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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PROFILE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE & EDUCATION (ECCD) IN SRI LANKA: ANALYSIS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT.

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to draw on several sources of information in an effort to present a comprehensive and well-informed profile of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCD) in Sri Lanka. The study also explores the nature of the ECCD institutions, profile of preschool children in Sri Lanka, standards of teacher training, qualifications and learning indicators of ECCD, Sri Lanka. The paper further identifies that although preschool enrollment of the Sri Lankan children has increased over the years, significant percentage of preschool are resource constrained. The findings of the study also convey that limited skills, competencies and inadequate training of the ECCD service providers as well as insufficient remuneration/ prestige for the preschool teachers also appear to hinder the quality of the ECCD service provision, especially to children from disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, findings report the need to introduce uniform standards to ECCD institutions in Sri Lanka, maintain a healthy teacher child ratio, and the need for increased state sector involvement in the ECCD service provision. The study provides recommendation for policy makers, teacher trainers and researchers of ECCD, Sri Lanka.

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Introduction:-

Early Childhood as a Critical Period in Human Development:-

Children indefinitely are the future of the world. Thus, early childhood has been considered a critical, profound period with the most rapid human growth (Salaswicz & Perry, 2010; UNICEF/UNESCO, 2012) is a widely acclaimed concept. According to literature, during early childhood, children are also extremely sensitive to the environmental influences (Berk, 2010; Erickson, 1974; Siegler, Deloache, & Eisenberg, 2003). In connection with these universally accepted notions, Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE) of the young child has emerged as an area of national concern for many countries. Thus, investment made on ECCE is reported to yield psychosocial as well as economic dividends in multiplication for any country (Heckman, Jora & Sergio, 2005; Alderman, 2011; Alderman & Vegas, 2011).

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The early childhood activities carried out in Sri Lanka is referred to as Early Childhood Care & Development (ECCD) (MWCA, 2016; Evans, 1996) and spans from 0 to 5 years. This definition of ECCD is somewhat different to its global referral of ECCE as a period spanning from 0 to 8 years (UNESCO/ UNICEF, 2012).

Thus, the aim of the present study is to provide a critical analysis of the ECCD profile in Sri Lanka. Within this framework, profile of preschool children, and preschools or ECCD centers, are reviewed. Also reviewed are the learning indicators of Sri Lankan preschool children, educational and professional qualifications of the preschool teachers.

Profile of preschool children: Sri Lanka:-

Children constitute a significant proportion of the 20 million population of Sri Lanka. Therefore, it was deemed important to find out the details of the Sri Lankan children and develop national goals to promote their wellbeing. As a significant step in this initiative, a National Plan of Actions was drawn in 2004 based on the Dakar report (MoE, 2008). One of the initial goals of this report was to increase the preschool attendance from 62% to 80%. Thus, if the National Plan of Action (MoE, 2008) goals are to be achieved there is a need to find out the number of children who enter grade 01 of the primary schools in Sri Lanka.

To all Sri Lankan children, the universal primary school education is guaranteed and is a mandatory requirement. Hence, the official school entry age in Sri Lanka is five years and above. A Sri Lankan child completing five years as at the 31st of January of the year receives the primary school admission. Therefore, the age group applicable for pre-schools in Sri Lanka is three to five years.

As mentioned before, the government of Sri Lanka does not shoulder the complete responsibility of its ECCD. Therefore, it is not mandatory for all Sri Lankan children to enroll in ECCD centers/preschools. However, due to the absence of statistics attributable to many and varied reasons such as limited funds, resource constraints, and conflict which prevailed in Sri Lanka, the exact number of children who attended preschools were not known in the last three decades. Conversely, the existing limited evidence suggests that the participation in pre-school education has increased over the years (MoE, 2008; MCDWA, 2010; Department of Census and Statistics, 2014).

In 1988 apparently 25% of the 3–4 year-olds attended preschools (Evans, 1996) while in 1994 the gross enrolment for ECCD was recorded to be 43% which reached 63% in 1999; (MoE, 2008), recording no gender disparity and maximum participation within 4 to 5 years.

The review also finds that several non-governmental organizations have tabulated the number of preschool children enrolled in their preschools. For instance, according to the display board, in the Sarvodaya (a Non-governmental organization providing community services) child development center there were 6199 preschools, 145519 preschool children and 12,398 preschool teachers under the patronage of Sarvodaya (Sarvodaya, 2003). Even though the information pertaining to conflict affected area are not listed in the Children's Secretariat, literature (Pathirana, 2006) convey that 73354 preschool children, 4507 preschool teachers and 2721 preschools were in the North-East province. Further, literature (Pathirana, 2006) also report that preschool enrollment in North-East province was found to be lower than the national preschool attendance, being attributable to the conflict which prevailed in Sri Lanka.

