

NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK (2020-2030)
PART IV - VOLUME I
POLICY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC
ACTIVITIES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION
(Reviewed and Revised)

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1. STATUS REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Early Childhood is internationally defined as the period of a child's life from conception to age eight. There are two reasons for assigning this age range for early childhood¹. The first reason is associated with the way children learn. Children below the age of eight learn best by constructing their knowledge when they have objects to manipulate and people to interact with. In short, they 'learn by doing'. The second reason is the importance of the continuity of experiences from prenatal to early primary years (age 8). Children need enriching opportunities for optimum nutrition, safety, health, responsive care, and education during this period. The upper age limit of early childhood, however, varies in different countries based on the admission age to the primary school system. As such, Sri Lanka has defined the term 'early childhood' as the period from conception to the age of school admission which is 5years².

There are many terms used to describe early childhood development programmes. Broader terms used are Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and Early Childhood Education (ECE). Both ECCD and ECCE refer to the holistic development of children including physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development from conception to age eight or five depending on the school admission age. ECCD/ECCE is more than preparation for primary, and it aims at the holistic development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to build a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing, thus nurturing, caring, capable and responsible future citizens³. On the other hand, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a broad term used to describe any type of educational programme offered in preschool years and may consist of any number of activities and experiences designed to aid in the cognitive (language, intelligence, problem solving, creativity, logical thinking, perception, memory etc.) and social-emotional development of pre-schoolers before they enter elementary school. The term ECCD encompasses the development of the child that embraces an even wider scope in childcare that goes beyond traditional education. In terms of organized educational programmes, ECE generally encompasses kindergartens (enrolling mainly five-year-old children), and pre-kindergartens and preschools aimed at children starting at about age three⁴. However, it should be noted that all these terms ECCD, ECCE, ECE, and ECD refer to care and education services provided in an institutional environment for children in their early years. The term 'care' refers to enabling environment which supports a child's optimal development. As UNESCO (2007)

¹ Evans, J. L., Myres, R.G., and Ilfeld, E.M. (2000). Early Childhood Counts: A programming Guide on Early Childhood Care and Development. World Bank Publications.

² Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2018). National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2007). Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education. EFA Global Monitoring Report.

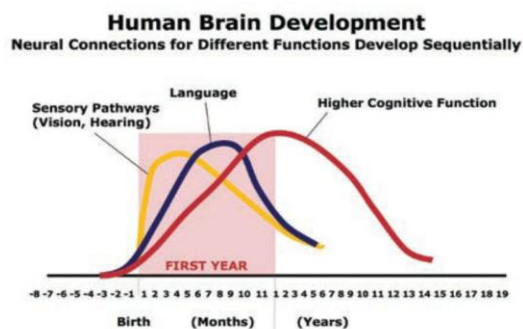
⁴ Hansen, J.S., Walsh, D.J., Liebovich, B.J., and Myers, R.G. (2018). Early Childhood Education. Retrieved November 25, 2021, from <https://www.encyclopedia.com>.

points out “in practice, care and education cannot be separated, and good quality provision for young children necessarily addresses both dimensions”⁵.

1.2 Significance of Early Childhood

Early childhood is a crucial phase of growth and development as the experiences incur during this phase can influence outcomes across the entire course of an individual’s life. Researchers specify that 90% of the brain develops by age 5⁶ and in the first few years of life, more than one million new neural connections are formed every second. After this period of rapid proliferation, connections are reduced through a process called pruning, so that brain circuits become more efficient. Sensory pathways like those for basic vision and hearing are the first to develop, followed by early language skills and higher cognitive functions (Figure 1). Connections proliferate and prune in a prescribed order, with later, more complex brain circuits built upon earlier, simpler circuits⁷. Appropriate Interactions are crucial for children during this period. If responses of caregivers are unreliable and inappropriate the brain architecture does not form as expected, which can adversely affect the learning and behaviour of children. Further, for children with disabilities or developmental delays, early childhood is the most significant time for early detection to ensure access to interventions that can help them reach their maximum possible potential⁸.

Figure 1: Critical Periods for Development of Basic Skills



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

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. (2007). Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education. EFA Global Monitoring Report.

