

Strategic Professionalization: A Best Practice Model for Early Childhood Education Community Extension of the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental

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ABSTRACT. High-quality early childhood care and education is essential for long-term development, yet many Child Development Workers (CDWs) lack formal academic credentials. This paper evaluates the "Certificate in ECE Program," a transformative community extension model developed through a strategic partnership between the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos and the Guihulngan City LGU. Utilizing a multi-method approach, the study validates a six-month professionalization pathway that successfully equipped 73 CDWs with essential pedagogical competencies and instructional strategies. Findings demonstrate that the program significantly enhanced educator confidence, professional efficacy, and personal growth while fostering essential attributes like empathy and patience. Ultimately, this zero-revenue, cost-sharing model bridged critical knowledge gaps and aligned local practices with national standards. The initiative serves as a replicable blueprint for institutionalizing collaborative partnerships to permanently elevate foundational education quality in marginalized communities.

1.0. Introduction

The global pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—specifically Quality Education (SDG 4) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)—identifies high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a foundational driver for long-term human development. While ECCE is essential for universal access targets by 2030, nearly 175 million children globally still lack pre-primary opportunities due to persistent socio-economic barriers (Muchenje et al., 2025; Sindhu & Gupta, 2024). By investing in the professionalization of the foundational workforce, educational institutions can establish inclusive environments that transcend these inequalities, fostering social cohesion and lifelong learning foundations (Camilleri & Camilleri, 2019; Isaac, 2024).

Professionalizing this workforce through structured training is vital for bridging the knowledge gap among Child Development Workers (CDWs) who lack formal academic credentials. Providing specialized development ensures that educators transition from traditional methods to evidence-based, learner-centered practices aligned with national standards. This training enhances professional competence and mastery of teaching strategies while fostering personal efficacy and improved child development outcomes (Imron et al., 2020; Farabi et al., 2025).

In the Philippines, the ECCD Law establishes rigorous standards, yet local implementation in areas like Guihulngan City faces significant resource and personnel hurdles. A critical disparity exists between national requirements and the frontline workforce, as many CDWs lack bachelor's degrees, limiting their ability to implement mandated pedagogical standards (Nachon et al., 2025; Robles & Faustino, 2025). Rural and marginalized communities further struggle with

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under-resourced centers and personnel who often perform only at beginner levels in cultural and linguistic competencies (Biana et al., 2021; Matjokana, 2023). Despite the framework of Republic Act No. 10410, persistent resource constraints continue to hinder quality delivery (Ulep et al., 2024; Gamao & Napiere, 2025).

A critical gap persists between the extensive practical experience of daycare teachers and their lack of recognized credentials and updated theoretical knowledge. This gap is most pronounced in marginalized areas where practitioners face geographic isolation and financial barriers to higher education (Zulu et al., 2022; Oke et al., 2021). While traditional outreach often fails by providing temporary aid that disempowers local staff (Smit et al., 2019), structured training and peer learning can successfully build professional competency even without formal degrees (Palupi, 2025). Evidence-based professional development, such as mentoring, is therefore essential to improve both educator practices and child outcomes (Deding & Minnaert, 2024).

Hence, this paper presented the Certificate in ECE Program as a transformative community extension model developed through a strategic partnership between the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos Graduate School (UNO-R) and the Guihulngan City LGU. The initiative addressed critical skills gaps by providing a six-month professionalization pathway for 73 initial completers at no cost. By offering intensive instruction, the program shifts academic outreach from temporary assistance toward sustainable empowerment and job security. This documentation may serve as a replicable blueprint for institutions aiming to create a "ripple effect" of competence and quality care within marginalized communities.

2.0. Methodology

This report validated best practices through a rigorous mixed-methods approach, combining written interviews with key stakeholders—including participants, facilitators, and LGU partners—with an extensive review of documentary evidence like the Memorandum of Agreement and curriculum designs. By integrating the perspectives of those directly involved with formal institutional records, this strategy aligns with established literature on educational program evaluation. This methodology ensures higher reliability and validity, providing a comprehensive assessment of the program's impact.

