



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Surveying and Monitoring the Implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Center Standards for Fiscal Year 2020

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ABSTRACT

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The main purpose of this research was to comprehensively evaluate the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Center standards for the fiscal year 2020 within all early childhood educational institutions throughout the nation, to identify and analyze the challenges and impediments encountered during the execution of these standards and to assemble an extensive report delineating the status of implementation for the National Early Childhood Development Center standards for fiscal year 2020. The study centered its focus on the oversight of early childhood development centers that catered to children ranging from newborns up to six years of age, as well as those preparing for entry into the first grade of elementary education. These centers were distributed across four distinct regions: North, Northeast, Central (inclusive of Bangkok), and the South. A self-developed Likert scale was used to get the opinions of the early childhood centers caregivers. The data for this study was diligently gathered from a comprehensive sample of 2,500 early childhood development centers caregivers, selected through stratified sampling, spanning the entire nation. In terms of findings, the research yielded noteworthy insights. A significant proportion of early childhood development centers, located across all regions of the country, exhibited substantial advancements in their efforts to implement the National Early Childhood Development Center standards for the fiscal year 2020. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there existed notable variances in compliance levels, with certain centers achieving a higher standard of implementation compared to others.

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education refers to a specialized and holistic educational approach tailored to children in their formative years, typically spanning from birth to around eight years of age. It encompasses a structured and intentionally designed set of experiences, both formal and informal, aimed at fostering cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development during this critical period of rapid growth and learning. High-quality early childhood education programs incorporate evidence-based practices, individualized instruction, and developmentally appropriate curricula to maximize each child's potential, equipping them with essential skills and a strong foundation for future academic success and well-being. Distinguished by its emphasis on play-based learning, culturally responsive practices, and individualized instruction, high-quality early childhood education endeavors to empower children with the essential skills and dispositions required to

thrive academically and emotionally, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and well-rounded citizenship (Darling-Hammond, et al. 2020).

Early childhood education in Thailand has seen significant development and expansion in recent years, reflecting the country's commitment to providing quality education and care for young children. Early childhood education in Thailand typically covers children from birth to around six years old, although there are variations in the age range depending on the specific program or institution (Mukerji, et al. 2023). The early childhood period is often divided into two main stages: the early years (0-3 years) and preschool years (3-6 years). Thai early childhood education places a strong emphasis on holistic development, focusing on the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects of a child's growth. Play-based learning and hands-on activities are commonly integrated into the curriculum, allowing children to explore and learn through interactive experiences (Ernst & Reynolds, 2021).

Early childhood development has emerged as a central emphasis of Thailand's constitutional and educational commitments, aimed at nurturing the comprehensive growth of the nation's children. Rooted in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, specific provisions such as Section 54, paragraph two, underscore the State's obligation to ensure the holistic care and development of young children before they formally commence their educational journey. This constitutional mandate encourages active collaboration between local government organizations and the private sector to create a supportive ecosystem for the development of young minds, encompassing their physical, mental, emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions (UNICEF, 2023).

The main goals of Thailand's early childhood education, including the 2003 Early Childhood Curriculum, are to foster desirable qualities in young children to support them to become good citizens, to behave in a moral manner, and to be disciplined, develop national and cultural pride, become experts in what they are good at, and be responsible to their families, communities, societies, and the nation (Department of Health, 2017). Section 258 of the Constitution further highlights the urgency of national reforms across various sectors, including education. This provision explicitly emphasizes the need to initiate actions in line with Section 54's principles, ensuring that young children access comprehensive development without imposing financial burdens on parents or guardians.

The legal framework, as exemplified by the National Education Act (1999) and its subsequent amendments (No. 2 in 2002 and No. 4 in 2010), places a premium on the management of early childhood education. It envisions the establishment of early childhood development centers, a diverse array of institutions including Child Centers, Child Development Centers, and those affiliated with religious organizations. Moreover, these legal provisions extend state support benefits to parents and guardians, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage effectively in nurturing and educating children (Jeong, et al. 2021).

