

Quality and Standards of Care and Education Provided by Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka: *Current Status and Way Forward*



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Preface

The National Education Commission (NEC), established by the National Education Commission Act No. 19 of 1991 is a body corporate with the primary mandate to function as the apex policy formulation body of the education sector, and to engage in policy analysis and research, review the ongoing programme and plans with respect to education and undertake research on issues of importance as a prelude to formulation of national education policy and plans at periodic intervals. Going along with this mandate, the NEC has embarked on series of research addressing the some of the current issues faced by the education sector.

This volume deals with the center-based early childhood care and education provision in Sri Lanka. Early childhood has been recognized as a crucial period of the life of an individual. Studies strongly suggest that the environmental influences exerted during this period on young children have a great impact on the development of their brains and their future behaviors. Ample evidences have also been available to show the provision of high-quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) is the proven way of providing a nurturing environment that supports brain development which enhances children's learning, development of their behavior and disposition. Therefore, many countries have fostered the centre-based ECCE provisions which are reinforced with compliance audit and quality assurance and certification systems.

Centre-based care and education for children prior to primary school admission was not in general practice up until nursery classes were introduced during British rule. Since the visit of Dr. Maria Montessori in 1944, the Montessori method of preschool education has firmly been established in Sri Lanka. A further expansion of preschools came about with Educational Reforms introduced in 1972 when the school admission age was raised to six years. Since then the Government has encouraged pre-primary education and as a result, ECCE centres have been established in every part of the country. When UNESCO proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) showed its commitment to children by establishing the Children's Secretariat (CS) during the same year to promote and coordinate activities related early childhood development. This was subsequently renamed as the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD).

Although the NSECD has introduced national standards for ECD centres, it is yet to implement a periodic compliance audit and quality assurance and certification systems which are the pre-requisites for improving the quality and standards of centre-based ECCE provisions. As prelude to working towards this national goal, the NEC has undertaken this study with the objective to assess the quality and standards of structural and process elements of ECCE provisions offered by ECD centres in Sri Lanka and propose the way forward.

Prof. Harischandra Abeygunawardena

Chairman

National Education Commission

October 2023

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Abbreviations

ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
NEC	National Education Commission
QAC	Quality Assurance and Certification
NSECD	National Secretariate for Early Childhood Development
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practices
PC	Provincial Councils
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
NMRC	National Monitoring and Regulation Committee
CS	Children's Secretariate
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka

Chapter 1: Introduction

In modern day, providing quality early childhood care and education to their children is the goal of all parents across all socio-economic divide. It is well known that the experience in early childhood is a crucial phase of growth and development as the experiences incur during this phase can influence outcomes across the entire course of an individual's life.

1.1 Significance of Early Childhood

Early childhood is a crucial phase of growth and development. Numerous research studies have shown that the first few years are the most crucial period in an individual's life^{1,2,3}. Researchers specify that 90% of the brain develops by age 5⁴ and in the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections are formed every second. After this period of rapid proliferation, connections are reduced through a process called pruning, so that brain circuits become more efficient. Sensory pathways like those for basic vision and hearing are the first to develop, followed by early language skills and higher cognitive functions (Fig.1.1. a). Connections proliferate and prune in a prescribed order, with later, more complex brain circuits built upon earlier, simpler circuits⁵. Appropriate Interactions are crucial for children during this period. If responses of caregivers are unreliable and inappropriate the brain architecture does not form as expected, which can adversely affect the learning and behaviour of children. Further, for children with disabilities or developmental delays, early childhood is the most significant time for early detection to ensure access to interventions that can help them reach their maximum possible potential⁶.

¹ Tierney, A.L. and Nelson, C.A. (2009) Brain Development and the Role of Experience in the Early Years. *Journal of Zero Three*,30(2), pp.9-13. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3722610/> (Accessed: 7 October 2022).

² Cusick, S. and Georgieff, M.K. (2013) The First 1000 Days of Life: The Brains Window of Opportunity. [UNICEF-IRC] 12 April. Available at:<https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/958-the-first-1000-days-of-life-the-brains-window-of-opportunity.html> (Accessed: 7 October 2022).

³ Shonkoff, J. P. and Richter, L. (2013). The powerful reach of early childhood development: A science-based foundation for a sound investment. In P. R. Britto, P. L. Engle, & C. M. Super (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood development research and its impact on global policy* (pp. 24–34). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199922994.003.0002> (Accessed: 7 October 2022).

⁴ *Early childhood brain development has lifelong impact* | Arizona PBS. (2017, November 22). Retrieved July 7, 2021, from <https://azpbs.org/2017/11/early-childhood-brain-development-lifelong-impact/>

⁵ Harvard University. (2019). *In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Retrieved June 5, 2021, from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/>

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund. (2019). *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education-in advocacy brief*. UNICEF.

Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially

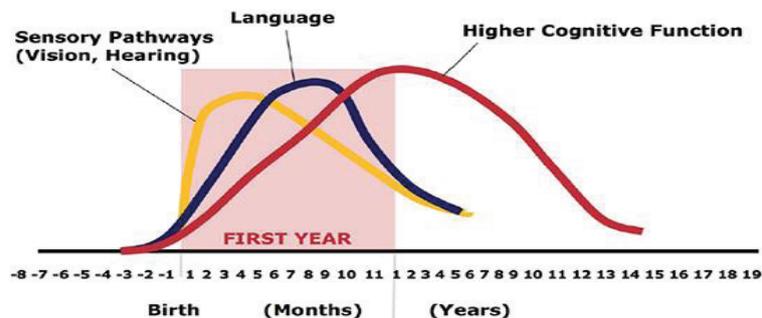


Figure 1.1.a: Critical Periods for Development of Basic Skills

Source: Nelson, C. A. (2007) *Center on the Developing Child. The Science of Early Childhood Development (In Brief)*. Retrieved July 5, 2021 from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

In addition to brain research, the studies conducted on ECCE programmes reveal that children enrolled in at least one year of preschool education are more likely to develop critical skills they need to succeed in schools, less likely to repeat grades or drop out of school, and therefore will be more able to contribute to peaceful and prosperous societies and economies when they reach adulthood⁷. According to Cherry (2019)⁸, children raised in nurturing environments become more secure, confident, and capable of dealing with challenges later in life, while those who were raised in less enriching settings might feel anxious and become incompetent to cope with life challenges. Research on child development reveals that environmental influences on young children make an impact on patterns of brain maturation, which in turn are associated with specific patterns of individuals' behaviours^{9,10}. The phenomenal changes that the human brain undergoes during this period, require an inspiring environment rich in meaningful experiences, multisensory stimuli, and adequate physical resources. These studies emphasize early childhood as the best period to invest in human capital development.

A study conducted by Professor James J Heckman and others in the US found that high-quality birth-to-five programmes for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment. In this study, the researchers looked at participants' improved health, IQ, education, and decreases in their involvement in crime, as well as the increased labour participation of the mothers whose children were a

⁷Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E., and Prados, M.J. (2017). "Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program". NBER Working Paper No. W23479. Retrieved August 3, 2021, from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23479>

⁸Cherry, K. (2019) Experience and Development: How Experiences influence Child Development [Verywell Mind] 27 November. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/experience-and-development-2795113> (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

⁹Tooley, U.A et al. (2021) Environmental influences on the pace of brain development. *Journal of Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 22, pp.372–384. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41583-021-00457-> (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

¹⁰Rubin, E. (2016) Early Life Environment Influences Brain Growth and Behaviors [physiology Today] 16 November. Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/demystifying-psychiatry/201611/early-life-environment-influences-brain-growth-and-behavior> (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

part of the program¹¹. This rate is much higher than the rate of return (7-10%) identified in previous research conducted by Professor Heckman and others (Fig. 1.1.b).

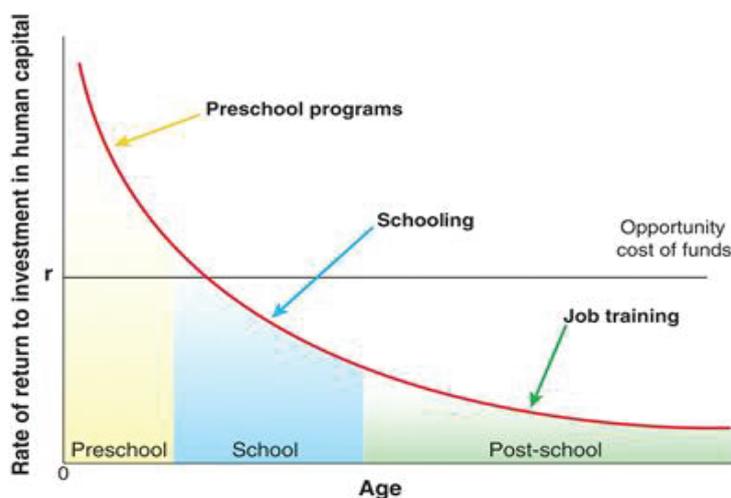


Figure 1.1.b: Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment

Source: Heckman, J.J. (2008) *School skill and Synapses*, "Economic Inquiry", 46(3) 289-324.

Having recognized the ECCD/ECCE as one of the best investments a country can make to promote human resource development, gender equality, and social cohesion, and to reduce the costs for later remedial programmes, the UNESCO has reinforced it in the Education 2030 agenda and in particular in Target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 which states 'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'¹².

1.2 Early Childhood Care and Education in the Sri Lankan Context

1.2.1 Origin and Progress

Introducing the first letters of the alphabet to children at an auspicious time when they reach the age of three years is a long-standing tradition in Sri Lanka that signifies the aspirations and value given for education by society. However, formal education for children prior to primary school admission was not in general practice up until nursery classes were introduced during British rule. During this period nursery school system was popular in Britain and that has influenced instituting nursery schools in a number of missionary schools and churches in Sri Lanka. In 1944, Dr. Maria Montessori visited Sri Lanka, and

¹¹ Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E., and Prados, M.J. (2016). *The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program*. Retrieved August 4, 2021, from https://cehd.uchicago.edu/?page_id=276#abccba

¹² UNESCO. (2015). *Education 2030 – Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Goal 4*.

subsequently, Montessori teacher training programmes were started. In the mid-20th century, the Montessori method of preschool education was firmly established in Sri Lanka.

A further expansion of preschools came about with Educational Reforms introduced in 1972 when the school admission age was raised to six years. The Government encouraged pre-primary education and as a result, ECCE centres mushroomed in every part of the country. When UNESCO proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) showed its commitment to children by establishing the Children's Secretariat (CS) during this year. Among the tasks assigned to the Children Secretariat was coordinating and directing activities for the development of children in early childhood. When the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment (present Ministry of Women and Child Development) was created in 2005 the CS became one of its major institutes carrying out programmes to ensure holistic development of children in early childhood¹³. The CS has contributed to the field of ECCD in many ways including introducing policies on ECCD, minimum standards for ECD centres, and ECD standards for children between the ages of 3-5 years. Considering the significant role played by the CS to the field of ECCD the Cabinet approval was granted to change its institutional name from 'Children's Secretariat' to 'National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD) in December 2020 and established the National Monitoring and Regulation Committee-(NMRC) The NMRC which is currently established in the Ministry of Education as the central level advisory and monitoring and regulatory body of the ECCE sector.

1.2.2 Salient features of ECCE in Sri Lanka

There are several types of preschools operating in Sri Lanka, applying different labels such as kindergarten, preschool, nursery school, Association Montessori Internationale preschool, Modern Montessori International preschool, and early childhood development centre, etc. However, the most common name used for ECCE centres is 'Early Childhood Development Centre'. This term was proposed in the National Policy on ECCD, in the year 2004 to "transform scholastically focused preschools into community-based child development centres that focus on age-appropriate holistic development"¹⁴, and this term has been used by most preschools since then.

According to the National Census of ECD centres conducted by the World Bank-assisted Early Childhood Development Project in 2016, there were 19,668 ECD centres in Sri Lanka and of these, 70.8% of ECD centres are managed by the private sector while others are managed by public institutions/local government authorities (19.8%), religious organizations (6.5%), and non-governmental organizations (3.0%)¹⁵. Although registration of ECD centres is mandatory in all provinces as per the regulations prescribed by respective Provincial Councils, it appears that a considerable percentage of ECD centres (26.6%) operate without any formal registration with a designated authority.