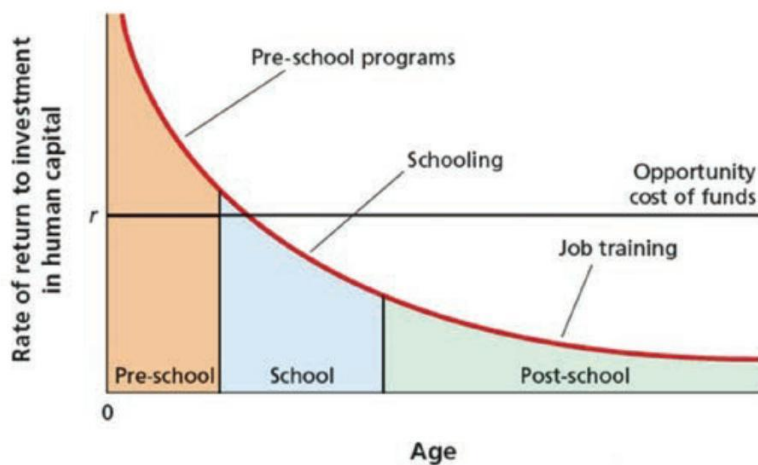
⁶ Early childhood brain development has lifelong impact | Arizona PBS. (2017, November 22). Retrieved July 7, 2021, from <https://azpbs.org/2017/11/early-childhood-brain-development-lifelong-impact/>

⁷ Harvard University. (2019). In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Retrieved June 5, 2021, from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd/>

⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund. (2019). A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education-in advocacy brief.UNICEF.

In addition to brain research, the studies conducted on ECCE programmes reveal that children enrolled in at least one year of preschool education are more likely to develop critical skills they need to succeed in schools, less likely to repeat grades or drop out of school, and therefore will be more able to contribute to peaceful and prosperous societies and economies when they reach adulthood⁹. These studies emphasize early childhood as the best period to invest in human capital development. A recent study conducted by Professor James J Heckman and others in the US found that high-quality birth-to-five programmes for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment. In this study, the researchers looked at participants' improved health, IQ, education, and decreases in their involvement in crime, as well as the increased labour participation of the mothers whose children were a part of the program¹⁰. This rate is much higher than the rate of return (7-10%) identified in previous research conducted by Professor Heckman and others (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment



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

1.3 ECCE/ECCD in the Sri Lankan Context

1.3.1 Historical Overview

Introducing the first letters of the alphabet to children at an auspicious time when they reach the age of three years is a long-standing tradition in Sri Lanka that signifies the aspirations and value given for education by society. However, formal education for children prior to primary

⁹ Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E., and Prados, M.J. (2017). "Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program". NBER Working Paper No. W23479. Retrieved August 3, 2021, from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w23479>.

¹⁰ Garcia, J.L., Heckman, J.J., Leaf, D.E., and Prados, M.J. (2016). The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. Retrieved August 4, 2021, from https://cehd.uchicago.edu/?page_id=276#abccba

school admission was not in general practice until nursery classes were introduced during British rule. During this period nursery school system was popular in Britain and that has influenced instituting nursery schools in a number of missionary schools and churches in Sri Lanka. In 1944, Dr. Maria Montessori visited Sri Lanka, and subsequently, Montessori teacher training programmes were started. In the mid-20th century, the Montessori method of preschool education was firmly established in Sri Lanka.

A further expansion of preschools came about with Educational Reforms introduced in 1972 when the school admission age was raised to six years. The Government encouraged pre-primary education and as a result, ECCE centres mushroomed in every part of the country. When UNESCO proclaimed 1979 as the International Year of the Child, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) showed its commitment to children by establishing the Children's Secretariat (CS) during this year. Among the tasks assigned to the Children Secretariat was coordinating and directing activities for the development of children in early childhood. When the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment (present Ministry of Women and Child Development) was created in 2005 the CS became one of its major institutes carrying out programmes to ensure holistic development of children in early childhood¹¹. The CS has contributed to the field of ECCD in many ways including introducing policies on ECCD, minimum standards for ECD centres, and ECD standards for children between the ages of 3-5 years. Considering the significant role played by the CS to the field of ECCD the Cabinet approval was granted to change its institutional name from 'Children's secretariat' to National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD) on 7.12.2020.

As discussed above ECCD/ECCE is one of the best investments a country can make to promote human resource development, gender equality, and social cohesion, and to reduce the costs for later remedial programmes. For disadvantaged children, ECCD/ECCE plays an important role in compensating for the disadvantages in the family and combating educational inequalities. The UNESCO's approach in ECCD/ECCE is reinforced in the Education 2030 agenda and in particular in target 4.2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 which aims to 'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (p35)¹².

1.3.2 Salient Features of ECCE in Sri Lanka

There are several types of preschools operating in Sri Lanka, applying different labels such as kindergarten, preschool, nursery school, Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) preschool, Modern Montessori International (MMI) preschool, and early childhood development centre, etc. However, the most common name used for ECCE centres is 'Early Childhood Development Centre'. This term was proposed in the National Policy on ECCD, in

¹¹UNESCO-IEB. (2010). World Data on Education 2010/2011 (7th ed.).

