

Drivers and Barriers in Decentralized Day Care Program Delivery in Camarines Sur, Philippines

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Abstract. Early childhood education (ECE) is crucial to holistic development and lifelong learning. Despite its importance, the decentralized setup of the ECCD faces challenges like local plan linkage, financing issues, policy implementation, resource ownership fragmentation, subsidiarity, and national government oversight (Manuel & Gregorio, 2011)^[21]. The need to emphasize government incentives and parental involvement is also emphasized (Escarlos et al., 2019^[4]; Biana et al., 2021^[6]; del Rosario et al., 2018^[11]; Bartolome, 2017^[5]).

This research used the multiple case study design to analyze the drivers and barriers of decentralized implementation of day care program delivery in Camarines Sur, Philippines. Data were gathered from Level 3 Day Care Workers of three selected day care centers through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis using NVivo was done to analyze the collected data.

Results reveal that poor governance can make it more difficult to provide public services, especially day care services. Innovation will be needed to get beyond this barrier. Bringing together various groups, including government agencies, the commercial sector, non-profit organizations, and civil society, can lead to innovative solutions. Enhancement may involve improved management strategies, creative program designs, and collaboration across sectors.

The analysis of program drivers and barriers increases the effectiveness of development interventions. Therefore, this study's results will be a robust baseline for evaluating existing programs and activities. Considering the identified drivers and barriers, relevant and tailored fit programs may be conceptualized. These innovations may improve child care facilities' management, thereby posting more favorable results and significant contributions.

Keywords: Early childhood education, contextualized program framework, day care program challenges, decentralized governance, day care implementation

1. Introduction

Early childhood care and education are crucial for holistic development and lifelong learning. The UN Sustainable Development Program aims for free primary and secondary schooling for all girls and boys by 2030, focusing on access, equity, governance, curriculum, teacher training, nutrition, and technology use (Tekin, 2019)^[26].

Child development is a crucial aspect of human development in the Philippines, as stipulated in Republic Act No. 842 and emphasized in UNICEF Philippines' 2022 appeal for quality early childhood education to foster holistic development (Dorji et al., 2022^[12]; Cadoseales, 2011^[8]; Arnold, 2004^[3]). The Philippines prioritizes children's care and development through various legal measures. The 1990 Republic Act 6972 mandates Day Care Centers for children up to age 6, while the Early Childhood Development Project was initiated in 1999^[22]. The 2000 ECCD Act established governance structures and the Council for the Welfare of Children in 2009.

Despite the increasing importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE), several challenges hinder the effective implementation of the Program. The decentralized setup of the ECCD faces challenges like local plan linkage, financing issues, policy implementation, resource ownership fragmentation, subsidiarity, and national government oversight (Manuel & Gregorio, 2011)^[21]. Studies on early childhood education emphasize the need for government incentives and parental involvement (Escarlos et al., 2019^[14]; Biana et al., 2021^[6]; del Rosario et al., 2018^[11]; Bartolome, 2017^[5]). Notably, in 2011, 4570 out of 42,026 barangays in the Philippines lacked a childcare center, highlighting the need for improved services due to financial and technical challenges. Hence, this study explored the relationship between decentralized governance and the quality of ECCD in rural areas, a topic that has not been extensively studied in recent literature (Manuel & Gregorio, 2011)^[21].

Consequently, the study aimed to analyze the drivers and barriers of decentralized implementation of day care program delivery in Camarines Sur, Philippines. To provide a lens through which data along ECCD work areas were assessed in understanding the operation of the centers, the study is thus anchored on the Systems Theory and Decentralization Theory. Systems Theory studies the abstract organization of phenomena, focusing on complex entities and mathematical models. Such conceptual underpinning is supported by the country's ECCD system, which comprises five components: curriculum, parent education, HR development program, management, and quality standards and accreditation. Furthermore, analyzing the drivers and barriers of decentralized implementation affecting program delivery in purposively selected day care centers explicates how decentralized systems reduce central governments' fiscal resources, administrative autonomy, and political functions, resulting in smaller fiscal resources and increased political responsibility.

