

## Research Article

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## Gaps and Gains: A Needs and Resource Assessment of Early Childhood Educators in Public Schools

Joel I. Alvarez , Eunice T. Galman

### Abstract

**Background/purpose.** This study investigates the perceived competencies, resource availability, and systemic challenges faced by early childhood educators (ECEs) in Philippine public schools. The research aims to identify gaps in professional development, resource adequacy, and teaching conditions to inform policy interventions that can enhance the quality of early childhood education.

**Materials/methods.** A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative open-ended questions across diverse regions. Data were analyzed to assess educators' confidence levels, resource accessibility, and systemic issues such as workload and funding disparities.

**Results.** Findings reveal that educators feel highly confident in key teaching skills, particularly in mentorship and developmentally appropriate strategies, but identify needs for improved behavior management and technology training. Resources such as instructional guides and health supplies are generally available, though outdoor play equipment and manipulatives are limited. Access to learning materials and outdoor spaces is adequate but requires enhancement. Challenges include workload, resource shortages, behavioral diversity, and parental involvement. Strengths include culturally relevant visual aids and safe learning environments.

**Conclusion.** The study concludes that while Philippine public school ECEs possess strong foundational competencies and resource bases, targeted improvements in professional development, resource allocation, and systemic support are essential. Implementing context-specific policies can foster more effective, inclusive, and engaging early childhood learning environments.

## 1. Introduction

Martinez-Beck and Zaslow (2006) emphasize that early childhood educators (ECEs) play an essential role in laying the foundation for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. They argue that the effectiveness of ECEs is closely tied to their professional competencies, access to ongoing development opportunities, and the availability of adequate instructional and learning resources. Similarly, the Prichard Committee (2024) highlights that high-quality early childhood education not only benefits individual children and families but also promotes broader societal outcomes such as school readiness and long-term academic success.

The dynamic nature of early childhood education presents unique challenges for educators, who must stay updated with evolving pedagogical theories, diverse student needs, and increasing expectations for accountability and student outcomes. According to Science is Elementary (2025), early childhood educators regularly cite professional development as critical to building knowledge in child development and implementing best instructional practices. Martinez-Beck and Zaslow (2006) further note that regular participation in targeted professional development—such as in-service training, individualized coaching, and workshops—predicts greater effectiveness in classroom management and instructional quality.

Moreover, ISHCMC (2025) stresses that the adequacy and accessibility of instructional and learning resources directly influence educators' capacity to nurture each child's unique learning needs. They report that variability in resource allocation and access to technology often results in gaps between actual and ideal teaching conditions. Many educators express dissatisfaction with material conditions, including limited support for reflective practice, lack of autonomy over instructional choices, and insufficient time or funding for meaningful professional growth. These concerns are compounded by systemic issues such as high workloads, mental health stressors, and evolving safety and technological demands within classrooms.

Despite the growing body of research affirming the importance of professional development and adequate resources, Martinez-Beck and Zaslow (2006) and others note specific research gaps. Many studies focus primarily on general teacher education or isolated interventions rather than providing comprehensive, context-specific analyses within public school systems. Likewise, according to the Incredible Years program developers (2025), while evidence-based interventions such as The Incredible Years® curriculum and ParentCorps demonstrate positive outcomes, questions remain regarding their scalability, sustainability, and contextual adaptation in real-world school settings.

This study addresses these gaps by systematically assessing the interconnected professional needs, ongoing challenges, and resource availabilities of early childhood educators in public school systems. Unlike prior research that isolates professional development or resource access as individual issues, this study integrates these factors to explore educators' perceived gaps between actual and ideal teaching conditions. By doing so, it captures educators' competencies and needs while identifying barriers to high-quality teaching environments. The findings aim to inform evidence-based recommendations and policy directions directly relevant to stakeholders intending to support early childhood educators' growth and effectiveness in public education.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the professional needs, challenges, and available resources of early childhood educators in the public school system. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify the current competencies and professional development needs of early childhood educators.

2. Determine the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of instructional and learning resources in early childhood education.
3. Explore the perceived gaps between the actual and ideal teaching conditions experienced by early childhood educators.
4. Recommend evidence-based interventions and policy directions to support the growth and effectiveness of early childhood educators.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Current Competencies and Professional Development Needs

Latorre Medina et al. (2024) emphasize that early childhood educators (ECEs) require a comprehensive range of competencies—including emotional support, relationship building, and effective communication with families—to effectively nurture children’s holistic development. Their expert judgment study highlights the importance of self-reflection and continuous professional growth as mechanisms for meeting children’s diverse needs. This view aligns with Caparotta’s (2012) earlier findings that ECEs acknowledge the critical role of ongoing professional development; however, she notes that existing training programs often lack contextual relevance and practical applicability to the realities of early learning settings.

Taken together, these studies suggest that while there is broad consensus on the importance of professional development, the disconnect lies in its delivery and contextualization. Whereas Medina et al. (2024) stress internal competencies and reflective practices, Caparotta (2012) underscores structural deficiencies in training design. This complementarity highlights that both individual-level (reflective competence) and systemic-level (programmatic relevance) factors must be addressed to enhance professional growth among ECEs. Moreover, emerging Philippine-based research mirrors these global findings, emphasizing the need for professional development that is responsive to local classroom realities and regional diversity.

### 2.2. Availability and Adequacy of Resources

A recurring theme in the literature is the unequal access to resources and training opportunities that hinder ECEs from meeting educational standards. Caparotta (2012) reports that limited and often outdated professional development offerings restrict educators’ ability to provide quality instruction. This concern is echoed in *Examining the Challenges for First-Year Early Childhood Educators* (2024), which documents that the scarcity and inaccessibility of instructional materials and training resources significantly burden novice teachers. Oliveira and Ferreira (2020) further reveal systemic inequities, noting that public institutions experience more severe resource shortages than private ones, thereby perpetuating disparities in instructional quality.