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

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

the year 2004 to “transform scholastically focused preschools into community-based child development centres that focus on age-appropriate holistic development”¹³ and used by preschool since then. Children between 3-5 years are expected to be enrolled in these centres. Despite these progressive measures, it has been noted that there is an inclination of using a traditional method of teacher-centred teaching-learning strategies in ECD centres, emphasizing the development of academic knowledge and skills rather than facilitating the holistic development of children.

The National Census of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in Sri Lanka conducted in 2016¹⁴ revealed the following:

- There are 19,668 ECD centres in Sri Lanka. Of these 71% are managed by the private sector, 19.8% are managed by the public institutions/local government authorities, 6.8% are managed by religious organizations, and 3% are managed by non-governmental organizations. Out of these, 88.2% of preschools charge fees.
- The enrolment rate of 3 to 5-year-old children in the ECD centre is 55.6%. Enrolment rate by sector illustrates that there is a noticeable disparity among urban (67.6%), rural (47.5%), and estate (43.9%) sectors.
- Although registration criteria stipulate that the adult-child ratio in ECD centres should be 1:20, it varies from 1-12 to 1-29 among ECD centres and across Districts in Sri Lanka.
- The minimum educational qualification required to be a preschool teacher is G.C.E. (O/L). Currently, 3% of preschool teachers possess degrees or post-graduate degrees and 59.9% of preschool teachers have passed the G.C.E. (A/L). However, there are 3.5% of preschool teachers who have not passed G.C.E. (O/L).
- Around 85% of preschool teachers possess professional qualifications of one year or more and around 10% of the teachers do not possess any professional qualifications.
- The average monthly income of a preschool teacher is LKR 11,117.00.
- Many ECD centres lack infrastructure facilities and learning and play materials. Around 28% of ECD centres do not have drinking water and about 10% of ECD centres operate without any toilet facilities. Except for swings and free play areas a majority of ECD centres do not have adequate outdoor equipment (only 44.4% have climbing frames, 45.3% have sand and water play area). Only around 5% of ECD centres have facilities for children with special needs (ramps/ handrails and adequate space for a wheelchair to pass in).
- Although registration of ECD centres is mandatory in all provinces, considerable percentages (26.3%) of unregistered centres are operating in the country.

¹³ Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare. (2004). National Policy on Early Childhood Education.

¹⁴ Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2016). National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka.

- Fees charged by ECD centres per month vary from less than LKR 500.00 to more than LKR 2,000.00. The burden on parents is worsened by profit-oriented marketing of educational material.

A study conducted by the World Bank in 2014 reveals those mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing compliance with prescribed standards, and collecting data on ECCE provision, are weak¹⁵. It has been further revealed that most ECD centres are managed by for-profit private service providers who operate in an environment of limited public investments for provision, oversight, regulation, and support¹⁶¹⁷.

Although child development is a joint responsibility of both parents and teachers, facilitation of parental involvement in ECD centre activities, focusing on children’s holistic development is minimal in the existing ECCE system. Providing an explicit outline of activities containing the study programme and its overall objectives to parents so that they can intellectually engage in the process of child development is not considered as an important criterion in registration requirements formulated by the provincial administrative entities of ECCE.

1.3.3 Policy Initiatives

The first National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development was introduced by the Children’s Secretariat in 2004, focusing on the holistic development of children from conception to five years¹⁸. This was revised in 2018 and the revised policy on ECCD was approved by the Cabinet in 2019. This policy recognized the importance of comprehensive and integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) services for children and made an array of policy recommendations to improve access to, and quality of centre-based ECCE.

According to National Policy on ECCD approved by the Cabinet in 2019, the responsibility of overall early childhood development of Sri Lanka has been entrusted with the Ministry in-charge of Women and Child Affairs and the responsibility of formulating and implementing a National Policy on Preschool Education has been devolved on the Ministry of Education by the Gazette Extraordinary No. 2103/33 dated 12.12.2018. This was further confirmed by the Gazette Extraordinary No. 1253/12 dated 10.12.2019 through which the Ministry in-charge of Education was entrusted with the task of analysing and formulating sectoral policies related to education development including preschool education in consultation with the ministry in charge of the subject of child affairs and all other stakeholders. In keeping with this Gazette

¹⁵ World Bank. (2014). Laying the Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka. Retrieved June 6, 2021, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/srilanka/publication/laying-foundation-early-childhood-education-sri-lanka>

¹⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund. (2018).” required Investments to Deliver High Quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Sri Lanka, discussion paper presented at the ‘Building Brains, Building Futures’ -Sri Lanka Early Childhood Development High Level Meeting. <https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/stories/building-brains-building-futures-sri-lanka-early-childhood-development-high-level-meeting>

¹⁷ Pathirana, B.D.D. (2017). Profile of early childhood care and education (ECCD) in Sri Lanka: Analysis of the Past and Present. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 5(3), 1372-1380.