Literature (MoE, 2008) further conveys that in the 21st century a high enrolment rates and high participation in Sri Lankan preschools has been recorded. For instance, according to the school census (MoE, 2008) the total percentage of preschool children has increased every year from 2000 to 2005. In 2005, it amounted to be 90% of the children who were enrolled in the primary schools, again recording no gender disparity. Furthermore, National Survey on ECCD, carried out by MCDWA (2010) reports that total number of children in Sri Lankan preschools amounted to be 516,123.

However, this number has not been portrayed in relation to the percentage of Sri Lankan children who enroll in primary schools, which the paper recognizes to be clear limitation. Conversely, more recent findings of the of the census data conveys that nearly 45 percent of children aged 3 years and over 85 percent of children over 4 years attended a pre-school in Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, 2014). However, lower percentage was reported within certain communities such as the plantation sector (Department of Census & Statistics, 2014). In this

light it could be said that Sri Lanka seems to be in the right direction and appears to have achieved the target stipulated in its NPA (MoE, 2008).

A profile of ECCD centers:-

Nature & Scope:-

According to MoE (2008) an island wide survey on Sri Lankan preschools had been carried out by the, secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Environment and Woman's Affairs; conveying that there were 6592 preschools. These preschools had been registered by the Children' Secretariat representing 18 districts, 8 provinces. Information pertaining to the North Eastern Province has not been included in this data (MoE, 2008). In 2000, Children's' Secretariat had 7725 preschools registered with 11366 preschool teachers and 204695 children which included information pertaining to 19 out of 25 districts in Sri Lanka (MoE, 2008)

National survey in ECCD in Sri Lanka (MCDWA, 2010) finds that there were 12,353 ECCD centers in Sri Lanka. However, out of them, less than half has been registered (n = 5414). Maximum number of these centers were situated in Kurunagala (n = 1103) while the minimum were recorded to be situated in Mannar (n = 94). However, data was not available on some districts (i.e. Kilinochchi, Mulativu, and Vavunia) affected by the conflict.

Resources: ECCD Institutions:-

Resources in ECCD institutions serve as indicators denoting their quality of service provision. MCDWA (2006) stipulate comprehensive and detailed physical environment standards for ECCD institution in Sri Lanka pertaining to premises, building, furniture & equipment and water/ sanitation. However, literature (UNICEF, 2003; WBG, 2014) conveys that majority of the ECCD institutions in Sri Lanka are resource constrained and do not seem to adhere to the standards stipulated by MCDWA (2006). For instance, a large percentage of preschools surveyed did not have an appropriate building and were in residential premises or located in cramped spaces. The survey also reports shortage of appropriate furniture and play material with inadequate arrangements for children with disabilities.

MCDWA, (2010) survey also finds that a large percentage of ECCD centers did not seem to have adequate outdoor facilities such as swings, sea saws, crawling and climbing units or free play areas. However, 72% of the centers were recorded of having safe drinking water.

Sri Lanka's Early Childhood Quality Assessment Survey (ECEQAS) in 2013 (World Bank Group, 2014) reports similar findings. It also records that a significant percentage of preschools in Sri Lanka were in shortage of teaching resources. Further, large percentages of preschools were also reported of being constrained with basic essentials such as safe drinking water and first-aid boxes. They also report that there was a paucity of teaching/ learning materials and other facilities for children with special needs. Furthermore, some ECCD centers surveyed had children from age 2 to age 7 in the same classroom. Moreover, centers in the estate sector and rural areas were reported to be resource constrained than those in urban areas.

Needs of the ECCD in Sri Lanka seems also to be primarily addressed by the non-public sector. National surveys (MCDWA, 2010) as well as individual research studies (Pathirana, 2006) convey that less than one fourth of the ECCD needs are addressed by the public sector. Literature further reports that ECCD services provided by the public sector seem to be of a higher quality (WBG, 2014). Thus, considering the importance of quality ECCD, the paper recommends this percentage to be significantly increased within the next 05 years.

