



EVALUATING THE GAWAD KALINGA SIBOL SCHOOL EXTENSION PROJECT: BRIDGING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GAPS IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Daryl Ann V. Cuivillas

0009-0006-6333-8502

cuivillas@jrmsu.edu.ph

Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Zamboanga del Norte

Abstract

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project, implemented by Jose Rizal Memorial State University-Dipolog Campus, provides quality early childhood education (ECE) to underserved preschoolers in Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City. This study evaluates the project's performance and impact over 12 years (2012–2024), focusing on promotion and retention rates, parental evaluations, and alignment with national and international educational goals. The descriptive evaluative design incorporated demographic analysis, performance metrics, and structured parental feedback. Data from 366 preschoolers revealed a promotion rate of 78.42% and retention rate of 21.58%, with parental evaluations consistently rating the project as highly effective (4.69 out of 5). The curriculum, centered on the 5Rs—Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, aRts, and Respect along with movements, and basic science—fostered significant improvements in literacy, numeracy, social skills, and basic scientific knowledge. Challenges, such as infrastructure limitations and retention rates linked to developmental readiness, were identified, offering insights for improvement. The study concludes that the project aligns with Republic Act No. 10410 and SDG 4, bridging gaps in ECE access and quality for marginalized communities. Recommendations include targeted learner interventions, infrastructure enhancements, and curriculum improvements to sustain and scale the program's impact.

Keywords: *Early childhood education, Gawad Kalinga, 5Rs curriculum, educational access, marginalized communities, SDG 4*



Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is universally recognized as a cornerstone for lifelong learning, cognitive development, and social and emotional growth. The 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates the State to provide quality education for all citizens, emphasizing the formative years as a critical period for holistic development (The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d.). This commitment is further underscored by Republic Act No. 10410, the Early Years Act of 2013, which institutionalizes the provision of comprehensive ECE services for children aged 0–8. This legislative framework aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, laying the groundwork for effective and impactful ECE programs (UNICEF Philippines, n.d.; NEDA, 2022).

Despite these frameworks, challenges persist in achieving equitable access to quality ECE, particularly in underserved and marginalized communities. Studies indicate that fewer than half of Filipino children aged 3–4 years are enrolled in preschool programs, highlighting significant gaps in access and participation (Chi, 2024). Factors contributing to this disparity include limited availability of daycare centers, insufficient qualified educators, and a lack of parental awareness regarding the benefits of early schooling (PIDS, 2023). Such conditions disproportionately affect rural areas, where resource constraints and logistical challenges hinder the implementation of robust ECE services (UNICEF & DepEd, 2021).

Gender disparities further compound these issues. Research by Alegado et al. (2020) reveals that girls in the Philippines tend to perform better than boys in early childhood education, a trend attributed to differences in engagement and developmental readiness. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable learning outcomes across genders.

Effective curriculum design is pivotal in addressing these challenges. Evidence-based programs, such as those analyzed by Dayalo (2024) and West Visayas State University (2024), demonstrate significant improvements in literacy and numeracy skills when interactive and culturally relevant teaching methods are employed. These findings emphasize the importance of localized and context-sensitive approaches to curriculum development, particularly in community-driven programs.

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project serves as a model for such initiatives. Since 2012, it has provided quality education to 366 preschoolers in Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City, addressing gaps in access and equity through a collaborative, community-focused approach. The project employs the 5Rs curriculum—Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, aRts, and Respect along with movements, and basic science—designed to foster holistic child development while incorporating parental and community engagement. Parental evaluations of the project consistently rate it as highly effective, reflecting significant improvements in children's literacy, numeracy, and social skills (Dayalo, 2024).

As the Philippines continues its efforts to meet SDG 4 targets and the mandates of Republic Act No. 10410, community-driven programs like the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project demonstrate their potential to bridge gaps in early childhood education. By addressing challenges in accessibility, curriculum quality, and community engagement, such initiatives contribute to the national goal of providing inclusive and equitable education for all Filipino children. This study evaluates the impact of the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project, situating its outcomes within the broader context of national and international efforts to improve early childhood education.

Methods

This study employed a descriptive evaluative research design to assess the performance and impact of the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project. The design is appropriate for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data related to the project's promotion and retention rates, as well as parental evaluations of its effectiveness. By integrating demographic analysis, performance metrics, and stakeholder feedback, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of the initiative's impact over its 12-year implementation.

