



Evaluating the Implementation of Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Vietnam: Perspectives from Teachers and Parents

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education (ECE) in Vietnam has experienced substantial reforms over the past decades, shifting from traditional teacher-centered practices to competency-based, child-centered approaches designed to promote holistic development. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of Vietnam's early childhood curriculum from the perspectives of teachers and parents. Using a systematic literature review approach, empirical and theoretical studies published between 2010 and 2025. The findings reveal significant gaps between policy intentions and practical realities. Teachers reported limited resources, insufficient professional training, and cultural constraints rooted in Confucian traditions, while parental involvement remained low due to limited awareness and diverse family dynamics. At the systemic level, disparities in infrastructure, funding, and policy coherence continue to hinder equitable curriculum implementation across regions. These findings emphasize the need for enhanced teacher capacity-building, culturally responsive school-parent partnerships, and context-sensitive policy strategies to improve curriculum fidelity and educational quality.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Curriculum Implementation, Vietnam

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan anak usia dini (PAUD) di Vietnam telah mengalami reformasi signifikan selama beberapa dekade terakhir, dengan pergeseran dari pendekatan pembelajaran berpusat pada guru menuju kurikulum berbasis kompetensi dan berpusat pada anak yang dirancang untuk mendukung perkembangan holistik. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengevaluasi implementasi kurikulum PAUD di Vietnam berdasarkan perspektif guru dan orang tua. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka sistematis dengan menganalisis studi empiris dan teoritis yang dipublikasikan antara tahun 2010 hingga 2025. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan yang signifikan antara kebijakan dan praktik. Guru menghadapi keterbatasan sumber daya, kurangnya pelatihan profesional, serta hambatan budaya yang berakar pada tradisi Konfusianisme, sementara keterlibatan orang tua masih rendah akibat kurangnya pemahaman dan kompleksitas struktur keluarga. Pada tingkat sistemik, kesenjangan infrastruktur, pendanaan, dan konsistensi kebijakan memperburuk ketimpangan implementasi kurikulum antarwilayah. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya peningkatan kapasitas guru, penguatan kemitraan sekolah-orang tua yang sensitif budaya, serta kebijakan berbasis konteks untuk meningkatkan kesesuaian implementasi kurikulum dan kualitas pendidikan anak usia dini di Vietnam.

Kata Kunci: PAUD, Implementasi Kurikulum, Perspektif Guru, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) in Vietnam has undergone a significant transformation over the past decades, evolving from informal, home-based care to a structured educational system with nationally standardized curricula. Historically, ECE was not widely prioritized before 1945 and mainly relied on traditional family-based caregiving practices. However, as Vietnam experienced rapid economic and social changes, the government recognized the necessity of developing a formal early education system to support children's holistic development. Since the introduction of the 2009 Early Childhood Curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), there has been a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered approach rooted in Confucian traditions toward more child-centered, play-based methodologies that encourage active participation, creativity, and exploration (Vu, 2021). This shift represents Vietnam's response to global trends in early education reform, aiming to improve school readiness and educational equity while ensuring children's social, cognitive, and emotional well-being. Understanding this historical background is crucial to comprehensively evaluating how the early childhood curriculum is currently implemented and perceived by key stakeholders.

Vietnam's early childhood education reforms have focused heavily on the design and adoption of a competency-based curriculum that emphasizes developing children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills through structured yet flexible learning experiences. However, the successful implementation of this curriculum depends significantly on teacher competencies, school resources, and institutional support. While many preschool teachers self-report a high level of confidence in their professional capabilities, recent research has revealed a considerable discrepancy between teacher perceptions and actual classroom practices. Ha et al. (2025) found that although teachers claim proficiency in instructional planning and child-centered teaching strategies, classroom observations revealed persistent challenges in adapting lesson plans to diverse learning needs, providing individualized feedback, incorporating technology, and maintaining active engagement among young learners. These findings indicate that curriculum reform alone is insufficient without robust capacity-building initiatives for educators, ongoing professional development, and adequate institutional support mechanisms.

