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From Cradle to Classroom:

A Four-part Policy Brief Series on Strengthening Responsive Early Childhood Teacher Education in the Philippines

What Are TEIs Actually Teaching? Examining the Policies, Programs, and Practices Shaping Early Childhood Education in Philippine Higher Education

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(Source: AI-generated image created using ChatGPT (OpenAI), June 2026)

This brief examines how Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the Philippines implement their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) programs in terms of curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, assessment practices, and quality improvement mechanisms. Drawing on qualitative data from 10 TEIs across Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, it reveals that play-based learning and developmentally appropriate practice are genuinely embedded in program delivery, not merely aspirational statements. Cultural contextualization is an emerging institutional priority, though it currently depends on individual faculty initiative rather than systematic policy guidance. Quality assurance mechanisms exist but remain compliance-oriented rather than improvement-driven, and research capacity is unevenly distributed across institutions. The brief argues that strengthening BECED programs requires investing in the conditions that make good teaching possible, such as culturally grounded materials, research-informed faculty, and learning environments that model the pedagogies pre-service teachers are trained to use.

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Introduction

What does it look like, on the ground, for a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) to prepare a future early childhood educator? What is taught, how is it taught, how is it assessed, and how is the program continuously improved? These practical questions lie at the heart of the first research question in the study *Enhancing Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences in Early Childhood Education (ECE): A Policy-Driven Approach to Effective Program Development and Implementation (Phase 1)*: What ECE policies, programs, and practices of TEIs are based on current and emerging teaching and learning delivery trends?

Answering this question matters because policy frameworks only have meaning insofar as they shape what actually happens inside institutions. The Philippines has invested significantly in building a national policy architecture for early childhood care and development — from RA 8980 to RA 10410, from CHED CMO No. 76 to the National Early Learning Framework — but policy documents do not teach children. Teachers do. And the quality of teachers is shaped, above all, by the quality of their preparation. This brief looks inside that preparation process, drawing on qualitative data from faculty, administrators, pre-service teachers, and cooperating teachers across 10 TEIs in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, to document what TEIs are doing well, what is still evolving, and what demands urgent reform.

Key Issues

1. The tension between standardization and contextualization. National policy frameworks set uniform expectations for BECED programs across all TEIs, regardless of regional context, resource availability, or community need. Yet the children that BECED graduates will teach are not uniform. They speak different mother tongues, come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and live in communities ranging from urban Metro Manila to remote Mindanao municipalities. TEIs are expected to produce graduates who are both nationally standardized and locally responsive, and navigating that tension is one of the defining challenges of BECED program implementation.

2. The evolving demands of the early childhood workforce. The landscape of early childhood education is not static. The rise of digital technologies, the integration of artificial intelligence into learning environments, the growing emphasis on social and emotional learning, and the heightened awareness of mental health in early childhood. All of these create demands on BECED programs that existing curriculum frameworks, written in 2017, did not fully anticipate. TEIs are attempting to respond to these emerging demands while maintaining fidelity

to established national standards, often without additional resources or policy guidance to support that evolution.

3. Assessment and research are often undervalued as tools for program improvement. Quality assurance and research are formally recognized as components of program excellence, but in practice they vary significantly across TEIs in depth, rigor, and utilization. Feedback mechanisms exist, like exit conferences, graduate tracer studies, and employer FGDs, but findings do not always translate systematically into curriculum revisions or faculty development plans. The loop between evidence and improvement is often incomplete.

Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

A. Key Findings

1. Play-based and child-centered pedagogies are genuinely embedded and not merely rhetorical. Across sampled TEIs, play-based learning is not treated as an add-on or an aspiration. It is structurally embedded in the BECED curriculum through dedicated courses, and it permeates the pedagogical orientation of faculty. Pre-service teachers articulate a sophisticated understanding of why play matters developmentally: "Children learn best when they are enjoying while learning something." Faculty confirm that their programs are "very much play-based, which I think is very much also aligned with ECCD principles." This pedagogical commitment is one of the genuine strengths of Philippine BECED programs and reflects successful uptake of global best practice in early childhood education.

2. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is taught but not always modeled. DAP is a cornerstone of the BECED curriculum and is well understood by pre-service teachers at the conceptual level, "DAP is about measuring if activities are appropriate for the age of the child." However, the modeling of DAP in actual TEI classrooms is inconsistent. When TEI spaces are not designed for early childhood learners—when furniture is adult-sized, when there are no learning centers, when materials are limited—the implicit message to pre-service teachers is that DAP is an ideal for children's classrooms but not a reality in their own learning environment. This inconsistency between what is taught and how it is taught matters for professional formation.

3. Cultural contextualization is an emerging priority that needs structural support. TEIs are increasingly aware that effective early childhood education in the Philippines cannot simply import Western pedagogical frameworks. Mother tongue-based instruction, culturally familiar content, and locally grounded examples are valued by faculty, students, and cooperating teachers alike. One cooperating teacher stated directly: "It would be better if we would start with a standpoint that is really in the Philippine context." This orientation is



promising but currently depends on individual faculty initiative rather than systematic curriculum policy. There is no national guidance on how cultural contextualization should be operationalized within the BECED curriculum across diverse regional contexts.