Average day in a preschool:-

The present study also reviewed the day today functions of the preschools in Sri Lanka, when drawing its ECCD profile. According to the national survey report of preschools in Sri Lanka (Wijetunge, & Wickramaratna, 2003); the preschool day starts between at 7.30 to 8.15 in the morning, and ends between 11.45 to 12.15 p.m. The preschool in Sri Lanka seem to generally operate for about three hours on weekdays with few children spending their weekends in the preschools. Activities in the preschools comprise of religious observations, learning activities in the classroom, outdoor play and intervals/ mealtimes (Wijetunge et al., 2003). This study also report that very few preschool teachers practiced activities for listening, pre-reading or pre-writing skills. However, activities for the development of reading and writing skills seem to be frequently practiced. The study further proclaims that cultural (e.g. New Year), and religious festivals as well as yearend marking of the preschools were also celebrated. The

study also finds that preschools in Sri Lanka is pressurized and judged by the activities as well as whether they teach children to read and write (Wijetunge et al., 2003).

ECCD: Curricula

The paper further finds that preschools following the child centered, activity based strategies advocated by ECCD experts and developmentally appropriate curricula were to be in minority. Many preschools were reported to teach the curricula taught in primary schools of Sri Lanka, than a one suitable for pre-primary aged children. Thus, reviewed curricula contained formal instructions in reading, writing and arithmetic (WBG, 2014). Further, grouping according to age categories for appropriate activities do not seems to be the popular or the majority's practice with children participating in activities as whole class (Wejetunge et al., 2003). The paper opinions that this may cause more damage than good in the minds of young children, going against the recommended best practice guidelines of the 'Child Friendly Development Centers' (MCDWA, 2006) and can be detrimental to young children's education and development.

Teacher child ratio in ECCD Centers:-

Quality child care has many aspects. A profound indicator impacting quality child care is the teacher-child ratio. Even though it is limited to a single aspect of quality, preschool teacher-to-child ratios give a quantitative indication of the frequency of contacts between teachers and children. Globally, regulations specifying the child-to-preschool teacher ratio typically increase with the age of children. According to the OECD Family Database (2010) certified teacher-to-child ratios are calculated by dividing the number of full-time equivalent children enrolled in pre-school programs by the number of full-time equivalent teachers at that level. Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) (2013) reports that there is a large variation on the staff: child ratios, from 1:6 to 1:24 with the smallest number of preschool children to a teacher being found in Sweden and The Netherlands. According to this report the highest number of children to a teacher is reported in countries such as China, Singapore and France.

The MCDWA (2006) guidelines recommend the child: preschool teacher ratio to be 20: 1. Moreover, based on the figures listed in the MCDWA survey (MCDWA, 2010) the present paper calculated preschool teacher, child ratio in Sri Lankan preschools to be 1:22. This figure seems to be slightly than the teacher, child ratio (1: 18) in the Sri Lankan government schools (MoE, 2016). Thus, considering the significance of the lower teacher, child ratios, in maintaining quality teacher, child interactions; the paper recommends the concerned authorities' to maintain preschool teacher, child ratio to be in the range of global standards for middle income countries.

Preschool Teacher Qualifications:-

Both educational and professional qualifications can be listed as essentials aspects required for preschool teachers to work successfully and deliver a quality ECCD provisions to young Sri Lankan children.

Teacher Educational Qualifications:-

MCDWA (2006) standards stipulate admission requirements for training of ECCD teachers as having passed three subjects at G.C.E (A/L) or selected through a screening test from those who have sat G.C.E (A/L). It also provides an age range for recruitment (18 to 30 years). However, before 2006, the minimum qualifications of preschool teachers stipulated by various organizations are General Certificate in Education -Ordinary Level (Pathirana, 2006; The report on ECCD, in Sri Lanka, 1986) with a credit pass in Mathematics and English. However, these documents also records that preference should be given to General Certificate in Education (A/L) (The report on ECCD in Sri Lanka, 1986) or minimum recruitment qualification should be G.C.E (A.L) from the date of initiation of the convention for the preschools (Pathirna, 2006).

Wijethunge et al., (2003) finds that a large number of preschool teachers did not comply even with this basic qualification stipulated by the government statutory bodies. MCDWA (2010) records less than 3% of the preschool teachers surveyed had educational qualifications of degree and above with 51% (n = 11924) having G.C.E (A/L) (i.e. successful completion of 13 years of education) and 38% with G.C.E (O/L) with mathematics and first language. On the other hand, 8% of the participants (n = 1784) had educational qualifications below G.C.E (O/L) or less than 11 years of education. Even though these facts convey that preschool teacher educational qualifications have steadily increased, considering the importance of ECCD to Sri Lankan children the paper recognizes this as a factor to be concerned and further improved.

