

**PERCEPTION OF PRIMARY
SCHOOL TEACHERS ON
SCHOOL READINESS
OF CHILDREN ENTERING
TO GRADE ONE**



NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION
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Perception of Primary School Teachers on School Readiness of Children Entering to Grade One



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Preface

The journey of every child into formal education is a moment of profound national importance. It is a critical juncture that lays the foundation for a lifetime of learning, personal growth, and contribution to our society. The National Education Commission (NEC), in its role as the nation's apex policy advisory body on education, has long recognized that the success of this transition is not a given; it is the result of a deliberate and collaborative effort. The concept of "school readiness," therefore, is a matter of paramount concern for us, as it encompasses not only the individual child but also the educational institutions and communities that will welcome them. This study on "Perception of Primary School Teachers on School Readiness of Children Entering to Grade One" has value in its direct engagement with the experiences and perspectives of our primary school teachers, the very individuals who are at the forefront of this crucial transition. While academic literature has often defined school readiness across three vital dimensions- children's readiness, the school's readiness, and the community's readiness on the ground insights of our educators provide a unique and indispensable perspective. These teachers, who are entrusted with nurturing our youngest learners, possess an unparalleled understanding of the competencies and behaviours that truly facilitate a smooth and positive school entry.

This research, meticulously conducted and thoughtfully presented, offers a powerful lens through which we can better understand the realities of our education system. It serves as a vital tool for the NEC, providing the empirical evidence necessary to formulate policies that are not just theoretically sound but are also practically effective. The findings will inform us of our efforts to enhance teacher training programs, develop more responsive curricula for early childhood education, and guide our public campaigns aimed at empowering parents. Consequently, I extend my gratitude to the researchers such as Dr. WWPN Weerakoon and Mrs. WDAK Damayanthi and Consultant Prof. GD Lekamge for their dedication to this critical subject. I also wish to thank the teachers, parents, and communities who participated and shared their invaluable experiences. This work is a testament to the collective commitment of our nation to providing every child with the best possible start in their educational journey. I urge all stakeholder policymakers, school administrators, educators, and parents to engage with the findings of this research. Let this publication catalyze a renewed dialogue and collaborative action, ensuring that our schools are not just ready for our children but are truly prepared to unlock their full potential.

**Professor Sarath Ananda
Chairman
National Education Commission**

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List of Abbreviations

NEC	National Education Commission
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECD	Early Childhood Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Chapter 1: Introduction

Starting formal schooling marks a significant milestone in a child's educational journey. A child's readiness for school, along with structured transition processes, plays a crucial role in shaping their ability to adapt to school environment and adjust successfully to the formal schooling. School readiness programs are designed to equip children with essential skills to facilitate smooth transition from pre-school to school. Those skills include physical skills, cognitive skills, Language skills and social-emotional skills. Both parents and teachers share a common goal of making this experience a very smooth and an interesting experience for their children. Teachers working with children of entering to school for the first time are in a unique position to observe and assess key factors that influence their school readiness. By interacting with children in a classroom setting, they can not only assess individually their readiness to school but also provide the necessary support in navigating the transition process.

The concept of School readiness is defined by two characteristics features on three dimensions, the characteristics features are 'transition' and 'gaining competencies'. The three dimensions are Children's readiness for school, Schools' readiness for children and families and communities' readiness for schools^{1,2,3}.

Children's readiness for school: This encompasses the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for children to engage effectively in the school environment.

Schools' readiness for children: Schools should be adequately equipped and prepared to meet the diverse needs of incoming students, creating an environment conducive to their learning and development.

Family and community support and services: A supportive network involving families and community programs is crucial in fostering children's readiness to school. This encompasses various services and resources that contribute to a child's overall preparedness.

There is a growing concern about the continuity between preschool education and Grade One curricula. While the abilities of most children in a classroom can serve as a general benchmark for

¹ Britto, P. R. (2012). *School readiness: A conceptual framework* (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

² Meisels, S. J. (1998). Assessing readiness (CIERA Report No. 3-002). Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED429272.pdf>.

³ Pianta, R. C. (2002). School readiness: A focus on children, families, communities, and schools (The Informed Educator Series) [Report No. ED463882]. Educational Research Service, U.S. Department of Education. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/ERIC-ED463882/pdf/ERIC-ED463882.pdf>.

setting expectations, using only this as a guide can miss the differences among students and their individual needs. Although Grade One school teachers may not initially play a direct role in determining a child's readiness for school, their observations of student behaviors once the child has entered the school environment can offer valuable insights into the concepts of 'school readiness' and the 'transition to school.' These insights will help to understand that how well children are prepared for formal schooling and what support systems they need for their progression. Further, the existing variations can create challenges in delivering an equitable and effective learning experiences for the children in the first year of their schooling. As such, teachers' perspectives on this exercise are utmost important, as they directly influence on designing and conducting their teaching and structuring early interventions for those children. On the other hand, such information would be helpful in designing training programs for Grade One teachers and also to formulate targeted policies that truly address classroom realities. Concerning the prevailing situation, this study explores Grade One government school teachers' perceptions on school readiness, aiming at developing a deeper insight on this important topic.

1.1. Significance of School Readiness of Children Entering to Grade One

1.1.1. The Concept of School Readiness

School readiness is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the preparedness of the child, the community, and the school that the child is about to enter. Although there is no single, universally accepted definition for "school readiness" at a broader level, it is generally understood to encompass a range of developmental domains that prepare a child for successful entry into formal schooling. Children's readiness for school is defined by a child's physical well-being and motor development (e.g., co-ordination, fine motor-skills), social and emotional development (co-operation, empathy, and the ability to express their emotion), approaches towards learning (enthusiasm, curiosity, temperament), language and communication (listening and speaking), basic knowledge (essential vocabulary and numbers) and cognitive skills (problem solving)^{4,5,6}. From the perspective of families and communities,

⁴ High, P. C., & Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care; Council on School Health. (2008). School readiness [Technical report]. *Pediatrics*, 121(4), e1008–e1015. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2008-0079>.

⁵ Marti, M., Melvin, S., Noble, K. G., & Duch, H. (2018). Intervention fidelity of Getting Ready for School: Associations with classroom and teacher characteristics and preschoolers' school readiness skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 44, 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.02.010>.

⁶ Britto, P. R. (2012). *School readiness: A conceptual framework* (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

readiness involves their ability to provide the necessary support for a child starting formal education⁷. In this context, the emphasis is on the extent to which a child's home environment and surrounding community can facilitate a smooth transition into school. From the school's perspective, readiness refers to the availability of appropriate infrastructure, resources, and support systems to accommodate young learners effectively⁸. It is strongly linked to the pre-school environment, and it indicates the acquisition of the necessary social skills, emotional skills, knowledge, and attitude to effectively engage and learn in school⁹.

1.1.2. Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' perceptions play a crucial role in shaping their professional behavior, commitment to teaching, choice of instructional approaches and materials, and overall effort to ensure student success. These perceptions are formed based on teachers' beliefs and views about their work environment, whether it involves curriculum changes or everyday classroom interactions. Factors such as teachers' knowledge, skills, and experiences contribute significantly to their attitudes, which in turn influence their perceptions¹⁰. When teachers believe that their efforts will positively impact on student learning, they are more likely to invest additional effort in their work. Conversely, if they lack confidence in a particular approach or reform, their commitment may diminish. In the context of early schooling, teachers' perceptions of a child's readiness can affect how they engage with children entering formal education for the first time^{11,12,13,14}. Most researchers discuss the importance of

⁷ McGettigan I.L. & Gray C. (2012). *Perspectives on school readiness in rural Ireland: The experiences of parents and children*. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2012.664465>.

⁸ Lynch, D., & Smith, R. (2016, May). Readiness for school reform. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 2(3), 1-12. Retrieved from https://www.ijicc.net/images/Vol2iss3/Readiness_Lynch_and_Smith.pdf.

⁹ Marti, M., Melvin, S., Noble, K. G., & Duch, H. (2018). Intervention fidelity of Getting Ready for School: Associations with classroom and teacher characteristics and preschoolers' school readiness skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 44, 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.02.010>.

¹⁰ Lin, H., Lawrence, F. R., & Gorrell, J. (2003). Kindergarten teachers' views of children's readiness for school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18(2), 225–237. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006\(03\)00028-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(03)00028-0).

¹¹ Kartal, H., & Guner, F. (2018). A review of articles that include the schools' readiness dimension. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 7(3), 431–443. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.7.3.431>.

¹² Kakia, L., Popov, H. N., & Arani, A. M. (2015). A comparison of parents' and teachers' evaluations about school readiness among first-grade pupils of primary schools in Tehran. *Cogent Education*, 2(1), Article 1100975. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2015.1100975>.

¹³ Ohle, K. A., & Harvey, H. A. (2017). Educators' perceptions of school readiness within the context of a kindergarten entry assessment in Alaska. *Early Child Development and Care*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2017.1417855>.

¹⁴ Serry, T., Imms, C., Froude, E., Joffe, B., Heine, C., & Merrigan, C. (2014). Preparatory teachers' perceptions of school readiness: A survey of Victorian teachers. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(1), 109–124. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0126-8>.

Kindergarten or Early Childhood Care and Education on school readiness, a few studies look at how parents and primary school teachers perceive those effects.

1.2. International Literature on School Readiness of Children Entering to Grade One

International literature defines school readiness as a broad and multidimensional concept that includes children's physical well-being, emotional maturity, social competence, language skills, and cognitive development^{15,16}. It also emphasizes that readiness should be seen as a shared responsibility among children, families, schools, and communities. UNICEF's School Readiness Framework outlines three interconnected components: ready children, ready families, and ready schools, advocating for a holistic approach to early education¹⁶. Teacher professional qualifications have been linked with overall class room quality¹⁷. Similarly, the OECD (2017) highlights the importance of aligning early childhood education and care (ECEC) with primary schooling to ensure smooth transition to school. Studies from countries like the United States and Canada demonstrate that high-quality early learning programs and family engagement significantly contribute to better outcomes in school readiness^{18,19}. Moreover, international research increasingly calls for inclusive, play-based, and culturally responsive practices to address disparities and support all children as they enter formal schooling²⁰. Findings from a recent Zambian study call for stronger links between early childhood education and primary schooling, along with prioritizing School-Based Continuing Professional Development of teachers. The study also stressed that insufficient understanding of early childhood development by primary school teachers can impede children's future academic achievement²¹. Further, It highlighted that primary school teachers with limited knowledge and understanding of early childhood development can

¹⁵ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017). *Starting Strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>.

¹⁶ Britto, P. R. (2012). *School readiness: A conceptual framework* (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

¹⁷ Tufail, S., & Farooq, M. S. (2021, April). Effect of teachers' professionalism on classroom engagement at primary school level. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 43(1), 247–254. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1320632> .

