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# THREADS OF CARE: WEAVING FAMILY, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP AS ROOT OF TEACHER EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL CARE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT**
*Teacher parental care for early childhood development is a concern in education. In this study, I explored the lived experiences of the Early Childhood Teachers in doing parental care as they navigate the complexities of fostering child's growth. Guided by the principles of phenomenological design and using the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, I interviewed eight teachers as my study participants whom I selected through purposive sampling technique. Consequently, I found that the teachers' parental care for early childhood development is shaped by their family background, parenting-teaching integration, and family as foundation of empathy; school leadership and support, and teacher autonomy and resources; and community relevance in lesson delivery, socio-economic challenges and empathy, and teacher as community agent. Future research should quantify themes, explore predictive relationships, and compare contexts to enrich teacher development.*
**KEYWORDS:** *Threads of care, weaving family, school, and community relationship, root of teacher experiences, parental care for early childhood development*

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce my study. I specifically included in this chapter the problem and its scope, the significance of the study, the problem statement, the assumptions, the theoretical lens and the paradigm.

### The Problem and Its Setting

Global neglect of early childhood development (ECD) is alarming with huge implications for the child's present and future, both now and for national development. Despite the fact that early childhood development is the basis for lifelong health, education and productivity, millions of children worldwide receive little care and stimulation. ECD Countdown to 2030 country profiles in 2020 showed terrifying statistics of less than half of infants below six months who are exclusively breastfed, under-fives with stunted growth reported in at least a third of countries, and about half of countries, three-quarters of children aged 1-4 are physically violently disciplined (ECD Countdown to 2030, 2020). It is not only their physical needs that are being neglected but also the growth of their emotional and cognitive faculties with huge repercussions such as increased development of depression, anxiety and behavioral problems. Further, even where many governments have put in place some basic policies to protect children, its enforcement and the presence of effective preventive and intervention services are hardly felt, even in high income countries. It is high time for all stakeholders to address such inequalities and invest massively in ECD so that all children can thrive and realize their full potential.

Philippine ECE is stuck in the constant web of structural and systemic problems. The government schemes are intended to create access and improve quality, but not equally in all areas especially the most remote ones (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2018). Parental care teachers delivering early childhood development program are treated in a way that places them in a liminal space, to say the least, undervalued and with ill-defined roles, limited professional development opportunities, low remuneration, and heavy workloads (Llego, 2021). At stake is not only their very wellbeing but also the developmental outcomes of children under their care.

The early childhood development (ECD) situation in the Philippines as seen through parental care teachers' eyes has always been marked with challenges and serious defects as well as neglect. Parental care teachers as the key players in building the first years of a child are often working in under-resourced, undervalued, and unsupported circumstances (UNESCO, 2022).

In many Asian countries such as Indonesia, and Vietnam, and for many other countries for that matter, early childhood educators will often report being excluded from policy consultations and curriculum development despite their front line knowledge and skills in addressing children's needs (Rao & Sun, 2010).

As thus documented, such neglect leads to teacher burnout, low morale, and attrition which are factors that disrupt the continuity and effectiveness of early education (Bernardo and Mendoza, 2020). The lack of adequate support mechanisms for early childhood

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educators will directly affect the children's cognitive, emotional, and social foundations which are critical to lifelong learning and development. Despite these challenges, the voices and lived experiences of early childhood educators remain largely undocumented in the recent literature to date on early childhood education and care.

This study is the first of its kind in that it recognizes and describes the hidden work of parental care teachers in early childhood care and education in poor contexts. Through the documentation of their lived experiences and perceptions, these educators' realities are brought to the fore, thereby contributing to system-wide knowledge about early childhood care and education. In doing so, the study informs early childhood care and education policy making in relation to responsive and inclusive early childhood care and education systems. The study contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) through the promotion of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. The study also contributes to teacher training and professional development. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of child-caregiver relationships for positive early childhood care and education emotional and behavioral outcomes and informs training on effective teacher–parent relationships. Finally, the study informs early childhood care and education reforms and teacher–parent collaboration, as well as early childhood care and education practices and systems.

**Assumptions**

This study is guided by assumption questions in order to understand the lived experiences of parental care teachers in early childhood care and education especially in under-resourced and rural Philippine context. Ontologically, this study assumes that reality is personal and social experience, that is, the perspective of each teacher is influenced by their cultural and institutional context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemologically, knowledge is constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants and value statements of persons involved in ECE (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). Methodologically, this study is qualitative interpretivist approach through deep interviews and thematic analysis in order to understand the lived experiences of teachers who navigate their daily lives (Punzalan, 2020; PIDS, 2023). Theoretically, this study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in understanding how overlapping systems interact with the roles of teachers and children such as in the family, school, community, and institutional policies (Yamada & Castro, 2020). Axiologically, this study is based on values and beliefs on issues of equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness in recognition of teachers' experiences in order to enhance ECE delivery. Thus, this study is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) towards inclusive, equitable, and quality education.

