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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 Stands in the Way? Systemic and Institutional Barriers to Responsive Early Childhood Teacher Education in the Philippines

Nikolee Marie A Serafico-Reyes, Arlyne C Marasigan, Heidi B Macahilig, Joyce L Bautista, Melissa T Bartolome, Alvin B Barcelona, April Ann M Curugan, Leonora P Varela, Nilo J Castulo, Bhejay L Molera, Seth R de Guia, Mark Ponce C San Juan



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

This policy brief examines the systemic and institutional barriers that prevent Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the Philippines from developing fully responsive Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) programs. Drawing on qualitative data from 10 TEIs and interviews with ECCD Council personnel, the brief identifies five interconnected barrier clusters: the attrition of ECE-specialized faculty and isolation from ECCD professional networks; the scarcity of locally produced, culturally grounded teaching and learning materials; the absence of simulation facilities and inadequate deployment site diversity; weak formal partnership infrastructure between TEIs and community-based ECCD providers; and mutual institutional unawareness between TEIs and the ECCD Council. Critically, these barriers compound each other and fall hardest on regional and underserved institutions. The brief argues that addressing them requires not piecemeal fixes but coordinated investment in the policy, material, and institutional infrastructure that makes responsive teacher preparation structurally possible rather than individually improvised.

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PNU Educational Policy Research and Development Office

(+632) 317-1768 loc 750 | eprdo@pnu.edu.ph | www.pnuresearchportal.org



Introduction

Knowing what a responsive early childhood education program looks like is not the same as being able to build one. Across the Philippines, Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) offering the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECEd) operate within a web of institutional constraints, resource scarcities, governance complications, and systemic incoherences that limit their ability to deliver what their own curricula promise. Understanding these barriers not as failures of individual institutions but as structural features of a system that was built incrementally across multiple agencies with limited coordination is essential to designing reforms that can actually work.

This policy brief addresses the third research question of the study: What are the barriers and possibilities in developing a responsive Early Childhood Education program for Teacher Education Institutions to effectively support early childhood programs? It draws on thick qualitative data from faculty, administrators, pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and ECCD Council personnel across 10 TEIs, and synthesizes five interconnected barrier clusters: human resources, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure and deployment sites, collaboration and partnerships, and institutional awareness. For each, it identifies not only what constrains program responsiveness but also what possibilities exist and what policy actions can actualize them.

Methodology

This brief draws on the qualitative dataset generated for the parent study, *Enhancing Pre-Service Teachers' Experiences in Early Childhood Education (ECE): A Policy-Driven Approach to Effective Program Development and Implementation* (Phase 1) (Serafico-Reyes et al., 2025). The parent study used a two-phase descriptive qualitative design: a Phase 1 scoping review of national ECE policies and TEI program documents, and a Phase 2 round of focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). The 10 participating TEIs were selected through purposive sampling from among roughly 200 Philippine TEIs offering the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, drawn from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (including BARMM), and screened as Mid- or High-Performer institutions on the Licensure Examination for Teachers, Elementary Level, 2017–2023; nine of the ten held CHED Center of Excellence or Center of Development status in teacher education. Within these 10 TEIs, 95 FGD and KII participants were purposively selected across four roles: pre-service teachers, faculty, administrators, and cooperating teachers, together with 2 key informants from the ECCD Council, for a total of 97 participants. FGDs of 2 to 6 participants were held

for pre-service teachers, faculty, and administrators; cooperating teachers were interviewed individually as KIIs. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis (as cited in Serafico-Reyes et al., 2025), with Phase 1 document/policy findings and Phase 2 interview findings triangulated against each other to verify the barrier clusters presented below.

Key Issues

1. Barriers are not isolated, they compound each other. A TEI that lacks ECE-specialized faculty is also likely to lack locally produced teaching materials, because it lacks the faculty expertise to develop them. A TEI without a simulation laboratory is also likely to struggle with practicum quality, because pre-service teachers arrive at deployment sites without foundational practice. A TEI without formal MOAs with community ECCD centers cannot expand practicum scope, regardless of how much faculty want to. Sections A and B of the Key Findings and Policy Recommendations below unpack each of these barriers and the specific evidence behind them.