3.0. Results and Discussion

3.1. Organization

An overview of the Certificate in Early Childhood Program. This initiative is a crucial community

extension program spearheaded by the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School (Official) in partnership with the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental. Designed as an intensive six-month certificate course, it specifically targets and supports eligible daycare teachers within Guihulngan City who currently lack bachelor's degrees in elementary or preschool education. The core curriculum focuses on enhancing essential knowledge and skills necessary for effective preschool instruction, covering fundamental areas such as early childhood education principles, infant and toddler care, language development, creative activities, integrating technology, and appropriate assessment methods.

Figure 1

Consultative meeting between Dean Madrigal and Hon. Mayor Filomeno L. Reyes and CSDW Head, Ms. Gianne Marie A. Mijares-Yu



Program Goals and Skill Development. The program is structured around three primary learning objectives to produce highly capable educators. First, participants are intended to acquire solid and substantial knowledge in child growth and development, exploring the universal physical, social, emotional, and cognitive processes children undergo. Second, it aims to develop creative and innovative skills in facilitating teaching by mastering the development, selection, and application of effective objectives, instructional materials, strategies, and assessment activities, particularly for enhancing early literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Finally, the course emphasizes gaining a comprehensive understanding of classroom management, focusing on effective techniques to manage diverse behaviors, including those associated with learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and other exceptionalities.

Expected Outcomes for Participants. Upon successfully completing the program, participants are expected to demonstrate a transformative level of professional competence. This includes possessing an in-depth understanding of a complex and coherent body of Early Childhood Education knowledge and skills that can be readily applied across various educational settings. Furthermore, they are anticipated to achieve a higher order level of skill in analyzing, critically

assessing, applying, and communicating expertise within the field. Ultimately, the program aims to cultivate their ability to creatively and flexibly apply this knowledge to novel situations, empowering them to solve complex educational problems through rigorous thinking and independent professional work.

3.2. Conceptualization and Planning of the Community Extension Program

Inspired by the child advocacy efforts of Dr. Dennis Madrigal, founder of the Hinterland Kids Project, the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School, through its various graduate programs (MAEd ECE, EdD, and Educational Management), conceptualized a significant community extension program focused on improving Early Childhood Education. This initiative quickly found a crucial partner in the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental. The concept was met with enthusiasm by Hon. Mayor Filomeno L. Reyes and City Social Development Welfare Head, Ms. Gianne Marie A. Mijares-Yu, who actively championed the program's approval before the local legislative body.

The partnership was officially sanctioned by the Sangguniang Panlungsod (SP) of Guihulngan City through Resolution No. 2023-82 on March 28, 2023. This resolution empowered the Mayor to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos (UNO-R). The core of this agreement was a commitment to provide free educational support and intensive training to eligible child development workers in marginalized communities. The goal was to equip these teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage and conduct activities in their respective Child Development Centers effectively and efficiently.

The formal signing of the MOA took place on June 16, 2023. Rev. Fr. Joel A. Alve, OAR represented UNO-R, and Hon. Mayor Filomeno L. Reyes signed on behalf of Guihulngan City, with Ms. Gianne Marie A. Mijares-Yu and Dr. Dennis V. Madrigal serving as official witnesses. This landmark collaboration formalized a two-year commitment to providing high-quality, intensive training for the child development workers at the margins. This strategic effort underscores the shared commitment to investing in the foundational years of young learners.

The central focus of the program is the delivery of a 6-month "Certificate in Early Childhood Program." This initiative is specifically designed to empower day care teachers, many of whom lack bachelor's degrees, by providing them with essential, top-notch training from the UNO-R Graduate School. This significant investment in the educators is expected to create a widespread "Ripple Effect," directly translating into a stronger educational foundation and a brighter future for countless young learners across Guihulngan City.

Following the MOA signing, the months from June to August 2023 were dedicated to meticulously planning the training logistics, which included curriculum development, scheduling, securing facilitators and student volunteers, and finalizing venues and participant screening. This thorough preparation culminated in the launch of the program's first training session for Batch 1 on September 16, 2023, with 33 participants commencing a six-week program. The successful launch of Batch 1 was followed by the start of Batch 2 on March 16, 2024, which welcomed 40 participants, signaling the successful implementation of the training program.

