WHITE PAPER

Quality Standards and
Quality Assurance Systems for
Pre-Primary Education
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I. Introduction

In recent years, government and parental investments in pre-primary education have expanded dramatically in many parts of the world. Despite the overall increase in the number of children accessing pre-primary education, in many countries, pre-primary enrollment rates remain unequal, with more access to pre-primary education for children in higher-income countries and families. Yet there is a strong push for expansion, raising hopes that over the next decade, more children will be able to access pre-primary education. Research has shown that quality provision is essential for ensuring that children benefit from pre-primary education, and the emphasis on fast expansion raises questions on the quality of provision (Woodhead et al., 2009), especially given the low level of training and support received by many early childhood educators (Mitter & Putcha, 2017; Neuman, Josephson, & Chua, 2015). As well, many countries have high rates of private provision (Samman, 2016), creating complex systems of education and care for young children with a wide range of quality.

Government quality standards can help clarify the characteristics of high-quality settings and serve as the basis for monitoring and improving quality over time, for both public and private settings. The content of quality standards, as well as how they are implemented through monitoring systems, can have a profound influence on whether or not early childhood education (ECE) provides the anticipated returns on investments (Burchinal, 2018), as it is not uncommon for ECE to fall short of expectations for promoting equity in education.

This document covers service quality standards and quality assurance systems.

Service quality standards refer to government guidelines on the practices and experiences that comprise children’s daily lives in pre-primary settings. Other standards, such as standards for staff (including pre-service training) and curricula (outlining expectations for the content of children’s learning), are related but distinct from service quality standards.

Quality assurance is the process of monitoring pre-primary settings to assess and ensure the quality of children’s experiences. This document focuses on the monitoring of service quality even though quality assurance systems may be broader in scope. Below we outline four main topics for consideration in building service quality standards and quality assurance systems:

• Defining quality for the purposes of service standards;
• Effective processes and questions to consider when designing service standards;
• Options for implementing standards through quality assurance or monitoring systems; and
• Guidance for countries interested in building and implementing quality standards and quality assurance systems.
II. Defining quality: What does “quality” mean in pre-primary settings?

Standards ideally articulate the elements of pre-primary classrooms that are most important for ensuring children’s learning, healthy development and safety while attending pre-primary school. While there is no one definition of “quality” in pre-primary settings, there are several sources of information that can help clarify important elements of service standards. It is also important to note that definitions of quality are contextually- and culturally-bound, and do not necessarily stay the same over time (OECD, 2015) – suggesting that the process for creating standards should plan for updating and modifications as the standards unfold.

Quality can be conceptualized as culminating in the day-to-day experience of relationships and interactions that are the most proximal influence on children. As outlined by Britto, Yoshikawa, and Boller (2011), quality emerges when there is alignment and coordination across several different elements, including systems, settings, and the adults that serve as the “agents of change” in children’s lives (see figure below).

Ecological Setting and Systems Levels and Cross-Cutting Quality Dimensions


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Ecological Setting and Systems Levels and Cross-Cutting Quality Dimensions

Because this brief is focused on service quality, or the experiences that characterize children’s day-to-day lives in pre-primary settings, we are focused on defining quality in pre-primary settings, rather than across the multiple levels of quality included in the figure above. Below we outline four influences on defining quality in pre-primary settings, and we describe examples and key lessons for standards creation that emerge from each.

We begin with a brief discussion of theoretical perspectives on defining quality. Next we outline four frameworks below, with an emphasis on finding points of convergence that emerge from all four on the meaning of “quality” across settings.

1. Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical dialogue on quality in early childhood education is several decades old. As exemplified by the ideas of attachment theory, Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, Waldorf and other approaches to early childhood education, ideas of what comprises “quality” for young children’s education have roots in several traditions of developmental psychology. It is important to note that these traditions are highly relevant to the larger political and social history in some countries than others; for example, the theoretical basis for Reggio Emilia may resonate deeply in Southern Europe, where it originated, whereas other parts of the world may rely more heavily on the different models of quality in pre-primary education linked to their unique historical, social, and cultural contexts. Because there are so many types of programs, standards and regulations for early childhood education, there have been several approaches to categorize and bridge the many components that contribute to quality. A complete summary is beyond the scope of this document, but sources are available in the peer-reviewed academic literature.

Theoretical definitions of “quality” are exemplified when examining the available research on elements of quality related to child development. But looking beyond the complexity of various theoretical traditions, fundamentally, quality can be defined by how well environments support child development: A high-quality environment is one that allows children to develop to their full potential and begin primary school with the knowledge, skills and social competencies that set the stage for their success.

The body of empirical work examining links between quality and child outcomes in a range of countries has grown in recent years. Although most of the research on quality and child development still comes from high-income countries, the available research from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) identifies both commonalities and differences in findings across contexts. A summary of these findings is next.

2. Translating Theory into Research: Empirical work on quality and child development and learning outcomes

Defining and researching “quality” in early childhood education emerged in response to two practical concerns: First, to help clarify the potential benefits of early childhood programs for children’s development; and second, to inform policy and practice, by helping to identify elements of effective programs and policies to promote young children’s development. Although some have questioned whether quality can be defined or measured at all (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007), trends towards defining and measuring quality for research, policy and programmatic purposes continue to receive attention.

Two broad “categories” of quality were articulated in early work on quality in early childhood education: **Process quality**, or the experiences of children in interaction with teachers and peers over the course of the day; and **structural quality**, or the regulations, policies and other influences on the classrooms that originate from outside of the classroom but affect it, by setting the stage for interactions between teachers and children (e.g., Cryer, et al., 1999). Structural quality is thought to be necessary but not sufficient for ensuring process quality.
Process quality refers to the processes by which a child learns and develops in an early childhood setting. Process quality theoretically draws on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of development and establishes the need for relationships in learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Process quality includes teachers’ approaches to interactions with students, and highlights the need for individualized instruction that builds on children’s understanding by posing questions, giving children many opportunities for engagement in learning, and supports children as they learn new skills and ideas. The teacher’s approach to pedagogy, such as emphasis on rote memorization versus emphasis on dialogue and interaction, is a vital part of process quality and how they conduct learning in the classroom.

Structural quality captures more concrete aspects of quality such as minimum teacher qualifications, teacher/child ratios, materials, and the physical environment, including safety and hygiene. While the concepts of both process and structural quality can be incorporated into policies and practices throughout an early childhood system, structural qualities tend to be easier to address through policies and regulations. Elements of structural quality such as mandates on teacher/child ratios, specifications for the buildings that house early childhood education, and health and hygiene are frequently included in national standards. Many countries’ quality service standards currently reflect structural quality more heavily than process quality, possibly due to the ability to easily see and record structural components of quality.