¹⁸ Janus, M., & Offord, D. R. (2007). Development and psychometric properties of the Early Development Instrument (EDI). *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 39(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cjbs2007001>.

¹⁹ Snow, C. E. (2006). What counts as literacy in early childhood? In K. McCartney & D. Phillips (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of early childhood development* (pp. 274–294). Blackwell Publishing.

²⁰ Britto, P. R. (2012). *School readiness: A conceptual framework* (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

²¹ Musonda, C. M., & Matafwali, B. (2023). What do preschool and grade one teachers say about school readiness and transition from early childhood education to grade one? A case of selected schools in Zambia's Chongwe and Lusaka Districts. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3), 133–137. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-11-3-6>.

hinder children's future educational success²². It also stressed for collaboration among primary teachers, kindergarten educators, and parents to ensure a smooth transition. Lastly, it stresses the need to prioritize school readiness programs to support children's holistic development²³. Transition to primary school often involves children experiencing changes in school settings²⁴ (sometimes far from home), school culture, curricula, language of instruction, expectations, resources, relationships and roles. Transition experiences can either enhance or negatively affect children's learning and development, with children from disadvantaged communities or those with disabilities being more likely to experience a negative transition, especially when their home language and culture differ from that of the school²⁵.

1.3. Sri Lankan Literature on School Readiness of Children Entering to Grade One

Sri Lankan literature on school readiness reveals that although access to early childhood education has increased, significant challenges remain in ensuring that children transition smoothly from preschool to Grade One^{26,27}. The National Education Commission highlighted the issue of inadequate focus on the holistic nature of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)²⁸. While there is a positive trend in preschool education in Sri Lanka, there is a need to better align preschool activities with appropriate developmental goals in primary education. Most children demonstrate moderate levels of school readiness at entry, but further improvement is needed. Misunderstandings and conflicting views among stakeholders have negatively impacted children's holistic development²⁹. The World Bank report mentioned that Children from wealthier households tend to demonstrate higher levels of school readiness and adaptive behavior³⁰. Further, they have mentioned that children with more

²² Tomora, D. D. (2023). An examination of primary school teachers' perception of school readiness programs. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science*, 18(3), 644–654. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v18i3.8623>.

²³ Abid

²⁴ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). Early childhood education: Equity, quality and transitions [Report for the G20 Education Working Group]. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/early-childhood-education-equity-quality-transitions-G20.pdf>.

²⁵ Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (Eds.). (1999). *The transition to kindergarten: A series from the National Center for Early Development and Learning* (Document No. ED438026). National Center for Early Development & Learning. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED438026.pdf>.

²⁶ Lekamge, D., & Withanage, V. B. (2017). Perceptions of different stakeholders on readiness of children entering grade one. <https://ours.ou.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Education-2.pdf>.

²⁷ Premarathna, M. T. S. (2024). The role of preschool education in promoting social and emotional development in Girithale GN Division in Polonnaruwa District [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. University of Colombo

²⁸ National Education Commission. (2022). *National education policy framework 2020–2030*. <https://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/National-Education-Policy-Framework-2020-2030-English.pdf>.

²⁹ Lekamge, D., & Withanage, V. B. (2017). Perceptions of different stakeholders on readiness of children entering grade one. <https://ours.ou.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Education-2.pdf>.

³⁰ World Bank. (2014). Laying the foundation for early childhood education in Sri Lanka. World Bank.

educated mothers and those from smaller families exhibit greater preparedness for school. An investigation revealed that Sri Lankan parents often perceive Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres primarily as institutions for academically preparing their children for primary school, rather than as spaces for fostering the holistic development of young children. The same study also highlighted that the difficulty in ensuring a smooth transition from preschool to primary school is partly due to the lack of coordination between Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) authorities and the Ministry of Education, which administers primary education³¹. These factors suggest that socioeconomic status, parental education, and family size play significant roles in shaping a child's early learning and development, ultimately influencing their ability to transition successfully into Grade One³². Further, they have emphasized that disparities in the quality of preschool education across regions contribute to unequal levels of readiness, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Warnasuriya (2020) highlights that a lack of alignment between the preschool and Grade One curricula and insufficient teacher collaboration hinder the transition process³³. Moreover, studies emphasize the limited awareness among Grade One teachers about early childhood developmental milestones, which affects their ability to support young learners effectively. Recent national policies, such as the National Early Childhood Development Policy³⁴, stress the importance of an integrated, holistic approach involving teacher training, curriculum continuity, and parental engagement to promote school readiness and equitable learning outcomes.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it provides a platform for teachers who are at the forefront of early primary education to share their professional insights and experiences. Second, it contributes to the broader understanding of school readiness within the Sri Lankan educational context. The findings may be advantageous to policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators to assure the support needed for teachers and learners which would ensure the smoother transition from preschool to formal education. Finally, the study can help identify gaps in early childhood education practices and suggest improvements for better alignment between Early Childhood Care Development programs and the expectations of Grade One teachers and school administrators.

³¹ Warnasuriya, R., Sosale, S., & Dey, S. (2020). Integrating early childhood care and education in Sri Lanka: From evidence to national action. World Bank.

³² World Bank. (2014). Laying the foundation for early childhood education in Sri Lanka. World Bank

³³ Warnasuriya, R., Sosale, S., & Dey, S. (2020). Integrating early childhood care and education in Sri Lanka: From evidence to national action. World Bank.

³⁴ Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2018). National Early Childhood Development Policy.

Chapter 2: Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the Study

In Sri Lanka, pre-school education is not mandatory and is largely provided by private institutions, religious organizations, and local authorities. As a result, significant disparities exist in the curriculum, teacher training, and school infrastructure^{35,36,37}. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand how primary school teachers perceive the concept of school readiness and readiness of children entering to Grade One. Given that Grade One teachers play a crucial role in facilitating children's smooth transition into formal schooling, it is essential to examine their expectations regarding the skills, behaviors, and attributes necessary for academic and social success of children at the entry. Teachers' perceptions of readiness are typically influenced by various factors, including their personal and professional experiences, the structure and culture of the schools they work in, the backgrounds of the children they teach, and broader societal views on early education. Drawing on these influences, the study identifies measurable variables to address key research questions. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the views and concerns of primary school teachers about the essential qualities children should have upon entering school. Insights from this research can support the development of informed education policies, curriculum improvements, and awareness initiatives for parents to enhance school readiness. To gather relevant data, the study may employ a combination of methodologies such as surveys, interviews, and classroom observations involving Grade One teachers.

2.2. Methodology

The present study was conducted to examine primary school teachers' knowledge and perception of school readiness and readiness of children entering to Grade One. This section outlines the research design, sample, data collection tools, and techniques of data analysis applied in the research. The survey design was used in this study as it allows access to a larger sample distributed all around the country and it is feasible to apply without travelling to long distance. The importance of a variety of skills was evaluated, covering domains such as social interaction, healthy lifestyle habits, motor coordination, cognitive development, emotional regulation, creativity, language proficiency, and mathematical abilities.

³⁵ National Education Commission. (2022). *National education policy framework 2020–2030*.

<https://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/National-Education-Policy-Framework-2020-2030-English.pdf>.

³⁶ National Education Commission. (2023). *SDG4 Midterm review*.

³⁷ Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2016). *National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka*.

2.2.1. Population and the Sample

The target school population of this study included 8,771 government schools in Sri Lanka that offer Grade One education in 2025. A stratified random sampling method based on the school categories was used to select the representative teacher sample of schools. Based on a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, the required sample size was calculated to be 337 schools.

The teacher population considered for this study included all Grade One teachers in government schools across Sri Lanka. A total of 581 teachers were selected, representing all school categories: 1AB, 1C, Type 2, and Type 3. The Annual School Census data served as the basis for selecting a representative sample.

Table 2.1: Distribution of School Sample According to the School Type

School Type	Total No of Schools (337)	Total No of Teachers (581)
1 AB	45	102
1 C	61	193
Type 2	94	97
Type 3	137	189

Table 2.2: Distribution of the School Sample by Province

Province	Frequency	Percentage
1.Western	41	12.2%
2.Central	47	13.9%
3.Southern	38	11.3%
4.Northern	42	12.5%
5.Eastern	33	9.8%
6.North Western	40	11.9%
7.North Central	29	8.6%
8.Uva	31	9.2%
9.Sabaragamuwa	36	10.7%
Total	337	100.0%

2.2.2. Survey Tool

The primary data collection tool for the study was the questionnaire which included both structured and open-ended questions. This allowed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study. All teachers in the sample were asked to respond to statements regarding their perception on the readiness of children entering to primary school. The questionnaire is divided into four sections.

First section	Demographic information of responded school and respondents
Second section	Information associated with the key developmental domains of preschool children and teacher expectations. Under section two, teachers were asked to rate the skills that preschools must develop in children entering to Grade One (1) , the skills that are Helpful but not-essential for first grade (2), and Non-essential preschool skills (3)
Third section	Teachers' perceptions about Information related to children with disabilities
Fourth section	Teachers' perceptions on entry-level competencies of Grade One students

2.2.3. Data Collection Procedure

The primary data collection tool was a mailed questionnaire, which was distributed to teachers from a selected sample of schools representing all categories and covering all nine provinces of Sri Lanka. Initially, a draft questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature and several rounds of discussions with stakeholders. A pilot study was conducted with Grade One teachers from 11 schools in the Colombo district which were not in the sample. Then, the final questionnaire was prepared and translated into Sinhala and Tamil medium with questionnaire guides with the support of language specialists. Data were collected from 377 government schools across 25 districts. The main fieldwork took place between January and March 2025. Questionnaires were mailed to the principals of the selected 377 government schools. Completed questionnaires were collected by the National Education Commission (NEC) through regular postal services.

2.3. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were presented and analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for descriptive statistics. Similar responses were encoded by themes for the collected Qualitative data, and the thematic analysis was used to analyze them in line with objectives. Finally, the conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made based on the views of teachers, previous literature and discussions with experts in the field.

2.4. Limitations of the Study

This research focused on Grade One teachers in selected primary schools and examined their perceptions based on direct classroom experience. It did not include data from parents, preschool teachers, or children themselves. While this focus allows for getting in-depth insight from the primary school perspective, it may limit the comprehensiveness of findings across all stakeholders involved in the school readiness activities. Further, the present research study applied only one instrument, a questionnaire, which may hinder the opportunities of the researcher to explore the concept beyond the limits of the questionnaire.

