Difficulties Encountered By Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality

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Abstract:

The study aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning in one of the municipalities in Negros Oriental Division as a basis for an intervention plan for the School Year 2022-2023. There were fifty (50) respondents were surveyed. Findings show that younger group teachers contributed a bigger number of respondents. Most of them are degree bachelor's degree holders, many of them had served for more than seven (7) years, and both respondents with lower and higher income were distributed equally. The level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the areas of social development and oral fluency development is low, while moderate in the area of activity-based assessment development.
In addition, when the respondents are grouped according to variables, the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the areas of social development and oral fluency development is low. Whereas in the area of activity-based assessment development was moderate. Further, there is a significant difference existed in the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the area of social development when compared according to the aforementioned variables. There is no significant difference existed in the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the areas of social development, oral fluency development, and activity-based assessment development when they are grouped and compared according variables. The result of this study, calls for the school leaders and administrators to initiate special training and workshop for all kindergarten teachers on how to deliver social development activities in a blended learning set-up.

Keywords: Difficulties encountered kindergarten teachers, blended learning modality, social development, oral fluency development, activity-based assessment development.

Introduction:

Nature of the Problem

Blended Learning (BL) in the Philippines emerged to accommodate the educational needs of all Filipino learners during the pandemic and to ensure the continued safety of all children (Villanueva, 2021). As determined by the Department of Education, Blended Learning Modality is a learning delivery that combines face-to-face with any or mix of online learning, TV/radio-based instruction, and modular distance learning (DepEd Continuity Learning Plan, 2020). This learning model serves alternative as part of the transition to in-person classes and will continue to implement as a permanent mode of instruction for kindergarten and basic education (DepEd Order No. 050, s. 2022).

At the onset of the implementation of the blended learning modality, the researcher personally experienced and observed wherein many kindergarten teachers faced overcoming difficulties and problems towards the current learning set-up. Most kindergarten teachers face difficulties in the conduct of learning tasks on social development, oral fluency development, and activity-based assessment development virtually or via online instruction, which is prescribed in the Early Care and Childhood Development (ECCD) and Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (KCG) (Diaz et al., 2022). Implementing the intended learning tasks in a blended learning set-up causes too much pressure on kindergarten teachers since limited learning resources are available. Moreover, conducting activity-based assessments was also problematic to them since they have limited interaction with the learners and parents, and not all kindergarten learners have the technology to be used during online or virtual instruction.

To gain success in blended learning modality in the kindergarten program, difficulties, problems, and significant issues should be revealed. Revealing these problems is important for reducing or solving the barriers to blended learning implementation to be conducted in the future. Hence, the researcher is motivated to conduct this study to determine the issues and concerns on the use of Blended Learning Modality among teachers and to propose an intervention plan to help minimize the difficulties faced by kindergarten teachers and grow professionally with ease and comfort to produce globally competitive learners amidst the pandemic.

Current State of Knowledge

Effective blended learning in school education has been hindered by certain concerns, difficulties, and challenges. Learning at a distance may be suitable for older students and adults, where learners have more control over time, place, path, and/or pace (Staker, 2020). However, younger pupils and those needing additional learning support may struggle to learn independently. Combining effective face-to-face teaching and facilitating the flexible distance learning of all pupils in a way that functions as a coherent pedagogical approach requires a high level of competence and innovation by teachers and school leaders. Effective blended learning requires flexibility or significant fundamental change across the education system and its support mechanisms.

Blended learning is a pedagogical approach where traditional face-to-face instruction is blended with other learning modes (Eaton, 2020). The technology becomes a part of their core work when used as instruction, collaboration among peers, and assessment. Blended learning is not simply adding technology to a traditional face-to-face classroom via tools like Google Docs or videoconferencing (Eaton, 2020). Blended learning is flexible in that it can look different based on the needs of a school, classroom, or individual student. While Shamsuddin & Kaur (2020) claimed that blended learning had been shown to have a positive impact on student learning regardless of learning style, making it accessible to all students.

Blended learning is familiar to the Philippine Education System since many colleges and universities around the country already adopted these concepts a long time ago. BL integrates techniques, such as face-to-face and online strategies and technology. As a new traditional model, BL is widely adopted in higher education. Also, BL is often called a hybrid approach in IHEs. Thus, BL is a combination of online and in-class instruction with reduced in-class seat time for students. Many Filipino teachers are new to blended learning and have not formally trained. Thus, teaching them the difference between online and face-to-face is critical – professional development is appropriately enhanced. One common problem in the Philippines must of the professional development is content-based, hands-on activity, and follow-up and evaluation upon implementation in the workplace, which play a crucial role in the accomplishment of blended learning. Thus, a different delivery mode, teaching methods, learning theories, learning styles, and competencies can help implement blended learning. Sufficient materials, equipment, and course plans to support blended learning and feedback from teachers and learners are highly recommended. Furthermore, using blended learning enhanced students' interest and motivated them to learn effectively (Tupas, 2020).