**Statement of the Problem.**

In this study ,I explored the lived experiences of the Early Childhood Teachers in doing the parental care as they navigate the complexities of doing their job in teaching the child.

1. What are the experiences of the teachers with their family that influenced their teaching with the preschoolers?
2. What are the experiences of the teacher in the school that shape their ways in dealing early childhood education?
3. What are the experiences of the teachers that in the community that shape their dealing with early childhood education?

This study is framed through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which is a theory that describes human development as the product of reciprocal and simultaneous interactions among nested environmental systems (Yamada & Castro, 2020). This study is guided with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory but limited to the microsystem and mesosystem only. This study focused on the interactions of parental care teachers and children as the microsystem, and the relationships of Early Childhood teachers to other individuals and settings that surround them as the mesosystem such as parents.

Microsystem, the immediate environment, are those direct interactions that teachers have with children in the classroom such as emotional interactions, teaching style, and how they take care of the children. These interactions shape the child in terms of cognitive, social, and emotional development as teachers navigate their engagement to the early developmental milestones of children and learning.

The mesosystem includes links between different microsystems. In this study, we focused on the relationship between teachers and parents. The aim of this study was to understand the relationship among these two individuals, i.e., how the collaboration, communication, and shared responsibilities between these two figures affect the child and how parental care teachers face this relationship.

By confining the study to the microsystem and the mesosystem, we gained a clearer insight into the links and immediate and direct environmental influences on the development of young children. The results of this study may also help enhance teaching practices and parent--teacher relationships, and improve approaches to early education that lead to better learning for children

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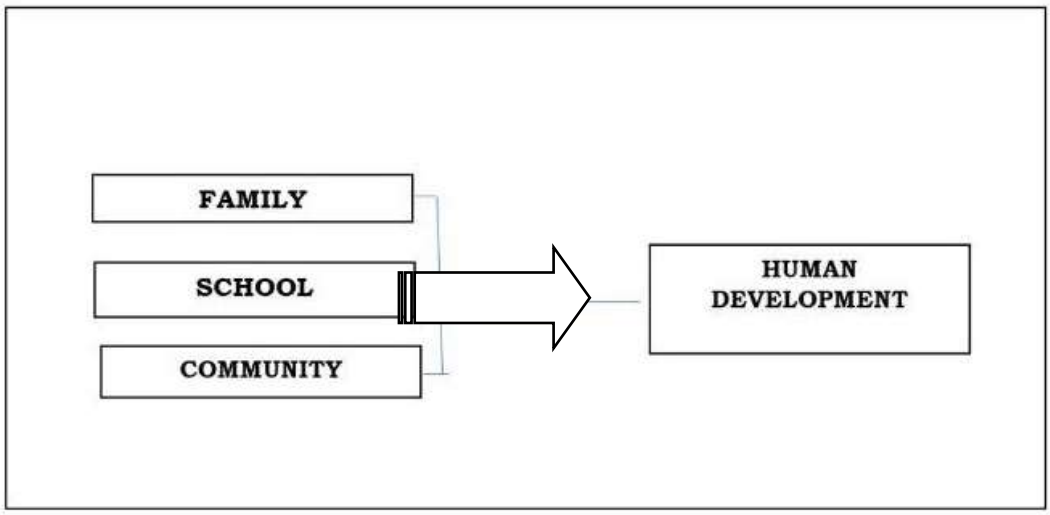



**Figure 1. Research Paradigm**

## CHAPTER 2

### Methodology

I presented the methodologies of my study in this chapter. I specifically presented the research design, locale, sampling technique, interview guide questions, data gathering procedure, data analysis, and the study's trustworthiness. These methods, provided me the opportunity to explore in the most appropriate way to generate the experiences of my study participants.

### Research Design

To ensure depth and relevance, participants were purposefully selected based on their direct experience in caring for and educating young children. The study involved preschool, daycare, and kindergarten teachers, along with home-based caregivers—all with a minimum of one to two years of experience. The goal was to include a broad spectrum of voices, so the sample also extended to coordinators, teacher assistants, special education teachers, and community-based educators. Participants came from both public and private settings and represented a mix of urban and rural locations, helping to capture a diverse range of experiences.

Recruitment took place through local early childhood centers, schools, and community programs, with a focus on individuals who were open to reflecting deeply on their personal experiences. Those who met the inclusion criteria went through a screening process, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Using semi-structured interviews, the study collected detailed personal stories, focusing on the challenges and strategies educators used in their roles. Interviews were recorded, transcribed word-for-word, and analyzed thematically. The study reached saturation with five participants—enough to ensure meaningful insights while maintaining a manageable scope for deep analysis.

