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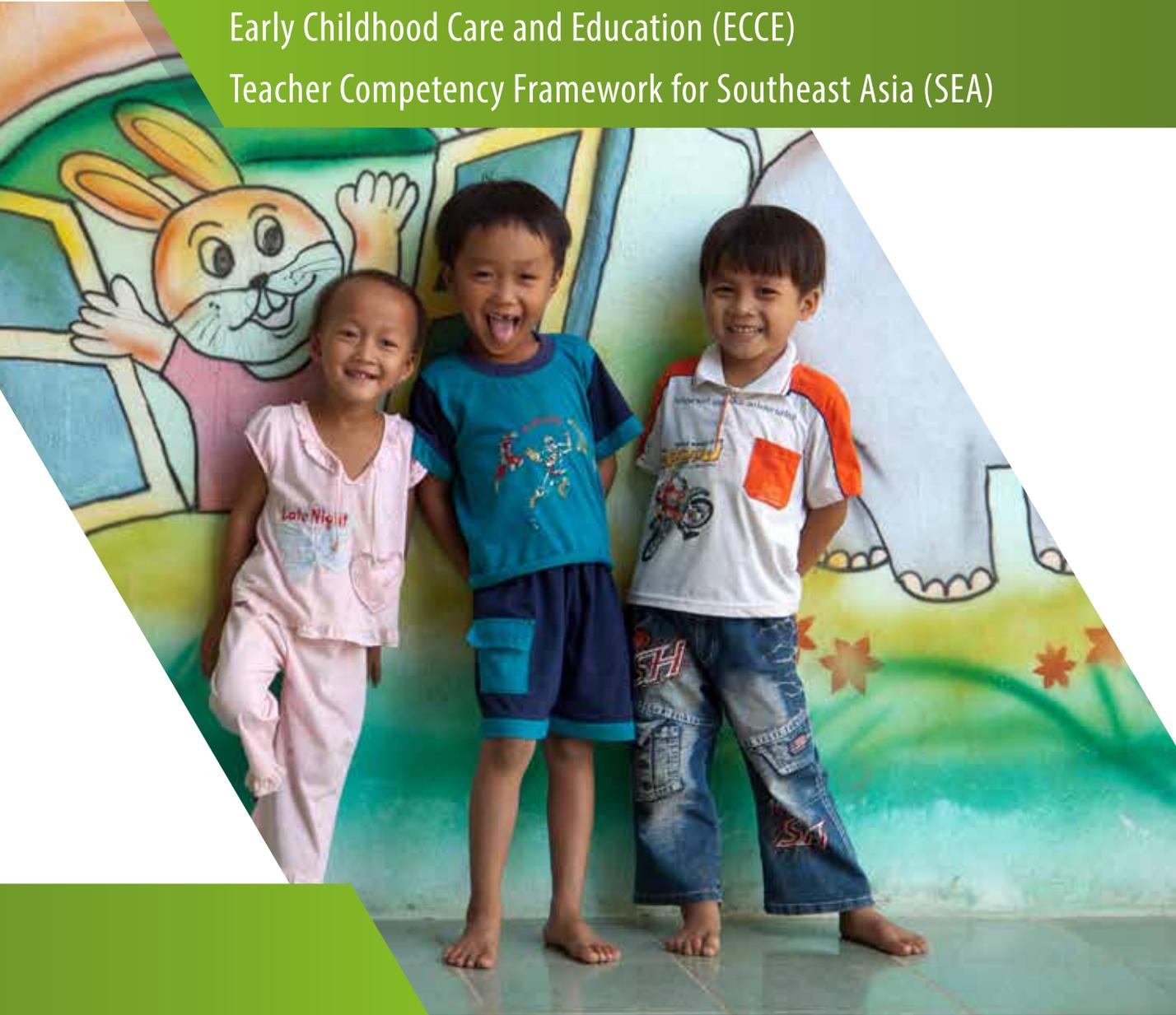
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# Pursuing Quality in Early Learning: Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Teacher Competency Framework for Southeast Asia (SEA)





**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)  
Teacher Competency Framework**  
.....  
**for Southeast Asia (SEA)**

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and

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# I. Introduction

With the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a platform for achieving quality early childhood care and education outcomes by 2030, ECCE policy-makers, practitioners, and academicians from Asia-Pacific countries gathered at the second Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education in Putrajaya, Malaysia in 2016 to share experiences, innovations, and lessons learned in developing and implementing ECCE policies and initiatives.

At the end of the forum, participants expressed their common commitment to ECCE through the Putrajaya Declaration. It highlighted a nine-point action agenda to support the achievement of SDG 4.2; *"By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."* In addition to SDG 4.2, the SDGs also recognize the need to *"substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states"* (UN, 2015).

In response to this global need as well as recognizing the critical roles that teachers have in early childhood development, UNESCO has engaged in initiatives in various parts of the world in contribution to the professionalization and capacity development of ECCE teachers including the development of the competency framework for ECCE teachers in Southeast Asia. The framework was developed in a consultative and participatory manner, taking into consideration views and insights from ECCE teachers, researchers, and practitioners from across Southeast Asia.

This document first provides a brief background, and discusses the purposes and intended audience for which the framework was developed (Section I). A succeeding section reflects on the regional ECCE landscape (Section II), before proceeding to a discussion of the ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia (Section III). Section IV suggests possible uses of the ECCE teacher competency framework; a final section concludes with areas for future action.

## Purpose

Building on existing regional initiatives on ECCE and teacher professional development, the ECCE teacher competency framework aims to enhance the professionalization and capacity development of ECCE teachers in Southeast Asia by:

- Providing comprehensive descriptions of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that ECCE teachers in Southeast Asia need to support holistic development of a child;
- Providing systematic and consistent structure and content to support the professional development of Southeast Asia’s early childhood workforce;
- Supplementing existing Southeast Asian frameworks, or functioning as a catalyst from which other countries can develop their own frameworks that consider unique country conditions and ECCE landscapes;
- Strengthening collaboration among different ECCE stakeholders at the local, national, and regional levels.

The framework does not intend to replace existing teacher competency frameworks in Southeast Asia, nor in individual countries that have developed their own teacher standards. Rather, it is an attempt to bridge the various efforts on early childhood education to improve this particular sector’s overall quality in the region. The framework likewise addresses calls to contextualize quality assurance mechanisms to be more responsive to Southeast Asian contexts and needs.

## Intended audience

The framework covers competencies of teachers of children aged three to five (3–5) in pre-primary settings. This document is thus developed for ECCE teachers and those responsible for ECCE professional development, such as teacher education institutions, higher education faculties, and human resource departments of governments and other agencies that provide ECCE services. A subsequent section (Section IV) presents suggested uses and applications of the framework.