Aligned with these constitutional and legislative commitments, the National Education Plan for 2017-2036 lays emphasis on the development of educational institutions at all levels. Strategy 3 within this plan, titled "Development of Potential for People of All Ages and Building a Learning Society," underscores the significance of educational quality and standards. Specifically, it highlights the pivotal role of child centers and pre-primary education institutions in providing high-quality, standardized learning activities. These activities are expected to align closely with early childhood curricula and ASEAN early childhood quality standards (Parker, et al. 2022).

While Thailand's commitment to early childhood development is embedded in its legal and policy frameworks, it is essential to rigorously assess the effectiveness of these initiatives. It is within this context that this research is conducted, with the primary aim of evaluating the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Center standards for fiscal year 2020. This study not only seeks to understand the current status of implementation but also endeavors to identify challenges and obstacles that may hinder progress. Furthermore, it aims to provide evidence-based and

pragmatic recommendations to enhance the overall effectiveness of early childhood development programs (Black, et al. 2017).

To gain a deeper understanding of the broader landscape of early childhood development, both within Thailand and internationally, we will now explore existing literature and research findings. These studies offer valuable insights into the global discourse surrounding early childhood education and the impact of effective implementation of standards and policies in this critical domain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Thailand is committed to promoting early childhood education as a foundation for lifelong learning and development. The country recognizes the importance of providing a strong start for its youngest citizens to prepare them for primary education and beyond (Vandeweyer et al. , 2021). Various types of early childhood services are available in Thailand, offering diverse educational and care options for young children.. While the government places significant emphasis on parents and families as the primary caregivers for children, especially during the crucial period from birth to 3 years old, it recognizes that circumstances may necessitate alternative early childhood services, which can be either publicly or privately operated (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006).

The landscape of early childhood education in Thailand can be further segmented into two distinct age groups. The first group comprises infants and toddlers, spanning from birth to 3 years of age. The second group, consisting of 3 to 5 year-olds, typically engages in some form of early childhood education service, which forms the focal point of this research study. Within this age bracket, three primary types of early childhood education are accessible: pre-school classes, kindergartens, and child-care centers. As elucidated by the UNESCO International Bureau of Education in 2011, private schools predominantly offer a three-year kindergarten program. In contrast, governmental (public) services encompass two-year kindergartens and one-year pre-school classes, often linked to primary schools in rural areas (Jones, et al. , 2021).

Numerous studies emphasize the pivotal role of early childhood education in shaping the future of nations. For instance, research by Heckman (2006) highlights the long-term economic and societal benefits of investing in early childhood education, underscoring its potential to reduce social disparities and enhance workforce productivity.

Internationally, initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, call for equitable access to quality early childhood development, recognizing its significance in achieving broader societal objectives (UN, 2015). The importance of such initiatives aligns with Thailand's commitment to early childhood development. Studies by Pianta and Hamre (2009) emphasize the importance of quality standards and teacher-child interactions in early childhood education. Understanding and implementing such standards are essential aspects of effective early childhood development, in alignment with Thailand's efforts. The role of parents and guardians in early childhood education is well-documented (Epstein, 2018). Effective policies and programs should not only target educational institutions but also equip parents with the knowledge and skills required to support their children's development.

Existing research, such as the work of Yoshikawa et al. (2016), sheds light on the challenges faced in early childhood development, particularly concerning access, equity, and quality. These challenges are pertinent to Thailand's context and underscore the need for comprehensive assessments and solutions. Pinyoanuntapong (2013) also conducted research on Thai Early Childhood Development where the main aim of the research was to develop a curriculum and to test the quality of the curriculum for Early Childhood Development centers throughout Thailand. The research resulted that Thai early childhood education curriculum promoted desirable characteristics of preschool children with quality. The results of the experiments revealed that the curriculum made the readiness mean of preschool children to be higher; the desirable characteristics of preschool in general were at the high level; and the curriculum was well effective and suitable to apply to the learning management of preschool children. Ackerman & Sansanelli (2010) conducted a statewide survey involving 391 child care center directors, with a focus on identifying the origins of their preschool