### Research Instrument

Early childhood educators work closely with both children and families, giving them a unique perspective on child development. Their role involves not just teaching, but also building bridges between parents and the educational system. This study aimed to uncover how educators made sense of these responsibilities. Staying true to the principles of phenomenology, the research design emphasized capturing authentic reflections through a combination of tools—primarily interviews, along with optional focus groups, observations, and reflective journaling.

The instruments were crafted to encourage open, in-depth storytelling, allowing educators to express the meanings they attached to their roles. Instead of steering participants toward predefined ideas, the tools aimed to draw out naturally emerging themes, offering valuable contributions to both theory and everyday practice in early childhood education.

### Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I played a central role in facilitating the study. I created a supportive space where participants felt comfortable sharing their stories and perspectives. Active listening, empathy, and careful attention to participants' words helped me understand

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not just what they said, but how they felt. I also took responsibility for interpreting the data—identifying recurring themes and ensuring the findings genuinely reflected what participants shared.

Being aware of my own perspectives was critical. Through reflexivity, I constantly checked for any biases that might influence how I interpreted the data. My goal was to present the findings with honesty, clarity, and respect for the participants' voices.

**Ethical Considerations**

The aim of this study was to understand early childhood educators' lived experiences with parental involvement—how they viewed parents' roles and how these views influenced their teaching. With this focus on personal experience and reflection, ethical considerations were a priority. The study underwent ethics board review and approval, and all participants gave informed consent, fully understanding their rights and the nature of the research.

By using a phenomenological approach, the study offered a respectful space for participants to share meaningful insights. The hope is that these findings can inform better policies and practices that support educators and parents in working together to nurture young children's development.

**Data Gathering Procedure**

Before collecting data, I laid a strong foundation by preparing a detailed research plan and securing approval from the ethics review board. Informed consent forms were developed and shared with participants to ensure they knew what to expect and how their information would be handled. I also trained the research team on ethical interviewing practices and the importance of confidentiality.

Given the health risks at the time, interviews were conducted via video conferencing. Both I and the participants followed safety protocols, including wearing face masks and shields. Interviews were recorded using mobile phones to ensure accuracy and completeness.

After the interviews, I transcribed the recordings with attention to detail and began analyzing the data using qualitative methods. Throughout the process, I consulted with the observing psychologist for insights and feedback. The findings were then compiled into a comprehensive report that respected participant confidentiality and aimed to contribute meaningfully to the field of early childhood education.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2014), guided the process of making sense of the data. I began by reading the transcripts thoroughly to become immersed in the content. Key points related to the research questions were highlighted and coded to simplify the analysis.

From these codes, I developed overarching themes by grouping similar ideas and experiences. Rather than focusing on frequency, I prioritized how relevant and meaningful each theme was to the study's goals. I then reviewed each theme carefully to ensure it captured the essence of the participants' shared experiences.

To validate the findings, I checked the transcripts multiple times and invited participants to review the final interpretations. This process, known as member checking, helped ensure that the analysis was both accurate and respectful of participants' views (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017).

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the quality and rigor of the research, I followed four key principles of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