The data collected are deemed to assist day care centers in Camarines Sur in evaluating early childhood programs, aiding stakeholders in benchmarking and policy adaptation, guiding local government units in allocating funds, and serving as a reference for future studies on contextualized program delivery. The study also provides a baseline for evaluating existing programs, enabling tailored-fit programs for child care management.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design to analyze the drivers and barriers of decentralized implementation affecting ECCD program delivery. Multiple-case design is a valuable qualitative research tool for understanding personal, social, behavioral, psychological, organizational, cultural, and environmental factors influencing organizational and leadership development (Creswell, 2013, as cited by Brink, 2018)^[7]. It provides in-depth insights into participants' perspectives and provides a comprehensive understanding of day care centers' functioning and challenges (Halkias, Neubert, Thurman, & Harkiolakis, 2022)^[16].

2.2 Sample

The study examined the ECCD landscape in five municipalities of Camarines Sur, a province in the Philippines. The Province in the Bicol Region has 35 municipalities and 2 cities, with 1,063 barangays. The capital is Pili. The population is 2,068,244, representing 34.01% of the Bicol Region and 1.90% of the Philippines. Naga and Iriga are landlocked component cities, while Libmanan is a coastal municipality with 75 barangays. Level 3 Day Care Centers were identified from these research settings. Identified cities and municipalities were chosen based on the presence of Level 3 Day Care Centers in their respective areas. As supported by Legaspi (2001), most municipalities implement decentralized services influenced by their development agenda and community needs. However, low-income communities struggle with day care services due to financial constraints^[19]. Quality service delivery is seen in cities and first-class municipalities.

The study identified day care centers with 5 Stars/Level 3 accreditation, as per Administrative Order No.15, series 2011, for case analyses^[1]. It involved day care workers from selected centers in Camarines Sur and its component cities, Iriga City and Naga City. Standards and indicators for the day care centers are divided into the following categories: 3 Stars / Level 1; 4 Stars / Level 2; and 5 Stars / Level 3 (Table 1).

Table 1. Standards and indicators for the day care centers along three categories^[1]

Level	Standards and Indicators
3 Stars /Level 1	Mandatory compliance (minimum) should be complied with since the absence of one would compromise the effectiveness of the service implementation. Certificate of Accreditation will state that the center has a Satisfactory rating.
4 Stars /Level 2	Optimal, but compliance would increase the quality of service implementation to a higher level. Certificate of Accreditation will state that the center has a Very Satisfactory rating.
5 Stars / Level 3	If complied with, the highest standards will make the facility a Center for Excellence, and its Certificate of Accreditation will state that the center has an Outstanding rating.

On the other hand, the standards and indicators for the day care workers are also divided into the following categories: Level 1, 2, and 3. Level 3 day care workers are expected to be highly competent (Table 2).

Table 2. Standards and indicators for the day care workers along three categories^[2]

Level	Standards and Indicators
1	Mandatory compliance (minimum) should be complied with since the absence of one would compromise the effectiveness of the service implementation. Certificate of Accreditation will state that the worker is competent.
2	Optimal, but compliance would increase the quality of service implementation to a higher level. Certificate of Accreditation will state that the worker is very competent.
3	The highest standards that, if complied with, will make the facility a Center for Excellence, and its Certificate of Accreditation will state that the worker is highly competent.

A Level 3 Day Care Worker was selected for Municipality B and another for Municipality C, with an accredited Level 2 DCW for Municipality A. Key informants were 5 Stars/Level 3 day care workers who shared drivers, barriers, and insights on decentralized implementation. City/Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers and ECCD Focal Persons validated responses from semi-structured interviews (Table 3).

Table 3. Number of research participants^[3]

Research Participants	Day Care Center for Municipality A	Day Care Center for Municipality B	Day Care Center for Municipality C
Level 2 Day Care Worker	1		
Level 3 Day Care Worker		1	1
City/Municipal Social Welfare Development Officer and/or ECCD Focal Person	1	2	1

2.2 Instruments

The questionnaire that was used in the study was based on the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Registration, Licensing, and Accreditation (RLA) Form 11 of Administrative Order No. 15, s. 2011 or the Guidelines for the Accreditation of Day Care Centers and Day Care Workers^[1], as well as the study on the Legal Frameworks for Early Childhood Governance in the Philippines by Marilyn F. Manuel and Eu-

berto B. Gregorio (2011). The study examines day care centers' profiles, policies, programs, and implementation plans. It covers five work areas: Children's Growth and Development, Partnership with Families, Communities, Local Government, Human Resource Development, Program Management, and Physical Environment and Safety.

