

Meaningful Stories Behind Phonics Instruction: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Child Development Workers

Michael H. Mangampo¹ and Sherill A. Gilbas²

¹ Teacher, Department of Education, Sorsogon State University Graduate School, Sorsogon, Philippines

² Faculty, Graduate School, Sorsogon State University, Sorsogon City, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of child development workers in teaching phonics and supporting early language acquisition in selected child development centers in Castilla, Sorsogon, Philippines. Specifically, it examined their experiences in language acquisition and learning, language support and materials, and personal development within early childhood education settings. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to capture the shared and meaningful experiences of five purposively selected child development workers from five barangays in one municipality of Sorsogon. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, narration, reflective journaling, and field notes. Thematic analysis revealed that child development workers employed varied approaches in teaching phonics, including teaching basic letter-sound relationships, using mother tongue and code-switching, integrating play-based activities, establishing routine and repetition, and addressing learners' differences through differentiated instruction. Findings also showed that instructional aids, reinforcement systems, and stakeholder support contributed to language development despite challenges related to limited learning materials, insufficient training opportunities, and low compensation. Furthermore, the participants demonstrated commitment to personal and professional growth despite structural limitations in early childhood education settings. The study highlights the significant role of child development workers in foundational literacy development and underscores the need for sustained institutional support, training opportunities, and accessible instructional resources for early childhood educators.

Keywords:- *Child development workers, phonics instruction, early language acquisition, lived experiences, early childhood education, qualitative research*

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a significant role in developing children's foundational language and literacy skills. Among the approaches commonly employed in child development centers, phonics instruction helps learners recognize the relationship between letters and sounds, which serves as a foundation for beginning reading. In this process, child development workers become important facilitators of language acquisition through the use of varied teaching strategies, learning materials, play-based activities, and meaningful classroom interaction. Despite their important role in early childhood education, many child development workers continue to experience challenges related to limited instructional resources, insufficient training opportunities, learners' diversity, and inadequate institutional support. These realities influence how phonics instruction and language support are delivered in child development centers. However, limited studies have explored the lived experiences of child development workers, particularly in localized settings. Thus, this study explored the lived experiences of child

development workers in teaching phonics and supporting early language acquisition in selected child development centers in Castilla, Sorsogon. Specifically, it focused on language acquisition and learning, language support and materials, and personal development.

1.1 Building Language Skills through Phonics

In today's fast-paced world, early childhood education has been one of the catalysts that play a vital role in the global education system. It facilitates learners' fundamental skills, including emotional, physical, cognitive, and social foundations. In these foundational learning stages, children develop skills in preparation for their future educational levels. Among these learning skills, language acquisition and learning have been the most common skills that should be learned by children, particularly the basic phonics skills.

Building language skills through phonics provides children with the relationship between letters and sounds. This language approach facilitates the learners' identification of letters and sounds, consonant-vowel-consonant patterns, and forming a new word. Teaching language skills by means of phonics enables the children to recognize the significance of graphemes and phonemes, because these provide a structured method of learning how the language develops in a written form. Similarly, according to Menendez et al. (2021), through a systematic understanding of the relationships between letters and sounds, phonics instruction helps children become effective readers by emphasizing the gradual growth of language skills. Thus, understanding the basic principles of phonics instruction enables child development workers and children to design effective classroom instruction that leads to improve learning outcomes in language development.

1.2 Language Support System

Language support system is one of the crucial dimensions in child development centers. It provides children with opportunities to explore basic skills like listening and speaking. Language development emerges not only through formal instruction but also through everyday interactions between children and child development workers. As cited by Franco et al. (2019), by allowing children to have playtime with language in a comfortable setting, play-based learning activities like word games and storytelling can improve early literacy abilities. Thus, play-based activities facilitate significant roles in supporting language development in child development centers. As child development workers, it is highly recommended to integrate varied learning activities to support the children in language development.

In line with this, providing a language support system in child development centers can possibly address the learners' differences, considering the diversity of children in the classroom who need to develop their language abilities. This is also suggested by Abbassi et al. (2023); these abilities can be improved by involving children in activities, including practicing sound-letter combinations, playing letter-matching games, and singing alphabet songs. In a child development center, learning would not be possible without the integration of educational technology into phonics instruction, which is among the most effective and efficient language support systems.

1.3 Teaching Phonics Skills

Phonics is a systematic process of providing foundational skills through introducing letters and sounds and blending the sounds gradually to form a new word. Child development workers must be equipped with knowledge and skills so that the learning outcome can be effectively realized. As stated in DepEd Order No. 173, s. 2019 entitled "Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa" (3Bs Initiative), phonics is the process of understanding the connection between letters and sounds. It implies the significance of familiarizing the sound of letters in teaching phonics skills. Furthermore, Adams (1990) indicates an ability to relate sensory language sounds with their corresponding textual forms. Success in phonics requires the ability to identify sounds within words and to recognize letters of the alphabet automatically. This pertains to the significance of phonics teaching in early childhood education, particularly in child development centers.

However, the process of teaching phonics is not an easy thread; it takes a lot of dedication and commitment to ensure the delivery of phonics instruction is effective despite the limited training attended, lack of learning resources, large class size, and learners' diversities, but the child development workers can still think of teaching strategies creatively for addressing learners' needs and interest in teaching phonics skills, such as storytelling

activities, play-based games, and letter-sound drills; these learning techniques are common in child development centers. Katz (2021) notes that there are some individualized learning techniques that technology can provide, like short stories, music, and games. These are the learning activities that can be employed by child development workers in teaching phonics.

1.4 The Child Development Workers

In the Philippines, based on the Second Congressional Commission on Education (2024), an EDCOMS 2 Year One Report, eighty-nine percent (89%) of child development teachers and workers work in temporary jobs and make an average of Php 5,000 a month. 19% of workers receive an honorarium of less than Php 1,000 per month, which leaves them without regular benefits or job security, according to DSWD data. Even worse, according to UNICEF, the starting compensation for a kindergarten teacher in DepEd is Php 27,000 per month, while the average salary for child development workers is Php 5,000. Therefore, this figure translates to the situation of the child development workers in the country, who are underpaid despite giving so much time and effort in transforming the future generation of the country. Aside from the low monthly compensation received by child development workers, they have been experiencing a lack of learning materials and limited training or workshops attended for enhancing their skills and knowledge in teaching phonics lessons to ensure the quality of early literacy education is achieved. Based on the study of Deladia and Janer (2021), the child development teachers or workers express dissatisfaction over their employment, concerning benefits, working environment, facilities, learning materials, assistance, and professional development opportunities. This is a reality experienced by child development workers in the Philippines, considering the difficulties they encountered in teaching early literacy in the child development centers.