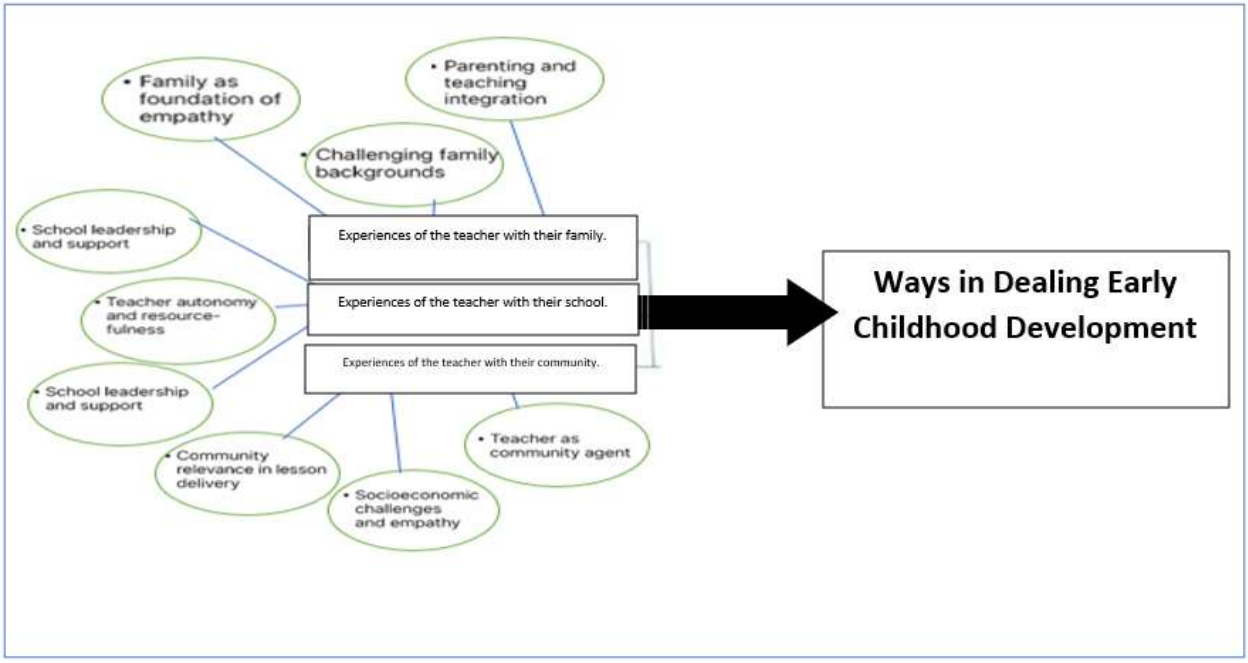
I used validated semi-structured interview questions and made sure every important detail was carefully recorded and analyzed. Participant feedback was also sought to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. To help others assess whether the findings apply to different settings, I provided rich, detailed descriptions of the participants and context. I documented every step of the research process clearly, making it possible for others to audit or replicate the study if needed. To ensure the findings were grounded in the data and not personal assumptions, I involved participants in verifying their transcripts and included an audit trail for full transparency (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Trochim, 2020).

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## CHAPTER 3

### Results

In this chapter I presents the results and key findings derived from the previous chapter, focusing on the themes that emerged from the interviews with parental care teachers. The chapter is organized into sections, each addressing a distinct theme in relation to relevant research and theoretical frameworks. The goal of this study is to understand the lived experiences of teachers in relation to how their community, school, and family influence their practices in early childhood education.




The diagram presents a thematic mapping of preschool teachers' lived experiences as they navigate early childhood development. It identifies three central domains of influence: the teacher's experiences with their family, with their school, and with their community. These domains contribute collectively to how teachers develop strategies and approaches in dealing with early childhood development. Each of these primary experiences is further broken down into sub-themes that illuminate how personal, institutional, and societal interactions shape the practices of educators.

**Experiences of the Teacher with their Family that Influence their Teaching with the Preschoolers**

This cluster underscores how familial interactions mold a teacher's empathy and integration of parenting styles into their teaching practice. One significant sub theme is the "Family as foundation of empathy," which highlights that teacher often draw on their familial bonds and values to nurture emotional intelligence in their classrooms. "Parenting and teaching integration" suggests a blurring of roles where experiences as parents influence how teachers manage young learners, and vice versa. "Challenging family backgrounds" represent struggles that teachers may face from within their own upbringing or current family dynamics, which, while difficult, often foster resilience and deepened sensitivity to children's diverse needs.

**On Family as Foundation of Empathy.** The first research question explored how family experiences influenced teaching practices. A dominant theme that emerged was the role of family in shaping empathy and caregiving behavior among preschool teachers.

Many participants, especially those who are also parents, expressed that their experiences within their own families deepened their emotional sensitivity towards students.

> *Usa pud ko ka inahan, mao nga makarelate ko sa mga ginikanan. Kung naay isumbong ang bata, dili dayon ko masuko. Kasabot ko nga basin naa pud problema sa ilang balay. Importante nga masabtan una ang sitwasyon. (T5 IDI 182–194)*
>
> *I'm a mother too, so I can relate to the parents. When a child reports something, I don't get angry right away. I understand that there might also be problems at home. It's important to understand the situation first.(T5 IDI 182–194)*

I deeply relate to what the teacher shared. Her words reflect compassion and understanding, qualities that are so important in dealing with young children. I admire how she chooses empathy over immediate judgment. It reminds me to always look beyond a child's behavior and consider what they might be going through at home. This approach not only supports the child but also builds a stronger

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connection between teachers and parents. It made me reflect on how powerful patience and understanding can be in shaping a child's well-being.

**On Challenging Family Backgrounds.** Teachers who experienced emotional hardship growing up also described teaching as an opportunity to provide what they themselves lacked.

