson plan per teacher • Sample contextualized materials	• Lesson plan evaluation rubric • Classroom observation • Learner participation records
Strengthen family and community partnership in supporting child development	• Training on parent communication and engagement strategies • Planning of parent meetings or learning activities • Use of community resources (when available)	ECE Teachers Parents Community Partners School Heads	Within 1 Grading Period	• At least 1 documented parent or community activity • Improved parent participation	• Attendance sheets • Activity reports • Parent feedback forms

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to strict ethical standards in educational research to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent, the District Supervisors, and the school administrators of the ten participating schools in the Municipality of Maasim. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and their voluntary participation, including their right to withdraw at any time without any penalty or negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. Participants' identities were protected using codes, and no identifying personal information was disclosed in any part of the analysis or report. All data gathered were used exclusively for research purposes and were handled and stored securely in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). The study ensured that participants were not exposed to any physical, psychological, or emotional harm, as the instruments used were non-intrusive and appropriate for the respondents. Throughout the entire research process, ethical principles of fairness, respect, objectivity, and academic integrity were consistently observed.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Early Childhood Education teachers in the Municipality of Maasim demonstrate a very high level of competence across key domains, including classroom management, curriculum implementation, assessment, family engagement, and professional responsibilities. The findings show that even non-specialized primary educators can meet ECE competence expectations when supported by localized professional development, peer collaboration, and adaptive teaching practices. However, challenges remain in play-based instruction, early identification, health and safety documentation, inclusive practices, resource limitations, and workload demands. These findings highlight that quality ECE in rural settings is strengthened not only through formal training but also through continuous support systems and professional networks that enable teachers to adapt and sustain effective practices.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, it is recommended that school administrators and education leaders continue to strengthen and sustain targeted professional development programs, particularly on play-based learning strategies, inclusive practices, and early identification of developmental needs. Teachers are encouraged to continuously enhance their instructional practices through reflective teaching, consistent observation and documentation, and the use of developmentally appropriate strategies. Future researchers



may also conduct similar studies in wider settings to further validate the findings and explore other factors influencing teacher competence in early childhood education.

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