Figure 2

Sangguniang Panlungsod (SP) of Guihulngan City Resolution No. 2023-82



3.3. Implementation Details of the Community Extension Program

Participant eligibility. Eligible participants must be daycare teachers serving the City of Guihulngan, Negros Oriental, who have been officially recommended by the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO). Ideal candidates should demonstrate a strong interest in early childhood education and a clear need for professional development, specifically regarding hands-on training, updated curriculum content, and advanced instructional strategies for teaching younger learners.

Program structure. The Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a strategic community extension initiative by the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School (UNO-R), in partnership with the Local Government Unit of Guihulngan City. This six-month, face-to-face

Table 1

Program Matrix

WEEK	TOPICS	SCHEDULE OF CLASSES		FACILITATORS
		BATCH 1	BATCH 2	
0	Orientation	September 16, 2023	March 16, 2024	Dr. Dennis Madrigal
1	Principles of Early Childhood Education	September 23-24, 2023	March 22-23, 2024	Dr. Sharon Medez
2	Group Care of Infants and Toddlers	October 14-15, 2023	April 27-28, 2024	Dr. Sharon Medez
3	Language Development and Creative Activities for Young Children	November 18-19, 2023	May 25-26, 2024	Dr. Sharon Medez
4	Facilitating Learner-Centered Teaching	December 9-10, 2023	June 22-23, 2024	Dr. Marisa Petalla
5	Technology for Teaching and Learning	January 13-14, 2024	July 20-21, 2024	Dr. Joel Bual
6	Assessment in Early Childhood Education	February 17-18, 2024	August 24-25, 2024	Dr. Marisa Petalla
Completion		February 18, 2024	September 22, 2024	Dean & Professors

program is designed to professionalize the city's foundational workforce by targeting daycare teachers who lack formal academic training. Sessions are held twice monthly on weekends (Saturdays and Sundays, 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM), providing an intensive and immersive learning environment. By addressing critical skills gaps, the program ensures that those shaping the city's youngest learners are equipped with the professional standards necessary for high-quality early childhood care.

Curriculum and impact. The curriculum progresses from foundational principles to advanced classroom integration, beginning with an orientation and covering ECCE philosophy, infant and toddler care, and literacy development. Later weeks focus on learner-centered teaching, classroom management, and the integration of educational technology, concluding with a module on developmental assessment strategies. This blend of face-to-face instruction and continuous mentoring has already proven successful; across two initial batches, 73 teachers graduated with measurable improvements in both professional competence and classroom quality. As a replicable model for sustainable community impact, this partnership demonstrates how academic and local government collaboration can drive lasting systemic change in early childhood education.

Financial resources. The program utilizes a strategic cost-sharing model that prioritizes resource allocation over direct currency exchange, ensuring financial sustainability without passing costs to participants. The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Guihulngan City managed logistical requirements, including transportation, meals, and accommodation

for faculty, while providing essential facilities such as the TESDA Training Center and OSCA Session Hall. Additionally, the LGU oversaw resource mobilization and participant recruitment to align the initiative with local governance priorities.

Complementing this, the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos (UNO-R) provided "in-kind" academic expertise through its community extension

service. This contribution included the full curriculum design, modules, and the instructional time of PhD-level professors and student volunteers. Consequently, the "Certificate in Early Childhood Education" was offered entirely free of charge, requiring only a personal investment of time from the participants. This scalable model has successfully produced 73 graduates across two cohorts by maximizing existing human capital and institutional infrastructure.

Technological resources. The program's technological support was educationally comprehensive yet logistically constrained, as "resource limitations"

COURSE OVERVIEW

Introductory Meeting

- Topic: Orientation on the Certificate in Early Childhood Education Program.

WEEK 1: Principles of Early Childhood Education

Focus: Comprehensive overview of early childhood care and education (ECCE).