Theoretical Underpinnings

The present study was anchored to the Situational Problem Theory of Jeong-Nam Kim and James E. Grunig in 2011. The situational problem theory attempts to explain why and how individuals handle difficulties and problematic situations. This theory has an assumption wherein the more an individual commits to difficulty/problem resolution, the more an individual becomes acquisitive of information pertaining to the difficulty and problem, selective in dealing with information, and transmissive in giving it to others when an individual tries to solve his/her difficulties, his or her communicative activeness increases in three domains of communication action: information acquisition, selection, and transmission (Kim and Grunig, 2011).

As a link in the present research venue, the focus was to determine the difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers and how they are able to handle them to implement the Blended Learning Modality successfully. By understanding the difficulties encountered and recognizing difficulties, he/she can find a solution. So that kindergarten teacher remains responsible for carrying out their duties and achieving learning objectives and goals, teachers facilitate the transfer of learning from the experiential activity to the real world, structure the process of reflection to derive the most learning from experience, and ensure that the learning outcomes are reached.

Objectives

The study aimed to determine the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in one of the municipalities of Negros Oriental during the School Year 2022-2023 as the basis for an intervention plan. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:1) the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality according to social development, oral fluency development and activity-based assessment development; 2) the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality when grouped according to the aforementioned variables; and 4) the significant difference in the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality when grouped and compared according to the aforementioned variables.

Methodology

This section presents the research design, locale of the study, respondents of the study, data gathering instrument, validity and reliability, data gathering procedure, ethical consideration, analytical schemes, and statistical tools.

Research Design

A descriptive research design was used to determine the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in one of the municipalities of Negros Oriental Division as a basis for an intervention plan for the School Year 2023-2024. This method provides a way to describe the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study. According to De Belen (2015), descriptive design is appropriate for studies that aim to find out what prevails in the present conditions, held opinions and beliefs, processes and effects, and developing trends. It is also used to determine the level or direction of attitude, difficulties, and challenges felt by the participants. A descriptive research design was appropriate since the present study also aimed to determine the prevalent conditions of the difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in the blended learning modality.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were the 50 kindergarten teachers in four districts in one of the municipalities of Negros Oriental. The researcher purposely selected kindergarten teachers as respondents. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers relies on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study. Researchers use purposive sampling when they want to access a particular subset of people, as all participants of a survey are selected because they fit a particular profile (Ames et al., 2019).

Instruments

The study utilized the researcher-made questionnaire. It was subjected to validity (4.93-excellent) and reliability (0.980-excellent). All of them were interpreted as worthy and good, respectively. Survey questionnaire divided into two parts. Part 1 focused on the Personal Information, including the age, highest educational attainment, length of service, and average family monthly income of the respondents. Part 2 is about the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in the blended learning modality. The instrument was divided into three areas, and each area was composed of ten (10) line questions. Each part of the questionnaire required the participants to read the items and mark the preferred option, except for the first part related to their personal information. The level of blended learning in each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale with 5 as always, 4 as often, 3 as sometimes, 2 as rarely, and 1 as almost never.

Data Gathering Procedure

For the smoother conduct of the study, the researcher employed the following procedures. The researcher sent a letter of request for the conduct of the study to the Office of Schools Division Superintendent of Negros Oriental. Upon approval, a separate letter was also sent to the school heads of all component schools attached to the approved letter from the superintendent. After securing the approval for the second request, school heads of every school sent the research instrument to his/her kindergarten teachers electronically. At the same time, a hard copy was provided to kindergarten teachers with no internet connection in their area. The researcher also included her contact number and messenger account in the research instrument in case some teachers may encounter difficulty answering the instrument. The data gathered from the responses of the respondents was tallied and tabulated using the appropriate statistical tools. The raw data were transformed into numerical code guided by a coding manual. This allowed computer processing, statistical derivations, and tabular presentation. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in the computer processing of the encoded data.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used the descriptive analytical scheme and mean to determine the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in the blended learning modality.

Objective No. 2 used the descriptive analytical scheme and mean to determine the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality when grouped according to the aforementioned variables.

Objective No.3 used the comparative analytical scheme and Mann-Whitney U test to determine the significant difference in the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in the blended learning modality when grouped and compared according to the aforementioned variables.

Ethical Considerations

Research Ethics Protocols are the principles that must be followed in conducting any research. Research ethics protocol makes sure that no human rights are violated, and research being conducted has no hidden agenda (Fleming, 2018). To ensure the protection of the participants of the study, the researcher gave importance to the respondents' voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, confidentiality, and anonymity. In this study, for voluntary participation, the researcher was asked to sign or agree to a consent form by filling out a blank line/data entry slot with respondents' initials or alias. However, they are free to withdraw at any time without a reason. For informed consent, the research ensured that the respondents were fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in research and must give their consent to participate. For risk of harm, the researcher did not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm because of their participation. If should this happens, the participants can decline to answer all the questions and may withdraw their participation at any time. For confidentiality, the researcher guaranteed the participants identifying information will not be made available to anyone who was not directly involved in the study. Further, for the anonymity of the respondents, the respondents used alias or initials to keep his/her identity anonymous to the researcher and other participants.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the data gathered in connection with the objectives of the study and analyses of these data facilitated by the identified appropriate statistical tools. It interprets the results derived from the analyses.