A study conducted by the World Bank in 2014 reveals although in principle there are prescribed standards for operating ECDs, the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing compliance with prescribed standards,

¹³ UNESCO-IEB. (2010). World Data on Education 2010/2011 (7th ed.).

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/sites/default/files/Sri_Lanka.pdf

¹⁴Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare. (2004). *National Policy on Early Childhood Education*.

¹⁵ Early Childhood Development Project (2016) National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka. Colombo

and collection of and collecting data on ECCE provision, are weak¹⁶. It has been further revealed that most ECD centres are managed by for-profit private service providers who operate in an environment of limited public investments for provision, oversight, regulation, and support^{17, 18}. The prevailing situation has been well articulated by the National Education Commission (NEC) in 2022 in its National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)¹⁹ which states that “most ECD centres are managed by for-profit private service providers who operate in an environment of limited public investments for provision, regulation and oversight, and support”.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Having recognized the need for intervention, the NSCED has introduced several progressive measures such as the introduction of minimum standards for ECD centres, national standards for early learning and development, and the Child Assessment Tool Kit for assessing the degree of attainment of the prescribed national standards²⁰. However, Sri Lanka is yet to establish a quality assurance and certification mechanism which is indispensable for continuous enhancement and sustenance of quality and standards of ECCE provisions. Therefore, as prelude design and introduce quality assurance and certification system, the NEC going along with its mandate has decided to conduct a study to assess the quality and standards of ECCE provisions offered by ECD centres in Sri Lanka.

¹⁶ World Bank. (2014). *Laying the Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka*. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/laying-foundation-early-childhood-education-sri-lanka>

¹⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund. (2018). “required Investments to Deliver High Quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Sri Lanka, discussion paper presented at the ‘Building Brains, Building Futures’-Sri Lanka Early Childhood Development High Level Meeting. <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/stories/building-brains-building-futures-sri-lanka-early-childhood-development-high-level-meeting>

¹⁸ Pathirana, B.D.D. (2017). Profile of early childhood care and education (ECCD) in Sri Lanka: Analysis of the Past and Present. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 5(3), 1372-1380.

¹⁹ National Education Commission (2022) National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030): Volume 1-Policy Proposals and Recommended Activities on Early Childhood Care and Education. Colombo. www.nec.lk

²⁰ The Children’s Secretariat (2018) Child Assessment Tool Kit. Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs. Colombo. <http://www.childwomenmin.gov.lk/institutes/childrens-secretariat>

Chapter 2: Research Approach

The quality and standard of early childhood education programmes are generally assessed by the assessing their structural and process features and child outcomes against the benchmarks /standards prescribed²¹. The key terms of this study, the structural and process quality, child outcomes, care and education and early childhood development centres are defined below.

a) Structural and Process quality

Structural quality refers to the physical features and characteristics of a programme²², and it includes the ECCE setting, class size, teacher-to-child ratios, teacher qualifications and experiences, teacher pay scale, along with the allotted square footage for play space. More specifically, it includes the readily quantifiable and regulable features such as location and surroundings, staff and their qualifications, group size, and classroom materials. It encompasses elements such as location and infrastructure facilities such as the extent of indoor and outdoor space and furniture and equipment, health and safety provisions, adult-child ratios and group size, staff qualifications, staff wages, and working conditions, teaching-learning approach, and curriculum.

Process quality refers to the quality of the child's day to day experiences in the ECE setting including interactions between the teacher and the child and the interactions between the teacher and the parent²³. More specifically, it refers to the daily experiences provided to children in centre-based ECCE setting. It encompasses elements such as the social, emotional, physical, and instructional aspects of children's activities and learning material and the interactions with teachers and peers which are considered proximal determinants of child development. Structural quality also affects the process quality as the environment in which the ECCE provisions are provided profoundly impacts child outcomes.

Although the process quality is perceived to have a more direct impact on child outcomes as compared to structural quality, researchers and leaders in the field of early care and education agree that process and structural indicators are interrelated, and when combined together they promote the highest quality experiences.

b) Child outcomes

Child outcomes refer to the level of a child's development in areas that are central to age-appropriate healthy development: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, cognitive development and language and communication skills, and general knowledge^{24, 25}.

²¹ Bonetti, S. and Brown K. (2018) *Structural Elements of Quality Early Years Provision: A Review of the Evidence*, Retrieved from https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review_EPI.pdf (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

²²Peterson G. and Elam E. (n.d.) *Process Quality and Structural Quality* [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_Observation_and_Assessment_in_Early_Childhood_Education_\(Peterson_and_Elam\)/02%3A_Quality_Counts/2.04%3A_Process_Quality_and_Structural_Quality](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Early_Childhood_Education/Book%3A_Observation_and_Assessment_in_Early_Childhood_Education_(Peterson_and_Elam)/02%3A_Quality_Counts/2.04%3A_Process_Quality_and_Structural_Quality)

²³ Slot, P., Leseman, P., Verhagen, J., Mulder, H. (2015). Associations between structural quality aspects and process quality in Dutch early childhood education and care settings. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 33, 4th Quarter 2015, 64-76. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200615000599>

²⁴ McKeown, K. et al. (2015) Determinants of child outcomes in a cohort of children in the Free Pre-School Year in Ireland, 2012/2013, *Journal of Irish Educational Studies*, 34(3), pp 245-263, Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03323315.2015.1065430>

²⁵ Bonetti, S. and Brown K. (2018) *Structural Elements of Quality Early Years Provision: A Review of the Evidence*, Retrieved from https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review_EPI.pdf (Accessed: 20 September 2022).

c) Care and Education

Care is defined in the National Policy of ECCD (2018)²⁶, as “*integrated set of actions that ensure children’s health, nutrition, protection, and their psycho-social and cognitive aspects of development*”. Early childhood education is defined in this policy as education that children in early childhood receive in a place organized to provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences. It focuses on holistic development of the child and promotes child’s readiness for learning. Based on these definitions care and education was defined in this study as actions that ensure children’s health, nutrition, protection etc. and developmentally appropriate learning experiences that promotes holistic development of the child and his/her readiness for schooling in an organized place.

d) Early childhood Development Centre

There are several types of institutional arrangements/settings that provide care and education for children between approximately 3-5 years’ operating in Sri Lanka, applying different labels such as preschool, Montessori, Early Childhood Development Center, etc. This term was proposed in the National Policy on ECCD, in the year 2004²⁷ to “*transform scholastically focused preschools into community-based child development centres that focus on age-appropriate holistic development*” and used by many preschools since then. This study defines the term early childhood development centre as a place that provides care and learning experiences for children between the ages of 3-5 years.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study to assess the quality and standards of structural and process features of ECCE provisions offered by ECD centres in Sri Lanka as a prelude to development of a quality assurance and certification system for ECCE system in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the specific objectives of the study are to:

- i) Assess the structural quality of ECD centres,
- ii) Assess the process quality of ECD centres, and
- iii) Generate baseline information to formulate for criteria and elements and standards and best practices for a quality assurance and certification system for ECD sector.

2.2 Research Method

As the study was aimed at obtaining data systematically to describe the structural and process quality aspects of ECD centres, the descriptive research approach was adopted as it allows to describe the characteristics of the population studied^{28,29}. Considering the advantage of time and cost to produce a status review of the quality and standards of ECD centres, the questionnaire survey method was adopted

²⁶ Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (2018) <http://www.childwomenmin.gov.lk/institutes/childrens-secretariat/national-policy>

²⁷ Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare (2004) National Policy on Early Childhood Education

²⁸ McCombes, S. (2022). Descriptive Research | Definition, Types, Methods & Examples. [Scribbr]10 October, Available at: <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/descriptive-research/> (Accessed: 16 October 2022).

²⁹ Siedlecki, S.L (2020) Understanding Research Designs and Methods Retrieved from https://journals.lww.com/cnsjournal/Citation/2020/01000/Understanding_Descriptive_Research_Designs_and.4.aspx

as the data collection instrument as it allows to include many variables without substantially increasing the time and cost while allowing to extrapolate the findings and the inferences drawn from a sample to the population³⁰.

2.3 Population and the Sample

The population of this study was defined as 19,668 ECD centres³¹ located across 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka. The sample size relevant to this population was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan Table³², and accordingly, the required sample size for a population of 20000 was 377. Accordingly, a sample of 377 ECD centres was selected randomly from all 25 administrative districts.

2.4 Development of Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection tool, the structure questionnaire was constructed based on the insight gained by perusing all pertinent literature on the status and quality of early childhood care and education and through the information gathered from interviews conducted with administrators of ECD centres, teachers, and parents and children, and by the perusal of documents/records maintained by ECD centres, and also through observations made on learning environments of few ECD centres. The draft questionnaire was presented to a panel of ECCE experts to ascertain its content validity. Then the draft questionnaire was amended according to the feedback received. Subsequently, the research team held several rounds of discussions with the panel of experts to prepare the draft questionnaire for field testing. After finalizing the draft questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with four selected ECD centres to assess its suitability and effectiveness in collecting information from the intended target group. After analyzing the data gathered from the pilot study, the draft questionnaire was further refined. Thereafter, the final questionnaire was translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages. It consisted of 78 items formulated under 18 themes related to 5 areas of the structure and quality features. The areas (criteria) and themes (elements) under which the study collected data through the questionnaire are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. The Quality Criteria and Elements by Each criterion

SN	Criteria	Elements
a)	Regulation and Monitoring	1) Regulatory and monitoring mechanisms
b)	Governance and Management	2) Management type

³⁰ Check J. and Schutt R. K. (2012) Research methods in education. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2012. p161.

³¹ Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (2016) National Census of ECD Centres

³² Krejcie, R. V. and Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30(3), 607–610. Available at: https://home.kku.ac.th/sompong/guest_speaker/KrejcieandMorgan_article.pdf (Accessed: 15 October 2022).

		3) Documents maintained
		4) Educational methods
c)	Physical Resources, Learning Environment, and Educational methods	5) Location 6) Indoor facilities 7) Outdoor facilities 8) Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities
d)	Human Resources	9) Staff attached to ECD centres 10) Parents 11) Other stakeholders
e)	Teaching and Learning Process and Teachers' involvement	12) Curriculum 13) Activities that promote health and physical development 14) Activities that promote socioemotional development 15) Activities that promote cognitive development 16) Activities that promote language and early literacy development 17) Activities related to creative arts that promote aesthetic appreciation 18) Extent and degree of teachers' involvement in the development of children's abilities.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from 358 ECD centres across 25 districts. Questionnaires were administered by 348 ECD Officers/Assistants of the National Secretariat of Early Childhood Development (NSECD) who are attached to Divisional Secretariats. District ECD Officers coordinated the entire process. Data collection was made by administering the framed questions to the ECD manager and/or head teacher, conducting direct observations of physical and learning resources and teaching and learning methods, and perusal of records. It was considered an advantage to recruit these ECD officers as enumerators since all of them were familiar with ECD centres in their working areas. They were trained in questionnaire administration and observations. Additionally, the training focused on obtaining data from existing records maintained in ECD centres and observing of ECD centres environment for specific information. The fieldwork commenced in May 2022 and was completed in September 2022. Completed data forms were collected by the NEC through normal postal service.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data collected using the questionnaire were encoded and analyzed quantitatively. A thematic approach was chosen to code and analyses these data under each criteria stated in Table 2.1. This process simplifies the complex information into themes and thereby helps to understand the issue. According to Lacey and Luff (2007) with thematic analysis, there is potential for including previous and evolved ideas in the coding process. The analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Percentages were used to analyze the results.

Chapter 3: Results and Discussion

Results of the study are presented under two broader categories: i) Structural Quality and ii) Process Quality of ECD centres.

3.1 Structural Quality of ECD Centres

The structural quality of ECD centres was assessed by analyzing data collected through the preschool teachers' responses to the questionnaire and observations. Results are presented under the four quality criteria: i) regulation and monitoring, ii) governance and management, iii) physical resources and learning environment, and iv) human resources.