Teacher perspectives play a vital role in understanding the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. The introduction of the "Sprout" framework under MoET reforms has provided greater autonomy and flexibility to teachers, encouraging them to adapt learning experiences based on local contexts and individual student needs (Le, 2023). However, this increased autonomy is accompanied by significant challenges. Educators often face resource shortages, insufficient classroom infrastructure, and heavy administrative workloads, which limit their ability to fully embrace innovative pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the shift from traditional teacher-led instruction to play-based, child-centered methods represents a profound cultural transition, requiring educators to redefine

their professional identities while balancing long-standing societal expectations of academic rigor (Le, 2023). Evaluating teachers' lived experiences and perceptions, therefore, is critical to uncovering potential gaps between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

Equally important in implementing the early childhood curriculum is the active involvement of parents and families, as they serve as primary partners in children's learning journeys. Studies in Vietnam have shown that parental engagement in ECE remains relatively limited, with challenges in communication, collaboration, and understanding the curriculum's objectives (Dinh, 2014). Vietnamese family structures, which often involve extended family members as caregivers, introduce unique cultural dynamics that influence parents' roles and expectations in early education (Huyen, 2019). Unlike some Western education models where parents are highly involved in classroom activities, Vietnamese ECE still tends to position teachers as the dominant authority in children's education. As a result, many parents are unfamiliar with the pedagogical changes introduced by the competency-based curriculum, particularly the transition from rote learning toward holistic developmental approaches. Addressing these gaps requires stronger school-parent partnerships, greater information sharing, and mutual understanding of educational goals.

Globally, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in strengthening early learning outcomes. Research by Hedges, Fler, Fler-Stout, and Hanh (2016) highlights the value of developing culturally responsive partnerships that integrate families' funds of knowledge into teaching practices. In Vietnam's context, fostering these partnerships requires bridging differences in expectations between teachers and families, improving communication channels, and promoting co-responsibility for children's developmental progress. Moreover, international best practices, such as the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) framework and Reggio Emilia-inspired emergent curriculum models, emphasize flexible teaching approaches that respond to children's interests, backgrounds, and individual learning needs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2020). Integrating these frameworks into Vietnam's ECE system can provide useful insights for evaluating how effectively the curriculum supports children's overall development and prepares them for lifelong learning.

In light of these considerations, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive literature review of existing empirical and theoretical research on the implementation of Vietnam's early childhood education curriculum, specifically from the perspectives of teachers and parents. The objective of this study is threefold: (1) to examine teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenges in implementing the competency-based curriculum; (2) to explore parental attitudes, involvement, and expectations regarding the curriculum's goals and learning outcomes; and (3) to identify key barriers and enabling factors that influence effective curriculum implementation in early childhood education. By synthesizing available research, this study seeks to provide policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers with actionable insights to strengthen professional support

systems, foster collaborative teacher–parent relationships, and enhance the quality and equity of Vietnam’s early childhood education system.

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review design to comprehensively evaluate the implementation of Vietnam’s Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum from the perspectives of teachers and parents. The review focuses on empirical and theoretical studies published between 2010 and 2025, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, reports, and policy documents relevant to ECE in Vietnam. Data collection was conducted through academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using search terms such as “*Vietnam early childhood education*,” “*curriculum implementation*,” “*teacher perspectives*,” and “*parental involvement*.” Inclusion criteria targeted studies that directly addressed curriculum implementation, teacher practices, parent engagement, or policy reforms, while studies unrelated to ECE or published before 2010 were excluded. Following PRISMA guidelines, the selection process involved three stages: identification, screening, and eligibility assessment to ensure the credibility and relevance of the included literature. Thematic analysis was then applied to synthesize key findings, identify emerging patterns, and map the interconnections between teacher and parent perspectives. This methodological approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing curriculum implementation and provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Perspectives: Autonomy, Challenges, and Professional Practice

Vietnam’s shift toward a child-centered Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum characterized by the “Sprout” framework and competency-based approaches has significantly altered teacher pedagogical roles and autonomy (Le, 2023). In principle, these reforms empower teachers to tailor instruction to children’s individual needs and local contexts, aiming to foster more holistic development. However, teacher autonomy has proven constrained by several systemic issues. Many educators report persistent limitations due to inadequate classroom infrastructure, insufficient instructional materials, and heavy administrative workloads that curtail their capacity to implement innovative teaching methods (Le, 2023).