Table 1
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Social Development

Items	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …		
1. responding to the needs of the learner	2.60	Moderate Level
2. understanding the feelings of others	2.34	Low Level
3. understanding other people's social cues, e.g., facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, or body language	2.34	Low Level
4. realizing how to behave in different social situations, such as House Visitation.	2.08	Low Level
5. understanding and respecting other people's rights; for example, learners need more help and guidance from their parents in learning.	2.10	Low Level
6. group or team activities or games	2.22	Low Level
7. caring for physical contacts, such as hugs	2.28	Low Level
8. getting along with others	2.02	Low Level
9. behaving well in school	1.50	Low Level
10. Respecting elders/people in authority/others	1.38	Very Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.09**	**Low Level**

As presented in Table 1, the respondents assessed an overall mean score of 2.09, interpreted as a "low level." It only shows that most of the kindergarten teachers experienced fewer difficulties with regard to conducting social development activities for kindergarten learners in a blended learning environment. However, if we go deeper in the analysis, the respondents assessed a lowest mean score of 1.38 on item No. 10, which states, "Respecting elders/people in authority/others," interpreted as a "very low level." On the other hand, the highest mean of 2.60 is on item No. 1, which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as a "moderate level. The result implies that most of the teachers are having difficulties responding to learners' educational needs, particularly in conducting social development activities.

This is because not all kindergarten teachers are well-skilled in delivering blended learning instructions, and some of them are new to this kind of learning modality. In addition, most kindergartens need help to formulate social development activities that suit a blended learning set-up. Hence, kindergarten teachers are encouraged to equip their knowledge and skills with blended learning instruction so that to respond immediately to the learner's educational needs. Kindergarten teachers and parents need to work together to help children develop positive social interactive skills (both online and at home) that will enable them to create and promote safe environments in their communities. In addition, they equipped their selves with the use of technology and online platforms in teaching. The results are supported by the views of Khan et al. (2015); the researchers expressed that blended learning is not easy to adopt. This means that certain things need to be addressed. The successful implementation of blended learning will largely depend on developing learning staff knowledge and skills, funding, and sufficient technology support. This means that lecturers should have an understanding and skills to blend both types of approaches, thus, the traditional and technological. This view is also supported by Wahyudin (2020) and Magasu, Mutale, Gondwe, Mubita, and Kombe (2021), who argue that once the teacher is properly trained, the desired end is in the field of teaching. This means the approach needs teachers with a wider outlook and should be flexible. They should be ready to accept the changes and be innovative and dynamic.

Table 2
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Oral Fluency Development

Items	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …		
1. letting the child introduce oneself	2.20	Low Level
2. allowing the child to talk about one's personal experiences/narrates events of the day through online	2.42	Low Level
3. letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods, or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words	2.88	Moderate Level
4. training the child to tell the function of each basic body part	1.90	Low Level
5. letting the child name the five senses and their corresponding body parts through a virtual platform	2.24	Low Level
6. observing the child's name the places and the things found in the classroom, school, and community	1.94	Low Level
7. letting the child name family members, school personnel, and community helpers.	2.20	Low Level
8. training the child to use polite greetings and courteous expressions in appropriate situations	2.12	Low Level
9. teaching the kids to describe the different kinds of weather	1.92	Low Level
10. letting the kids tell the names of the days in a week, months in a year	2.34	Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.22**	**Low Level**

The results in Table 2 disclose the respondents' assessed overall mean score of 2.22, which was interpreted as a "low level." This shows that most kindergarten teachers experienced fewer difficulties in preparing oral fluency development lessons and activities for kindergarten learners. If to investigate the results further, the respondents perceived a lowest mean score of 1.90 on item No. 4 which states "training the child tell the function of each basic body part," and interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 2.88 is on item No. 3 which states "letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words" interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that most kindergarten teachers are having difficulties during online platforms instruction wherein the child is asked to talk and narrate appropriate descriptive words about personal experiences, family members, etc. The reason is that not all parents and learners have the gadgets and knowledge of the use of online platforms for virtual instruction. In addition, kindergarten teachers also need help to implement appropriate oral fluency activities that suit blended learning instructions. With this, many of the teachers are worried because their kindergarten learners' oral fluency was less developed in a blended learning set-up. Hence, kindergarten teachers are encouraged to orient, assist and help educate the parents of their parts during the online oral fluency activities to motivate the child's full attention during the online platform class. Kindergarten teachers must broaden home-school partnerships to maximize the children's oral communicative context at home. In addition, the kindergarten teachers must collaborate with the parents to develop a daily oral reading schedule for the children.

The result coincides with the ideas brought up by Genishi (2018) on the importance of oral fluency development. According to her, the development of oral fluency is one of the child's most natural and impressive accomplishments. By the time they start kindergarten, children know most of the fundamentals of their language, so they can converse easily with someone who speaks as they do (that is, in their dialect). Hence, teachers must sustain natural language development by providing environments full of language development opportunities. Continue to encourage interaction as children come to understand written language. Children in the primary grades can keep developing oral abilities and skills by consulting with each other, raising questions, and providing information in varied situations.