However, although many studies are predicated on the ideas of structural and process quality, recent work has called into question the key assumptions that structural quality promotes process quality, and that process quality leads to child outcomes (Burchinal, 2018). In the United States, for example, there is evidence that more emotional and instructional support for young children promotes children’s learning, but effect sizes tend to be small (Burchinal, 2018). When looking across international studies, effect sizes on the relation between process
quality and child development increased somewhat but were still relatively small (Burchinal, 2018). Associations between structural quality and child development were smaller than process quality effects; a somewhat stronger effect was noted for the content of curricula, but in many situations, elements that were predicted to promote children’s learning and development led to smaller effect sizes than expected. There are several reasons why this could be true, including limitations of measurement and overall increases in quality that dilute effects. But these findings are important to note when generating advice for countries.

What do these complicated results mean for quality standards? Burchinal concludes that “models of ECE quality should include quality and content of instruction, and the degree to which teachers actively scaffold learning, monitor children’s progress, and use that information to individualize instruction and engage parents in their children’s education.” This definition goes beyond existing ideas of “process quality” to include a focus on the content of instruction as well as the quality of teacher/child interaction. Ideally, measures of instruction would track the experiences of individual children, documenting the instructional content (e.g., measures for literacy could include categories such as phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, read alouds), level of instruction (e.g., focusing on rote to higher order learning), level of teachers’ talk and scaffolding with target children (e.g., from direct questions with binary responses to elaborated decontextualized conversions), and type of activity (e.g., large group, small group)” (p. 5).

Research has affirmed that process quality has the more profound influence on child development than structural quality, and emerges as being especially relevant across countries (for a specific example, see Montie et al., 2006). While structural elements are often included in quality service standards, a focus on children’s experiences and interactions with teachers and peers also should be highlighted. But importantly, the common reliance on process and structural dimensions of quality may lead to misplaced policy emphases. Instead, quality service standards should recognize the importance of curricula, teacher training and education, as well as tracking progress for individual children either formally or informally, all of which may require intentional links with curricular standards, staff standards, and educational assessment policies.

In sum, quality standards should be broad in scope to include multiple dimensions of quality, including process and structural quality, with an overarching theme of ensuring developmental appropriateness of instruction. Emphasis may be needed on the content of instruction as well as how teachers and children interact; and standards should be updated and revised as research on quality and child outcomes becomes available.

At present, for low- and middle-income countries, there is little empirically-based guidance on whether standards should rely on specific curricular approaches or pedagogies, such as play-based or more academically-focused, largely due to the limitations of the existing research base on quality and child development. Developmental theories clearly point to the importance of teacher/child interaction, experimentation and child engagement as key pathways to learning. It is now essential to expand the evidence base to include children’s experiences in low- and middle-income countries. As well, contextual influences have a profound influence on associations between quality and child development; for that reason, a research agenda is recommended to accompany the design and implementation of standards, as described in greater detail below.
3. Using existing quality frameworks to define quality standards

Despite complex research findings, a notable body of work has been developed in recent years that provides guidance to providers, policymakers and other stakeholders on key elements of quality. These guides are not necessarily intended to be used as the basis for quality standards, but they do outline key elements of quality that can serve as a starting point for thinking through the types of elements to include in standards. Below in Annex 1 we provide brief examples of how these guides have defined quality in practical terms, through measurement; approaches to self-assessment; and guidance for professional development.

Frameworks

Annex 1 includes four examples of frameworks: The International Step by Step Association Competent Educators of the 21st Century; the Measuring Early Learning Quality & Outcomes (which was designed as the basis for a monitoring tool, but has been used as a framework of quality); the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s accreditation standards; and ACEI’s Global Guidelines. For each, we have included the list of domains covered and examples of indicators.

Looking across the frameworks, all include multiple elements of ECE; all focus on both structural and process elements; and all emphasize the importance of interactions. As well, all have indicators that are intended to capture the essence of the underlying principle. These frameworks, and others like them, can serve as a starting point for considering the content of quality service standards, to be further adapted for country use through a stakeholder process.

Research Tools

Several research tools have been designed to capture the quality of children's learning environments (see Fernald et al., 2017, for a review), most commonly to reveal patterns between the quality of children's learning environments and aspects of child development. Most of these tools were developed for use in high-income countries (see MELQO, 2017, for an overview) and require substantial training and expertise to use and interpret well. The Environmental Rating Scales, the CLASS Scale, and the MELQO MELE Scale are all examples of research tools that are intended to help generate evidence on quality to inform policy and practice. Many of the studies conducted to date on quality and child development use one or more of these scales, all of which reflect ideas and perspectives on quality that largely come from high-income countries but are consistent with the ideas articulated in the frameworks above.

Looking across the various tools developed as starting points for defining quality, most have emphasized multiple domains of early childhood educational experiences, including the physical environment, the content of the curriculum, the interactions between teachers, children, parents and the broader community, and the accommodations for individual children, including children with special needs.

However, while research scales can provide a starting point for addressing quality, the content of research tools should not be confused with quality standards. As discussed below, standards should be developed that reflect a range of stakeholder viewpoints, and also should be possible to monitor over time. Most research tools are not intended or appropriate for frequent use as monitoring tools, especially when monitoring systems may be nascent. They simply require too much time, expertise and financial resources to implement on a regular basis across a country population. As well, the cultural and contextual influences on quality may not be captured well by research tools developed in another context. However, implementing research tools and examining the resulting data can help provide evidence on quality that in turn can be used to help define quality standards.
Effective Processes for Developing Service Quality Standards

As the general content of the standards is outlined, several questions emerge regarding the structure of the standards (outlined in more detail in Annex 2):

- Should they be aspirational, or describe basic, minimum levels necessary to protect children’s well-being? Some countries have included both minimum standards and aspirations for higher-quality provision (e.g., India, Vietnam).

- What is the primary purpose of the standards – will they be used as a tool for accountability; to promote self-reflection; or some other purpose? Will the degree of alignment between a program and the standards be shared with parents? If so, how?

- Who should be involved in deciding the final content and structure of the standards?

- How will the standards be validated, for example, empirically to examine the association between the standards and specific elements of child development? Or through feedback from parents or teachers or service providers?

- How often should the standards be reviewed/updated, and in response to what types of feedback? Who will be responsible for reflecting on the effectiveness of the standards in improving child development?

In some countries, there may be diverse views of quality among parents, teachers, and policymakers. It is important to acknowledge that different definitions of quality may exist; recognizing and working with these differences leads to more effective ways of implementing standard and producing change. For example, teachers may frequently rely on rote memorization as a pedagogical technique. If quality standards introduce a strong focus on teacher/child interaction and play-based learning, the standards may be more effective if teachers can contribute to the generation of examples and help define bridges between existing understanding of quality and new ideas contained in standards.