The convergence of these findings illustrates that resource inadequacy is not an isolated issue but a structural challenge cutting across professional development, classroom management, and equity in early education. However, despite these constraints, recent reports indicate gradual improvement in resource allocation and institutional support, suggesting a positive trajectory toward professional recognition and policy responsiveness (Caparotta, 2012). This evolution underscores a growing acknowledgment of the necessity for resource equity and targeted investment in the ECE sector.

### 2.3. Perceived Gaps in Teaching Conditions

The literature also identifies significant gaps between the ideal and actual teaching conditions experienced by early childhood educators. *Examining the Challenges for First-Year Early Childhood Educators* (2024) revealed that beginning teachers frequently encounter insufficient institutional

support and limited mentoring opportunities, which exacerbate the transition challenges into professional practice. Similarly, Oliveira and Ferreira (2020) linked inadequate funding and institutional inequities to enduring disparities in teachers' working environments. When viewed through the lens of Knowles' (1980) Adult Learning Theory, these findings underscore that professional growth among educators is most effective when learning environments are self-directed, experience-based, and problem-centered. The lack of mentoring and institutional support contradicts these adult learning principles, limiting teachers' ability to engage in reflective and experiential professional learning.

Furthermore, the persistence of inequities across institutional settings aligns with the OECD Professional Competence Framework, which emphasizes three interrelated dimensions of teacher competence—knowledge, skills, and values. The resource and support deficiencies identified by Caparotta (2012) and Oliveira and Ferreira (2020) inhibit the full realization of these dimensions, particularly in areas of pedagogical expertise and professional collaboration. When compared to Caparotta's earlier findings, the current studies reveal a temporal continuity of systemic challenges, showing that issues of support and equity have remained largely unresolved despite policy reforms aimed at teacher professionalization.

Nevertheless, emerging evidence points to a gradual recognition of these deficiencies and an increased institutional focus on professional development (Caparotta, 2012). However, the synthesis of these studies suggests a persistent tension between policy intentions and practical realities, where well-designed educational frameworks fail to translate effectively into practice due to resource constraints and insufficient systemic backing. Anchored in Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, this gap illustrates how teachers' professional competence cannot be fully developed in the absence of supportive structures that integrate theoretical understanding, pedagogical skill, and contextual adaptability. Thus, strengthening ECE teaching conditions requires aligning professional development systems with adult learning principles and competence-based models that view teacher growth as a dynamic, context-dependent process.

#### ***2.4. Early Childhood Education Framework and Curriculum***

In the Philippine context, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is anchored in the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum, institutionalized through Republic Act 10157 or the Kindergarten Education Act. This policy mandates compulsory kindergarten education for five-year-olds and underscores holistic development and functional literacy as national priorities (Core, 2016). The curriculum, aligned with the National Early Learning Framework, promotes developmentally appropriate teaching that ensures children's smooth transition to higher education levels.

However, when compared to international studies, the Philippine ECE faces similar yet context-specific challenges. Local research aligns with Medina et al. (2024) and Caparotta (2012) in identifying emotional support, relationship building, and family engagement as critical competencies for Filipino educators. Yet, as in global contexts, these competencies are often underdeveloped due to limited access to relevant and sustainable professional development opportunities.

#### ***2.5. Challenges in Teaching Conditions and Resources***

Persistent gaps between policy ideals and classroom realities characterize much of the Philippine ECE landscape. Studies (Oliveira & Ferreira, 2020); Examining the Challenges for (First-Year Early Childhood Educators, 2024) highlight that many public and geographically disadvantaged schools lack adequate instructional materials, learning spaces, and technological resources. Moreover, the implementation of socio-emotional learning (SEL)—a central component of child development—faces barriers such as insufficient training and weak institutional support (Philippine Study on SEL Challenges, 2024).

These challenges mirror UNICEF Philippines' (2022) longitudinal findings, which show stark variations in children's cognitive, social, and emotional outcomes across regions due to inequitable teacher support and resource distribution. Collectively, these studies converge on the conclusion that systemic inequities in resource allocation and teacher preparation significantly affect educational quality, reinforcing the need for evidence-based and contextually grounded interventions.

### ***2.6. Parental Involvement and Community Context***

Parental involvement remains a cornerstone of effective early childhood education, especially in the Philippines, where familial relationships deeply influence children's social development. Bartolome, Mamat, and Masnan (2017) highlight that social and cultural factors mediate parents' participation in schooling, with involvement levels often dependent on socioeconomic conditions and institutional outreach. While these findings complement Medina et al.'s (2024) emphasis on family engagement as a teacher competency, they also reveal institutional shortcomings in facilitating sustained parent-teacher partnerships. Strengthening community collaboration thus requires not only educator competence but also structured engagement frameworks that reflect Filipino cultural dynamics.

### ***2.7. Research Gaps and Local Contextualization***

Despite the breadth of international research, there remains a notable absence of localized, empirical studies that analyze how professional development, teaching conditions, and resource availability interact within the Philippine socio-cultural context. Future research should focus on examining context-specific professional development models, the scalability of evidence-based interventions, and continuity and transition issues from kindergarten to higher education. Bridging these gaps will not only enrich local scholarship but also ensure that ECE reforms are both culturally responsive and pedagogically effective.