learning expectations and program standards. The mentioned their reliance on the state's child care licensing standards. However, certain responses indicated that the terms "program standards" and "learning standards" might not be commonly used within the child care industry's vocabulary in New Jersey.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore and follow up the implementation according to the National Early Childhood Development Institute Standards Annual fiscal year 2020 of early childhood education institutions all affiliated in the country.
2. To study problems and obstacles in the implementation of the Child Development Center Standards National Early Childhood
3. To report the implementation according to the National Early Childhood Development Institute Standards Annual fiscal year 2020 of early childhood education institutions all affiliated in the country.

METHODOLOGY

It was an exploratory research which constitutes a comprehensive survey and ongoing assessment of the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Institute standards for the fiscal year 2020 within Early Childhood Development Centers.

Refinement of assessment instruments

The research began by refining the assessment instruments to ensure precision and accuracy. The content validity and linguistic precision were meticulously examined by qualified experts. Additionally, the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) was calculated with inputs from nine experts.

Question selection

Questions with an IOC value equal to or exceeding 0.67 were retained, reflecting their alignment with the research objectives and standards. Any questions falling below this conformity threshold were either adjusted or excluded from the assessment, maintaining the integrity of the research instrument.

Pilot testing and confidence determination

The revised assessment instrument, endorsed by qualified experts, underwent a pilot testing phase with 30 non-sample participants. This exercise served to ascertain the confidence level of the instrument. Subsequently, the confidence value was determined using Cronbach's method, yielding an Alpha Coefficient of 0.97 for the entire assessment instrument.

A self-developed scale was used to get the opinions of the early childhood centers caregivers. The questionnaire was developed according to the established implementation tracking form, meticulously aligned with the National Early Childhood Development Center standards. Data from all 2,500 Early Childhood Development Centers caregivers across the nation were diligently recorded and archived in Excel format, maintaining a structured and organized repository for analysis and assessment. These research participants were selected by using stratified random sampling from ECC nationwide as mentioned below;

- Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC): 1,067 participants
- Ministry of Interior: 740 participants
- Bangkok: 416 participants
- Office of the Private Education Commission: 200 participants
- Ministry of Social Development and Human Security: 25 participants
- Ministry of Public Health: 16 participants
- 36 participants from other departments running ECC, including TASA/Satit Schools

Data analysis

This research encompasses an extensive examination and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Institute standards within Early Childhood Development Centers. These results are conveyed through various illustrative elements aimed at facilitating easy comprehension.

Analysis of early childhood data and teachers/caregivers in early childhood development centers:

Preschool children and teachers/caregivers:

- Early Childhood Development Centers were categorized based on the age levels of children enrolled. This analysis revealed:
- 143 children aged under 1 year, accompanied by 1,109 teachers and 56 caregivers.
 - 790 children aged 1 year to 1 year 11 months and 29 days, with 101 teachers and 95 caregivers.
 - 12,863 children aged 2 years to 2 years 11 months and 29 days, alongside 875 teachers and 772 caregivers.
 - 31,741 children aged 3 years to 3 years 11 months and 29 days, with 1,904 teachers and 1,058 caregivers.
 - 63,056 children aged 4 years to 4 years 11 months and 29 days, accompanied by 3,368 teachers and 1,629 caregivers.
 - 74,397 children aged 5 years, right before entering Grade 1, with 4,014 teachers and 1,740 caregivers.

