

WELLBEING STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN TAIWAN'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK: A HOLISTIC APPROACH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

CHEN-YA JUAN

Department of Early Childhood Education, National Taichung
University of Education, Taiwan

YI-HUANG SHIH*

Center of Teacher Education, Minghsin
University of Science and Technology, Hsinchu, Taiwan

SHIH-CHIEH KAO

Department of Early Childhood and Family Education,
National Taipei University of Education, Taipei, Taiwan

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJREHC.2025.6628>

ABSTRACT

In Taiwan's Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework (2017), which highlights two foundational principles: supporting children's holistic development and recognizing the cultural value systems that shape learning. Accordingly, the Framework delineates six interconnected areas of learning that guide curriculum planning and pedagogical decision-making. In line with this structure, the present article discusses wellbeing strategies for young children from two complementary perspectives: the six learning domains and the cross-cutting learning issues articulated in the ECEC Curriculum Framework. This article draws on the Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework to examine how its learning domains and learning themes embed strategies for promoting young children's wellbeing.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework, six learning domains, wellbeing, young children

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This article outlines a holistic approach to promoting young children's wellbeing within Taiwan's Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework, and promote young children's mental health. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community in the future (World Health Organization, 2025). Furthermore, the discussion links the Framework's six learning domains—physical movement and health, cognition, language, social development, emotional development, and aesthetics—to practical wellbeing strategies implemented across program design, classroom practice, family–community partnerships, and child-centered assessment. Grounded in an interactionist understanding of development, the ECEC Curriculum Framework emphasizes the continuous interplay between the individual

child and their surrounding environment, with a particular focus on shaping children's ways of thinking and engaging with the world. It highlights two foundational principles: supporting children's holistic development and recognizing the cultural value systems that shape learning. Accordingly, the Framework delineates six interconnected areas of learning that guide curriculum planning and pedagogical decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2024). In line with this structure, the present article discusses wellbeing strategies for young children from two complementary perspectives: the six learning domains and the cross-cutting learning issues articulated in the ECEC Curriculum Framework (Shao & Shih, 2024; Shih & Chang, 2023).

2.0 OVERALL GOALS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Early childhood education provides a foundation for all subsequent educational phases. The curriculum framework serves as a guideline for preschool curricula in Taiwan. This framework specifies several goals for children: supporting physical and mental health; developing habits; enriching life experiences; promoting ethical understanding; cultivating social habits; expanding aesthetic experiences; encouraging creative thinking; assisting in the formation of early childhood cultural identity; and inspiring environmental stewardship. Beyond these developmental aims, the framework highlights the importance of helping children establish an early sense of cultural identity and inspiring awareness and stewardship of the natural environment. Together, these goals illustrate the framework's commitment to promoting children's all-round wellbeing and guiding educators toward practices that support balanced, meaningful, and culturally grounded early learning (Ministry of Education, 2017; Shih, 2020a, 2020b, 2024).

3.0 THE INTEGRATION OF THE SIX LEARNING DOMAINS AS A FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING YOUNG CHILDREN'S HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

The organization of the curriculum domains in this Framework is grounded in young children's developmental characteristics rather than in traditional academic subject divisions. The six learning domains outlined in the Curriculum Framework—Physical Movement and Health, Cognition, Language, Social Development, Emotional Development, and Aesthetics—collectively constitute the foundational structure that supports young children's holistic well-being. Well-being encompasses not only physical health, but also emotional security, social connectedness, cognitive curiosity, aesthetic experience, and the formation of self-identity within cultural contexts. By integrating well-being strategies across the six domains, the curriculum cultivates young children's comprehensive physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development through a multidimensional approach. Furthermore, the six domains are not intended as isolated instructional categories. Instead, they intersect through integrative curriculum design, play-based contexts, and lived experiences, thereby establishing a multidimensional foundation for supporting holistic well-being. The Physical Movement and Health domain provides the sense of bodily security and vitality essential for active participation; the Cognitive domain fosters exploration, curiosity, and problem-solving abilities, enhancing learning effectiveness and confidence; the Language domain enables children to articulate needs and emotions, promoting communication and psychological safety;