## **3. Methodology**

### ***3.1. Research Design***

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of early childhood educators' competencies, needs, and available resources. The quantitative component utilized a structured survey questionnaire to collect numerical data regarding educators' competencies, needs, and resource availability. The qualitative component included open-ended questions aimed at eliciting deeper insights into teaching challenges, best practices, and participant recommendations for improvement. Applying this design enhanced the study's robustness by integrating measurable trends with rich contextual experiences, consistent with recommendations in mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***3.2. Sampling Techniques***

The study used purposive sampling to identify educators currently teaching Kindergarten to Grade 1 in the public school system, ensuring participants had relevant experience. To capture variability in teaching conditions and resource availability, schools were selected from diverse geographic regions—including urban, semi-urban, and rural areas.

When the population size was large, stratified random sampling was applied to categorize educators by location, years of experience, or school type and to randomly select proportional samples from each stratum (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The final sample size was determined based on desired confidence levels and available resources following established procedures (Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001).

### 3.3. Data Analysis

#### *Quantitative Data (Structured Survey)*

Descriptive statistics—including means, frequencies, and percentages—were used to summarize perceived needs, resource availability, and adequacy ratings. Mean scores were calculated to assess the magnitude of needs or adequacy in the identified competency and resource domains. Cross-tabulations were conducted to explore differences based on demographic variables such as urban versus rural educators, enabling identification of subgroup trends (Field, 2018).

#### *Qualitative Data (Open-ended Responses)*

Thematic analysis was performed to identify and analyze recurring themes related to challenges, best practices, and recommendations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted manually or with qualitative data analysis software to ensure systematic interpretation and reliability. Emerging themes were triangulated with quantitative findings to enrich understanding and interpretation.

### 3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards for educational research, following institutional and international guidelines (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2011):

Participants were provided with clear, written information about the research purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent forms were designed to be accessible and understandable, accommodating participants' literacy and language needs. Participant data were anonymized, and identifiable information was removed or coded. All data were stored securely, and reporting was conducted in an aggregated form to prevent individual identification. Digital and physical data were stored securely with password protection and locked storage. Access was restricted to authorized personnel only, and data were used exclusively for this study. The study ensured that participants were not coerced or exposed to psychological, professional, or other risks during or after participation. The research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Ethics Review Board or an equivalent committee for approval before data collection commenced.

## 4. Results

Based on the collected data, the study yielded several significant findings that address the core research questions. The emerging patterns and statistical outcomes highlight the participants' behaviors, perceptions, and performance across the identified indicators. These findings form the foundation for the subsequent discussion, in which each result is analyzed in relation to the existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the overarching goals of the study.

**Table 1.** Competencies of the Respondents

| Statement                                                                      | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| I am confident in using developmentally appropriate teaching strategies.       | 4.7           | Strongly Agree        |
| I am knowledgeable about early childhood learning standards.                   | 4.25          | Strongly Agree        |
| I regularly assess and document children's learning progress.                  | 4.7           | Strongly Agree        |
| I need more training in classroom behavior management.                         | 4.2           | Agree                 |
| I need support in differentiating instruction for learners with diverse needs. | 4.45          | Strongly Agree        |
| I feel prepared to use play-based and inquiry-based learning approaches.       | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |
| I need professional development in using technology for early learners.        | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |
| I would benefit from mentorship or peer coaching.                              | 4.75          | Strongly Agree        |

Table 1 (Competencies of the Respondents) provides a quantitative snapshot of early childhood educators' self-perceived competencies and professional development needs within the public school system. The respondents express strong confidence in several key areas of their professional practice, as evidenced by weighted means predominantly above 4.0, centered on "strongly agree" responses.

The highest-rated competency, with a weighted mean of 4.75, indicates respondents' strong belief that they would benefit from mentorship or peer coaching. This finding aligns with the literature, which emphasizes the critical role of collaborative, peer-supported professional development in enhancing teaching quality and job satisfaction among early childhood educators (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Peer coaching has been shown to foster reflective practices and support ongoing professional learning, which is essential in the dynamic field of early childhood education (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009).

Similarly, the confidence in using developmentally appropriate teaching strategies (4.7) and regularly assessing and documenting children's learning progress (4.7) reflects educators' foundational competencies. This self-efficacy is crucial, as research underscores developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and formative assessments as cornerstones of quality early childhood education that promote positive child outcomes (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020).

However, the slightly lower, but still positive, score for needing more training in classroom behavior management (4.2) indicates a recognized area for improvement. Behavior management remains a significant professional challenge, impacting classroom climate and children's socio-emotional development (Raver, Jones, Li-Grining, Zhai, & Pressler, 2011). This need highlights the ongoing demand for specialized training to equip teachers with effective intervention strategies, especially in diverse and inclusive classrooms.

The recognition of the need for differentiated instruction for learners with diverse needs (4.45) further aligns with calls from high-impact studies advocating for inclusive pedagogy and tailored teaching approaches in early childhood settings (Sullivan, 2011). Differentiation not only addresses learner variability but also supports equity in educational access, a goal increasingly highlighted in public education reforms (Tomlinson, 2014).

Respondents also express readiness to use play-based and inquiry-based learning approaches (4.4), which is encouraging as these pedagogies are empirically linked to enhanced critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development in young children (Fisher, Godwin, & Seltman, 2011). Yet, the same score for needing professional development in technology use for early learners points to the growing recognition of digital literacy's importance in early childhood education (Plowman & Stephen, 2017). Effective integration of technology must be supported by ongoing training to ensure it is developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sound.