Two sources of information provide a cross-country look at the content and structure of standards: Starting Strong IV (OECD, 2015) and the World Bank’s SABER-ECD (Neuman & Devercelli, 2013). Both provide useful guidance on the process of creating standards. While there are no specific recommendations for what standards should include, Starting Strong notes that many countries have created quality standards that work across staff and settings characteristics, expectations for children’s experiences in classrooms, and desired child outcomes. SABER-ECD describes whether quality standards exist and if there is any enforcement, but does not provide detailed information on the content of the standards, whether monitoring is holistic or focused only on a few elements of quality, or the points of connection between elements of the system. As countries develop standards, then, it should be noted, as outlined above, that there may be points of connection with staff quality standards and the curricular standards used to describe expectations for child development.
The following conclusions on quality service standards emerge:

**Ideas of quality originated with basic developmental theories, which were then translated into definitions and measures of quality in several frameworks.** Now with several years of evidence, albeit mainly from high-income countries but growing all the time, it is clear that quality can have an impact on child development—and there is some evidence to document the importance of teacher/child interactions, developmentally-appropriate curricula, and highly trained teachers for child development in LMIC (e.g., Rao et al., 2012; McCoy & Wolf, 2018).

**Structural features, such as space, teacher/child ratios, and safety are also important aspects of quality.** Although there is less evidence to support structural features, such as staff/child ratios and safety standards, structural quality facilitates process quality, and thus is an important element of children’s learning and development.

**Quality standards reflect existing evidence that points towards a strong focus on teacher/child interactions and developmentally-appropriate curricula, and standards should include multiple elements of learning environments, such as quality of interactions, access to materials, safety/health, pedagogy, and ongoing support for teachers’ professional development.** Standards should not be limited to structural elements of quality, such as ratios, physical spaces, and hygiene.

**The process of creating quality service standards should reflect multiple viewpoints on quality, balancing aspirational visions for early childhood settings with practical and feasible pathways for all providers, even those who may need assistance in reaching standards.** When quality service standards suggest substantial changes to existing practice, identifying a process for bridging between current practice and recommended practice is important.

**Beyond the learning environment, quality standards should reflect a holistic view of child development, and should consider health, nutrition and parenting as important influences on child development.** This could translate into standards focused on parent engagement, providing healthy foods for children during pre-primary education, and ensuring that children’s health is protected through daily health and safety practices, such as handwashing and activities to teach children about health and safety.

**There should be intentional and clear alignment of quality service standards with staff and curricular standards.** For example, if quality standards include reference to teacher/child interaction, it may be essential to include pre-service training in pedagogy as part of staff standards, and ensure that curricular standards leave ample room for emphasis on teacher/child interactions as well as outlining expectations for topics to be covered.

Because associations between quality and child development tend to vary across countries and there is less work overall on LMIC, efforts should be made to create long-term research agendas to accompany the design and roll-out of quality service standards, with plans to adjust and update in response to experience and empirical findings.

Across all points, it is important that the design of quality standards is undertaken with a clear idea of how the standards will be used for monitoring. Standards are only useful if applied to early childhood settings. If standards are vague or conversely, have too much detail to easily translate into monitoring tools and associated monitoring systems, it may be difficult for programs, teacher training institutions, or inspectors to use them to assess and improve quality.

In the next section, we discuss options for building quality assurance systems, with the assumption that standards will need to be aligned with the goals of quality assurance systems.
Quality Standards and Quality Assurance Systems for Pre-Primary Education

IV. Building quality assurance systems

1. What are quality assurance systems?

Quality standards and assurance mechanisms are complementary elements of well-functioning pre-primary sub-systems. If standards define the goals and expectations of quality pre-primary education, quality assurance mechanisms are options for how governments and providers promote service quality and incentivize improvement.

Although the terms “quality assurance” and “quality monitoring” are frequently used interchangeably, generally quality monitoring is more narrowly focused on data collection for compliance with standards or requirements, whereas quality assurance also involves incentives for ongoing improvement efforts. According to a recent six-country study, quality assurance refers to: “the regular and continuous process by which those who work in, or administer ECE ensure that children receive a quality experience” (Bertram & Pascal, 2016, p. 117). This process can involve a range of policies and procedures for the collection, analysis, and reporting of information on pre-primary settings as well as mechanisms to provide support, rewards, or penalties to service providers based on the extent to which they are meeting established requirements or expectations, with the ultimate goal of benefiting children.

Although more LMIC are developing service quality standards for pre-primary education, fewer have developed mechanisms to monitor these standards, and there is scant documentation of these practices (Anderson et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2017). In OECD countries, including those with longer traditions of quality assurance, monitoring of service quality is an area of ongoing policy development in many nations (OECD, 2015). Drawing on the limited information and evidence available, the next sections will identify some of the main purposes and approaches to quality assurance in early childhood education settings, with a focus on pre-primary education, and will raise some issues for country actors to consider in developing or revising mechanisms to monitor and ensure service quality. While a range of factors can be monitored as part of quality assurance systems, including staff performance and child development outcomes, this review focuses on service quality.

2. Purposes of quality assurance

Countries may have several purposes for developing a quality assurance system. The most common are to:
1. ensure government and public accountability;
2. manage/improve performance;
3. inform parental choice;
4. inform policy discussions
(Bertram & Pascal, 2016; OECD, 2015).

First, by regularly monitoring pre-primary settings, governments can hold services responsible for meeting basic standards related to health and safety, curriculum implementation, and the workforce. To strengthen accountability, governments or other responsible entities may enact consequences for non-compliance (or rewards for meeting/exceeding requirements). Monitoring systems that share data with parents and others also may help interested stakeholders hold pre-primary settings accountable for meeting quality expectations. This may be particularly important in countries with a mix of government and non-state provision and in contexts with decentralized governance for early childhood services.
Second, quality assurance systems can support internal performance management processes for staff and administrators by encouraging them to reflect individually or as a team on areas of strength and weakness of the pre-primary setting. The feedback on various dimensions of service quality can be used to better target follow-up support (e.g., training, materials, etc.) to settings and staff who need it most, which, in turn, can lead to improved service delivery and better classroom practices. The ISSA Framework and the ACEI Global Guidelines are both intended to promote self-reflection and internal performance management rather than inform external monitoring.

Third, governments may develop quality assurance systems to inform parental choice. In particular, in market-based systems (which tend to have mixed public and private delivery with limited government oversight) making external quality assessments/ratings available to parents can help them differentiate among available preschool options. However, the extent to which parents—particularly those with lower incomes—can exercise choice will be influenced by the availability and affordability of high-quality settings.

Fourth, quality assurance systems can (and ideally should) contribute to policy discussions and reforms. By tracking changes in service quality over time, monitoring data can provide information at both the settings and systems level that can be used to inform the development and revisions of standards, curricula, and teacher training. In addition, governments can use this information to guide resource allocation for quality improvement in early childhood provision (World Bank, 2016).