¹⁸ Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. (2018). National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development.

notification, the National Policy on Preschool Education was formulated by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Cabinet granted its approval for this policy in 2019, December. In the meantime, the NEC also has formulated a policy on preschool education in the third quarter of 2019¹⁹ conforming to the powers and functions granted to it by the National Education Commission Act, No. 19 of 1991. According to this Act²⁰, one of the powers and functions of the NEC is to make recommendations to the President, on educational policy in all its aspects, with a view to, ensuring continuity in educational policy and enabling the education system to respond to changing needs in society, including an immediate review of educational policy and plan or plans and the making of recommendations to the President, on a comprehensive National Education Policy.

To resolve the issues related to the implementation process of the policies formulated by the MoE and other agencies, the Hon. Minister of Education, in November 2020 appointed a committee that included the officials from MoE, State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-Schools & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services, and other relevant State Ministries, NEC, Ministry of Health, Children's Secretariat, representatives from Provincial Preschool regulatory bodies, and experts in the subject to review the situation critically and constructively and make suggestions. The policy framework for ECE (Draft National Policy on to ECE, 2020) proposed by this committee was accepted by the Hon. Minister of Education.

A review of these policies reveals that although there is no substantial difference among goals, objectives, and strategies there is a difference among the proposed implementation process. The goals and objectives of all these policies have focused on equitable access, quality of services provided to children, professional development of teachers and other staff, financing ECE services, and parental involvement in children's learning. It is noted that the draft ECE policy of the committee appointed by the Minister of Education, 2020 complements the other two policies and emphasizes the need for central governance and parental involvement.

With the devolution of powers by the 13th Amendment of 1987 to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the management and supervision of preschools were vested with Provincial Councils. To exercise this mandate, Provincial Councils have passed provincial statutes and set up provincial authorities/ bureaus/units for supervision and management of preschools which are currently known as ECD centres. Registration of ECD centres, providing guidance, introducing professional and educational standards, and providing teacher training opportunities to teachers have been stated in all provincial statutes as the main functions of these provincial establishments or regulatory bodies. However, recognizing the need to establish a central mechanism of standard-setting, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure the quality, equity, and social justice in ECCE, the Government in 2020 has established a dedicated State Ministry for preschool education.

¹⁹ National Education Commission. (2019). National Policy on Preschool Education.

²⁰ National Education Commission Act No. 19 (1991, April).

1.3.4 Identified Issues/Gaps in ECCE Provisions

As highlighted by the NEC²¹, WB²²²³, and the Presidential Taskforce Report²⁴ as well as other documents, the ECCD/ECCE sector is confronted with many issues that hinder the universal provision and full achievement of benefits of early childhood development. These issues are discussed under the headings of a) Need for an effective enforceable national policy on ECCE, b) Lack of clarity in role definition in the provision of ECCD/ECCE services, c) Inequalities for access and enrolment, d) Substandard quality of ECCE provisions, e) Inadequate focus on holistic nature of ECCE, f) Inadequacies of public investment, government regulation, coordination and oversight, g) Poor quality of preschool teachers and caregivers, and poor remuneration and inadequate social recognition, h) Lack of enforceable legal provisions for ECCE, and i) Limited engagement by parents.

- a) **Need for an effective enforceable national policy on ECCE:** Sri Lanka is yet to formulate an effective national policy on education. In terms of the National Education Commission Act, the President (subject to the provisions of the Constitution) may declare from time to time the National Education Policy which shall be conformed to by all authorities and institutions responsible for education in all its aspects [Section 2(1) of the NEC Act]. According to this Act, the structure of the educational system includes preschools as well. While powers in respect of education have been devolved to Provincial Councils, those powers must be exercised in conformity with national policy. Once the national policy has been duly formulated in respect of any subject, there cannot be any conflicting provincial policy on that same subject²⁵. Since there is no national policy on ECCE, the provinces have formulated their own policies and passed their own statutes. Therefore, to implement central government policy initiatives effectively across all provinces, Sri Lanka needs an effective enforceable national policy with a mechanism of implementing, monitoring, and evaluation declared by the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
- b) **Lack of clarity in the role definition in the provision of ECCE services:** The ECCD/ECCE sector is expected to be centrally directed and coordinated, and provincially managed. However, it is noted that there has been no consensus over who should take the lead role at the national level. This has arisen as a result of an existing policy of entrusting overlapping responsibilities to two agencies; the responsibility of overall childhood care and development to the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and the responsibility of

²¹ National Education Commission. (2019). National Policy on Preschool Education.