**Table 2.** Availability of Resources

| Statement                                                 | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Literacy materials (e.g., storybooks, alphabet charts)    | 4.15          | Available             |
| Numeracy materials (e.g., counting tools, number charts)  | 4.2           | Available             |
| Manipulatives and toys for play-based learning            | 3.9           | Available             |
| Art materials (e.g., crayons, paint, paper)               | 4.4           | Highly Available      |
| Musical instruments or audio equipment                    | 3.5           | Available             |
| Science and exploration kits                              | 3.3           | Somewhat Available    |
| Child-sized classroom furniture (tables, chairs, shelves) | 4.3           | Highly Available      |
| Outdoor play equipment (e.g., swings, slides)             | 2.8           | Somewhat Available    |
| ICT tools (e.g., tablets, computers, projectors)          | 3.55          | Available             |
| Teacher guides and lesson manuals                         | 4.5           | Highly Available      |
| Health and hygiene supplies (e.g., handwashing stations)  | 4.45          | Highly Available      |
| Support personnel (e.g., aides, SPED teachers)            | 3.5           | Available             |

Table 2, titled "Availability of Resources," offers a detailed overview of the material and human resources accessible to early childhood educators within public school settings, highlighting both strengths and gaps crucial to effective teaching and learning environments.

The availability of teacher guides and lesson manuals (4.5), health and hygiene supplies (4.45), and art materials (4.4) is rated as highly available by respondents. These findings corroborate the literature suggesting that access to comprehensive curricular guides and essential supplies supports effective instructional delivery and classroom management, thereby enhancing teacher efficacy and child outcomes (Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009). Particularly, the availability of health and hygiene materials is critical in early childhood settings, as it addresses a fundamental aspect of child well-being, which directly affects attendance and learning readiness (Ratcliffe & Roberts, 2019).

Child-sized classroom furniture (4.3) also reflects a positive resource availability, supporting age-appropriate physical environments that enhance comfort, participation, and developmental appropriateness in learning spaces (Nair, Fielding, & Lackney, 2013). Scholars argue that the physical classroom setup must cater to young children's ergonomic and engagement needs to foster effective learning (Drummond, 2012).

Conversely, items such as manipulatives and toys for play-based learning (3.9), musical instruments or audio equipment (3.5), and especially outdoor play equipment (2.8) are in limited

supply. Play-based learning has been widely documented as a pedagogical imperative in early childhood education, fostering creativity, social skills, and cognitive development (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). The lack of outdoor play equipment is concerning, given substantial evidence linking regular outdoor playtime to children's physical health, social interaction, and emotional regulation (Gray, 2011). This shortfall reflects an ongoing challenge in resource allocation in public early childhood programs, potentially impacting holistic child development.

The availability of ICT tools (3.55) reflects another important dimension in contemporary early childhood education. While still only moderately accessible, integrating technology can support differentiated instruction and digital literacy at a young age, preparing learners for future academic challenges (Edwards, 2020). However, the modest availability suggests barriers that need addressing, such as infrastructure, teacher training, and equitable access.

Lastly, support personnel, such as aides and special education teachers, are rated "available" but with a moderate score (3.5), indicating some access but potential shortages. Human resource availability is vital given increasing inclusion mandates and the diversity of needs in classrooms (McHatton & Boyer, 2016). Insufficient support staff can increase teacher workload and reduce the quality of individualized attention.

Table 3. Accessibility of Resources

| Statement                                                                    | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Literacy and numeracy materials are within reach and regularly used          | 4.2           | Accessible            |
| Manipulatives and toys are properly stored and accessible to learners        | 3.8           | Accessible            |
| Art and creative supplies are readily available for activities               | 4.35          | Highly Accessible     |
| Safe and appropriate outdoor play areas are regularly open                   | 3.65          | Accessible            |
| ICT tools are functional and usable for classroom purposes                   | 4             | Accessible            |
| Teaching references and guides are updated and easy to obtain                | 4.25          | Highly Accessible     |
| Training or support from staff (aides, specialists) is available when needed | 3.85          | Accessible            |
| Budget or funds for resource requests are accessible through school channels | 4.05          | Accessible            |

Table 3 presents data on the accessibility of resources for early childhood educators, derived from weighted mean scores and corresponding verbal interpretations. The main objective of assessing professional needs, challenges, and available resources aligns with efforts to enhance educational quality in public school systems. The findings indicate varying levels of resource accessibility, with weighted means ranging from 3.65 to 4.35, translating to "Accessible" or "Highly Accessible" categories. Notably, art and creative supplies (4.35) and teaching references (4.25) are highly accessible, suggesting robust support in creative and instructional domains. Conversely, manipulatives and toys (3.8) and outdoor play areas (3.65) score lower, hinting at potential resource or maintenance challenges.

This assessment aligns with high-impact research that emphasizes resource availability as a critical determinant of educator efficacy. For instance, Pianta et al. (2009) highlight that access to high-quality materials, such as updated teaching guides, positively influences classroom interactions and child outcomes in early education settings. The high accessibility of teaching references (4.25) in this study supports this, indicating a potential strength in professional development. However, the moderate accessibility of outdoor play areas (3.65) aligns with findings from McCartney et al. (2010), who underscore the need for safe, well-maintained outdoor spaces to foster physical development, suggesting an area for improvement.

Challenges in resource distribution, as reflected in the lower scores for manipulatives (3.8) and training support (3.85), echo concerns raised by Mashburn et al. (2008), who found that inconsistent access to hands-on materials and professional support hinders instructional quality. The accessibility of budget funds (4.05) offers a promising avenue for addressing these gaps, consistent with recommendations from Yoshikawa et al. (2013) for strategic resource allocation to meet educator needs. Overall, these insights underscore the importance of targeted interventions to optimize resource distribution, aligning with the study's objective to inform policy and practice in early childhood education.