## II. The context for developing an ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia

In most Southeast Asian countries, data show that children typically enrol in pre-primary education programmes at age 3, and join primary school at age 6. Assuming that children stay in pre-primary school for one to three years, this crucial window provides ECCE teachers with opportunities to positively influence child learning and development outcomes and adequately prepare them for primary education.

Despite increased awareness on the importance of ECCE, according to latest available data, access to pre-primary education in Southeast Asia remains far below the targets set for 2030, with only Malaysia and Vietnam having net enrolment rates of at least 80 per cent.

**Table 1.** Selected indicators for early childhood education in Southeast Asia

| Country/<br>Indicator | Age of<br>entry at<br>pre-primary<br>school (2015) | Official age<br>of entry<br>at primary<br>school (2015) | Theoretical<br>duration of<br>pre-primary<br>years (2015) | Enrolment in<br>pre-primary<br>education<br>(2015) | Net<br>enrolment<br>rate (2015) | Gross<br>enrolment<br>ratio |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Brunei<br>Darussalam  | 3  | 6   | 3   | 13,301   | 65                              | N/a                         |
| Cambodia              | 3  | 6   | 3   | 187,450  | 17                              | 8                           |
| Indonesia             | 5  | 7   | 2   | 5,349,040  | 39                              | 18                          |
| Lao PDR               | 3  | 6   | 3   | 175,492  | 33                              | N/a                         |
| Malaysia              | 4  | 6   | 2   | 934,480  | 81                              | N/a                         |
| Myanmar               | 3  | 5   | 2   | 453,480  | 24                              | N/a                         |
| Philippines           | 5  | 6   | 1   | 1,165,771  | 41                              | N/a                         |
| Singapore             | 4*   | 7*  | 3   | 66,331*  | N/a                             | N/a                         |
| Thailand              | 3  | 6   | 3   | 1,636,244  | 58                              | 70                          |
| Timor-Leste           | 3  | 6   | 3   | 18,983   | 16                              | N/a                         |
| Viet Nam              | 3  | 6   | 3   | 3,754,975  | 78                              | 21                          |

**Note:** For Indonesia and Myanmar, refer to 2014; for Viet Nam, refer to 2013; for the Philippines refer to 2009. For Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) data, for Cambodia, 2012; for Indonesia 2014; for Thailand and Viet Nam, 2015.

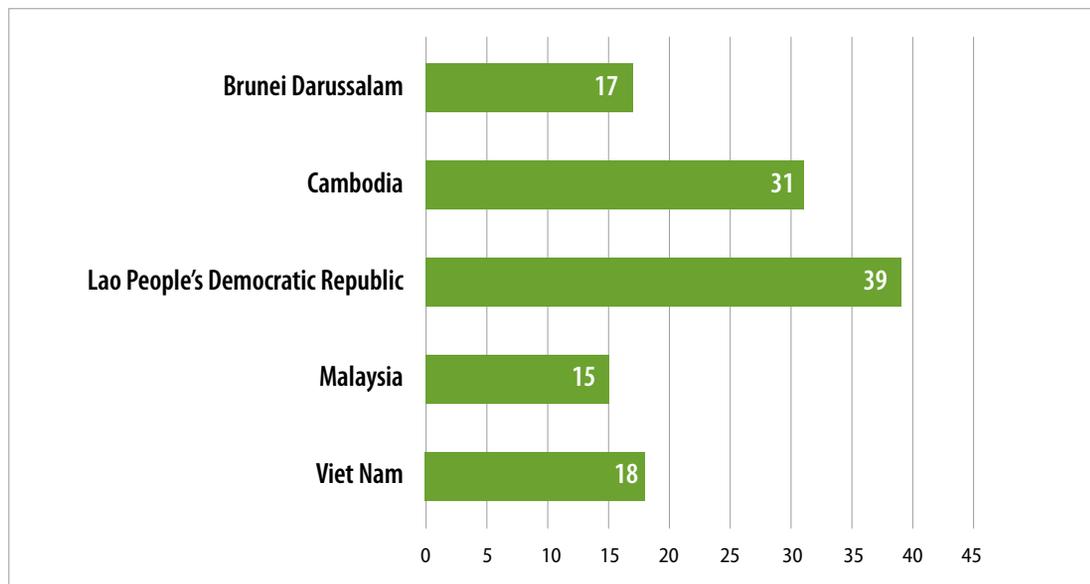
**N/a:** Not available

**Sources:** UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), accessed July 2017.

\*For Singapore, updated data were provided by the Singapore Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), with references to the Singapore Yearbook of Statistics.

At the same time, available comparable data on pre-primary education teachers in Southeast Asia support the need to further improve teacher qualifications. While available country data indicate that Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Viet Nam have reported to have training for “all” or “almost all” pre-primary education teachers (UIS, 2017), “the ratio of pupil-qualified teacher” in pre-primary education still remains low, and provides further impetus for countries to increase the number of qualified teachers.

**Figure 1.** Pupil/qualified teacher ratio in pre-primary education (headcount basis, 2015)



*Source:* UIS, accessed October 2017.

To address the gaps in pre-primary education, various regional initiatives to support ECCE exist. In line with the SDGs, the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) identified ECCE as the first of seven priority areas to be promoted from 2015 to 2035. Consistent with this prioritization, a new SEAMEO Regional Centre for ECCE and Parenting (SEAMEO-CECCEP) was established in Bandung, Indonesia in 2017 to further strengthen ECCE in Southeast Asia through capacity building, research policy advocacy and knowledge dissemination activities.

A review conducted on quality assurance initiatives around early childhood care and development (ECCD)<sup>1</sup> in ten Southeast Asian countries<sup>2</sup> identified that different countries had achieved varying levels of progress in terms of developing systems for quality assurance. Malaysia and Indonesia, for example, were among those that had made significant progress, while the Philippines and Brunei Darussalam were among those that were developing or had recently implemented quality assurance systems at the time of this framework development.

<sup>1</sup> The use of the term “ECCD” reflects the then programmatic-focus (2010 to 2011) on ECCD.

<sup>2</sup> While Singapore was unable to participate in the project workshops, to the extent available, the INNOTECH-ARNEC project attempted to also include data on ECCD in Singapore.

Thailand had policies related to quality assurance, including those mainstreamed in the National Education Act of 1999, and specific policies contained in the 2005 Early Childhood / Basic Education Standards (SEAMEO INNOTECH and ARNEC, n.d.).