Appropriately, questionnaire pre-testing was conducted at an identified Level 3 Day Care Center. This was an avenue for the researcher to achieve the face and content validity of the tool that was utilized by identifying recurring questions and errors. Pre-testing conditions were similar to actual data collection, and troublesome portions were improved or filtered out to address boredom or difficulty.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher coordinated with the Office of the Local Chief Executives through a letter seeking approval for the conduct of the study. After the approval of the request, the researcher sent individual letters asking permission to conduct the study with the respective City and Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers and/or ECCD Focal Persons and Barangay Captains among identified Level 3 Day Care Centers. Interviews were scheduled upon approval of the request.

In line with the collective interpretation of data, the researcher looked into the research participants' empirical and first-hand experiences or responses. The employment of document analysis was also observed to determine day care centers' compliance along with program delivery. The researcher requested these pertinent documents to substantiate the collection of secondary data.

To validate collected data, follow-up interviews among City/ Municipal Social Welfare Development Officers and/or ECCD Focal Persons or Division Heads in charge of monitoring and supervising day care program delivery in the different cities or municipalities were also conducted.

Data collection and validation lasted for five (5) months with ninety-nine (99) days, excluding holidays, non-working days, and weekends. The venue for the interview was the respective offices and day care centers of the research participants. In these interviews, the researcher ensured a safe place with exclusive access to store all pertinent documents.

2.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Narrative analysis was used to examine drivers and barriers of decentralized implementation in day care centers that improve program implementation along identified work areas based on the DSWD Registration, Licensing, and Accreditation (RLA) Form 11 of Administrative Order No. 15, s. 2011 or the Guidelines for the Accreditation of Day Care Centers and Day Care Workers. Thematic analysis was employed based on the participants' narratives. Transcription and analysis were observed based on the results of the semi-structured interviews among the purposively identified day care workers.

NVivo software was eventually utilized to organize and code multiple data sources. Data interpretation, queries, and visualizations were also exported. Summary of word queries were eventually clustered. Words per cluster were categorized based on the reflected frequency count and percentage. Themes were identified through a combination of inductive and deductive approaches, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the data. Results were accordingly recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

3. Results

3.1 Drivers

Decentralization in day care centers can have both positive and negative impacts. Decentralization can lead to increased health service investment, personalized care, and improved accountability, but it requires addressing potential issues and achieving a balance for successful implementation.

Looking at the frequency of responses, the participants positively noted practices emphasizing partnerships with stakeholders and other institutions, health and nutrition advocacy, organizational management, and support and assistance from the local government units. Themes were anchored on the recurrence of words as expounded by the study participants. Visual presentation is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Drivers of decentralized implementation ^[1]

3.2 Barriers

Decentralized Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs particularly in day care centers face various challenges in various settings. Capuno (2005) suggests that decentralization hinders local service delivery and financing innovation, potentially perpetuating poverty and misgovernance in impoverished areas due to uneven governance quality ^[9].

The most frequent words associated with the barriers of decentralized implementation, as visualized in a word cloud, are shown in Figure 2. The weight of each unique frequency is shown by the differing sizes of the words that are displayed. The given themes are confirmed by the hierarchically classified word frequency under barriers of decentralized implementation, as indicated by the matching frequency count. Arranged from greatest to lowest, topmost responses include: barangay, accreditation, comply, budget, and approach.

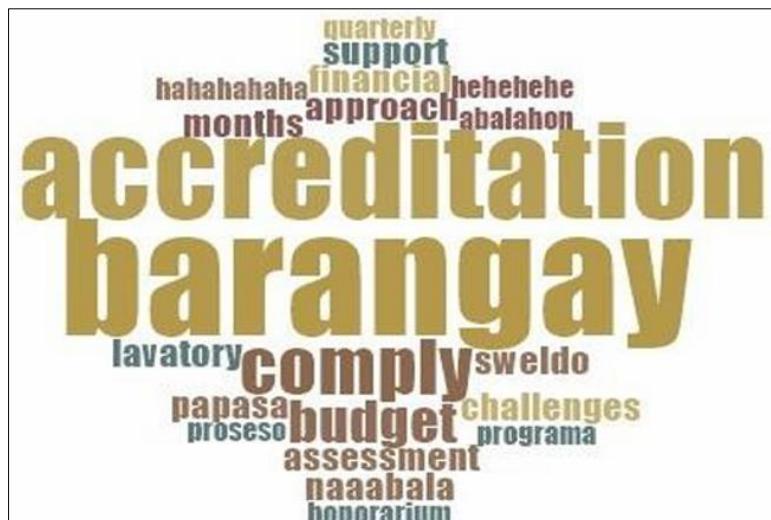


Figure 2. Barriers of decentralized implementation ^[2]