With this, the researcher purposively identified five child development workers in the child development centers in Barangay San Rafael, Monte Carmelo, Oras, San Isidro, and Miluya. The four selected participants have only finished high school but attended the short-term course in the Early Childhood Education Program (ECEP) at Bicol University, and the other participant is a first-year student at Castilla Colleges.

Frameworks of the Study

This study was anchored on the theories of Chomsky (1960), Krashen (1981), Vygotsky (1978), and Skinner (1950), which collectively explain children's language acquisition and learning in early childhood education. Chomsky's Nativist Theory highlights that children possess innate language abilities that can be developed through meaningful learning experiences and phonics instruction. Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of meaningful interaction, exposure to language, and natural communication in language learning. Meanwhile, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory underscores the significance of social interaction, guidance, and instructional support in children's language development. Lastly, Skinner's Behaviorist Theory explains that repetition, reinforcement, and routine activities contribute to effective learning and behavior formation. These theories collectively support the role of child development workers in facilitating phonics instruction, language acquisition, and meaningful classroom engagement among young learners.

Objectives

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of child development workers. Specifically it focused on the lived experiences of child development workers along (a) language acquisition and learning; (b) language support and materials; and (c) personal development.

2. METHODOLOGY

To explore the lived experiences of child development workers, this study employed a descriptive qualitative research method, utilizing phenomenological research. In this context, the researcher employed a phenomenological design to capture the child development workers' experiences in teaching phonics in child development centers. However, in qualitative research, a qualitative research method is "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994, pp. 1–2). Thus, the significance of the lived experiences of child development workers (CDWs) was examined in this present study.

Likewise, as postulated by Watson et al. (2015), the phenomenological design employs a methodical approach to examine shared experiences and extract relevance from them.

The in-depth interview was conducted with the child development workers, and a classroom observation. The researchers employed an interview guide, observation notes, the researcher's reflective journal, interview notes, and a transcription of the recorded interview.

Data collection was conducted in accordance with the study's objectives and qualitative phenomenological design. The researcher utilized in-depth interviews, observation notes, and reflective journaling to gather relevant data from the participants. Ethical considerations were strictly observed by securing approval from the five barangay captains, followed by obtaining informed consent from the participating child development workers. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured throughout the study. During the data gathering process, the researcher documented the participants lived experiences, classroom practices, instructional materials, teaching aids, and play-based resources used in child development centers.

The gathered data from interviews, observations, and narrations were organized, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed for accuracy. To maintain the credibility of the study, the researcher set aside personal assumptions and biases during the analysis process. Significant statements from the recorded interviews were identified through horizontalization and grouped into meaningful themes using thematic analysis. The analysis focused on the lived experiences of child development workers in terms of language acquisition and learning, language support and materials, and personal development.

3. RESULTS

Lived Experiences of Child Development Workers

This highlights the lived experiences of child development workers, along with language acquisition and learning, language support and materials, personal development, and a proposed self-paced guide in teaching Phonics.

3.1 Language Acquisition and Learning

Language acquisition and learning highlight common themes, such as teaching basic phonics skills; the use of the mother tongue and code-switching; routine and repetitive tasks; play-based activities; the integration of differentiated instruction; and the addressing of learners' differences. These common themes were identified during interviews, observations, and narrative interviews conducted with five child development workers at selected development centers in the five barangays of one municipality in the province of Sorsogon.

Table 1
Language Acquisition and Learning

Themes	Descriptions
Teaching Basic Phonics Skills	Child development workers introduced letter sounds, CVC patterns, and letter forms through varied activities and technology, but limited materials and training hindered phonics articulation and language development.
Using Mother Tongue and Code-Switching	Language acquisition and learning is challenging for child development workers. The CDWs used mother tongue and code-switching, translating English stories into Bikol and shifting between Tagalog and English based on students' language preference.
Providing Routine and Repetition of Task	The child development workers provided daily

Employing Activities	Play-Based	activities, such as singing alphabet songs, to promote language learning. Letter and sound identification were also routine tasks using flashcards, Jolly Phonics, and matching capital and lowercase letters.
Integrating Instruction	Differentiated	Child development workers used play-based activities like dance, music, singing, and games to support language learning. Nursery rhymes and classroom games were commonly integrated to engage children and enhance language acquisition.
Addressing Differences	Learners'	Child development workers used differentiated instruction, providing basic letter identification for beginners and C-V-C or blending for advanced learners. They also used activities like dancing, singing the alphabet, and games to support language development. In addressing learners' differences, the CDWs used mother tongue in teaching phonics and employed code-switching between Tagalog and English to support language acquisition and learning.

3.2 Language Support and Materials

The learning environment and experiences emphasize the recurrent themes of implementing reinforcement and reward systems, using instructional aids and digital materials, encountering limited learning materials, and dealing with stakeholders' support as experienced by child development workers in child development centers of the five barangays.

Table 2.
Language Support and Materials in Child Development Centers

Themes	Descriptions
Implementing Reinforcement and Reward System	Reinforcement and reward systems support language learning in child development centers. CDWs use one-on-one support for struggling learners and motivate performance through stars and positive affirmations.
Using Instructional Aids and Digital Materials	Instructional aids and digital materials support effective language learning. CDWs used flashcards, toys, television, speakers, and storybooks. Flashcards with illustrations showed upper- and lowercase letters and related objects, while television and speakers supported alphabet songs through Jolly Phonics.
Encountering Limited Learning Materials	Child development workers developed resiliency despite limited materials, conducting fundraising and using personal funds to purchase resources. NGOs like EDUCO donated storybooks, but these were insufficient to meet needs.

Dealing with Stakeholders' Support

Parents supported daily activities in child development centers, including feeding programs and cleanup. Barangay Local Government Units and Barangay Health Workers monitored children's health, which impacts language learning. EDUCO also supported centers by donating storybooks for language development.

3.3 Personal Development.

The personal development presents the common themes about self-paced learning for beginning reading, advancing educational qualifications, and training and seminars. These are the common themes which emphasized from the interviews, observations, and narration of child development workers.

Table 3.
Personal Development

Themes	Descriptions
Self-Paced Learning for Beginning Reading	The child development workers experienced difficulties in teaching phonics since not all of them were equipped with basic skills and knowledge for teaching beginning readers. None of them were properly trained on the basic principles in teaching phonics for enhancing the reading skills of children.
Advancing Educational Qualifications	The child development workers received a monthly salary ranging from P 2,000.00 to 5,000.00 pesos. There were no additional benefits since they were only appointed by the local government units' executive. Moreover, the CDWs completed high school diplomas, but only one participant has been completing her college degree.
Training and Seminars	The child development workers attended training and a seminar last 2017 but it was the last time that they attended personal development that can be used in teaching phonics.