> *Wala ko'y inahan nga nagpadako nako. Pero karon, gusto nako matagamtaman sa akong mga estudyante ang kalipay nga wala nako masinati. Mao nga pirme nako silang gakson ug estoryahan og hinay ug malumo.(T8 IDI 304–307)*
>
> *I didn't have a mother to raise me. But now, I want my students to experience the happiness I never had. That's why I always hug them and talk to them gently.(T8 IDI 304–307)*

Hearing this really touched me. It takes a strong and loving heart to turn one's own pain into something positive for others. I admire how this teacher didn't let the absence of a mother's love harden her heart, instead, she chose to give that love freely to her students. It made me reflect on the importance of emotional connection in teaching. Sometimes, a simple hug or a gentle word can make a big difference in a child's life. This reminds me that our past doesn't define us, but it can guide us to become more compassionate and intentional in how we care for others.

**On Parenting and Teaching Integration.** The integration of parental identity into teaching was another emergent theme. Participants who were parents brought strategies from home into the classroom, such as using patience, affection, and gentle discipline.

> *Wala ko'y inahan nga nagpadako nako. Pero karon, gusto nako nga matagamtaman sa akong mga estudyante ang kalipay nga wala nako masinati. Mao nga pirme nako silang gakson ug estoryahan og hinay ug malumo.(T8 IDI 304–307)*
>
> *I didn't have a mother to raise me. But now, I want my students to experience the happiness I never had. That's why I always hug them and talk to them gently.(T8 IDI 304–307)*

This reminds me how important it is to be patient and understanding with children, especially those who are very active or energetic. Instead of reacting with anger or scolding right away, asking "Why did you do that?" helps uncover the reason behind their behavior. This approach promotes communication and helps build trust between teacher and student. It makes me realize that every child deserves to be heard and understood before judgment is passed.

These insights demonstrate that teachers often merge their personal and professional identities in early childhood settings. Their personal narratives influence their values, relational style, and classroom strategies.

**Experiences of the Teacher with their School that Influence their Teaching with the Preschoolers**

The school environment emerges as a critical axis of influence in shaping teacher practice. "School leadership and support" is mentioned twice, emphasizing its centrality in empowering teachers to succeed. Supportive leadership helps teachers feel valued and provides the structural foundation necessary for innovation. "Teacher autonomy and resourcefulness" reveals how empowered teachers become creative problem-solvers, capable of designing meaningful learning experiences even with limited materials. These experiences culminate in a strengthened professional identity, allowing teachers to tailor educational delivery to suit the unique needs of early learners.

**On School Leadership and Support**. The second research question focused on the influence of the school environment. A recurring theme was the impact of leadership and administrative support on teacher morale and professional growth.

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*Ang among principal kay supportive kaayo. Dili siya magpugos unsay among buhaton pero maghatag siya og giya. Naa pud mi mga seminar, ug usahay magtan-aw pud mi sa lain nga klase aron makat-on (T8 IDI 404–409)*

*Our principal is really supportive. She doesn't force us on what to do but provides guidance. We have seminars, and there are also times when we observe other classes so we can learn. (T8 IDI 404–409)*

In my point of view, having a principal who supports rather than forces are truly uplifting. It makes me feel respected and trusted in my abilities. The guidance she provides through seminars and class observations makes me feel motivated and hopeful to improve. I appreciate being part of a learning environment where growth is encouraged, and this support inspires me to become a better teacher for my students.

**On Teacher Autonomy and Resourcefulness**. In contrast, teachers in under-resourced school expressed that a lack of leadership support forced them to rely on personal initiative and peer collaboration.

*Sa among eskwelahan, kami ra gyud ang nagtinabangay. Wala kaayo mi daghang suporta gikan sa taas, pero mangita mi ug mga paagi. Naggamit mi og YouTube, nag-download og mga materyales, ug buhaton namo tanan aron lang naay matudlo ang mga bata.(T1 IDI 90–96)*

*In our school, it's really just us helping each other. We don't get much support from the higher-ups, but we find ways. We use YouTube, download materials, and do everything we can just so our children have something. (T1 IDI 90–96)*

Hearing this made me feel a mix of admiration and concern. It is inspiring how the teachers support each other despite the lack of resources or help from higher authorities. Their creativity and determination, using YouTube and downloading materials, show their genuine commitment to providing quality learning for their students. At the same time, it also makes me reflect on how important it is for schools to receive adequate support so teachers won't have to struggle alone. Their dedication reminds me that passion and teamwork can overcome many challenges.

**On School Leadership and Support.** Collegiality and teamwork were also important. Teachers viewed fellow educators as their emotional and professional support system.

***Kung kapoy na kaayo ko, ang akong mga kauban sa trabaho ang akong kusog ug suporta. Nagtinabangay mi. Usahay, naay usa nga moingon, 'Okay ra, ako ang mopuli nimo ugma.' Mao na ang nagapadayon nako.****(T2 IDI 123–126)*

*When I'm really exhausted, my coworkers are my support system. We help each other. One of them would even say, 'It's okay, I'll take your place tomorrow.' That's what keeps me going. (T2 IDI 123–126)*

Some educators also noted the creativity required when school resources were lacking. From my perspective, this shows how important it is to have a supportive team, especially in challenging work environments. Knowing that my coworkers are there to back me up when I'm tired gives me comfort and strength to keep going. It reminds me that teaching isn't just about individual effort but about teamwork and caring for one another. This kind of support makes a big difference in motivated and staying feeling valued.