4. Discussion

4.1 Drivers

Partnership with stakeholders and other institutions. Stakeholders' support is important in operating and delivering day care services and activities. Their engagement is needed to ensure that the necessary support is provided to achieve the centers' goals in all aspects of child development. As practiced in the identified centers, partnerships are evident in the conduct of DCW training and capacitation, parent effectiveness seminars, health and nutrition-related programs, child protection initiatives, and maintenance of the centers' indoor and outdoor environment. Partnerships initiatives are also discussed as overarching aspects of the centers' best practices, especially on the level of health and nutrition and physical environment.

As emphasized, inter-local collaboration is noted in the identified centers. Services are therefore provided in the DCCs but are implemented in partnership with other LGU offices such as the DRRMC and BFP on disaster response; PNP on security and drug addiction; Department of Education on instruction as part of the BCPC; and DSWD on parent formation and children's welfare and protection. NGO participation is also valuable as they facilitate or sponsor feedings and cleanup drives during Brigada Eskwela at the beginning of the school year. Particularly, through the Rural Health Units and Barangay Health Units or Offices, the Municipal Health Office handles child health services such as immunization and growth and nutritional monitoring.

Evidently, through partnerships, several stakeholders collaborate to create a nurturing atmosphere that promotes young children's overall development and well-being. Consistently, schools should establish a home-school parental involvement framework involving all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, principals, and government officials, to foster partnership and empower partnership (Bartolome & Mamat, 2020). This is made possible by creating efficient communication plans and considering the requirements and preferences of early childhood program personnel and families; ECE partnerships can enhance implementation processes (Hawkinson & Tribble, 2019) ^[17].

Health and nutrition advocacy. The Department of Social Welfare (DSWD) provides a Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) to day care centers as part of the government's Early Childhood Care and Development program. This community-based feeding program is conducted in partnership with the Local Government Units. For 120 days, children receive hot meals during snack or meal times, supplemented by food supplementation, overseen by parents and caregivers, using locally accessible food sources. Early-life health foundations are crucial for the development of intellectual skills, human capital, and economic productivity (Spears & Lamba, 2013^[25]; World Health Organization, 2002^[29]; Shonkoff et al., 2012^[24]; Watanabe et al., 2005^[8]).

Accordingly, interviews and secondary data prove that all identified centers comply with the Program. Respective LGUs, including Barangay Units and concerned centers, follow local structures that ensure compliance and delivery according to set standards. At the Barangay level, the Barangay Captain, Councilor in charge of the Health Committee, Barangay Nutrition Scholar, Barangay Health Worker, Day Care Workers, and parents work together to comply with government directives on food supplementation.

The practice proves the importance of a strong relationship between childcare centers and parents as a crucial factor for promoting healthy eating habits in children. Regular communication about menus, meal planning, and nutrition instruction helps parents understand their children's nutritional priorities. This proactive involvement promotes a balanced diet and overall well-being. Parents should be actively involved in their child's development, working closely with them to promote healthy behaviors within and outside the home (Lindsay et al., 2006) ^[20].

Established support from the parents, LGU, Barangay, and other stakeholders, along with program delivery, are measures to combat the barriers that encompass SFP implementation. As a recommendation, the multisector action for child well-being necessitates deliberate action and investment to create opportunities (Zaidi et al., 2018) ^[30].

Organizational management. Effective ECCD Program delivery necessitates organized and streamlined coordination between and among key players. This involves both internal and external stakeholders performing unique roles toward a common goal for child centers. As mentioned by DCW I, this management structure requires check and balance as one of the foregrounds for quality assurance.

Parallel to monitoring and evaluation and the variability in its administration, a study conducted by Hujala et al. (2014) shows that there is a demand for creating a national quality evaluation system to guarantee equal childcare services ^[18]. Moreover, fundamental guidelines for an accrediting system are deemed by examining the psychological challenges faced by early childhood educators (An, 2016) ^[2] .

An additional factor, as mentioned by DCW II, is LGU accountability. For DCW II, program management should not be the sole obligation of the DCWs. Hence, shared responsibility with the LGU and Barangay Council must be observed.

Equally important factors are planning and commitment. These aspects were underpinned by DCW III, who underscored the value of inter-agency collaboration.