the Social domain nurtures belonging and interpersonal connections through cooperation and interaction; the Emotional domain strengthens emotional recognition and regulation, cultivating resilience and stability; and the Aesthetic domain nourishes the inner life by offering avenues for self-expression, pleasure, and creativity. Through daily practice, these domains operate in an integrated manner, jointly supporting balanced development across physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic dimensions. In this sense, well-being is not merely an outcome of the curriculum but a dynamic state that is continuously cultivated, experienced, and enacted through learning and everyday life. Each of the six domains is structured by domain aims, curriculum goals, and age-level learning indicators. The six core competencies represent a synthesis of the abilities embedded within each domain; these domain-specific abilities encompass awareness, dispositions, and attitudes toward oneself, others, and the environment, reflecting the broader meaning of “competency.” Domain aims articulate the image of the child envisioned by each domain and express the overall developmental expectations for young learners. Curriculum goals specify the learning trajectories within each domain and are derived from empirical studies and relevant research evidence. Under each domain, the curriculum goals are further broken down into age-appropriate learning indicators for four age groups (ages 2–3, 3–4, 4–5, and 5–6), emphasizing progressive development built on children’s prior learning. Together, these curriculum goals and learning indicators serve as a blueprint for preschool curriculum planning. While competencies differ across educational stages, early childhood education emphasizes six core competencies: awareness and recognition, expression and communication, care and collaboration, reasoning and appreciation, imagination and creativity, and self-regulation. These competencies provide the foundation for a smooth transition into the core competencies of the 12-Year Basic Education system, ultimately supporting the development of well-rounded and responsible citizens (Ministry of Education, 2017).

4.0 THE LEARNING THEMES WITHIN THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AS CATALYSTS FOR ENHANCING YOUNG CHILDREN’S HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

The learning themes in preschools include multicultural education, life education, moral education, aesthetic education, and environmental education. The foundation of these learning themes is rooted in Confucius’s educational philosophy of ren (benevolence, 仁). Through the implementation of the preschool curriculum, children are guided to cultivate a benevolent disposition. They learn to appreciate and respect their own and others’ lives and cultures; to demonstrate ethical conduct; to care for their living environment; and to notice, appreciate, and respond to the beauty around them. Moreover, Confucius’s philosophy emphasizes respect, care, and harmonious interpersonal relationships, which align closely with the core values embedded in multicultural, life, moral, aesthetic, and environmental education.

In the context of multicultural education, Confucius’s concept of ren enables children to understand and respect peers from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering an inclusive and pluralistic learning environment. In terms of life education, the Confucian ideal of benevolence helps children cherish their own lives and those of others, cultivating gratitude and reverence for life. With respect to moral education, ren is central, as it teaches children how to behave ethically in daily interactions, respect others, and develop sound values. In aesthetic education, Confucius’s focus on inner virtue can be linked to children’s appreciation of beauty in their surroundings, inspiring deeper artistic and aesthetic awareness. Finally, in environmental

education, the Confucian spirit of benevolence can be extended to caring for the natural world, encouraging children to protect the environment and value natural resources (Ministry of Education, 2017).

5.0 REFLECTIONS

Human rights to education are both essential and beneficial. To actualize this right, governments must ensure that everyone—particularly young children—has free and compulsory access to high-quality, inclusive, and equitable education and learning opportunities, ensuring that no one is left behind (Rad et al., 2022). Children’s learning, development and well-being are directly influenced by their daily interactions with other children, adults, their families and the environment. This interactive process is known as “process quality”, and leads to a key question – which policies set the best conditions for children to experience high-quality interactions in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. “Diversity” has long been regarded as a defining feature of early childhood education. Yet diversity is not an educational end in itself; rather, it is a means for fostering children’s overall well-being. If diversity is reduced merely to expanded activity formats, cultural elements, or instructional materials—without addressing children’s developmental needs, cultural identities, and socioemotional growth—its educational significance cannot truly be realized. This perspective aligns with contemporary theories of well-being (OECD, 2021). First, the OECD (2021) defines early childhood well-being as a multidimensional and integrated state that encompasses physical, psychological, social, and cognitive domains. It emphasizes that educational practices should enhance children’s emotional security, autonomy in learning, and social connectedness. Within this framework, a diverse curriculum that respects each child’s cultural background and developmental characteristics can more concretely support their multidimensional well-being. Second, the World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualizes well-being not merely as the absence of illness but as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.” From this viewpoint, a diversity-oriented curriculum should promote children’s sense of belonging, emotional regulation, and meaningful interpersonal relationships—not simply increase the visible variety of activities. This suggests that diversity, if it does not advance children’s socioemotional development, falls short of the WHO’s well-being principles (World Health Organization, 1948, 2025).