2. The barriers fall hardest on the institutions serving the most underserved communities. Regional TEIs, particularly those in BARMM and geographically isolated areas, reported the most acute resource constraints among the 10 TEIs in this study: smaller faculties with fewer ECE specialists, less access to professional development, weaker community partnership infrastructure, and greater physical distance from the national policy conversations where ECCD program developments are shaped and communicated. This pattern is consistent with broader, documented disparities in how educational resources reach regional versus Metro Manila-based institutions in the Philippines, though the evidence presented here speaks specifically to the TEIs that participated in this study rather than to a nationally representative sample.

3. Practicum access, more than the private-public boundary itself, limits the diversity of settings pre-service teachers experience. DepEd schools are the primary practicum deployment sites for BECED students because they are public institutions with an existing administrative relationship with TEIs. Private early childhood centers are largely inaccessible to pre-service teachers because schools can reasonably object to having unlicensed student teachers practice with children whose families are paying substantial fees. Participants in this study perceived private centers as potentially offering more varied resources and pedagogical approaches, though this brief does not present a systematic comparison of public and private practicum quality and does not claim private settings are inherently superior. The more precise policy problem is the limited diversity of accessible practicum sites overall: pre-service teachers currently have little structured exposure to



community-based, non-DepEd settings such as CDCs and barangay day care centers.

Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

A. Key Findings

1. Faculty attrition in ECE specialization is a quiet crisis.

The shortage of ECE-specialized faculty is not a new problem, but it is worsening through attrition that is not being met with targeted recruitment. In one sampled TEI, the ECE faculty has shrunk from four to three specialists, with only a handful of affiliates supplementing instruction. When ECE-specialized faculty retire, resign, or move to other institutions, their replacements are often drawn from general education or adjacent fields. They are still competent educators, but without the depth of knowledge in infant and toddler development, play-based pedagogy, and ECCD assessment that BECED instruction specifically requires. Critically, faculty who are not connected to ECCD professional networks, ones who self-describe as "not really updated on what is happening in the ECCD" and who rely on personal initiative to search for information, cannot effectively translate current ECCD policy developments into curriculum practice. The faculty awareness gap and the faculty specialization gap are, at root, the same problem: insufficient investment in the professional ecosystem of BECED teacher educators.

2. The scarcity of local ECE learning materials reflects a broader underinvestment in the field.

TEI libraries that are "the largest in the Visayas" still report that ECE books must be ordered from abroad and that local holdings are only just beginning to grow. This is not merely a resource problem; it is a statement about how the Philippine publishing and educational materials industry has historically prioritized other fields over early childhood education. Pre-service teachers studying for a degree in ECE in the Philippines have limited access to case studies drawn from Filipino communities, to teaching materials grounded in local languages and cultural contexts, and to research literature that reflects Philippine developmental realities rather than Western norms. The consequence is that their professional formation is shaped disproportionately by knowledge produced elsewhere, for other children, in other contexts.

3. Without simulation facilities, the theory-practice gap is reproduced structurally.

Pre-service teachers cannot practice what they cannot see modeled. When TEI classrooms are adult-sized, shared between multiple programs, and equipped with general rather than early childhood-specific materials, they cannot function as professional learning laboratories for early childhood educators. Classroom sharing requiring morning and

afternoon shifts, the absence of observation zones, and the lack of privacy in consultation spaces. These are not cosmetic inconveniences. They are the material conditions under which professional identity and practical competence are or are not formed. A pre-service teacher who has never arranged a child-centered learning environment before graduation is genuinely less prepared to create one as a beginning teacher.

4. The absence of formal MOAs with community ECCD providers is the single most tractable barrier.

Unlike material shortages or infrastructure gaps, which require capital investment, the absence of formal partnership arrangements between TEIs and LGU-operated CDCs, barangay day care centers, and ECCD Council programs is primarily a governance and procedural barrier, and the relevant accreditation responsibilities are already defined in law: LGUs administer accreditation of private ECCD programs and the ECCD Council administers accreditation of public ECCD programs, with barangay day care centers themselves established under Republic Act No. 12199 (Republic of the Philippines, 2025). It can therefore be addressed through policy action at comparatively low capital cost, though it still requires sustained inter-agency coordination. Several faculty participants identified this directly: "We cannot just easily deploy unless we have the MOU." The potential for change is real: some TEIs have already established MOAs with LGUs or expressed concrete plans to do so. What is missing is a national policy framework that standardizes the process, clarifies the responsibilities of each party, and incentivizes TEIs and LGUs to formalize these arrangements.