Training and professional development exhibit notable weaknesses. Although initiatives exist to enhance teacher competencies, especially in planning and engaging learners, these are often theoretical and lack hands-on practice (Ha et al., 2025). As a result, classroom observations reveal that many teachers still rely heavily on teacher-directed instruction and struggle with adapting lessons to diverse learner needs, integrating formative feedback, or incorporating technology effectively (Ha et al., 2025). This highlights a mismatch between policy intentions and actual practice.

Compounding the problem is the cultural legacy of Confucian pedagogical traditions in Vietnam, which emphasize teacher authority, rote learning, and academic rigor. These deeply embedded values influence educators' mindsets and behavior, creating internal tensions as they try to transition toward child-led, play-based approaches (Le, 2023). Many teachers experience discomfort or uncertainty when attempting to relinquish control or deviate from familiar methods, which slows the uptake of new pedagogies.

The lack of robust evaluation and assessment tools for professional development further weakens capacity-building efforts. Nguyen (2023) highlights a gap in validated instruments that could track teachers' growth in child-centered practices over time, limiting the ability to monitor progress or target support where needed. Without robust evaluation mechanisms, both educators and policymakers may remain in the dark about what is working and what needs adjustment.

Moreover, international insights from global efforts like UNESCO and OECD's "Survey of Teachers in Pre-Primary Education" (STEPP) stress the importance of teacher training, recognition, working conditions, and motivation in ensuring quality ECE (UNESCO/OECD, 2016). Although STEPP data do not yet provide Vietnam-specific findings, their principles are instructive: enhancing teacher practice requires supportive policies, resources, and continuous learning environments. This aligns with Vietnam's context, where gaps in infrastructure and training have hindered ideal implementation.

Despite the challenges, there are anchors of promise. Some teachers—especially in urban or better-resourced centers—have demonstrated creative adaptations, integrating localized play materials or storytelling aligned with children's cultural backgrounds (Le, 2023). These instances suggest that when conditions support it, educators can effectively translate child-centered pedagogies into engaging learning experiences.

Moving forward, it is critical to strengthen teacher support systems through high-quality, practice-oriented professional development, validated assessment tools, and infrastructure investment. Creating reflective communities of practice where teachers share strategies may help bridge the gap between policy and practice, allowing autonomy to flourish within supportive conditions.

Parent Engagement: Awareness, Cultural Dynamics, and Collaboration

Parental involvement plays a vital role in effective ECE implementation; however, in Vietnam, engagement remains limited and uneven. Many parents, particularly in both rural and urban contexts, remain unfamiliar with the goals and methodologies of the new competency-based curriculum, relying instead on traditional expectations of teacher-led instruction (Dinh, 2019). This disconnect reduces opportunities for meaningful home-school synergy in supporting young children's learning.

Extended family structures significantly shape engagement dynamics. In many Vietnamese households, grandparents and other relatives often assume

caregiving roles. This complex family composition influences both the expectations surrounding early education and how children are supported at home (Huyen, 2019). Many of these caregivers may not be informed about contemporary curriculum aims, further complicating alignment between home activities and school objectives.

Insights from Epstein's framework—used within the Vietnamese context by Dinh (2019)—reveal how involvement spans parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. However, most ECE programs in Vietnam struggle to engage families beyond basic communication; opportunities for parent volunteering, decision-making, or contribution to curriculum remain sparse (Dinh, 2019). These gaps hamper efforts to create robust learning ecosystems involving both school and family.

Recent empirical studies in primary education provide promising leads. For example, Van et al. (2025) found that stronger parental involvement in communication, volunteering, and community collaboration correlates positively with student performance outcomes, suggesting that engagement initiatives can yield real learning benefits. Although this study focused on primary settings, the findings have implications for early childhood contexts where similar mechanisms can be adapted to foster stronger foundations.