While the international community was still preparing for transitioning to the SDGs, as early as 2014, Southeast Asian countries, with support from UNESCO and SEAMEO and with a funding contribution from the Government of Japan, began working on a project on “Early Childhood Teacher Development in Southeast Asia”. The project contributed to the qualitative improvement of pre-primary education by supporting the professionalization and capacity development of pre-primary teachers. It entailed conducting a survey among Ministries of Education in eleven countries and a series of workshops to validate the information gathered. The project resulted in the “Southeast Asian Guidelines for Early Childhood Teacher Development and Management”, which was approved by the Ministers of Education of all eleven SEAMEO member countries (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016).

Addressing concerns surfaced by ECCE teachers in the validation workshops, the Guidelines present concrete recommendations to aid education ministries and key stakeholders in professionalizing and enhancing capacities of early childhood education practitioners, so that they may be more effective drivers of quality ECCE. For example, in addressing concerns related to teacher deployment and retention, countries are being encouraged to develop systematic deployment strategies to ensure a balanced ECCE workforce; to develop incentives for ensuring that qualified ECCE teachers are deployed to remote, poorer, and disadvantaged regions; and to develop policies to ensure longer-term retention of teachers in the profession. In terms of ensuring continuous professional development, ministries are encouraged to develop systematic and equitable processes and programmes for ensuring that support is continuously available for ECCE teachers’ professional development (Ibid.).

In early 2017, the SEAMEO Secretariat, SEAMEO INNOTECH, and the Teachers’ Council of Thailand (TCT), began a collaborative project to develop a regional competency framework for primary and secondary teachers in Southeast Asia. Although articulated differently and targeting a different sub-set of educators, the framework likewise recognizes four essential competency areas needed by basic education teachers to enable them to (1) know and understand what they teach; (2) help students learn; (3) engage the community, and; (4) become better teachers every day. The framework places the learner at the centre, and includes a set of success descriptors that can help users, primarily teachers, track their progress and professional development as they pave the way for helping learners navigate a new and challenging future. When approved by SEAMEO member countries, the general competency framework can be used to ensure continuity and complementarity of professional development initiatives for teachers from early childhood, through primary and secondary education.

## Linking the competency framework with existing standards

The Southeast Asian Guidelines for Early Childhood Teacher Development approved by SEAMEO member countries provide a valuable resource for education ministries and other ministries and organizations working on ECCE, to professionalize early childhood teachers and promote better status and working conditions of ECCE personnel, consistent with the global ILO Policy Guidelines. The Southeast Asian Guidelines have succinctly summarized the recommended teacher development process, which starts from upgrading teacher qualification policies, through recruitment, pre-service training, deployment, and continuous professional development (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the process.



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**Figure 2.** Teacher development and management process



**Source:** UNESCO and SEAMEO (2016). Southeast Asian Guidelines for Early Childhood Teacher Development and Management.

The Guidelines discuss suggested recommendations in the following core areas of teacher development and management:

- qualification, certification, and licensing of accreditation;
- recruitment to the profession;
- pre-service teacher education;

- deployment and retention;
- continuous professional development;
- competencies and professional ethics;
- monitoring and quality assurance for performance appraisal;
- employment terms and working environments; and
- effective governance systems for ECCE.

Moreover, the Southeast Asian Guidelines in fact recommended that *“competency standards should be based on a particular vision and objectives for each country’s education system”*, and should generally include competencies around subject knowledge and curricular content, pedagogy, assessment, and evaluation, language and culture, information and communication technologies, social and interpersonal relations, and the ability to deal with emergencies. Teachers’ ethical behaviour around young children is likewise seen as important in the discussion of teacher competencies (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016: pp. 15-16).

The ECCE teacher competency framework thus takes into account all of these suggested competencies in order to ensure alignment with the regional guidelines.

### III. The ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia

In developing the ECCE teacher competency framework, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological framework for human development was used as a key reference. Bronfenbrenner's framework recognizes that a confluence of factors contribute to the child's holistic development and that child development does not occur in a vacuum and becomes more effective when interactions occur on a regular and extended basis. Thus, interactions between children and their early childhood teachers in pre-schools and other learning environments are important. Research demonstrating teachers' crucial role in child development outcomes (see for example, Barnett, 2003) provides further impetus for improving early childhood teachers' competencies.

The framework defines competencies as a combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced success in specific performance areas. In the context of ECCE, competencies are seen as crucial to achieving the desired outcomes of holistic child development and learning. Building on Bronfenbrenner's framework, the competencies identified in UNESCO and SEAMEO's (2016) existing guidelines, and insights from ECCE practitioners and experts during a framework validation workshop held in Thailand in August 2017, this framework places the competent ECCE teacher at the centre and suggests that ECCE teachers are able to demonstrate competencies across four domains: (1) content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment; (2) the learning environment; (3) engagement and collaboration; and (4) professional development. Embedded in the four broad competency areas are a set of seven **core or general competencies** related to ECCE teachers' general areas of responsibility and **supporting or enabling competencies**, or specific tasks/knowledge, that ECCE teachers should be able to perform or demonstrate to support each general competency.

Figure 3 illustrates the ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia. The corresponding list of supporting or enabling competencies, which are likewise central elements of the framework, will be discussed in subsequent sections.

**Figure 3.** The ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia



## The contextual landscape for the ECCE teacher competency framework

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s framework, the ECCE teacher competency framework recognizes that the child’s earliest learning and development interactions occur within different learning spaces. At home, for example, it is not only the parents, or mothers, who take care of children. The rise of the middle class in Asia (see for example, ADB 2010), has also brought about changes in the family structure, identified in Bronfenbrenner’s framework as the microsystem. For example, whereas males have traditionally been the primary income earners in the household, females now more than ever contribute to the household income. With both parents contributing to the household income, early childhood care and education responsibilities in the household are shared with family members such as grandparents, siblings, other family members, and in some cases, hired help/child-minders.

Likewise, evolving definitions of “families” now consider the realities of single-parent households, as well as families with same-sex partners. Shifting realities in the economic sphere, such as the seasonal or permanent migration of one or more parents for work, influence the child’s growth and development. Reyes’ desk review on the social costs of migration notes how, “parental absence creates displacement, disruptions, and changes in caregiving arrangements,” (Reyes, 2008), and such “left-behind” children are then often raised by less educated, less motivated, and less energetic extended family members. Changes in the child’s different environmental contexts such as these, would then have effects on their learning and development.

The framework also recognizes that ECCE landscapes vary across different countries. Thus, the framework considers the presence, quality, and/or absence of (1) the national environment, including the socio-economic and political environment and cultural norms and values; (2) national policies related to early childhood care and education, including professional and ethical standards for ECCE teachers; and (3) supporting resources for ECCE, including from public, private, and other sources.