These four underlying objectives are not mutually exclusive, and it is common for countries to report that they monitor service quality to serve a variety of purposes (Bertram & Pascal, 2016; OECD, 2015). However, there may be tensions in these purposes, particularly between monitoring for accountability, which often entails consequences for staff and services, and monitoring for performance management, which requires open reflection on areas of weakness. It is therefore important for countries to balance the need for quality assurance systems to exert control through external monitoring with the desire to support participation and cooperation through monitoring processes by service providers.

While governments may share similar purposes for developing quality assurance systems, there is little evidence on the impact of quality assurance mechanisms on the quality of settings and children’s outcomes. One of the challenges is distinguishing the influence of quality assurance mechanisms from other efforts to improve service quality, such as program standards, curriculum, and professional development (Litjens, 2014; OECD, 2015). A few studies in the US and the UK suggest that the quality of settings improved after the introduction of new monitoring approaches (e.g., QRIS in some US states, OFSTED in the UK), though it is not possible to determine causality. Nor is it possible to know if similar approaches used in different contexts would yield similar results (OECD, 2015). Therefore, while it is generally acknowledged the effective regulatory and monitoring systems are important to ensuring that all children receive good pre-primary education regardless of the type of provision, additional research is needed to untangle the effects of different tools and strategies in diverse contexts.

3. Existing quality assurance mechanisms

How do countries approach external monitoring of service quality?

There are two key mechanisms for external monitoring of service quality: accreditation and inspection (Bertram & Pascal, 2016). Both mechanisms are typically led by a government authority though countries vary regarding whether responsibility for quality assurance lies at the national or sub-national level.

Accreditation (also known as registration or licensing) involves the process of seeking approval to operate from an independent external body located at either the national or sub-national level. Typically before or shortly after a setting opens, a site visit takes place to ensure that the setting is complying with regulations. Settings may need to renew their accreditation. Accreditation is common in almost all OECD countries and many low- and middle-income countries.
While accreditation usually focuses on minimum levels of quality to operate, it may be associated with incentives for good performance such as a higher rate of government reimbursement for higher quality. An example is the Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS) in many states in the US. Some countries (e.g., India, Vietnam) have more than one tier of quality standards incorporated into their quality assurance systems (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2011). In Singapore, it is mandatory for kindergartens and childcare centers to register with the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) and must meet baseline requirements to receive a license to operate. In addition, services that have achieved higher levels on the ECDA Quality Rating Scale may apply for a certificate from the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework, a voluntary process that includes interviews, classroom observations, and document checks (Paul, 2017). In other countries (e.g., US, Indonesia), early childhood professional associations oversee voluntary accreditation processes to encourage settings to exceed minimum standards.

**Inspection** is commonly used in higher-income countries and some low- and middle-income countries to monitor service quality on a more regular basis. Many countries have adopted both accreditation and inspection into their quality assurance systems. Inspection (also known as external review) often involves a visit to the setting by an external official to observe and assess the quality of the setting. In most OECD countries, inspections focus on two main areas: regulatory compliance and communication and collaboration within settings, and with parents and families (OECD, 2015). A recent review of 21 OECD countries found that inspections tend to cover the following quality standards (Anderson et al., 2017 based on OECD, 2015 data):

- Teacher training and qualifications
- Program structure, curriculum, and/or interactions
- Infrastructure
- Health/safety/nutrition
- Classroom environment
- Family engagement

Inspections are a common feature of many education systems around the world. In countries where preschool is integrated in the education systems, inspectors are typically responsible for visiting both preschool and primary classes. For example, the Ghana Education Service oversees inspections for kindergarten and primary school classrooms. While inspections are required in most OECD countries, it is a voluntary process in Finland and Germany. Whether mandatory or not, a range of tools and approaches can be used to collect information, most commonly observation, checklists, interviews, surveys, and document review. Standardized instruments or rating scales are infrequently used (e.g., ECERS has been translated and adapted in some European countries including Germany and Italy). In countries which lack an overall quality framework and/or standardized procedures and instruments, there is concern inspectors may rely more on subjective assessments of quality rather than consistent monitoring across preschools (OECD, 2015).

Few monitoring systems mandate input from stakeholders, but in practice many do gather information from a range of sources, especially managers and teachers. Many high and middle-income countries incorporate views of parents, often through satisfaction surveys, but it is rare for children to be engaged in the process. In Chile, staff are observed by a peer evaluator, typically another classroom teacher working at the same level, who fills out a structured questionnaire, which is incorporated with reviews conducted by the school director, and then submitted to the Ministry of Education. Self-evaluation data may also inform external monitoring reports (see discussion about internal monitoring below). While it seems desirable to incorporate diverse inputs, countries report that it can be challenging to reconcile multiple perspectives of quality in external monitoring mechanisms (OECD, 2015).

Countries vary in the extent to which their approach to quality assurance is based more on support and cooperation or on control, and this emphasis is often dictated by practices in the education sector at large. In a few countries, like Denmark, instead of an accreditation system, local communities are responsible for ensuring that national requirements are met. In Germany, while services must comply with basic standards for accreditation, quality assurance is decentralized, and providers can choose which tools and processes to follow to monitor quality (OECD, 2015).
In lower-resource contexts, quality assurance mechanisms for pre-primary education are less common. Where they exist, quality assurance processes in LMIC tend to be less comprehensive in scope than those in higher-income countries. Even in countries with a range of established standards, it is more common for countries to monitor a more limited set of easily measurable aspects of early childhood settings, such as infrastructure, instructional materials, and teacher/child ratios than variables related to process quality (Anderson et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2017).

For example, only about 10 countries participating in the World Bank’s SABER-ECD project monitor service quality standards, such as operating hours, teacher-child ratios, and infrastructure standards. A recent IDB study suggests that monitoring may be more prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean although the depth and frequency varies significantly across countries. All 19 countries reported monitoring quality standards, including teacher qualifications, infrastructure and the classroom environment (teacher-child ratios, indoor space per child and in some cases materials and furniture). Health, safety, and nutrition were monitored in 12 of the 19 countries (cited in Anderson et al., 2017).

What are the consequences of monitoring results?

In OECD countries, it is common for accreditation and inspection results to be shared with the settings and with the government entity or private provider responsible for managing them. For example, in France, inspectors observe teachers for two hours and then conduct follow-up interviews to analyze the practices observed and to identify priorities for professional development, such as training or the observation of another teacher (OECD, 2015). Some countries seek to improve transparency and accountability by making results available to the public. Given that reports can be “markers of quality” for parents and other stakeholders, several countries (e.g., Chile, Estonia, New Zealand, Poland, US) publish reports on the Internet (Bertram & Pascal, 2016; OECD, 2015).