²² Dunder, H., Millot, B., Riboud, M., Shojo, M., Aturupane, H., Goyal, S. & Raju, D. (2017). Sri Lanka education sector assessment: Achievements, challenges, and policy options. World Bank.

²³ World Bank. (2014). Laying Foundation Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka.

²⁴ Presidential Taskforce on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs. (2020). Re-Imaging Education in Sri Lanka, Vol II- Core Group Reports.

²⁵ As observed by His Lordship Justice Mark Fernando in the Supreme Court case of Kamalawathie and Others v The Provincial Public Service Commission: [(2001) 1 SLR 1, 5].

formulating and implementing a national policy on preschool education to the Ministry of Education. It is claimed by the Children's Secretariat that the policy submitted by the Ministry of Education in 2020, and approved by the Cabinet has overlooked their central role, and has proposed to implement the policy and activities overlooking the island-wide network of officers operated by the Children's Secretariat. As mentioned in Section 1.4.1, the committee of experts appointed by the Minister of Education to resolve this issue has proposed to establish a National Management and Regulatory Committee in the Ministry of Education and a National Action/Working Committee in the State Ministry of Women and Child Development to carryout ECCE activities liaising with the Provincial Action/Working committees and other stakeholders. The National Management and Regulatory Committee (NMRC) was established in the Ministry of Education to guide the formulation of policies, projects and activities required for maintaining a high standard in early childhood education in Sri Lanka and monitoring and empowering the implementation of such activities²⁶.

However, the MOE has taken steps to strengthen child-friendly pedagogy in preschools to better prepare children for formal education. Accordingly, a Preschool Education Unit has been established within the MOE to lead the implementation of preschool education, recognizing the MOE as the key stakeholder in this sector. In this context, the NMRC is no longer proposed. Clear role definitions should be established to avoid duplication of functions and to ensure smooth implementation and effective monitoring systems. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should bear the responsibility in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MWCA) in this regard.

- c) **Inequalities in access and enrolment:** There is a noticeable disparity in the enrolment rates across provinces (ranging from 47.0% - 80.2%), districts (ranging from 46.1%-82.7%), and among urban, rural, and estate sectors (67.7%, 47.5%, and 43.9% respectively). As stated elsewhere, statistics have shown that the average enrolment rate of 3-5-year-old children in ECD centres was around 56%. The age disaggregation of the same data shows that 22.6% of three-year-old children and 63.4% of 4-year-old children have enrolled in ECD centres. Further, access to ECCE for children with special needs is limited with only 49 ECD centres catering to children with special needs in the country (MoE, 2012)²⁷. Reasons for low attendance appear to be multifactorial; unavailability of preschools nears the households, terrain difficulties, high enrolment and tuition fees, and lack of parental awareness of the benefits of early childhood education.
- d) **Substandard quality of ECCE provisions:** Ensuring quality ECCE provisions in Sri Lanka is a key challenge. Misguided competition in achieving capabilities in reading, writing and, mathematics has marginalized the concept of holistic development in the minds of both teachers and parents. Even though some progress has been made in

²⁶ Ministry of Education. (2021). Cabinet Memorandum ED/ST/SER/21/01.

²⁷ Ministry of Education. (2012). Education for All: Island wide Information on ECCE Centres by Province.

introducing guidelines and standards for ECD centres and learning and development, the extent to which these are adopted is not certain, and in general, the quality improvement through such interventions is uneven and generally low. Lack of national curriculum framework/guidelines has resulted in ECD centres carrying out activities that are neither age nor individually appropriate. Most ECD centres are relatively weak in terms of approaches to facilitating the learning of children with special needs and the use of materials for the development of cognitive skills²⁸. It has revealed that on a spectrum of minimal essential elements for high-quality ECCE, ECD centres at the lower end of the spectrum would not have proper infrastructure facilities, while ECD centres at the other extreme ensure child's wellbeing, but may not offer developmentally appropriate learning programmes.

- e) **Inadequate focus on holistic nature of ECCE:** Holistic ECCE addresses health and wellbeing of children and coordination among sectors – pre-schools, parents and health care services, etc. For ECCE to be effective care and education must supplement each other. The psychosocial and spiritual development of the child should extend beyond schools and institutions to the family and society.

Opportunities should be available to the child to optimize development, especially during critical periods of brain development in the home environment through a process of advocacy and education in collaboration with other sectors that promote best parenting practices. To achieve this, an integrated approach to ECCE is essential since it focuses on holistic child development. The integrated approach fundamentally seeks to build cross-sectoral coordination systems, promote programme innovation, overcome gaps in knowledge, service, and resources²⁹.