4. DISCUSSION

This section presents the lived experiences of child development workers, along with transforming interactions into language development opportunities, employing meaningful materials in facilitating language support effectively, developing yourself while shaping young minds, and a self-paced guide in teaching Phonics. Each objective has a corresponding common theme that is essential in this study.

4.1 Meaningful Stories: Lived Experiences of Child Development Workers

This presents the lived experiences of child development workers, along with basic skills in language acquisition and learning, an innovative approach to language support and materials, personal development as a catalyst for effective phonics instruction, and a proposed self-paced guide in teaching Phonics.

4.1.1 Transforming Everyday Interactions into Language Development Opportunities.

This delves into the common themes, such as teaching basic Phonics skills, using mother tongue and code-switching, providing routine and repetition, employing play-based activities, integrating differentiated instruction, and addressing learners' differences.

4.1.2 Teaching Basic Phonics Skills. These are the foundational skills employed by child development workers to gradually introduce the letters and sounds with the integration of varied learning activities such as games, singing, dance, and the use of educational technology as well.

As narrated by one of the workers, “*Pigpapakilala ko muna ang letters saka na kami maproceed sa sounds, mahalaga na matutunan kan mga aki ang letters and sounds ta iyu po baga iyan ang foundation para makabasa ang aki gamit ang iba-ibang learning activities*” [I introduce first the letters of the alphabet, then we will proceed to sounds with the use of different learning activities] (Personal interview, CDW-M). The CDW believed that children must learn letter sounds because they serve as a foundation for early reading. This narrative illustrates that the child development workers gradually introduced the letters of the alphabet first, followed by the sounds of letters, along with capital and lowercase letters. Familiarization and understanding of letter sounds serve as the foundation of reading skills by blending sounds to form new words through varied learning activities. This aligns with the concept of Menendez et al. (2021), which states that phonics teaching emphasizes the gradual growth of reading skills and helps children become competent readers by providing a systematic understanding of the relationships between letters and sounds.

Also, the participant CDW-MC added, “*Ang pigigibu ko, pigpapakilala ko po muna ang sound of letters kasi mahalaga po baga matutunan kan mga aki sa child development centers ang Phonics po luway-luway sana gamit ang iba-ibang learning activities like games & singing*” [Sir, I introduced the letters and sounds gradually with the integration of learning activities like games and singing, because phonics is important to young learners in the child development centers] (Personal interview, CDW-MC). The statement of the CDW captures the significance of the gradual introduction of letter sounds with the integration of learning activities like games, dance, and singing. Thus, it is anchored in the well-known reading model by Gough (1972), which is the bottom-up or phonics-based model of reading, illustrating how reading abilities are processed gradually, progressing from letter to sound to words to meaning. According to this model, teaching phonics is effective, especially for beginning students, when letters and their sounds are introduced gradually. This means that every child learns at a different pace, which child development workers need to consider when teaching phonics and other early childhood education competencies.

The narratives of five child development workers highlight a well-structured, development-appropriate approach and strategies for teaching basic phonics skills. The participants begin by introducing the letters and their sounds in the alphabet, followed by familiarization with the big and small letter forms. This step-by-step process underscores the significance of introducing letter-sound skills as a basic element in beginning reading. However, without varied learning activities, it would not be possible for the classroom to become engaging. Therefore, the child development workers employed engaging activities like games, storytelling, singing, dancing, and even the integration of technology in teaching phonics skills.

This approach elaborates that teaching basic phonics skills becomes effective if the child development workers are aware of the systematic approach to children, by introducing first the letters, then connecting them to sounds by blending the consonant-vowel-consonant to form a new word. Also, the significance of scaffolding the children since they really need assistance until they develop their full potential. The integration of education technology, along with varied learning activities and learning drills, suggests that learning becomes effective when children demonstrate participation and engagement in the classroom.

Generally, the narratives of child development workers emphasize the significance of providing the foundational skills in teaching basic phonics skills, with the use of different learning activities by integrating learning activities, such as learning drills, play-based activities, and storytelling activities.

4.1.3 Using Mother Tongue and Code-Switching. The other child development workers narrate the significance of using the mother tongue and code-switching in teaching phonics. Similarly, according to the CDW-MC:

Ang gamit ko po sir sa pagtuturo lalo na sa pagtuturo ng Phonics ay combination ng Tagalog at English at syempre po hindi po mawawala ang mother tongue lalo na sa mga bata na hindi nakakaintindi ng wikang Ingles, walang problema po sa Tagalog kasi lahat naman po sila nakakaintindi ng Tagalog po. [I used the combination of English and Tagalog in teaching phonics and also the use of mother tongue, especially for learners who cannot understand and speak English; there is nothing wrong with the use of Tagalog because all of them can understand.] (Personal interview, CDW-MC)

The narrative of the CDW demonstrates the crucial role of using the mother tongue and code-switching in teaching phonics; it facilitates effective learning. Significantly, this statement is supported by the work of Monfero (2023), who stresses that a strong foundation in the mother tongue’s phonemic awareness facilitates learning both Filipino and English in the Philippine educational system, where children learn multiple languages continuously. As narrated by the participants from child development centers, this underscores the crucial role of using the mother tongue and code-switching (Tagalog and English) in teaching phonics.

Similarly, another participant, CDW-O, added, “*Ako po sir ang gamit ko po talaga is mother tongue, nasa bulod po бага kami sir, bilang lang sa kamot ang marunong magintindi ki English po kaya minsan nag tatag-lish man ako*” [Since we live in a remote area in the municipality of Castilla, few students can speak and understand English; the majority speak in their mother tongue, so I use the mother tongue or Bikol in teaching phonics, or sometimes I use Taglish] (Personal interview, CDW-O). This narrative reflects the use of the mother tongue and code-switching in teaching phonics, considering the demographics of the children residing in remote areas in the municipality of Castilla.

In addition, the CDW’s statement is further supported by Samuelson and Coronel-Molina (2017), as this approach, known as code-switching in bilingualism, occurs when a bilingual individual alternates between two languages during a single conversation. In this manner, children can understand difficult concepts without becoming confused by using their mother tongue as a bridge to English. Thus, this also relates to a guided learning process where students can transfer concepts and knowledge between languages and develop confidence. As a result, learning occurs more easily, and children are more likely to feel encouraged. Proficiency in their mother tongue, followed by a gradual transition to English, fosters competence and confidence during classroom participation.

Likewise, this multilingual approach in the classroom by means of code-switching enables the child development workers to adjust based on the first language orientation of the children. According to the participant, they used English sometimes, but their mother tongue is the most essential medium of instruction that facilitates holistic comprehension and participation in teaching phonics.

