

Why Knowledge Matters: Exploring on the Teachers' Mastery and Competence on Teaching Strategies that are Appropriate for Young Learners

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Abstract

Teachers who know their subject matter thoroughly and fits their strategies can be more effective and efficient in delivering lessons. This study sought to determine the level of teachers' mastery on the subject matters and their teaching strategies. The study employed a descriptive-quantitative type of research design which was voluntarily participated by 400 teachers in the Division of Zamboanga City, Philippines. The quota sampling technique was utilized in the study for the reason that teachers followed a skeletal system in reporting to school, and the researcher had to depend on their availability considering the time frame to conduct the survey. Based on the study's findings, teachers displayed a high level of performance in terms of their subject matter expertise and teaching strategies. Thus, it is suggested that the Department of Education continue organizing seminars, workshops, and training programs to enhance teachers' subject matter mastery.

Keywords: *teachers' mastery, competence, teaching strategies, early learners, teachers' performance*

Introduction

Education is an ever-evolving sphere, and it is imperative for educators to adapt in tandem with its advancements. The duty of teachers is to introduce students to the constantly emerging insights and discoveries in the world. Therefore, continuous improvement of knowledge is vital, requiring the teaching community to actively participate in ongoing learning and personal development.

In the present era, relying solely on traditional teaching methods is insufficient to nurture young minds. It has become an urgent need to adopt and implement modern approaches in the teaching and learning process. The profound impact of technological advancements in various aspects of life emphasizes the significance of teachers embracing these changes. As key influencers in shaping future generations, teachers are essential facilitators of progress.

In order to effectively meet the learning needs of their students, teachers must be aware of each child's distinct abilities and strengths in the classroom. Casimiro (2021) in his study elaborated that curricular and pedagogical readiness among teachers play significant role towards developing an effective child development program. The teacher's expertise in the subject matter forms the foundation for their ability to impart knowledge and skills to their students. When teachers have a profound understanding of the content they teach, they can communicate complex ideas clearly, offer insightful explanations, and provide accurate and comprehensive information about concepts, theories, and practical applications. This clear communication aids students in comprehending intricate concepts more easily and fosters a deeper grasp of the subject.

According to Adediwura and Bada (2007), it is essential for teachers to have a deep understanding of the subjects they teach. They emphasized that teachers cannot effectively teach something they do not comprehend themselves. When teachers have a thorough grasp of the content, they communicate more clearly, maintain better coherence in their discussions, and provide superior explanations compared to those with weaker subject knowledge. The level of a teacher's knowledge regarding the subject matter significantly influences how students perceive the teaching, which, in turn, can have a significant impact on students' academic performance.

Recognizing the crucial role of knowledgeable and competent educators in cultivating optimal learning experiences for young learners has gained more prominence. Teachers who possess a mastery of both subject matter and pedagogical skills, specifically tailored to the unique needs of young children, are essential in creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. Despite the acknowledged importance of teacher knowledge, there is still a need to explore further the factors that contribute to teachers' expertise and proficiency in implementing appropriate teaching strategies for early learners.

Casimiro, Atrido & Calahat (2021) also noted in their study that during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced challenges in aligning their strategies to the abrupt change in the educational set up.

Sampson and Fyrtos (2008) have also explored the concept of competence, particularly in the context of vocational training and education from the perspective of human resource management. Their focus was on the interdependence between personal characteristics, proficiency level, and the teaching context, particularly when instructing young learners. The importance of early childhood education cannot be emphasized enough, as it forms the basis for a child's cognitive, social, emotional, and academic growth. This critical phase acts as a receptive period during which children absorb information and experiences that will shape their lifelong learning journey. Consequently, the quality of education provided during this crucial stage profoundly influences their overall educational achievements.

This study aims to explore the fundamental question of the significance of knowledge in early childhood education. The main focus is on investigating the level of proficiency and skill that teachers possess in utilizing teaching strategies suitable for young learners. By understanding the impact of teachers' knowledge and expertise on young students, we can gain valuable insights to improve educational practices and create a more effective learning environment for them.

Related Literature and Studies

On the Teachers' Mastery on the Subject Matters

According to Kimberly (2009) cited in Fakeye (2012), it is essential for teachers to possess expertise in their respective areas of study. Without this knowledge, their effectiveness as educators is compromised. The level of a teacher's subject matter competence, as highlighted by Mullens (1993), is a crucial determinant of students' learning outcomes and can be used as a measure of effective teaching. However, it is observed that many teachers lack the necessary subject competence, which may be attributed to English being their second language, leading to difficulties in acquiring and mastering it. Anderson (1991) emphasized that teachers must possess the knowledge and skills required to achieve their educational goals, and their ability to apply this knowledge is vital for success.