- f) **Poor quality of ECCE teachers and caregivers, and poor remuneration and low social recognition:** As stated earlier, 83% of preschool teachers have completed a professional training of one year or more, and about 10% of teachers do not have any formal training on ECCE or recognized qualifications. Although there are certificate and diploma level training programs on ECCE conducted by different institutions including the Open University of Sri Lanka, there are no degree programmes that offer higher qualifications. On the other hand, teachers who have professional qualifications are not regularly updated on new knowledge³⁰ which affects the quality of the learning environment and interactions provided in ECD centres. A central foundation for learning in ECCE is formed by the peer group, play, and activities offered by adults³¹. However, there is a tendency among Sri Lankan parents to view ECD centres as centres for preparing their children academically for primary school rather than as a place for promoting the holistic development of young

²⁸ World Bank. (2014). Laying the Foundation for Early Childhood Education in Sri Lanka.

²⁹ Vargas-Baron, E. (2005). Planning Policies for Early Childhood Development: Guidelines for Action.

³⁰ Athukorala, K. (2017). Early Childhood Care and Development: Current Issues and Future Challenges.

³¹ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2000). Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland.

children³². Furthermore, ECCE teachers and support staff are usually underpaid, and these along with low social recognition given to the ECCE teachers have made it difficult to attract quality people into ECCE sector.

- g) **Inadequacies of public investment, government regulation and coordination, and oversight:** The government policy recognizes the importance of ECCD/ECCE in the optimal development of children in early years that impact lifelong productivity, health, and well-being. It has made a significant investment in ECCE through the World Bank-assisted ECD project established in the Ministry of Women and Child Development. However, the provision of ECCE services in Sri Lanka has been largely dependent on non-state resources and incentives. Thus, the quality of ECCD/ECCE services offered appears to vary among providers. Though the State's role has mainly been regulatory, even that lacks clarity. As a result of minimal public provision and control and oversight, there is considerable geographic variation in access to and quality of ECCE services, where the poor, mostly in rural areas depriving of the benefits of ECCE. As stated in Section 1.5 of this document, out of 19,668 preschools, 70% are managed by the private sector and 88.2% charge fees. And most of these are located in urban and semi-urban areas, and as a result provision of ECCE to rural areas is relatively low.

Further, there exist significant shortcomings in the vertical and horizontal coordination of ECCE provisions. As of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, in 1987, Provincial Councils have been assigned the responsibility of supervision of the management of preschools. There is significant inadequacy in the leadership capacity in ECCE-serving governmental agencies. With the decentralized role of supervision and management of ECD centres, there appears to be confusion with regard to roles and responsibilities of the national (National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development) and provincial administrative entities (authorities/units/bureaus/departments) established for ECCE and front-line workers. It also has affected the allocation of finances and other resources and leads to duplication of functions³³. As a result, there is an inadequacy in quality and standards and disparities across provinces and districts.

- h) **Lack of enforceable legal provisions for ECCE at national and provincial levels:** In keeping with the National ECCD policy, the NSECD has taken several measures to implement policy instructions that ensure the quality of ECCE services. Minimum standards for ECD centres, registration of ECCE teacher training programmes, early childhood development standards for preschool children aged 3-5 years are some of these measures initiated by the NSECD. Since these measures are not backed by enforceable

³² Warnasuriya, R., Sosale, S. and Dey, S. (2020). Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka: From Evidence to National Action. World Bank.

³³ Warnasuriya, R., Sosale, S. and Dey, S. (2020). Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka: From Evidence to National Action. World Bank.

legal provisions, the NSECD has not been able to take action against those who do not adhere to policy instructions.

Although the 13th Amendment of the Constitution empowers the Provincial Councils to make necessary legislation relating to supervision of the management of preschools and registration and supervision of preschools, provincial administrative entities (Authorities/Bureaus/Departments/Units) established for ECCE have failed to take any legal action against those who violate provincial statutes and regulations. Some of the ECD centres (preschools) in private schools and international schools are not registered with the regulatory bodies set up for ECCE and are not bound by standards introduced by the provinces. These ECCE centres run as profit-making businesses registered under the Companies Act. Lack of legal powers to take action against these centres and other centres which operate without obtaining registration is a serious challenge faced by the provincial administrative entities on ECCE. Therefore, a legislative act to empower the regulatory system of ECCE appears to be an urgent requirement.

- i) **Limited parental engagement in ECCE:** Parents' engagement in their children's early childhood education is not adequately facilitated and appears to have been misguided by the over-enthusiastic emphasis on physical growth and preparation for schooling. This stems from their lack of understanding of the value of ECCE in psychosocial development and their role and responsibilities in guiding preschool children to accrue intended benefits. Parents often place relatively less value on the intrinsic benefits of ECCE and tend to view ECD centres solely as learning centres that prepare children for their entry into primary school. On the other hand, strategies that encourage parents to participate in their children's learning are scarcely integrated into ECD centre activities. It is important to engage parents in a reciprocal way (two-way communication) which helps teachers to understand the child's family culture and provide culturally relevant learning experiences and parents to understand the school culture and share their child's unique strengths and weaknesses, and talents with teachers.