The study was conducted in Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City, a marginalized community served by the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project. The project catered to preschool-aged children (3–5 years old) from underserved households, with a total of 366 enrollees from School Year (SY) 2012–2013 to SY 2023–2024. The study also involved parents of these children and key stakeholders, including the Barangay Council of Sicayab Bucana, the City Social Welfare Development Office of Dapitan City, and faculty members of the College of Teacher Education (CTED) at Jose Rizal Memorial State University (JRMSU)–Dipolog Campus.

Data for this study were gathered mainly from the Unpublished Terminal Reports of the project crafted by the implementers since SY 2012–2013 to SY 2023–2024 kept in the Community Extension Unit Head Office of JRMSU-Dipolog, ensuring a rigorous approach to capturing relevant information.

1. Demographic and Performance Data

A. Demographic data were compiled from annual enrollment records, capturing details such as age, gender, and enrollment trends over the 12-year period.

B. Performance data, including promotion and retention rates, were drawn from terminal reports prepared annually by the CTED faculty implementers and approved by the JRMSU Council of Research Development and Extension (CORDEX).

1. Parental Evaluation

- Structured evaluation tools, developed and validated by the Vice President for Research Development and Extension (VPRDE) Office, were used to assess parental perceptions of the project.



- Parameters evaluated included the project's objectives, facilitators, time management, school materials, and children's learning progress in reading, writing, arithmetic, arts, respect, and basic science.
 - Data were collected at the end of each school year, starting in SY 2016–2017.
2. Qualitative Insights
- Feedback from parents, collected through open-ended survey questions, provided qualitative insights into areas for improvement.
 - Interviews with stakeholders, including the Barangay Council and the City Social Welfare Development Officer, supplemented the quantitative data.

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project was implemented using a structured approach that ensured collaboration among stakeholders and alignment with the project's objectives. The implementation was divided into three phases:

1. Pre-Implementation Activities
- Terminal reports from the previous school year were reviewed and presented to the CORDEx for evaluation.
 - Consultations were conducted with parents, barangay officials, and the City Social Welfare Development Office to finalize roles and responsibilities, as formalized in Memorandums of Agreement.
 - Pre-enrollment activities, including flyer distribution and parent-teacher consultations, identified eligible preschoolers for enrollment.
2. Implementation Activities
- A dedicated teacher from the extension office conducted daily classes, supported by CTED faculty members who provided weekly or monthly teaching sessions.
 - Nutritional support, provided by the City Social Welfare Development Office and parents, complemented educational activities, ensuring a holistic approach to child development.
 - Classes were monitored weekly by the project leader, with additional support from CTED students during community engagement activities.
3. Post-Implementation Activities
- Terminal reports were crafted and presented to CORDEx, documenting performance metrics and stakeholder evaluations.
 - Year-end celebrations, including culmination programs, highlighted the achievements of the children and acknowledged the contributions of stakeholders.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, to summarize enrollment trends, promotion and retention rates, and parental evaluations. Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses and interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and provide contextual depth to the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating parents and stakeholders. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by coding personal information and securely storing data. The study was reviewed and approved by the JRMSU Institutional Research Ethics Committee. By employing a robust methodology that integrates diverse data sources and analytical techniques, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project's impact on early childhood education in Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Beneficiaries

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project served a total of 366 preschool-aged children from SY 2012–2013 to SY 2023–2024. The demographic data revealed that 193 children (52.73%) were girls, while 173 (47.27%) were boys, indicating a slightly higher female enrollment. This trend aligns with national data indicating that girls are more likely to enroll and persist in early childhood education than boys (Alegado et al., 2020). The higher number of girls enrolled in the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project suggests a need to find better ways to encourage and support boys in early childhood education, ensuring that all children, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to learn and grow.

In terms of age distribution, 72.97% of the enrollees were 4-year-olds, 25.95% were 3-year-olds, and 18.11% were 5-year-olds. This reflects the community's preference for preschool education as a preparatory stage for kindergarten, aligning with Republic Act No. 10157, which mandates kindergarten education for children aged 5. The fact that most enrollees are 4-year-olds shows that the community values preschool as an important step before kindergarten, highlighting the need for programs that support this approach in line with Republic Act No. 10157.