Key Topics:

- Historical and philosophical influences on ECCE.
- Program planning and curriculum development.
- Indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- Organizational structure and guidance techniques.
- Current issues and comparative early childhood programs.

WEEK 2: Group Care of Infants and Toddlers

Focus: Overview of programs specifically designed for infants and toddlers.

Key Topics:

- Care, protection, and safety of very young children.
- Developmental-educational curriculum appropriate for this age group.
- Designing effective physical and social environments for infant and toddler care.

WEEK 3: Language Development and Creative Activities for Young Children

Focus: Building a strong foundation in language, literacy, and creative expression.

Key Topics:

- Research-based principles and practices for language and literacy development.
- Developmental sequences and effective teaching strategies for language.
- Current trends and issues in early literacy.
- Varied teaching strategies and approaches to develop children's creative abilities and artistic expression.

WEEK 4: Facilitating Learner-Centered Teaching

Focus: Practical application of teaching strategies, specifically covering effective classroom management in a preschool setting.

WEEK 5: Technology for Teaching and Learning

Focus: Effective and responsible use of digital learning tools in early childhood classrooms.

Outcomes: Increased learner engagement, improved lesson planning for teachers, and facilitation of personalized learning experiences.

WEEK 6: Assessment in Early Childhood Education

Focus: Developing a comprehensive framework for evaluating early childhood learners.

Key Topic: Strategies and methods for assessing children's development and learning progress.

initially affected access to technological tools and classroom facilities. To overcome these hardware shortages, the organizers adopted adaptive strategies, utilizing "digital resources and shared learning materials" to facilitate interactive learning while dedicating specific curriculum time to "Technology for Teaching and Learning" to equip teachers with essential digital skills. Consequently, while the immediate support was made adequate through these workarounds, future planning explicitly prioritizes the integration of "digital literacy training" to establish a more robust, long-term technological foundation for the participants.

Dean Dr. Dennis Madrigal. There were 33 completers who received their Certificates of Completion.

The Second Completion Program followed on September 22, 2024, also commencing around 2:00 PM, but held at the City Gymnasium in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental. The list of distinguished guests for this event included Hon. Vice Mayor Ana Eunice Beatrice Reyes, Ms. Gianne Marie A. Mijares-Yu, DCC Cluster Heads, Dr. Marisa Petalla, and Dean Dr. Dennis Madrigal, highlighting continued strong leadership support for the ECCE program. A total of 40 completers were awarded Certificates of Completion.

Interactive Sessions with Dr. Sharon Rose Medez, Dr. Marisa Petalla, and Dr. Joel Bual



Facilitators: The program is supervised by the RBGS Dean, Dr. Dennis Madrigal. The main program facilitators were composed of Dr. Marisa Petalla, LPT; Dr. Joel Bual, LPT; Dr. Sharon Rose Genita Medez, RPsy, LPT; and volunteer MAEd ECE/Educational Management students.

Major Requirements to get the Certificate: A major requirement for participants to receive the Certificate is the submission of session outputs, reinforcing the importance of the work presented during the monitoring phase and complete attendance.

Completion Programs. The Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECCE) Completion Program has been held successfully twice.

The First Completion Program took place on February 18, 2024, at approximately 2:00 PM in the St. Francis College-Guihulngan Amphitheater, Guihulngan, Negros Oriental. Esteemed attendees included Hon. Mayor Filomeno Reyes, Hon. Vice Mayor Ana Eunice Beatrice Reyes, Ms. Gianne Marie A. Mijares-Yu, DCC Cluster Heads, Dr. Marisa Petalla, Dr. Joel Bual, and

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring (Formative Assessment). Learning and participation are monitored continuously throughout the sessions by requiring groups to present collaborative outputs for peer and facilitator review. This process serves as a feedback mechanism where facilitator critiques and peer appreciation provide immediate guidance for improvement.

Evaluation (Summative Feedback). A summative evaluation is conducted at the program's conclusion using a participant feedback form. The results are analyzed to identify areas for improvement and guide the refinement of future program iterations.