1.4 Introduction to the revised National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)

Following the formulation and publication of the NEPF (2020-2030) in 2022, the NEC identified the necessity for an update in response to changes in national governance and developments in global education systems. Consequently, the original policy framework was comprehensively reviewed to assess implementation progress, address new challenges, and ensure alignment with current national and international priorities. The revision process also considered both previous and proposed national policy frameworks. A comparative analysis of the NEPF (2020-2030), the National Policy on Preschool Education 2019, and the National Policy on Preschool Education 2025 identified several key gaps. A detailed chart summarizing these comparisons and contradictions is provided as an attachment at the end of this section.

- Absence of targeted measures to address access barriers such as transportation, distance, and financial constraints.

- Lack of clear guidelines for interdisciplinary curricula and holistic teacher professional development.
- No concrete mechanisms for improving teacher quality, recruitment, training, remuneration, or professional recognition.
- Missing comprehensive, national approaches to monitor, assess, and ensure the quality and uniformity of ECCE services.
- Inadequate strategies for fair resource distribution, and weak regulation, oversight, and accountability mechanisms.
- Unclear roles and responsibilities for stakeholders and no legal requirements to uphold quality standards.
- No strategies to engage parents and communities in ECCE, or to ensure continuous improvement through research and evaluation.

A few core areas and proposed policies and strategic activities under those core areas have been recommended accordingly, where required.

1.5 Conclusion

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Provincial Councils (PCs) have taken various measures to develop early childhood care and education system. As revealed by the National Survey on ECD centres conducted by the CS in 2010³⁴ and the National Census Report published in 2016, the initiatives taken by the GOSL and PCs in expanding ECCE services and increasing enrolment rates of children have indeed resulted in a significant expansion of ECCD services across the country. Nevertheless, despite the expansion in the provision of ECCE services by various stakeholders, the problems pertaining to the ECCE sector seem to continue. These include issues pertaining to the need for an effective enforceable national policy on ECCE, lack of clarity in role definition in the regulation and supervision of management of ECCD/ECCE services, inequalities for access and enrolment, substandard quality of ECCE provision, inadequate focus on holistic nature of ECCE, inadequacies of public investment, government regulation, coordination and oversight, poor quality of ECCE teachers and caregivers and poor remuneration and inadequate social recognition, lack of enforceable legal provisions for ECCE and limited engagement by parents. These issues appear to curtail the quality and standards of the ECCE service provision in Sri Lanka.

The review identifies that the existing policy framework emphasizes systemic quality improvements, holistic child development, and regulatory monitoring, with a greater focus on curriculum and assessment. However, it requires more action-oriented and specific implementation strategies with operational guidelines. Furthermore, a strong commitment to promoting evidence-based policy and practices, as well as parent and community engagement is essential for the effective implementation of this initiative.

³⁴ The Children's Secretariat. (2010). National Survey on Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka.

2 POLICY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDED STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES

This section presents proposed policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) formulated by the NEC in recognition of the right of every child in early childhood to learn and develop in an environment that lay the foundation for lifelong learning with physical, cognitive, psychosocial, and spiritual development, personality and attributes of social responsibilities. The ECCE policy proposals followed Guiding Principles (GP) constructed by the NEC for the National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030). However, its Directive Principles (DP) and core areas have been adapted to suit early childhood education.

The core areas include;

- i. Access, and Equity and Inclusiveness,
- ii. Holistic Development - Physical, Cognitive, and Socio-emotional Development,
- iii. Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education - Structure, Processes and Outcomes,
- iv. Benchmarking and Quality Assurance,
- v. Financing of Early Childhood Care and Education,
- vi. Regulation, and Governance and Management,
- vii. Parents, Family and Community Involvement, and
- viii. Data, Research, and Evaluation

The policies set forth under each core area while addressing the current issues/gaps discussed in detail in section 1.3.4 of this document, shall provide guidance for the development of all legislation, programmes, funding, monitoring and evaluation, etc., for the establishment of an effective, integrated and sustainable ECCE system in Sri Lanka.

Further, in order to ensure the efficient implementation of the proposed policy and strategic activity framework, a suitable institutional and regulatory framework for policy implementation is also proposed and it is given in Section 3.