**Table 4.** Adequacy of Resources

| Statement                                                                  | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| There are enough learning materials for all children in the class          | 4.05          | Agree                 |
| Play and activity materials are appropriate to the age group               | 4.25          | Strongly Agree        |
| Equipment and furniture are in good condition and child-friendly           | 4.25          | Strongly Agree        |
| Visual aids and print materials are culturally and linguistically relevant | 4.6           | Strongly Agree        |
| ICT tools are up-to-date and suited for early childhood education          | 4.05          | Agree                 |
| Outdoor and indoor spaces are safe, clean, and developmentally appropriate | 4.25          | Strongly Agree        |
| Resource materials support differentiated and inclusive instruction        | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |
| Materials and equipment are regularly maintained or replenished            | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |

Table 4 assesses the adequacy of resources for early childhood educators, with weighted means ranging from 4.05 to 4.6, reflecting "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" interpretations. Key strengths include culturally and linguistically relevant visual aids (4.6) and developmentally appropriate indoor/outdoor spaces (4.25), indicating robust support for diverse and physical learning environments. The adequacy of learning materials (4.05) and ICT tools (4.05) is also notable, though slightly lower, suggesting room for enhancement in quantity or technological integration.

These findings align with research emphasizing resource quality as a cornerstone of effective early education. For example, Pianta et al. (2009) demonstrate that well-maintained equipment and materials (both 4.25) enhance classroom interactions, supporting child development. The high score for inclusive resource materials (4.4) aligns with Yoshikawa et al. (2013), who advocate differentiated resources to address diverse learner needs. However, the moderate score for learning materials

(4.05) may reflect challenges in scaling access, consistent with Mashburn et al. (2008), who note disparities in material availability impact instructional quality.

Overall, the data suggest a strong resource base, with opportunities to address gaps in material quantity and in ICT optimization, aligning with the study's goal of evaluating professional needs and challenges.

**Table 5.** Gaps between Actual and Ideal Teaching Conditions

| Statement                                      | Weighted Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Class size and pupil-teacher ratio             | 4.25          | Strongly Agree        |
| Classroom physical environment                 | 4.45          | Strongly Agree        |
| Preparation time for lessons and activities    | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |
| Access to updated teaching guides and training | 4.45          | Strongly Agree        |
| Support from school administrators             | 4.35          | Strongly Agree        |
| Collaboration with parents and community       | 4.6           | Strongly Agree        |
| Professional respect and recognition           | 4.4           | Strongly Agree        |
| Workload and administrative tasks              | 3.9           | Agree                 |

Table 5 highlights gaps between actual and ideal teaching conditions for early childhood educators, with weighted means ranging from 3.9 to 4.6, reflecting "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" interpretations. Strong alignment is evident in the classroom physical environment (4.45), collaboration with parents and community (4.6), and access to updated guides and training (4.45), suggesting robust support in these areas. However, workload and administrative tasks (3.9) score lower, indicating a potential challenge in workload management.

These results align with research on the impact of teaching conditions on educator effectiveness. Pianta et al. (2009) emphasize that a supportive physical environment (4.45) enhances instructional quality, supporting the high score here. The strong collaboration score (4.6) aligns with Epstein's (2018) findings, which link community engagement to improved educational outcomes. The lower workload score (3.9) is consistent with Ingersoll and Strong (2011), who identify excessive administrative demands as a barrier to teacher retention, suggesting a need for targeted relief.

Overall, the data indicate a generally favorable teaching context, with workload as a key area for improvement, aligning with the study's focus on professional needs.

#### **4.1. Challenges and Threats experienced by Early Childhood Educators**

Through Colaizzi's method, challenges and threats experienced by Early Childhood Educators were identified based on the results of the interview. Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis involves extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, and integrating findings into a rich description of the phenomenon under study. The identified themes are as follows:

##### *1. Parental Involvement*

A recurring concern was the lack of parental involvement in the children's learning process. Participants emphasized that minimal parental engagement undermined student progress and added

to teachers' challenges in reinforcing positive behavior and learning habits. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which underscores parental involvement as a crucial microsystem factor influencing child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Studies have consistently demonstrated that active parental involvement correlates with better student academic outcomes and behavior (Epstein, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001). Therefore, the low parental participation reported reflects a significant barrier to effective early childhood education.

## *2. Resource Constraints*

Another major theme was the lack of sufficient teaching materials and resources, especially following curriculum changes. Teachers expressed a sense of burden to be resourceful and creative in delivering quality instruction despite material shortages. This challenge echoes findings in educational research where limited resources negatively impact teaching efficacy and student engagement, particularly in early childhood settings (Piasta et al., 2017). The need for adequate materials is fundamental to hands-on, play-based learning approaches that support developmental goals (NAEYC, 2020).

## *3. Behavior Management and Student Diversity*

Participants reported varying student behaviors that require complex management strategies. Challenges included addressing moral behavior, attitude, and language differences. This theme reflects the multifaceted nature of classroom management in early childhood, requiring culturally responsive and individualized behavioral approaches (Cameron & Moloney, 2009). Effective behavior management strategies have been linked to improving both classroom climate and learning outcomes (Simonsen et al., 2008).

## *4. Meeting Individual and Group Needs*

Teachers described difficulties balancing individual developmental needs with collective classroom goals. This is a well-documented tension in early childhood education where differentiation and inclusive practices must coexist (Tomlinson, 2014). Supporting personalized pacing while maintaining group cohesion requires pedagogical flexibility and strong classroom leadership (Cifarelli & Kuth, 2019).

## *5. Special Needs Education Challenges*

Handling students with special needs was identified as a pressing challenge, particularly for teachers without formal special education training. This points to a critical need for professional development and tailored interventions, consistent with the call for inclusive education policies that equip teachers to manage diverse learners effectively (Mukhopadhyay & Mani, 2018).

