

Good Practices in Early Childhood Care and Development Quality Assurance in Southeast Asia



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Introduction

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* recognizes education and development as children's rights. How these rights should be dispensed was extensively tackled and effectively worked out during the *World Education Forum* held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, that focused on education for all (EFA) and aimed to specifically expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

ECCE is considered a contributing factor to the first *Millennium Development Goal (MDG)* of reducing poverty and a key to meeting the second MDG—to achieve universal primary education by ensuring that by 2015, all boys and girls will be able to complete primary education.

In the *2010 World Conference on ECCE: Building the Wealth of Nations*, participating nations adopted the broad and holistic concept of ECCE as "the provision of care, education, health, nutrition, and protection to children aged 0 to 6." ECCE then became a right and an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning.

The growing recognition of education as a right and increased awareness of the importance of ECCE both to human and economic development as well as the eventual upsurge in ECCE programs and services paved the way for more opportunities for children to develop their full potential.



In Southeast Asia, governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) offer a wide range of ECCE programs and services, particularly for children aged 0–6, except in Timor-Leste where ECCE services are offered to children aged 0–8. Care is specifically provided to children from birth to 6 years old while education is provided to children aged 3–6.

Good practices on quality assurance of ECCD were identified during a SEAMEO INNOTECH Regional Research Forum on Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in Southeast Asia held in October 2011. These good practices included innovative approaches to ECCD in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Philippines.

Case 1: Indonesia

The establishment of the Directorate of Early Childhood Education (ECE) under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in 2011 prompted the Indonesian government to prioritize ECE program development, which focuses on expanding access to ECE and improving the quality of ECE services in the country.



UNESCO advocates ECCE programs that attend to health, nutrition, security, and learning and which provide for children's holistic development.

In order to expand access to ECE services, the Indonesian government launched several programs to motivate communities to participate in developing ECE programs by providing block grants; socializing ECE programs at various levels; and sponsoring seminars, workshops, and the like.

The Indonesian government also implemented a Ministry of National Education (MONE) regulation to improve the country's ECE standards—*Education Regulation No. 58, 2009*—which includes standards for the development of children, educators, and educational workers; content standards; processing and assessment procedures; as well as facilities and infrastructure provision. Based on *Education Regulation No. 58, 2009*, the MoEC developed programs to ensure educational quality.

To enhance the capabilities of early childhood educators, the government implemented training and apprentice programs at both the national and local (i.e., provincial and district) levels. Early childhood educators were trained to use the “center approach” to teaching—an eclectic method developed by the Creative Preschool in the United States also known as the “beyond center and circle time (BCCT) method.”

The center approach allowed early childhood educators to effectively teach children without incurring high costs. Teachers were taught to use nonfactory-made educational toys to enhance the children's learning. This

ECCE has since become a right and an indispensable foundation for lifelong learning.

Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to 6 years old. A time of remarkable brain growth, these years lay the foundation for subsequent learning and development.

approach was introduced and has been implemented since 2004. At present, the government provides in-service training to teachers in order to reinforce their skills. Cascaded training activities have been implemented since 2011 as well. Some early childhood educators obtained preservice training through formal university education.

The center approach also allowed communities to develop training courses at the local government level. As such, it can be considered the best ECCD practice in Indonesia because it has given way to acceptable, effective, sustainable, and transferable training for early childhood educators.

Challenges remain, however. For instance, a lot of early childhood educators in Indonesia still do not meet the qualifications set in the *ECE Standards* (e.g., holding a diploma for a four-year course or a bachelor's degree). The government still needs to work toward further enhancing the capabilities of existing early childhood educators.

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Case 2: Malaysia

In Malaysia, a curriculum is generally regarded as “a plan of study or of learning experience.” In the Malaysian context, a curriculum is defined as “an educational program that includes curricular and co-curricular activities that encompass all the knowledge, skills, norms, values, cultural elements, and beliefs that will help fully develop a child with respect to the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional aspects as well as inculcate and develop desirable moral values and transmit knowledge” (*Education Act of 1996*).

Based on literature on the development of children, learning in the early years should be informal and not as structured as in the primary or secondary levels. As such, Malaysia believes that a rigid and standardized national curriculum is not suitable for ECCE.

Malaysia's first *National Preschool Curriculum (NPC)* was developed in 2003. It was used by various preschool education providers run by the Ministry of Education (MOE), the *Laman Web Rasmi Jabatan Kemajuan Masyarakat (KEMAS)*, the *Portal Rasmi Jabatan Perpaduan Negara Dan Integrasi Nasional (PERPADUAN)*, and the private sector.