This practice suggests that teaching phonics for beginning reading can be meaningful and accessible when child development workers consider the linguistic competence of the children. Using mother tongue and code-switching, the participants encountered limited language barriers in the delivery of instructions that may affect language learning in developing the foundational reading skills of the children. In addition, this approach addresses the learners’ diversity in the classroom. Also, code-switching suggests that it allows children to acquire a second language and make connections from their first language.

In general, this suggests the importance of language flexibility in teaching phonics for the beginning of reading, based on the researcher’s perspective. The use of the mother tongue and code-switching is considered the most practical approach because it is learner-focused and facilitates language learning rather than the strict implementation of a monolingual approach in teaching phonics. The finding also highlights the importance of multilingual instructions to improve the comprehension and self-confidence of the children. Furthermore, the use of code-switching for beginning reading ensures that the target language would not be compromised; it only embraces the learner diversity to address the learners’ needs and interests in teaching phonics skills to the children in the child development centers.

4.1.4 Providing Routine and Repetition of Tasks. The child development workers can testify to the effectiveness of using classroom routine and repetition in teaching phonics. As narrated by CDW-SR, “*Kaya ang ginagawa ko, Sir, unang araw pa lang ng pasukan, introduce ko na agad ang basic skills na gusto kong matutunan nila tulad ng sounds of letters po, kaya sa paulit-ulit po na ginagawa naming tuwing umaga*” [I immediately introduced the basic language skills that the children have to learn, like letter sounds, through repeated practice every morning] (Personal interview, CDW-SR). Providing a daily routine and repetition of tasks in teaching phonics ensures mastery of the concept. Furthermore, the narrative of the CDW demonstrates the effectiveness of providing daily routines and repetitive activities in teaching phonics, particularly in child development centers. This CDW’s narrative is connected with the work of Cunningham (2007), which states that independent practice activities should enable children to apply their emerging skills in various approaches and with significant repetition.

Building a daily routine and repetitive tasks ensures gradual mastery of letter sounds, employing Jolly Phonics in teaching letter and sound identification, as well as familiarizing capital and lowercase letters. As narrated by CDW-O, “*Meron ako pigaapod na sound drill, ipapailing ko sa inda ang letter tapos sasabihon ninda ang sound, every day ko po iyan man, sir, na ginagawa ko po sa inda para mas lalong matandaan po ninda.*” [I have a so-called sound drill through Jolly Phonics; I show the letters, then they identify the sound; it is one of our daily morning routine activities] (Personal interview, CDW-O). The statement by the participant, “sound drill,” shows the repetition of daily activities that enhance children’s engagement and mastery of phonics, while the use of Jolly Phonics facilitates children’s participation and addresses individual differences. This aligns with the use of Jolly Phonics as a commercial approach to teaching, which facilitates students’ attention, particularly with the integration of modern technology in phonics instruction. Caseta (2018) investigates the application of Jolly Phonics in two schools, one private international school and one Italian school in Milan, Italy, where students are learning English as a second language.

The consistent implementation of building a daily routine and repetition of tasks facilitates mastery of the task in teaching phonics. It is important to build these activities during the first day of the class, like introducing the

sounds of letters, along with the big and small letters, consonant-vowel-consonant patterns, and other basic concepts in teaching phonics. Thus, these repetitive activities and building a daily routine help the children to recall and recognize the basic phonics skills gradually, so that the children become confident when they demonstrate the skills. These approaches provide consistent reinforcement in teaching phonics skills. Building daily routines enables children's readiness, while repetition of tasks ensure mastery of the phonics skills gradually by integrating engaging varied activities.

In a nutshell, the significance of building daily phonics skills activities and repetition of tasks without changing the structure of the lesson. It promotes mastery of the phonics skill that helps the children become confident when they demonstrate the skills.

4.1.5 Employing Play-Based Activities. The five child development workers agreed on the use of play-based activities in teaching phonics. The CDWs recognize the significance of interactive play in the classroom. The participant CDW-SI narrated, "It gauges the learners' active participation, integrating play, games, and the playing of interactive videos, particularly when teaching the sounds of letters to children" (Personal interview, CDW-SI). This narrative indicates the value of play-based activities in teaching phonics lessons in early literacy because these activities play a significant role in children's participation in the child development center. This statement is supported by Abbassi et al. (2023), which states that these skills can be enhanced by allowing children to participate in activities, including practicing sound-letter combinations, playing letter-matching games, and singing alphabet songs.

In a child development center, learning would not be possible without the integration of educational technology and play-based activities in teaching phonics. Moreover, as supported by Dictado et al. (2022), play-based learning fosters engagement and motivation, which are essential components of literacy development. Likewise, tailored learning experiences that address each child's needs can significantly enhance literacy development, ensuring they receive the necessary support to excel academically.

Another participant, CDW-SI, said, "*Sa panahon ngayon ang dami ng play activities sa mga bata na puwedeng i-download sa internet na mas nakakatulong para maging interactive ang klase*" [Nowadays, many play-based activities can be downloaded from the internet, which help make the classroom interactive] (Personal interview, CDW-SI). Fortunately, play-based activities can be downloaded from different social media platforms that guide teachers, workers, and educators in teaching phonics lessons for improving early literacy. As supported by Franco (2019), early reading abilities can be improved by adding play-based learning activities like word games and storytelling, which allow children to explore language in a comfortable classroom setting without feeling anxiety or pressure from the external environment. Significantly, integrating play-based activities in phonics instruction builds internal motivation in children and addresses learners' diversity, particularly kinesthetic learners who prefer learning through play-based activities.

Based on the child development workers' narrative. The integration of play-based activities in teaching phonics plays a pivotal role in children's participation and phonics skills. Also, it is an integral part of the effectiveness of instruction in teaching phonics through the use of storytelling activities with actions, singing, and interactive videos that can be downloaded via different platforms. The children learn phonics skills effectively if they are physically moving and emotionally engaged, rather than sitting in one place.

This approach indicates that active engagement is essential for cultivating phonic skills in young learners. By integrating phonics lessons into play and movement, CDWs are coordinating instructional techniques with children's natural learning preferences. Kinaesthetic and auditory experiences, such as vocalizing letter sounds or performing narratives, augment memory retention and comprehension. This concept suggests that traditional, passive instructional approaches may be inadequate or ineffective for early learners. Integrating play into lessons on phonics not only maintains engagement but also cultivates a conducive learning atmosphere in which children feel encouraged and at ease to participate. It underscores the notion that learning is rendered more significant when it is enjoyable and engaging.

This indicates that the narrative implies that providing child development workers with training in interactive and play-based pedagogies could further improve classroom participation and learning outcomes in teaching phonics. Ultimately, the implementation of play-based activities demonstrates that phonics lessons, when presented through engaging and meaningful experiences, can significantly enhance both participation and learning results in beginning readers.