Chapter 3: Results

A total of 581 teachers out of the selected 337 schools were included in the sample across the nine provinces. Out of them, 292 schools and 488 teachers responded to the questionnaire survey. As a percentage, School response rate was 86.6% (292 out of 337) and Teacher response rate was 84.0% (488 out of 581). These overall responses indicate a generally high level of participation to the survey across provinces. The findings of the research are presented under the following headings

3.1) Demographic information of responded school and Teachers, 3.2) Availability of Training Opportunities, 3.3) Teachers' perceptions of school readiness, 3.4) Teachers' perceptions of children with disabilities, and 3.5) Teachers' awareness of entry-level competencies of Grade One students.

3.1. Demographic Information of Responded Schools and Teachers

3.1.1. Demographic Information of Schools by Province, Type of Schools and Medium of Instructions

Table 3.1. Percentage of Responded Schools and Teachers by Province

Province	Number of Schools in the Sample	Number of Schools Responded	Percentage %	Number of Teachers in the Sample	Number of Teachers Responded	Percentage %
1. Western	41	33	80.5	82	53	64.6
2. Central	47	37	78.7	74	60	81.1
3. Southern	38	36	94.7	75	68	90.7
4. Northern	42	37	88.1	65	60	92.3
5. Eastern	33	28	84.8	58	51	87.9
6. North Western	40	36	90.0	70	53	75.7
7. North Central	29	25	86.2	46	39	84.8
8. Uva	31	28	90.3	45	42	93.3
9. Sabaragamuwa	36	33	91.7	66	62	93.9
Total	337	292	86.6	581	488	84.0

The data reveals a strong overall response rate across provinces, with 86.6% of sampled schools and 84.0% of sampled teachers participating in the study. The Southern Province showed the highest school response rate at 94.7%, while Sabaragamuwa and Uva had the highest teacher response rates at 93.9% and 93.3% respectively. In contrast, the Western Province recorded the lowest teacher response rate at 64.6%, indicating a major gap in participation compared to other regions.

3.2. Teachers' Response Rates by Type of School

Province	Grd 1-5	Grd 1-9	Grd 1-11	Grd 1-13
1.Western	11		12	10
2.Central	18	2	6	11
3.Southern	16		9	11
4.Northern	13		10	14
5.Eastern	10		8	9
6.North Western	14		13	9
7.North Central	12		6	7
8.Uva	13		8	7
9.Sabaragamuwa	12		12	9
Total	119	2	84	87

The table 3.2 shows the distribution of schools by type of school (Grades 1–5, 1–9, 1–11, and 1–13) across provinces. A majority of the schools fall under the Grade 1–5 categories, Type 3 (119 schools), followed by Grade 1–11, Type 2 (84 schools) and Grade 1–13, 1AB/1C (87 schools), with only 2 schools extending up to Grade 9, Type 2.

3.3. Schools Response Rate by Medium of School

Province	Sinhala	Tamil	Sinhala/Tamil
1.Western	29 (35)	4 (5)	0 (1)
2.Central	18 (26)	16 (17)	3 (4)
3.Southern	35 (37)		1 (1)
4.Northern	3 (5)	34 (37)	
5.Eastern	12 (12)	16 (21)	
6.North Western	33 (37)	3 (3)	
7.North Central	19 (23)	6 (6)	
8.Uva	18 (18)	10 (13)	
9.Sabaragamuwa	28 (31)	4 (4)	1 (1)
Total Responded	194 (223)	93 (107)	5 (7)

The data indicates the distribution of schools according to medium of instruction across provinces. Out of the total number of schools responded, 194 were in Sinhala medium schools, 93 were in Tamil medium schools, and only 5 were bilingual (Sinhala/Tamil). Sinhala medium schools were most from the Southern (35) and North Western (33) provinces, while Tamil medium schools were from the Northern (34) and Eastern (16) provinces. Provinces such as Central and Uva displayed a more

balanced distribution between Sinhala and Tamil schools. However, bilingual representation remains very low, with only 5 schools across all provinces identifying as Sinhala/Tamil medium.

3.1.2. Demographic Information of the Teachers

Table 3.4. Information of Teachers Gender and Age

Respondent		Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	10	2.0%
	Female	478	98.0%
Age	Less than 30	54	11.1%
	30-39	159	32.6%
	40-49	123	25.2%
	>= 50	152	31.1%
	Total	488	100.0%

As indicated in the table 3.4., the majority of respondents were female (98.0%), while only 10 participants (2.0%) were male. This data reflects the gender distribution of the teaching profession in Sri Lanka, particularly in the general education sector. Nearly one third of the respondents (32.6%) were in the age group of 30–39 years which represented the largest single category among respondents however, the overall age distribution was fairly balanced across all age groups. The lowest distribution of the respondents (11.1%) were from the age category less than 30. It is shown that, as a whole, more than 90% of matured teachers had been included in the sample.

Table 3.5: Educational and Professional Qualifications of the Teachers

Highest Education Qualification	Frequency	Percentage %
M.A	6	1.2%
M.Ed	8	1.6%
B.Ed	22	4.5%
B.A	142	29.1%
B.Sc.	4	0.8%
A/L Pass	293	60.0%
Other	13	2.7%
Total	488	100.0%

Highest Professional Qualification	Frequency	Percentage %
PGDE	61	12.5%
B.Ed	22	4.5%
NCOE Dip	201	41.2%
Trained Teacher	153	31.4%
Not Qualified	25	5.1%
Other	19	3.9%
Not Responded	7	1.4%
Total	488	100.0%

As Shown in Table 3.5, the majority of the respondents (60%) were with "A/L Pass" qualification and had obtained diploma from National Colleges of Education (41.2%). Thirty-seven percent% of respondents had graduate level qualifications (BA, BSc, B. Ed) and had limited exposure to professional training (PGDE-12.5%, M.A.- 1.2% holds an M.Ed.-1.6%). In addition, a significant number of respondents (31.4%) were Trained Teachers.

Table 3.6: Years of Experience of Teachers

Years	Frequency	Percentage %
<1	21	4.3%
1-5	105	21.5%
6-10	87	17.8%
11-15	59	12.1%
16-20	67	13.7%
21-25	39	8.0%
26-30	39	8.0%
>30	71	14.5%
Total	488	100.0

One fourth of the respondents have less than 5 years of experience (<1-4.3%, 1-5-21.5), indicating that the majority of respondents had some level of teaching experience. Among them, a significant proportion (14.5%) has been in service for more than 30 years. They had long experience though they were signaling the approach of retirement. Notably, a significant percentage, (over 74%) had more

than 5 years of teaching experience, suggesting that the study sample included substantially well experienced teachers.

3.2. Availability of Training Opportunities and Participation of Teachers

3.2.1. Availability of Training Opportunities for Primary Teachers

In Sri Lanka, Grade One teachers typically undergo training specifically developed for primary education. This training is designed to equip them with essential pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills required to support young learners at the foundational stage of their education. Findings from this study reveal that a significant majority of respondents (89.8%) have received such kind of training. However, a smaller proportion (8.2%) reported that they did not receive this kind of training, yet they were still teaching Grade One students.

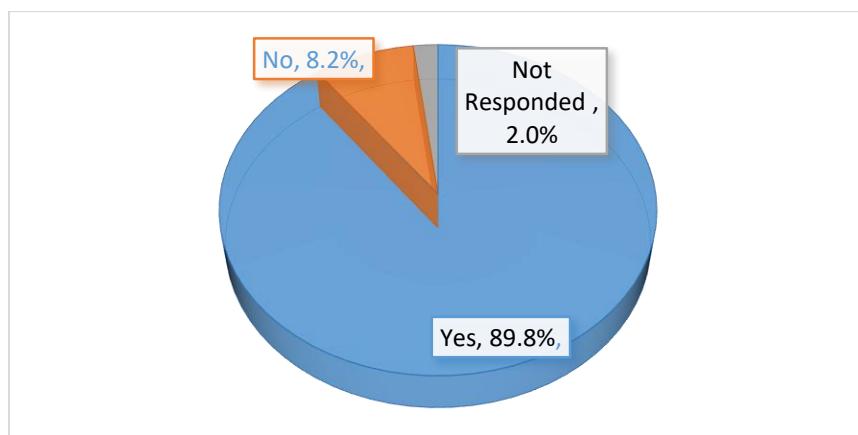


Fig 3.1: Availability of Opportunities for Primary Training

3.2.2 Participation of Teachers in In-service Training

Primary teacher training in Sri Lanka is a vital part of the country's education system. Through various diplomas, degrees, and postgraduate programs, the country is working to prepare skilled and committed teachers for its schools. The Figure 3.2. clearly shows that a vast majority of teachers (over 90%) have participated in the in-service training, which suggests that the training programs were accessible to teachers and their engagement was high.

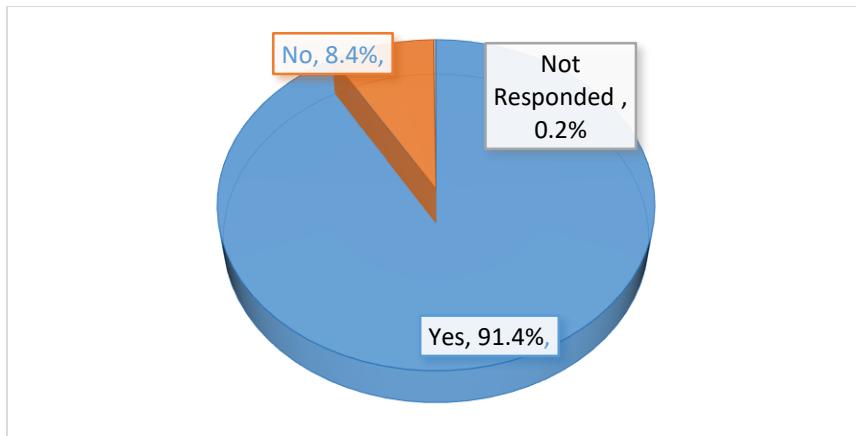


Fig 3.2: Participation in In-Service Training Sessions

Table 3.7: Frequency of Participation of the Teachers

Frequency of Participation	Frequency	Percentage %
Only for last session	11	2.3%
Only one time	20	4.1%
Only two time	44	9.0%
All sessions	360	73.8%
Other	11	2.3%
Not responded	42	8.6%
Total	488	100.0%

The data reveals a strong engagement, with nearly three-quarters (73.8%) of teachers attending all in-service training sessions. However, a minority (15.4%) had limited participation (one or two sessions), which may point to accessibility or scheduling barriers. The 8.6% non-response rate might reflect either teachers' lack of awareness or low interest in reporting.

Table 3.8: The Most Recent In-Service Training Attended by Teachers

Recent Participation	Frequency	Percentage %
Term Before	296	60.7%
Year Before	74	15.2%
Two years before	21	4.3%
Before many years	32	6.6%
Others	31	6.4%
Not responded	34	7%
Total	488	100

A clear majority (60.7%) of respondents recently attended in-service training, indicating strong current involvement and positive indicator for continuous professional development. About 15.2% attended a year ago, while 11% (two years or more ago) may be at risk of having outdated knowledge.