Although there is not much comparative data on the rates of compliance with standards, there is evidence from SABER-ECD data that it is a challenge for many LMIC countries to meet standards. “[F]ew countries reported adequate levels of compliance with any of the standards, either because the compliance was low or because there was no information on compliance” (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 7). Countries may enforce compliance in different ways, using different kinds of incentives. In about half of 21 countries surveyed by OECD, monitoring results are linked to specific sanctions or rewards. Most commonly, settings are expected to address any of the areas identified for further attention, and follow-up visits by inspectors verify these changes have been made. In some countries (e.g., Chile), staff with performance issues may be required to receive additional training; ongoing challenges may lead to dismissal (e.g., Chile) or loss of the service’s accreditation (e.g., Slovak Republic, Korea). Extreme violations of standards that endanger children may lead to fines or closure of the setting (OECD, 2015).

Similarly, in many LMIC countries (e.g., Georgia, Jamaica, Nigeria, Philippines), early childhood settings can be closed for persistent failure to meet service quality standards. In the Philippines, for example, early childhood centers will lose their permit to operate if they do not comply with requirements of the external assessment and do not reapply within a year. In Jamaica there may also be legal and/or financial penalties for non-compliance with early childhood regulations and settings will be closed if they do not meet legally-binding standards within a set time period after inspection and/or children are deemed to be in danger (see Annex 3).

Rewards for settings that meet or exceed standards may include less frequent inspection visits and occasionally financial bonuses (OECD, 2015). External inspection and monitoring processes can also promote continuous quality improvement, particularly when reports document achievements and identify areas for further development that can guide professional development activities (Bertram & Pascal, 2016). Ensuring that resources are available to address areas of concern and creating a supportive environment for reflecting upon and addressing results from monitoring may also facilitate quality improvement (Anderson et al., 2017). For example, in the French Community of Belgium, pedagogical counselors...
supervise and support practitioners by reviewing the results of the pre-primary inspection reports with them and providing ongoing guidance with a focus on improving practice (OECD, 2015). In contrast, few LMIC include professional development or coaching in their monitoring systems. One exception is the Philippines, where technical assistance is provided to help early childhood programs meet external assessment requirements (SEAMEO Innotech, 2011).

Monitoring of the non-state sector

Some countries have different monitoring processes for publicly and privately operated pre-primary services, while others use a common framework for both sectors (see box Monitoring of standards in Jamaica). For example, in Chile, the government entity responsible for monitoring kindergartens (JUNJI), monitors private kindergartens that receive voluntary quality certificate, but does not have the authority to sanction private kindergartens (Anderson et al., 2017). In LMIC, private pre-primary settings are often excluded from registration requirements. Even when private providers are subject to similar regulations, they are less likely to be accredited than public settings. For example, in Indonesia, 97% of children attend private preschools, and only 8% of these are accredited. Limited human resource capacity restricts monitoring efforts: there are 200 accreditation staff and 147,000 early childhood settings (Denboba et al., 2015 in UNESCO, 2017). In South Africa, although registration is not required in all provinces, non-state early learning centers must meet local government standards and register with the national Department of Social Development in order to receive government subsidy. However, a recent audit of early learning centers found: only 45% met the norms and standards required for full licensing; 11% were conditionally licensed, needing to make improvements to infrastructure, equipment, staff skills or training; the rest were unlicensed (cited in Anderson et al., 2017).
Monitoring of standards in Jamaica

Since 2003, supervision and regulation of all early childhood care and education provision, including child care centers, preschools, and basic schools, falls under the auspices of the Early Childhood Commission. The ECC includes representatives from all line ministries, the private sector, and the political opposition. The regulatory and monitoring system operates similarly for public and private operators. By law, prior to opening, early childhood operators must apply for registration and pay a fee of $3,000 to help cover the costs. In their applications, operators must demonstrate that they meet requirements in the Early Childhood Act (2005) and Early Childhood Regulations (2005). Standards for the Operation, Management, and Administration of Early Childhood Institutions (2007) provide guidance for meeting both legally-binding and voluntary standards across 12 categories: staffing; developmental/education programs; interactions and relationships with children; physical environment; indoor and outdoor equipment, furnishing and supplies; health; nutrition; safety; child rights, child protection and equality; interactions with parents and community members; administration; and finance.

Once the application is reviewed by the ECC, an inspector conducts a site visit and rates both mandatory and voluntary standards on a 3 point scale: “Needs Improvement,” “Acceptable” or “Good.” A certificate of registration, valid for five years, is issued to programs that pass inspection. Those that do not pass need to make changes within a set timeframe or can be shut down if children’s health or safety are at risk. A 2013 study found that 2,522 of 2,660 early childhood institutions in the country were registered. Regular supervision visits to monitor compliance with regulations and standards should take place twice a year, but in practice, occur less frequently. A national registry tracks program compliance with standards. Inspection reports are available to the public and published online.

Sources: Anderson et al., 2017; World Bank, 2013; and https://ecc.gov.jm/
How do countries approach internal monitoring of service quality?

There is less documentation on national approaches to internal monitoring, self-evaluations, and related quality assurance mechanisms, particularly in non-OECD countries. Whereas external monitoring is conducted by actors (e.g., inspectors, government officials) who are not part of the early learning setting, internal monitoring is conducted by managers and practitioners who work in that setting. In the recent OECD survey, three-quarters of the countries reported using self-evaluations to monitor service quality (OECD, 2015). In contrast to accreditation and inspection, which are usually required, self-evaluation and reflection processes are voluntary activities in most countries. There are a few LMIC that require internal monitoring as part of their quality assurance systems. For example, early childhood centers in the Philippines must conduct both an internal and external assessment covering all standards, which leads to a designation at one of three levels of “recognition” (See Annex 2).

Although the content of self-evaluations is not usually prescribed at the national level, internal monitoring of service quality tends to focus on collaboration among staff and on communication between staff and parents. Other common areas for attention include the availability of materials and the implementation of the curriculum, and, to a lesser extent, the quality of the facility/classroom and the leadership or management of the setting (OECD, 2015).

To support internal quality monitoring, some countries have developed self-assessment tools (e.g., surveys, portfolios, journals, checklists) to help staff and administrators document and critically reflect on their practice and the overall functioning of the setting. Peer observation and professional learning communities also are tools for building support networks of practitioners and fostering reflective practice (e.g., ISSA framework). In Germany, for example, some kindergartens facilitate peer learning by offering professional advice and support to other centers and serving as examples of good practice in particular areas of the curriculum (OECD, 2015).

Typically, there is a structured process for participants to discuss the results and develop a plan to address areas for improvement. In Slovenia, where self-evaluation by kindergartens is mandatory, guidelines exist to help guide provider through important steps, including: defining the areas for self-evaluation; selecting the instruments; processing, analyzing and interpreting the data; and ensuring that the information contributes to the quality assurance plan for the kindergarten (OECD, 2015).