4.1.6 Integrating Differentiated Instruction. The participant described that she embraced children with different abilities and interests, and the levels of learning activities were based on the learners' abilities. According to the CDW-M, "*Iba't ibang kakayahan at interes sa pagkatuto po. Dapat mong iayon ito batay sa kung ano po ang kakayahan ninda. May mga grupo ka na marunong na sa sounds of letters, so ang activity ninda ay iba man*" [Different learning capabilities and interests; you should align them based on their learning needs and interests.

Some children are already familiar with the sounds of letters, so their activities are different] (Personal interview, CDW-M). The CDW emphasizes the integration of differentiated instruction by identifying children's needs and interests. Knowing the learners' needs and interests guided the CDW on what particular learning activities are best suited to the children in teaching phonics lessons. This narrative supports earlier research by Mavidou and Kakana (2019), which defines differentiated education as designing teaching strategies, materials, and activities to meet each student's unique learning needs, abilities, and levels of progress, ensuring that each child receives learning appropriate to their developmental stage and allowing teachers or workers to manage the classroom efficiently.

As reflected in the CDW-SI narrative, "*Merong naman talaga pong um advance, merong din pong slightly advance, may advance tsaka may medyo mayroong kailangan mo po siyang i-re-assess, yung ganun po kasi hindi naman po lahat ng bata ay pare-pareho*" [Children who are advanced, slightly advanced, average, or in need of reassessment are observed to provide diverse learning activities according to their learning needs in teaching phonics instruction] (Personal interview, CDW-SI). In this statement, advanced learners have different learning tasks than struggling learners. Hence, the CDW shows awareness of learners' needs and interests by using a variety of activities like play, tracing, and identifying letters and sounds. Moreover, the CDW offered age-appropriate learning activities because very few children had longer attention spans. Shenoy et al. (2024) demonstrate how challenging it is for child development workers to deliver instruction that meets the diverse learning needs of students. With this, child development workers have gradually adopted differentiated instruction as a key pedagogical strategy in response to this challenge in the delivery of classroom instruction in early literacy.

The integration of differentiated instruction employed by child development workers as teaching strategies is aligned with the learners' needs and interests. The learning activities are adjusted to the children's readiness levels. The participants objectively group children according to their prior knowledge of phonics skills, like some are able to blend the sounds or consonant-vowel-consonant. While the other activities are best suited for those children that needs to reinforce letters and sound recognition.

This teaching approach emphasizes that teaching phonics is diverse rather than a uniform approach that leads to a higher probability of achieving learning outcomes in teaching phonics. Significantly, the environment of the classroom becomes increasingly inclusive since there is no child would be left behind. However, this suggests the significance of child development workers' competence in teaching phonics, because integrating differentiated instruction takes creativity and timing. In a child development center, like a usual classroom setting, differentiated instruction has always been the common approach to address the learners' needs and interests.

The child development workers' ability to integrate differentiated instruction in teaching phonics demonstrates the CDWs' competence to address learners' diversity despite the limited learning resources they encountered in handling phonics lessons. Thus, differentiated instruction is an ideal way of dealing with children's strengths and weaknesses objectively in teaching phonics.

4.1.7 Addressing Learners' Differences. According to participant CDW-M, she recognized that children learn at different paces, some learning fast, some learning gradually, and learn the concept: "*Iba-iba ang mga estudyante po; merong mabilis matuto, igwa man talagang mabagal matuto po at merong naman mahaba o maikli ang span of attention*" [Students have different learning paces; some learn fast, while others struggle to learn] (Personal interview, CDW-M). This narration demonstrates the experiences encountered by the CDW regarding individual differences and how these are addressed to meet learners' needs in teaching phonics lessons. Based on the narrative, child development workers may encounter difficulties such as learners' differences, particularly short attention spans. As highlighted by Shen and Konstantopoulos (2022), Connolly and Haeck (2022), and Adamu et al. (2022), the typical attention span of younger students is between ten (10) and fifteen (15) minutes. In addition, child development workers should provide engaging activities so that children do not get bored and remain excited as they explore their learning in the child development center. Also, the activities must be aligned with learning competencies to enhance language competence in phonics skills.

Initially, with 25 students in the classroom, they relied on experience and learned from their mother how to manage children while studying at home. The participant CDW-O narrated, "*Sabi ko papanuhon ko daw po ini? Sa dakulon kong estudyante, iba-iba ang ugali at interest. Tulad ng may estudyante na maikli ang span kan atensyon*" [At first, I doubted if I could handle this group of learners with different behaviors and interests, including those with a short attention span] (Personal interview, CDW-O). This narration is common in child development centers, where learners' individuality is evident, particularly in attention span, which is a common challenge in teaching phonics. However, by addressing these differences objectively, learning outcomes may be achieved through the integration of various activities. As stated by Connolly and Haeck (2022), this may vary depending on the child's age, developmental stage, level of interest, and learning environment, which suggests that age influences attention span.

The participants' statements underscore that addressing learners' diversity reflects varied learning paces in teaching phonics. Some children quickly comprehend concepts, while others require additional support and patience. This illustrates classroom diversity characterized by differences in intellectual abilities, prior knowledge, and readiness to learn among children in child development centers.

Acknowledging these differences indicates that an integrated approach to education is inappropriate. Consequently, child development workers have a great responsibility to implement diversified instruction in teaching phonics, flexible pacing, and diverse methods of instruction to appropriately meet both advanced and struggling learners. It also indicates the need for patience, instructional flexibility, and continuous assessment to monitor each child's progress. In the absence of such changes, slower learners may be left behind, whereas faster learners may experience boredom due to a lack of challenges in phonics instruction.

Generally, this understanding of varied learning paces emphasizes the significance of inclusive and adaptive teaching in phonics. It signifies a transition from teacher-centered methodology to a more learner-centered methodology, wherein instruction is tailored to students' needs rather than requiring students to keep to a rigid structure. This insight demonstrates the child development worker's awareness of individual differences, an essential component of effective teaching of phonics practice. Nonetheless, it encourages additional consideration of whether educators possess adequate resources, training, and institutional support to effectively address the differences in practice. Also, the researcher acknowledges that although awareness is an essential initial step to take, the primary problem is how to transform this understanding into consistent, equitable educational practices that accommodate all children in the child development centers, particularly in teaching phonics.

4.2 Employing Meaningful Materials: Facilitating Language Support Effectively

This part shows the abilities of child development workers to create a child-friendly learning environment that fosters meaningful learning outcomes, access to language support, and materials. Thus, it includes the common themes such as implementing reinforcement and reward systems, using instructional aids and digital materials, encountering limited learning materials, and dealing with stakeholders' support.