3.3. Teachers Perception on School Readiness of Students

Table 3.9: Teachers' Perceptions on Making Preschool Education Mandatory

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	390	79.9%
No	94	19.3%
Not responded	4	0.8%
Total	488	100.0

When asked to state whether preschool education should be mandatory or not for children entering Grade One, a majority of teachers (79.9%) supported making preschool education mandatory before Grade One, emphasizing its perceived value for school readiness and early childhood development. The data clearly indicates that the teachers perceive early childhood education as essential for school readiness and for smooth transitions into formal education.

3.3.1. Teachers Perceptions on Essential Skills Needed for Students-entering to Grade One

The aspect of school readiness was broken into eight segments namely Social skills, Healthy lifestyle habits, Motor skills, Cognitive skills, Emotional skills, Creative skills, Language skills and Mathematical skills in this research study. Table 3.10 illustrates the teacher responses on social skills.

Table 3.10: Perceptions of Teachers on Social Skills as a segment of School Readiness

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non-Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
1. Working cooperatively with peers	83.6%	14.3%	0.8%	1.2%
2. Maintaining good relationships with the teacher	76.4%	20.3%	1.8%	1.4%
3. Ability to respect others (friends, teachers)	75.0%	21.7%	1.6%	1.6%
4. Ability to work as a team member	69.9%	22.5%	5.7%	1.8%
5. Motivation to help children with special needs	56.8%	30.5%	10.7%	2.0%
6. Interacting positively with other teachers and adults encountered at school	43.2%	43.9%	11.3%	1.6%

Social Skills segment had six sub components. Out of them, teachers identified "Working collaboratively with peers" (83.6%), "Maintaining good relationships with the teacher" (76.4 %) and 'Respecting others' (75.0%) as the most important skills for preschoolers entering to school. 'Ability to work as a team member" (69.9%) was also considered significant but some viewed it as slightly less essential. These findings highlight that teachers see positive peer and teacher relationships as the foundation of social readiness for school. The least response rate (43.2%) was for the essential skill that "Positive interaction with other teachers and adults encountered at school". Overall, the data emphasizes that school readiness is strongly associated with developing respectful, cooperative, and relationship-building skills within the immediate classroom context. These are seen as crucial foundational skills for school readiness and classroom harmony.

Table 3.11: Perceptions of Teachers on Healthy Lifestyle Habits

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non-Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
7. Taking care of personal hygiene	89.1%	8.8%	1.0%	1.0%
8. Maintaining proper eating habits	87.3%	10.0%	1.2%	1.4%
9. Maintaining personal safety	78.3%	17.8%	3.1%	0.8%
10. Adapting easily to school	56.1%	35.9%	7.0%	1.0%
11. Ability to work to a schedule	40.4%	44.7%	13.5%	1.4%

Developing healthy lifestyle habits in early childhood is vital for growth, development, and long-term well-being. Most teachers identified 'personal hygiene' (89.1%), 'proper eating habits' (87.3%), and 'personal safety' (78.3%) as essential skills for Grade One students, viewing them as foundations for physical health and self-care. In comparison, 'adapting to school' was rated essential by 56.1% and 'working to a schedule' by only 40.4%, indicating these are seen as skills better developed in later.

Table 3.12: Perceptions of Teachers on Motor Skills

Motor Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non-Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
12. Gross Motor Skills	74.6%	22.1%	2.7%	0.6%
13. Fine Motor Skills	67.6%	28.3%	3.1%	1.0%

Motor skill development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood development, which influence child's physical abilities, academic performance, and overall confidence. For Grade One students in Sri Lanka (typically aged 5-6 years), mastering both fine motor skills (small, precise movements like writing and cutting) and gross motor skills (larger movements like running and jumping) is essential for their daily learning and play activities. Teachers had considered Gross motor skills (e.g., running, jumping, large movements) as more crucial than fine motor skills, with a higher percentage (74.6%) identifying them as important for school readiness. While both sets of motor skills are regarded as very important, fine motor skills have a slightly higher proportion of individuals who view them as useful but not essential.

Table 3.13: Perceptions of Teachers on Cognitive Skills

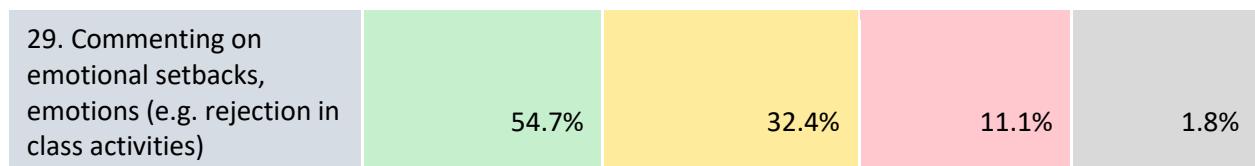
Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non- Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
14. Recognize colors	77.5%	19.7%	1.8%	1.0%
15. Demonstrate readiness to learn	58.2%	35.0%	5.9%	0.8%
16. Ability to work independently	54.5%	32.8%	11.3%	1.4%
17. Being able to focus on a task and sustain it until the end	43.9%	45.9%	9.2%	1.0%
18. Ability to initiate tasks independently	42.0%	46.5%	10.0%	1.4%
19. Curiosity about new things	41.0%	48.4%	9.2%	1.4%
20. Solve simple age-appropriate problems (e.g. about the environment)	37.3%	46.1%	15.0%	1.6%
21. Ability to engage in imaginative play	35.7%	47.3%	15.6%	1.4%
22. Ability to accurately identify one's own thoughts	34.0%	41.8%	22.7%	1.4%
23. Being able to plan an action (e.g. a game, a game, a creation, a meal)	22.5%	48.4%	28.1%	1.0%

The questionnaire included ten sub-components representing Cognitive Skills. Survey data indicates that more than three fourth of respondent's identified that 'recognizing colors' (77.5%) as the most

required skill for the children entering Grade One. Over 50% respondents agreed that 'Ability to work independently' (54.5%) and 'Demonstrate readiness to learn' (58.2%) as vital for entering first-grade, emphasizing their importance in the preschool education. Research findings further reveal that the response rates for skills such as "being able to focus on a task and sustain it until the end" (45.9%), "being able to plan an action" (48.4%), "ability to initiate tasks independently" (46.5%), "ability to engage in imaginative play" (47.3%), "ability to accurately identify one's own thoughts" (41.8%), "solving simple age-appropriate problems" (e.g., about the environment) (46.1%), and "curiosity about new things" (48.4%) fall within the 40%–50% range. It shows that the respondents perceive that those skills are helpful but not essential for the children when they are entering to the Grade One. The Grade One teachers consider these skills as beneficial, even if not mandatory for school readiness. The skills 'Being able to plan an action' (28.1%), 'Ability to accurately identify one's own thoughts' (22.7%) received a higher response rate for non-essential skills. These findings suggest teachers, general agreement on core competencies achieved at preschools, while recognizing the value of broader cognitive skills in a child's early development.

Table 3.14: Perceptions of Teachers on Emotional Skills

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non- Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
24. Commitment to expressing personal physical needs	85.2%	11.3%	3.1%	0.4%
25. Commitment to expressing harassment, abuse, etc.	79.5%	14.5%	4.5%	1.4%
26. Reluctance to engage in wrongdoing	67.0%	24.2%	7.4%	1.4%
27. Ability to control emotions (e.g. sadness, anger)	63.3%	27.7%	8.4%	0.6%
28. Ability to distinguish between good and bad	61.9%	29.1%	7.6%	1.4%



Emotional skill development plays a crucial role in a child's overall development, particularly in helping them navigate and adapt to new environments and experiences. More than three fourth of the respondents agreed that the skills such as 'Commitment to expressing personal physical needs' (85.2%) and 'Commitment to expressing harassment, abuse, etc.' (79.5%) are most essential to develop emotional skills among preschool children as components of their readiness to school. Similarly, more than 50% of them emphasized that all the other skills should be essentially developed among these children as those skills ensure children's safety and well-being. 'Commenting on emotional setbacks, emotions' (e.g. rejection in class activities) was the most significantly helpful but non-essential skill (32.4%) while the skills such as 'became Ability to distinguish between good and bad' (29.1%) and 'Ability to control emotions' (e.g. sadness, anger) (27.7%) as more significant. These findings reflect a strong emphasis on emotional readiness as a foundation for successful school entry.

Table 3.15: Perceptions of Teachers on Creative Skills

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non-Essential	Non-Essential	No Response
30. The ability to sing a poem or a song to a certain tune and rhythm, and to dance	62.7%	32.4%	3.9%	1.0%
31. Expresses an idea about a drawing he/she has drawn	51.2%	39.8%	8.2%	0.8%

Development of creative skills is an important component of early childhood education, for raising imagination, self-expression, and confidence in young learners. In this study, more than 50% respondents mentioned that they have identified both mentioned skills as essential for children entering to the Grade One while considering the' ability to sing a poem or a song with proper tune and rhythm, and to dance' (62.7%) as most essential. This indicates a strong emphasis on musical and rhythmic expressions as part of school readiness. Meanwhile, more than one third of the respondents perceived that these skills are not essential but still useful, suggesting that even if not critical, it is widely appreciated for its developmental benefits. Only a small minority views (10%) is that those creative skills are unnecessary for school entry.