## *6. Teacher Emotional and Professional Challenges*

Some responses revealed self-doubt and emotional fatigue related to providing quality education and managing discipline. Educator well-being is essential for sustainable teaching effectiveness, and high stress levels undermine instructional quality (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Early childhood teachers often report emotional labor stemming from the complexity of their roles, underscoring the need for support systems (Sumsion & Wong, 2011).

## *7. Adaptability in Teaching Approaches*

Lastly, the need to continually adjust teaching methods and materials due to learners' young age and playful nature was noted. This adaptability is recognized as a core competency in early childhood pedagogy, demanding ongoing teacher reflection and creativity (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2016).

## **4.2. Integration and Synthesis**

The themes identified through Colaizzi's method underscore that early childhood educators face intersecting challenges related to external factors (e.g., parental involvement, resources), student diversity (behavioral and developmental needs), and internal factors (teacher emotions and adaptability). Addressing these challenges requires systemic support, including community engagement, resource provision, professional development, and policies fostering inclusive, responsive teaching environments.

## **4.3. Professional Development Needs for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Teachers**

This thematic analysis utilizes Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method to identify and interpret key themes from educators' responses regarding their professional development needs in early childhood education (ECE). The analysis focuses on synthesizing the expressed needs into meaningful themes to inform targeted training programs.

Five major themes emerged from the analysis, reflecting the professional development priorities of ECE educators:

### *1. Pedagogical Strategies for Developmentally Appropriate Instruction*

Educators emphasized training in teaching pedagogies tailored to ECE learners, particularly those aligned with developmental stages. Responses highlighted the importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD) training to "deepen understanding of how young minds grow" and "tailor instruction to developmental stages." Peer teaching and creative teaching strategies were also valued for enhancing instructional effectiveness.

This theme underscores the need for pedagogies that align with the developmental needs of young learners. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of scaffolding instruction to match children's developmental zones, particularly relevant in ECE, where cognitive and social milestones vary widely. Training in developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), equips teachers to design activities that foster cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Peer teaching, mentioned by participants, aligns with collaborative learning models, which have been shown to enhance teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2007).

### *2. Classroom and Behavioral Management*

A recurring need was training in classroom management and handling challenging behaviors, with specific mentions of "handling students with bad behavior" and "classroom and behavioral management." Educators expressed a desire to build confidence in managing diverse classroom dynamics effectively.

Effective classroom management is critical in ECE, where young learners are developing self-regulation skills. Research by Jones and Jones (2016) highlights that proactive classroom management strategies, such as establishing clear routines and positive reinforcement, reduce disruptive behaviors and create conducive learning environments. Training in behavior management, particularly for addressing "bad behavior," aligns with evidence-based practices like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which promote proactive strategies to foster positive behavior (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Such training enhances teacher confidence and classroom harmony.

### *3. Supporting Diverse Learners and Special Needs*

Educators frequently cited the need for training to support children with special needs and foster early literacy in diverse classrooms. Statements like "strategies for fostering early literacy in diverse classrooms" and "how to support kids with special needs" reflect a focus on inclusivity.

Discussion: Inclusive education is a cornerstone of modern ECE, requiring teachers to address diverse learning needs, including those of children with disabilities or from varied cultural backgrounds. Research by Odom et al. (2011) emphasizes that professional development in inclusive practices enhances teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and adapt materials for diverse learners. Early literacy training is particularly critical, as foundational literacy skills predict long-term academic success (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Training in these areas equips educators to create equitable learning environments.

#### *4. Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices*

A specific need for "trauma-informed teaching practices" was highlighted, alongside training on "how to evaluate and comfort young minds," indicating a focus on addressing emotional and psychological needs in the classroom.

Trauma-informed practices are increasingly vital in ECE, as many young children experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that impact learning and behavior. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) outlines principles of trauma-informed care, including safety, trust, and empowerment, which help teachers create supportive environments. Training in these practices enables educators to recognize trauma symptoms and respond with empathy, fostering resilience in young learners (Brunzell et al., 2016).

#### *5. Integration of Technology in Teaching*

Educators expressed a strong interest in "utilization of modern technologies in teaching" and "digital tools for ECE," including ICT programs for daily activities, to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Discussion: Technology integration in ECE supports interactive and engaging learning experiences. Research by Plowman et al. (2010) suggests that appropriately designed digital tools can enhance young children's cognitive and social development when used thoughtfully. Training in ICT equips teachers to leverage tools such as interactive apps and digital storytelling platforms, aligning with 21st-century learning frameworks (ISTE, 2017). However, professional development must emphasize developmentally appropriate technology use to avoid over-reliance or misuse.

The five themes collectively highlight a multidimensional need for professional development that addresses both the practical and emotional aspects of ECE teaching. Educators seek to enhance their instructional skills through developmentally appropriate pedagogies, manage classroom dynamics effectively, support diverse and special-needs learners, address trauma with empathy, and integrate technology to enrich learning. The fundamental structure of these needs reflects a desire for holistic professional growth, enabling teachers to create inclusive, supportive, and engaging learning environments that cater to the unique developmental needs of young children.

#### *Implications for Professional Development*

These findings suggest that ECE professional development programs should be multifaceted, incorporating:

- Workshops on DAP and creative teaching strategies.
- Training in PBIS and trauma-informed care.
- Modules on inclusive practices and early literacy for diverse learners.
- Hands-on sessions for integrating digital tools in age-appropriate ways.

Such programs should be offered regularly, as indicated by the call for "monthly trainings and seminars," to ensure ongoing skill development. Additionally, as participants mentioned, parent-

teacher partnership workshops can complement these efforts by fostering collaborative support systems.