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## 1. National Environment

Many governmental policies have significant impact on education, and socio-economic policies have the most direct impact. These include allocation of the annual national budget to education and the share for ECCE within the education budget. Economic policies that target job creation, management of labour laws and unemployment directly and indirectly impact on ECCE human resources trends and practices. Other macro-system factors such as cultural norms and prevalent belief systems also greatly influence ECCE practices.

## 2. National Policies (Education)

The national policy on education does more than cascade policy implementation and develop systemic mechanisms that drive and regulate institutional and individual practices. The policy is a formal signaling that directs public attention to ECCE in the education sector. Policy on national teacher professional and ethical standards, and guidelines on requisite qualifications for recruitment, preparation, tenure and promotion articulate the government's stance on teacher professional status and expectations of the standard of teacher practices.

## 3. Supporting Resources

Apart from the annual budget for education, other resources for ECCE can come from the wider public as well as the private sector. Governmental guidelines on land use, transport and infrastructure have a direct impact on the resources available to ECCE centres. The private sector is potentially a rich provider of resources, such as support from corporate social responsibility initiatives or from other forms of community outreach projects.

The framework suggests that these three categories of elements in the macro-system interact to influence early childhood care and education outcomes. For instance, the presence of quality ECCE standards in a country requiring teachers to have a certain number of training/teaching practicum hours may translate to better-informed teaching pedagogies. The existing socio-economic environment, identified as part of the macro-system, influences different elements such as the formulation of national laws and standards. Allocation of resources for ECCE, and cultural norms and values may influence the content and pedagogy of ECCE programmes. These elements of the ECCE landscape then influence the microsystem – the school or the learning environment in which the learning occurs.

With the role of child educators underscored in different research, the framework places the ECCE teacher at the centre. The teacher, found in different learning environments for early childhood learners such as daycare centres, kindergartens, pre-school centres, and faith-based ECCE centres, is deemed part of the child's microsystem. Interactions between the child and the teacher are seen as proximal processes, which are very important to child development. Thus, the framework suggests that teacher characteristics, qualifications, and work experience are important elements contributing to the outcome of a holistically-developed child.

Moreover, this framework recognizes that ECCE teachers are professionals who require specialized training and continuing professional development throughout their careers. Teachers are lifelong learners who need to constantly update their knowledge and skills. They require opportunities to reflect individually and collectively on improving and transforming their practice of the teaching profession.

During the validation workshop for the Southeast Asian framework, participants expressed their aspirations for pre-school teachers to have sufficient educational qualifications, such as

a degree in early childhood education. With countries facing possible constraints in terms of funding and addressing the need for qualified teachers, requiring pre-school teachers to obtain degrees before they are allowed to teach may need more concerted efforts across different agencies and ministries concerned with early childhood care and education.

Also during the workshop, participants identified the following common characteristics and attributes of an ECCE teacher, that go beyond the knowledge and skills expected of teachers. These characteristics and attributes provide the underpinning values, beliefs and skills for the decisions and actions teachers make in their day-to-day work.

- Is kind, patient, and warm
- Demonstrates love for children
- Reflects on the children's conditions and contexts
- Reflects on improving practices in dealing with children
- Communicates well with others
- Is healthy and practices personal care
- Is flexible and creative
- Is a positive role model for children
- Demonstrates positive discipline
- Engages and stimulates children's learning and development
- Is concerned with self-development

While these attributes are not specifically identified in the framework, it might be helpful to keep them in mind, as basic attributes that are relevant to ECCE teachers.

## Understanding the elements of the framework

In using this framework, it is important to recognize that the framework flows sequentially in logical and progressive manner. This section discusses each of the four broad competency domains: (1) content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment; (2) the learning environment; (3) engagement and collaboration; and (4) professional development. The seven core competencies are then discussed under the corresponding competency domain, and the enabling competencies are presented to further illustrate how these support the achievement of the core competencies.

### *Content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment competencies*

The first set of competencies, **content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment competencies** are seen as the most essential for ECCE teachers. This domain covers the first of two core competencies: *understanding the child's holistic development and learning, and facilitating child development and learning*. These are supported by a set of twenty-one

supporting competencies that enable ECCE teachers to demonstrate competence in the domain of **content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment**.

In the first core competency for example, competent ECCE teachers are able to understand, among others, the basics of a child's holistic development and learning. In addition, the Southeast Asian framework puts a premium on the rights-based principle set forth by international bodies, which recognizes that education is a fundamental right across the human life cycle. (See for example UNICEF and UNESCO, 2007). Thus this is the foremost enabling competency for ECCE teachers.

The teachers are able to recognize the different paces by which children develop, and the context in which development occurs. Thus, aside from being knowledgeable about the theories on holistic child development, teachers are expected to know about relevant laws, policies, and standards, at least in their own country contexts. Knowledge of the stages of child development also helps teachers to identify children who may be at-risk or have special needs.

An understanding of the child's holistic development and learning needs to be translated to effective facilitation of child development and learning. For example, equipped with knowledge on child development and learning and approved national ECCE curricula or guidelines, teachers are able to design and implement appropriate ECCE programmes. Moreover, teachers are able to recognize the importance of play as part of learning, and provide opportunities for play-based learning and development.

With understanding of the context of holistic child development and learning, competent teachers are able to utilize available and developmentally appropriate tools and strategies to facilitate child development and learning. With the focus given to mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) (see for example, UNESCO, 2013), communicating using the child's mother tongue or the child's first language is a competency expected of the ECCE teacher for ethnolinguistic children. The use of ICT, to enhance teachers' own learning and, when appropriate, in the classroom, is a specific competence that ECCE teachers are expected to possess, and has thus been included in this framework. This is also consistent with the teacher competencies identified in the Southeast Asian guidelines.

In the Southeast Asian Guidelines, assessment and evaluation competencies may refer to *"knowledge of various child development and learning assessment tools, feedback mechanisms, and data collection systems"*; *"formative assessments supporting children's individual learning needs"*; and *"competencies in identifying and responding appropriately to children with special needs, such as those with delays or disabilities"* (Ibid: p.16). These elements have been included in the framework, although subsumed under the general competency of facilitating child development and learning.