Research has shown a strong correlation between what teachers know and what they teach, underscoring the significance of teachers' subject matter knowledge for effective instruction. When teachers are unfamiliar with the content they are teaching, it can hinder their effectiveness, especially considering that teachers' characteristics may be specific to the subject. To address this, it is essential for teachers to master the subject matter before embarking on their teaching roles. It is important to note that while pedagogical knowledge is not identical to subject matter knowledge, they are closely connected, as teachers' mastery and utilization of pedagogical strategies in the classroom reflect their depth of subject matter knowledge.

On the Teachers' Teaching strategies

Regarding pedagogical competence, Gliga (2002), Faidal, Nur & Suriani (2020), and Richard (2015) shed light on its significance. Pedagogical competence can be seen as the minimum professional standard required by law for individuals to fulfill their roles in the teaching profession. It involves a teacher's ability to creatively use their knowledge, professional and life experiences, values, and talents to solve educational problems and achieve effective results in real pedagogical activities. Richard (2015) specified various aspects of pedagogical competence, such as classroom management, interaction, language

teaching skills (reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary), language assessment, and the use of appropriate teaching approaches, methodologies, techniques, and strategies. A teacher with excellent pedagogical competence can successfully apply these criteria in the classroom to benefit their students.

According to Ryegård (2010), an important aspect that all teachers should understand is the students' needs and preferences in the classroom. He argues that students dislike teachers who primarily lecture, as it makes them feel demotivated and passive. This limited input from students hampers the learning process, leading to outcomes that may not meet the teacher's expectations. To be highly motivated and effective, teachers must work on developing their competence.

Although there is no consensus on the overall goals of schooling, it is widely accepted that students' learning is the most crucial outcome (Hattie & Anderman, 2019). As a result, educational research aims to identify effective methods to promote and enhance students' learning. Teachers are considered key players in the education process, and various teacher factors, including competence, qualifications, teaching experience, and professional development, have been found to significantly impact students' academic outcomes (Bates, Shifflet, & Lin, 2003).

Among these teacher factors, quality teaching, which encompasses effective and productive instructional methods and strategies, plays a central role in students' learning processes and outcomes (Orlich, Harder, Trevisan, Brown, Miller, 2017). Teaching strategies can be broadly categorized as methods related to teaching programs, such as mastery learning, reciprocal teaching, and problem-based teaching, or as specific instructional methods like questioning or meta-cognitive strategies instruction.

Scott (2015) emphasizes the need to rethink pedagogy in the twenty-first century and focus on developing new competencies for today's learners. Traditional approaches that rely on memorization or simple procedures may not foster critical thinking skills or learner autonomy. Instead, meaningful enquiry-based learning that is relevant and valuable to students and their communities is crucial for developing higher-order skills. Engaging in real-world experiences, sustained engagement, and collaboration allows learners to construct and organize knowledge, conduct detailed research and analysis, and effectively communicate their findings to various audiences (Barron and Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Saavedra and Opfer (2012) argue that learners must urgently develop their skills and enhance their learning to address global challenges effectively. However, despite the consensus on the importance of skills like critical thinking, effective communication, innovation, problem-solving, negotiation, and collaboration, traditional pedagogy has not adapted to tackle these new challenges.

Leadbeater (2008) contends that successfully reinventing educational systems worldwide depends on transforming pedagogy and redesigning learning tasks. Empowering learner autonomy and creativity is a crucial part of the solution. While technology can support the transformation of pedagogy, it's essential to recognize that twenty-first-century learning experiences should encompass more than just technological tools. Leadbeater emphasizes that learning strategies for this century will extend beyond school, involving learning through interactions with peers, inter-generational partnerships, and community relationships. Learning can occur outside of the classroom, in places like libraries, museums, community centers, local businesses, or nearby farms, among others. Both Robinson (2006) and Leadbeater (2008) advocate for radical transformation of the idea of school as the sole provider of learning experiences.

Bodrova, Leong, and Paynter (1999) state that research suggests children make significant learning gains when presented with new concepts and skills just beyond their current independent abilities. This instructional approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the "zone of proximal development." The key is to find the right level of challenge for each child, where assistance can help them progress to the next developmental stage. Readiness should be seen as a "window of opportunity," where an instructional method will be most effective.

Many teaching strategies have an optimal window of opportunity, a specific time when they have the most substantial impact on a young child's literacy learning. Applying a teaching strategy too early or too late, or for an inappropriate duration, may diminish its effectiveness. For instance, a common early

literacy technique involves having a child draw a picture and then write a story about it. This strategy is based on the idea that when a child writes their own message, the context is more meaningful, and they are more likely to make connections between spoken words and written letters, a skill emphasized in literacy standards documents.

Based on these findings, the researcher was motivated to investigate teachers' proficiency in subject matters and their teaching strategies. The results of this study could provide a basis for exploring appropriate strategies to use in early childhood education.