Table 3
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Activity-Based Assessment Development

Items	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …		
1. observing virtually kid how to write their given name	2.90	Moderate Level
2. observing virtually or recorded video how kids identify the basic body parts	2.56	Moderate Level
3. assessing virtually how kids identify the letters of the alphabet	2.92	Moderate Level
4. observing virtually or videotaped kids tracing, copying, and writing the letters of the alphabet	2.86	Moderate Level
5. letting kids identify virtually the letter, number, or word that is different in a group	2.72	Moderate Level
6. observing kids to identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather	2.30	Low Level
7. letting kids identify the sequence of events, such as before, after, first, next, last, etc., through virtual activities	2.72	Moderate Level
8. assessing kids virtually to arrange objects one after another in a series/sequence according to a given attribute such as size, length)	2.76	Moderate Level
9. allowing kids to count objects with one-to-one correspondence up to quantities of 10 through a virtual platform	2.60	Moderate Level
10. observing kids virtually or through recorded video to add quantities of up to 10	2.68	Moderate Level

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using concrete objects.

Overall Mean	**2.70**	**Moderate Level**

The results in Table 3 reveal that the respondents assessed an overall mean score of 2.70 and interpreted it as a "moderate level." From the result, some kindergarten teachers encountered difficulties while conducting an activity-based assessment. However, to examine further the items in Table 5, respondents assessed a lowest mean score of 2.30 on item No. 6, which states "observing kids identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather" interpreted as "low level." Whereas the highest mean of 2.92 is on item No. 3, which states "assessing virtually how kids identify the letters of the alphabet," interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that most kindergarten teachers needed help in conducting activity-based assessments virtually, especially in assessing learners' progress in identifying and writing letters of the alphabet. This is because not all kindergarten learners have comfortable home learning environments. Some of them live in a noisy environment which causes distractions to the child during the virtual assessment. At the same time, some learners do not have an internet connection or technology to be used during the virtual assessment of a child's learning development. Hence, kindergarten teachers must learn whether the child performed the tasks and activities. At the same time, some parents are already tired and exhausted after doing household chores. Hence, more time is needed to monitor their child's development. Therefore, kindergarten teachers must conduct a teacher-parent partnership to set up a comfortable learning environment so that the child's full attention during the virtual assessment is guaranteed. Kindergarten teachers must conduct regular classroom PTA meetings, organize group chats for the classroom parents and conduct monthly home visitations to follow up on the learning development of the learners.

The result is supported by DepEd Order No. 047 s mission. 2016, wherein an assessment must be done to identify the child's total development. Assessment is best conducted regularly to know where the child is at. Activity-based activities are essential to healthy and holistic child development as it gives children opportunities to learn about and understand their world and practice newly acquired skills. It is also essential in building children's self-confidence, problem-solving, and cooperative learning skills that prepare them for lifelong learning. The varied activity-based assessment in kindergarten leads the learners to become emergent literates and helps them to acquire naturally the competencies to develop holistically.

Table 4
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Social Development When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger		Older	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. responding to the needs of the learner	2.70	Moderate Level	2.48	Low Level
2. understanding the feelings of others	2.44	Low Level	2.22	Low Level
3. understanding other people's social cues, e.g., facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, or body language	2.48	Low Level	2.17	Low Level
4. realizing how to behave in different social situations, such as House Visitation.	2.07	Low Level	2.09	Low Level
5. understanding and respecting other people's rights; for example, learners need more help and guidance from their parents in learning.	2.11	Low Level	2.09	Low Level
6. group or team activities or games	2.15	Low Level	2.30	Low Level
7. caring for physical contacts, such as hugs	2.19	Low Level	2.39	Low Level
8. getting along with others	2.04	Low Level	2.00	Low Level
9. behaving well in school	1.56	Low Level	1.43	Very Low Level
10. respecting elders/people in authority/others	1.37	Very Low Level	1.39	Very Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.11**	**Low Level**	**2.06**	**Low Level**

Table 4 reveal the results of the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the area of social development was low regardless of their age. It is supported by the responses, wherein younger respondents assessed an overall mean of 2.11 and older respondents of 2.06, both interpreted as "low level." However, in a deeper look at each item, younger respondents assessed the lowest rating of 1.37 on item No. 10, which states, "Respecting elders/people in authority/others" interpreted as "very low level." At the same time, the highest mean of 2.70 is on item No.1, which states "responding to the needs of the learner," interpreted as "moderate level." In the same manner, older respondents assessed the lowest rating of 1.39 on item No. 10, which states "Respecting elders/people in authority/others," interpreted as "very low level." At the same time, the highest mean of 2.48 is on item No. 1, which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as "low level."

These results imply that younger and older respondents experienced the same difficulties while conducting social development activities for kindergarten learners in a blended learning approach. Most of them need help to respond immediately to the educational needs of kindergarten learners because of the blended approach. As a kindergarten teacher, you must know the lesson and curriculum well. Teachers should collaborate with the parents to ensure the intended social development activities, learning tasks, and activity-based assessments are implemented. Social development in a young child is vital to ensuring a successful outcome in life. All children need to engage in activities that promote social skills. Children who are not socially competent are at risk for challenging behavior in childhood and adulthood. Hence, kindergarten teachers and parents must allow the learners to promote social skills in the classroom and at home every day.