5. Impact/Quality of the Community Extension

The collected feedback, synthesized from written interviews with program participants, facilitators, students, and Local Government Unit (LGU) partners, consistently highlights a high-quality early childhood

education (ECE) training program. This program yields significant, transformative impacts, resulting in substantial personal growth and enhanced professional skills for the Child Development Workers (CDWs), ultimately leading to improved quality of early childhood care and increased community contribution.

A. Personal Growth and Enhanced Professional Skills

Professional Competence and Skill Enhancement. The program significantly upgrades the professional knowledge and practical skills of the participants, enabling them to be more effective educators.

Enhanced Knowledge & Skills. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) training was highly successful, significantly enhancing the knowledge, enthusiasm, and essential skills of the day care workers in early childhood care and education.

It significantly enhanced my knowledge... and enthusiasm for early childhood care and education. (P1, B1)

The training was extremely successful and has greatly enhanced our skills as day care workers. (P2, B1)

The ECE training significantly enhanced my understanding of essential childcare methods." (P3, B1)

I gained essential skills in childcare and education, which directly increased my knowledge... (P5, B1)

Mastery of Teaching Strategies/Instructional Materials. The material provided a strong foundation in effective teaching strategies, offering valuable knowledge on various methods and techniques, including how to create suitable instructional materials and adjust to children's behavior.

We learned how to create instructional materials (IMs) suitable for children and how to adjust to children's behavior." (P4, B1)

It provided me with a strong foundation in... effective teaching strategies for young children." (P7, B1)

I gain valuable knowledge regarding various teaching ideas, strategies, methods, and techniques. (P1, B2)

Increased Confidence and Efficacy. The training significantly boosted their confidence and effectiveness as a Child Development Worker.

The program helped me become a more confident and effective Child Development Worker... (P1, B1)

This training has made me a highly confident and effective Child Development Worker... (P5, B1)

It boosted my confidence and expanded my knowledge as a Child Development Worker. (P2, B2)

Personal Growth and Improved Disposition. Beyond technical skills, the training fostered essential personal attributes crucial for working with young children, such as emotional intelligence and self-awareness.

Increased Patience and Empathy. The training significantly enhanced their knowledge, patience, and enthusiasm while strengthening their empathy and understanding of children's diverse needs, resulting in more intentional interactions.

It significantly enhanced my knowledge, patience, and enthusiasm... (P1, B1)

On a personal level, the training significantly enhanced my patience, empathy, and understanding of children's diverse needs, leading me to be more intentional in my interactions. (P7, B1)

Self-Awareness and Purpose. The training program significantly enhanced their self-awareness, confidence, and sense of purpose, clarifying my role and increasing their fulfillment as a Child Development Worker (CDW) contributing to critical early years.

I also became more self-aware and reflective... (P7, B1)

Overall, the training significantly enhanced my sense of purpose and fulfillment in contributing to the critical early years... (P7, B1)

The program boosted my confidence and clarified my purpose as a Child Development Worker (CDW)... (P3, B2)

Interpersonal Development. It helped them personally develop skills such as welcoming others, overcoming embarrassment, and showcasing our talents.

On a personal level, it helped us develop skills like welcoming others, overcoming embarrassment, and showcasing our talents." (P4, B1)

Positive Impact on Children and Community.

The enhanced CDW capabilities directly translate to better outcomes for the children and their families, fulfilling the program's core mandate.

Improved Child Development Outcomes. The challenging ECE certificate training equipped participants with the latest theories and methodologies to provide high-quality, ECCD Law-aligned care, enabling them to better foster children's growth, learning, and development of social skills.

...better equipped to help the children in our community grow and learn." (P1, B1)

...challenging ECE certificate training was essential for deepening my skills in fostering children's social responsibility, independence, and self-expression. (P6, B1)

...equipping them with the latest theories and methodologies to provide high-quality care that aligns with the ECCD Law... (LGU Partner 1)

Holistic/Social-Emotional Support. ECE training critically equips workers to provide emotional and adaptive support, teach positive relationship strategies, and empower them to advocate for holistic child development and build stronger parent/caregiver relationships.