Table 3.16: Perceptions of Teachers on Language Skills

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non- Essential	Non- Essential	No Response
32. Ability to clearly express one's needs	64.5%	26.0%	8.4%	1.0%
33. Ability to communicate (e.g., following instructions)	59.8%	32.8%	6.1%	1.2%
34. Ability to read ahead (e.g., reading pictures)	52.0%	31.6%	15.4%	1.0%
35. Ability to listen with understanding (e.g., listening to a story and answering a question asked by the teacher)	49.4%	39.5%	9.8%	1.2%
36. Ability to write ahead (e.g., drawing shapes)	39.5%	35.0%	24.0%	1.4%
37. Ability to recall several events in a story from memory	20.1%	16.8%	35.2%	1.2%
38. Ability to correctly identify letters	13.5%	29.3%	55.7%	1.4%
39. Ability to read letters	11.3%	23.6%	63.7%	1.4%
40. Ability to contribute meaningfully to discussions	10.9%	13.5%	50.4%	1.4%
41. Ability to use a wide range of vocabulary	9.0%	21.1%	61.3%	1.6%
42. Ability to write one's name	8.2%	21.1%	69.3%	1.4%
43. Ability to write ahead	8.2%	43.4%	69.9%	1.8%

44. Ability to write letters	7.8%	20.1%	70.7%	1.4%
45. Ability to read words	6.8%	19.5%	72.3%	1.4%
46. Ability to write words	5.9%	16.8%	75.8%	1.4%
47. Ability to speak in grammatically correct extended sentences	2.5%	13.7%	83.2%	1.4%
48. Ability to look up and write a sentence	2.5%	13.5%	82.6%	1.4%
49. Ability to write a free sentence	1.8%	13.7%	83.0%	1.4%

There were 18 sub-components in the questionnaire representing language skills. Data in the table 3.16 reflects varying perception of teachers on language skills. Among them, more than half of the respondents identified ability to clearly express one's needs (64.5%), basic communication (59.8%) and ability to read ahead (52.0%) as the most essential skills. Further, they have mentioned that the ability to listen with understanding (e.g., listening to a story and answering a question asked by the teacher) (49.4%) is also a helpful skill. They responded that skills such as the Ability to read ahead (e.g., reading pictures) (31.6%), the Ability to write ahead (e.g., drawing shapes (35.0%), and the Ability to communicate (e.g., following instructions) (32.8%) are also helpful but not essential. Moreover, Grade One teachers do not expect children to write a sentence at school. More than 75% respondents believed that skills such as Ability to speak in grammatically correct extended sentences (83.2%), Ability to write a free sentence (83.0%), Ability to look up and write a sentence (82.6%) and Ability to write words (75.8%) are not essential for the preschoolers when they are entering to the Grade One. Further, the ability to write ahead is emphasized as most helpful but non-essential skill (43.4%) when they are entering Grade One. This indicates that fluency in writing and reading is not widely expected by Grade One teachers, and the development of such skills are likely to be considered as part of the formal curriculum. It seems that they expect useful and supportive skills that could ease the learning process in the early grades like reading and writing letters or words are generally viewed as not essential but useful by most respondents, with a significant percentage seeing them as not necessary for preschool development (e.g., writing words: (75.8%) say it's not needed). Skills requiring more advanced language abilities, such as writing sentences (83.0%) and using a wide range of vocabulary (61.3%), are viewed as non-essential by most people. This suggests that school readiness is primarily

associated with developing basic communication and comprehension abilities, while formal reading and writing are largely viewed as skills to be developed later in their educational journey.

Table 3.17: Perceptions of Teachers on Mathematical Skills

Skill	Essential (Preschool Must Develop)	Helpful but Non-Essential	Non- Essential	No Response
50. Ability to count accurately one to ten in a sequence	30.7%	35.7%	32.8%	0.8%
51. Ability to identify a basic shape	21.9%	37.3%	39.8%	1.0%
52. Ability to correctly identify printed numbers (1 - 9)	16.2%	38.1%	44.9%	0.8%
53. Ability to write numbers 1 - 10	7.6%	23.2%	68.0%	1.2%
54. Ability to add two numbers whose sum is less than 9	3.3%	14.1%	81.4%	1.2%

The questionnaire included five sub components in relation to this. According to table 3.17, the majority of the respondents considered that the ability to count from one to ten in sequence (30.8%), understanding shapes and sizes (21.9%) and ability to correctly identify printed numbers (1 - 9) (16.2%) must be essentially developed among children before they enter Grade One. It is also showing that skills such as ability to correctly identify printed numbers (1 - 9) (38.1%), understanding shapes and sizes (37.3%) and abilities to count one to ten accurately (35.7%) are helpful but not crucial. Basic mathematic operations such as ability to add two numbers whose sum is less than 9 (81.4%) and ability to write numbers 1-10 (68.0%) are generally seen by teachers as not necessary at the preschool level.

3.3.2. Teachers Perceptions on Identified Prior Skills and Their Benefits for both Children and Teachers

The skills and abilities outlined in the below tables are essential for children entering first grade as they provide the foundation for effective learning and smooth transition to the school setting. Developing these competencies early helps minimize learning disparities, encourages active involvement in classroom activities, and promotes a confident start to formal education. In this section, participants were invited to share their views on the reasons for considering the listed skills and abilities as important for children entering first grade.

Table 3.18: The Importance of Prioritized Skills for Children

Prioritized Skills	Frequency	Percentage %
1. Being able to adapt easily to school	61	12.5%
2. Willingness to attend school	16	3.3%
3. Facilitating learning in the classroom	36	7.4%
4. Creating more motivation for learning	22	4.5%
5. Facilitating increased productivity	26	5.3%
6. Facilitating teacher-student interaction	21	4.3%
Only two skills are important	24	5.0%
Only three skills are important	18	3.5%
Only four skills are important	19	4.0%
Only five skills are important	50	10.0%
All skills are important	189	38.7%
Other	2	0.5%
Not responded	4	1.0%

As Table 3.18 illustrates, 12.5% indicated that the children are able to adapt easily to school when they are equipped with those skills. The results further revealed that the majority of the respondents (61.2%) perceived that more than two skills are important. Among them, 38.7% responded that all the mentioned skills are important. It highlights that a strong consensus on the holistic value of these skills in the school environment. Among these, being able to adapt easily to school was the most individually

acknowledged skill (12.5%), followed by "Facilitating learning in the classroom" (7.4%) and "Facilitating increased productivity" (5.3%). This strongly suggests that a comprehensive, balanced skills framework is needed rather than privileging a narrow subset.

3.3.3. Advantages for Grade One Teachers When Children Possess School Readiness Skills

In this section, Grade One teachers were asked to share their views on the benefits they experience when children are equipped with the skills and abilities when they enter school. The responses highlighted a wide range of advantages, which, after careful analysis, were categorized into ten main benefit areas. These benefits reflect that early mastery of essential skills not only supports children's learning and adjustment but also enhances the teaching and classroom management process of teachers. The categorization allowed for a clearer understanding of the recurring themes in teachers' feedback and provided insight into how well-preparedness positively influences both academic progress of children and the overall classroom environment.

Table 3.19: Teachers Responses on Possible Benefits through Acquisition of Skills

Possible Facilities		No. of Respondents	Percentage (out of total respondents)
1.	Identifying and Understanding Students	90	18.4%
2.	Supporting and Developing Skills	154	31.6%
3.	Improving and Facilitating for Teaching and Learning process	449	92.0%
4.	Encouraging Student Engagement	102	20.9%
5.	Classroom Management	113	23.2%
6.	Student Adaptation and Adjustment	149	30.5%
7.	Teacher-Student Relationship	103	21.1%
8.	Peer Collaboration and Teamwork	98	20.1%
9.	Increasing Student Confidence and Motivation	1	0.2%
10.	Emotional and Psychological Support	1	0.2%

The Result revealed that above mentioned skills are beneficial in 10 ways for the teachers for their teaching and learning process at Grade One. Majority of the teachers (91%) had responded that these skills facilitate them to Improve their teaching and learning process. It indicates that teachers perceive strengthening the teaching and learning process as the most critical factor in ensuring a smooth transition for Grade One students. One-third of the teachers recognize the importance of developing

foundational skills (e.g., literacy, numeracy, motor skills) in early learners (31%) and another 30% of teachers stressed the need to help students adapt and adjust to the new school environment and routines through these skills. Twenty-three percent of Teachers think that these skills are needed for managing student behavior, maintaining classroom order and creating a conducive learning atmosphere while around 20% of teachers think separately that they help children in three ways: they view engagement as vital to motivate and involve students actively in the learning process. Peer collaboration and teamwork support as helpful for social development and classroom integration. Student-teacher positive relationships are considered important for students' emotional security and learning readiness. Eighteen percent of the teachers say that these skills facilitate in Identifying and Understanding Student characteristics. There was extremely low attention (<1%) of teachers on emotional factors that support developing self-efficacy in students and a critical gap could be identified in recognizing the emotional readiness of children entering Grade One. It is equally important during this critical transition period.

3.3.4: Teachers' Responses on Skills Demonstrated by Children

In this section, teachers were asked to indicate, based on their professional experience, which of the previously listed skills and abilities are most commonly exhibited by the majority of children entering the first grade. Their responses provided valuable insights into the typical readiness profile of new entrants to primary school. After compiling and reviewing the answers, the skills mentioned were systematically grouped and categorized for clarity. This process revealed that the majority of responses linked with ten distinct skills, which represent the core competencies that teachers most frequently observe among first-grade entrants. These identified skills form an important foundation for understanding children's preparedness for formal learning and for tailoring teaching strategies to meet their developmental needs.

Table 3.20: Teachers' Responses on Skills Demonstrated by Children

Skills		No. of Respondents	Percentage (out of total respondents)
1.	Creative Skills	383	78.5%
2.	Social Skills	285	58.4%
3.	Self-Directed Learning	248	50.8%
4.	Motor Skills	239	49.0%
5.	Adaptability	177	36.3%
6.	Self-Care and Independence	134	27.5%
7.	Cognitive Skills	90	18.4%
8.	Language and Literacy Skills	81	16.6%
9.	Emotional Skills	58	11.9%
10.	Mathematical Skills	54	11.1%

Teachers' responses in the table 3.20 reflects that they have identified ten key skills as important for children's development in the context of school readiness. The most frequently acknowledged skill was Creative Skills (78.5%). The respondents considered innovation, imagination, and creativity in line with 21st-century skills. Social Skills (58.4%) and Self-Directed Learning (50.8%) were also given a significant importance in developing interpersonal communication and collaborative and independent learning environment. Motor Skills (49.0%) and Adaptability (36.3%) also show high priority in physical and emotional responsiveness into the new environments, rules, and social settings transitioning into school. The respondents have given lower emphasis on Mathematical Skills (11.1%), Emotional Skills (11.9%), and Language and Literacy Skills (16.6%). They may have thought that there would be sufficient opportunities in the school to focus on development of those skills.

3.3.5 Teachers' Views on most Responsible Parties for Developing School Readiness Skills in Children

In this section, teachers were asked to share their views on who they believe holds the primary responsibility for developing the specified skills in children. Respondents were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and professional judgment when identifying the individuals or groups they consider most responsible, such as parents, preschool teachers, primary school teachers, or the broader community.

Table 3.21: Teachers' Opinions on the Primary Agents Responsible for Developing School Readiness Skills

Responsible Party		Frequency	Percentage
1.	Preschool Teacher	151	30.9%
2.	Grade One Teacher	136	27.9%
3	Parents	101	20.7%
4.	Parent , Grade One Teacher and Preschool Teacher	35	7.2%
5.	Parent & Preschool Teacher	33	6.8%
6.	Parent & Grade One Teacher	15	3.1%
7.	Preschool Teacher & Grade One Teacher	7	1.4%
8.	Other	7	1.4%
9.	Not Respondent	3	0.6%
Total		488	100.0

As illustrated in table 3.21, the majority of respondents (30.9%) perceived that the preschool teacher would be the most responsible person. It was, closely followed by Grade One teachers (27.9%) and parents (20.7%). A smaller percentage attributed responsibility to combinations of stakeholders, with 7.2% recognizing the shared role of parents, preschool teachers, and Grade One teachers, indicating an awareness of the importance of their collaborative efforts. Interestingly, only 3.1% and 6.8% believed in joint responsibility between parents and Grade One teachers or preschool teachers respectively. These findings suggest that while preschool teachers are viewed as the primary agents in preparing children for school, there is also a growing recognition of the need for stronger

collaboration among parents and primary educators to ensure a smoother and more holistic transition for children entering Grade One.