Currently, communication pathways between teachers and parents remain underdeveloped. Schools often rely on informal methods or periodic meetings, which may not capture the diversity of parental schedules or needs (Van et al., 2025). This is compounded by time constraints among working parents, highlighting the need for flexible and tech-supported channels, such as apps or online newsletters to share curriculum goals and children's progress—recommendations that have been advanced by recent studies (Van et al., 2025).

Innovative approaches show promise. Hedges et al. (2016) highlight that culturally responsive partnerships, which recognize parents as first educators and mobilize local funds of knowledge, can strengthen collaboration and curriculum alignment. Adapted to Vietnam's cultural context, these models could build bridges between educational innovations and home environments.

To maximize parental engagement, ECE programs should offer structured yet flexible involvement opportunities—such as home-based activity guides, parent-child workshops, or volunteer roles tailored to families' skills and availability. Enhancing digital communication channels and nurturing culturally adaptive partnerships could foster deeper alignment between home and school.

System-Level Barriers and Enabling Factors in Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation does not occur in isolation but within broader systemic frameworks shaped by policy, resources, and structural readiness. Vietnam's ECE reforms reflect progressive policy direction, yet implementing competency-based, child-centered curricula across diverse localities remains uneven. TPS 2009 and subsequent frameworks articulate reformist ideals, but

systemic support remains fragmented, with localized variation impacting fidelity of implementation (Vu, 2021).

Resource disparities between urban and rural areas present significant barriers. Many rural centers face deficiencies in learning materials, inadequate physical spaces, and limited access to training (Vu, 2021). These constraints hinder their capacity to operationalize new pedagogical approaches, reinforcing inequalities in early learning experiences.

Policy-level implementation strategies also lack effective monitoring and feedback systems. While curriculum mandates exist, mechanisms for tracking adherence, identifying challenges, and adapting support strategies—especially in less advantaged regions—are limited (Vu, 2021). Without systematic oversight, reforms risk remaining superficial rather than transformative.

Despite these challenges, frameworks like the UN's 4As (Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, Adaptability) offer meaningful lenses for evaluating progress. A 2024 report applying the 4As framework in Vietnam reveals scattered provision of "free ECE," with significant gaps in quality and equitable access across regions (Duong, 2024). This crystallizes the need for balanced expansion of both access and quality.

International models also offer inspiration for evaluation. The International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) has shown promise in multicountry contexts—including Vietnam—for assessing children's cognitive and socioemotional development, although cross-country comparison may be limited (UNESCO, 2019). Implementing such tools in Vietnam could offer objective indicators of curriculum impact in different settings.

Partnerships between policymakers, researchers, communities, and international agencies can foster context-sensitive adaptation. Pilot programs incorporating inclusive curricula, professional development clusters, and community involvement monitored through robust frameworks might serve as models for scaling equitable implementation.

Finally, sustained political commitment reflected in funding, policy coherence, and cross-sector coordination is essential. A multi-level governance model involving central oversight, localized adaptation, and feedback loops could foster both fidelity and flexibility in curriculum implementation.

CONCLUSION

This literature review highlights that the implementation of Vietnam's Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum, while progressive in design and aligned with global best practices, continues to face significant challenges in practice. Teachers encounter constraints in adapting to child-centered pedagogies due to limited resources, insufficient training, and deeply rooted cultural expectations, while parental involvement remains limited because of low awareness and complex family dynamics. At the systemic level, disparities in infrastructure, funding, and monitoring mechanisms further hinder consistent and equitable implementation across regions. Nevertheless, promising strategies—such as

culturally responsive teacher–parent partnerships, competency-based professional development, and localized adaptation frameworks—offer pathways for improving curriculum fidelity and educational outcomes. By strengthening teacher capacity, fostering parental engagement, and enhancing policy coherence, Vietnam can bridge the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, ultimately advancing the quality, inclusivity, and sustainability of its early childhood education system.

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