Critically, ECE equips workers to provide crucial emotional and adaptive support... and teaching strategies for maintaining positive relationships with both peers and adults. (P4, B2)

...empowering me to advocate for holistic child development and build stronger parent/caregiver relationships. (P3, B2)

B. Program Quality

Highly valuable, transformative, and essential content. The participants consistently describe the program's content as necessary, transformative, and having high utility in their daily work.

Valuable and Worthwhile. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Certificate Training was an extremely beneficial, valuable, enriching, and transformative experience.

The ECE Certificate Training was extremely beneficial. (P1, B1)

The training was very valuable. (P4, B1)

The Certificate Training in Early Childhood Education was both enriching and transformative. (P7, B1)

Foundation and Practical Utility. This program equipped them with practical skills and theoretical knowledge for daily application, instilling the confidence required to effectively teach the new generation of learners.

This program distinguished itself by making me even more equipped with practical skills and theoretical knowledge that I apply daily... (P7, B1)

This program instills the confidence required to effectively teach the new generation of learners. (Professor 1)

Recommendation for continuity and expansion.

The overwhelming positive sentiment manifests as strong recommendations for others to take the course and a plea for the program to continue and expand.

Strong Recommendation. They wholeheartedly recommend this essential program to every Child Development Worker (CDW), as it not only provides valuable knowledge but also equips them with the foundational skills necessary for building the future of the young learners they serve.

I highly recommend this program because it is essential for Child Development Workers. (P1, B2)

I highly recommend this program to other CDWs." (P1, B1)

I recommend you also take the course to share this valuable knowledge with others. (P3, B1)

I wholeheartedly recommend this training to every CDW; it's a valuable gift to yourself and the children you serve. (Professor 2)

I strongly recommend this program because handling young learners is foundational work—CDWs are not just teaching, they are building the future. Programs like this are essential to ensure the success of that foundation. (Professor 3)

Need for Continuity/Expansion. Regular training, including ongoing professional development and integrating digital literacy, is highly valuable and should continue to be offered to all day care workers, even experienced staff.

Regular training, even for experienced staff, is highly valuable and should continue to be offered to all day care workers. (P2, B1)

I hope this training continues. (P8, B1)

recommend implementing ongoing professional development programs and integrating digital literacy training... (Ms. Atido, Volunteer)

Institutional and Collaborative Excellence. The program's success is attributed to its ability to bridge knowledge gaps, provide academic credentials, and foster effective partnership between the University and the Local Government Unit (LGU).

Professionalization and Compliance. The program ensures Child Development Workers (CDWs) achieve professionalization with a recognized academic credential, which is a crucial requirement for CDW assessment and enhances their foundational knowledge.

This program ensures that CDWs are professionalized with a recognized academic credential... (Ms. Ramos, LGU Partner)

It is not only a requirement for CDW assessment but also a crucial program for enhancing their foundational knowledge... (LGU Partner 2)

Rewarding Collaboration. The Certificate Course partnership with UNO-R fosters invaluable open collaboration, significantly benefiting both Child Development Workers (CDWs) and the LGU.

The partnership with the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos (UNO-R) for a Certificate Course... significantly benefits both the Child Development Workers (CDWs) and the Local Government Unit (LGU). (Ms. Ramos, LGU Partner)

It fosters invaluable open collaboration and partnership. (Ms. Lapore, Volunteer)

Bridging Knowledge Gaps. The training significantly helps bridge the knowledge gap, especially since many of the teachers are not Education graduates.

Since many of the teachers are not Education graduates, the training we provide is of significant help in bridging that knowledge gap. (Professor 1)

Research indicates that professional development for early childhood educators significantly elevates both teacher competence and child outcomes. Specifically, targeted extension programs improve pedagogical skills, foster sustainable partnerships with parents and government entities, and enhance the quality of learning environments (Cadosales et al., 2020). Effective training yields substantial growth across professional and social competencies, driven largely by internal motivation and robust institutional support (Raihan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, holistic, project-based learning approaches have been shown to increase teacher confidence in designing innovative educational experiences (Aufa & Zaratusar, 2023). Evidence-based practices, particularly coaching and mentoring, consistently improve educator performance and student results (Deding & Minnaert, 2024), while collaborative partnerships between universities and community stakeholders are essential for overcoming barriers to formalized education (Shelton et al., 2022). Consequently, the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) extension program has demonstrated a profound impact by professionalizing daycare workers, enhancing their empathy and instructional expertise, and securing vital University-LGU collaborations to ensure the long-term quality of local early childhood education.