Enrollment trends showed fluctuations across the years, with the highest enrollment (50 children) recorded in SY 2013–2014 and the lowest (22 children) in SY 2012–2013 and SY 2021–2022. The decline in enrollment during SY 2021–2022 coincides with the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the broader impact of global crises on early childhood education (NEDA, 2022). This implies, that the enrollment trends, with peaks and valleys over the years—especially the drop during SY 2021–2022 due to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—underscore how global crises can significantly affect early childhood education, reminding us of the need for supportive measures during challenging times.

Performance of the Project in Terms of Promotion and Retention Rates

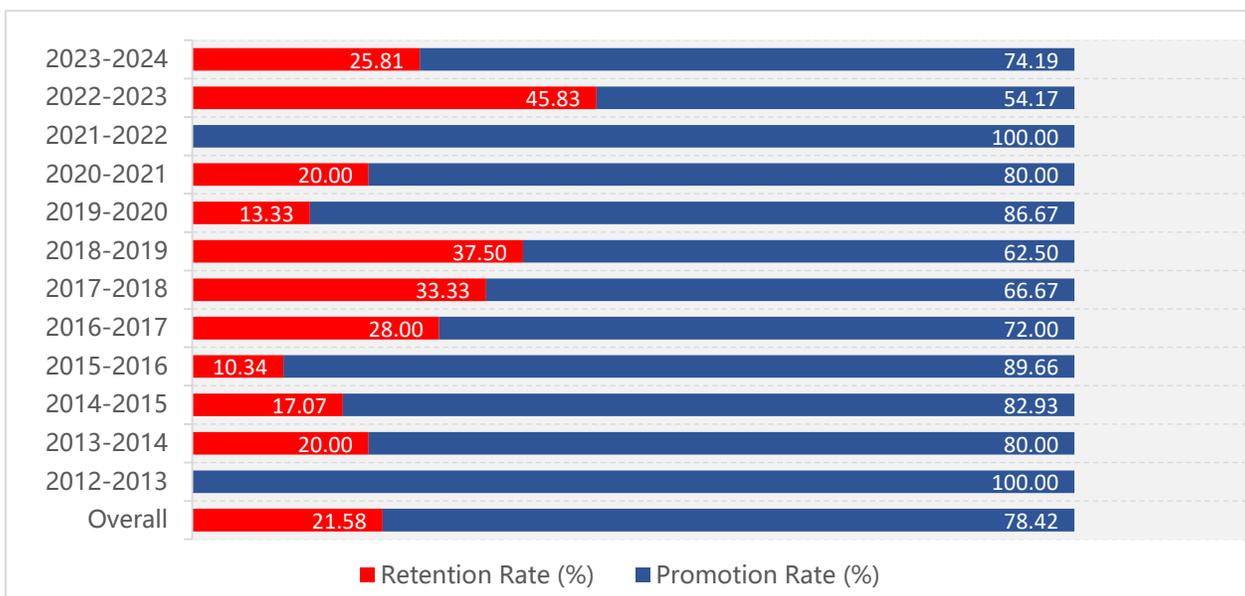
The program achieved an overall promotion rate of 78.42%, with 287 children

advancing to kindergarten out of 366 total enrollment (Figure 1). Additionally, the overall retention rate was 21.58% which is primarily due to developmental readiness rather than program deficiencies. The program recorded its highest promotion rate (100%) in SY 2012–2013 and SY 2021–2022, years with lower enrollment numbers that allowed for a favorable teacher-to-student ratio and enhanced individual attention.

Retention rates peaked at 45.83% in SY 2022–2023, possibly due to post-pandemic disruptions affecting children's readiness and engagement. This underscores the need for targeted interventions to support children’s developmental milestones, such as differentiated instructional strategies and additional learning resources (UNICEF & DepEd, 2021). These results imply that the program's promotion rate of 78.42% reflects successful advancement to kindergarten, but the lower retention rate of 21.58%—especially peaking at 45.83% in SY 2022–2023 due to post-pandemic challenges—highlights the importance of providing targeted support to help children meet their developmental milestones, emphasizing the need for tailored instructional strategies and extra learning resources.