For ECCD initiatives to succeed, the interplay of factors such as planning, monitoring, and accountability are deemed. ECCD Centers require increased accountability from all parties involved, with clear roles and duties defined in operating rules and assessment tools (Gayleg, 2022) ^[15] . With the absence of such and other relevant factors, Reyes (1996) on the implementation analysis of the Day Care Law in the National Capital Region underpinned the key issues, which include resource mobilization, leadership drive,

technical capability, and institutional support. Factors such as differing statuses of day care workers, lack of focus, technical capability, mismatch between LGUs' capacity and demand, and weak participation from parents, NGOs, and private organizations contribute to these challenges^[23].

Support and assistance from the Local Government Units. LGU support is crucial for day care centers' success, promoting comprehensive development, community involvement, and efficient policy execution, significantly impacting the well-being of young children. LGUs enable day care centers to create a conducive learning environment as they provide sufficient resources to them.

Support from the provincial, municipal and barangay level was ascertained by DCW I in saying, "Ugwa po nagtatao po sindang tabang" [Yes, they provide assistance.] The same affirmation was also supported by the ECCD Focal Person.

Correspondingly, LGU support must be manifested not only in the provision of material support but also in enjoining the participation of other stakeholders. Thus, LGUs must also collaborate with parents, local authorities, and other stakeholders to foster community engagement. This initiative promotes a robust structure that allows community members to participate in developing the ECCD Program. As attested by DCW II, assistance is provided by the LGU through the MSWDO as it capitalizes on the development of parents as partners in program implementation.

DCW's discussion was consistent with the statement of the ECCD Focal Person who recalled the conduct of the Parents' Summit and the provision of kitchen utensils. Moreover, as part of the CSWDO's program priorities, the CSWDO also discussed details of parent formation. Further, LGU's initiatives and commitment to developing DCCs were highlighted by the CSWDO. The narrative focused on on-going projects and the CSWDO and LGU's plans.



Figure 3 presents some of the highlights of the annual Parents' Summit.^[3]

With such LGU support and initiative on strengthening collaboration, it is important to note that family engagement involves ongoing interactions between families and day care facilities. This fosters mutual respect and understanding, promoting the development and well-being of young children. Apart from parent engagement, program management at the LGU level also posits equal importance. The success of day care centers depends heavily on LGU support, which promotes comprehensive development, community involvement, and efficient policy execution.

Apart from parent engagement, program management at the LGU level also posits equal importance. The success of day care centers depends heavily on LGU support, which promotes comprehensive development, community involvement, and efficient policy execution. This was supported by DCW III who narrated:

“The City government provides the necessary support. They also provide free books (ECCD Checklist), materials, and even buildings. Certain budgets are also allotted for repairs. We also conduct referrals for children's needs to the city government through the effort of the Barangay, specifically in the care of children with special needs. This is true for the 27 barangays of Naga City since we work as one with the support of LGU Naga and the respective barangays. Truly comprehensive.”

DCW III also recognized the importance of accountability and monitoring. She added:

“Looking at the level of support accorded, accountability is apparent. Without that accountability, support will not be manifested. Monitoring is also very intensive. We have the Office of the Division Head, which was not present in the past.”

4.2 Barriers

Barangay micromanagement. Barangay micromanagement is prevalent in day care worker selection and appointment, with most interviewed day care workers confirming the scenario. Usually, after municipal elections, replacements are common, wasting years of training and experience. Children's education is negatively impacted by nepotism and micromanagement, where barangay officials appoint DCWs based on blood relations or in exchange for favors, regardless of the applicant's qualifications. This leads to weak transparency and oversight, making it difficult for day care centers to serve children and families effectively.

Acknowledging that educational background is an important requirement for DCWs' accreditation and the necessary training and seminars that capacitate them, LGU Libmanan, through the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office, is working on particular measures to ensure their tenure regardless of political affiliation. It is also a known fact, based on experience, that certain DCWs simply take their years of service in the centers as a platform to gain teaching experience as a requirement for DepEd application.

“Tenure lies with the Barangay. We are now working on a contract to ensure DCW's tenure for at least 2 years. Training for these DCWs is never easy. There

is so much investment, and efforts are eventually wasted simply because of the DCW's political affiliation."

As the ECCD Focal Person shared, the same scenario also happens when hiring certain DCWs in Iriga. Accordingly, the CSWDO seconded concerns about hiring and tenure. The justification details the role that the Barangay assumes in hiring DCWs.