In the Southeast Asian context, it is worth noting that competencies related to assessment are subsumed under the **content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment** domain,

suggesting the embeddedness of the need for assessment in reviewing the child’s progress in holistic development and learning. The aspect of embeddedness of assessment-related competencies in the Southeast Asian ECCE framework is distinct from other frameworks, such as the competencies identified in SEAMEO member countries’ guidelines on early childhood teacher development and management (UNESCO and SEAMEO 2016) and the ECCE teacher competency framework for the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Thus, when applying this competency framework to their own particular contexts, Southeast Asian ECCE practitioners should consider the possible merits of emphasizing “assessment” as a distinct competency for ECCE teachers.

**Box 1.** ECCE teacher competencies in the domain of content knowledge, pedagogic practice, and assessment

| Core/General Competencies   | Enabling/Supporting Competencies   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. Understands the child’s holistic development and learning.</b> <i>These are competencies related to ECCE teachers’ theoretical and practice-based knowledge and understanding of child development and learning.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Demonstrates understanding of the rights of the child.</li> <li>2. Shows respect for individual learners, and places the child at the centre of teaching and learning activities.</li> <li>3. Equips oneself with knowledge on holistic child development and learning, including theories on early childhood development.</li> <li>4. Equips oneself with knowledge of relevant laws, policies, and standards on early childhood care and education.</li> <li>5. Explains relevant knowledge on child development and learning to colleagues, parents, and other ECCE stakeholders.</li> <li>6. Recognizes that children develop at different paces and have diverse needs, interests, and potentials.</li> <li>7. Is able to observe and describe the range of developmental (e.g. cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual) characteristics of a child.</li> <li>8. Identifies children who are at risk/or and have special needs.</li> <li>9. Understands that a child develops in the context of his/ her family and community.</li> </ol> |

| Core/General Competencies   | Enabling/Supporting Competencies  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>2. Facilitates child development and learning.</b> <i>These are competencies related to ECCE teachers' strategies to facilitate child development and learning, including the use of assessment tools, techniques, and results to support child development and learning.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Designs and implements developmentally-, linguistically-, and cultural-appropriate and gender-sensitive practices in classroom management, based on approved national curricular guidelines or frameworks.</li> <li>2. Uses knowledge of child development and learning to plan, design, and implement ECCE programmes.</li> <li>3. Promotes and provides opportunities for play to support child's development and learning.</li> <li>4. Promotes and implements developmentally-appropriate classroom management activities, strategies, and practices for different profiles of learners.</li> <li>5. Utilizes differentiated play-based activities and teaching and learning strategies that encourage creative and critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and children to be active learners.</li> <li>6. Uses appropriate tools, strategies, and technologies, including ICT, to facilitate development and address different developmental needs of children.</li> <li>7. Prepares, incorporates, and adapts the use of cultural knowledge and indigenous/locally-produced learning materials in the design of lessons and activities to enhance indoor and outdoor learning experiences.</li> <li>8. Where appropriate and feasible, communicates using the child's mother tongue/first language in teaching-learning instructions.</li> <li>9. Monitors, records, and reflects on each child's progress and development according to approved early learning development standards.</li> <li>10. Uses assessment results to inform the design of future activities.</li> <li>11. Uses assessment results for referrals of children at risk and children manifesting significant delays or other special needs for further diagnosis, support and intervention.</li> <li>12. Uses assessment results to evaluate and determine interventions for child transition and readiness for primary education.</li> </ol> |

### **The learning environment**

In Southeast Asia, establishing a **learning environment** that addresses the developmental needs of children is seen as important. Whether this environment is a community-managed facility, a faith-based learning space, a government-funded daycare service or a private pre-school, it is important that ECCE teachers ensure that both indoor and outdoor learning facilities are safe, clean, and conducive for child learning and development. Beyond physical structures, the competent ECCE teachers are also able to ensure that children's health, safety, protection, and overall well-being are safeguarded.

Thus, this framework recognizes two core competencies under the domain of the learning environment: *establishes a nurturing, inclusive, and safe environment; and promotes health, nutrition, safety, and protection of children*. These competencies, are supported by a set of twenty-five sub-competencies that in turn enable ECCE teachers to demonstrate competence in the domain of the child's **learning environment**.

Among the foremost enabling competencies for ECCE teachers are providing and designing a conducive learning and development environment that considers socio-emotional and physical needs of children and that allows children to feel nurtured, safe, and protected. Moreover, in line with various development agendas to ensure inclusion of all learners, teachers are able to provide an environment and demonstrate use of inclusive practices that encourage the inclusion of all children, especially those with special needs, in different learning and development activities.

Again, consistent with the Southeast Asian guidelines, competencies related to language and cultural competencies, dealing with information and communication technologies, and the ability to deal with emergencies are included among the enabling competencies for the **learning environment** domain.

**Box 2.** ECCE teacher competencies in the learning environment domain

| Core/General Competencies  | Enabling/ Supporting Competencies   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>3. Establishes a nurturing, inclusive, and safe environment.</b><br/> <i>This concerns competencies related to how teachers create environments conducive for children</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provides a safe and conducive learning environment that allows the child to feel nurtured, safe, and protected.</li> <li>2. Designs a child-friendly, safe, and conducive environment that considers socio-emotional and physical needs of all children.</li> <li>3. Provides a gender-sensitive and culturally/linguistically-sensitive environment that encourages the inclusion of all children, especially those with special needs.</li> <li>4. Provides an environment that supports the integration of health, nutrition, early learning, and protection.</li> <li>5. Prepares an environment that fosters critical thinking, creativity, communication, cooperation, curiosity, empathy, exploration, problem solving and decision-making.</li> <li>6. Ensures that all classroom resources, technologies, and learning materials are safe, clean, complete, and appropriate.</li> <li>7. Provides learning materials that encourage children to discover and create.</li> <li>8. Establishes developmentally-appropriate routines for learning to foster a sense of security and develop healthy habits in children.</li> <li>9. Fosters positive interactions, including teacher-adult, teacher-child, child-child, and child-adult relationships.</li> <li>10. Interacts with all children in a loving and caring manner.</li> <li>11. Actively listens to children and is responsive to their needs.</li> <li>12. Shows consistently positive models to demonstrate behaviour expected of children.</li> <li>13. Demonstrates use of inclusive practices that work for children of all backgrounds, characteristics, and abilities.</li> <li>14. Provides a range of strategies to support positive discipline and encourage child's positive behaviour.</li> </ol> |

