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From Cradle to Classroom:

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

Aligning Policy and Practice in Early Childhood Education: Strengthening Pre-Service Teacher Preparation in the Philippines

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This policy brief examines the alignment between national Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policies and the preparation of pre-service teachers in the Philippines. Drawing on a scoping review and qualitative data from 10 Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), the study analyzes how policy frameworks are translated into curriculum design and field-based training. Findings show strong alignment at the level of curriculum. TEIs have aligned their Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECED) programs with CHED CMO No. 76, the National Early Learning Framework (NELF), and DepEd standards. Developmentally appropriate, play-based, and inclusive pedagogies are widely integrated. However, this alignment is not consistently realized in practice. Pre-service teachers have limited exposure to authentic early childhood settings, particularly for children aged 0–4, and depend on fragmented systems for field training. Critical structural gaps remain. The supply of qualified early childhood educators remains insufficient to meet national demand, with only 3,993 BECED graduates produced since 2005, which is far below the workforce requirements indicated in DepEd reports, particularly for kindergarten and early childhood programs. Governance fragmentation across DepEd, DSWD, DOH, and the ECCD Council further constrains coordination and program delivery. This brief calls for policy reforms that move beyond alignment in design toward alignment in implementation, including the full operationalization and strengthening of the implementation of Republic Act No. 12199.

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Policy Context and Problem Definition

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is widely recognized as a critical investment in human capital, shaping cognitive, social, and emotional development and influencing long-term educational outcomes (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2024). Across the Asia-Pacific region, ECCE systems emphasize teacher quality, curriculum continuity, and inclusive access as key drivers of equity and development.

Despite these commitments, the Philippine education system has been characterized as a “failed system” marked by “miseducation,” reflecting persistent gaps in access, quality, and system coherence (EDCOM II, 2024). These challenges are particularly evident in ECCD, where participation rates remain uneven and service delivery varies across regions.

A central issue is the misalignment between policy intent and implementation, which can be understood across three dimensions. Structural misalignment arises from fragmented governance across DepEd, DSWD, DOH, ECCD Council, and LGUs, leading to coordination gaps and uneven program delivery. Pedagogical misalignment is reflected in the disconnect between curriculum standards and practice, particularly the limited exposure of pre-service teachers to 0–4 age settings despite policy coverage. Institutional misalignment emerges from weak linkages between Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) and ECCD service providers, resulting in inconsistent field-based training opportunities.

This study examines how ECED programs in TEIs align with national standards and identifies systemic barriers that constrain effective implementation. It argues that the core issue is not the absence of policy, but the limited alignment between policy frameworks and the realities of teacher preparation and practice.

ECCD Policy Framework and System Architecture

The Philippine ECCD system is anchored in a set of interrelated laws. The ECCD Act (RA 8980, 2000) established a national system integrating education, health, and nutrition services. The Kindergarten Education Act (RA 10157, 2012) institutionalized compulsory kindergarten, while the Early Years Act (RA 10410, 2013) formalized governance for programs serving children aged 0–4. Teacher preparation is guided by four key frameworks. CHED CMO No. 76 defines the curriculum and competencies for the BECED program. The National Early Learning Framework (NELF) outlines developmental standards for children aged 0–8. DepEd Order No. 47 sets standards for kindergarten education, while the K to 3 curriculum ensures continuity across early grade levels.

These frameworks collectively shape the preparation, implementation, and assessment of pre-service teacher education. They provide a coherent structure for aligning curriculum with national goals and developmental benchmarks.

However, their effectiveness depends on how they are operationalized within TEIs and across ECCD delivery systems. Without consistent implementation, alignment at the policy level does not translate into improved teaching practice or learning outcomes.

System Strength: Strong Curriculum Alignment

TEIs demonstrate strong alignment between BECED programs and national policy frameworks. Curricula are consistently aligned with CHED CMO No. 76, NELF, DepEd Order No. 47, and the K to 3 basic education curriculum (old). This alignment ensures coherence in learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment practices. Across the sampled TEIs, curriculum mapping and alignment exercises are institutionalized practices, with most institutions reporting periodic reviews and audits to ensure compliance with national standards. Institutions regularly conduct curriculum mapping and audits to maintain compliance with national standards and respond to emerging educational demands. Faculty and administrators report that alignment enhances instructional clarity, accountability, and program quality.

The BECED curriculum reflects a holistic approach to early childhood education. It integrates developmentally appropriate practices, play-based learning, inclusive education, and family and community engagement. Programs also incorporate mother tongue-based instruction and culturally responsive teaching, ensuring relevance to local contexts. These features are consistently reported across participating TEIs, indicating convergence in program design despite institutional differences. Interdisciplinary components, including health, nutrition, and social-emotional learning, are embedded to support holistic child development. Assessment practices are aligned with ECCD standards and include performance-based and developmental tools.