Preschool Teachers: Professional Training:-

Sri Lankan preschool teachers are expected to provide preschool children with foundations for academic success and creative expression while preparing them for primary education which start from 6 years onwards. Thus, it is expected educational as well as professional qualifications of the preschool teachers contribute to the quality of the ECCD experiences that Sri Lankan children receive.

Research and expert perspectives agree that one of the key elements that determine the quality of ECCD is training and qualifications of the preschool teachers. Thus, professional training acquired by the preschool teachers is considered to denote the quality of the ECCD provision.

Before, 2006 the preschool teacher training in the Sri Lankan milieu seems to be unstructured and inclusive, generally existing in the range of one day to one year. The guidelines for child development centers, MCDWA (2006) stipulates minimum period of professional training using standard curricula approved by the National Committee on ECCD should be one year, containing 300 hours. It further specifies that there should be in-service training during weekends with at least once a year (n = 50 hours) refresher training (MCDWA, 2006). Even though this stipulation would set the professional training required by the Sri Lankan preschool teachers on the right track, the paper expects some setbacks created due to *laissez faire* professional training standards which existed prior to 2006.

As a result, large number of in-service preschool teachers working in Sri Lankan preschools may not meet the standards stipulated by the MCDWA (2006). For example, a survey carried out by Wijetunge et al., (2003) report that nearly 25% of the preschool teachers in their sample were untrained while only 15.1% with training over one year. Further, most number of training programs followed by the preschool teachers in the sample were less than one year (45.1%). When Pathirana (2006) surveyed 275 preschool in 18 districts in Sri Lanka, the outcomes conveyed that only one tenth (9.6%) of the teacher population surveyed had two year of professional training while 39.2% of the sample were with a professional training between 6 to 11 months (Less than a year).

A more recent research (MCDWA, 2010) finds that little less than one fifth (n = 4005) of the preschool teacher population surveyed were without any professional qualification with 14% (n = 3208) reporting a training less than 3 months. However, the data pertaining to those with training over one year is not available which is noted as a limitation in this report. According to the World Bank Group (2014), about 39 % of the preschool teachers met the minimum standard of one year of professional ECCD training, with variations existing across provinces. Maximum percentage was recorded in Central Province (60%) while the minimum was recorded in Northern Province (30%).

However, the need to provide quality, child sensitive/centered training for preschool teachers has been focused on and highlighted by almost all national level reports on ECCD, Sri Lanka (Pathirana, 2015; WBG, 2014; MoE, 2008; Wijetunge et al., 2003, ECCD in Sri Lanka, 1986). NPA (MoE, 2008) also recommends the training of teachers through the Children's Secretariat, provincial education ministries and the National Institute of Education (NIE). Further, it also recommends quality assurance, supervision and monitoring to ensure the quality of contents of the preschool education curricula and the services provided. However, since Provincial authorities are also responsible for determining the quality assurance, supervision and monitoring of the Sri Lankan preschool teachers, requirements expected of them also seems to depend heavily on the province in which the preschool is located.

Thus, the paper recommends a national plan of action for capacity building of both pre-service and in-service preschool teachers with the responsibility of monitoring and implementing professional standards of the preschool teachers be vested with the Children's Secretariat. Even though the professional training available to preschool teachers seem to have come a long way with the quality improvements; the paper envisage it requires further improvements and quality assurance audits before it can reach the global standards. For example, preschool teachers in developing countries are generally trained at the same level and in the same training institution as primary school teachers (OECD Family Database, 2010). Thus, the paper recommends the Children's Secretariat, Sri Lanka to consider this aspect when making revisions to the existing policy. The paper is also of the view that the Children's Secretariat require to encourage provincial ECCD sectors to meet the national standards of preschool teacher trainings.

Preschool teacher training programs:-

The last few decades of Sri Lankan ECCD did not recognize training to be a mandatory aspect, to be employed in a Sri Lankan preschool (UNICEF, 2003). Even though Sri Lanka no longer allows the Carte Blanch for any person to start/own their preschool, limitations exist due to the absence of formal procedure to monitor or screen the quality and quantity of knowledge, professional training imparted by the preschool teacher training institution (UNICEF, 2003; Pathirana, 2015). However, the paper also acknowledges and commends the initiatives which are gradually being taken to change this practice (MCDWA, 2006; UNICEF, 2003).