| Core/General Competencies  | Enabling/ Supporting Competencies  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>4. Promotes health, nutrition, safety, and protection.</b><br/><i>Competencies related to strategies and practices to ensure that the child's health, nutrition, safety, and protection needs are addressed.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifies and links children with health, safety, nutrition, and protection services available in the community.</li> <li>2. Implements culturally-appropriate policies, regulations, and practices that ensure the child's health, nutrition, safety, and protection.</li> <li>3. Supports the development of the child's self-help skills (e.g. self-feeding, dressing, hygiene, and toilet training) to encourage good habits and independence in children.</li> <li>4. Monitors and documents the immediate health, nutrition, safety, and protection needs of the child.</li> <li>5. Prepares children to protect themselves from possible threats and dangers to their bodies and minds (e.g. teaching children about road safety, stranger-danger, etc.)</li> <li>6. Can recognize risk factors/adverse conditions in the child's family (e.g. substance abuse, domestic violence, parents' health conditions) that may affect the child's health, safety, and protection.</li> <li>7. Detects, reports, and refers possible cases of child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities.</li> <li>8. Administers basic first aid as an initial response to injuries and sickness.</li> <li>9. Is prepared to respond promptly and appropriately to emergencies such as accidents, fires, disasters, and calamities.</li> <li>10. Prepares children to respond appropriately in case of emergencies.</li> <li>11. Is prepared to adequately respond to and support the health, nutrition, safety, protection, and well-being needs of the child, including those who are possible victims of abuse or neglect.</li> </ol> |

### Engagement and collaboration

Going back to Bronfenbrenner's framework, which recognizes the importance of interactions among different systems and the relationships of different actors in each system, **engagement and collaboration** is likewise seen as a competency domain in the ECCE framework. The competent ECCE teachers are able to engage stakeholders in the child's development for

varying reasons. For example, they are able to maintain regular relations with the child’s family members, legal guardians or immediate caregivers to provide feedback on matters concerning the child’s development, as well as to extend learning experiences at home. Moreover, they are able to collaborate with peers – including other ECCE teachers and primary school teachers – to share relevant knowledge about the child’s development, as well as to ensure continuity in learning outcomes when the child moves on to primary school.

In some instances, teachers are also expected to extend their roles. From being stewards of children’s learning in the classroom, they are also to be staunch advocates of ECCE, sometimes mobilizing support for resources from different ECCE stakeholders. While more advanced competencies such as high-level fund-raising may be delegated to administrators of ECCE facilities, at the minimum, ECCE teachers should be able to communicate such needs to their supervisors and relevant authorities.

**Box 3.** ECCE teacher competencies in the engagement and collaboration domain

| Core/General Competencies   | Enabling/ Supporting Competencies   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>5. Engages parents and families as partners in ECCE.</b><br/> <i>Competencies related to working with children’s families and caregivers as partners in ECCE.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishes open communication with parents and families, using appropriate strategies and technologies.</li> <li>2. Builds and sustains mutual trust and cooperation with parents and families.</li> <li>3. Explains ECCE programmes to and collaborates with parents, families, and caregivers to extend and reinforce positive learning experiences at home.</li> <li>4. Plans and implements activities or programmes for parents, families, and caregivers to support the child’s early childhood care and education.</li> <li>5. Encourages parents’ and families’ participation in classroom activities.</li> <li>6. Encourages involvement of positive male role models (e.g. fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, etc.) in ECCE.</li> <li>7. Involves parents/families in child assessment and provides feedback to enable them to support child’s development and progress at home.</li> <li>8. Informs parents/families about and encourages their involvement in community services on child health, nutrition, safety and protection.</li> </ol> |

| Core/General Competencies   | Enabling/ Supporting Competencies   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>6. Networks and collaborates with relevant stakeholders to promote ECCE.</b><br/><i>Competencies related to working with a range of stakeholders concerned with the general well-being of children.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborates with ECCE teachers for knowledge sharing, peer learning, and support.</li> <li>2. Collaborates with peers, daycare providers, and primary school educators to ensure that children are provided with a smooth transition of developmentally-appropriate support, across different levels.</li> <li>3. Works collaboratively with primary, especially early grade teachers, to understand early childhood and early grade curricula and relevant background information to ensure a smooth transition from ECCE to primary levels.</li> <li>4. Works collaboratively with relevant specialists and authorities for appropriate actions to improve inclusion of children with special needs.</li> <li>5. Establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with relevant stakeholders/service providers (e.g. community, government, private sector, and non-government partners) for appropriate actions to ensure the delivery of health, nutrition, safety, protection, and social services for children.</li> <li>6. Involves members of the community to enrich learning experiences of children and promote ECCE in the community.</li> <li>7. Identifies and engages with relevant local, national, regional, and international agencies/organizations for benchmarking, programme development, and enrichment.</li> <li>8. Serves as an advocate to encourage community leaders, local government executives, and other ECCE stakeholder to promote and support ECCE goals.</li> <li>9. Mobilizes support from different ECCE stakeholders.</li> </ol> |

### *Professional development*

In addition and equally significant, the competent ECCE teachers are able to demonstrate their commitment to improve themselves and the practice of their profession as ECCE practitioners, through continuing **professional development**. This does not merely refer to participation in in-service training or academic upgrading of certification. At the core of the professional development activities lies a commitment to proactive and continuous lifelong learning and personal mastery. This includes a range of enabling competencies that demonstrate teachers' pride and commitment in their roles as ECCE teachers, adherence to professional ethical standards, professional behaviour, and continuous planning, participation, and reflection on the ways by which they can improve the practice of early childhood care and education.

In an increasingly dynamic environment, ECCE teachers are expected to network and engage in communities of practice that will allow them to continuously share their experiences and learn from one another. This will also provide them with opportunities to share how they have been using the teacher competency framework, and how the framework can be improved in the future, depending on the evolving practice of the ECCE profession.



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**Box 4.** ECCE teacher competencies in the professional development domain

| Core/General Competencies  | Enabling/ Supporting Competencies   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>7. Ensures continuous personal growth and professional development.</b><br/><i>Competencies that demonstrate ECCE teachers' commitment to improve themselves and the practice of their profession as ECCE practitioners.</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Demonstrates pride in and commitment to one's roles as an early childhood teacher.</li><li>2. Behaves in a professional and ethical manner, including respecting diverse views and cultures, upholding ethics and values, and collaborating with colleagues, as identified in national laws, policies, and other relevant professional and ethical standards related to early childhood.</li><li>3. Identifies, plans, and participates in professional development programmes/activities that promote continuous improvement as an early childhood teacher.</li><li>4. Develops his/ her interpersonal skills.</li><li>5. Develops his/ her technological literacy and skills to support implementation of ECCE programmes.</li><li>6. Continuously reflects on ways to improve the practice of ECCE by applying new knowledge, learnings, and insights from professional development activities/programmes in the practice of ECCE.</li><li>7. Demonstrates leadership in the practice of early childhood education.</li><li>8. Shares and disseminates new knowledge and skills gained from professional development activities with other ECCE stakeholders through appropriate venues (e.g. meetings, fora, seminars, etc.).</li><li>9. Engages in research activities to improve early childhood care and education.</li></ol> |

## Summary

These four domains – **content knowledge, pedagogic practice and assessment; learning environment; networking and collaboration; and professional development** – are key elements of the competency framework for ECCE teachers in Southeast Asia. These elements are not independent from each other; rather, there are synergies and interrelations within each set of competencies. The competencies identified in the framework demonstrate that different actors in the microsystems (e.g. parents-teachers, teachers-peers, teacher-stakeholders), interact.