Information from internal monitoring of service quality can be used both for ensuring compliance with standards and promoting continuous quality improvement. While self-evaluation is an internal process of collecting and analyzing information by those working in an early childhood setting, it can be supported by external actors and can also feed into external monitoring mechanisms (see box Linking external and internal evaluations in New Zealand). For example, inspectors often use self-evaluations reports as an input to their assessment of service quality.

In some countries (e.g., Australia, India, Ireland, New Zealand), an external evaluator or team reviews the self-evaluation report, validates the information/documentation collected, and provides feedback which can be used for accountability and performance management. In India, early childhood center staff are encouraged to conduct self-evaluations and use the results to develop a “center improvement plan” to be implemented in a phased manner. Subsequently, an external team visits the center to conduct interviews and observations in order to validate the self-evaluation process, verify the improvement plan and provide feedback to the staff and management about the center’s activities, management, and allocation of resources (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2013).

While service providers may need support to act upon the information generated from internal monitoring, it is not always provided as part of the quality assurance system. In the Nordic countries, pedagogical advisors work closely with early childhood practitioners to support team evaluation and documentation and to introduce new pedagogical approaches that are likely to promote internal quality improvement processes. Collecting information on internal practices on a regular basis can also support continuous formative assessment for teachers, particularly when it is linked to professional development opportunities (OECD, 2015).
Linking external and internal evaluations in New Zealand

New Zealand approaches external and internal evaluation as complementary strategies to improving early childhood service quality. An external evaluation process or “education review” is led by the Education Review Office (ERO), the government agency responsible for evaluating and reporting on early childhood services and schools in New Zealand. The main guiding question for reviews of early childhood services is: ‘How well placed is this service to promote positive learning outcomes for children?’ The quality review framework for early childhood services includes standards that focus on four pillars:

- **Pou Whakahaere** – how the service determines its vision, philosophy and direction to ensure positive outcomes for children
- **Pou Ārahi** – how leadership is enacted to enhance positive outcomes for children
- **Mātauranga** – whose knowledge is valued and how the curriculum is designed to achieve positive outcomes for children
- **Tikanga whakaako** – how approaches to teaching and learning respond to diversity and support positive outcomes for children

At the beginning of the education review, each early childhood service completes a self-evaluation report. This process gives practitioners the opportunity to share how they are working to meet the standards in the quality review framework. The self-review report also guides the focus of and approach to the on-site visit. If the self-indicates the service is performing well on certain standards, the review aims to validate these results. When areas for attention are identified, the ERO helps to build the service’s capability to evaluate and improve its own practice. On average, early childhood services and schools are visited by a review team once every three years. However, the frequency of the external evaluations is guided by the individual service’s capacity to conduct self-review and the results from the internal and external evaluations. External reviews will take place more often where there are concerns about the performance of a centre and there are risks to children’s education and safety. Centers with a history of consistent self-reviews and those that make good use of assessment data will be reviewed less frequently. The goal is for managers and practitioners to embed internal monitoring in day-to-day practice for both accountability and improvement purposes. Teachers, managers, parents, and children may be consulted during the review; findings are discussed at the end of the visit. In addition, monitoring reports are published to make services more transparent and accountable to stakeholders.

Sources: OECD, 2015 and www.ero.govt.nz
4. Conclusions and challenges regarding quality assurance systems

In summary, quality assurance for early childhood services is a dynamic policy area globally and a relatively nascent one in most LMIC. Most governments recognize the importance of ensuring that pre-primary services meet minimum standards for operating and have developed mechanisms for providing initial authorization when a center or school opens. In addition, it is common for accreditation to be complemented with regular monitoring of service quality through inspections. However, there is a fair amount of variation in terms of approach (e.g., which programs are inspected? how often? what tools are used? who provides input? what are the incentives for compliance and continuous improvement?). In many countries (with less documentation available in LMIC), pre-primary services conduct internal monitoring or self-evaluation activities, often on a voluntary basis, to inform external assessments of quality and to support their own continuous quality improvement efforts. It can be challenging to ensure that early childhood services receive the additional support and resources to address the issues that emerge from external and internal reviews, which limits potential to translate these quality assurance mechanisms into meaningful change at the service level. In addition, the pathways for using service-level monitoring data to inform national and local policy are not always well articulated.

As countries consider developing or reforming their quality assurance systems for pre-primary education, a number of factors should be considered, including the context for early childhood development in the country, such as the degree of decentralization of responsibility for preschool services, the mix of public and private providers, as well as the existing philosophy and approaches to data collection and monitoring in the education and social sectors. In addition, the institutional, technical, and financial capacity to develop and sustain a functioning quality assurance system for the pre-primary sub-sector should inform the options that governments select.

Given that most documented country experience comes from higher-income contexts, it is important to recognize that low- and lower-middle income countries face some unique challenges to monitoring service quality and developing quality assurance systems for pre-primary education, including:

- **Lack of service quality standards**: Standards for monitoring may not be developed, or if they are developed, may be too broad or too onerous for monitors to use effectively.

- **Limited capacity to monitor**: Inspectors may not exist and if there are inspectors, they may not be trained to look beyond minimum health/safety or have limited time and resources available to spend with each site. It can be particularly challenging to make regular monitoring visits to rural and remote areas.

- **Low level of professionalism**: Many preschools are staffed with community volunteers and paraprofessionals who may not have training or experience in self-evaluation and also may require more support to address weaknesses identified through monitoring efforts.

- **Large private sector**: It may be challenging to bring a large under/unregulated private sector under a quality assurance umbrella without strong incentives/enforcement mechanisms, including sufficient staff to monitor private providers.

- **Limited resources to help countries** address weaknesses related to service quality.

The recommendations and guidelines for countries in the next section (see Annex 2) take these challenges into account and recognize the diverse contexts in which quality assurance systems are being developed or reformed.
# Annex 1. Quality frameworks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Step by Step Association: Competent Educators of the 21st Century</strong></td>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Self-assessment and professional development; advocacy to policymakers on important elements of quality</td>
<td>Interactions, Family and Community, Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy, Assessment and Planning, Teaching Strategies, Learning Environment, Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association for Childhood Education International: Global Guidelines</strong></td>
<td>Global, with emphasis on low- and middle-income countries</td>
<td>Program-level self-assessment</td>
<td>Environment and Physical Space, Curriculum Content and Pedagogy, Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers, Partnerships With Families and Communities, Young Children with Special Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Association for the Education of Young Children</strong></td>
<td>United States, but used in many countries</td>
<td>Program-level assessment conducted by outside observers; can be linked to accreditation in some states</td>
<td>Relationships, Curriculum, Teaching, Assessment of Child Progress, Health, Staff Competencies, Preparation and Support, Families, Community Relationships, Physical Environment, Leadership and Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measuring Early Learning Quality &amp; Outcomes (MELQO)</strong></td>
<td>Global, with emphasis on low- and middle-income countries</td>
<td>Starting point for national adaptation of quality measurement – not intended as a standards tool</td>
<td>Interactions, Play, Pedagogy, Environment, Family/Community Engagement, Personnel, Inclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Example of Principle or Construct