The results are supported by DM Order No. 162, 2020, published by the Department of Education. According to the Order, teachers are advised to adopt strategies that respect the unique contexts and diversity of learners in terms of their readiness, learning interest, and learning profile, as well as the social and emotional development of the learners. In addition, Mejah et al. (2019) also claimed that social skills and emotions play an important role in children's life. Socio-emotional development involves emotional control and matures social skills. This can help children control their emotions, thoughts, and actions to adapt to society. This could influence children's learning. Socio-emotional development starts with the ability to comprehend and handle emotion, followed by positive emotional achievement. The ability to manage their emotion could help children to understand their needs, emotion, and others' perception to build up social interaction with others. This component, too, stresses the ability and confidence to face the full of challenges in daily life.

Table 5
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Oral Fluency Development When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger		Older	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. letting the child introduce oneself	2.19	Low Level	2.22	Low Level
2. allowing the child to talk about one's personal experiences/narrates events of the day online	2.52	Moderate Level	2.30	Low Level
3. letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods, or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words	2.93	Moderate Level	2.83	Moderate Level
4. training the child to tell the function of each basic body part	1.74	Low Level	2.09	Low Level
5. letting the child name the five senses and their corresponding body parts through a virtual platform	2.26	Low Level	2.22	Low Level
6. observing the child name the places and the things found in the classroom, school, and community	1.89	Low Level	2.00	Low Level
7. letting the child name family members, school personnel, and community helpers.	2.11	Low Level	2.30	Low Level
8. training the child to use polite greetings and courteous expressions in appropriate situations	2.07	Low Level	2.17	Low Level
9. teaching the kids to describe the different kinds of weather	1.85	Low Level	2.00	Low Level
10. letting the kids tell the names of the days in a week, months in a year	2.26	Low Level	2.43	Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.18**	**Low Level**	**2.26**	**Low Level**

Table 5 shows the need for a higher level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the area of oral fluency development as perceived by younger and older respondents. Younger respondents assessed an overall mean of 2.18, while older respondents had an overall mean of 2.26. Although they vary in numerical value, both ratings were interpreted as "low level." But if to conduct further analysis, younger respondents assessed the lowest rating of 1.74 on item No. 4, which states, "Training the child to tell the function of each basic body part," interpreted as "low level." At the same time, the highest mean of 2.93 was item No. 3, which states, "letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words" interpreted as "moderate level." Whereas older respondents assessed the lowest rating of 2.00 on item No. 6, which states, "observing the child name the places and the things found in the classroom, school, and community," and item No. 9, which states, "teaching the kids to describe the different kinds of weather" interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 2.83 was on item No. 3 which states "letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words" interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that regardless of respondents' age, they encountered the same degree of difficulties in blended learning instructions when conducting oral fluency development activities and learning tasks for kindergarten learners. Because there is no actual face-to-face interaction with learners, teachers need help to conduct oral fluency activities effectively. Not all learners' parents have the technology to be utilized during online oral fluency activities. Hence, most of the teachers felt that their learners' oral fluency abilities needed to be developing in a blended learning setup. They

urge for the conduct of in-person classes immediately to catch up with the intended learning need of their children that was caused by the pandemic.

According to the study conducted by Staker (2020), effective blended learning in school education has been hindered by certain concerns and challenges. The researcher found out that learning at a distance may be suitable for older students and adults. However, younger and kindergarten pupils and those needing additional learning support may struggle to learn independently. On the other hand, The Early Child Care and Development (ECCD) Checklist is a normed developmental screening tool that is used by various stakeholders who work with Filipino children. It outlines developmental milestones categorized under seven domains. Oral language development is most evident in the domain area of Language, Literacy, and Communication, and this is grouped with five other domains: auditory perception and discrimination, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary development, and listening comprehension (Diaz et al., 2022). Addressing these domains allows learners to express themselves using their mother tongue, which paves the way for early literacy learning and the development of communicative skills. This will help improve students' attitudes toward reading and writing and their perceptions of themselves as effective language users and learners (Department of Education, 2016).

Table 6
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Activity-Based Assessment Development When Grouped According to Age

Items	Younger		Older	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. observing virtually kid how to write their given name	3.04	Moderate Level	2.74	Moderate Level
2. observing virtually or recorded video how kids identify basic body parts	2.74	Moderate Level	2.35	Low Level
3. assessing virtually how kids identify the letters of the alphabet	2.96	Moderate Level	2.83	Moderate Level
4. observing virtually or videotaped kids tracing, copying, and writing the letters of the alphabet	3.07	Moderate Level	2.61	Moderate Level
5. letting kids identify virtually the letter, number, or word that is different in a group	2.85	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level
6. observing kids to identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather	2.44	Low Level	2.13	Low Level
7. letting the kids identify the sequence of events, such as before, after, first, next, last, etc., through virtual activities	2.85	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level
8. assessing kids virtually to arrange objects one after another in a series/sequence according to a given attribute such as size, length)	2.93	Moderate Level	2.57	Moderate Level
9. allowing kids to count objects with one-to-one correspondence up to quantities of 10 through a virtual platform	2.74	Moderate Level	2.43	Low Level
10. observing kids virtually or through recorded video to add quantities of up to 10 using concrete objects.	2.81	Moderate Level	2.52	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	**2.84**	**Moderate Level**	**2.53**	**Moderate Level**