When reviewing the preschool teacher training courses it was observed that many and varied organizations provide preschool teacher training, Department of Education, University of Peradeniya, 2003; Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014; Sarvodaya, 2000; Yoshida Preschool Teacher Training, 1987) including state sector, non-governmental as well as and private fee levying institutions. According to the World Bank, Group (2014) there were about 35 registered ECCD training programs with the Tertiary Vocational Education Commission (TVEC).

The structure (Fulltime and Weekend) and duration (ranging from one day to two years) of these courses seemed to vary widely. The government authorities who offer preschool teacher training programs include Ministry of Social Welfare, Municipal Councils, Urban Councils, The Children's Secretariat, and Divisional Councils (MoE, 2008). In addition, national universities (Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014), teacher training colleges (NIE, 2016) and technical colleges (LAVTAC, 20186) also offer preschool teacher training programs. Further, private institutes also seem to prepare students (preschool teacher trainees) for entry-level positions in CDC's or preschools (Mother's Touch, 2016; Training Centre for Montessori Teachers, 2016).

The content of these courses more or less seem to include Learning Procedure, Child Psychology, Child Health and Nutrition, and teaching practices (OUSL, 2014). However, different training institutes seemed to present the program modules a different approach. For instance, review of training modules offered by many and varied training institutes conveyed that they contained titles such as practical life, sensory materials, language development, geography, history, astronomy, Botany, Zoology, Arithmetic, and art therapy. .

The types of education qualifications for teacher trainees also seem to vary according to the institute they offer. For example, the preschool teacher training programs reviewed were with varied labels such as 'Certificate in Pre - school Education Program' ii. Advanced Certificate in Pre-school Education, and Diploma in Early Childhood & Primary Education (OUSL, 2016), Diploma in the Montessori Method of Education (Training Centre for Montessori Teachers, 2016), Foundation Certificate in Children's Services and Diploma in Early Childhood Development and Education (Mother's Touch, 2016).

The duration of these programs also seemed to vary with a certification program containing a duration of 6 months to one year (OUSL, 2016; LATVC, 2016) and diploma course with duration of one to eighteen months (OUSL, 2016; Training Centre for Montessori Teachers, 2016; Mother's Touch). These teacher training programs are required to be registered with Children's Secretariat as well as The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (WBG, 2014).

Program contents of the ECCD teacher training programs in Sri Lanka:-

The guidelines for child development centers (MCDWA, 2006) stipulates that the professional training component of the preschool teachers should comprise of Philosophical basis as well as historical background of the ECCD, knowledge of child rights and developmental trajectories from 0 to 5 years, the concept of child friendly CDC's, development milestones from 0 to 5 years, early identification of at risk children, 'enlightened child care practices' and parent education, minimum standards for CDC's, management of CDC's, child observation/monitoring & keeping records, maintaining relations with other service providers, providing parent awareness, providing parental & community support, setting up management committee & mechanism for monitoring/ evaluation of CDC's, personality development of CDC staff, basic English knowledge, visits to CDC resource centers, group workshop experience in producing CDC learning material using locally available resources, and practical experience at a recognized & relevant CDC for not less than one month.

Curriculum analysis of preschools surveyed in the National Survey Report of preschools in Sri Lanka shows that there is a positive picture of training coverage in the preschool training curriculum (Wijetunge et al., 2003). When reviewing the literature, it was also observed that preschool teacher training programs offer multitude of subjects, to

the teacher trainees such as mathematical and language concepts, child psychology, the role of the preschool etc. They also appears to provide theoretical and practical training components to the trainees though the percentage of theory and practice provided varies from one program to the other (Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014; Sarvodaya, 2000; Yoshida Preschool Teacher Training, 1987). However, the review of these program contents also conveys that there is duplication as well as triplications of topics within these programs. Further, majority of these training programs seemed to lack the comprehensive curriculum outlined by the MCDWA (2006).

Hence, the paper recommends that initiatives are required in order to ensure comprehensive coverage of topics for preschool teacher training programs. The paper also opinions that initiatives are also required in accrediting institutions that provides preschool teacher training thereby ensuring standards and quality. It further suggests that the funding should be available to these preschool teacher training institutions to provide free trainings to the preschool teacher if and when required, considering the best interest of the Sri Lankan children.