"That has become part of the system with the change of Barangay administration. We cannot impose on retaining the same DCWs since the decision lies at the Barangay level. The City cannot take such concern since they are not on the LGU items and personnel list. Indeed, Barangay level. We just subsidize."

As previously discussed, tenure is not a prevailing concern in Naga City. The ECCD Division Head confirmed that the Barangay recommends day care workers. However, the City, through the ECCD Division, facilitates the selection and appointment of aspiring DCWs. Likewise, the appointment is made after the applicant has successfully passed the recruitment process, including demonstration teaching, interview, written exam, and submission of required documents.

Significantly, as supported by UNICEF (2024), most CDWs lack stable employment, with only 11% having permanent jobs, hindering young children's sustainable learning and development, despite their critical role in transitioning from early to formal education [27].

Lack of fund support and resources. Day care facilities require adequate funding and support to enhance the nation's human capital and raise the next generation. In context, the country's inadequate funding for day care facilities has severe consequences for children and day care workers. Remarks and inconsequential reactions to air out comments on the level of Barangay support for funds and resources were laughingly expressed by DCW I. DCW II also emphasized the same underpinning the lack of resources.

To arrest the issue of limited funds and resources, a common practice that DCW I and DCW II observe is the conduct of fundraising activities. Fundraising, as cited, is usually done at least once a year in partnership with the parents as the main collaborators. These IGPs are conducted to materialize targeted projects, such as improving the internal and external environment of the center and procuring some needed materials and equipment that facilitate classroom instruction. Consistently, DCW I narrated:

"We organize fundraising as an additional activity to improve the day care center. This also aims to develop socialization among pupils since everyone is enjoined to participate. IGPs are conducted once a year, usually during Valentine. With other activities, we identify a proper schedule."

DCW II also underpinned the same concern. To arrest the issue of limited funds and resources, a

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Consistently, DCW I narrated:

“ We organize very good projects with IGP, just like the 2 day care center gates that we have. We ensure that we submit the report to our Barangay Captain with every organized project or activity for every organized project or activity. We also rely on fundraising for improvements. We make sure that we set our targets. Before project implementation, we start with target identification to ensure collected funds are properly appropriated.”

Relative to the cited issues and concerns, the DCW from Naga City consistently affirmed that in their case, there are no noted major and minor difficulties with material and financial resources.

Related experiences find a connection with the assessment released by EDCOM 2. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2) is a national commission tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector. A report on the current situation revealed that the governance structure lacks a local ECCD coordinating committee, leading to LGUs struggling to convert existing Day Care Centers into CDCs. Despite funding assistance, only a small number of LGUs avail it (ECCD Council, 2022) ^{1[3]}. Based on the report, LGUs face challenges such as lack of funding, incomplete fences and playgrounds, and inability to submit required documents, such as the full liquidation report for the NCDC building construction. Insufficient funding and resources for day care centers can significantly impact children, day care workers, and society. Many day care facilities struggle to provide quality care and instruction due to financial constraints, limiting children's access to essential early learning opportunities.

Limited compensation and benefits for DCWs. Decentralization significantly impacts day care workers' operations, affecting standards, procedures, and care quality for young children. Variability in monthly honorarium received by day care workers and allocation by LGUs and barangays is evident based on the interviews and validation. Most DCWs lack additional monetary and material benefits except for uniform allotment.

In the case of DCW I, a mechanism is followed to appropriate the monthly honorarium. As cited by the Day Care Worker, the fiscal year is divided into 4 quarters accordingly. The LGU handles the appropriation of honorarium for all DCWs in the Municipality for quarters 1 and 3. Appropriate honorarium is based on the accreditation level or status of the Day Care Worker. Levels include: non-accredited, Level I, Level II, and Level III. Regarding the amount or allocation per level, the LGU follows the amount stipulated in the DSWD Accreditation Tool. The honorarium is also given by the LGU on a lump sum basis toward the end of the assigned quarter.

On the other hand, the honorarium being provided in the Municipality varies among 75 Barangays of Libmanan, Camarines Sur. As mentioned by the DCW, the amount is identified based on the IRA of their respective Barangays. Aside from the honorarium from both the Barangay and LGU, DCWs also receive the so-called participation fee from each child. The total varies according to the parents' approval during consultation at the beginning of the school year. Since the said contribution is collected voluntarily, ensuring the regularity of monthly payments is a concern that the DCWs constantly encounter. Aside from the cited remuneration, the additional benefit received by the DCWs is the uniform

or polo shirts, which are usually given by the Barangay and the LGU. As explained, appropriate budget is allocated for such concern. As clarified, DCWs do not receive the same benefits given to other regular employees.