### Interactions

The educator interacts with children in a friendly and respectful manner that supports the development of each child’s construction of self/identity and learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The educator’s interactions are warm and caring, expressing appreciation and enjoyment of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The educator’s interactions with and expectations of children are consistent with the process of child development and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The educator interacts frequently with individual children throughout the day, building on their strengths and stimulating their learning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The educator’s interactions are responsive to each child’s emotional, social, physical, and cognitive strengths and needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The educator provides opportunities for children to make choices and to have those choices realized and respected by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The educator’s interactions with children develop their initiative, autonomy, self sufficiency, and leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Curriculum content

Flexible, comprehensive plans are implemented that are oriented to the children, family, and cultural contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Indicators related to subconstruct:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating scale including excellent; good; adequate; minimum; inadequate and emphasis on recording specific examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Relationships

The program promotes positive relationships between all children and adults to encourage each child’s sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child’s ability to contribute as a responsible community member.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of indicators related to subconstruct:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers anticipate problematic behavior and take steps to prevent it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use narration and description of ongoing interactions to identify prosocial behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show two objects, materials or visual images in your classroom that depict men and/or women in work, family, and/or personal roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show or describe one example of how children have opportunities to participate in decision making about class plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show or describe one example of how you have anticipated problematic behavior and taken steps to prevent it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Pedagogy

Approaches that teachers take in teaching children, including individualized and/or group lessons and opportunities for dialogue, and in supporting a successful transition to primary school independent work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has an age-appropriate curriculum or set of guidelines been developed outlining competencies and lesson plans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do children use objects to learn mathematics; for example, do teachers encourage children to use objects for numerical exploration like sorting, counting and operations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do teachers introduce new vocabulary by reading storybooks to children daily?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are children learning to perform new skills independently?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2. **Steps to consider in building quality assurance systems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps to consider</th>
<th>Questions to Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form a stakeholder group to address quality. Generate a definition of quality that involves the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders, including teachers and parents.</td>
<td>Which government agencies have responsibility for early childhood, including health, nutrition, and social protection? Which stakeholders or experts may not be typically engaged, but would have important perspectives to add or whom could be influential in how the standards are developed or used, such as civil employee unions, academics, or advocacy groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define the theoretical tradition in the country.</td>
<td>Which schools have a reputation for being the “best” schools? What types of pedagogical approaches do they use? How are teachers currently trained? What theoretical models are they taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review existing work on early childhood in the country or region to describe the broader early childhood context</td>
<td>What reports have been prepared in recent years? Where can a description of existing quality be found, in research, government documents or other reports?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using information from theoretical traditions, stakeholders’ views and existing studies and reports, identify the present strengths and challenges in quality. Clarify whether standards are intended to serve as a minimum, or will be aspirational, and whether a “step” system to bridge between existing practices and desired practices would be helpful.</td>
<td>What are 10 strengths and 10 areas for improvement within ECE settings? Where would the standards potentially have the most positive impact, by setting a minimum, outlining aspirational goals, or some combination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning with an existing quality “framework” that recognizes multiple dimensions of quality, map desired constructs and preliminary indicators to include in the standards.</td>
<td>How do the “global” constructs contained in the frameworks manifest themselves in the country- for example, how does the stakeholder group define “play-based” learning? What does effective pedagogy look like? Are there constructs that do not seem relevant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include a mix of process and structural quality in standards, but place more emphasis on the elements that are most strongly associated with child development.</td>
<td>Which structural elements seem most important? How can structural elements be complemented by process elements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the purpose of monitoring as quality standards are being constructed, to help ensure that the resulting standards can be used in the manner intended.</td>
<td>What are the goals for the system over the next 5 years? What role will the standards make in helping to achieve those goals? Will the monitoring system be focused on self-assessment, accountability, or a combination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider what type of monitoring tool is needed to align with the standards.</td>
<td>Who is responsible for monitoring? How much training in child development does this group have, and what is a reasonable monitoring tool to expect them to use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a research agenda to validate and update quality service standards that includes emphasis on quantitative work on associations between quality and child development, and qualitative work that focuses on perceptions of quality among teachers, parents and other stakeholders.</td>
<td>What research questions surface as the standards are being developed? For example, do any stakeholders have questions about the role of pedagogy in promoting child development; whether the length of the day makes a difference for children’s learning? How confident is the stakeholder group that the definition of quality emerging in the standards is shared by parents and/or others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a plan for evaluating and modifying quality service standards and quality assurance systems over time, potentially on a 5-year cycle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps to consider</td>
<td>Questions to Address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminate existing standards widely to all stakeholders to build a common</td>
<td>What are the most effective ways to inform stakeholders about quality standards e.g., translations into local languages, developing versions for those who are less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding of quality (a common challenge is that practitioners have never</td>
<td>literate? Are standards used in developing training programs for staff and those who support/supervise them? Is guidance provided to pre-primary providers on what data should be collected to improve quality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seen the standards).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Align quality assurance mechanisms (including measurement tools) with existing</td>
<td>What information do inspectors need to determine whether the setting is meeting service standards? Are multiple tools (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations, self-evaluation) used to collect information from different source/ perspectives and to triangulate the data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve a range of stakeholders including staff, parents, and children in</td>
<td>Are a range of perspectives on quality incorporated into internal and external monitoring processes? Would making consultations with stakeholders mandatory increase the likelihood they will take place? How are the results from these reviews shared and discussed with administrators, practitioners, and parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>providing input into monitoring processes to reflect diverse perspectives on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop common procedures for accreditation of public and private preschools and</td>
<td>Is there legislation mandating registration/licensing for early childhood services to operate? Does the law apply equally to public and private preschools and to services operating in schools and community settings? If not, is there another mechanism to ensure that all settings protect children's health and safety?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>track compliance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create incentives for both public and private preschools to follow regulations and</td>
<td>Are service standards applicable and enforceable across all pre-primary providers? Do financial or non-financial incentives encourage services to meet standards and to address deficits if they are not in compliance? Are there negative consequences for preschools that fail to meet standards within a reasonable timeframe? Are there processes to reward services that demonstrate quality achievements or improved performance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work toward progressively higher standards.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that inspectors are trained on relevant aspects of early learning to</td>
<td>Do the desired profiles of inspectors and other monitoring roles exist and/or do they need additional training and support? To what extent can the system draw on experienced current or former early educators? What manuals/guidelines/tools are needed to support standardization and the consistent monitoring across settings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectively and consistently monitor quality across settings and help programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>address areas for improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge monitoring and practical support for quality improvement efforts, including</td>
<td>Does the system balance monitoring for control/accountability and monitoring for development/improvement? Are participants comfortable reflecting critically on service quality, including areas for improvement, without fearing negative consequences? Do practitioners receive guidance (from managers, peers, pedagogical counselors or others) to use monitoring data to develop a plan for improving their practice? Are sufficient resources available to implement that plan and reflect on continuous improvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>links to professional development opportunities. Explore various supports for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continuous reflection and improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider the time and resources needed to sustain a well-functioning quality</td>
<td>Is the time required to complete self-evaluation and external evaluation processes reasonable (e.g., monitoring process quality tends to be more time and labor intensive)? Are there sufficient inspectors to visit services, including those in more rural and remote areas, on a regular basis? What logistical barriers may prevent regular monitoring and how can those be mitigated? Would a differentiated response to previous monitoring results (like in New Zealand) help tailor and target resources according to need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assurance system.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate data collection and share the results of monitoring processes with a</td>
<td>What type of data is contextually-appropriate to share with the public? Will assessments of individual preschools be shared in full on online or only aggregated results? Are there mechanisms to coordinate the flow of data across all levels of government to provide a broad picture of quality? To what extent do these data inform policy discussions and planning at the local and national levels?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wide a set of stakeholders to promote accountability and inform policy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Steps to consider in developing quality standards