3.1.1 Regulation and Monitoring

The provision of early childhood care and education is a devolved subject according to Article 154(1) of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka (1987)³³. Therefore, only the provincial authorities have the power to pass legislation for the management and supervision of ECD centres in their respective provinces. Accordingly, respective all 9 Provincial Councils have enacted Statutes requiring all ECCE providers to register their establishment with the designated authorities, and it appears to be the primary measure adopted by the provincial authorities to regulate ECCE services. In these Statutes, as of the guidelines and standards introduced by the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD), the criteria for registration of centres including the minimum qualifications for teachers have been prescribed.

Results of the study revealed most of the ECD centres (97.5%) are registered with entities established by the Provincial Councils, and a few have registered with the *Pradeshiya Sabhas* and the Provincial Departments of Probation and Child Care (DPCCs). Data also revealed that 1.1% of ECD centres operating in Hambanthota, Galle, Rathnapura, and Puttalam districts have registered with the *Pradeshiya Sabhas* and 0.8% centres operating in Galle, Kurunegala, and Anuradhapura districts have registered with the DPCCs. Registering with institutions that are not mandated for ECCE provisions by the provincial level Statutes could challenge the authority of the entities established for ECCE in the provinces and question the legitimacy of such centres to operate. Further, as emphasized by the WHO (2018)³⁴, the registration entails the supervision and monitoring which requires regular visitations and observation of programme performance to ascertain whether the activities are accomplished in quantity and quality as the responsibility of monitoring ECD centres lies in the hands of Provincial Councils. Thus, registering ECD centres in different places may hinder the effective monitoring of ECD centres in provinces.

³³ The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka Published by the Parliament Secretariat 2-PL 1962. (2008). <https://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution/constitution-upto-17th.pdf>

³⁴ World Health Organization (2008) Organizing Systematic Supervision Monitoring and Evaluation. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK310626/#:~:text=Supervision%20is%20completed%20by%20monitoring,the%20examination%20of%20periodic%20reports.>

Monitoring of ECD centres is one of the tasks expected from the ECD officers attached to the Central Government and it is done by the NSECD through its ECD officers' network, deployed at District and Divisional Secretariats. In addition, some of the provincial entities (e.g. Western and Central provinces) also have officers appointed by provincial authorities for monitoring ECD centres. Data revealed that ECD officers from Districts and Divisional Secretariats generally visit ECD centres approximately 3 times per year while the officers of the provincial entities appear to visit ECD centres on yearly basis. However, the study revealed that there were some ECD centres (6.9%) in the sample which were not visited by any ECD officer from any authority showing lapses in the monitoring system. Further, whether these visits are made for monitoring purposes is not clear as the study found no evidence to prove that there is a systematic monitoring mechanism adopted by the central level authority, the NSECD or by the provincial entities operating at the provincial level.

3.1.2 Governance and Management

Governance and Management have been assessed through the data collected on the management type and practices followed by the ECD centre, documents maintained by the ECD centre, and the ECCE methods adopted by ECD centres. It is important to assess the management type and practices and ECE methods adopted by these centres as these elements affect the quality aspects of the ECD centre as well as the quality of ECCE provisions provided by the ECD centre. Documents maintained by the ECD centres are expected to reveal whether the centre is operating in an organized manner by adhering to prescribed management practices.

a) Management Type

As shown in Fig. 3.1.2.a, 56.4% of ECD centres are managed by private sector organizations or private individuals while 32.4% are managed by government and government-assisted institutions. Around 8.9% of ECD centres have been conducted by a religious institution and 1.4 % of centres functioned with assistance from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Most of the private ECD centres as reported by Warnasooriya et al (2020)³⁵, use homegrown curricula, which is popularly labeled as 'preschool curriculum' that appear to give priority into parental demands for the preparation of children for schooling over the psychosocial aspects. Focusing only on the preparation of children for schooling may promote asynchronous development in children and hence would not achieve the intended outcomes of institutionalized provision of ECCE.

³⁵ Warnasooriya, R. et al., (2020) Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka from Global Evidence to National Action. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34646/9781464816185.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Accessed: 7 November 2022).

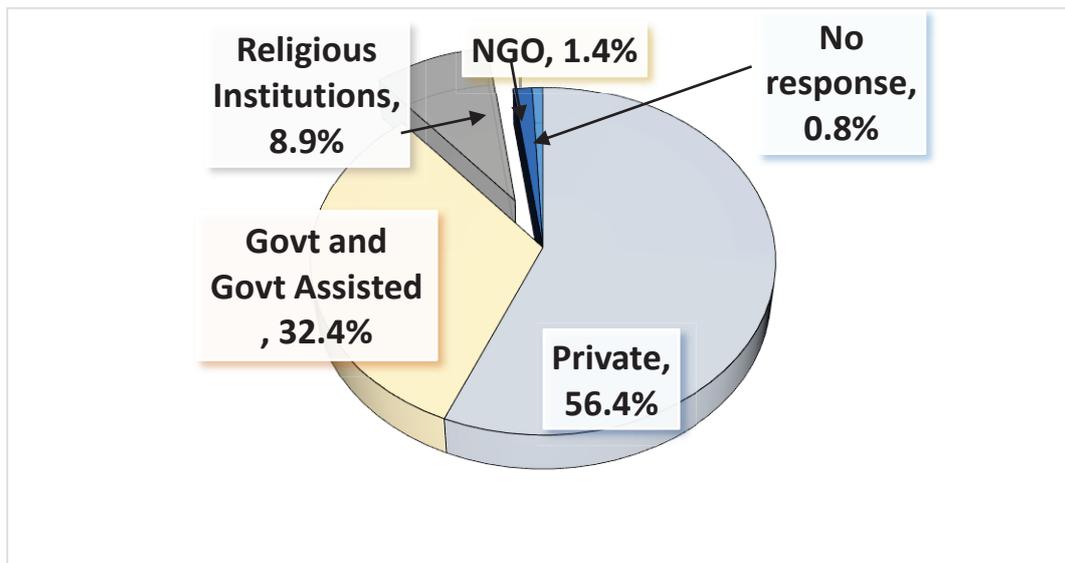


Figure 3.1.2.a: Management Type

b) Documents Maintained by the ECD Centre

According to National Standards for ECD centres prescribed by the NSECD in 2006 and revised in 2022, any ECD centre should maintain at least the following documents

- Admission Register
- Attendance Registers for children, teachers, and parent meetings
- Personal information including the health status of each child and medical reports of teachers
- Addresses of parents/guardians/relevant others to contact in an emergency
- Progress records of children, including children's skills development records
- Record of preschool activities, logbook, details of parent education programmes, records of parent-teacher meetings, etc.

As depicted in Fig.3.1.2.b, most of ECD centres (90.0%) maintain most of the essential files. However, 25.9% centres do not maintain medical history records of children while 64.4% of ECD centres do not maintain written reports of emergencies including accidents and allergies that may occur during school hours. The national standards stipulated by the NSECD expect ECD centres to keep a record of the health status of each child and any emergencies that are important to be recorded since they affect the health status of the child. Although national standards have not stipulated teachers' medical fitness records as essential, this study made an attempt to ascertain since it was suggested as a criterion for registration by the study conducted) on "Consolidated Registration System for ECD centres in the Provinces of Sri Lanka" (Epa, n.d. ³⁶).

Data of this study revealed that most ECD centres (78.4%) do not have teachers' medical fitness reports.

³⁶ Epa, A. (n.d.) A Consolidated System of Registration for Provincial Early Childhood Development Centers, Unpublished report submitted to the World Bank funded Early Childhood Development Project, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs.

The study also shows that most of the documents maintained at ECD centres are managed manually.

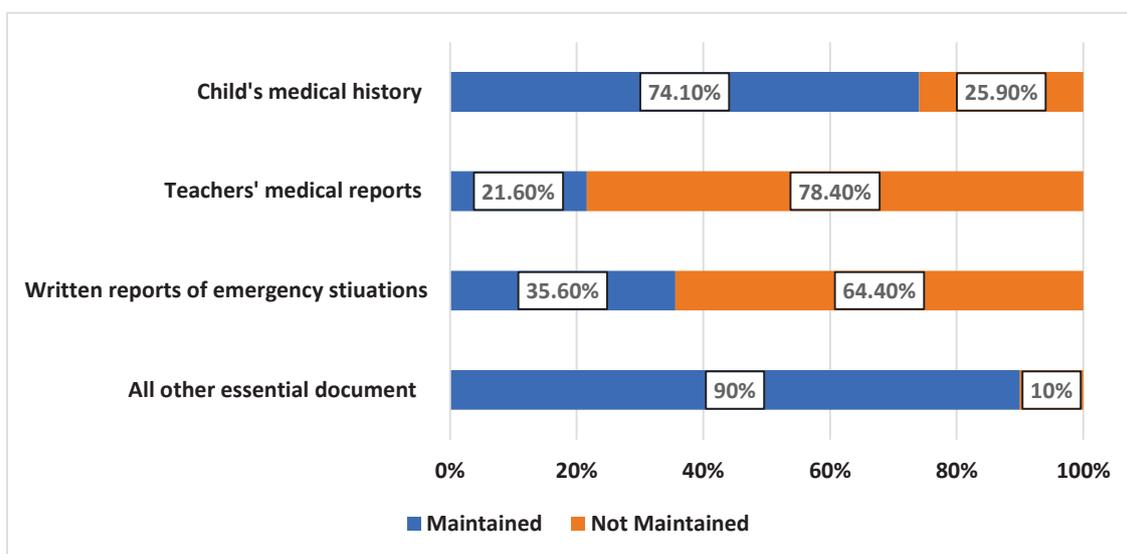


Figure 3.1.2.b: Documents maintained by ECD centers

c) ECCE Methods Adopted by ECD Centres

As shown in Fig.3.1.2.c, most ECD centres (76.8%) have adopted the commonly named “preschool method”, and 19.6% of ECD centres adopt well-accepted methods such as the Montessori. A small percentage of ECD centres have not answered this inquiry, perhaps they are not sure of the ECCE method adopted.

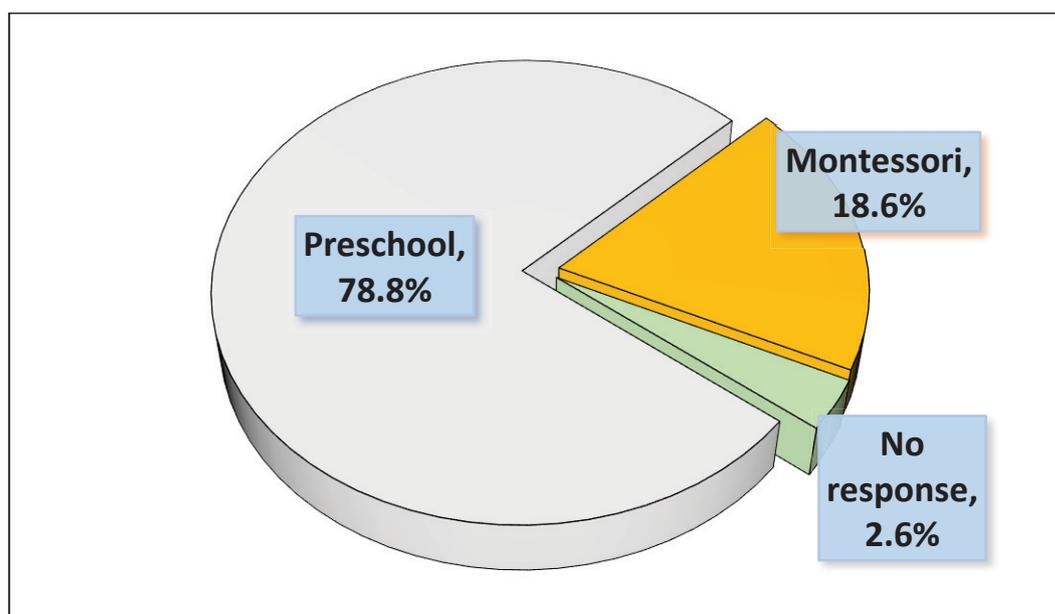


Figure 3.1.2.c: ECCE methods adopted by ECD centres

Generally, the widely used ECCE methods adopted in preprimary education are developed based on the philosophies of their originators. The philosophy of the Montessori method is the “prepared environment” where children explore and learn independently. Reggio Emilia’s approach to preprimary education is based on the image of a child with strong potential for development and a subject with rights, who learns through the hundred languages belonging to all human beings and grows in relation with others (<https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>). However, the philosophy of the self-named ‘preschool method’ is yet to be explained.