4.2.1 Implementing a Reinforcement and Reward System. As stated by the participants, CDW-M, CDW-O, CDW-SR, and CDW-MC promote a child-friendly learning environment where giving rewards is significant in the child development center and ensures positive behavior in the future: "*Nakita mo naman po sir na after kan activity naming, nagbibigay ako reward tulad ng star at positive affirmation sa inda, like saying Good job!! Nakakatulong kasi 'yan para ma-boost pa lalo ang self-confidence ng mga bata*" [As you can see during your classroom observation, children who demonstrate good behavior receive rewards such as stars and positive affirmations like "Good job!" and "Very good!" because these help boost their self-confidence] (Personal interview, CDW-M). The statement "Good job" facilitates positive affirmation that boosts children's self-esteem and develops their confidence without self-doubt in participating in phonics lessons. These forms of reinforcement and reward systems are empirically supported by McVee et al. (2019), which state that student-centered instruction emphasizes the importance of providing support, reinforcement, and direct instruction to achieve mastery learning. Thus, reward systems and reinforcement motivate children through both intrinsic and extrinsic means.

As narrated by participant CDW-SI, "*Bilang bahagi ng aking classroom routine sa tuwing umaga, hinahayaan kong i-identify ng bata ang tunog ng bawat letra, kapag ang bata ay tama ang naibigay na sound, binibigyan ko agad ng star po*" [As part of my classroom routine, I let each child identify the sounds of each letter. When a child identifies the correct sound, he/she immediately receives a star] (Personal interview, CDW-SI). The narration illustrates that giving rewards (stars) motivates children to be active in the classroom and helps manage behavior that may affect the classroom routine. This narration is aligned with the work of Morrison et al. (2021). According to Vygotsky's socio-constructivist viewpoint, shared instruction in small groups may enhance children's phonics learning by providing opportunities for peer interaction and supported reinforcement. Furthermore, Elish-Piper (2020) states that learners feel encouraged and prepared to take on new tasks when teachers provide consistent encouragement and acknowledge small accomplishments. Children who grow up in this nurturing environment become more resilient learners and are better prepared to engage in challenging tasks like word decoding and sentence construction, which are essential elements of early reading.

The participants elaborate on the consistent integration of reinforcement and the giving of rewards in teaching phonics. The rewards and reinforcement are in the form of positive affirmation and giving of stars for those children who have demonstrated positive behavior and outstanding performance. In these practices, it ensures positive classroom interaction and develops the child's self-confidence. Also, it encourages children to perform better and reinforce a positive behavior in the future.

Significantly, reinforcement and reward systems suggest both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among children who play a crucial role in teaching phonics, particularly in a child development center. Thus, the use of

positive affirmation can boost children's self-esteem and enthusiasm. However, providing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has a limitation since children may become dependent on it.

Overall, it is recommended to clarify the implementation of reinforcement and reward systems on the first day of regular classes, so that children are aware of the positive and negative effects of their behavior during phonics lessons. With this, these practices by child development workers reinforce both behavioral and emotional development among children by cultivating children's positive attitude and reinforcing children's responsibility for their behavior.

4.2.2. Using Instructional Aids and Digital Materials. Nowadays, since systems of early education are dynamic due to the sudden change of digitalization and instructional aids in teaching phonics lessons, the participants, CDW-MC, are adept at using technology in the classroom through instructional aids and digital materials. The CDW narrated, "*Ako po sir igwa ako laptop kaya kapag nagtuturo akong sounds kan letter, tracing of letters, storytelling, naggagamit po ako ki PowerPowent, pigcoconnect ko po iyan sa TV, engaging po talaga ang mga aki*" [I have my own laptop, so when I teach letter sounds, tracing, and storytelling, I use PowerPoint and connect it to the TV, which makes the children highly engaged] (Personal interview, CDW-MC). The statement of the CDW, "engaging po talaga ang mga aki," demonstrates the effectiveness of using digital materials in teaching phonics, as children actively participate when these are integrated into instruction. The narrative of the CDW is supported by Alhums (2021), who states that digital resources, interactive whiteboards, phoneme-based applications, and audiovisual materials attract attention and enhance sound identification.

Likewise, another CDW-O narrated, "*Binibigyan oras ko yong pagprepare ki visuals para sa mga bata, kapag may kwarta nagbabakal ako ki flashcards na pigagamit sa pagturo ki alphabet, asin mga educational apps na magagamit sa pagturo ki phonics basta may internet*" [My priority is preparing visual aids for my learners; if I have extra funds, I buy flashcards for teaching the alphabet and use educational apps for teaching phonics when there is internet] (Personal interview, CDW-O). This narrative elaborates the use of colorful instructional materials like flashcards and educational applications available on the internet in teaching phonics lessons. Sharma (2023) postulates that children's engagement and understanding in phonics instruction can be increased by combining digital resources like educational apps and interactive programs with hands-on materials such as phonics cards, reading blocks, and letter tiles.

The participants illustrate the integration of educational technology in teaching phonics lessons through the use of a laptop in presenting the PowerPoint and a built-in television in the classroom. These digital materials effectively delivered the phonics lessons, such as sounds of letters, storytelling, and play-based activities. The participants demonstrated that the utilization of instructional aids and digital materials promotes children's participation in teaching phonics lessons.

In addition, utilizing instructional aids and digital materials implies that educational technology promotes children's meaningful interaction in language learning. Currently, child development workers are becoming innovative to improve the delivery of phonics lessons in phonics objectively. However, with the use of instructional materials, the child development workers are required to attend training and workshops to effectively and efficiently deliver the phonics lessons aligned with the children's needs and interests.

In a nutshell, educational technology has been continuously evolving due to the sudden changes in technological innovation. It implies that the child development workers should be innovative and adaptive based on the occurrence of technological advancements, since the use of educational technology promotes children's participation, and it helps to expand their span of attention during the delivery of phonics lessons. Fortunately, the child development workers develop initiative in utilizing instructional aids and digital materials, so this initiative ensures the children's active engagement despite the lack of CDWs' training and workshops on the use of these instructional devices. Thus, the use of instructional aids and digital materials should be used objectively by enriching the children's cognitive level, both in graphemes and phonemes, promoting socialization, and addressing individual needs and interests.

