
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A common curriculum framework helps staff to enhance their pedagogical skills, children to grow with a smooth transition into schooling, and parents to better learn about child development.

A common framework in the form of a curriculum or learning standards helps staff to clarify their pedagogical aims, keep progression in mind, provide structure for the child's day, focus on the most important aspects of child development, and respond adequately to children's needs. It can also ensure continuity between ECEC and primary schooling, by equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed for primary school and further learning. Additionally, a common framework helps parents learn about child development, encourages them to ensure a good home learning environment, and can act as a bridge between staff and parents for information sharing about what children do in centres, thus facilitating needs-based interventions.

On ECEC outcome indicators, Korea, in general, performs well above the OECD average, such as on students' learning outcomes at age 15. However, Korea can improve labour market and demographic outcomes.

Regarding ECEC policy outcomes, Korea performs above the OECD average on several child outcomes: Korea's infant survival rates are high. Enrolment rates in ECEC for three-year-olds and children below the age of three are high, and Korean students outperform most other OECD countries on the PISA assessments for reading, mathematics and science. However, female employment rates are below the OECD average, gender equality in median earnings falls below the average, and fertility rates are among the lowest in OECD countries.

For better ECEC policies, Korea could increase public spending per child, improve the staff-child ratio in kindergartens and staff qualifications in child care. Korea is currently undertaking the development of a co-ordinated curriculum between kindergartens and child care.

Korea spends much less on child care and education for three- and five-year-olds, spends little on family benefits in cash or through tax measures, and has few paternity leave entitlements in place. While kindergarten teachers (staff in teaching positions) are well educated, child care staff are relatively educated at a lower level. While the staff-child ratio in child care is similar to the international average, the ratio is unfavourable in kindergarten.

Korea has different curricula in place for different provisions but is working towards providing more continuous child development in ECEC. Korea has a standardised child care curriculum, which covers all children aged zero to five years in child care. In parallel, there is the national curriculum for kindergarten for three- and four-year-old children attending kindergarten. Aiming at providing children with better continuous development and learning,

Korea recently set out a national, common curriculum for all children aged five in ECEC: the *Nuri Curriculum*. The government has announced to extend the common curriculum to ages three and four. Korea can learn from countries that have a common curriculum, such as Finland, New Zealand and Scotland (United Kingdom).

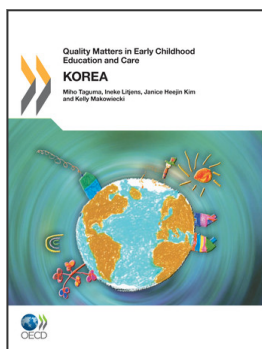
To benefit from a curriculum change, Korea could consider such actions as revisiting content to reflect parental expectations, latest research findings, emerging subjects and child happiness, and improving the leadership skills of professionals.

Building upon the existing frameworks in place, Korea could further enhance quality in its ECEC curricula. Other country practices would suggest potential areas for reflection such as: 1) reviewing the curriculum approach; 2) improving alignment with primary schooling; 3) revisiting or rethinking the curriculum content by applying latest research findings in policy design; 4) possibilities for improving children's life satisfaction through curriculum; 5) reflection of parental expectations in curriculum; 6) addressing emerging subjects, such as children's health and revisiting the use of ICT in ECEC; and 7) improving the leadership skills of staff and management.

Korea could learn from Finland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, as they have taken measures including involving parents in curriculum design; implementing one curriculum for ECEC; supporting staff in communicating about the curriculum; and developing assessment practices linked to the curriculum.

Common challenges countries face in enhancing quality in ECEC curriculum include: 1) defining goals and content; 2) curriculum alignment for continuous child development; 3) effective implementation; and 4) systematic evaluation and assessment. Korea has made several efforts in tackling these challenges, mostly focusing on defining and revising the content by, for example, providing autonomy to local authorities for adaptation of the framework to local needs. Korea has also implemented steps to align curricula better through the development of a national curriculum for all five-year-old children in ECEC.

To further their efforts, Korea could consider strategies implemented by Finland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, such as engaging parents in setting child-specific curricula; developing one curriculum for children in the whole ECEC age range; developing a communication toolkit for staff and materials that target parents; and integrating curriculum as part of the assessment practices by ensuring assessment practices meet the aspirations of the curriculum.



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