6. Challenges and Coping Approaches

The implementation of the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program encountered several logistical and pedagogical hurdles. Primary challenges included scheduling conflicts for participants with ongoing teaching duties, limited access to specialized instructional resources, and varying levels of academic preparedness among Child Development Workers (CDWs). Additionally, some participants showed resistance when transitioning from traditional methods to learner-centered approaches, while communication gaps between the university and the Local Government Unit (LGU) occasionally hindered decision-making. Initial inconsistencies in monitoring and assessment also required the standardization of feedback mechanisms to ensure equitable evaluation across diverse groups.

To mitigate these issues, the program adopted flexible scheduling and utilized low-cost, locally available teaching aids alongside digital resources. Facilitators employed differentiated instruction and peer-mentoring to support learners at different levels, while continuous orientation helped overcome resistance

to new pedagogical practices. Coordination was streamlined through established protocols and regular stakeholder meetings, ensuring prompt resolution of administrative gaps. By implementing standardized rubrics and formative feedback loops, the program maintained rigorous assessment levels, ultimately successfully enhancing the professional competence of CDWs and the quality of local early childhood care.

7. Sustainability of the Community Extension Program

The sustainability of the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a community extension program is strongly supported by its institutionalized collaboration, demonstrated positive impact, and clear demand for continuity. The program's structure and reception indicate several factors that contribute to its long-term viability:

Strong Institutional Partnership. The initiative is built on a formal, strategic partnership between the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School (UNO-R) and the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Guihulngan City.

Formal Agreement: The collaboration was formalized through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), approved by the Sangguniang Panlungsod (Resolution No. 2023-82) on March 28, 2023, and signed

Shared Benefit: This rewarding collaboration significantly benefits both the Child Development Workers (CDWs) and the LGU, fostering invaluable open collaboration.

Significant and Measurable Impact. The program's success in achieving its goals provides compelling evidence for its value and the need for its continuation. High impact is a critical factor for the continuity of community extension services.

Professional Competence: The training significantly upgraded the professional knowledge, practical skills, and enthusiasm of the day care teachers. This leads to professionalization with a recognized academic credential, which is a crucial requirement for CDW assessment and foundational knowledge enhancement.

Enhanced Efficacy: Participants reported increased confidence, self-awareness, and a stronger sense of purpose in their role as a CDW.

Improved Outcomes for Children: The enhanced CDW capabilities directly translate to improved child development outcomes and strengthened community support, as teachers are better equipped with the latest theories and methodologies to provide high-quality, ECCD Law-aligned care.

Table 2

Long-term Sustainability

Sustainability Element	Evidence from the ECE Program	Implication for Continuation
Relevance/Need	Targets CDWs, many of whom lack bachelor's degrees, providing free, essential, top-notch training, and bridging a critical knowledge gap.	The program addresses a core, persistent skill gap and is vital for ECCD Law compliance, guaranteeing ongoing relevance.
Effectiveness/Quality	Content is described as highly valuable, essential, enriching, and transformative. It has been delivered successfully to two batches, with 73 completers.	Proven quality minimizes the need for comprehensive restructuring and supports continued investment from partners.
Monitoring & Evaluation	Formative monitoring is conducted continuously via group outputs, peer review, and facilitator feedback. Summative evaluation is done via a dedicated Evaluation Form to inform future improvements.	The established feedback loop allows for adaptability and responsive refinement, which is crucial for long-term program quality and continuity.

on June 16, 2023.