For instance, a teacher's understanding of the child's holistic development and learning, identified as the first core competency, should translate into how he or she designs and conducts lessons in the learning setting, and how he or she engages with other ECCE stakeholders, to better engage children in the learning process. Familiarity with the needs and gaps in providing a conducive learning environment, meanwhile, may propel the teacher to maximize his or her networking and collaboration competencies, so that he or she can more effectively communicate these needs to key ECCE stakeholders.

Likewise, these domains also interact with the elements of the broader ECCE landscape, and should not be treated independently. For example, understanding holistic development and learning, as well as knowledge on relevant laws and policies related to ECCE, may be included as prerequisites in terms of national curricula or standards for early learning teachers. These competencies may then be more easily addressed if the macro-systems provide support mechanisms for such.

## IV. Possible uses and applications

The ECCE teacher competency framework for Southeast Asia is not meant to be prescriptive; it is neither meant to be used to impose sanctions on teachers who do not demonstrate the competencies identified, nor to reward teachers who demonstrate the competencies. The knowledge and skills in the featured competencies would be progressively acquired. Thus, the framework can be used as a reference for developing competencies of pre- and in-service teachers or strengthening existing skills and knowledge of ECCE teachers. In-service teachers can also use the framework as a reference to improve their competencies, as well as to track and plan their own professional development and advance their career goals.

Relevant ministries, teacher training institutions, and the donor community can use the framework to streamline or prioritize the training areas on which they wish to focus. For example, in geographic areas that may be more prone to natural disasters, relevant authorities may decide to prioritize teacher training activities focused on competencies relevant to providing a safe and conducive environment for ECCE. In instances where families and other household members are not as involved in ECCE, authorities may also decide to provide training activities that aim to strengthen teachers' competencies in engaging families as partners in ECCE.

When endorsed by SEAMEO member countries, the framework is also a potentially-relevant document to guide the newly-established SEAMEO Regional Centre for ECCE and Parenting (SEAMEO CECCEP) in Bandung, Indonesia as it develops its inaugural five-year strategic development plan. The framework document, as well as the research done on ECCE in the sub-region, can provide the CECCEP team with deeper insights on issues and realities on ECCE in the region as the team crafts capacity building programmes, research initiatives, policy advocacy and knowledge-dissemination activities designed to strengthen ECCE in Southeast Asia.

The simplicity and the flexibility of the framework provides different ECCE stakeholders with the leeway to refer to the framework according to how they think it is relevant to support their context and needs. Users are encouraged to be creative in their use of the framework, with the caveat that the framework is meant to advance ECCE goals. Table 2 presents a sample of how different users can apply the framework, depending on specific purposes.

**Table 2.** Sample uses and applications of the framework

| Intended User   | Possible Applications   | Purpose   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Education ministries</b>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education ministries can refer to the framework as a benchmark for developing new competency standards, or reviewing their own national teacher competency frameworks or certification/accreditation systems.</li> <li>2. Education ministries working on ECCE can plan to develop or enhance capacity building programmes for state teacher training institutions.</li> </ol>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning for state-funded capacity building programmes on ECCE</li> <li>• Benchmarking standard for developing new, or reviewing existing competency frameworks</li> <li>• Reviewing teacher policies with a view to improve the status and working conditions of ECCE teachers</li> </ul> |
| <b>Other government ministries (e.g. Social Welfare Ministry, Ministry of Women, Youth, and Children, etc.)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Other government agencies working on ECCE can refer to the framework to plan for relevant activities related to providing support services for ECCE.</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning support initiatives on ECCE</li> <li>• Strengthening inter-government collaboration on ECCE</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Teacher training institutions</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Curriculum developers at teacher training institutions can refer to the framework to develop new programmes or courses on Early Childhood Care and Education, or to upgrade ECCE teacher training programmes from diploma/ certificate to degree levels.</li> <li>2. Curriculum developers can refer to the framework to enhance existing curricula on ECCE programme offerings.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing new/ enhancing existing curricula</li> <li>• Upgrading ECCE teacher programmes</li> </ul>   |

| Intended User                                   | Possible Applications  | Purpose   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Faculty at higher education institutions</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Faculty of teaching programmes or courses on ECCE can use the framework as a guide for developing new courses/ improving existing courses on ECCE.</li> <li>2. Faculty can refer to the framework to combine relevant courses with other non-ECCE courses and provide career options to become ECCE teachers, in order to increase the number of qualified ECCE teachers.</li> <li>3. Faculty at higher education institutions can conduct research around the framework and related ECCE themes.</li> <li>4. Faculty can also use the framework as a benchmark from which to assess their own competencies related to ECCE.</li> </ol>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECCE course enhancement/ development</li> <li>• Jump-off for research on competency development, professional development, and other related themes</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>ECCE centre directors/ administrators</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ECCE centre directors/ administrators can refer to the framework to develop or enhance existing recruitment standards and working conditions of ECCE teachers.</li> <li>2. ECCE centre directors/ administrators can use the framework to plan for the professional development of ECCE teachers.</li> <li>3. ECCE centre directors/ administrators can use the framework as a tool to advocate for ECCE support/ resources from state, community, or other partners.</li> <li>4. ECCE centre directors/ administrators can use the framework as an input to mentoring, coaching, and instructional supervision of ECCE teachers.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving or developing recruitment standards</li> <li>• Continuing professional development</li> <li>• Mobilizing resources</li> <li>• Mentoring/coaching/ instructional supervision</li> </ul> |