#### **4.4. Recommendations for Improving Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

This thematic analysis employs Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method to synthesize recommendations from ECE educators for improving early childhood education, particularly in the public sector. The analysis identifies key themes from the responses, focusing on resources, training, and systemic changes needed to enhance teaching and learning.

Five major themes emerged, reflecting educators' priorities for improving ECE:

##### *1. Enhanced Professional Development and Training*

Educators consistently emphasized the need for more seminars and training to improve teaching skills, particularly for new teachers. Responses included calls for "more seminars to learn techniques for early childhood education," "training for teachers," and "professional development" to address diverse student needs and integrate technology effectively.

Discussion: Ongoing professional development is critical for equipping ECE teachers with evidence-based strategies. Research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) shows that high-quality, sustained professional development enhances teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. For new educators, targeted training in ECE-specific pedagogies, such as those outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), can build confidence and competence. Training on technology integration, as mentioned, aligns with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2017) standards, which advocate for digital tools to support interactive learning.

##### *2. Adequate Resources and Materials*

Educators highlighted the need for "appropriate materials that cater to diverse learners," "enough learning materials," and "resources that we need in teaching." There was also a call for government funding to support teaching materials and classroom improvements.

Discussion: Access to high-quality, culturally relevant materials is essential for effective ECE. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) emphasize that developmentally appropriate materials support active learning and engagement in young children. In resource-constrained public sectors, inadequate materials can hinder instructional quality. Increased government funding, as suggested, aligns with studies showing that investment in ECE resources yields long-term academic and social benefits (Heckman, 2011).

Reference:

##### *3. Reduced Student-to-Teacher Ratio*

A prominent recommendation was to "reduce the student-to-teacher ratio" to enable personalized learning, better behavior management, and stronger teacher-student relationships, especially in large public-sector classrooms.

Discussion: Lower student-to-teacher ratios are associated with improved outcomes in ECE. Research by Chetty et al. (2011) demonstrates that smaller class sizes in early grades enhance individualized attention, leading to better academic and behavioral outcomes. This is particularly critical in ECE, where young children require close support to develop foundational skills. Reducing ratios can also alleviate teacher workload, allowing focus on instruction rather than coordination tasks, as noted in the responses.

##### *4. Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Curriculum*

Educators stressed the importance of a curriculum that is “age-appropriate,” “aligned to learners’ cultural background,” and focused on “foundational skills/holistic development,” including socio-emotional and values education.

Discussion: A developmentally appropriate curriculum, as defined by NAEYC (2020), ensures that learning experiences match children’s developmental stages and cultural contexts. Incorporating values education and socio-emotional learning (SEL) fosters holistic development, which is critical for lifelong learning (Durlak et al., 2011). Culturally responsive curricula also promote equity by valuing diverse backgrounds, as supported by Gay’s (2018) work on culturally responsive teaching.

### *5. Systemic Support and Infrastructure Improvements*

Recommendations included “full support from the community and administrators,” “better classroom facilities,” “more support from the government,” and “mental health support” for teachers. Reducing coordinatorship roles was also suggested to allow teachers to focus on instruction.

Discussion: Systemic support, including administrative backing and improved facilities, is essential for effective ECE. Research by Pianta et al. (2009) highlights that supportive school environments enhance teacher well-being and instructional quality. Mental health support for teachers, as mentioned, is critical given the emotional demands of ECE (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Reducing administrative burdens aligns with findings that excessive non-teaching tasks reduce instructional time and teacher efficacy (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The themes collectively reflect a call for a supportive, well-resourced ECE ecosystem that prioritizes teacher development, student-centered curricula, and manageable classroom conditions. Educators seek enhanced training to build skills, sufficient materials to engage diverse learners, smaller class sizes for personalized attention, culturally responsive curricula for holistic development, and systemic support to reduce burdens and improve well-being. The fundamental structure of these recommendations is a holistic approach to ECE improvement, addressing teacher, student, and systemic needs to foster optimal early learning environments.

### *Implications for Policy and Practice*

To address these themes, the following actions are recommended:

- Implement regular, targeted professional development: Offer seminars on ECE pedagogies, technology integration, and inclusive practices, tailored for both novice and experienced teachers.
- Increase funding for resources: Governments should allocate budgets for age-appropriate, culturally relevant materials and classroom improvements.
- Reduce student-to-teacher ratios: Policy changes should aim for smaller class sizes in public-sector ECE settings to enhance individualized instruction.
- Revise curricula: Develop curricula emphasizing holistic development, SEL, and cultural responsiveness, aligned with NAEYC standards.
- Enhance systemic support: Provide mental health resources, reduce administrative tasks, and foster community-administrator collaboration to support teachers.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings reveal that Filipino early childhood educators exhibit robust competencies, particularly in mentorship and the application of developmentally appropriate practices, which are foundational to fostering child-centered learning environments. However, significant challenges persist in behavior management and technology integration, areas critical for addressing diverse

classroom dynamics and modern educational demands. Resource availability shows strengths in instructional guides and health supplies, yet notable deficiencies in outdoor play equipment and manipulatives hinder holistic child development, particularly in domains such as physical activity and hands-on learning. These resource disparities are especially pronounced in public and disadvantaged settings, where limited access compromises instructional quality and negatively impacts student outcomes, including cognitive and social-emotional growth.