3.1.3 Physical Resources and Learning Environment

The elements of physical resources and the learning environment assessed in this study are the location of the ECD centre, land extent, outdoor and indoor facilities, and health and sanitation facilities.

a) Location and Land Extent

A considerable number of ECD centres (35.3%) are operated without minimum land space adequate to provide indoor and outdoor learning areas. As shown in Fig. 3.1.3.a, most of the centres are located in places that are considered undesirable for children’s development and learning: 20.4% are located away from the main road, Further, 31% of ECD centres are situated near unprotected water sources, 30.4% are near liquor bars, 31.0% are near factories or garages and 29.3% are near fish or meat stalls. Although percentages are small, the study found that there are few centres with no proper road access (3.9%), or in land plots, which are not covered by a protective fence or wall (12.3%) or a gate (17.0%), and a few are located near hazardous sites (6.4%).

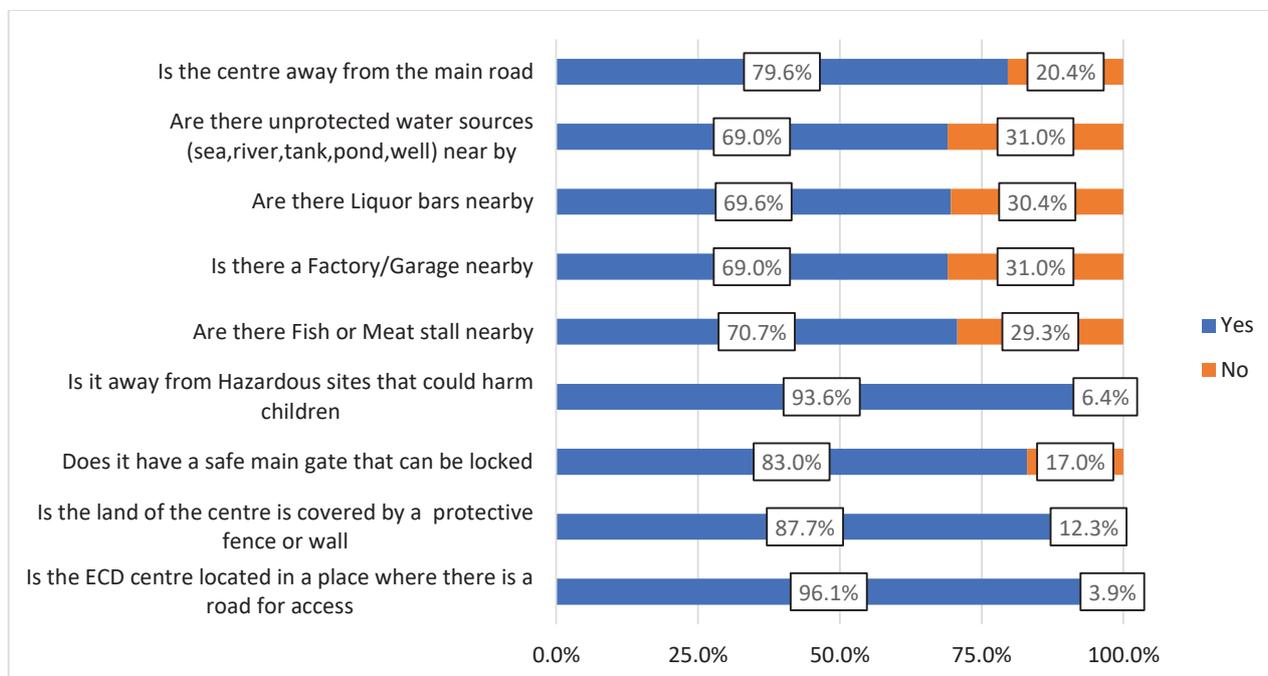


Figure 3.1.3.a: Percentage of ECD centers by Location

b) Outdoor Facilities

As shown in Fig. 3.1.3.b.i, about 14.8% of the ECD centers studied do not have enough outdoor space for children's activities. Adequate outdoor space is crucial for various physical and recreational activities that promote children's development and well-being. Roughly one-third of the centers do not offer gardening activities for children. Gardening can be an educational and enjoyable activity for kids, teaching them about nature and sustainability. Further, approximately 39% of the ECD centers do not have sand and water play areas. Sand and water play are important for sensory and motor skill development in young children.

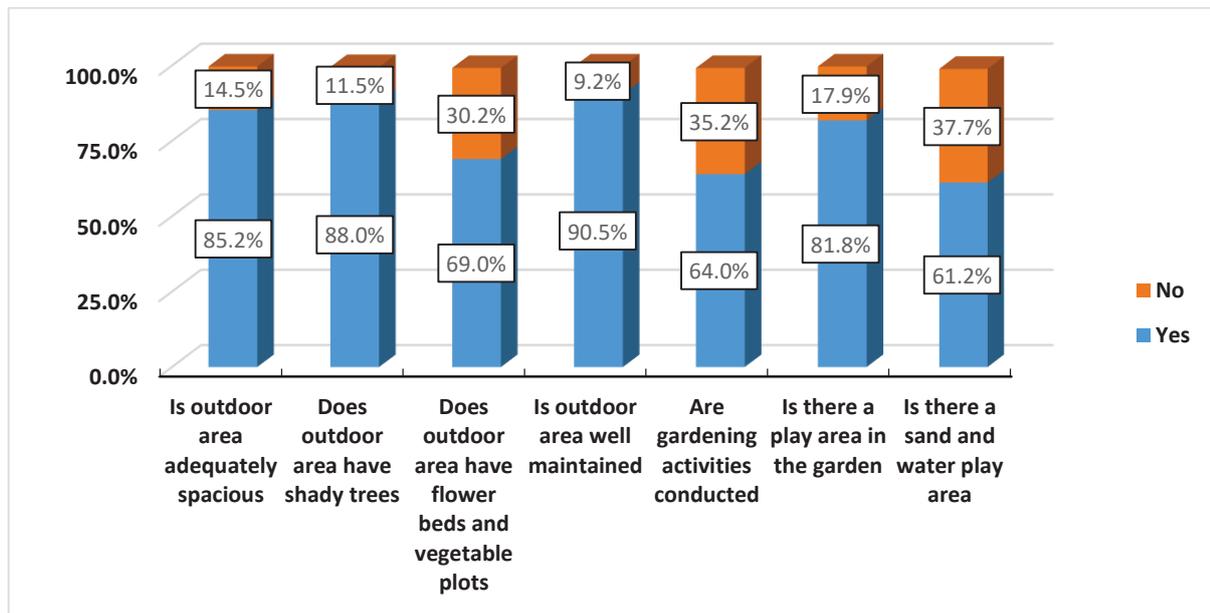


Figure 3.1.3.b.i: Percentage of ECD centers by Outdoor Facilities

As shown in Fig. 3.1.3.b.ii, 40.2% of ECD centres do not have a seesaw, 32.1% do not have a climbing frame, 32.7% do not have a mat slide and 59.5% do not have a tunnel for children to creep. It is well accepted that these play items and equipment are essential for children to learn reflexes and movement control, develop fine and gross motor skills, build stronger muscles and improve balancing skills.

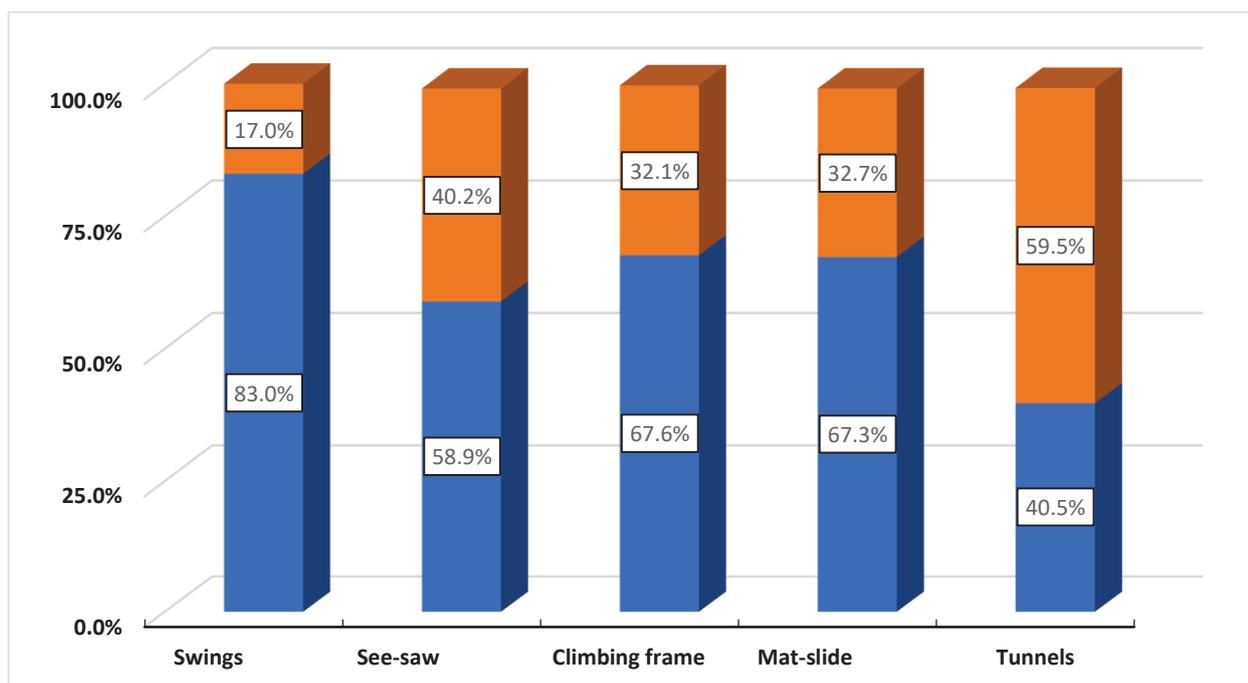


Figure 3.1.3.b.ii: Percentage of ECD centers having outdoor equipment

c) Indoor Facilities

It is well recognized that safe, adequately spacious buildings with the necessary facilities are required for children to learn and develop. The study revealed that a considerable percentage of ECD centres function without formal office space (48.3%) or sick rooms (48.0%). Further, classrooms are not separated in 46.6% of centres. It was also found that a majority of centres (87.4%) are not accessible to children with special needs suggesting that most of the ECD centres in Sri Lanka are still not ready to accommodate children with disabilities.

It is very conceivable that children miss many learning opportunities when the necessary, facilities are not available. Approximately, one-fourth of the centres (23.3%) do not have adequate indoor space and learning areas (25.4%). The floor mats required for children to sit and engage in group activities were not available in nearly 25.0% of ECD centres. Further, the data also revealed that most centres do not have a kitchen/kitchenette for children to learn many skills by engaging in cooking. Another significant gap found in a few centres is the non-availability of first-aid boxes (5.3%). Young children are highly active and unexpected injuries can happen at any time. Having a first-aid box gives a sense of security for teachers as well as parents. Further, the study revealed that many centres (52.6%) do not think it is necessary to display contact details to be used in an emergency. Apart from these gaps, this study found that some ECD centres operate without adequate types and quantities of furniture and equipment: 10.6% centres lack the required tables and chairs for teachers; 11.5% centres did not have a blackboard/whiteboard; 10.3% centres did not provide exclusive space for children to keep their belongings, and 21.2% centres did not provide cupboards or lockers to store children's learning materials.

d) Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Facilities

It is well recognized that the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities are vital for healthy living of all human beings, and it is particularly important for children. This study observed that most of the ECD centres in the sample (96.3%) are equipped with WASH facilities. However, the WASH facilities of some ECD centres need improvement. Responses to the questionnaire obtained through observations as depicted in Fig. 3.1.3.d revealed that 3.6% lack water supply, 5.4% lack toilets with water supply, 3.6% lack clean and well-maintained toilets, 26.8% lack toilets suitable for children, 55.9% lack separate toilets for teachers and 2.2% lack soap and water. It appears that the conditions of WASH facilities in these ECD centres require the attention of authorities since it affects the health and well-being of young children.