| Intended User   | Possible Applications  | Purpose  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Lead teachers/<br/>supervisors/<br/>pedagogical<br/>advisors of<br/>ECCE teachers</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher supervisors/ lead teachers can refer to the framework for recruitment of qualified ECCE teachers.</li> <li>2. Teacher supervisors/ lead teachers can use the framework to plan professional development programmes for ECCE teachers</li> <li>3. ECCE teachers' supervisors/pedagogical advisors can use the framework as a tool to plan, review, and assess ECCE teachers' performance in the classroom.</li> <li>4. Supervisors/ pedagogical advisors can use the framework to design coaching activities to improve capacities of ECCE teachers.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving or developing recruitment standards</li> <li>• Planning for teachers' professional development</li> <li>• Planning and reviewing teachers' performance</li> <li>• Coaching and mentoring</li> </ul> |
| <b>ECCE teachers</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At the start of each school year, teachers can use the framework to identify competency areas they need to demonstrate throughout the school year and plan to improve on those areas, aligned with the ECCE centre's/ school's curriculum.</li> <li>2. At the start of each school year, teachers can use the framework to assess the areas they wish to improve on as professionals.</li> <li>3. Throughout the year, teachers can refer to the competencies to assess progress in terms of planned self-improvement goals.</li> </ol>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing professional development</li> <li>• Enhancing skills, knowledge, and other areas for improvement</li> <li>• Assessing progress in terms of planned professional development goals</li> </ul>       |
| <b>Regional<br/>ECCE centre/s<br/>(e.g. SEAMEO<br/>Regional<br/>Centre for Early<br/>Childhood<br/>Care, ducation,<br/>and Parenting)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The SEAMEO CECCEP/ other regional ECCE organizations can use the framework to craft capacity building programmes for ECCE practitioners in the region.</li> <li>2. Regional organizations can design and conduct research and knowledge dissemination activities around ECCE teacher competencies and professional development.</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guiding the development of capacity building programmes</li> <li>• Providing a platform to strengthen regional research collaboration</li> </ul>  |

## V. The way forward

The development of this framework responds to the challenges set forth during the Putrajaya Forum, specifically action agenda 3, which calls for the development of clear policies, strategies and guidelines for the professionalization of ECCE personnel through professional development. Should Southeast Asian Ministers of Education and key ECCE stakeholders adopt this competency framework for ECCE teachers, this will be another step forward, in terms of addressing commitments made towards achieving improved teacher quality and enhanced readiness for primary education.

Recognizing the vital role that well-trained professionals play in the improving and assuring the quality of ECCE, this framework provides a clear but flexible starting point to complement and interface with existing national and regional initiatives related to regulations, standards, and competency frameworks for teachers. Based on the unique ECCE contexts and situations in each Southeast Asian country, a possible concrete way forward for ECCE stakeholders is to assess where they are in terms of initiatives and systems in place for ECCE, review the competency framework, and determine how they can best adapt and apply the teacher competency framework to make their work on ECCE more relevant.



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# Glossary of Key Terms and Definitions

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Assessment</b>                  | In the context of the ECCE teacher competency framework, assessment competencies may refer to the knowledge of various child development and learning assessment tools, feedback mechanisms, and data collection systems; formative assessments supportive of children’s individual learning needs, and teacher competencies in identifying and responding appropriately to children with special needs (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016). |
| <b>Child protection</b>            | Protection from any form of abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse. This also includes the provision of positive parenting and appropriate health and nutrition (PRC4ECCE, n.d.).  |
| <b>Competencies</b>                | These are a combination of skills, knowledge, behaviour, and attributes necessary for successful job performance (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2015).  |
| <b>Competency framework</b>        | These are a set of suggested desired professional competencies of ECCE teachers, which may vary by country/ regional context. This framework focuses on the desired competencies for early childhood teachers in Southeast Asia.   |
| <b>Development</b>                 | This refers to the child’s holistic development in terms of physical health and growth, social-emotional, language, cultural, self-care, and thinking skills (PRC4ECCE, n.d.).   |
| <b>Developmentally-appropriate</b> | This refers to activities that are age and culturally-appropriate, including those that are based on the child’s individual abilities and stages of growth (PRC4ECCE, n.d.).   |
| <b>Early childhood</b>             | UNESCO, UNICEF, and most international literature define early childhood as the period between birth and eight years, the most rapid period of human development.  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Early childhood care and education</b> | <p>ECCE puts emphasis on the child’s holistic development (social, emotional, cognitive, and physical) to establish a strong foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. As articulated in the SDGs, ECCE includes a focus on including child readiness for primary education.</p> <p>Early childhood education (ECE), early childhood education and care (ECEC), early childhood care, early childhood development (ECD), and early childhood care and development (ECCD) are among various terminologies used interchangeably.</p> |
| <b>ECCE programmes</b>                    | <p>Programmes that, in addition to providing children with care, offer a structured and purposeful set of learning activities either in a formal institution (pre-primary or ISCED 0) or as part of a non-formal child development programme. ECCE programmes are usually designed for children from age three and include organized learning activities that constitute, on average the equivalent of at least two hours per day and 100 days per year (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016).</p>  |
| <b>ECCE teacher</b>                       | <p>A suitably-qualified individual employed to provide care and education to children in a registered, out-of-home facility. For the purposes of this competency framework, individual countries will need to consider the various roles of early childhood professionals in their own contexts and develop a clear definition of the ECCE teacher for the purposes of applying the competency framework (Adapted from PRC4ECCE, n.d.).</p>   |
| <b>Inclusion</b>                          | <p>This refers to the process of overcoming barriers that limit the presence, participation, and achievement of learners (UNESCO, 2017).</p>  |
| <b>Interpersonal skills</b>               | <p>As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, this refers to the ability to communicate or interact well with other people.</p>   |
| <b>Intrapersonal skills</b>               | <p>These refer to skills and communications that occur within a person’s own mind, such as through meditation, prayer, visualization, and positive affirmations.</p>  |

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| <b>Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE)</b> | This refers to the use of the mother tongue as the language of instruction in the classroom. MTB-MLE is not about restricting access to national and international languages, but about properly preparing children to learn these languages well. MTB-MLE recognizes that starting in the language they know best allows children to build a strong foundation, which then enables them to make an effective transition into other national or international languages (UNESCO, 2013).  |
| <b>Outcomes</b>   | Desired results for children’s learning and development across different domains.  |
| <b>Pre-primary education</b>                                | ISCED level 0; programmes at the initial stage of organized instruction, primarily designed to introduce very young children, aged at least 3 years, to a school-type environment and provide a bridge between home and school. Various referred to as infant education, nursery education, pre-school education, kindergarten, or ECE, such programmes are the more formal component of ECCE. Upon completion of these programmes, children continue their education at ISCED 1 (primary education). (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016). |
| <b>Professional development</b>                             | This refers to the variety of training activities, formal education, or advanced professional learning, which can help teachers, administrators, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (The Glossary of Education Reform).  |
| <b>Recruitment</b>  | The process of adding new individuals to a population or sub-population (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2016).   |





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