Analysis of early childhood teachers and caregivers:

- Information on early childhood teachers and caregivers was categorized, revealing:
 - The majority of teachers held bachelor's degrees, followed by those with postgraduate qualifications, and a smaller proportion with education below the bachelor's level.
 - Teachers most frequently graduated in early childhood/kindergarten education (79.20%), with the remainder from other fields (20.80%).
 - Caregivers demonstrated a similar pattern, with 48.50% possessing bachelor's degrees and 46.20% holding qualifications in Early Childhood/Kindergarten Education.
 - Only 51.46% of teachers and caregivers received at least 20 hours/year of professional development training, while 86.68% received less than 20 hours/year, and 12.08% had never undergone training.

Opinion analysis of the implementation of the early childhood development center standard:

Standard 1: Operational data analysis according to national early childhood development institute

- In examining the data regarding the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Education Standards, it was found that 83.32% of early childhood development facilities could comply with the first standard.
- These facilities demonstrated their capacity to manage various aspects, including health promotion, learning enhancement, personnel management, family and community engagement, environmental safety, and systematic administration.
- The remaining 16.00% exhibited some areas of improvement.

This research embodies a meticulous examination of data and opinions, shedding light on the state of early childhood development centers and the adherence to national standards, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of early childhood education in Thailand.



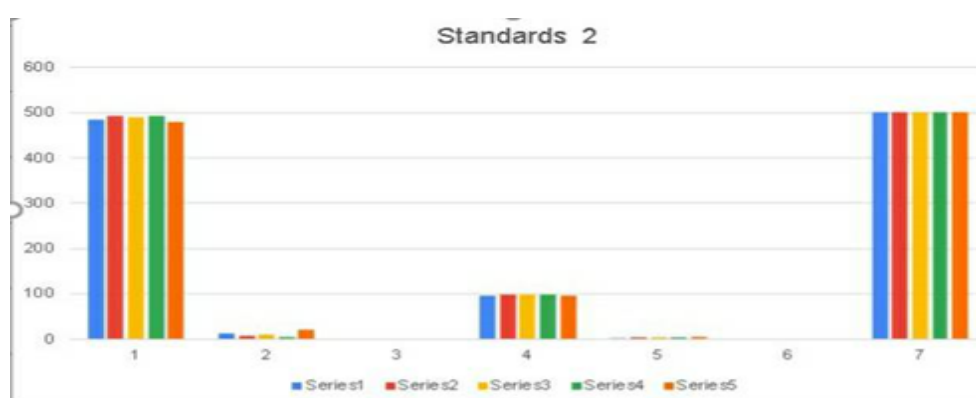
Analysis of operational data according to the National Early Childhood Development Education Institute Standard 2 reveals significant findings. The survey data, focusing on the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development School Standards, provides valuable insights into this area.

Standard 2 care, learning experiences, and play provided for early childhood development

In Standard 2, which pertains to the care, learning experiences, and play provided for early childhood development, the results are noteworthy. A substantial 94.91 percent of caregivers demonstrated proficiency in meeting this second standard, underscoring their dedication and competence. Only a modest 5.02 percent exhibited partial adherence, signifying room for improvement.

Specifically, the roles played by early childhood development centers in promoting physical development and ensuring the well-being of children emerged as a standout strength. This aspect garnered the highest compliance rate. It was closely followed by the facilitation of emotional development, psychological-social development, moral cultivation and the fostering of good citizenship, promotion of intelligence, language, and communication development, as well as the holistic care and development of children. Additionally, supporting children during the transition phase to adapt seamlessly to the next level of education received commendable attention.

These findings highlight the dedication of teachers and caregivers in nurturing various facets of early childhood development, ensuring the physical, emotional, social, moral, and intellectual growth of the children under their care. It is a testament to their commitment to providing a comprehensive and supportive learning environment that aligns with the National Early Childhood Development School Standards.



An analysis of operational data in accordance with the National Early Childhood Development Education School Standard, specifically Standard 3, yields valuable insights. The survey data pertaining to the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development Education Standards reveals the following:

Standard 3 the quality of early childhood educational institutions

In Standard 3, which addresses the quality of Early Childhood Educational Institutions, 96 % caregivers indicated that these institutions are proficient in operating in accordance with the third standard. This underscores the commitment and effectiveness of these institutions in upholding the quality benchmarks set by the National Early Childhood Development Education Standards.