5. The awareness gap between TEIs and the ECCD Council is mutual and costly.

TEI faculty do not know what the ECCD Council is currently doing. The ECCD Council does not have systematic visibility into what TEIs are currently teaching. As a result, the ECCD Council's capacity-building initiatives do not reliably reach BECED faculty; changes in ECCD competency standards are not systematically communicated to TEI curriculum committees; and opportunities for TEI participation in ECCD program implementation as practicum sites, as training providers, and as research partners go unrealized. This mutual invisibility is a governance failure with direct consequences for program quality. It represents, perhaps more clearly than any other finding in this study, the cost of a fragmented ECCD system in which the agencies responsible for training early childhood educators and the agencies responsible for delivering ECCD services operate in parallel rather than in partnership.



Table 1*Summary of Evidences by Barrier Cluster*

Barrier Cluster	Type of Evidence Presented in the Study	Illustrative Data Point
1. Faculty attrition & isolation from ECCD networks	Institutional case example; participant self-report	ECE faculty complement shrank from four to three specialists in one sampled TEI; faculty self-described as “not really updated on what is happening in the ECCD.”
2. Scarcity of local ECE learning materials	Institutional resource inventory; informant statement	A TEI library described as “the largest in the Visayas” still relies on imported ECE titles.
3. Absence of simulation facilities	Facility/infrastructure observation	Adult-sized, shared classrooms; morning/afternoon shift use; no observation zones.
4. Weak formal MOA/partnership infrastructure	Participant quote; cross-TEI practice comparison	“We cannot just easily deploy unless we have the MOU”; some TEIs have MOAs, others do not.
5. Mutual TEI-ECCD Council unawareness	Cross-referenced informant accounts (TEI and Council sides)	TEI faculty reported not knowing current Council initiatives; Council reported no systematic visibility into TEI curricula.

Note. The parent study (Serafico-Reyes et al., 2025) used thematic analysis across 97 participants from 10 TEIs rather than standardized frequency counts.

B. Key Policy Recommendations

1. Establish a dedicated BECED Faculty Development Scholarship Program administered by CHED. CHED should create a funded scholarship program specifically for faculty in TEIs offering BECED programs who wish to pursue advanced study in early childhood education, particularly in infant and toddler development, inclusive ECE, and ECE research methods. This is consistent with CHED's existing authority over higher education faculty development and program quality

under CHED Memorandum Order No. 76, s. 2017 (Commission on Higher Education, 2017). Priority should be given to faculty in regional and BARMM-based TEIs. This program should be accompanied by a returnee service requirement, ensuring that scholarship recipients bring new specialized knowledge back to underserved institutions.

2. Commission the development of a Philippine Early Childhood Education Resource Library. The ECCD Council and DepEd, co-chairs of the ECCD Council for curriculum and early childhood education matters under the ECCD System Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2025), in partnership with CHED and the National Book Development Board, should commission the development and production of a Philippine-authored, locally grounded ECE resource library, including teaching guides, children's books in regional languages, developmentally appropriate activity kits, and case studies of effective Philippine ECE practice. These materials should be distributed to all TEIs offering BECED programs and, through LGUs, to CDCs and day care centers that serve as practicum sites.

3. Create a National MOA Template and Partnership Protocol for TEI-ECCD Site Deployment. To remove the procedural barrier that currently prevents TEIs from deploying pre-service teachers to CDCs and community-based ECCD programs, CHED and DILG, both respectively regulate TEIs and oversee LGU implementation of the ECCD System, including LGUs' administration of private ECCD program accreditation (Republic of the Philippines, 2025), in coordination with the ECCD Council and DSWD, should develop a standardized national MOA template and partnership protocol. This template should define the roles and responsibilities of TEIs, LGU-operated CDCs, and barangay day care centers in practicum deployment, specify minimum safety and supervision standards, and provide a streamlined approval process. DILG should circulate the protocol to LGUs nationwide, consistent with its authority over local government units under both the Local Government Code (Republic of the Philippines, 1991) and the ECCD System Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2025), and incentivize participation through child-friendly LGU award mechanisms.