- **Define** the theoretical tradition in the country.
- **Use** an existing quality framework with multiple dimension as a starting point and engage key stakeholders in a core work group.
- **Form** a stakeholder group to address quality.
- **Review work** on early childhood in the country/region to describe the broad context.
- **Consider** what type of monitoring tool is needed by aligning with standards.
- **Identify** the purpose of monitoring while creating the quality standards.
- **Create** both process and structural quality standards, emphasizing process standards.
- **Use** multiple sources of data, and create a plan for evaluating and modifying standards and systems over time.
- **Create** a research agenda that highlights both quantitative and qualitative work to measure quality service standards.
Steps to consider in building quality assurance systems

- **Involve** a range of stakeholders including staff, parents, and children to reflect diverse perspectives on quality.

- **Align** quality assurance mechanisms (including tools) with existing standards.

- **Disseminate** existing standards widely to all stakeholders.

- **Support** mechanisms that bridge monitoring and practical support for quality improvement efforts.

- **Address** logistical constraints like transportation when setting frequency of visits.

- **Ensure** that inspectors are trained to effectively monitor quality and help programs address areas for improvement.

- **Balance** monitoring for control/accountability with monitoring for improvement.

- **Explore** various incentives/supports for continuous reflection and improvement.

- **Create** incentives for both public and private schools to participate in quality assurance system.

- **Consider** what is contextually appropriate to report and how to reach stakeholders.

- **Support** mechanisms that bridge monitoring and practical support for quality improvement efforts.

- **Balance** monitoring for control/accountability with monitoring for improvement.
Annex 3. **Analyses of example country standards and quality assurance systems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Do standards include process and structural elements?</th>
<th>Are indicators designed to be measured?</th>
<th>Which aspects are monitored?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nigeria</strong> (ages 0 to 5; including creche (0 to 3); pre-nursery/playgroup (3-4); nursery/kindergarten (3-5))</td>
<td>Few process indicators included. Some imply process (i.e., “regular interactive visits to center by parents”) and others are more explicit (i.e., “promote child’s mental and social development by being responsive”)</td>
<td>Majority of indicators are structural and would be possible to measure. Process indicators not defined enough to be measurable.</td>
<td>Not clear. Conditions for closure outlined as “persistent failure to meet core standards”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Georgia</strong> (information provided isn’t sufficient. Text of actual law vs. information on quality standards)</td>
<td>Ratios and group sizes by age, hours of the day and number of meals defined; other information not available.</td>
<td>Translation of indicators into measurement would be complicated process, but could attempt to assign indicators to some or all of the standards.</td>
<td>Assume all standards outlined in the National School Readiness goals, but not specified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serbia</strong></td>
<td>Yes. Structural and Process elements both included and outlined. Detailed descriptions of expected teacher behaviors, including responsiveness and emotional support, included.</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philippines</strong> (center-based early childhood programs ages 0-4)</td>
<td>Both. Covers 8 areas: health/nutrition/safety, physical environment/safety, interactions between staff and children and among young children and other adults and safety, staffing, curriculum, instruction and assessment, family/community involvement, leadership, management, registration/evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td>All centers must register and apply for a permit to operate. Annual evaluation includes input from different stakeholders and determines readiness for “recognition.” Within 3 years, center must conduct both an internal and external assessment covering all standards and leading to three levels of recognition valid 3-5 years</td>
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<td><strong>Jamaica</strong> (Early Childhood Institutions, including day care (ages 0-3) and basic school/preschool (4-6))</td>
<td>Yes. 12 standards including structural (physical environment, equipment, staffing) and process (interactions and relationships with children, and interactions with parents and community)</td>
<td>Yes, each standard includes detailed explanations and performance criteria with three categories: needs improvement, acceptable, good.</td>
<td>Includes both legally-binding and voluntary standards; both are monitored during inspection visits</td>
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<td>Are results used for accountability (e.g., are there consequences for non-compliance)?</td>
<td>How were standards developed?</td>
<td>To which facilities do the standards apply?</td>
<td>Does monitoring focus on compliance or improvement, or both?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, in that facilities can be closed if standards are not met.</td>
<td>No information provided.</td>
<td>Yes — acknowledgement that many children were in private, unregulated care was a primary reason to develop standards</td>
<td>Compliance: Few mentions of mentoring or links to professional development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutions can be closed for not meeting standards.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes refers to all “institutions” providing ECE.</td>
<td>Seems to be more focused on compliance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Permit can be revoked if center does not comply with requirements of the external assessment and does not reapply within a year</td>
<td>Developed and validated in consultative workshops with representatives of the ECCD Board, reps of the Dept of Social Welfare and Dev’t from the provincial/local levels, teachers, and heads/directors from public and private child dev. centers, and researchers</td>
<td>Yes, slightly different procedures for public and private but common assessed against same standards</td>
<td>Dual focus on compliance and improvement. TA provided to help meet external assessment requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes, there legal (including imprisonment) and/or financial penalties for non-compliance of the Early Childhood Regulations. Settings can be closed if they do not meet legally-binding standards within a set time period after inspection and/or if children are deemed to be in danger</td>
<td>Developed by the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder Early Childhood Commission. Informed by longitudinal research in Jamaica and international research</td>
<td>Yes, for equity reasons, they apply to all early childhood settings</td>
<td>Mostly compliance? However, inspections also report on standards that are not legally binding to encourage institutions to go beyond minimum requirements</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References