This assessment reaffirms that Early Childhood Educational Institutions are dedicated to providing a high standard of education and care, aligning their practices with the prescribed standards. It reflects their commitment to ensuring the optimal development and learning experiences of young children, fostering an environment conducive to their growth and development.



Standard 4 Analysis of data on the suitability of the standard consistency

In our study, we sought to gauge the suitability of standard consistency within the realm of early childhood education. Our findings reveal that an overwhelming majority, precisely 92% of the caregivers, expressed their opinion on this matter. Their collective feedback underscores the overarching effectiveness of early childhood schools in ensuring the comprehensive development and nurturing of young children.

This research reaffirms the notion that these educational institutions are not only well-equipped but also deeply committed to providing a holistic educational experience that aligns seamlessly with the highest standards in the field of early childhood education. It is evident from the caregivers' perspectives that the current standards in place are not only suitable but also necessary for the optimal growth and development of the children under their care.

These insights emphasize the importance of maintaining and, where necessary, improving the existing standards within the field of early childhood education. The overwhelming consensus among caregivers provides valuable feedback and reaffirms the significance of maintaining and continually refining these standards to ensure the best possible educational experience for our youngest learners.

Part 5 the study of information on problems and obstacles in the implementation of the national early childhood development education school standard.

The investigation into the challenges and hindrances encountered during the implementation of the National Early Childhood Development School Standards as per caregivers has illuminated several critical issues:

Divergent management approaches: According to 87% caregivers a notable problem is the lack of alignment and consistency in the management of Early Childhood Development Centers. It is evident that these centers do not uniformly adhere to the prescribed standards. This inconsistency in management practices poses a significant hurdle to achieving standardized and high-quality early childhood education.

Inefficient facility management: According to 85% of caregivers another pressing issue lies in the inefficient management of facilities, including inadequate upkeep and utilization of learning

resources. This inefficiency can negatively impact the overall learning environment, potentially compromising the quality of education provided to young children.

Budgetary constraints: According to 86% caregivers many Early Childhood Development Centers face budgetary constraints, which hinder their ability to provide adequate administrative support. This financial limitation can impede the effective management and operation of these centers, potentially leading to suboptimal outcomes for early childhood education.

Lack of qualified personnel: According to 84% caregivers a critical challenge centers around the availability of personnel with the requisite knowledge and skills to provide enriching experiences for early childhood development. A substantial portion of the personnel employed in these centers does not possess direct qualifications in the field of early childhood education. This deficiency can impact the quality of care and education offered to young learners.

DISCUSSION

This research delves into the challenges faced by various affiliations involved in early childhood development center management in Thailand, including inconsistencies and budget constraints, which impede effective operations and caregiving. Despite these hurdles, a substantial majority of early childhood development facilities exhibit proficiency in adhering to national standards, with caregivers excelling in providing comprehensive care and education.

The findings of the present study are in line with the research findings of Yoshikawa *et al.* (2016), who sheds light on the challenges faced in early childhood development, particularly concerning access, equity, and quality. These challenges are pertinent to Thailand's context and underscore the need for comprehensive assessments and solutions. Similarly, Pinyoanuntapong (2013) also conducted research on Thai Early Childhood Development where the main aim of the research was to develop a curriculum and to test the quality of the curriculum for Early Childhood Development centers throughout Thailand. He also found the same nature of commitment of early childhood caregivers and challenges faced by them. The present research is also in line with the research of Ackerman & Sansanelli (2010) a statewide survey involving 391 child care center directors, who suggested that organizations seeking ELCF grants could better support child care centers in implementing more rigorous program and learning standards by tailoring their training and technical assistance efforts to accommodate the diverse starting points of child care quality, the financial needs of the Early childhood centers in Thailand are also very crucial as indicated by the research participants.