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*Nakatudlo ko sa usa ka pampublikong eskwelahan nga walay mga dulaan o libro. Gigamit namo ang mga recycle nga botelya, karton, ug mga bato—pero maayo gihapon ang resulta kay nakakat-on ang mga bata.(T6 IDI 280–284)*

*I once taught at a public school with no toys or books. We used recycled bottles,cardboard, and stones—but the results were still good because the children learned.(T6 IDI 280–284)*

This statement reminds me that teaching is not about having fancy materials but about creativity and dedication. Even without toys or books, the teacher was able to make learning happen using simple, recycled items. It makes me realize that what matters most is the effort and heart we put into helping children learn. This inspires me to be resourceful and patient, knowing that meaningful learning can happen anywhere with the right mindset. Despite disparities, the findings highlight the resilience and resourcefulness of preschool teachers committed to nurturing their learners.

**Experiences of the Teacher with their Community that Influence their Teaching with the Preschoolers**
The is the third pillar shaping a teacher's approach to early childhood education. "Community relevance in lesson delivery" reflects the importance of integrating local culture, practices, and language into teaching to make learning more relatable for children. "Socioeconomic challenges and empathy" suggest that community hardships such as poverty enable teachers to become more compassionate and responsive. The role of the "Teacher as community agent" positions educators not just as instructors, but as advocates and change-makers within their neighborhoods, bridging gaps between home and school for a more holistic developmental approach.

**On Teachers as Community Agents** . The third research question explored how the community environment shaped preschool teaching. Teachers emphasized the importance of community relevance in their lesson delivery. They made lessons more engaging by using familiar examples that reflected the students' everyday life.

***Sa among barangay, daghan sa mga ginikanan kay mga mag-uuma ug mga tindera sa dalan. Mao nga sa klase, gamiton nako ang mga pananglitan nga dali nila masabtan—sama sa pagtudlo og mga kolor, gamiton nako ang mga prutas nga kasagaran makita duol nila, sama sa saging, bayabas, ug manga.*** *(T1 IDI 18–28)*

*In our barangay, many of the parents are farmers and street vendors. That's why in class, I use examples that they can really understand—like when I teach colors, I use fruits that are commonly found around them, such as bananas, guavas, and mangoes.(T1 IDI 18–28)*

I Ifeel inspired and touched by how the teacher thoughtfully uses examples from the children's everyday lives. It shows genuine care and effort to make learning relatable and meaningful. Knowing that the teacher understands the community makes me feel hopeful that education can truly connect with and support the students in a way that respects their background.

**On Socioeconomic Challenges and Empathy**. Participants also described how socioeconomic challenges in their communities shaped their responses to student needs with more empathy and flexibility.

*Usahay, ang bata moanhi sa eskwelahan nga wala pa makakaon og pamahaw. Dili nako masugdan dayon ang leksyon. Kinahanglan una nako silang atimanon—hatagan og tubig o pan kung naa, kay unsaon man nila pag-focus kung gutomon sila. (T4 IDI 108–123)*

*Sometimes, a child comes to school without having had breakfast. I can't start the lesson right away. I need to take care of them first, give them water or bread if I have any, because how can they focus if they're hungry.(T4 IDI 108–123)*

This interview makes me feel compassionate and aware of the real struggles some children face before even starting their day at school. It reminds me that teaching is not only about delivering lessons but also about caring for the whole child, including their basic needs. I realize how important it is to be patient and understanding because hunger can deeply affect a child's ability to learn. This motivates me to always look beyond academics and consider the wellbeing of the students first.

**Community Relevance in the Lessons Delivery.** Teachers viewed themselves as more than educators—they felt like moral guides, mentors, and family members to their students and the community.

*Kaila ko sa mga ginikanan sa komunidad. Kabalo sila nga puwede sila mo duol nako kung naa silay problema. Murag dili lang ko maestro/mga maestra—murag igsoon o inahan pud ko sa mga bata ug sa ilang mga ginikanan…" (T7 IDI 201–206)*
*The parents in the community know me. They know they can approach me if they have a problem. It feels like I'm not just a teacher—I'm like a sister or even a mother to both the children and their parents.(T7 IDI 201–206)*

This makes me feel the deep connection and trust that can develop between teachers, students, and their families. I see how being more than just an instructor, being like a sister or mother figure, builds a strong support system. It reminds me that teaching is not

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only about academics but also about nurturing relationships and being approachable. I admire this kind of closeness because it creates a caring environment where everyone feels valued and supported. This deep community connection influenced how they disciplined students, structured routines, and integrated values education into everyday teaching.