Figure 1

The Promotion and Retention Rates of the Child Beneficiaries



Impact of the Project Based on Parental Evaluation

Parental feedback consistently rated the project as "Very Much Effective," with an average rating of 4.69 out of 5 across key parameters such as objectives, facilitators, time management, and materials. Over the years, parents noted significant improvements in their children’s learning, particularly in reading, writing, arithmetic, and arts. In recent evaluations, the program received an "Outstanding" rating (94%) for its impact on children’s development. Parents also provided constructive feedback, highlighting areas

for improvement, such as upgrading classroom facilities, pathways, and restrooms. These recommendations reflect the community's commitment to enhancing the program's quality and sustainability. Parental feedback showing the program as "Very Much Effective" underscores its positive impact on children's learning (Table 1), while their constructive suggestions for improving classroom facilities and amenities reflect a strong community commitment to further enhancing the program's quality and sustainability.

Table 1

Parental Evaluation on the Project

School Year	Rating	Interpretation
2016-2017	4.69	Very Much Effective
2017-2018	4.71	Very Much Effective
2018-2019	4.59	Very Much Effective
2019-2020	4.61	Very Much Effective
2020-2021	4.40	Very Much Effective
2021-2022	4.72	Very Much Effective
2022-2023	4.86	Very Much Effective
2023-2024	4.93	Very Much Effective
Overall Rating	4.69	Very Much Effective

Legend

- 4.20 - 5.00 Very Much Effective
- 3.40 - 4.19 Much Effective
- 2.60 - 3.39 Effective
- 1.80 - 2.59 Less Effective
- 1.00 - 1.79 Not effective

Curriculum Effectiveness

Parental evaluation results showed that there are significant improvements in their children's learning (Overall Rating=Outstanding). Though in SY 2021-2022, they rated the project's impact as "Very Satisfactory" (88%) however, this rating improved to "Outstanding" with scores of 96% and 97%, respectively, for SY 2022-2023 and SY 2023-2024 (Table 2).

These evaluation results highlight the significant impact of the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project on the learning and development of the children beneficiaries. The consistent improvement in ratings over the years suggested that the program had effectively addressed the educational needs of the children, particularly in key areas such as literacy, numeracy, social skills, and basic science.

Moreover, the overall "Outstanding" rating (94%) underscores the parents' strong satisfaction with the project's outcomes. This aligns with the objectives outlined in Republic Act No. 10410, also known as the Early Years Act of 2013, which emphasizes that early childhood education is a critical foundation for holistic child development. By investing in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), the project not only contributes to the cognitive growth of the children but also supports their physical, emotional, and social well-being, as elucidated by the Philippine government laws (Philippines, 2024; Republic Act No. 10410, n.d.).

The 5Rs curriculum—Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, aRts, and Respect along with movements and basic science—proved effective in addressing the developmental needs of preschoolers. The curriculum's integration of movement activities and basic science further enriched the learning experience. Similar to findings by Dayalo (2024) and West Visayas State University (2024), the project's curriculum emphasized interactive and culturally relevant teaching methods, resulting in notable gains in literacy and numeracy.

Table 2

Parental Evaluation on the Impact of the Project to Children's Learning

School Year	Rating (%)	Description
2021-2022	88%	Very Satisfactory
2022-2023	96%	Outstanding
2023-2024	97%	Outstanding
Overall Rating	94%	Outstanding

Legend

- 90 - 100 Outstanding
- 85 - 89 Very Satisfactory
- 80 - 84 Satisfactory
- 75 - 79 Fairly Satisfactory
- Below 75 Poor

Alignment with National and International Goals

The Needs Assessment Survey conducted by the College of Teacher Education at JRMSU-Dipolog in 2012 (*Unpublished Terminal Report*, 2012) revealed a significant gap in early childhood education resources within Barangay Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City. At that time, only one daycare center was operational, which was insufficient to accommodate the increasing number of pre-kindergarteners in the area. Additionally, the City Social Welfare Development Officer (CSWDO) confirmed that many preschool teachers lacked formal qualifications in education and were receiving minimal salaries, further impacting the quality of early childhood education available.

By establishing the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project in this marginalized barangay, the initiative aligns with critical national policies, such as Republic Act No. 10410, as well as international goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The project emphasizes equitable access to and high quality of education, effectively addressing the persistent gaps in early childhood education faced by marginalized communities.