Furthermore, from an educational ethics perspective, Noddings once again envisions a school system built on the idea that different people have different strengths, and that these strengths should be cultivated in an environment of caring, not of competition (Noddings, 2005). Noddings’ (2005) ethics of care argues that authentic education centers on the well-being of the cared-for and is grounded in caring relationships between teachers and children. From this theoretical lens, diverse learning domains and issue-based curricula contribute to children’s well-being when they enable children to feel understood, respected, and supported. Conversely, if diversity remains a superficial display of cultural elements or a compilation of activities without deepening caring relationships, it cannot genuinely enhance children’s well-being.

In sum, diversity becomes a core value in early childhood education only when it is tightly connected to the concept of well-being and meaningfully responsive to children’s physical, psychological, cultural, and social contexts. This strengthens the educational legitimacy of

diversity-oriented curriculum design and aligns early childhood programs with international professional expectations regarding children's best interests and overall well-being.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This article draws on the Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework to examine how its learning domains and learning themes embed strategies for promoting young children's wellbeing. Specifically, the analysis extends to discuss the pedagogical, relational, and environmental strategies implicitly woven into the framework. These strategies include fostering secure and responsive teacher–child relationships, creating inclusive and culturally meaningful learning environments, and designing play-based, inquiry-oriented learning experiences that nurture children's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive wellbeing. Furthermore, the framework emphasizes collaboration among educators, families, and communities to provide continuity of care and support. By unpacking these interconnected strategies, this paper highlights how the ECEC Curriculum Framework positions wellbeing not merely as an isolated learning outcome but as a holistic and cross-cutting principle that shapes the overall design and enactment of early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2017).

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Education (2017). The early childhood education and care curriculum framework. Ministry of Education.
2. Noddings, N. (2005). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
3. OECD. (2021). Starting strong VI: Supporting meaningful interactions in early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f47a06ae-en>
4. Pan, T. T. (2014). The practice of language arts in the new guidelines for the preschool curriculum. *Child Care and Education*, 4, 29-54.
5. Rad, D., Redeş, A., Roman, A., Ignat, S., Lile, R., Demeter, E., Egerău, A., Dughi, T., Balaş E., Maier, R., Kiss, C., Torkos, H. & Rad, G. (2022). Pathways to inclusive and equitable quality early childhood education for achieving SDG4 goal—a scoping review. *Front. Psychol.* 13:955833. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.955833
6. Shao, Y. L., & Shih, Y. H. (2024). Effects of interactive electronic picture books on young children's oral expression skills. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 12(2), 312-323. DOI:10.18488/61.v12i2.3680
7. Shih, Y. H. (2020a). Investigating the aesthetic domain of the “Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum Framework” for young students in Taiwan. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(1), 37-44. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2020.81.37.44>
8. Shih, Y. H. (2020b). Teaching principles for aesthetic education: Cultivating Taiwanese children's aesthetic literacy. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(3), 568-576. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2020.83.568.576>
9. Shih, Y. H. (2024). Learning for children in an educational enrichment: a perspective derived from Taiwan's Early Childhood Education & Care Curriculum Framework. *Front. Educ.* 9:1412972. doi: 10.3389/educ.2024.1412972

10. Shih, Y. H., & Chang, S. C. (2023). Preschool teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform in Taiwan's early childhood education. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(4), 886-896. DOI:10.18488/61.v11i4.3542
11. World Health Organization (1948). Constitution of the World Health Organization. WHO.
12. World Health Organization. (2025). Mental health. WHO.