3.3.6. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Teaching and Learning Process for Students with Varying Levels of Readiness

The study aimed to gain deeper insight into Grade One teachers' perspectives on the challenges they face when managing and delivering lessons to children with varying levels of readiness. Teachers were invited to share in detail the specific difficulties they encounter in adapting their teaching to accommodate children with a broad spectrum of learning abilities, prior knowledge, and developmental skills in the same classroom. Their responses reflected the reality that some children begin Grade One with well-developed literacy, numeracy, and social skills, while others may have had little to no prior exposure to structured learning environments. This disparity often requires teachers to simultaneously address foundational skill development for some students while extending learning for others who are more advanced. After categorizing the responses, the challenges identified by teachers were grouped into seven main skill areas, which collectively illustrate the range of adaptations and strategies required to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.

Table 3.22: Teachers Responses on Challenges They Faced in the Teaching -Learning Process

	Issues	Frequency	Percentage (out of total respondents)
1.	Children's behavior and personality	259	53.1%
2.	Syllabus and Teaching Process	257	52.7%
3.	Time management	200	41.0%
4.	School and class Management	145	29.7%
5.	Diversity of children	128	26.2%
6.	Parental influence	118	24.2%
7.	Special needs and physical/mental problems	49	10.0%

The results revealed that over half of Grade One teachers identified learners' behavior and personality (53.1%) and the syllabus and teaching process (52.7%) as the major challenges. Forty-one percent responded that time management as a significant issue to allocate sufficient time for all planned activities. School and class management (29.9%) and Diversity of children (26.2%) appeared to be moderate challenges for teachers. Among these issues, parental influence (24.2%) and special needs

and physical/mental problems (10.0%) were less frequently reported but they remain important for including children in the mainstream classroom.

3.3.7. Teachers' Suggestions for Easing/Facilitating the Adaptation of Children Entering Grade One

The Grade One Teachers were asked to share their suggestions for facilitating the adaptation of children entering Grade One to school life. Teachers were invited to draw from their classroom experiences and professional knowledge to identify strategies that could help children feel more comfortable, confident, and prepared during this important transition. Once the responses were gathered, they were reviewed and organized into ten main suggestions, each representing a key area that teachers felt would make a meaningful difference in easing children's adjustment to their new learning environment.

Table 3.23: Teachers' Suggestions on Strategies for Adapting Children to the School

Suggestions		Frequency	Percentage (out of total respondents)
1.	Classroom and Learning Environment	265	54.3%
2.	Play-Based Learning	193	39.5%
3.	Curriculum and Learning Methods	188	38.5%
4.	Teacher-Student Relationship	162	33.2%
5.	Early Childhood Education (Preschool)	136	27.9%
6.	Student Independence and Social Skills	130	26.6%
7.	Identifying and Supporting Special Needs	54	11.1%
8.	Conducting Awareness Programmes	49	10.0%
9.	Other Suggestions'	33	6.8%
10.	Health, Nutrition, and Well-being	19	3.9%

Teachers suggested several strategies that help pre-school children adapt more smoothly to Grade One. The majority of teachers in Grade One Suggested Classroom and Learning Environment (54.3%) as the top area for facilitating the adaptation of children to the school. This shows that many educators believe a more supportive, engaging, and child-friendly classroom environment is key to enhancing learning outcomes of children. Play-Based Learning (39.5%) and Curriculum and Learning Methods (38.5%) also were their strong preference for developmentally appropriate, engaging, and flexible teaching strategies in early grades. Teacher-Student Relationships (33.2%) and Preschool Education (27.9%) reflect the importance of emotional bonding and proper foundational learning

before entering formal schooling. Student Independence and Social Skills (26.6%) suggests an emphasis on life skills, self-confidence, and peer interactions from an early age. Although Support for Special Needs (11.1%) and Awareness Programs (10.0%) are significant areas for inclusive and community-oriented education, the response rates were low. Health, Nutrition, and Well-being (3.9%) was the least mentioned, but it still plays a critical role in a child's ability to learn and participate.

3.3.8. Teacher's Perceptions on Supporting Students Entering to Grade One Without Preschool Education

There is a possibility that some children who have not received any preschool education may enter directly to the first grade. To understand the preparedness of Grade One teachers, to support these children, they were asked whether they feel confident and capable of effectively working with and meeting the learning needs of such students within the first-grade classroom setting. The teachers' responses to this question are summarized in the table below.

Table 3.24: Teacher Perspectives on Supporting First Grade Students Without Preschool Education

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	422	86.5%
No	64	13.1%
Not responded	2	0.4%
Total	488	100.0

It was encouraging to find that a significant majority of teachers (86.5%) believe that first grade students who have not attended preschool can still be supported effectively within the school environment. Only 13.1% of teachers expressed doubt about their ability to support such students, while a very small fraction (0.4%) did not respond. This strong affirmative response suggests that most teachers feel confident in their capacity to accommodate children entering Grade One without early childhood education. However, the notable minority who answered "No" points to the potential challenges that may still exist and the importance of equipping teachers with targeted training and resources to address the diverse needs of these students.

Table 3.25: Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of the Functioning of the Preschool

	Statement	Yes	No	No comments	Not respondents
1.	The teaching and learning process currently implemented in preschools is appropriate.	29.9%	28.5%	38.7%	2.9%
2.	Preschools prepare children for first grade.	75.0%	7.2%	16.0%	1.8%
3.	Preschool teaching (language, math skills) is an obstacle to the learning and teaching process in first grade.	40.6%	45.9%	12.3%	1.2%
4.	Parents are unnecessarily interfering in preschool education.	59.2%	17.4%	21.9%	1.4%
5.	There is a clear difference between children who received preschool education and those who did not.	77.7%	12.1%	8.4%	1.8%
6.	There is a difference between the level of preparation required in preschool and the level of a child entering first grade.	72.5%	15.6%	10.9%	1.0%
7.	There is a difference between the level that preschool prepares those children for and the level that first grade teachers expect.	68.9%	18.9%	10.7%	1.6%
8.	It is difficult to change the skills and habits acquired in preschool in first grade.	61.5%	29.5%	7.6%	1.4%

9.	Teachers' expectations regarding the readiness of children entering first grade vary depending on the type of school.	37.7%	43.0%	17.8%	1.4%
10.	The diversity in preschools is a barrier to adaptation to first grade.	44.5%	37.5%	16.6%	1.4%
11.	Preschool teachers should be aware of the expected readiness of first graders.	92.0%	3.9%	2.7%	1.4%

Table 3.25 presents the perceptions of teachers regarding the effectiveness of preschools and challenges faced by preschools in preparing children for Grade One. A strong majority (75%) believed that preschools adequately prepares children for formal schooling, and 77.7% observed a clear difference between children who have attended a preschool and those who have not, highlighting the recognized value of early childhood education. However, several concerns emerge while preschool is generally seen as beneficial, 72.5% believed that there is a mismatch between the involvement expected from preschools and the actual readiness of children entering Grade One, and 68.9% felt there is a gap between what preschools deliver and what Grade One teachers expect. Additionally, 61.5% agreed that the skills and habits acquired in preschool are difficult to change later, emphasizing the importance of getting early education right. Parental interference is also a concern, with 59.2% teachers stating that parents unnecessarily influence preschool education. Notably, 92% of respondents strongly agreed that preschool teachers should be aware of the readiness expected from first graders, underlining the need for better alignment and communication between preschool and primary education.

Table 3.26: Grade One Teachers' Perception on the Impact of Student Diversity on Teaching and Learning

Impact	Frequency	Percentage
Easy	143	29.3%
Disturbing	197	40.4%
No Impact	140	28.7%
Not responded	8	1.6%
Total	488	100.0

Teachers were asked to indicate, based on their professional experience, what impact that the diversity among children entering Grade One has on their teaching and learning process. This question aimed to gather insights into how variations in children's backgrounds, readiness levels, learning abilities, and developmental stages influence classroom activities in Grade One. According to the table 3.26, a significant percentage of respondents (40.4%) described the experience as "Disturbing," indicating considerable concern or difficulty with the subject in question. Only 29.3% found it "Easy," while a similar proportion, 28.7%, reported that it had "No Impact" on them. Only a very small percentage (1.6%) did not respond to this question. This distribution highlights that the majority of teachers experienced either negative or neutral effects, with a notably smaller group finding the experience positive or manageable. The relatively high percentage of those disturbed suggests that the issue warrants further investigation and possibly the implementation of corrective measures.

3.4. Teachers' Views on Inclusion of Children with Different Abilities/ Physical Disabilities for Grade One

In keeping with the Gazette proposals of 1997³⁸, the Ministry of Education has issued circulars to schools and regional offices to ensure that children with learning disabilities in each educational division have access to special schools and special education units^{39,40}. However, According to UNICEF (2016), about 23.5% of children with disabilities aged 5–14 were excluded from mainstream education⁴¹.

³⁸ Gazette notification 1003/5 of 25. November 1997

³⁹UNICEF (2016). EVERY MIND: Equal Rights to Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka. <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/every-mind>

⁴⁰ National Education Commission. (2022). *National education policy framework 2020–2030*. <https://nec.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/National-Education-Policy-Framework-2020-2030-English.pdf>.

⁴¹ UNICEF (2016). EVERY MIND: Equal Rights to Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka. <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/every-mind>

Table 3.27: Teachers' Willingness to Admit Children with Diverse Abilities into Grade One

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	329	67.4%
No	142	29.1%
Not responded	17	3.5%
Total	488	100.0

The results show that 2/3 of the respondents (67.4%) had given positive response confirming their willingness to admit children with different abilities/physical disabilities to Grade One. Among Grade One teachers 1/3 (29.1%) had felt unprepared, unsupported, or reluctant to handle children with special needs in Grade One classrooms.

Table 3.28: Teachers' Views on Individualized Instruction for students with Different Abilities

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	206	42.2%
No	272	55.7%
Not responded	10	2%
Total	488	100

The results revealed that, over half of the respondents (55.7%) do not think that there is a need for teaching children with different abilities separately. They believe that all children should learn together in the same classroom environment. However, a significant portion of the participants (42.2%) believed that children with different abilities should be taught separately. Reasons such as difficulty in managing the classroom and difficulty in addressing diverse needs, Lack of training or resources to implement inclusive strategies may have led to such responses.