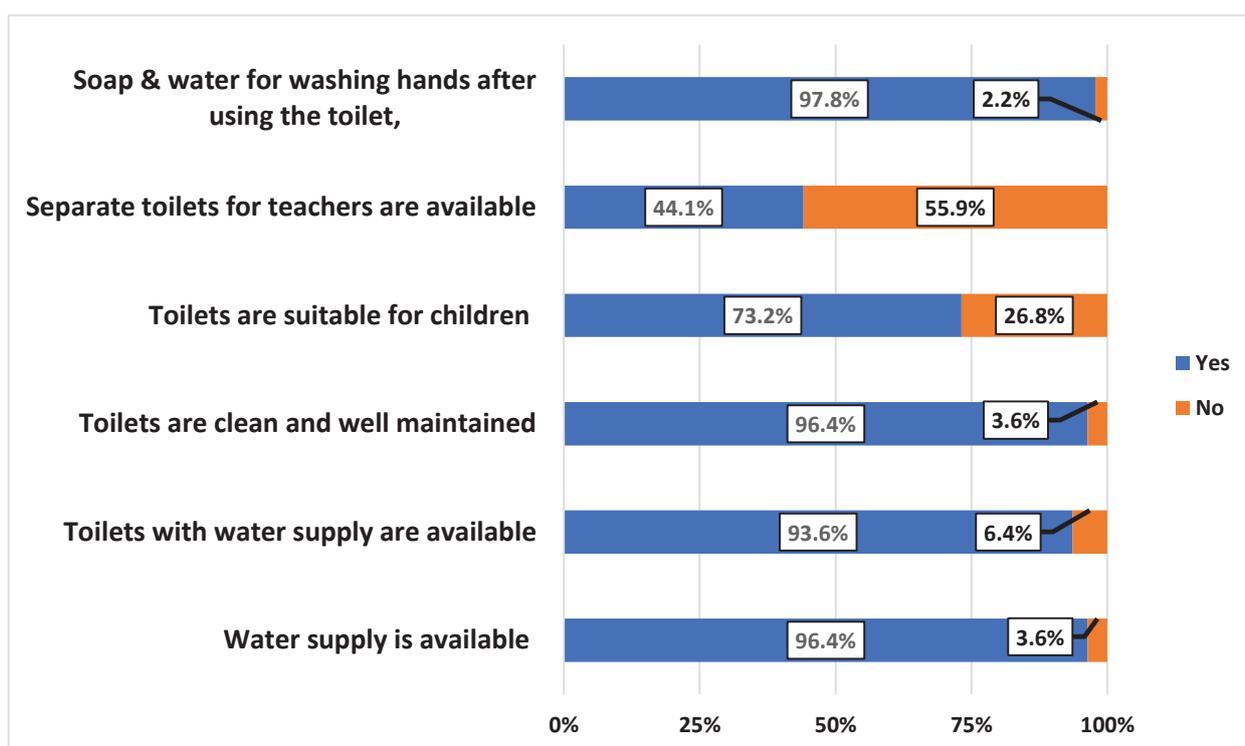


Figure 3.1.3.d: WASH status of ECD centres

3.1.4. Human Resources

- a) **Staff Profile:** It well recognized that efficient managers, competent teaching staff (teachers and teacher assistants), and support staff (i.e. helpers, maintenance staff, cleaning staff, security staff, etc.) are the human resources necessary to manage and maintain an ECD centre. This study revealed that 48.3% of ECD centres do not have a designated person as the manager or principal. Further, 33.0% of ECD centres do not have teaching assistants to assist teachers, 81.6% run without helpers and 77.3% do not have cleaning and maintenance staff.

b) Student: staff Ratio: Appropriate teacher-child ratios are one of the main aspects of a high-quality early childhood programme. The teacher-child ratio stipulated in the ECD centre standards formulated by the NSECD is 1:20, and the data revealed most of the ECD centres (84.6%) satisfy this requirement (Fig. 3.1.4.b).

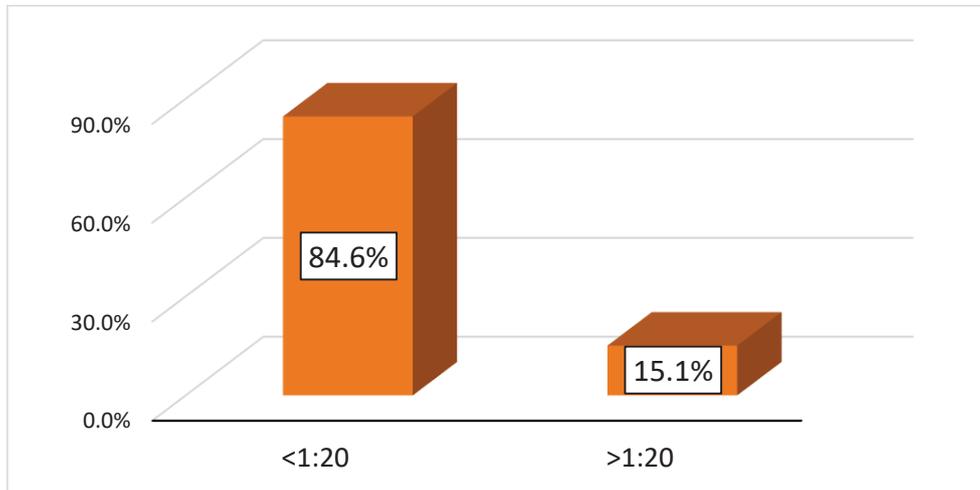


Figure 3.1.4.b: Percentage of teacher child ratio of ECD centers

c) Qualification of Staff: Having a set of qualified and experienced teachers and teacher assistants who possess the required professional and academic qualifications at the ECD centres is prerequisite for the provision of efficient and effective ECCE services. This study, as depicted in Fig. 3.1.4.c, revealed that a majority of teachers (84.8%) possess GCE O/L qualifications or above, and only around 7.0% of the teachers were with education qualifications below GCE O/L. Further, the results showed that most of the preschool teachers (84.6%) have had professional training of one year or more. However, there were 5.4% of teachers have not undergone any professional training.

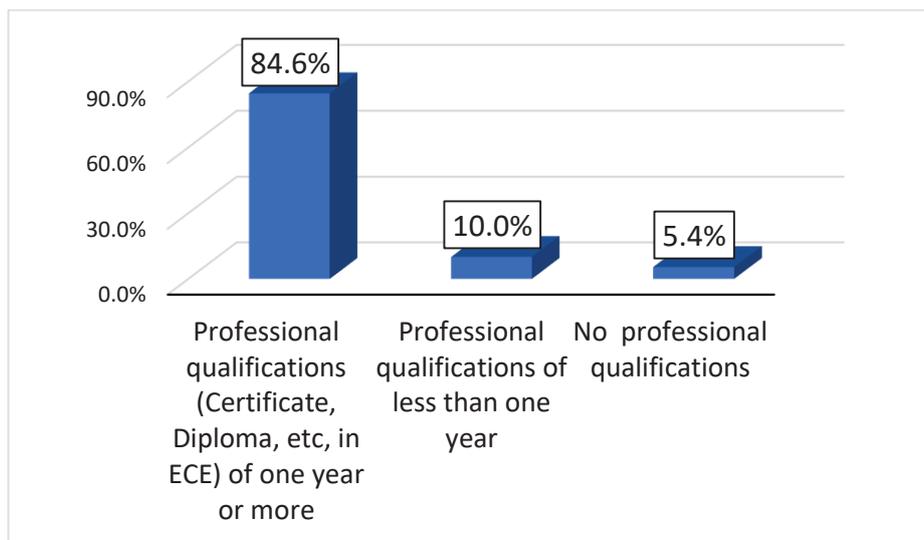


Figure 3.1.4.c: Professional Qualifications of ECD Teachers

d) Remuneration Rates: Results of the study also revealed that preschool teachers are poorly remunerated. As shown in Fig. 3.1.4.d, in general half of the sample (50.1%) receive a salary between 10,000-20,000 rupees, and a considerable number of teachers (31.5%) receive less than 10,000 rupees as their monthly remuneration. These results confirm the findings of previous surveys (National survey on ECD centres, 2010 and National Survey of ECD centres, 2016) which highlighted the low wages received by preschool workers.

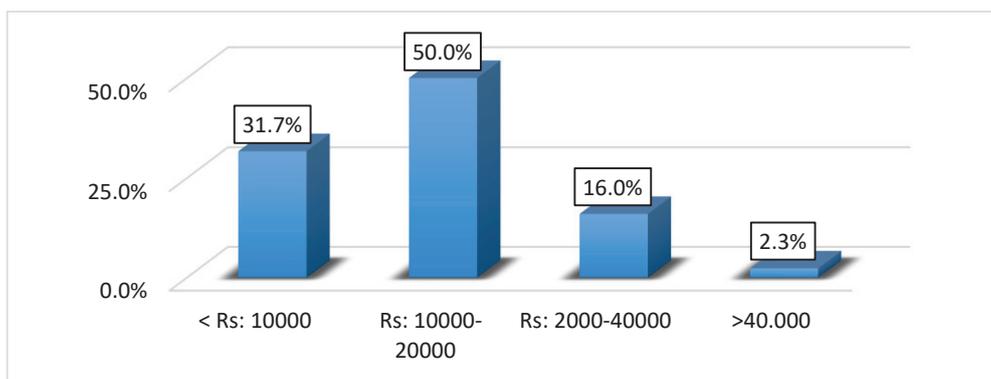


Figure 3.1.4.d: Average salary of Teachers

e) Experience of Teachers: The experience of a teacher is another factor that promotes his/her effectiveness and efficiency. According to Kini and Podolsky (2016)³⁷ as teachers gain experience their students learn more and are likely to do better on other measures of success too such as school attendance. On the other hand, it also reflects teacher retention within the institution/service. However, this study, as shown in Fig. 3.1.4.e, revealed that more than 50% of the teacher population have less than 10 years of teaching experience. Only 33.1% of teachers have more than 15 years of experience. This suggests that the current preschool system has a problem in retaining teachers.

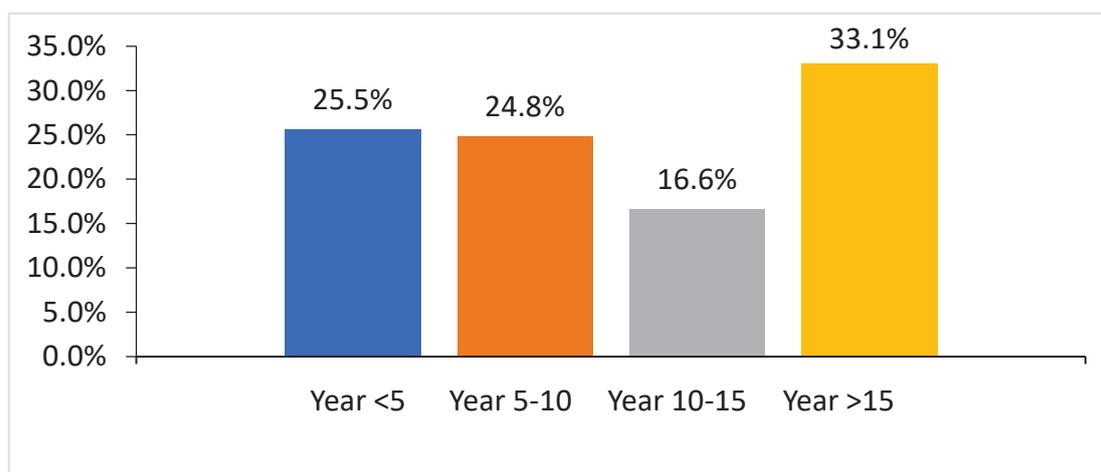


Figure 3.1.4.e: Experience of Preschool Teachers

³⁷ Kini, T. and Podolsky, A. (2016) Teaching Experience and Teacher Effectiveness. [American Federation for Teachers] Available at: <https://www.aft.org/ae/fall2016/notebook> (Accessed: 15 October 2022).

f) **Retirement of Age of Teachers:** This study revealed that there is no defined age of retirement by any regulation for preschool teachers. Nevertheless, as shown in Fig. 3.1.4.f, most of the teachers in the study sample (96.6%) were below the age of 60 which is generally considered as the retirement age for government teacher service in Sri Lanka. However, 3.4% of teachers were found to be above 60 years of age.