4.2.3 Encountering Limited Learning Materials. The child development workers experienced limited learning materials. As cited by CDW-M, a shortage of facilities or classroom supplies is addressed through fundraising efforts: "*Nagsasagawa kami ng mga fundraising events, tulad ng mga paligsahan o searches, at ang perang nalilikom ay napupunta sa mga kinakailangan tulad ng learning materials na ginagamit naming pangturo sa mga bata lalo na sa pagtuturo ng phonics*" [We hold fundraising events, such as contests or searches, and the money raised goes toward what is needed, such as learning materials, especially in teaching phonics] (Personal interview, CDW-M). This narrative implies limited learning materials in child development centers. Thus, fundraising activities are common practices to raise funds, and the proceeds are used to purchase learning materials for teaching phonics lessons and other learning needs. This finding is relevant to Vetrico (2023), which states that children's

reading achievement is significantly influenced by socioeconomic factors, and the limited availability of educational resources restricts opportunities to develop phonemic skills, particularly in low-income areas.

In addition, the participant shared similar experiences with limited learning materials by conducting fundraising activities, with proceeds allocated to purchase necessary resources for teaching phonics. As narrated by CDW-MC, “*Dati meron kaming galing sa EDUCO, pero ngayon wala na. Ito ay kulang. Bilang isang CDW, kailangan mo ulit ng mga mapagkukunan sa pag-aaral, kaya nagfa-fund-raising talaga kami, pambili ng learning supplies*” [We had learning materials from EDUCO before, but now they no longer provide them. As a CDW, you need resources, so we conduct fundraising to buy learning supplies] (Personal interview, CDW-MC). The CDW experienced limited resources, such as reading materials, a learning space combining classroom and play areas, lack of handwashing facilities, an inadequately constructed kitchen for the feeding program, and an unsuitable floor plan for children. This narrative is anchored in the work of Monfero (2023), which states that limited learning materials contribute to low performance in phonemic awareness and may affect both learners and child development workers in teaching phonics lessons.

Therefore, these experiences encountered by child development workers imply that the limited learning resources could develop the CDWs' resourcefulness and initiate fundraising activities to address the situation of limited learning materials. Consequently, it affects the performance of CDWs and children, which result to low quality education in the delivery of instruction in teaching phonics.

Moreover, the CDWs nowadays are becoming adaptive in the situation were they cannot control, instead they can deal with the situation positively by being proactive and resourceful amidst challenges in the delivery of instruction in teaching phonics. Thus, teaching phonics in a child development center is a critical stage where teachers and child development workers should be equipped with learning materials to ensure that the learning objectives are met.

4.2.4 Dealing with Stakeholders' Support. The participants agreed that the child development centers in their respective barangays are cooperative in all projects and programs. According to the child development workers, collaboration among stakeholders builds a learning environment: “With the assistance of parents, barangay officials, and co-workers, the learning environment is meaningful to the children towards the development of children in phonics lessons” (Personal interview). This statement shows the full support of parents, barangay officials, and colleagues to the children and child development workers for early literacy learning, especially in phonics lessons.

Also, it implies that the parents take part in everyday activities and assist in keeping the classroom clean, and barangay officials participate in programs as partners and co-workers; cooperation improves community support and children's learning. This finding is anchored with Hemmerichs et al. (2016). This involvement includes helping with schoolwork, participating in school events, and creating a positive learning atmosphere at home, among other things. Significantly, as cited by Oplatka and Tamir (2009), to reduce these causes of stress and enhance workers' well-being, perceived social support, which includes a sense of belonging, assistance, and inspiration from coworkers and supervisors, is important.

The participant CDW-MC added, “*Nagtutubod ako na an kooperasyon kan mga magurang talagang mahalaga, nagkakaigwa ako nin mga pagtiripon kaiba an mga magurang ay talagang*” [I believe parents' cooperation is really significant; I hold meetings with parents because I make sure they are always involved in every activity] (Personal interview, CDW-MC). This finding translates that the same effort rendered by parents and other stakeholders has full support for every activity, like the supplemental feeding program in the preparation of meals. Classroom cleaning after class dismissal and health monitoring are ensured by Barangay Health Workers along with the child development worker. The participation of stakeholders ensures a conducive classroom for learning, which leads to the convenience of the children in the child development centers. According to Campbell (2021), parents and carers are essential to a child's literacy development, especially in teaching phonics lessons, and insufficient or inefficient interventions for children might worsen current disparities in early literacy. Parents' and community involvement provide learning access and collaboration to ensure the delivery of instruction is efficient and effective towards the development of children in the child development center.

The participants expressed appreciation for the support of stakeholders in their respective barangays, the barangay officials, barangay health workers, Municipal Social Welfare and Development (MSWD), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), particularly the EDUCO, for providing their invaluable support to ensure that the quality of education in the child development centers.

This indicates that the early literacy education in the child development centers cannot function alone without the support of stakeholders, because this collaboration facilitates strengthening the programs and projects in the child development centers that ensure the delivery of instruction in teaching phonics that are responsive to the needs and interests of the children. Hence, the CDWs and CDCs alone cannot function without the initiative of other

entities or stakeholders, since the child development center is not an independent entity, but rather, collaboration with different stakeholders is necessary in the attainment of early literacy, particularly in teaching phonics lessons.

Therefore, strong collaboration with stakeholders reflects a holistic approach to provide quality education, particularly in teaching phonics to the children in child development centers.

4.3 Developing Yourself while Shaping Young Minds.

It establishes insights into the personal development of child development workers as molded by their experiences in facilitating children's holistic development. It also highlights the need for relevant training, seminars, and even a demand for a salary increase, considering the low pay hike of child development workers nationwide. However, it fosters resilience amidst challenges in teaching phonics in child development centers.

4.3.1 Self-Paced Learning for Beginning Reading. Based on participants CDW-M, CDW-O, CDW-MC, CDW-SR, and CDW-SI, “*Kapagal magturo lalo na kung kulang ka sa sapat na kaaraman po sa pagtuturo kaya sana kaipuhan mi talaga ki sapat na kaalaman na makakatabang samuya sa pagtukdo ki phonics sa mga aki, grabe ang challenge talaga*” (Personal interview). The summarized narratives of the participants illustrate the voices of the CDWs for the enhancement of their knowledge and skills in providing self-paced learning for beginning reading. The finding is supported by Dilgard et al. (2022), which states that, if executed properly, providing preschool teachers with systematic phonics training can enhance their abilities to teach literacy to early children. On that note, training of child development workers is imperative in the delivery of instruction more effectively and efficiently to achieve the holistic growth of children in the development centers.

The participants highlight the difficulties they encountered in teaching phonics, especially to beginning readers in the child development centers. The CDWs realized that they lacked knowledge and preparation in teaching phonics lessons. So, these statements of CDWs reflect that the effectiveness of the delivery of instruction in teaching phonics lessons requires expertise. With this, self-paced learning for beginning reading develops CDWs' initiative to enhance their knowledge and skills independently without pressure, despite the limited training and workshops attended. Thus, it shows that the CDWs exhibit willingness and enthusiasm to learn independently through self-reliance and initiative.