Table 3.29: Grade One Teachers' Expectations on Training to Support Diverse Learners

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	424	86.9%
No	54	11.1%
Not responded	10	2.0%
Total	488	100.0

The findings show that a strong majority (86.9%) of teachers agree that teachers need training to effectively engage children with different abilities from the first grade. Factors such as overconfidence, lack of awareness, or reliance on existing experience may have led to negative responses.

3.5. Teachers Perceptions on Grade One Entry Competencies

Table 3.30: Teachers Awareness of Entry Requirements for Grade One Admission

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	467	95.7%
No	16	3.3%
Not responded	5	1.0%
Total	488	100.0

The data shows that the majority of respondents (95.7%) are aware of the entry requirements⁴² for admitting to Grade One, indicating strong familiarity with the relevant policies and procedures. This high level of awareness suggests that most stakeholders are well-informed about the criteria for school entry, which is essential for ensuring a smooth and equitable admission process.

⁴² Mukunthan, T. (n.d.). Concept of entry competencies and essential learning competencies of Sri-Lankan children. Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education

Table 3.31 Teachers' Utilization of Listed Skills in Identifying School Readiness in Children

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	466	95.5%
No	5	1.0%
Not responded	17	3.5%
Total	488	100.0

The data indicates that a vast majority of respondents (95.5%) actively use the listed skills to assess school readiness in children, reflecting a strong alignment with established evaluation practices. This high rate of utilization suggests a consistent approach among educators and stakeholders in identifying whether children are prepared for the requirements of Grade One.

Table 3.32: Effectiveness of Assessment Skills on Getting a Clear Understanding of Each Child

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	435	89.1%
No	33	6.8%
Not responded	20	4.1%
Total	488	100.0

According to the data, 89.1% of respondents believed that assessment skills are effective for getting a clear understanding of each child's readiness to school and development. The high level of confidence in assessment practices highlights their importance in tailoring educational support to meet individual student needs.

Table 3.33: Relevance of Identifying Student Competencies for Effective Teaching and Learning in Grade One

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	463	94.9%
No	9	1.8%
Not responded	16	3.3%
Total	488	100.0

The data shows that 94.9% of respondents agree that identifying student competencies is crucial for effective teaching and learning in Grade One. This strong consensus highlights the importance that educators place on understanding individual student abilities to implement appropriate instruction and foster successful learning outcomes in students.

Table 3.34: Use of Interviews for Identifying Children During Grade One Admission

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	153	31.4%
No	249	51.0%
Not responded	86	17.6%
Total	488	100.0

The data indicates that only 31.4% of respondents use interviews as a method for identifying children entering Grade One, while a majority of (51.0%) do not. Additionally, 17.6% did not respond to this question. This suggests that interviews are not widely practiced or accepted as a standard tool for assessing readiness of children at school entry, possibly due to policy restrictions, time constraints, or concerns about fairness and consistency in the admission process.

Chapter 4: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1. Discussion

School readiness has appeared as a critical determinant of children's smooth transition into formal education, influencing their long term academic success and social development ^{43,44}. The present study explored the perceptions of Sri Lankan Grade One teachers regarding the competencies that the children should possess in line with their readiness to school, challenges they face as teachers, and support mechanisms they have applied for those who are not ready for Grade One. Since teachers interact directly with children at the point of entry into primary education, their views offer valuable understandings into both the strengths and gaps of the current system of school readiness. There is no doubt that high quality preschool education significantly contributes to nurturing essential competencies and supporting children's early learning. Skills such as self-regulation, empathy, clear communication, and problem solving are vital for building strong interpersonal relationships, maintaining emotional health, and adapting to new social situations. Research consistently highlights that thoughtfully designed early childhood programs enhance these competencies by providing supportive and interactive environments⁴⁵. These settings allow children to form positive social connections, express their emotions constructively, and learn to work collaboratively with others.

Over two decades ago, Japan faced what was known as the “first grader problem,” where many children struggled to adjust and integrate during their initial year of primary education. This challenge highlighted the critical importance of ensuring a smooth transition from early childhood education to formal schooling. In response, Japan amended the School Education Act in 2006, leading to significant updates in early childhood education and care (ECEC)⁴⁶. These revisions included a new focus within ECEC objectives and updates to the kindergarten curriculum specifically the course of study for Kindergartens and other official ECEC guidelines, emphasizing the role of effective transitions in supporting children's readiness for school⁴⁷. More specifically, authorities in 24 per cent of

⁴³ Britto, P. R. (2012). *School readiness: A conceptual framework* (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

⁴⁴ OECD. (2017). *Starting strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>.

⁴⁵ Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., Mincic, M., Kalb, S., Way, E., Wyatt, T., & Segal, Y. (2012). Social-emotional learning profiles of preschoolers' early school success: A person-centered approach. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(2), 178–189.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (2016). Country Note on Transitions between ECEC and Primary Education JAPAN.

⁴⁷ OECD. (2017). *Starting strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>.

participating countries (14 out of 59) have fully integrated curricula (e.g., Italy and Switzerland) between ECEC and primary school⁴⁸. Integrated curricula typically involve a single document that covers shared themes, goals, and perspectives for a relatively broad age range, including (at least) the last year of ECCE (typically called Kindergarten) and first years of primary school, with separate contents to match each age group⁴⁹.

The present study has achieved generally high participation across nine provinces, with school and teacher response rates of 86.6% and 84.0% respectively, indicating strong engagement from the sampled education stakeholders. However, the majority of teacher respondents were female (98.0%), reflecting the gender composition of the teaching workforce in the country; while this aligns with broader trends in primary education, with such a tiny number of male teachers, the comparison between men and women isn't reliable. Previous research has confirmed that teachers' professional qualifications and training are closely linked to overall classroom quality⁵⁰. The findings of this study are encouraging, with nearly 90% of Grade One teachers reporting that they had received primary (pre-service) training. High participation in in-service training further strengthens this trend, as 73.8% of teachers reported attending all sessions and 60.7% had done so recently. These figures suggest that professional development structures have strong reach and that the teaching workforce is, for the most part, actively engaging in continuous capacity-building. However, the data also reveal certain gaps, the presence of teachers with outdated training (those whose last engagement was two or more years ago, approximately 11%) and a considerable non-response rate on training timing implies potential lapses in systematic refreshers or tracking that indicating outdated professional preparation. The minority of teachers who attended only some sessions had pointed to barriers such as scheduling conflicts or limited accessibility. There is strong agreement among teachers (nearly 80%) in favor of making preschool education mandatory, reflecting a belief that early childhood preparation substantially aids transition and readiness for Grade One.

While highlighting the specific readiness skills that teachers consider essential for incoming Grade One students, a comprehensible priority pattern emerges across domains. When consider about social skills, high importance is placed on cooperative behaviors (e.g., working with peers, building

⁴⁸ ibid

⁴⁹Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (n.d.). *Transitions in Canada: Early childhood education to primary education* [PDF].

https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/418/Transitions_in_Canada_From_Early_Childhood_Education_and_Care_EN.pdf

⁵⁰ Britto, P. R. (2012). School readiness: A conceptual framework (Education Section, Programme Division). UNICEF. <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>.

relationships with teachers), emphasizing classroom socialization as a foundation for successful transition to school. Lower prioritization of positive interaction with other adults suggests perhaps an assumption that such broader social engagements develop more gradually or are less immediately critical. In Sri Lanka, where education emphasizes discipline, respect, and communal values, the social development of Grade One students is particularly significant. At this stage, for transition from preschool to formal schooling, children require foundational skills such as cooperation, communication, empathy, and respect for others. Research and observations suggest that Sri Lankan Grade One students typically develop social skills through structured classroom activities, group learning, and cultural practices that emphasize collective harmony. These key competencies form the essential foundation for a child's holistic development within the school environment and beyond. Children develop collaboration and teamwork skills as they learn to share resources, negotiate roles, and pursue common goals transitioning from parallel play to fully interactive and cooperative learning. This is deeply supported by respect to authority & peers, which involves not only following teacher instructions to maintain a harmonious classroom but also showing genuine politeness to classmates by actively listening, valuing diverse contributions, and respecting personal boundaries. Effective Communication Skills are the vehicle for this interaction, enabling children to express their needs, ideas, and feelings clearly. In the Sri Lankan context, this is primarily fostered in Sinhala or Tamil to ensure confident self-expression, with English introduced as a valuable tool for future opportunities in some schools. The critical skill that may support all those interactions is the emotional regulation, which empowers children to manage frustrations, navigate conflicts constructively, and adapt to disappointments without becoming overwhelmed. This ability to self-soothe and persevere is what allows them to remain engaged learners and supportive peers. Ultimately, these competencies are not isolated; they are deeply intertwined, creating a resilient and socially skillful individual who is prepared for academic challenges, positive relationship-building, and responsible citizenship. However, challenges such as large class sizes, limited teacher training in socio-emotional learning, and varying home environments may impact skill development. Understanding these dynamics is essential for educators and policymakers to strengthen early childhood education strategies in Sri Lanka. This study explores the current state of Grade One students' social skills, influencing factors, and potential improvements through perceptions of teachers to support holistic development.

Further, the teacher respondents highlighted the fundamental self-care behaviors, personal hygiene, nutrition, and safety as essential, signaling teacher awareness that these habits support attendance, concentration, and overall participation. The findings indicate that teachers place a strong emphasis on healthy lifestyle habits as a core component of school readiness. Skills such as taking care of

personal hygiene (89.1%), maintaining proper eating habits (87.3%), and ensuring personal safety (78.3%) are widely viewed as essential for promoting children's physical health, independence, and self-care capabilities. In contrast, skills like the ability to work to a schedule and adapting easily to school were more frequently rated as helpful but non-essential. This suggests that teachers believe such abilities, while beneficial, are not as urgent at the school entry and can be developed further during the primary grades. The distinction reflects an understanding that foundational self-care and safety habits are prerequisites, whereas organizational and adaptation skills can develop progressively as children mature within the school environment.

Moreover, Gross motor skills control out fine motor skills seeming essentiality, possibly aligning with caregivers' and teachers' observations that broader physical coordination supports engagement in play-based and classroom activities, particularly for younger Grade One entrants. The results highlight the significant role motor skills play in preparing children for Grade One in Sri Lanka. Teachers place a greater emphasis on gross motor skills, with 74.6% identifying them as crucial for first-grade readiness. This prioritization reflects the immediate demands of the school environment, where children engage in activities that require coordination, balance, and physical strength such as playground interactions, physical education, and movement-based classroom tasks. Strong gross motor abilities also support posture, attention, and participation in group activities, all of which contribute to successful school adaptation.