A different scheme is followed for the DCWs of Iriga City. As confirmed by the MSWDO, DCWs receive an honorarium from the LGU and Barangay every month. Barangay honorarium is identified based on the Barangay IRA, while the honorarium, which is charged against the LGU fund, is identified according to the accreditation level of the DCW. As elaborated by the DCW, the Barangay also provides a bonus in December. The participation fee for each child is also collected based on the amount approved by the parents. However, as in the case of the first DCW, the amount is given voluntarily, making it difficult to ensure 100% compliance. Similarly, regular distribution of polo shirts is also accorded among DCWs. In a year, as cited, they usually receive around 2 pieces of polo shirts from the LGU according to regular celebrations, which often require participation during street parades such as the Tinagba Festival in February and the Foundation Anniversary of Iriga in September, plus a specially weaved dress or uniform intended to be worn during graduation ceremony. The Barangay also provides at least 2-4 pieces of polo shirts a year during Barangay Assemblies. DCWs do not enjoy the same monetary benefits that regular employees receive but are accorded uniforms or polo shirts from LGU and Barangay.

In the case of DCW III, variability is observed in many aspects compared to the first two narratives. The City provides a regular honorarium for one school year every month. A standardized amount is given to all newly-hired DCWs. Such an amount is higher than the salary received by early childhood teachers, who come from most privately owned and well-known facilities in the Province. From the initial starting salary, variability is also observed as the salary increases according to the tenure and performance of the DCW. The City also provides other benefits, such as annual rice appropriation and gratuity pay for DCWs, which are often given in December. Uniform allowance is also given following a unique design per Barangay. DCWs also receive other benefits in Barangay. The Barangay provides the monthly honorarium according to its Barangay IRA, rice appropriation twice a year, and bonuses given in May and November. Accordingly, the Barangay honorarium increases as its IRA also increases. Moreover, collecting participation fees is not of great concern since most parents can regularly settle the expected account.

Matters on honorarium were clarified by the ECCD Division Head, who mentioned that there is a standard honorarium for all beginning teachers in the City. As explained, "It is according to the tenure. That comes from the City, and there are counterparts from the Barangay."

Markedly, the varying benefits and compensation received by DCWs are referenced in the DILG Opinion No. 14 s. 2022 concerning a letter dated December 23, 2021, with attached Provincial Resolution No. 5651-2021, requesting from the Department a legal opinion on the extent, nature, and possible amount of compensation, honorarium, and financial assistance that the [Provincial Government of Oriental Mindoro] may grant to qualified barangay personnel in the Province including, Barangay Tanod, members of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, and Day Care Workers, under, form or chargeable to local or provincial funds provides clarifications:

Barangay Day Care Workers belong to positions other than the mandatory barangay officials, who may be created in the barangay and may be compensated

in the form of salary or honorarium at the discretion of the barangay government concerned.

Thus, Barangay Day Care Workers are appointed by the barangay when a position for such is created by the unit.

Under LBC 63, the ceiling of the honoraria of Barangay Day Care Workers should not exceed the salary rate for SG6 of the salary schedule being implemented by the city/ municipality where the barangay belongs...

Similar to Tanods, Barangay Day Care Workers are not entitled to receive other forms of remunerations except honoraria, allowance, and other types of emoluments authorized by the law of ordinance.

As further clarified in the same letter, “*Day Care Workers similarly receive honoraria which should not exceed SG6. Unless otherwise provided by law, they are not entitled to PERA, additional compensation, year-end bonus, mid-year bonus, and other incentives accruing to regular employees of the barangay.*”

Considering the conducted interviews and legal mandates, it is imperative to note that decentralization limits local revenue-generation capacity, leading to limited appropriation of funds for day care centers and childcare workers. Needless to say, national laws dictate that barangays handle day care operations in their local communities.

5. Conclusion

Initiatives and best practices emphasize the importance of coordination and integration in ECCD service delivery, facilitating children’s growth and development through individual checklists, dental and medical services, supplementary feeding, and pedagogical training. Clear procedures and assessment tools enhance instruction and programs, promoting parental participation and connectedness in childcare.

Accordingly, partnership with families, communities, and local government in service delivery structures is deemed necessary. Parents play a crucial role in ensuring their children’s development and supporting childcare services. Parent volunteers’ distinctive roles must be defined, and parents’ involvement in organizing their children’s outputs must be situated. Collaboration between day care facilities and barangay officials also plays a crucial role in child welfare and in implementing initiatives.