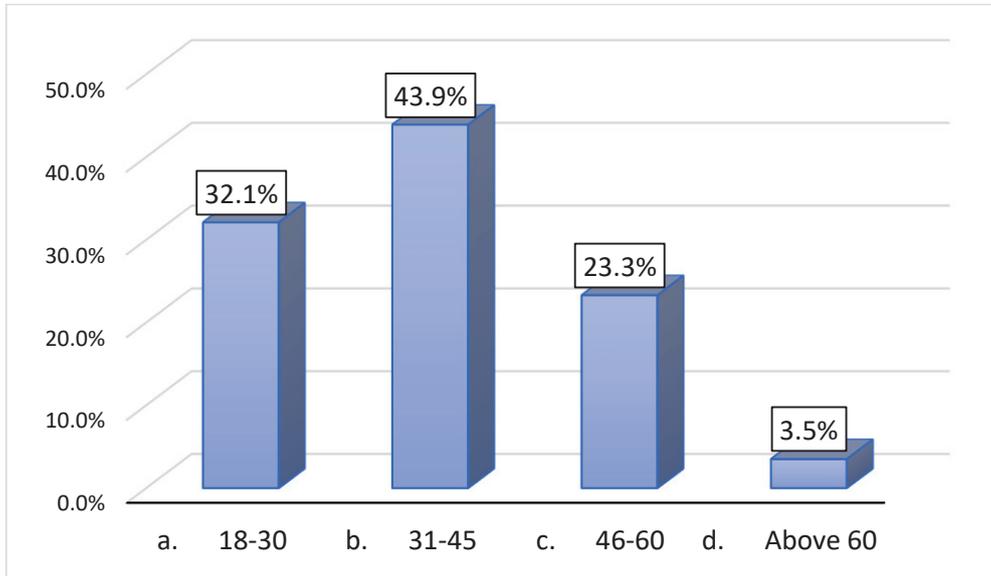


Figure 3.1.4.f: Preschool teachers' ages

g) **Continuing Professional Development:** Updating teachers' knowledge regularly is essential for teachers to enhance their professional competencies. Since they deal with children and often make decisions about children on their progressive development, updating their knowledge will help them to make assess the children's progress more effectively and take informed decisions. This study found that most of the preschool teachers have been provided with ample opportunities to update their knowledge and skills through the training opportunities arranged by a multitude of institutions and organizations such as government institutions (which are facilitated by NSECD through Divisional Secretariates:65.0% and District secretariat Offices:7.5%, Pradeshiya Sabha:15.6%, Zonal Education Office:11.7%, and MOH:32.8%, etc.), private sector organizations such Atlas, and non –governmental organizations such as World Vision, *Sarvodaya*, and the Red Cross Society. A vast majority of teachers (88.1%) attended the training opportunities offered through the government institutions such as the Divisional Secretariat, District Secretariat, *Pradeshiya Sabha*, etc.

3.1.5. Parental Participation

Parental engagement in children’s learning has proven to have a significant impact on improving child outcomes through preschool education³⁸. However, in this study, only 46.6% of ECD centres have stated that either both parents or at least one parent directly participated in ECD centre activities. Again, this participation is more by the mother as 50.0% of the ECD centres which have had parental involvement, only the mothers’ involvement was reported. Others who participate on behalf of parents are grandparents (0.8%) and guardians (0.8%).

Nonetheless, most parents discuss with teachers about children’s progress (94.8%), attend teacher-parent meetings (97.8%), and attend parental education programmes (95.8%). Moreover, most parents enthusiastically take part in extra-curricular events organized by the ECD centres such as ‘*shramadhana*’/regular cleaning of the centres (89.1%), and also the annual events such as ‘*singithi pola*’ organized by the centre (98.9%).

3.1.6. Other Stakeholder Participation

Other stakeholders who involve in ECD centre activities are the officers of the Government Public Health Service (i.e. Medical Officer of Health-MoH, Public Health Inspector- PHI, and Public Health Midwife - PHM) and from the provincial authorities. It was found that a majority of the ECD centres (approximately 57.0%) have been visited at least once a year by one or more officers of the Public Health Service and the provincial authorities. However, this study found that some ECD centres (21.2%) of were not visited by any of the above mentioned officers.

3.2 Process Quality of ECD Centres

Results with respect to the process quality of ECD centres are presented under the criterion of the teaching and learning process and teachers’ involvement

3.2.1 Teaching Learning Process

The teaching and learning process was assessed under elements of i) Curriculum, ii) Activities promoting health and physical development, iii) Psychosocial environment in the centre, iv) Activities promoting cognitive development, v) Activities promoting language and early literacy development, and vi) Activities related to creative art

³⁸ Bierman, K.L. et al. (2017) “Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children.” Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University. 1 January. Available at: <https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/rwjf432769-ParentEngage.pdf> (Accessed: 16 October 2022).

3.2.2. Curriculum and Daily Schedules

As shown in Fig. 3.2.2, most of the ECD centres (96.8%) in the sample follow a written curriculum. It is expected from the teachers to write daily schedules/plans on activities they organize for children based on the curriculum goals. The study found that although most of the centres follow a written curriculum, some of them (6.3%) do not write daily schedules/plans. Further, it was found that some of the daily plans/schedules written by teachers (10.1%) were not aligned with the curriculum goals.

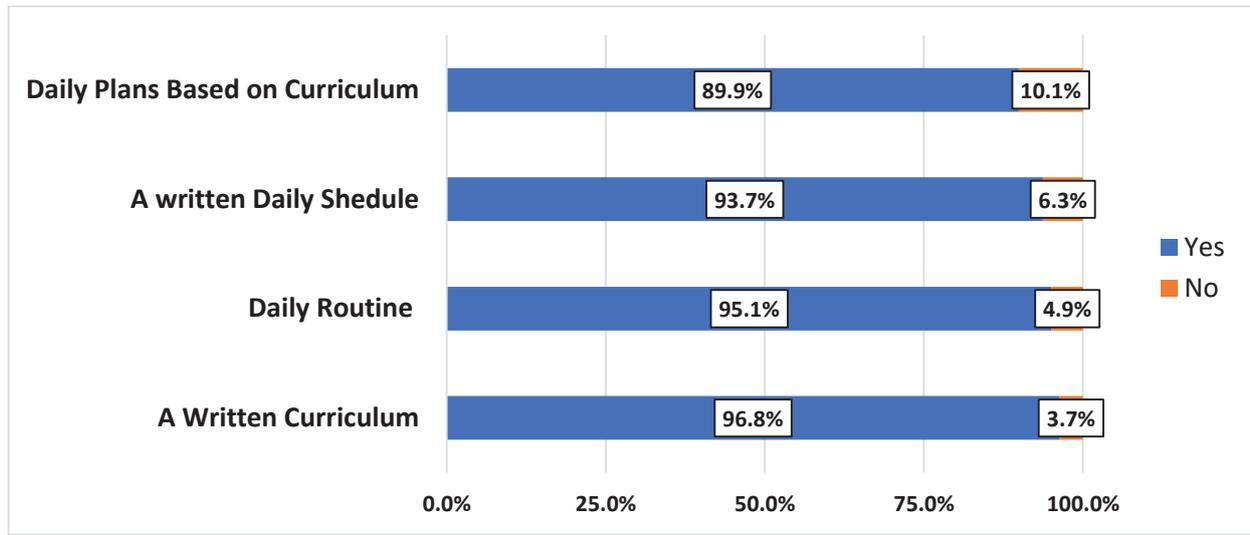


Figure 3.2.2: Curriculum and Daily Schedules

It is well recognized that ECD teachers must work according to a planned daily routine from arrival to departure. Generally, most ECD centres (> 80.0%) follow a daily routine. But the activities conducted in the daily routine vary. Most of the ECD centres have scheduled arrival (99.4%) and departure (98.9%) times. Although religious observances are not compulsory for preschools, most centres (99.4%) have allocated time for this task. Circle time is an important activity in a daily routine since teachers are expected to focus on developing children’s self-regulation skills, listening skills, attention span, etc., during this time. However, 15.8% of ECD centres do not include circle time in their daily routines. Although the percentages are small, some ECD centres do not maintain an organized timetable for regular activities such as outdoor activities, mealtimes, small group work times, whole class work times, and for cleaning. In general, the data indicate that there are ECD centres are rather unaware or that do not practice the key activities that should be a must in early childhood care and educational settings.

Table 3.2.2: Daily Routine data

Daily Routine	Yes %	No %
• Arrival time	99.4	0.6
• Religious observances	99.4	0.6
• Circle time	84.2	15.8
• Outdoor activity time	96.6	3.5
• Mealtime	99.4	0.6
• Small group work time	92.2	7.8
• Whole class work time	94.3	5.8
• Cleaning	96.3	3.7
• Departure	98.9	1.1

3.2.3 Activities Promoting Health and Physical Development

a) Health Promotion: The study found, as depicted in Fig. 3.2.3.a.i, teachers in most ECD centres (97.4%) promote cleanliness of children by regular checking. They monitor handwashing and meals brought from home. However, in 1.7% of ECD centres teachers do not monitor handwashing and in 4.0% of centres teachers do not monitor meals brought from home or provided by the centre to ascertain whether the meals are nutritious and healthy. The study also revealed that most centres do not conduct health checks with the support of the MoH or PHM. This is in contrast to the standards stipulated by the NSECD which emphasize the need to conduct regular health checks with the support of health officers.

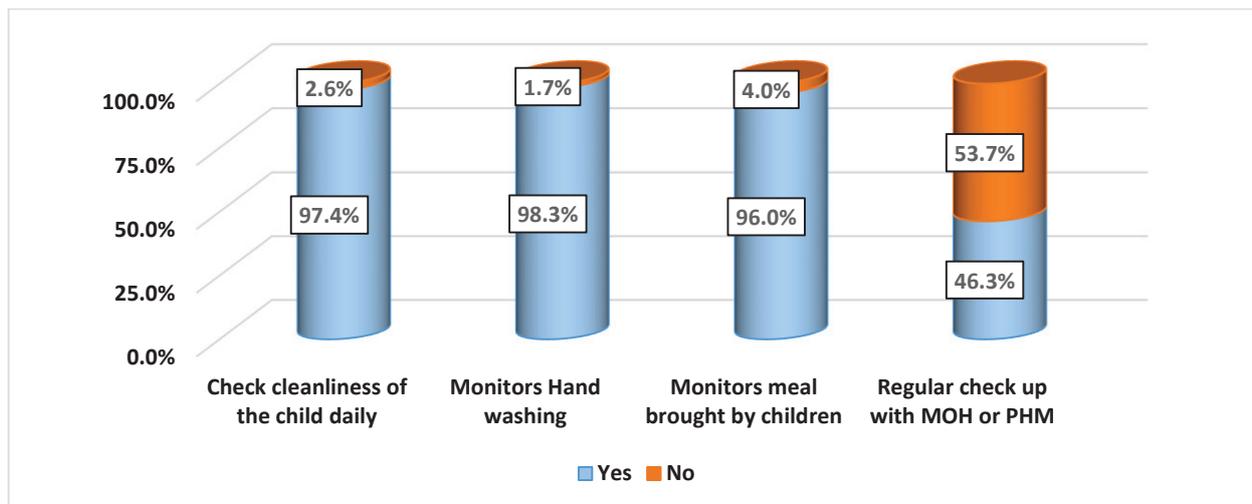


Figure 3.2.3.a.i: Activities Promoting Health

The development of self-help skills is important for children’s health and physical well-being. Therefore, some selected skills such as washing hands, wearing and removing shoes, etc., were observed. As shown in Fig. 3.2.3.a.ii although in most ECD centres (> 90.0%) teachers promote these self-help skills, there were few centres that do not focus on promoting them.