As depicted in Table 6, younger respondents assessed an overall mean score of 2.84, interpreted as "moderate level," whereas older respondents assessed an overall mean score of 2.53, interpreted as "moderate level." This could mean that the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in the area of activity-based assessment development, as perceived by the younger and older teachers, are somewhat the same. But then again, if to analyze the items further, younger respondents assessed the lowest rating of 2.44 on item No. 6, which states "observing kids identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather" interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 3.07 is on item No. 4 which states "observing virtually or videotaped kids tracing, copying and writing the letters of the alphabet" interpreted as "moderate level." On the other hand, older respondents also assessed the lowest rating of 2.13 on item No. 6, which states observing kids identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather" is interpreted as a "low level," while the highest mean of 2.83 is on item No. 3 which states "assessing virtually how kids identify the letters of the alphabet" interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that both younger and older respondents are having difficulties in the utilization of the online platform in the conduct of activity-based assessment, not because they have no skills in the use of technology, but because most of the learners need the gadgets and ability to use online platforms. Both groups of respondents find it difficult to assess virtually the performance of the kindergarten learners, especially when the kids are asked to identify, trace, copy, and write the letters of the alphabet. Hence, the teachers need help to provide immediate feedback to the learners to help them appreciate what they already know and do well, enabling them to learn more or do better. Activity-based assessment is a critical aspect of the teaching and learning process. According to DepEd Order No. 047, series of 2016, assessment in Kindergarten should be ongoing and well-planned.

Assessment assists teachers to understand individual strengths and weaknesses and enable them to design appropriate learning activities to cater to the needs of individual learners. The assessment also identifies possible learning difficulties or disabilities that may require further evaluation and/or plans for early interventions.

Table 7
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Social Development When Grouped According to Highest Educational Attainment

Items	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. responding to the needs of the learner	2.76	Moderate Level	2.25	Low Level
2. understanding the feelings of others	2.62	Moderate Level	1.75	Low Level
3. understanding other people's social cues, e.g., facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, or body language	2.50	Moderate Level	2.00	Low Level
4. realizing how to behave in different social situations, such as House Visitation.	2.26	Low Level	1.69	Low Level
5. understanding and respecting other people's rights, for example, learners need more help and guidance from their parents in learning.	2.38	Low Level	1.50	Low Level
6. group or team activities or games	2.38	Low Level	1.88	Low Level
7. caring for physical contacts, such as hugs	2.50	Moderate Level	1.81	Low Level
8. getting along with others	2.12	Low Level	1.81	Low Level
9. behaving well in school	1.59	Low Level	1.31	Very Low Level
10. respecting elders/people in authority/others	1.38	Very Low Level	1.38	Very Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.25**	**Low Level**	**1.74**	**Low Level**

Results in Table 7 reveal that the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the area of social development according to highest educational attainment was low. It is supported by the responses, wherein respondents with lower educational attainment assessed an overall mean of 2.25 and respondents with higher educational attainment is 1.74, both interpreted as "low level." However, in a deeper look at each item, respondents with lower educational backgrounds assessed the lowest rating of 1.38 on item No. 10, which states "respecting to elders/people in authority/others" interpreted as a "very low level," while the highest mean of 2.76 is on item No. 1 which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as "moderate level." As for respondents with higher educational background, they assessed the lowest rating of 1.31 on item No. 9, which states "behaving well in school," interpreted as "very low level," while the highest mean of 2.25 is on item No. 1, which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as "low level." The results imply that both groups of respondents with lower and higher educational attainment perceived the same level of difficulties in blended learning modality when it comes to conducting social development activities for kindergarten learners virtually. Both groups of respondents need help to respond immediately to the needed educational needs of the learners because of the current learning modality set-up. They notice that a blended learning set-up cannot fully help in the development of their children's social skills. Social skills are very important and have been learned ever since an early age. Children's problems with social development are more toward a lack of social skills in social interaction and trouble building up and maintaining a good rapport with peers. It would have negative effects on the children's learning. The results support the advocacy of the Department of Education, wherein according to DepEd Order No. 047, s. 2016, every aspect of a child's growth and development is interrelated and interdependent. Thus, teachers and parents must nurture the child in a good and caring environment that enhances healthy and dependable relationships with other children and, most significantly, adults for the development of learners' social and emotional skills. Learners are given equal opportunities to effectively promote their physical, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual development, including values formation to ascertain school readiness. The learning and development of every child involve a series of complex and dynamic processes that are best attended to more positively and responsively.