The experiences of child development workers depict that self-paced learning for beginning reading is not enough to address the structured personal development of CDWs. It will lead to impacting the teaching quality of CDWs in teaching phonics lessons, which is a critical stage since CDWs are delivering foundational skills that can be valuable elements in basic phonics reading skills.

However, despite the shortcomings in teaching phonics lessons. The child development workers demonstrate resiliency amidst limited learning resources; instead, CDWs' eagerness to learn independently through self-paced learning for beginning reading serves as an inspiration and guide to becoming more effective and efficient in the delivery of phonics lessons. Though in this context, self-paced learning will not suffice to support the holistic approach in teaching phonics systematically, at least it broadens the perspectives of the CDWs on the crucial elements of attending a structured training and seminars on teaching phonics lessons.

4.3.2. Training and Seminars. According to participants, particularly CDW-O, she needs continuous training support, such as crafting learning materials or modules, classroom management, and effective handling of children, because she believes that learning is a continuous process. “*2017 pa kami nag-attend ki training, di na haloy na naman бага. Ngaya sa classroom management, pag-handle sa mga bata, paggawa ng learning modules*” [Way back in 2017, I attended a training, but I have not participated in any training since. Hopefully, the training must focus on classroom management, learning modules and materials, and how to handle children] (Personal interview, CDW-O). During the classroom observation, the participant did not attend any training or seminar, as they were only focusing on the classroom discussion. Based on the narration of child development workers, the last time they attended training and seminars was in 2017. In this context, knowledge of phonics would not suffice, given the inconsistencies in training and seminars attended. Given the opportunities to attend training and seminars, these would include classroom management, preparation of learning materials, and effective teaching strategies in teaching phonics.

This narrative shows the limited training of CDWs in the child development centers, training, or workshops that highlight classroom management and learning modules that can be used in teaching phonics lessons. As cited by Moats (2023), abilities and expertise of teachers or workers have direct impact on how well they teach phonemic awareness. Workers or teachers believe they are not well-trained to teach phonics skills. According to the study of Zoleta et al. (2025), just one (9.09%) DCW is sent to training once a month, while ten (90.91%) DCWs only attend training once a year for personal and professional development.

With this, the lack of training and seminars by child development workers suggests a failure in the early childhood educational system of the government agency administering child development centers in the Philippines, because early childhood literacy, particularly in teaching phonics should have access to personal and professional development of child development workers nationwide through structured training and seminars for enhancing knowledge and skills relative to teaching phonics lessons.

Thus, the lack of training and seminars by CDWs reflects that the government agency has less interest in providing professional and personal development of child development workers. However, despite the limited training and seminars attended by CDWs, they develop initiative, resourcefulness, and self-reliance in upgrading their knowledge and skills in teaching phonics lessons through self-paced learning.

4.3.3 Advancing Educational Qualification. The participant CDW-SI mentioned that the government did not provide enough salary, especially for the child development center. “In our barangay, I only receive a monthly salary of almost four thousand pesos (P 4,000). So, the monthly salary is not enough, maybe because we did not finish college, unlike the other professions. In my case, I only finished a high school diploma” (Personal interview, CDW-SI). Likewise, the CDWs from the said barangay agreed that they receive low salaries every month. Based on the narrative of the child development workers in the selected child development centers in Castilla East District, the average monthly salary of child development workers ranges from PHP 2,000.00 to 5,000.00.

According to the EDCOMS 2 Year One Report, 89% of child development teachers and workers in the Philippines have temporary jobs and earn an average of Php 5,000 a month. According to DSWD data, 19% of workers earn an honorarium of less than Php 1,000 per month, leaving them without regular benefits or job security. Even worse, according to UNICEF, the average remuneration for child development workers is Php 5,000, although the starting pay for a kindergarten teacher in DepEd is Php 27,000 per month.

In an attempt to elevate the early childhood education workforce and improve the quality of Early Childhood Care and Development for Filipino children, the Technical Education Skills Development Authority (TESDA, 2025) Board has officially approved the National Certification (NC) III for Child Development Workers (CDWs). This approval is therefore compliant with the recently enacted Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) System Act (RA 12199), which mandates that Child Development Workers and Child Development Teachers (CDTs) have better training and credentials, higher compensation, and continual professional development. Fortunately, according to Early Childhood Care and Development (2025), recently, based on the national budget of 2026, there will be an allocation for the establishment of child development centers and a Plantilla position for the child development workers and teachers, and other programs for the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). This means the child development centers will have the opportunity to improve their facilities, given the allocation from the 2026 national budget.

As stated by participants CDW-M, CDW-MC, CDW-SI, CDW-SR, and CDW-O, the monthly salary they received ranged from Php 2,000 to Php 5,000 pesos only. All of them only completed the high school diploma, but one participant is currently enrolled in community college in Castilla. Also, they were appointed by the barangay officials without considering their bachelor's degrees.

This suggests that the monthly salary of CDWs, which leads to economic struggles of the participants, considering the continuous inflation rate in the Philippines. In addition, the educational qualifications of CDWs reflect pedagogical incompetence in the delivery of instruction in teaching phonics lessons.

Therefore, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), along with the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), should advance their educational qualifications by prioritizing the college degree holders who aspire to be child development workers or any allied education programs. Also, the child development workers have the chance for a permanent position, and hopefully a good compensation based on a salary standardization scheme to suffice their daily needs.

5. CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that the lived experiences of child development workers are consonant with language acquisition and learning, highlighting the teaching of basic phonics skills, the use of mother tongue and code-switching, providing routine and repetition of tasks, employing play-based activities, integrating differentiated instructions, and addressing learning differences. This has to be followed by the experiences of child development workers towards language support and materials, which include implementing reinforcement and reward systems, the use of instructional aids and digital materials, limited learning materials, and dealing with stakeholders' support. However, in terms of personal development, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that highlights self-paced learning for beginning reading, advancing educational qualifications, and training and seminars for the child

development workers. Furthermore, considering the limited resources in the child development center, the researcher proposed a self-paced guide in teaching phonics to address the scarcity of resources.

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends the use of the mother tongue and code-switching to address the learners' needs and interests, and differentiated instruction, considering the diversity of learners in the child development centers. It can be an effective strategy employed by child development workers to facilitate teaching phonics instruction effectively. Similarly, the integration of educational technology (laptops, PowerPoint presentations, and television) in teaching phonics instruction, such as play-based activities, rhyming words, songs, music, and dance, facilitates children's engagement. Also, as a child development worker, always consider the reinforcement and reward systems by giving rewards to learners who have demonstrated good behavior and performance, and providing reinforcement to those students who need immediate guidance. In a nutshell, this can be realized with support from the national and local government, especially in providing specialized training and giving reasonable compensation for the child development workers.

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