However, training programs reviewed (Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014; Sarvodaya, 2000; Yoshida Preschool Teacher Training, 1987) did not contain a separate subject to train preschool teacher trainees in topics such as value education, environment protection, early violence prevention or Non-Violent Communication. The paper recognizes this to be a limitation while recommending the above listed aspects to be addressed during the curriculum revisions of these preschool teacher training programs in the future.

Further, the paper also recommends that as stipulated by the MCDWA (2006) guidelines, the government of Sri Lanka requires to ensuring one year teacher training mandatory to all preschool teachers within a year of starting/assuming duties in a preschool or before being recruited to the post. As an incentive to be so trained, this training may be provided free of charge. The paper further suggest that if NGOs and INGOs working for the well-being of young Sri Lankan children such would provide funds to train preschool teachers, established ECCD training institutions (e.g. the Open University of Sri Lanka) complying with the MCDWA (2006) standards; offering structured preschool teacher training programs with adequate/ centralized infrastructure, regional training centers, and a resource pool of experts to conduct teacher training programs could provide scholarships to in-service preschool teachers in need of training.

Considering the national relevance and need for the preschool teacher training; the paper further suggests that the program cost necessitates being affordable to the potential trainees requiring such a training. The paper further suggests that when in-service preschool teachers require completing their stipulated professional qualifications total or significant percentage of the program cost should be borne by the government or the donor agencies (i.e INGO's) striving to improve the ECCD standards in Sri Lanka.

Learning indicators for Sri Lankan preschool children:-

Inarguably, preschools or ECCD centers play an important role in developing children's interest in learning; through varied techniques and activities (i.e. games, group play, artwork and music). Preschool teachers also facilitate pre-reading, writing and basic math concepts, while encouraging creativity and social interactions within children.

However, a review of ECCD curriculum framework or learning standards indicators for Sri Lankan preschools seem to remain absent to this date (WBG, 2014). Furthermore, the MCDWA (2006) guidelines detailing standards for other aspects have also not listed specific curriculum framework or detailed learning indicators for Sri Lankan preschools. Thus, the paper recommends that Sri Lankan preschools require streamlining and coordinating to provide quality education to children. The paper further suggests that they also need to take into account children's neuropsychological readiness to learn.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Education & Cultural Affair-in its EFA report (MoE, 2008) lists 11 objectives of the ECCD centers. They are: 1. Provision of an environment, which is favorable, fruitful and safe for obtaining sensory experiences; 2. Provision of opportunities to develop a good, courteous behavioral pattern through day-to-day activities, 3. Guidance to get used to good health habits, 4. Provision of a favorable environment for development of good habits, 5. Provision of opportunities for physical development and skills development, 6. Development of intellectual and creative abilities, 7. Development of skills to attend to routine work and to complete them, 8. Guidance to love, to appreciate, evaluate and to safeguard the environment, 9. Provision of abilities to face challenging situations, 10. Build up a favorable atmosphere for getting used to work with cohabitation and 11. Make arrangements to the child to live a happy a joyous life. Even though these objectives

seems to fill the gap which exist within the Sri Lankan ECCD, in the absence of comprehensive learning indicators there is an urgent need to develop them.

However, given the constraints in physical resources and the preschool teacher qualifications/trainings the paper believes the learning indicators require to be mapped out for Sri Lankan preschools. For this purpose, the paper recommends the curriculum framework provided in the Yoshida preschool teacher training program which list one year ECCD curriculum can be taken as trail blazer for future ECCD curricula (Yoshida free preschool teacher training institute, 1990). The paper further recommends that Sri Lanka should mandate a national pre-school curriculum or specific guidelines for preschools, followed by a national pre-school curriculum for children with special needs.

Moreover, Sri Lanka also requires developing specific standards to monitor and evaluated learning outcomes of the preschool children. Again, the absence and the absolute necessity for it have been stressed by a more recent report of ECCD (WBG, 2014). However, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (2016) has listed it in their website as having formulated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Standards as an activity to be provided to pre-school teachers in the future.

In sum, the paper finds that the profile of ECCD, Sri Lanka records quality as well as quantitative improvement from past to present with increased child enrollment to Sri Lankan preschools, rigorous standards of teacher training and improved/ increased resource in the preschools to create a child friendly environment. However, the paper also outlines that resource constraints, limitation pertaining to learning indicators, gaps in preschool teacher training/ competencies, insufficient remuneration/ prestige for preschool teachers and gaps in state sector involvement seemed to curtail the quality of the ECCD service provision in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the paper highly recommends improved quality to ECCD, Sri Lanka through increased state involvement and monitoring.

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