Table 8
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Oral Fluency Development When Grouped According to Highest Educational Attainment

Items	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. letting the child introduce oneself	2.29	Low Level	2.00	Low Level
2. allowing the child to talk about one's personal	2.41	Low Level	2.44	Low Level

experiences/narrates events of the day through online

Items	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
3. letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods, or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words	2.97	Moderate Level	2.69	Moderate Level
4. training the child to tell the function of each basic body part	2.00	Low Level	1.69	Low Level
5. letting the child name the five senses and their corresponding body parts through a virtual platform	2.38	Low Level	1.94	Low Level
6. observing the child name the places and the things found in the classroom, school, and community	1.97	Low Level	1.88	Low Level
7. letting the child name family members, school personnel, and community helpers.	2.26	Low Level	2.06	Low Level
8. training the child to use polite greetings and courteous expressions in appropriate situations	2.21	Low Level	1.94	Low Level
9. teaching the kids to describe the different kinds of weather	1.97	Low Level	1.81	Low Level
10. letting the kids tell the names of the days in a week, months in a year	2.35	Low Level	2.31	Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.28**	**Low Level**	**2.08**	**Low Level**

As depicted in Table 8, the results reveal that the level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in modular blended learning modality in the area of oral fluency development according to highest educational attainment is low. It is supported by the responses, wherein respondents with lower educational attainment assessed an overall mean of 2.28 and respondents with higher educational attainment assessed an overall mean of 2.08, both interpreted as "low level." However, in a deeper look at each item, respondents with lower educational attainment assessed the lowest rating of 1.97 on items No. 6 and 9, which states, "observing the child name the places and the things found in the classroom, school and community" and "teaching the kids to describe the different kinds of weather" while the highest mean of 2.97 was on item No. 3 which states "letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words" interpreted as "moderate level." As for respondents with higher educational attainment, they assessed the lowest rating of 1.69 on item No. 4, which states, "Training the child tell the function of each basic body part," interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 2.69 is on item No. 3 which states "letting the child talk online or videotaped about family members, pets, toys, foods or members of the community using various appropriate descriptive words" interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that regardless of respondents' educational attainment, they experienced the same level of difficulties in blended learning modality in terms of conducting oral development for kindergarten learners. Both groups of respondents have problems during blended learning, especially with the learners being asked to talk or express about their family members, favorite pets, foods, and people in the community with appropriate descriptive words.

Oral fluency is an important skill that needs to be developed in children, especially in the early years. In a study by van der Pluijm et al. (2019), they reiterated the importance of giving attention to oral fluency development since it is a key factor in the literacy development of young children. It is here where young children gain vocabulary knowledge and syntactic structure that are primarily drawn from their oral language used at home that would later be used in reading, writing, and other literacy skills. Further, in research by Education Development Center Inc. (2018) to determine the status of literacy, language, and communication at the kindergarten level, three observers visited 32 schools from regions 1 and 7. During their observation, a major indicator that oral language instruction was limited and needed to be given more focus was that teacher talk dominated classrooms leaving students little opportunity to express themselves beyond one-word responses. It is, therefore, necessary to review the oral language components in the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide to determine if there are any components that may need to be recovered in the unpacking process.

Table 9
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Activity-Based Assessment Development When Grouped According to Highest Educational Attainment

Items	Lower		Higher	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. observing virtually kid how to write their given name	2.88	Moderate Level	2.94	Moderate Level
2. observing virtually or recorded video how kids identify basic body parts	2.74	Moderate Level	2.19	Low Level
3. assessing virtually how kids identify the letters of the alphabet	3.03	Moderate Level	2.63	Moderate Level
4. observing virtually or videotaped kids tracing, copying, and writing the letters of the alphabet	3.06	Moderate Level	2.44	Low Level
5. letting kids identify virtually the letter, number, or word that is different in a group	2.85	Moderate Level	2.44	Low Level
6. observing kids to identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather	2.35	Low Level	2.19	Low Level

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7. letting kids identify the sequence of events, such as before, after, first, next, last, etc., through virtual activities	2.76	Moderate Level	2.63	Moderate Level
8. assessing kids virtually to arrange objects one after another in a series/sequence according to a given attribute such as size, length)	2.82	Moderate Level	2.63	Moderate Level
9. allowing kids to count objects with one-to-one correspondence up to quantities of 10 through a virtual platform	2.62	Moderate Level	2.56	Moderate Level
10. observing kids virtually or through recorded video to add quantities of up to 10 using concrete objects.	2.76	Moderate Level	2.50	Moderate Level
Overall Mean	**2.79**	**Moderate Level**	**2.51**	**Moderate Level**

Table 9 shows that there is a moderate level of difficulties encountered by kindergarten teachers in blended learning modality in the area of activity-based assessment development as perceived by respondents with lower and higher educational attainment. Respondents with lower educational attainment assessed an overall mean of 2.79, while respondents with higher educational attainment had an overall mean of 2.51. Although they vary in numerical value, both ratings were interpreted as "moderate level." But if to conduct further analysis, respondents with lower educational attainment assessed the lowest rating of 2.35 on item No. 6, which states "observing kids identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather" interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 3.06 was on item No. 4 which states "observing virtually or videotaped kids tracing, copying and writing the letters of the alphabet" interpreted as "moderate level." On the other hand, respondents with higher educational attainment assessed the lowest rating of 2.19 on items No. 2 and 6 which states "observing virtually or recorded video how kids identify basic body parts" and "observing kids to identify what to wear and use for each kind of weather" interpreted as "low level," while the highest mean of 2.94 was on item No. 1 which states "observing virtually kid how to write given name" interpreted as "moderate level." This implies that both groups of respondents experienced the same level of difficulties during blended learning, especially in the conduct of activity-based assessments virtually or online. Kindergarten teachers are having a hard time conducting assessment activities virtually, especially when the learners were asked to write, copy, and trace the letters of the alphabet. Since there is no face-to-face interaction with the learners, teachers need help to identify learners left behind. The teachers have to report every child's progress details and assessments along with the curriculum. With the results, teachers may provide reinforcement and intervention activities to those struggling learners. The findings adhere to the views of Mayasari and Kemal (2020). According to them, assessment is part of the learning process, which as a whole cannot be separated from teaching activities; carrying out evaluations carried out in educational activities has a very important meaning because evaluation is a measuring tool or process to determine the level of achievement of success that has been achieved by students on teaching materials or materials that have been delivered so that with the evaluation, the objectives of learning will be seen accurately and convincingly. The teachers still have a role to play in evaluating distance learning.