In the study's context, local government units provide support and services for childcare services. In contrast, local structures monitor and organize programs for children up to six years old, led by designated Barangay Officials. Importantly, DCWs require extensive support, training, and mentoring to enhance basic skills and prepare them for classroom instruction. Narratives highlight the need for continuous development in the workforce.

Consequently, legal mandates set minimum requirements for DCW accreditation, ensuring competent, educationally qualified providers for DCCs, ensuring the success of day care programs, and the selection of high-quality childcare providers.

Complementary to ensuring effective program operation, managing a day care center requires accurate records and effective monitoring to create safe environments for children. DCCs should emphasize the value of the environment's role in learning, ensuring no risks and good condition of materials and equipment.

In general, organization and decision-making within the center are governed by policies and procedures. A high-quality, safe, professional day care environment depends on well-structured policies and processes. Crucially, day care centers' services, activities, organizational structures, and physical environment must adhere to legal requirements and offer precise instructions to guarantee high-quality program delivery. Moreover, the data indicates that decentralized governance has led to inconsistent quality across day care centers, suggesting the need for standardized oversight and support mechanisms. Data from this study also supports the recommendation for targeted funding, as centers that received consistent financial support demonstrated significantly better outcomes in child development metrics.

The Decentralization Theory and the Systems Theory support the findings of the study. Decentralization explains the ECCD structure and program delivery from the national, provincial, city/municipal, and barangay levels. Consequently, through the lens of the Systems Theory, the Philippines' ECCD program structure is seen as a dynamic system that shares governance and connects components for integrated services.

The recommendations provided in this study are intended for the stakeholders, community, and organizations involved in delivering childcare services, specifically day care centers. The recommendations were anchored on the findings of the study.

With the challenges confronting LGUs, Barangay Councils, DCCs, and DCWs with the devolved structure of ECCD Program delivery, policymakers should look into evidence-based policies. A grassroots approach is deemed beneficial when they look into the actual financial capacity of the LGUs and the Barangays as they allocate funds for the operations of childcare facilities. To enjoin collaboration and greater participation, mandates must also center on an inclusive approach that fosters multiple-sector partnerships and collaboration for the needs of all stakeholders.

Importantly, a contextualized program must also be developed with policymakers enabling responsible line agencies to conceptualize a contextualized program for early childhood care and development. Specifically, day care centers cater to the variability of the facilities as identified in the study's results. Likewise, implementing community-based support models similar to those used in rural Thailand could enhance the effectiveness of ECCD programs in Camarines Sur by leveraging local resources and expertise.

The Provincial, Municipal, and Barangay Officials Government units should also organize measures to identify and accordingly address the needs of DCCs and DCWs under their jurisdiction. Clear-cut policies must also be organized to delineate the particular roles of all childcare service personnel. This measure ensures greater accountability in delivering and performing expected roles against expected outputs. Concerned offices must spearhead programs and activities that encourage community responsiveness and participation in day care centers.

Acknowledging the robust mandates and standards set by the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the operation of Day Care Centers, monitoring and evaluation measures must be intensified to ensure compliance with set standards. The Department should also bridge assessment results to concerned agencies to provide appropriate assistance for childcare facilities under their supervision.

Strategic decisions must also be made by provincial, municipal, and barangay officials, prioritizing programs and projects that promote the welfare of children and day care workers in their respective communities. Enactment of local laws and resolutions should also

be given priority to address the emerging needs of the centers in response to their economic, social, and developmental needs and their human resource. Further, investment in training and capacity-building programs for Barangay Day Care Workers to equip them with essential skills, knowledge, and resources for quality care and education for young children must be prioritized.

Importantly, DCWs play a pivotal role in the delivery of childcare services. Hence, they must have a positive attitude and behavior in managing children in the center. Upskilling should also be given priority to allow oneself to keep up-to-date with the expected knowledge and skills deemed for effective child management. They should also adhere to set standards and policies to ensure children's health, safety, and learning in their respective centers.

Parents should also deepen their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in promoting child learning and development in the center and the home setting. Engagement and support must also be manifested in all DCC programs and activities toward positive outcomes for all.

Lastly, a contextualized program framework for day care centers in the Province is thus recommended. Contextualization of daycare program implementation is necessary as it allows for a more inclusive and collaborative day care program delivery at the local level.

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