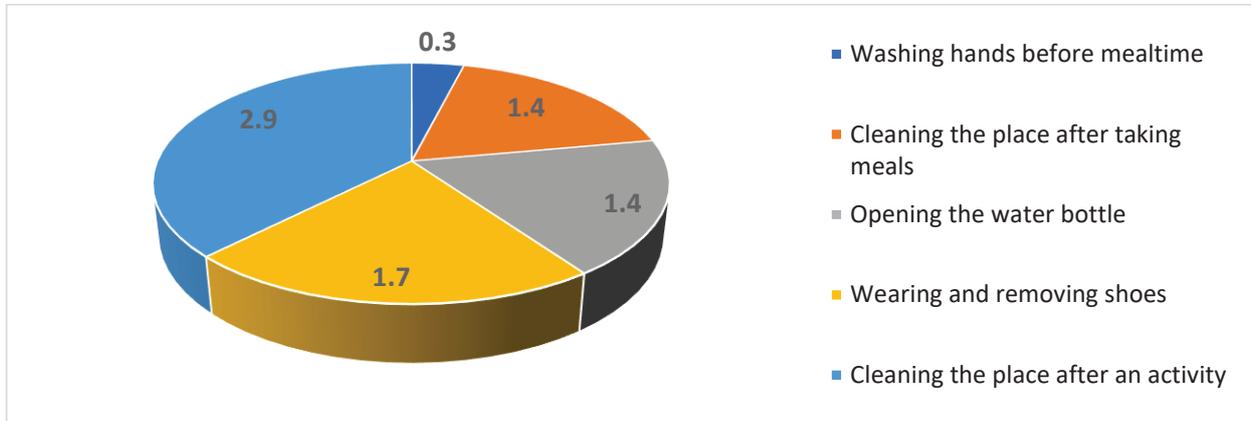


Figure 3.2.3.a.ii: Percentage of ECD Centres that do not promote Self Help Skills

b) Physical Development: Gross and fine motor skills help children to perform well in school and later in life. Therefore, the development of these skills is one of the main goals of ECCE. This study reports, as depicted in Fig. 3.2.3.b.i, most ECD centres (> 90.0%) implement activities to promote gross motor skills such as balancing, running, jumping, and throwing. Similarly, as depicted in Fig. 3.2.3.b.ii, more than 90.0% of centres also organize activities to develop fine motor skills such as block building, drawing, painting, threading, pasting, molding, and collage work to develop fine motor skills. However, data show that skipping which builds bilateral motor coordination, and concentration, and sharpens children’s ability to focus is not implemented in 31.9% of centres. Although the percentages are small (< 6%), this study found that there are centres that do not implement these activities. Even though the percentages are small, this should not be ignored since no child should be deprived of these stimulating and exciting experiences.

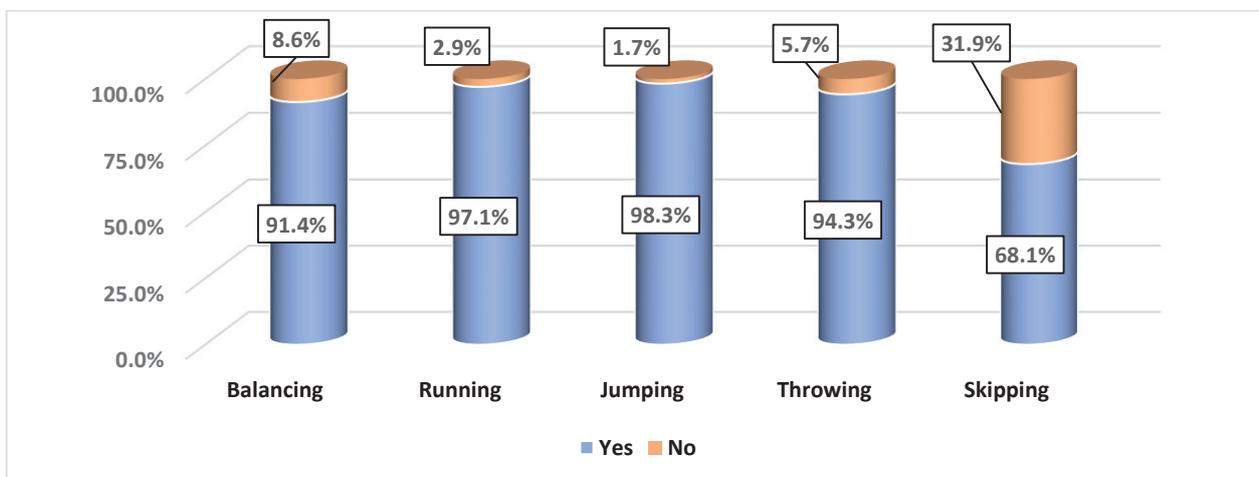


Figure 3.2.3.b.i: Activities promote Gross Motor Abilities

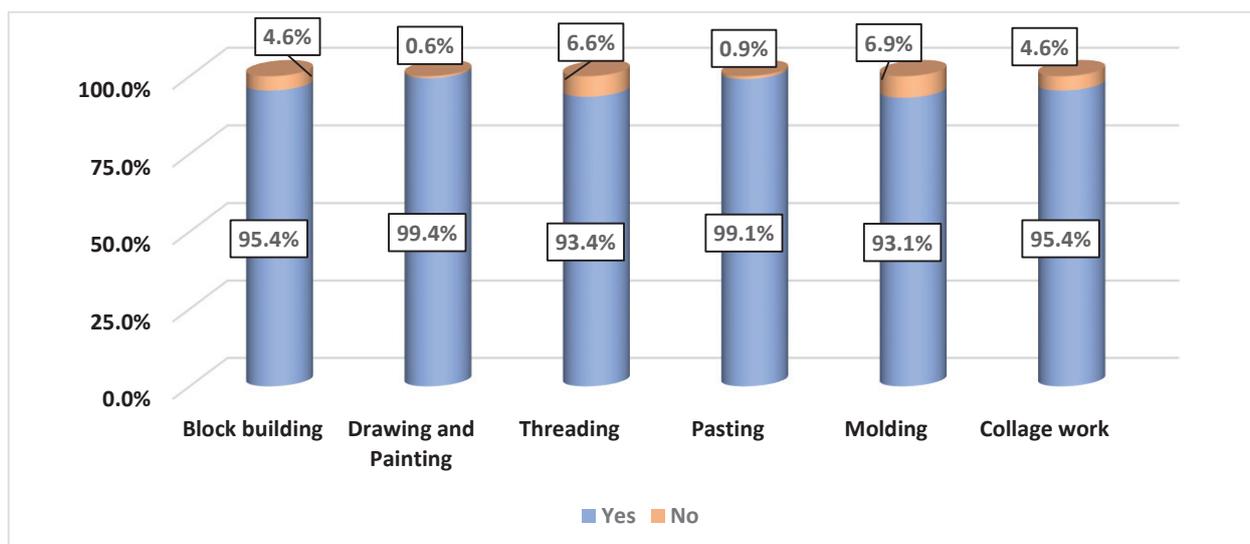


Figure 3.2.3.b.ii: Activities promote children’s Fine Motor abilities

3.2.4 Psychosocial Environment

The psychosocial environment involves the relationship between teachers and students such as the collaborations and interactions between teachers and students, between students as well as students and their environment³⁹. Therefore, it is important for teachers and students to perform their respective roles in the classroom to provide a positive psychosocial environment. As listed in Table 3.2.4, most of the ECD centres (> 89.0%) have understood the importance of this aspect. In most of the centres (98.3%), there was evidence of the existence of a good relationship between the teacher and the children. Almost all of the teachers (99.1%) greet children at arrival, responds appropriately to their needs, provide an opportunity to interact with peers, converse with them respectfully promote sharing, and appreciate the positive behaviour of children. All teachers (100%) appreciate children’s work. Although data regarding the psychosocial environments of most ECD centres are satisfactory, this study found that 9.8% of ECD centres do not provide opportunities for children to interact with adults, and 1.7% of ECD centres cannot deal effectively with children’s temper tantrums, crying, and aggressive behaviours.

Table 3.2.4: Psychosocial Environment

Psychosocial Environment	Yes	No	No Response
There is a good relationship between the teacher and the children (responds to children’s needs, etc.)	98.3	1.7	
• Greet children at arrival	99.1	0.9	
• Converse with children respectfully	99.1	0.9	
• Appreciates children’s work	100		
• Responds appropriately to children’s needs	99.1	0.9	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to interact with other adults	89.7	9.8	0.6

³⁹Fraser, B. J. (1994) Classroom and School Climate. Cited in. Jamaluddin, N. S., Kadir, S. A., Alias, S. N., & Abdullah, A. (2021). A Review of Psychosocial Learning Environment. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 10(3), 804–808.

Teacher provides opportunities for children to interact with Peers	99.1	0.9	
Materials are shared by children when engaged in group Work	99.1	0.9	
Teacher Assigns age-appropriate responsibilities to children	99.4	0.6	
Teacher handles conflict situations skillfully (temper tantrums, crying, aggressive behavior)	98.3	1.7	
Appreciates positive behaviors of children	99.1	0.9	

3.2.5 Activities Promoting Cognitive Development

This study selected mathematical concepts and children’s approaches to learning and environmental awareness as criteria to assess the implementation of activities that promote cognitive development. Results revealed, as listed in Table 3.2.5, more than 90.0% of ECD centres engage children in activities that promote most of the mathematical concepts (*i.e. colours, patterns, one-to-one correspondence, order, measurement except money, etc.*) related to comparison and measurement. Most of the ECD centres implement activities to promote spatial relationships (90.5%) and spatial language (89.4%). The percentages of ECD centres that implement activities to promote number concepts; *i.e.* counting, number symbols, and number estimation, respectively were 100%, 96.6%, and 89.9%. However, this study notes that activities to promote the concepts of 3D shapes, money, spatial language, and number estimation are not being implemented in some of the ECD centres (22.1%, 13.8%, 10.3%, and 9.5%, respectively). This is a matter of concern since failure to develop these concepts could affect children’s performance in primary school.

As for children’s approaches to learning, as listed in Table 3.2.5, this study notes that most ECD centres promote curiosity (98.3%), initiation and persistence (96.3%), and problem-solving skills (92.4%). The majority of ECD centres provide practical experiences in gardening and promote environmental awareness through excursions (77.0% and 89.0%, respectively). They also provide opportunities for children to develop “*awareness of living and non-living things and the community*” (96%). On the whole, data reveal that a majority of ECD centres conduct activities aiming at the cognitive development of preschool children.

Table 3.2.5: Activities are organized to develop logical thinking skills and mathematical concepts

Comparison and measurement	Yes	No	No Response
• Colours	97	2.6	0.3
• 2D and 3D shapes	77.6	22.1	0.3
• Pattern making	98	2	
• One to one correspondence	94	5.5	0.6
• Order	96.8	3.2	
• Height, weight, length	96.3	3.7	
• Money	85.9	13.8	0.3
Spatial awareness			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spatial relationships (how objects and people move in relation to each other). 	90.5	8.9	0.6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spatial language 	89.4	10.3	0.3
Numbers			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counting 	100		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number symbols 	96.6	3.4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number estimation 	89.9	9.5	0.6
Teacher promotes children's approaches to learning (look for evidence for the following)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curiosity(Let children ask questions and answers appropriately) 	98.3	1.4	0.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiation and persistence (Let children initiate activities and complete them) 	96.3	3.2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem solving (let children solve problems alone) 	92.8	6.9	0.3
Activities are organized to develop creativity and imagination	96.6	3.4	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to explore experiment and learn.	95.4	4.6	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop environmental awareness			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living things (animals, trees, and plants) 	98.6	1.4	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-living things (Non-living natural things and man-made things) 	96.3	3.7	
Awareness of the world and the community (the world, People who help us, important places in the community)	96.3	3.7	
Practical experience is provided to children on gardening (Look for evidence on planting, watering etc. accordingly)	77	22.4	0.6
Excursions and outings are used to provide environmental experiences to children	89	9.5	0.6

3.2.6 Activities Promoting Language and Early Literacy

This study assessed the number of ECD centres that organize activities to promote the development of children's receptive language, expressive language, and language comprehension. As listed in Table 3.2.6, data revealed that more than 96.0% of ECD centres provide opportunities for children to develop these skills. Although teachers should use the play method to develop them, 2.6% of centres do not use games with instructions that need children to listen and understand. Data also reveal that although in a majority of centres (97.1%) teachers allow children to ask questions, teachers in a few centres (2.3%) do not encourage questioning which is vital in language and cognitive development. When developing expressive language skills teachers should let children speak about their work, people, and happenings. However, teachers in a few centres do not provide much opportunities for such things; 3.4% of centres do not provide opportunities for children to show things and speak about, 1.4% of centres do not provide opportunities to speak about their work, and 2.0% of centres do not give a chance to children to speak

about people, events and happenings. Similarly, developing nonverbal language skills has not been taken seriously by 4.3% of centres.