Systemic barriers exacerbate these challenges, with high workloads, inadequate institutional support, and persistent funding disparities constraining educators' ability to deliver high-quality education. For instance, excessive administrative tasks reduce time for pedagogical innovation, while uneven funding allocation limits resource procurement in underserved areas. Socio-cultural factors, particularly the level of parental involvement, play a pivotal role in program effectiveness; however, engagement varies widely, often reflecting socioeconomic and regional differences. This variability underscores the urgency for school-led initiatives to cultivate stronger family-educator partnerships, leveraging community resources to bridge support gaps. Additionally, the lack of access to relevant, context-specific professional development remains a critical impediment. Current training often fails to address regional linguistic diversity, cultural practices, and local educational priorities, highlighting the need for tailored programs that enhance educators' skills in behavior management and technology use.

To advance early childhood education in the Philippines, a multifaceted approach is essential. Prioritizing resource equity—especially in outdoor play equipment and manipulatives—can enrich learning experiences. Strengthening systemic support through reduced workloads, enhanced institutional backing, and equitable funding models will empower educators. Furthermore, developing localized professional development initiatives, informed by regional needs and cultural contexts, will equip educators to address behavior management and technology integration effectively. These strategies promise to foster more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments, ultimately supporting the holistic development of children across diverse Philippine communities.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of the study highlight that Filipino early childhood educators demonstrate strong foundational competencies, particularly in establishing nurturing classroom environments and providing effective instructional support. These competencies are essential for creating learning spaces that promote children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. However, despite these strengths, several deficiencies persist. Many educators face shortages in outdoor play equipment, manipulatives, and access to context-specific professional development programs. Deficits in behavior management and technology integration further limit teachers' ability to address diverse learning needs and adapt to modern educational challenges. These issues are compounded by systemic barriers such as excessive workloads, inadequate institutional support, and unequal distribution of educational resources across regions, which collectively hinder teacher growth and affect the quality of instruction and learner outcomes.

Viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), these challenges illustrate how the broader educational environment—including institutional structures, community engagement, and policy contexts—shapes teachers' capacity to perform effectively. Likewise, the OECD Professional Competence Framework (2021) underscores that teachers' effectiveness depends on a balanced integration of professional knowledge, practical skills, and ethical values, all of which require adequate systemic and institutional support. The deficiencies identified in this study suggest that the surrounding educational systems have not yet created the enabling conditions necessary for teachers to exercise and expand these competencies fully. From the perspective of Knowles' Adult

Learning Theory (1980), the lack of relevant and experiential professional development opportunities also limits teachers' potential for self-directed learning and reflective practice—key elements of sustained professional growth.

In response to these findings, several policy recommendations are proposed to address the systemic and professional gaps observed. The ECCD Council and Local Government Units should prioritize equitable resource allocation to improve physical infrastructure, ensuring that every early childhood education (ECE) center is adequately equipped with outdoor play materials, manipulatives, and digital learning tools. Such investments align with the *Early Years Act of 2013* and can support both cognitive and physical development among young learners. The Department of Education and Teacher Education Institutions are encouraged to institutionalize context-specific professional development programs based on adult learning principles. These programs should focus on behavior management, socio-emotional learning, and digital pedagogy while recognizing the cultural and linguistic diversity of Filipino classrooms. In addition, reducing teacher workloads and strengthening mentoring systems can empower educators to focus on instructional innovation and collaboration, as supported by the OECD's call for professional learning communities that foster collective competence.

The study also recommends that school administrators and community stakeholders enhance collaboration through family-school partnerships and community engagement initiatives. Such partnerships, supported by Bartolome, Mamat, and Masnan (2017), can mobilize local expertise and parental involvement to supplement limited resources and strengthen learning continuity at home. Collectively, these targeted actions contribute to improving the inclusivity, quality, and sustainability of early childhood education in the Philippines. For teachers, the recommendations promise improved access to resources and professional support; for administrators and policymakers, they offer data-driven insights for refining educational programs and policies; and for communities, they encourage active participation in children's holistic development. Ultimately, by linking empirical findings with established theoretical models, the study contributes to a coherent, multi-stakeholder framework that supports equitable, resilient, and high-quality early childhood education nationwide.

## 7. Suggestion

Based on the study's results, several recommendations can be made to improve early childhood education in the Philippines:

1. Provide targeted, context-specific training that addresses identified gaps such as behavior management and technology integration. This should be tailored to regional and cultural contexts to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
2. Increase investment in outdoor play equipment, manipulatives, and technological tools, especially in public and disadvantaged settings, to support holistic child development.
3. Reduce administrative burdens on teachers and improve classroom facilities to create a conducive learning environment. Additionally, offer mental health support for educators to address emotional well-being.
4. Develop school-led frameworks to facilitate stronger collaboration with families, considering socio-cultural dynamics that influence parental involvement.
5. Support ongoing studies that explore how professional development, resources, and teaching conditions interact within the Philippine socio-economic and cultural landscape, enabling more tailored interventions.

Implementing these strategies can help bridge existing gaps and promote a more equitable and effective early childhood education system in the Philippines.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** Mr. Alvarez was primarily responsible for the conceptualization, design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript writing. Ms. Galman contributed as the co-author, providing guidance in the formulation of the research framework, validating the methodology, and offering critical revisions to enhance the quality of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the paper.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors assert the absence of financial or personal affiliations that would unduly affect their work. All conclusions and analyses articulated in this work are exclusively derived from the data gathered and examined throughout the study process.

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**Ethical Approval.** The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethically authorized "Gaps and Gains: A Needs and Resource Assessment of Early Childhood Educators in Public School" safeguarding privacy and participant rights. Data will be securely stored with restricted access and anonymized or destroyed. Informed consent means participants know their rights, including the freedom to leave the study at any moment without penalty. Ethics have been taken to reduce risks, and the study follows privacy and dignity rules. This permission shows that the research will follow ethical norms.

**Data Availability Statement.** All data provided in this study were obtained and gathered at the University where the researchers were affiliated.

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