4. Pilot an Adopt-a-CDC Program linking TEIs to barangay Child Development Centers in underserved communities. Drawing conceptually on the private-sector partnership model of DepEd's Adopt-a-School Program (Republic of the Philippines, 1998; Department of Education, 2013), CHED and DILG should jointly pilot a structured Adopt-a-CDC program in which TEIs formally partner with specific barangay Child Development Centers for a multi-year period. Joint CHED-DILG leadership reflects CHED's regulatory authority over TEIs and DILG's oversight of LGUs, which are directly responsible for establishing and maintaining CDCs and



administering private ECCD program accreditation under the ECCD System Act (Republic of the Philippines, 2025); the ECCD Council should set the applicable program standards, and DSWD should be consulted given its continuing role as a national ECCD support agency. Under this arrangement, the TEI would provide faculty expertise, curriculum support, and annual cohorts of BECED student practitioners; the CDC would provide authentic early childhood practicum placements and access to the community context in which its children live. The program should be piloted in three to five regions, with particular attention to geographically isolated and disadvantaged communities where access to qualified ECE support is most limited.

5. Establish TEI Early Childhood Simulation Laboratory Grants. CHED should create a capital grant facility — channeled through its regular institutional development funding mechanisms, where TEIs offering BECED programs can apply for, to build or upgrade a dedicated, developmentally scaled ECE simulation laboratory, including child-sized furniture, observation areas, and age-appropriate play and learning materials. Grants should be phased over three years and prioritize regional and BARM-based TEIs identified in this study as lacking such facilities.

6. Institutionalize a standing TEI-ECCD Council Coordination Mechanism. The ECCD Council, in coordination with CHED and the national network of TEIs offering BECED, should establish (a) a designated ECCD Council liaison for each TEI offering BECED, (b) an annual TEI-ECCD Council forum to review competency-standard updates and program alignment, and (c) a regular bulletin or advisory communicating ECCD policy and competency-standard changes directly to TEI curriculum committees. This responds directly to the mutual-unawareness finding and gives the ECCD Council's existing coordination mandate (Republic of the Philippines, 2025) a concrete, recurring mechanism for reaching teacher educators.

7. Support BECED faculty participation in ECCD professional networks. CHED and the ECCD Council should jointly subsidize BECED faculty membership in, and attendance at, national and regional ECCD professional networks and conferences, with priority access for faculty in regional and BARM-based TEIs. This directly targets the professional-isolation dimension of Finding 1, which this brief treats as distinct from, though related to, the faculty specialization shortage addressed by Recommendation 1.

Conclusion

The barriers documented in this study are real, deep, and interconnected — but they are not evidence of institutional

failure. The TEIs in this study are navigating genuine structural constraints with limited resources and considerable professional commitment: faculty seeking out ECCD updates on their own initiative, administrators pursuing MOAs through personal relationships in the absence of institutional frameworks, and pre-service teachers visiting schools to observe children when practicum placements fall short. This improvisation should not be normalized, since it is a cost borne disproportionately by the least-resourced institutions and communities, but it is evidence of professional commitment worth building on.

What is needed now is not more improvisation but better infrastructure. The policy infrastructure, institutional infrastructure, and material infrastructure that allows committed educators to do their work without having to rebuild the system from scratch in each institution and each cohort. The possibilities identified in this brief are not theoretical: formal partnership frameworks, faculty scholarship programs, locally produced materials, joint coordination bodies, and community practicum programs are all achievable within the current policy environment. What has been missing is the political will and inter-agency coordination to pursue them systematically. This series of policy briefs has aimed to make that case and to provide the evidence base on which that will can be built.

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Declaration

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nikolee Marie A Serafico-Reyes (serafico.nma@pnu.edu.ph) is an Associate Professor of Social Science Education at the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences and a faculty researcher at the Educational Policy Research and Development Office of the Philippine Normal University. She teaches pedagogical content knowledge courses in social studies in the same university. Her research interests are on curriculum history, social studies and history education, and educational policy reviews.

Arlyne C. Marasigan (marasigan.ac@pnu.edu.ph) is a Professor of Educational Leadership and Management at the College of Advanced Studies, Philippine Normal University. She serves as a faculty researcher at the Education Policy and Research Development Office (EPRDO) and as Associate Editor of *The Normal Lights*. She has contributed to internationally funded projects, including Erasmus+ CBHE initiatives (ESTA and SECRA) and an Australia Alumni Grants Scheme project on education in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Her work includes evaluating USAID's ABC+ program and producing policy research on Madrasah education.