Research Objective

Determine the level of teachers' mastery on the subject matters and their teaching strategies.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive-quantitative type of research design. The study utilized a survey checklist in the gathering of data. The study was conducted in eight selected elementary schools in Zamboanga City Division, specifically in quadrants 1.1 and 1.2, with a total of 400 teachers. The quota sampling technique was utilized in the study for the reason that teachers followed a skeletal system in reporting to school, and the researcher had to depend on their availability considering the time frame to conduct the survey. The researcher utilized the questionnaire checklist in the gathering of data for the study. The instrument consisted of three parts. Part I consisted of the profile of the respondents in terms of school assignment, age, sex, educational attainment, and length of service. Part II was a checklist on the stress level by Kebbi (2018) in terms of relationships with colleagues, professional growth, work conditions, and students' behavior. Each indicator has ten statements with five options numbered and described: 5:- Very High, 4:- High, 3:- Moderately High, 2: Loww and 1: Very Low. Part III was a checklist on the teachers' performance by Alegado (2021) in terms of mastery of the subject matter, classroom management skills, teaching strategy, evaluation skills, and mentoring skills. Each indicator has ten statements with five options numbered and described: 5:- Very High, 4:- High, 3:- Moderately High, 2: Loww and 1: Very Low. Furthermore, to strengthen the reliability of the research instrument, the Cronbach alpha was utilized. At a 0.975 alpha value, it connotes very high reliability for the survey questionnaire used in this study.

Results and Discussions

On the Teachers' Level of Mastery on the Subject Matter

Table 1. presents the level of teacher performance of the respondents in terms of mastery of the subject matters. As can be gleaned from Table 8, a grand mean of 3.86, interpreted as "high," was rated by the respondents in all the constructs with regards to the level of teacher performance of the respondents in terms of mastery of the subject matters. The statement reflects mastery of the subjects he/she teaches was rated the highest (3.98), closely followed by constructs: integrates subject matter with relevant topics. (3.92), manifests confidence and firmness with every piece of information given (3.90). Also, the following constructs were rated within the interval of 3:51–4:00, interpreted as "high," providing varied learning experiences for intellectual development. (3.88), relates subject matter to other fields of knowledge (3.86), provides intelligent resolution of test questions (3.84), explains difficult concepts well (3.83), writes students' activities intelligently (3.82), enriches discussions on the module with contemporary issues and events (3.81), and has a comprehensive and accurate grasp of the subject matter (3.79).

Table 1. Level of Teacher Performance of the Respondents in terms of Mastery of Subject Matters

Mastery of Subject Matter	Mean Response	Remarks
Comprehensive and accurate grasp of the subject matter.	3.79	High

Relates subject matter to other fields of knowledge.	3.86	High
Integrates subject matter with relevant topics.	3.92	High
Enrich discussions on the module with contemporary issues and events.	3.81	High
Write students' activities intelligently.	3.82	High
Provide varied learning experiences for intellectual development.	3.88	High
Provide intelligent resolution of test questions.	3.84	High
Explains difficult concepts well.	3.83	High
Manifests confidence and firmness with every information given.	3.90	High
Reflects mastery of the subjects he/she teaches.	3.98	High
Grand Mean	3.86	High

Legend:

4.51 - 5:00	Very High	Very high performance
3:51 - 4:00	High	High performance
2:51 - 3:00	Moderately High	Average performance
1:51 - 2:00	Low	Low performance
1:00 - 1:00	Very Low	Not performing at all

The findings of the study reveal that respondents have a high level of performance in terms of mastery of subject matter; this is evident as the majority of the respondents, or 35%, were in the teaching profession for 16 years and above based on the demographic profile and length of service. Considering the number of years they spent in this profession, the respondents were confident that they were well versed in the lessons they taught in class.

These imply that the respondents were confident that they had knowledge of the lessons they wrote on their module, integrating subject matter with relevant topics and firmness with every piece of information given to the students, including the provision of varied learning experiences and intelligent resolution of test questions for the intellectual development of their students. Also based on the result of the study, it was revealed that respondents affirmed that they have the ability to relate subject matter to other fields of knowledge, explain difficult concepts well, write students' activities intelligently, enrich discussions on the module with contemporary issues and events, and comprehensively and accurately grasp the subject matter.

In a study conducted by Castillo (2021) entitled "Adjusting to the New Normal Education: Perceptions and Experiences of Fellow Junior High School Teachers on the Conduct of Class Observation in this COVID-19 Pandemic," one of the concerns identified was their notable experiences in the actual delivery of their lesson during the observation period. Results of the study revealed that informants stated that mastery of the subject matter was the most essential factor for the successful delivery of the lesson.