It is well recognized that teachers should organize pre-reading and pre-writing activities to develop early literacy skills in children. They need to use teaching aids to develop these skills. Teaching aids are considered an integral component of classroom teaching⁴⁰. However, it was disappointing to note that some ECD centres in Sri Lanka do not possess any teaching aids that develop pre-reading skills in children. Without these aids, teachers will not be able to illustrate and reinforce language skills. This study found that teaching aids are not available in some centres to develop skills such as visual discrimination (11.2%), left-to-right eye orientation (16.1%), matching the picture with words (6.9%), and flashcards (7.5%)

In contrast, this study found that almost all ECD centres provide opportunities for children to cut, paste, and paint which helps to develop manipulative and pre-writing skills. However, children in 5.5% of ECD centres have no opportunities to develop the ability to distinguish children’s books from other books, and in 2.6% of centres teachers do not encourage children to read a simple word that represents a picture.

Table 3.2.6: Activities Promoting Language and Early Literacy

Language and Early literacy	Yes	No	No Response
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop receptive language (listening) skills	98.6	1.4	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop language comprehension			
• Teacher uses stories to develop language comprehension	99.7	0.3	
• Teachers uses games with instructions that needs children to listen and understand	96	2.6	1.4
• Children ask questions from the teachers	97.1	2.3	0.6
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop expressive language skills			
• Conducts activities such as ‘show and tell’	96.6	3.4	
• Encourages children to express about their work	98.6	1.4	
• Encourages children to speak about people, events and happenings	98	2	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to learn non- verbal language and emotions (Look for evidence on emotions such as happy, sad, angry etc.)	95.7	4.3	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop pre-reading skills			
• Teacher has prepared teaching aids for visual discrimination	88.8	11.2	

⁴⁰Sudhakar, J. (2017). Teaching Aids and Resources Aid the Best Learning. [LinkedIn] 25 October. Available at: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/teaching-aids-resources-best-learning-ms-jemi-sudhakar/> (Accessed: 16 October 2022).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has prepared teaching aids for left to right eye orientation 	83.6	16.1	0.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has prepared teaching aids for matching picture with words 	92.8	6.9	0.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher has prepared picture flash cards to promote early reading 	92	7.5	0.6
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop pre-writing skills			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher uses activities such as painting, threading, pasting, cutting to develop pre-writing skills 	100		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher encourages children to draw letter like shapes 	99.1	0.9	
Teacher provides opportunities for children to develop awareness of print			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities in the preschool for children to develop the ability to distinguish children's books from other books and print from picture 	94	5.5	0.6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages children to read a simple word that represent a picture 	97.1	2.6	0.3

3.2.7. Activities Promoting Creative Arts

Creative arts such as singing, dancing, drawing, painting, drama, rhythmic movement, etc., help to develop an aesthetic appreciation and a balanced personality in children. As listed in Table 3.2.7, data from this study reveal that teachers in most of the ECD centres (> 90.0%) conduct activities related to music and movement, drama, miming, role play, make-believe play, etc. Most of the ECD centres also organize annual exhibitions and concerts (> 91.0%). However, there were a few centres (<10.0%) that do not organize these activities at all in the centres.

Table 3.2.7: Activities Promoting Creative Arts

Creative Arts	Yes	No	No response
Teacher organizes aesthetic activities such as music and movement (Look for evidence on drama, miming, role play, makes believe play etc.)	94.5	5.2	0.3
Annual exhibitions are conducted	91.8	7.8	0.9
Annual concerts are conducted	93.7	6	0.3

3.2.8. Teachers' Involvement in Facilitating the Development of Children's Abilities

Teachers are role models for children. Therefore, as stated in the standards formulated by the NSECD for Early Childhood Development Centres, there should be a positive individualized relationship between the teacher and children where children experience a sense of joy, safety, love, and acceptance. Since

teachers are responsible for the holistic development of children, they should allow children to initiate activities of their choice. However, as listed in Table 3.2.8, this study noted that only 45.6% of ECD centres allow children this freedom. This is a sad situation since it discourages children to be creative and innovative. The study also found 27.5% of ECD centres do not organize guided play activities and 22.6% of centres do not use free play activities for learning. Although when engaged in language and early literacy development activities 97.1% of teachers (see section v) allowed children to ask questions. in their daily routine activities, it was noted that a lesser percentage (90.8%) of teachers often did so and, appreciated children’s attempts. However, most of the teachers (96.3%) respect each and every parent despite some teachers (23.2%) not being forthcoming in providing information to parents about what children learn in the centre.

Table 3.2.8. Teachers’ Involvement in Facilitating children’s development

Types of Practices	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No response
I. Teacher allows children to initiate activities of their choice	45.6	53	0.9	0.3	0.3
II. Teacher organizes guided play activities	71.6	27.5	0.3	0.3	0.3
III. Teacher uses free play activities for learning	76.8	22.6			0.3
iv. Teacher elicits appropriate responses	94.8	4.9			0.3
v. Teacher encourages children to ask questions	90.8	8.9			0.3
vi. Teacher responds to every child’s questions	92.3	7.4			0.3
vii. Teacher appreciates children’s attempts when engaged in activities	97.1	2.6			
viii. Teacher respects each and every child	97.7	2.3			
ix. Learning materials are easily accessed by children	84	14.3			0.3
x. Teacher provides information to parents on what children learnt in the centre	76.8	23.2			
xi. Teacher respects each and every parent	96.3	3.2	0.3		

Chapter 4: Key Findings, Conclusion and Way Forward

Key Findings: The results of the study revealed that more than half of the centres (56.4%) of the study sample were owned and managed by the private sector. Despite provincial statutes having made mandatory for all ECCE providers to register their ECD centres with the provincial councils (PCs), only 97.5% of centres in the study sample were registered with them. As regards to compliance auditing by designated authorities such as MoH office and Provincial Authorities, there appear to be no regularity as regard to their inspection and how these inspections are conducted were not very clear. Because of this *laissez-faire* approach of the authorities, many centres appear to operate in a manner fit for their purpose.

As related to structural quality of the ECD centres, the results revealed that most ECD centres (78.8%) have adopted the so-called “preschool method” whose philosophy is unknown. A considerable number of ECD centres (35.3%) operated without minimum land space and nearly one-third of centres were in places considered undesirable for children’s development and learning as stated in the national standards published for ECD centres. Although most centres were equipped with essential outdoor and indoor facilities, approximately one-fourth of the centres did not have adequate indoor space, learning areas, and other essential facilities. Further, a considerable number of centres operated without adequate quantities of furniture, teaching and training aids, and learning space. Although most of the ECD centres (96.3%) were equipped with basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, there were centres (3.7%) that lacked even the basic requirements. The study revealed that nearly half of the centres did not have a designated person as a manager or principal. Further, 33.0% of ECD centres did not have teaching assistants to assist teachers. However, most of the ECD centres (84.6%) satisfied the standard requirement of a teacher-child ratio of 1:20. Further, most of the preschool teachers (84.6%) were professionally qualified with the training of one year or more.

The observation on the process features of the ECD centres revealed that although most ECD centres followed a written curriculum and a daily routine, a few centres have not followed them. Out of those who prepared daily plans, some have not stated curriculum goals and the essential features of a daily routine in their daily plans. Most ECD centres except a few have followed activities that promote children’s holistic development to a satisfactory level.

Conclusion: There is a significant dichotomy that exist with respect to structural and process quality aspects within the ECD sector operating in the country. Though most of the centres demonstrated the satisfactory quality of the structural and process features, a sizable fraction of ECD centres is grossly deficient in all structural and process quality aspects. As such findings of the study suggest that tightening regulations and monitoring of the ECCE sector coupled with the introduction of a quality assurance and certification system that shall prescribe the best practices (*i.e. a set of guidelines, ethics, or ideas that represent the most efficient or prudent course of action in ECCE settings*) and standards (*i.e. the levels of quality or attainment*) is vital to foster the quality and standards of ECCE provisions across all ECD centres in Sri Lanka.

Way Forward: The way forward to foster the quality and standards of ECCE provisions across all ECD centres in Sri Lanka is to streamline and tighten the regulations and monitoring of the ECCE sector coupled with the introduction of a quality assurance and certification system. In this regards, the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030); Vol. I - Policy Proposals and Recommended Strategic Activities for Early Childhood Care and Education⁴¹ prescribed by the NEC in 2022, has proposed seemingly appropriate and easily implemented policies and recommended strategic activities to enhance the quality and standards of ECCE. The policy framework has expanded on six core areas, namely;

- a) Access, and Equity and Inclusiveness,
- b) Holistic Development; Physical, Cognitive, and Socioemotional Development,
- c) Structure, Processes, and Outcomes,
- d) Benchmarking, and Quality Assurance,
- e) Financing of Education and
- f) Regulation, and Governance, and Management.

As regards, Regulation, and Governance, and Management, the policy document while highlighting the measures taken by many countries to maintain the quality of ECCE through effective governance emphasized the need to have cohesive policy and a well-aligned system, with effective and accountable governance to ensure the equitably meeting of the needs of all preschool-aged children, their parents, educators and other stakeholders.

In proposing, the policy and strategic activities to realise this goals, NEC has defined a set of directive principles on which policy and strategic activities could be prescribed. These include; i) The State ensures the enactment of the legal framework for the ECCE sector to guarantee the rights of every preschool-aged child to have the access to quality early childhood education and regulate the ECCE sector, and ii)

The State recognizes the need for having an appropriate governance and management structure with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of central and provincial authorities and agencies. As regards to the policy, it prescribed that;

“Legal and regulatory framework, cohesive policy and a well-aligned system, with effective and accountable governance and management, shall be ensured for early childhood care and education”.

To realise this policy objective, the NEPF (2020-2030) has proposed 9 strategic activities including the enactment of appropriate legislation and establishment of an institutional and regulatory framework for the ECCE sector to empower the State agencies to prescribe and enforce necessary regulations to ensure the equity and inclusiveness, and quality of the early childhood care and education system and strengthening the National Secretariat for Earlychildhood Development (NSECD) and the Provincial

⁴¹ National Education Commission (2022) National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030): Volume 1-Policy Proposals and Recommended Activities on Early Childhood Care and Education. Colombo. www.nec.lk

Authorities and Entities (PAEs) in-charge of ECCE to oversee the governance, management and coordination, and quality assurance process of ECCE.

As regards, to Benchmarking, and Quality Assurance the NEC defined directive principles on which policies and activities should be framed. Directive principles stated that; i) the State is committed to ensuring quality and standards of ECE provisions by institutionalizing the concept of quality and culture in ECCE centres through a nationally prescribed quality assurance and accreditation framework (i.e. criteria, elements, standards and best practices), and ii) all ECCE providers/centres and programmes should be subjected to national quality assurance and accreditation process. Going along with the above directive principles, the NEC proposed a policy that states;

“a national quality assurance and accreditation system matching with international benchmarks should be in place to guide, review and certify/accredit all ECCE programmes”.

To achieve this national policy objective, the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030); Vol. I - Policy Proposals and Recommended Strategic Activities for Early Childhood Care and Education recommended seemingly appropriate and workable strategic activity framework. This framework proposed that;

“the Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs under the technical advice and guidance of the National Monitoring and Regulation Committee ((NMRC) shall facilitate the establishment of an institutional entity (eg. National Quality Assurance Council - NQAC) at the National Education Commission or at any other suitable statutory body, supported by national regulations to administer the quality assurance and accreditation programme through the NSECD and PAEs of ECCE”.

In additions, several other strategic activities have been proposed to ensure the ECCE providers adopt the prescribed best practices and institutionalize quality culture in their establishments to enhance the quality and standards of ECCE service provisions offered by ECD centres across all provinces.

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