Table 10
Difficulties Encountered by Kindergarten Teachers in Blended Learning Modality in the Area of Social Development When Grouped According to Length of Service

Items	Shorter		Longer	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
As a teacher, I have difficulty in …				
1. responding to the needs of the learner	2.71	Moderate Level	2.50	Moderate Level
2. understanding the feelings of others	2.42	Low Level	2.27	Low Level
3. understanding other people's social cues, e.g., facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, or body language	2.42	Low Level	2.27	Low Level
4. realizing how to behave in different social situations, such as House Visitation.	2.13	Low Level	2.04	Low Level
5. understanding and respecting other people's rights, for example, learners need more help and guidance from their parents in learning.	1.96	Low Level	2.23	Low Level
6. group or team activities or games	2.21	Low Level	2.23	Low Level
7. caring for physical contacts, such as hugs	2.25	Low Level	2.31	Low Level
8. getting along with others	2.04	Low Level	2.00	Low Level
9. behaving well in school	1.63	Low Level	1.39	Very Low Level
10. respecting elders/people in authority/others	1.38	Very Low Level	1.38	Very Low Level
Overall Mean	**2.11**	**Low Level**	**2.06**	**Low Level**

As divulged in Table 10, respondents with shorter in-service assessed an overall mean score of 2.11, interpreted as "low level," whereas respondents with longer in-service assessed an overall mean score of 2.06, interpreted as "low level." This could show that both respondents with shorter and longer in-service had experienced the same degree of difficulties in blended learning modality in the area of social development. However, if examining the items thoroughly, respondents with shorter service assessed the lowest rating of 1.38 on item No. 10, which states "respecting to elders/people in authority/others" is interpreted as a "very low level," while the highest mean of 2.71 was on item No. 1 which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as "moderate level." Similarly, respondents with longer in service assessed the lowest rating of 1.38 on item No. 10, which states "respecting to elders/people in authority/others," interpreted as a "very low level," while the highest mean of 2.50 was on item No. 1 which states "responding to the needs of the learner" interpreted as "moderate level." The results imply that regardless of teachers' length of service, they encountered the same level of difficulties in blended learning modality when conducting social development activities for kindergarten learners. The current teaching-learning set-up is one reason many teachers need help to respond immediately to the needs of the learners and formulate learning activities for blended learning. Kindergarten teachers, as the spearhead of the implementation of blended learning, hence, they must be knowledgeable of the learning content of the curriculum. Designing social development activities for kindergarten learners is challenging, especially if the teacher is new to the service and has less training in blended instruction. The results are supported by the study of Roszak and Kołodziejczak (2018). From the results of their study, they concluded that organizing blended learning requires constant adaptation of teaching, and teachers' different attitudes towards education and willingness to change become relevant. In addition, not all teachers think about the design of blended learning in the same way, and findings show that most teachers are led by practical considerations rather than attending to individual students' needs. Addressing this issue may be done through dialogue with peers in order to dispel anxieties, share challenges and solutions, and better reach a shared vision. In addition, according to Almazeedi (2019), children learn a lot from their families, teachers, and peers. It is therefore essential for teachers and parents to put strategies in place to foster children's healthy social development.

Conclusions

In conclusions, most of the kindergarten teachers encountered fewer difficulties in blended learning modality in conducting social development activities. Responding immediately to the educational needs of kindergarten learners is the most prevalent concern among teachers during blended learning instruction. Kindergarten teachers need help in implementing oral fluency development activities. A lot of them encountered problems during virtual and online instruction. Most kindergarten learners have difficulty speaking out about their selves through online or virtual instruction. In addition, the majority of kindergarten teachers faced reasonable problems during the conduct of activity-based assessment development. Kindergarten teachers struggle to assess and monitor virtually whether the learners' social and oral fluency skills are progressing or not. Further, the highest educational attainment of the kindergarten teacher may contribute to varying difficulties encountered in the blended learning modality, particularly in social development. Based on the results, this study calls for the following: 1) calls for the school leaders and administrators to initiate special training and workshop for all kindergarten teachers on how to deliver social development activities in a blended learning set-up; 2) teachers show Video Recorded Materials where learners can listen, follow and imitate and motivate parents to assist and help educate on their part during the online oral fluency development activities to motivate child's full attention during online classes; 3) teachers use various kinds of assessment like online assessment materials using google forms, Ready-made PowerPoint presentations of various assessment activities, and interactive online games; and 4) teacher must conduct a regular classroom PTA meeting.

Acknowledgement

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