On the Teachers' Performance in terms of Teaching Strategies

The level of teacher performance of the respondents in terms of teaching strategy is presented in Table 2. According to the data in Table 2, respondents rated the level of teacher performance in terms of teaching strategy as "high," with a grand mean of 3.99. All constructs related to this aspect received ratings within the range of 3.51 to 4.50. The statement "selects, prepares, and utilizes instructional materials effectively in achieving teaching objectives" received the highest weighted mean (4.04), followed closely by "presents the lesson systematically and analytically" (4.03), "organizes and presents subject matter clearly and coherently, adjusts teaching methods to students' needs, interest, and abilities" (4.01), "stimulates thinking and clarifies lessons through effective questions" (4.00), and "encourages students to express their own point of view" (3.99). Other factors assessed include "communicating ideas effectively in English/Filipino fluently" (3.98), "providing challenging tasks, problems, and assignments" (3.97), "using a variety of teaching techniques, approaches, and strategies to make the lesson interesting and meaningful" (3.94), and "using ICT instruction in delivering the lesson to the students" (3.91).

Table 2. Level of Teacher Performance of the Respondents in terms of Teaching Strategies

Teaching Strategy	Mean Response	Remarks
Organizes and presents subject matter clearly and coherently.	4.01	High
Communicate ideas effectively in English/Filipino fluently.	3.98	High
Presents the lesson systematically and analytically.	4.03	High
Stimulates thinking and clarify lessons through effective questions.	4.00	High
Adjust teaching methods to students' needs, interest and abilities.	4.01	High
Uses variety of teaching techniques, approaches and strategies to make the lesson interesting and meaningful.	3.94	High
Uses ICT instruction in delivering the lesson to the students.	3.91	High
Encourages students to express their own point of view.	3.99	High
Provides challenging tasks, problems, and assignments.	3.97	High
Selects, prepares and utilizes instructional materials effectively in achieving teaching objectives.	4.04	High
Grand Mean	3.99	High

<i>Legend:</i>	<i>4.51 – 5.00</i>	<i>Very High</i>	<i>Very high performance</i>
	<i>3.51 – 4.50</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>High performance</i>
	<i>2.51 – 3.50</i>	<i>Moderately High</i>	<i>Average performance</i>
	<i>1.51 – 2.50</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Low performance</i>
	<i>1.00 – 1.50</i>	<i>Very Low</i>	<i>Not performing at all</i>

The finding of the study reveals that respondents performed well and had the skills to present lessons in a way to make it more interesting and comprehensible. According to the respondents, they had been using same strategies over the years and these proved to be effective. However, in this new normal, the respondents had to think of a way where the lessons presented in the module would really catch the interest of the students, so learning could take place, such as the construct of the sentence and the used of drawings and other illustrations especially for lessons in the lower grades.

The result implies that respondents has the ability and skills to enticed students to learn their lessons through the use of instructional materials, also, in the presentation of lessons and adjusting to teaching methods based on students' needs, interest and abilities. Moreover, the result shows that respondents had the ability on how to encourage students to participate in class discussion by using a variety of teaching techniques, approaches and strategies to make the lesson interesting and meaningful.

A similar study was conducted by Giridharan & Raju (2017) entitled "Impact of Teaching Strategies: Demonstration and Lecture Strategies and Impact of Teacher Effect on Academic Achievement in Engineering Education" The findings revealed that teaching with demo was better than lecture strategy. Also, it was found out that experienced teachers had an impact on students' academic achievement and better at interaction effect with regard to lecture strategy. based on the findings it was established that the demonstration strategy had produced significantly better academic achievement among engineering students independent of Teacher Effect.

Likewise, Achor, Samba and Ogbeba (2013) conducted a study entitled "Teachers' Awareness and Utilization of Innovative Teaching Strategies in Secondary School Science in Benue State, Nigeria". The study indicated that teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding innovative teaching strategies, but only a limited number of these strategies were effectively put into practice by the teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that training programs and workshops should focus on providing effective teaching techniques for applying these innovative strategies.

Conclusions

Mastery of the subject matter allows teachers to address learners' misconceptions and inaccuracies. Additionally, it signifies the personal and professional growth of the teachers. Likewise, the effectiveness

of teaching strategies is context-dependent and multidimensional. Both factors are crucial in the context of teaching and learning. Based on the study's findings, teachers displayed a high level of performance in terms of their subject matter expertise and teaching strategies. Thus, it is suggested that the Department of Education continue organizing seminars, workshops, and training programs to enhance teachers' subject matter mastery. Additionally, they should ensure that teachers have the necessary qualifications, especially for those teaching early childhood education, which is considered a critical phase of learning. This approach would enable teachers to be more efficient by aligning their interests and capabilities with their assigned roles. Teachers are also encouraged to continuously improve their professional skills.

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