These strengths indicate that TEIs have effectively responded to policy directives and global trends in early childhood education. However, alignment at the curriculum level does not consistently translate into alignment in practice, particularly in field-based training and institutional coordination.

System Constraints: Gaps in Workforce, Training, and Governance



The primary constraint across the ECCD system is the gap between policy design and implementation. This is most evident in teacher preparation, where strong curricular alignment is not matched by consistent and meaningful practice.

1. Human Resource Constraints

Many TEIs face shortages of faculty with specialized expertise in early childhood education, particularly in infant and toddler development. This limits the depth of instruction and the quality of mentoring for pre-service teachers.

Professional development opportunities exist but are uneven across institutions. Sustained and targeted faculty upskilling is needed to address emerging demands in early childhood pedagogy and inclusive education.

2. The 0–4 Age Gap in Training

Pre-service teachers have limited exposure to children aged 0–4. Practicum experiences are concentrated in DepEd kindergarten settings, which serve five-year-old learners.

This reflects a misalignment between ECCD policy coverage and teacher preparation practice. Graduates are often underprepared for roles in daycare centers and community-based programs that serve younger children. This gap is reinforced by the absence of explicit requirements in current CHED standards for practicum placement in child development centers serving 0–4, as well as the limited institutionalization of partnerships between TEIs and community-based early childhood providers.

3. Resource and Infrastructure Gaps

TEIs and partner institutions face shortages of Developmentally Appropriate Materials (DAM), which are essential for implementing child-centered and play-based pedagogies. Infrastructure limitations further constrain experiential learning.

Many TEIs lack simulation facilities or early childhood laboratories. Similarly, deployment sites often lack adequate resources, reducing the quality and consistency of field experiences.

4. Disjointed Governance of ECCD Across Agencies

ECCD governance is fragmented across multiple agencies, including the ECCD Council, DSWD, DepEd, DOH, and LGUs. Overlapping mandates and weak coordination result in inconsistent implementation.

This fragmentation weakens alignment between TEIs and ECCD service delivery systems. As a result, field training

opportunities vary significantly across regions, reinforcing inequities in teacher preparation.

Policy Actions for System Reform

Addressing these challenges requires aligning policy design with implementation. The following recommendations focus on strengthening coordination, expanding experiential learning, and building workforce capacity.

Immediate (1–3 Years)

- Issue an inter-agency directive to clarify roles and accountability across DepEd, DSWD, DOH, ECCD Council, and LGUs. This will strengthen coordination and improve program delivery. This directive must also include practicum hours in child development centers serving children 0–4 years old. This could be in the form of a specific number of hours, defined competencies, and supervision guidelines so that placement standards are upheld in qualified sites.
- Allocate targeted funding for faculty upskilling, with emphasis on early childhood pedagogy and infant and toddler development. Establish a national digital repository of ECE learning materials to support TEIs and partner institutions.

Strategic (3–5 Years)

- Develop a national competency framework for early childhood educators, with distinct standards for teaching children aged 0–4. Align this framework with curriculum and licensure systems.
- ECCD Council, DSWD, and CHED should develop a program supporting TEIs in building partnerships with community-based 0–4 ECCD providers. The program should offer technical assistance for site identification, partnership agreements, supervision protocols, and curriculum integration aligned with NELF competencies. Encourage diverse partnerships to ensure exposure across all early childhood settings.
- Institutionalize partnerships between TEIs and community-based ECCD centers through formal agreements. These partnerships will expand and standardize experiential learning opportunities.
- Establish a centralized data system to track enrollment, graduation, licensure, and workforce deployment, enabling evidence-based planning. Include mandatory tracer studies at one and three years post-graduation to assess readiness for 0–8 settings, employment patterns,



and practicum adequacy. Data should inform curriculum review.

Transformative (5–10 Years)

- Fully operationalize and strengthen the implementation of Republic Act No. 12199 to consolidate fragmented responsibilities under a functional coordinating mechanism. This includes clarifying inter-agency roles, establishing accountability systems, and ensuring effective coordination across DepEd, DSWD, DOH, ECCD Council, and LGUs.
- Increase public investment in early childhood teacher education through scholarships, infrastructure support, and incentives for service in disadvantaged areas.
- Position ECCD as a national development priority, recognizing its role in long-term educational and economic outcomes.

Conclusion: From Alignment to Implementation

The Philippines has established a strong policy framework for early childhood education, but its impact is constrained by uneven implementation. TEIs demonstrate high levels of curricular alignment, yet gaps in experiential learning, governance, and workforce development persist.

Aligning policy and practice is essential to strengthening early childhood teacher preparation. This requires coordinated governance, expanded field-based learning, and sustained investment in the ECCD workforce.

Without these reforms, policy gains will remain limited in practice. With them, the ECCD system can more effectively support the development and learning of all Filipino children.

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Declaration

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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 recommendation 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 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 system and which also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in 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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