The sub-themes across the three experiential domains, family, school, and community, reveal a shared emphasis on empathy, integration, and adaptability. From deriving emotional sensitivity from familial experiences to leveraging school support for pedagogical autonomy, and finally, to engaging with the community to promote inclusivity and relevance, each sub-theme enriches the teacher's toolkit for handling early childhood development. These insights affirm the multifaceted identity of preschool educators as nurturers, professionals, and civic participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### Discussion

I included in this chapter findings, future directions and implications of my study. My study revealed three major themes on the lived experiences of the teachers to family, school, and community, that shape teachers' ways of dealing with early childhood development. These also include subthemes such as empathy rooted in family experiences, resourcefulness and leadership in school environments, and culturally responsive, compassionate practices influenced by community contexts. The interconnected roles of community, school, and family in education underscore the need for a holistic approach that bridges all three domains.

The key findings under Theme 1, Experiences of the Teacher with their Family, reveal that teachers' family experiences significantly shape their approach to early childhood education. Whether through empathy developed from their own upbringing, the integration of parenting techniques into classroom management, or overcoming challenging family backgrounds, these lived experiences foster compassionate and responsive teaching. Teachers who are also parents apply home-based strategies such as patience, active listening, and gentle discipline in the classroom, while those who lacked emotional support in childhood consciously provide warmth and care to their students.

This aligns with recent literature emphasizing the impact of personal histories on teaching identities. Haim and Amdur (2021) suggested that educators' familial and emotional backgrounds contribute to their relational approaches in early education; while Jones and Brown (2020) stressed that emotional attunement, often rooted in personal caregiving experiences, enhances children's socio-emotional development. These findings highlight that teachers' personal narratives are not separate from their professional roles but serve as essential foundations in fostering empathy-driven and child-centered teaching practices.

The findings under Theme 2 affirms that the school environment plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' professional identity and instructional practices. Supportive leadership, characterized by guidance, professional development opportunities, and autonomy, empowers teachers to grow and innovate. Moreover, in under-resourced schools, teachers rely heavily on collaboration and personal resourcefulness, using online tools and improvised materials to sustain quality education. The support also emerges as a key buffer against burnout, reinforcing the importance of shared responsibility in teaching.

Theme 3 affirms the powerful role of community in shaping preschool teaching practices. Teachers actively incorporate community life into their lessons, making learning more contextual and meaningful for children. The use of locally familiar objects, languages, and examples fosters cultural relevance and strengthens learner engagement. Moreover, the presence of poverty and hardship in the community cultivates greater empathy among teachers, prompting them to address students' basic needs before instruction. They also assume broader roles as community agents, often acting as emotional anchors and bridges between home and school.

These findings support recent studies such as Ladson-Billings (2021), who highlighted the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in early education. Similarly, Gay (2020) stressed that connecting lessons to students' lived experiences enhances comprehension and identity formation. Empirical work by Alade et al. (2022) also showed that teachers in low-income communities who practice responsive caregiving significantly improve student wellbeing and resilience. Overall, the study affirms that community-based teaching fosters empathy, strengthens teacher–parent partnerships, and nurtures holistic development in young learners.

The study affirms that preschool teaching is not isolated within the classroom walls but is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of educators across three major spheres: family, school, and community. Each domain contributes uniquely to shaping teachers' professional identity and approaches to early childhood development. Teachers who draw from nurturing family environments bring empathy and emotional intelligence into their classrooms, creating safe and caring spaces for learners. Supportive school environments, on the other hand, equip them with the confidence and tools to be autonomous, innovative, and resourceful. Community involvement enriches their awareness of cultural and socioeconomic contexts, enabling them to make learning relevant, inclusive, and transformative.

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Furthermore, these experiences foster a holistic mindset in teachers, encouraging them not only to educate but also to advocate for their learners. In particular, the emphasis on sub-themes like community relevance, socioeconomic empathy, and teacher agency reflects a grounded, socially conscious approach to teaching. Teachers become more than just facilitators of knowledge; they emerge as bridge-builders who connect the home, school, and community to support each child's growth. Such comprehensive insight into early childhood development leads to more personalized, culturally responsive, and empathetic teaching strategies that truly address the developmental needs of young learners.

The findings confirm that early childhood education is rooted in the integration of family, community, and school. Teachers are not just knowledge providers but also caregivers, cultural mediators, and community advocates. This study aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, highlighting how a teacher's effectiveness is shaped by interconnected systems.