Strong LGU Support: The LGU, through Hon. Mayor Filomeno L. Reyes and the City Social Development Welfare Head, actively supported and lobbied for the program. This official endorsement and resource mobilization (funding, participant recruitment, venue provision) ensure the program is aligned with local governance priorities and is not solely reliant on the university's resources.

Clear Demand for Continuity and Expansion.

Feedback from participants, facilitators, and LGU partners overwhelmingly supports making the program a long-term fixture.

Strong Recommendation: Participants highly recommend the program to other eligible CDWs, underscoring its essential nature.

Need for Ongoing Development: There is a specific request and hope that the training continues and includes ongoing professional development and digital literacy training for all day care workers,

even experienced staff. This shift from a one-time project to a continuous professional development track is key to sustainability.

For long-term sustainability, the program can leverage its current strengths and adapt, aligning with broader principles for sustained extension services:

The strong institutional integration and the high-impact results make a compelling case for the Certificate

in ECE to be a sustainable and expandable model for community extension, particularly in the context of professionalizing foundational early childhood development roles.

MOA was recently signed with a local government unit in Negros Occidental, and several other LGUs have expressed interest in adopting this model to standardize and elevate the skills of their preschool educators.

Certificate in Early Childhood Education Completion Program Activities for Batches 1 & 2



8. Cost-benefit Analysis

The program utilizes a zero-revenue, cost-sharing model where the "Certificate in Early Childhood Education" is delivered free of charge through a strategic partnership between the Local Government Unit (LGU) and the University (UNO-R). By leveraging LGU-funded logistics—including transportation, meals, and venues—against UNO-R's "in-kind" academic expertise and curriculum, the initiative efficiently produced 73 certified graduates across two batches without passing costs to end-users. This resource allocation demonstrates high scalability, as initial investments in human capital were successfully applied to meet local governance priorities.

For participants, the program offers a substantial return on investment, requiring only a temporal commitment of twice-monthly classes over six months to gain a recognized credential. Ultimately, this collaboration converts institutional investments into tangible professionalization and long-term job security for the local childcare workforce.

9. The Future of the Community Extension Program

Following the expiration of the initial Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Guihulngan City program, renewal discussions are underway to ensure the remaining day care workers receive their Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE). The program's success has already sparked regional expansion; a new

As a flagship community extension initiative of the University of Negros Occidental – Recoletos (UNO-R) Graduate School, this self-sustaining program moves beyond temporary aid to achieve strategic professionalization. By bridging knowledge gaps for non-education graduates and aligning with ECCD Law standards, the initiative has permanently enhanced the competence and confidence of the foundational workforce. With robust monitoring and plans to include digital literacy training, this replicable model serves as a blueprint for future academic outreach, fostering lasting collaborative change across the region.

10. Synthesis

The most significant finding is that the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) program created a profound, transformative impact by significantly enhancing the professional competence, practical skills, and confidence of day care workers (CDWs) in Guihulngan City. The training successfully bridged the knowledge gap for teachers who are not Education graduates and fostered essential attributes like patience and empathy, which directly translated into improved, ECCD Law-aligned child development outcomes and strengthened community support. The key recommendation, stemming from the overwhelmingly positive feedback and the program's success, is to ensure its continuity and expansion into an ongoing professional development track, integrating training on digital literacy for all day care workers to maintain the high quality and foundational impact on young learners.

11. Conclusion

The Certificate in Early Childhood Education (ECE) program stands out as a true best practice model for the Recoletos de Bacolod Graduate School's community extension efforts because of its deliberate and self-sustaining design. It demonstrates that academic outreach is most impactful when it moves beyond temporary aid to achieve strategic professionalization. By forming a deep institutional partnership with the Guihulngan City LGU, UNO-R was able to provide a recognized academic credential—a vital, transformative investment that not only bridged a critical knowledge gap for local day care workers but also permanently elevated the quality and confidence of an entire foundational workforce. This program is a testament to the fact that when education focuses on empowerment, it creates a powerful ripple effect, ensuring a brighter, more competently guided future for countless young learners across the community. We look forward to this model serving as the blueprint for future outreach, proving that collaboration for competence is the key to lasting change.

12.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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