4. Interdisciplinary content — health, nutrition, and SEL — is integrated but is assessed unevenly. BECED programs embed health, nutrition, and social-emotional learning (SEL) as cross-cutting dimensions of holistic child development, consistent with the NELF's comprehensive developmental framework. Pre-service teachers learn about proper nutrition, food safety, physical health, and emotional well-being as dimensions of their professional responsibility. However, assessment of these interdisciplinary competencies is less consistent than assessment of core pedagogical skills. Performance-based assessment tools are used, but their alignment with the ECCD Checklist and other developmental assessment instruments varies across TEIs.

5. Quality assurance is practiced but not yet data-driven in most TEIs. Regular curriculum audits, faculty evaluations, and feedback from cooperating teachers are standard practices across most sampled TEIs. Some institutions conduct alumni tracer studies and employer FGDs, which provide valuable longitudinal evidence of program effectiveness. However, the translation of these data into concrete program improvements—revised syllabi, updated course offerings, and new faculty development priorities—is not systematic. Quality assurance tends to be compliance-oriented rather than improvement-oriented in many institutions.

6. Research is valued as a principle but underinvested as a practice. Faculty and administrators consistently affirm the importance of research for program improvement. Some TEIs have developed new training modules based on research findings. But access to current ECE research, particularly research grounded in the Philippine context, is limited. Many faculty report relying primarily on their own initiative to search for updates on ECCD developments. The absence of a structured, funded research agenda for BECED program improvement means that innovation tends to be isolated and idiosyncratic rather than systemic.

B. Key Policy Recommendations

1. Develop a National Cultural Contextualization Guide for BECED Programs. CHED, in collaboration with the ECCD Council and regional TEIs, should develop a practical guide for incorporating Filipino cultural values, indigenous knowledge systems, and local community contexts into BECED course content. This guide should provide specific examples for different regions and language communities, moving beyond the general principle of cultural responsiveness to offer

concrete, implementable strategies. TEIs in BARMM, the Cordilleras, and other culturally distinct regions should be specifically engaged in its development.

2. Require TEIs to maintain living curriculum documents that incorporate emerging trends. CHED should require BECED programs to maintain curriculum documents that are revised on a defined schedule—not only in response to formal CMO updates but also in response to emerging research and practice trends. A biennial curriculum review requirement, with a standardized reporting template, would institutionalize the habit of evidence-based curriculum development and reduce the risk of programs becoming outdated between major policy reviews.

3. Invest in TEI learning environments that model developmentally appropriate practice. The physical and pedagogical environments of TEIs should reflect the standards they teach. CHED should include the quality of on-campus learning environments—including child-sized furniture, learning centers, culturally relevant materials, and simulation spaces—as criteria in BECED program accreditation reviews. Capital funding mechanisms should be established to help resource-constrained TEIs meet these standards.

4. Establish a funded Philippine ECE Research Program. The absence of locally grounded, policy-relevant ECE research creates a structural gap that individual faculty initiatives alone cannot fill. A dedicated national ECE research program that is funded through CHED, DOST, or the ECCD Council should commission applied research on BECED program effectiveness, graduate readiness, and the developmental outcomes of children taught by BECED graduates. TEI faculty should receive findings directly through accessible, practitioner-facing publications.

5. Strengthen alumni feedback loops as a systematic program improvement tool. Graduate tracer studies and employer FGDs are already practiced by some TEIs and should be standardized across all BECED-offering institutions. CHED should require TEIs to submit annual reports on graduate outcomes—including employment settings, perceived preparedness, and employer satisfaction—and to demonstrate how this evidence has informed curriculum and program decisions. This would transform quality assurance from a compliance exercise into a genuine learning process.

Conclusion

Inside Philippine TEIs, early childhood education is being prepared with genuine commitment and increasing sophistication. Play-based learning, developmentally appropriate practice, inclusive pedagogy, and cultural responsiveness are not empty phrases in BECED programs. These are being taught, practiced, and valued. This is a



meaningful achievement, built over decades of faculty dedication and institutional investment.

But the preparation process has real limits. When the environments in which future teachers learn do not model the environments they are being trained to create; when research is an aspiration rather than a structured institutional practice; when cultural contextualization depends on individual faculty creativity rather than policy guidance; and when quality assurance produces data that rarely drives improvement then, even strong pedagogical commitments can fall short of their potential. The reforms proposed here are not about rebuilding a broken system. They are about strengthening a functioning one so that the gap between what TEIs intend and what they deliver continues to narrow.

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The PNU Educational Policy Research, and Development Office

The EPRDO is a specialized research center in the University focused on policy research and studies on teacher education. It is established to provide research-based policy recommendations to policy makers. It also serves as the clearing house for all data relevant to teacher education in the Philippines and beyond.

Vision

The Philippine Normal University through the EPRDO aims to be an innovation hub of teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Mission

To strengthen the culture of excellence in teacher education research and educational policy studies.

Objectives

The EPRDO shall manage the University's research production, enhance human resource capabilities, and share expertise to other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the area of teacher education research

Strategies

1. Establish and maintain a web-based university research portal that facilitates automated research management systems, and which also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in the country and Southeast Asia.
2. Share research expertise and competence in teacher education research with other TEIs throughout the country;
3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
4. Design and implement the research capability program for faculty and staff;
5. Manage University's research production particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

Values

SYNERGY (Working collaboratively as a team)

EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)

EXCELLENCE (Achieving high quality research outputs)

PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the University)

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