In the last two decades, however, Malaysia formulated comprehensive ECCE policies, laws, and legislations such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, the *Education Act of 1996* (i.e., *Act 550*), the *Education Development Master Plan (PIPP) 2006–2010*, and the *National Policy on Indigenous Children*. All of these policies and legislations specifically mentioned the need to provide quality preschool programs and to implement a national curriculum. Some ECCE policies have been implemented for at least five years.

ECCE policy implementation also underwent reviews, which led to the discovery of various issues, primary of which was the need for a national preschool curriculum that is:

- **Standards based and modular oriented:** Malaysia needs to implement a national preschool curriculum that can alleviate the noncompliance of privately owned preschools to implementation; enhance the competence of preschool teachers, especially in teaching English and problem solving; encourage the use of suitable teaching and learning approaches in preschool classes (i.e., both public and private); and expand the reach of special education and indigenous preschools.
- **Thinking directed:** Malaysian teachers should allow their students to experience disciplines so they can comprehend and conceptualize these, as opposed to just acquiring knowledge and obtaining information.
- **Child centered:** Malaysia believes that learning can only be considered meaningful if it has meaning to a child. As such, the national preschool curriculum should allow children to construct their own knowledge

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and should not be spoon-fed. Children are taught in the context of their natural environment, drawing on their needs and interests as each lesson unfolds (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1993). Each child should learn according to his/her pace and situation at a certain point in time.

- **Character building:** Malaysia believes in accordance with UNESCO's four pillars of learning, that learners should learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together, and learn to be. It thus needs a national preschool curriculum that will produce balanced individuals who can work with others, demonstrate strength in character, and are responsible.

The Malaysian government believes that the economic and social returns on ECCE investment depend on the quality of a country's ECCE program. Because producing quality products is only possible with the implementation of quality processes, it needs to continually develop its ECCE curriculum. Although it has begun implementing a well-thought-out national preschool curriculum, it will continue to further improve this in order to produce better and brighter futures for its youth.

Case 3: Philippines

In the Philippines, preschool education aims to develop children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills so they will be better prepared to adjust to and to cope with the demands of formal schooling. To ensure that the preschool curriculum addresses the children's strengths and needs as well as starts instruction "where the learners are," the government administers the *Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist*. This assessment tool aims to determine the learners' level of competence in different domains so teachers can design instruction that is appropriate to their learning needs.

Developing this national assessment tool has been a great innovation on the part of the Department of Education (DepEd) to improve the relevance and quality of ECCD programs at the community level.

The results teachers obtain from implementing the *ECD Checklist* as well as the information they obtain from the learners' parents help them accurately assess the children's abilities and effectively teach. The implementation of such an assessment has proven useful and effective despite small hiccups such as the lack of readiness of some pupils in small schools and the insufficiency of materials for assessment.

Developing this national assessment tool has been a great innovation on the part of the Department of Education (DepEd) to improve the relevance and quality of ECCD programs at the community level. It would be even better, however, if the data gleaned from this and other assessments are consolidated and statistically analyzed to monitor the development and progress of the country's young learners as inputs to evidence-based decision making and policy formulation related to ECCE programming.

The growing recognition of education as a right and increased awareness of the importance of ECCE both to human and economic development as well as the eventual upsurge in ECCE programs and services paved the way for more opportunities for children to develop their full potential.



Conclusion

Among the Southeast Asian countries included in the report, it was clear how important building up the foundation for preschool education is in order to realize proper ECCD implementation. The Indonesian, Malaysian, and Philippine governments have all begun to implement good ECCD practices but still need to further enhance current programs to produce more knowledgeable and better-prepared young learners for primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Governments of other SEAMEO member countries are likewise striving to improve the quality, relevance, and efficiency of their own ECCD initiatives in recognition of the critical role ECCE players in establishing a solid foundation to lifelong learning.

The case studies revealed that government policies can promote quality ECCE teaching. The government can see the potentials of an ECE center approach because it can be easily applied in local communities. The curriculum development process takes time to develop but a national common ECE curriculum can produce better early childhood education for future generations. Finally assessment in ECE is a tool for quality assurance. The scale of government support for ECCE assessment will bring better learning outcomes.

The full “Good Practices in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Quality Assurance in Southeast Asia” report can be accessed electronically through www.seameo-innotech.org

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