This study affirms that preschool teaching is a deeply human endeavor shaped by the personal, social, and institutional ecosystems surrounding teachers. By valuing the lived experiences of educators and grounding policies in empathy, cultural awareness, and systemic support, early childhood education can become more inclusive, responsive, and impactful.

**Implication for Practice**

findings of this study underscore the importance of incorporating teachers' personal narratives and lived experiences into professional development and teacher education programs. Given that educators' early family environments influence their emotional responsiveness and classroom management styles, teacher preparation should include reflective practices that help future educators explore and understand their own backgrounds. Training modules that emphasize self-awareness, empathy development, and emotional literacy may enable teachers to translate their familial experiences into compassionate, child-centered pedagogy. Embedding reflective journaling, narrative sharing, and socio-emotional learning components in teacher education curricula may prepare educators to engage more authentically and empathetically with young learners.

Additionally, schools may foster environments that recognize and support the diverse personal and professional experiences teachers bring to their roles. Administrators and educational leaders play a crucial role in promoting teacher agency, autonomy, and collaboration. Creating professional cultures grounded in mutual respect and support can enhance teacher resilience and reduce burnout, especially in under-resourced contexts. Mentorship programs, continuous professional development opportunities, and participatory leadership structures are essential strategies that can strengthen teachers' confidence, creativity, and commitment to early childhood development. These practices not only improve instructional quality but also contribute to a more stable and motivated teaching workforce.

The study also highlights the value of integrating community knowledge and cultural context into early childhood education. Teachers may benefit from training that equips them to incorporate local values, languages, and practices into their instructional approaches. Schools and teacher education institutions should therefore prioritize culturally responsive pedagogy and community-based learning experiences. This includes forging strong school-community partnerships, organizing immersion activities, and inviting community members to participate in curriculum co-creation. By doing so, educational practices may become more inclusive, relevant, and empowering for both teachers and learners, particularly in culturally diverse or socioeconomically disadvantaged settings.

Finally, policy makers and curriculum developers must recognize the holistic nature of teaching and support frameworks that bridge the home, school, and community. Policies should promote integrated support systems that encourage collaboration between teachers, families, and community stakeholders. For example, multi-agency support teams, family engagement initiatives, and community advocacy training can extend the reach and effectiveness of early childhood programs. When teachers are positioned as connectors and advocates within this ecosystem, their ability to nurture the developmental, emotional, and academic needs of children may significantly enhance. Ultimately, grounding educational practice in empathy, cultural responsiveness, and systemic awareness may lead to more inclusive, sustainable, and transformative early learning environments.

**Future Directions**

Building upon the findings and thematic framework of this study, future research can expand and validate the insights gained by exploring the predictive relationships between teachers' lived experiences and their approaches to early childhood development. The modified paradigm provides a foundation for transforming qualitative themes into measurable variables. A suggested direction is the use of quantitative methods, particularly multiple linear regression, to examine how experiences with family, school, and community influence teachers' ways of dealing with early childhood development. This may offer a broader empirical understanding of which contextual factors most significantly impact teacher behavior and practices.

One important step in advancing this research is the operationalization of the themes and emerging sub-themes into indicators for data collection. For instance, the theme "Family as foundation of empathy" may be reflected in items that assess emotional

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responsiveness, while "Community relevance in lesson delivery" may be translated into practices that integrate local culture and values into the curriculum. These indicators may then serve as variables in future survey tools or assessment scales. Such tools may allow for a more structured, large-scale examination of how these dimensions shape teaching strategies across different populations.

Future studies may also benefit from longitudinal research designs to observe how teachers' experiences and strategies evolve over time. The dynamic nature of family structures, school leadership, and community engagement means that a teacher's approach to early childhood development is likely to change. Tracking these changes can offer insights into professional growth, resilience, and the sustainability of teaching practices. Furthermore, longitudinal studies may help establish causality, rather than mere correlation, between personal-contextual factors and teaching approaches.

Another promising direction is conducting comparative studies across different cultural, socioeconomic, or regional contexts. Teachers in urban, rural, or marginalized communities may face distinct challenges and supports that influence their educational practices. By comparing findings across diverse groups, future researchers may distinguish between universal patterns and context-specific dynamics. These insights may guide the development of localized interventions and teacher support systems that are responsive to unique community needs.

Finally, the interdisciplinary potential of this research should be considered. Future directions may involve collaboration across education, psychology, and social sciences to build a more holistic understanding of how teacher identity and practice are shaped. Teacher training programs, curriculum planners, and educational leaders may all benefit from research that integrates reflective, lived experience with pedagogical strategy. By grounding future studies in the lived realities of educators, as captured by the present study's paradigm, researchers and practitioners alike can co-construct more responsive, empathetic, and effective early childhood education environments.