The research findings are contrary to Busch *et al.* (2023), who with his co-authors examined flexible early childhood education (ECE) programs for young refugee children in Germany and found that these programs effectively support social-emotional adjustment. Structural quality varied based on program settings, but process quality was consistently high. However, these programs prioritize social-emotional development over pre-academic learning, suggesting that they may not fully substitute traditional ECE services. Further research is needed to develop adaptive assessment tools that consider diverse program implementation strategies and the specific needs of refugee children. In Thailand the quality of Early Childhood Centers is based on the structural and administrative standards only.

Practical and theoretical implications

The research offers practical insights into addressing challenges and enhancing the quality of early childhood development centers in Thailand. The findings emphasize the need for organizations and policymakers in Thailand to offer tailored training and support to early childhood development centers. This should consider the diverse starting points and specific needs of these centers, particularly regarding the challenges posed by budget constraints and inconsistencies. Providing targeted assistance can help centers enhance their quality of care and education. Given the financial challenges highlighted by research participants, it is crucial for authorities to consider increased

financial support for early childhood centers. Adequate funding can alleviate budget constraints, enabling centers to maintain high-quality standards and support caregivers effectively.

The study underscores the importance of comprehensive assessments in the early childhood education sector. Authorities should conduct regular evaluations to identify areas of improvement and address inconsistencies. This can lead to more effective management and caregiving within these centers. The findings align with international research, such as Yoshikawa *et al.* (2016) and Pinyoanuntapong (2013), which have highlighted similar challenges and commitments in the field of early childhood development. This suggests that the challenges faced by early childhood development centers in Thailand are not unique and should be addressed with global best practices in mind.

The study reinforces the importance of a standard-based quality assessment system in Thailand's early childhood education sector. While the research participants expressed commitment to national standards, it is crucial to continue maintaining and refining these standards to ensure comprehensive development and nurturing of young children.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A notable limitation of this research pertains to potential sampling bias. The study's findings rely on a specific subset of early childhood development centers in Thailand. This sample may not fully encapsulate the diversity and heterogeneity inherent in the broader landscape of such centers across the nation, thereby potentially introducing sampling bias into the study's conclusions. Another limitation stems from the utilization of self-reported data as a primary source of information. Data acquisition predominantly hinges on self-reported responses from caregivers and early childhood development centers. While self-reporting is a conventional data collection approach, it can introduce response bias and may not invariably mirror the precise operational and caregiving realities within these centers.

The avenue of longitudinal studies holds significant promise as a future research direction. The adoption of longitudinal research designs would facilitate the continual monitoring and documentation of the developmental trajectories in tandem with quantitative methodologies, future research could undertake qualitative inquiries, such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Such qualitative investigations would furnish richer and more nuanced insights into the experiences, perceptions, and narratives of caregivers, educators, and children within these centers. Expanding the scope of research participation to encompass a broader spectrum of stakeholders, including parents, community members, and local authorities, constitutes a salient future research trajectory.

CONCLUSIONS

In the realm of early childhood development center management, various affiliations in Thailand face unique challenges, including inconsistencies and budget constraints, which hinder effective management, caregiving, and education quality. A significant majority of early childhood development facilities (83.32%) exhibit proficiency in complying with the first standard, showcasing their capacity to manage various aspects of center operations in line with national standards. Caregivers excel in meeting the second standard, with 94.91% demonstrating proficiency in providing care, fostering learning experiences, and facilitating play, especially in areas such as physical development, emotional well-being, and transitioning to the next level of education.

Caregivers overwhelmingly believe (96%) that early childhood educational institutions operate proficiently in accordance with the third standard, highlighting their commitment to delivering a high standard of education and care. A majority of caregivers (92%) express their opinion on the suitability of standard consistency, emphasizing the effectiveness of early childhood schools in ensuring comprehensive development and nurturing of young children, thereby reaffirming the importance of maintaining and refining existing standards in the field of early childhood education.

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