The program’s collaborative model—which involves local government units (LGUs), the Dapitan City Social Welfare Development Office, and community stakeholders—exemplifies best practices in delivering localized educational services (PIDS, 2023). This partnership is instrumental in enhancing educational opportunities and fostering community engagement in early childhood development.

Furthermore, as highlighted by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the Department of Education (2021), early childhood education serves as a crucial foundation for learning and is a strong predictor of future academic success. Research indicates that children who participate in early childhood education (ECE) are significantly more likely to enroll in primary school at the official starting age of 6 in the Philippines compared to their peers who do not access ECE. By addressing these critical needs, the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project not only aims to fulfill immediate educational demands but also contributes to the long-term educational trajectory and overall development of children in the community.

1. Contextualize the project's outcomes within the framework of national and international ECE goals, including SDG 4.

2. Provide actionable insights for sustaining and scaling community-driven ECE initiatives in underserved areas.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite the significant successes of the Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project, several challenges must be addressed to ensure sustainability and scalability. The retention rate of preschoolers indicates an urgent need for enhanced support systems, including the development of individualized learning plans tailored to meet diverse learning needs and comprehensive teacher training programs to improve instructional effectiveness. Furthermore, infrastructure improvements, as highlighted by parental feedback, are essential for creating a conducive learning environment that can sustain the program’s positive impact.

Additionally, addressing gender disparities in participation and performance remains a critical area for intervention. Targeted strategies, such as community outreach initiatives to engage boys and programs that promote readiness for formal schooling, are necessary to ensure that all children benefit equitably from early childhood education (Alegado et al., 2020).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project serves as a replicable model for community-driven early childhood education programs, with its strong alignment to policy frameworks and responsiveness to local needs. To effectively scale the program to other underserved areas, it is imperative to foster sustained collaboration among stakeholders, including local government units, community organizations, and educational institutions. Increased funding will be crucial for expanding resources, while ongoing evaluation processes can help ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to community dynamics.

Conclusions

The Gawad Kalinga Sibol School Extension Project has successfully demonstrated its impact on early childhood education in Sicayab Bucana, Dapitan City. The project effectively met its objectives, as evidenced by the following:

1. **Promotion and Retention Rates:** The project achieved a promotion rate of 78.42%, demonstrating its capacity to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten. Retention rates, primarily linked to developmental readiness, suggest the need for targeted support but do not detract from the overall effectiveness of the program.
2. **Parental Evaluations:** Consistently high ratings from parents (average 4.69 out of 5) confirmed the project's perceived effectiveness. Feedback highlighted improvements in children's literacy, numeracy, social skills, and basic science knowledge (Outstanding) validating the project's focus on holistic child development.
3. **Alignment with National and International Goals:** The project aligns with Republic Act No. 10410 and SDG 4, addressing gaps in access and quality in early childhood education for marginalized communities.
4. **Provide actionable insights for sustaining and scaling community-driven ECE initiatives in underserved areas.** The retention rate of preschoolers indicates an urgent need for enhanced support systems, including the development of individualized learning plans tailored to meet diverse learning needs and comprehensive teacher training programs to improve instructional effectiveness. Furthermore, infrastructure improvements, as highlighted by parental feedback, are essential for creating a conducive learning environment that can sustain the program's positive impact.

Despite these successes, challenges such as retention rates and infrastructure limitations were identified, underscoring opportunities for improvement. The study confirms that the project has met its objectives by providing quality early childhood education, engaging stakeholders effectively, and contributing to broader educational goals.

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Disclosure: Use of AI Tools

In compliance with Threshold's guidelines for the ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automated tools in academic research, the authors disclose the use of OpenAI's ChatGPT for enhancing the quality and clarity of the manuscript. ChatGPT was utilized to assist in refining the language, structure, and formatting of the text, ensuring a high level of academic rigor and coherence. The authors confirm that all data analysis, critical interpretations, and conclusions presented in this manuscript were conducted independently by the research team. The AI tool was employed strictly for editorial assistance and did not influence the scientific content or ethical considerations of the study. All intellectual contributions from the AI tool are in accordance with the authors' original intentions and have been reviewed and approved by all co-authors. The use of ChatGPT complies with Threshold's ethical standards and guidelines for transparent reporting of AI involvement in research. The authors remain fully responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content presented in this paper.

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