

## Profile of Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka: Analyzing the Past, Designing a Way Forward

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Notion of the early childhood as the period of most rapid human growth with greatest sensitivity to environmental influences during the first four or five years of life is widely acclaimed. It has also been considered as a critical period in the human development.

Presently, early childhood care and education in Sri Lanka seem to be carried out more or less as a small business or charity to those in need of it. Multiplicity of early childhood educational agencies, which provide an uneven distribution of facilities of early childhood care and education seem to be in need of supervision and monitoring. Moreover, individuals engaged in providing early childhood education seem to have in general limited skills, inadequate training, remuneration and prestige.

Government of Sri Lanka has not been enthusiastic about shouldering the responsibility of early childhood care and education. The national education systems recognize the child from the age of 5 years. As a result, social, cognitive and emotional needs of young children during this significant period, which are considered as critical, and contributing to the overall development seem to be neglected. Though several policy implications and national plan of actions seem to have repeatedly stress the importance of early childhood care and development, to date a comprehensive policy and an action plan which recognize the significance of preschool education remain absent. The paper advocates the need for design, evaluate and implement effectual early childhood education programmes.

In this paper, existing policy reports and national survey carried out during the past twenty years are reviewed in an effort to define best practices in early childhood education and to outline future directions for the field. The importance of identification and registration of early childhood educational institutions, minimum qualifications and training for preschool teachers, utilizing culturally sensitive practices and outcome measures, and providing empirical support to document efficacy of programmes are discussed in detail. In addition, policy implications and the potential key role that preschool teachers and parents could play in the challenge to provide an effective early childhood education are highlighted.

Key Words: Early childhood; Pre schools; Policy

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