Heidi B Macahilig (macahilig.hb@pnu.edu.ph) is a full professor and director of the Educational Policy Research and Development Office (EPRDO) at the Philippine Normal University (PNU). A pioneering graduate of PNU's Ph.D. in Reading Education, her expertise centers on literacy, teacher

education, and language-in-education reform, specifically bridging the gap between evidence-based research and national policy.

Joyce L Bautista (bautista.jl@pnu.edu.ph) is a Full Professor of Early Childhood Education at the Philippine Normal University who works on graduate program development, teacher education, and on efforts to support early childhood policies and standards. She works with national agencies, officer of national and international organizations in ECE, undertakes program accreditation and research on developmentally appropriate practice and teachers' professional development within the Philippines and the region.

Melissa T Bartolome (bartolome.mt@pnu.edu.ph) is an Associate Professor of the Faculty of Education and Information Sciences (FEIS) of Philippine Normal University-Manila. As one of the 2022 Global Leaders for Young Children Cohort, she is engaged in discussions and advocacies on early childhood issues in the country and internationally. Her field of interest includes early childhood education, special education, parental involvement, and social & emotional learning. Teacher Mel is also a resource speaker, module writer, and a lecturer and reviewer in Licensure Examination for Teachers. Her professional objective is to be of help and assistance in improving the quality of Early Childhood Education by using her experience and expertise in the area of teaching, educational product development, and research.

Alvin B Barcelona (barcelona.ab@pnu.edu.ph) is an Associate Professor of Educational Research and Evaluation and the Graduate Program Coordinator at the Faculty of Education and Information Sciences of Philippine Normal University- Manila. He teaches professional education courses and research for early childhood education. His research interests include educational assessment, program evaluation, mathematics education, AI in education, and teacher training.

April Ann M Curugan (curugan.aam@pnu.edu.ph) is an Associate Professor of the Faculty of Education and Information Sciences (FEIS) of Philippine Normal University-Manila. She is teaching courses in Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and MA-ECE programs as well as Professional Education courses. She serves in different capacities such as lecturer, resource person, facilitator, module writer, trainor, and LEPT reviewer. Her academic and research interests include early childhood pedagogies, social and emotional learning, and educational technologies.

Leonora "Cleo" Varela (varela.lp@pnu.edu.ph) is a full-time faculty member of PNU-College of Advanced Studies. She's the former program adviser for the MA in Early Childhood



Education. She teaches course subjects for Early Childhood Education majors at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. Her research interests include children's social and emotional development, music and movement, play-based learning, parent education and involvement, and teacher well-being.

Nilo J Castulo (nilocastulo@msutawi-tawi.edu.ph) is a professor at Mindanao State University-Tawi-Tawi, Philippines. He co-chaired CIES's Global Migration Group, serves as a journal regional editor, and holds a PhD from Beijing Normal University, China.

Bhejay L Molera (molera.bl@pnu.edu.ph) is a Licensed Professional Teacher, serves as a Research Assistant at the Philippine Normal University's Educational Research and Development Office. With extensive experience as a data analyst and researcher for DepEd-LCC and TEC-funded projects, his work explores the intersection of literacy, mathematics education, and innovative teaching pedagogies. He is dedicated to advancing evidence-based strategies within the teacher education landscape.

Seth R de Guia (deguia.sr@pnu.edu.ph) is a licensed Guidance Counselor who currently serves as a Research Assistant under the Educational Policy Research and Development Office of the Philippine Normal University. His experience covers multiple national research initiatives related to education and other TEC-led projects. His scholarly interests center on education, psychology, and its intersectionality to other fields.

Mark Ponce C San Juan (sanjuan.mpc@pnu.edu.ph) is a Licensed Professional Teacher and a graduate student taking a Master of Arts in Education in Curriculum and Instruction at the Philippine Normal University (PNU). He started his career as the Technical Assistant of the Graduate Research Office (GResO) of PNU and now serves as a Researcher for research projects of the Department of Education Literacy Coordinating Council (DepEd LCC) and the Educational Policy Research and Development Office (PNU - EPRDO) of PNU. His research interests include curriculum and instruction, literacy, and comparative education.



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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.

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EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)

EXCELLENCE (Achieving high quality research outputs)

PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the University)

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Heidi B. Macahilig, PhD
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Address

Room 205, Pedro Orata Hall
Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines 1000

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PNU Educational Policy Research and Development Office
(+632) 317-1768 loc 750 | epfdc@pnu.edu.ph | www.pnuresearchportal.org