Although fine motor skills, such as writing, cutting, and handling small objects, are also considered important, they are more frequently rated as "useful but not essential." This suggests that while these skills are necessary for academic tasks like handwriting and craft work, teachers may believe they can be refined and strengthened after school entry through structured learning and daily practice. Overall, the findings indicate that teachers view motor skills as a foundational element of early schooling, with a slight prioritization of gross motor competence. This perspective underscores the need for preschool programs to provide balanced opportunities for both gross and fine motor skill development, ensuring children enter Grade One with the physical readiness to fully participate in learning and play.

In the Sri Lankan educational setting, a child's cognitive development in Grade One is influenced by a mix of cultural, linguistic, and educational factors. Cognitive development involves the progression of a child's ability to think logically, comprehend concepts, remember information, and solve problems. Recognizing colors emerged as the most frequently identified essential skill (77.5%), reflecting its foundational role in early learning activities such as reading readiness, categorization, and classroom participation. Similarly, the ability to work independently (54.5%) and readiness to learn (58.2%) were valued by over half of the respondents, emphasizing the importance of fostering independence and a

positive learning mindset in preschool. Interestingly, the higher ratings for non-essential skills such as planning an action (28.1%) and accurately identifying one's own thoughts (22.7%) suggested that teachers recognize these abilities as developmental assets that can be nurtured within the primary school context rather than making mandatory prior to entry.

Emotional Skills, such as strong emphasis on children's ability to express personal needs and safety related concerns (e.g., expressing harassment or abuse) reflects a heightened awareness of child protection and empowerment. The results highlight that emotional skill development is considered crucial for children's successful transition to Grade One. The majority of teachers identified expressing personal physical needs (85.2%) and reporting harassment or abuse (79.5%) as the most essential skills, emphasizing children's safety, independence, and self-advocacy. Over half of respondents rated all other emotional skills as essential, linking them to relationship-building, adaptation, and managing school life. Skills such as handling rejection (32.4%), distinguishing right from wrong (29.1%), and controlling emotions (27.7%) were seen as helpful but non-essential, though still valuable for resilience and moral growth. Overall, the findings stress that emotional readiness, alongside academic preparation, forms a key foundation for early schooling success.

Findings revealed that teachers prioritized social skills, healthy lifestyle habits, and emotional competencies as essential for school readiness. Skills such as working cooperatively with peers (83.6%) and maintaining personal hygiene (89.1%) were seen as foundational. This aligns with international frameworks (UNICEF, 2012; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) which emphasize the importance of self-regulation, cooperation, and health as prerequisites for effective learning. Interestingly, advanced literacy and numeracy skills were not considered mandatory by most teachers, suggesting that Sri Lankan teachers value holistic development over premature academic preparation. This reflects similar arguments made in the Sri Lankan National Early Childhood Development Policy, which stresses the need for play-based and child-centered learning (National Education Commission, 2016).

The early years of education, especially through preschools and home environments, plays a vital role in shaping these abilities. Sri Lanka's multilingual setting, primarily Sinhala, Tamil, and English adds both richness and complexity to language learning. Children often learn in their mother tongue during preschool, with formal instruction in the same or a second language in Grade One. The national curriculum emphasizes early literacy through activities such as storytelling, phonics, and vocabulary building. Readiness in language and literacy is influenced by several factors including exposure to books, family literacy practices, teacher support, and access to learning materials. Understanding the level of language and literacy readiness among Grade One students is essential for identifying learning needs, adjusting teaching strategies, and ensuring equitable access to quality education. Early

assessment and support in these areas can help children develop confidence and skills required for a smooth transition into formal schooling. Language and literacy skills are foundational to a child's academic success and overall communication development. In Sri Lanka, the children entering Grade One are expected to have acquired basic language abilities that support learning across subjects. These skills include listening, speaking, recognizing letters, understanding simple instructions, and beginning to read and write. More than 75% respondents perceived that skills such as Ability to speak in grammatically correct extended sentences (83.2%), Ability to write a free sentence (83.0%), Ability to look up and write a sentence (82.6%) and Ability to write words (75.8%) are not essential for the preschoolers when they are entering to Grade One. However, a small number of respondents considered these skills as *essential* and even as abilities that preschool must develop. This reflects some misunderstanding of the developmental expectations, as these skills exceed the government school requirements for Grade One entry and set expectations that are unrealistically high for most children at this stage. Skills like reading and writing letters or words are generally viewed as not essential but useful by most respondents, with a noteworthy percentage seeing them as not necessary for preschool development (e.g., writing words: 76.2% say it's not needed).

Adaptability, facilitating classroom learning, and increasing productivity were the most valued individual skills, reflecting the practical demands of early primary classrooms. Teachers reported that these skills support teaching in multiple ways, most notably by improving the overall teaching learning process (91%), fostering foundational competencies (31%), easing student adjustment to school (30%), and aiding classroom management (23%).

When asked about the skills students demonstrated most, teachers identified creative skills (78.5%), social skills (58.4%), and self-directed learning (50.8%) as the most important skills. In contrast, less emphasis was placed on traditional academic skills such as mathematics, language, and literacy. The study further revealed that teachers attributed the greatest responsibility of school readiness to preschool teachers (30.9%), followed by Grade One teachers (27.9%) and parents (20.7%). These perspectives highlight the pivotal role of preschool education in preparing children for the smooth transition to Grade One. However, the relatively low endorsement of shared responsibility suggests a gap in collaborative practices. International literature underscores the value of partnerships among families, schools, and communities in supporting children's transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Taken together, these findings emphasize the need for an integrated approach to early education—one that not only balances cognitive, social, and emotional readiness but also actively fosters collaboration between educators and families to ensure a smooth and holistic transition into primary school.

While 67.4% of respondents expressed willingness to admit children with disabilities, nearly one-third felt unprepared to handle such students. This ambivalence underscores the urgent requirement for specialized teacher training and adequate resources for inclusive classrooms. The OECD (2017) and UNICEF (2016) both highlight inclusive readiness as a global challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts where systemic supports are limited. The findings indicate a generally positive attitude toward inclusive education, with 67.4% of respondents willing to admit children with different abilities or physical disabilities to Grade one, reflecting their openness to diversity. However, 29.1% expressed reluctance, likely due to feeling unprepared or unsupported, and 3.5% did not respond, possibly reflecting uncertainty or limited awareness. While 55.7% support integrating children with different abilities into the same classroom, 42.2% favor separate teaching, citing challenges such as classroom management, addressing diverse needs, and insufficient training or resources. A strong majority (86.9%) perceived that teachers require targeted training to work effectively with such students, though a minority may underestimate this need due to overconfidence or reliance on prior experience. Overall, the results highlight both encouraging acceptance of inclusive practices and the need for professional development of teachers to address practical challenges in implementation.

The majority of respondents (95.7%) are aware of the entry requirements, reflecting strong familiarity with relevant procedures. This high awareness is essential in promoting transparency and equality in the admission process, ensuring that all stakeholders operate within a shared understanding of criteria and regulations. Similarly, the data shows that 95.5% of respondents actively apply the listed skills when assessing school readiness. This strong alignment with recommended evaluation practices suggests a consistent and standardized approach to identifying whether children are prepared for Grade One. Confidence in the effectiveness of these assessment skills is also notable, with 89.1% of respondents perceiving they provide a clear understanding of each child's readiness and developmental stage. This indicates trust in the current assessment tools and methods, as well as recognition of their role in adapting educational support to meet individual needs. However, the 6.8% expressing doubts may point to an opportunity for further professional development, refinement of tools, or broader sharing of best practices to strengthen the reliability of assessment. The findings reveal a strong agreement (94.9%) among respondents on the importance of identifying student competencies for effective Grade One teaching and learning, highlighting teachers' recognition of adapting instruction to individual needs. However, the low reported use of interviews (31.4%) during admissions, contrasted with the majority not using them (51.0%), suggests a gap between the supposed importance of assessing readiness and the methods employed. This limited use of interviews may stem from policy limitations, time constraints, or concerns over fairness and standardization in the admission process.

4.2. Conclusion

The study provides comprehensive insights into teachers' perceptions of school readiness and highlights the multifaceted nature of children's readiness to Grade One in Sri Lanka. Teachers consistently emphasize the importance of foundational social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills, including cooperation, empathy, self-care, gross motor abilities, and basic literacy and numeracy readiness. High participation rates and strong engagement in professional development indicate that teachers are generally well-prepared and aware of school readiness of Grade One.

Findings also reveal a strong recognition of the value of preschool education, inclusive practices, and early childhood programs in supporting children's transition to formal schooling. However, gaps remain, particularly in socio-emotional skill development, adaptation to large classrooms, and the practical application of assessment methods. Additionally, unrealistic expectations regarding advanced literacy and cognitive skills for preschoolers indicate a need for alignment between teacher perceptions and government standards. Overall, the study highlights the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to early education that balances cognitive, social, and emotional development, while fostering collaboration among preschool teachers, primary teachers, and parents. This study would be an eye opener for relevant authorities to take decisions on how pre-school education should be changed to facilitate the holistic development of children and to be aligned with the goals and expectations of the primary education.

4.3. Recommendations

I) Strengthen Early Childhood Education Programs for Smooth Transition to Primary Education

1. Emphasize the development of social-emotional skills, self-care, and gross and fine motor abilities alongside foundational literacy and numeracy in preschool curricula.
2. Encourage play-based and interactive learning environments that support collaboration, problem-solving, and emotional regulation of children.

II) Encourage Joint Practices and Professional Exchanges Across Preschool and Primary Education

1. Encourage regular collaboration and knowledge-sharing between preschool and primary school teachers through joint training programs, professional learning communities, classroom observations, and exchange visits.
2. Design an integrated and well-aligned curriculum that supports pedagogical continuity across the education system and during transition phases.

III) Enhance Inclusive Education Practices

1. Offer targeted programs to increase awareness and professional practice of teachers and provide resourceful classroom environments to effectively include children with diverse abilities and physical disabilities in mainstream classrooms.
2. Promote strategies for classroom management, differentiated instruction, and collaborative learning to accommodate all students.

IV) Encourage Collaborative Engagement with Families and Communities

1. Encourage parents to support early learning through home literacy activities, social skill development, and healthy lifestyle habits.
2. Promote awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of preschool education and school readiness for long-term academic and social success.

V) Refine Assessment Practices for School Readiness

1. Increase the use of qualitative assessment tools such as interviews to complement standardized checklists, providing a more holistic understanding of each child's readiness.

2. Strengthen monitoring and sharing of best practices to improve consistency and reliability in readiness assessments.

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