2.1 Definitions of Key Terms in the Policy

Child-Centred Approach: Teachers who use child-centred approach place the child at the centre of the teaching-learning process in which children become active participants. It involves giving children choices of learning activities, with the teacher acting as a facilitator of learning³⁵. It concentrates on the child as an individual and gives priority to the interests and needs of children.

Child Outcomes: One of the criteria that determine the quality of ECCE programmes is child outcomes. It refers to the level of a child's development in areas that are central to normal and healthy development: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity;

³⁵ International Bureau of Education. Child Centred Approach. Retrieved April 4, 2020 from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/c/child-centred-approach>

language and cognitive development; communication skills, and general knowledge. Good quality programmes help children acquire require skills (school readiness, general life skills, and independence) and achieve desirable outcomes (cognitive, social, emotional, physical, language, and other skills)³⁶.

Child to Child Approach: The child-to-child approach is an education model that supports children builds knowledge and skills as they relate and interact with one another.³⁷ This approach has been shown to promote smoother transition from preschool to primary school as older children help younger children to acquire school-readiness skills, literacy, and social skills in communities where formal preschools are either unavailable or not well equipped.³⁸ The activities introduced under this concept help children practice social skills, resolve conflicts, and boost cognitive growth, creativity, memory, and independence.³⁹

Code of Practice⁴⁰: This is a set of written rules which explains how people in a particular profession should behave in any work environment. In any work environment, a code of practice ensures that the activities of a particular professional comply with required standards. Violating a code of practice in any profession may have legal consequences⁴¹.

Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogies: Pedagogy is a set of instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place and provide opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions within a particular social and material context. It refers to the interactive process between teacher and learner and the learning environment⁴². Developmentally appropriate practices are methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning⁴³. Developmentally appropriate pedagogies focus on both the age and individual needs of children.

³⁶ Rohacek, M., Adams, G.C., Kiske, E. E., with Danziger, A., Derrick - Mills. D., and Johnson, H. (2010). Understanding Quality in Context: Child Care Centres, Communities, Markets and Public Policy.

³⁷ Deepa Srikantaiah Aug 2024 Scaling Impact of a Play-Based, Child to Child Approach to Make Pre-School to Primary School Transition Fun and Inclusive, retrieved from <https://www.gpekix.org/project/scaling-impact-play-based-child-child-approach-make-pre-school-primary-school-transition>

³⁸ Sedere, Upali & Campus, Siba & Lanka, Sri. (2025). 'Child to Child Learning' Scaling the Impact of Child-to-Child Model from Play-Based Learning to Equitable and Inclusive Education Background. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/396651995_'Child_to_Child_Learning'_Scaling_the_Impact_of_Child-to-Child_Model_from_Play-Based_Learning_to_Equitable_and_Inclusive_Education_Background

³⁹ Ranaweera, Padmini, Why School Readiness Matters, The Daily Morning, April 27, 2026, p. 6

⁴⁰ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/code-of-practice>

⁴¹ <https://www.reference.com/business-finance/meaning-code-practice-785df7315aefb2df>

⁴² Siraj-Blatchford et al., (2002) As cited in Wall, S., Litjens, I., Taguma, M.(n.d.) Early childhood Pedagogy and Care: England. Retrieved July 5,2021,from <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/early-childhood-education-and-care-pedagogy-review-england.pdf>

⁴³ National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2020). Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Position Statement.

Early Childhood Education: Based on the universally accepted definitions, the term early childhood education is defined as the initial stage of organized instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children (between the ages around 3-5 years) to an environment, that provides a bridge between home and a school-based atmosphere⁴⁴.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programmes: All centre-based educational programmes, designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children at least from three to five years of age, and have staff that is adequately qualified to provide educational programmes for children are termed as ECCE programmes. There are different pedagogical practices such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), Creative Curriculum, etc., adopted in ECCE programmes across the world.

Equity and Inclusiveness: Equity is defined as personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnicity, language, disability, or family background, that are not obstacles to reaping the benefits of early childhood education. Inclusiveness is defined as the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups⁴⁵.

Inclusive Practices: Teaching that recognizes the diversity of students, enabling all students to access course content, fully participate in learning activities and demonstrate their knowledge and strengths at assessment is termed as inclusive practices. Inclusive practice values the diversity of the student as a resource that enhances the learning experience⁴⁶. An inclusive approach to teaching means recognizing, accommodating, and meeting the learning needs of all students, acknowledging that students have a range of individual learning needs and are members of diverse communities and avoiding stereotyping of students as belonging to specific groups with fixed predictable and fixed approaches to learning⁴⁷.

Most Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Children: Children who are orphans, abused and neglected, children without families, refugees, children with disabilities, street children and children living in extreme poverty are considered as most vulnerable and disadvantaged children⁴⁸. Children who live in prisons with their mothers in Sri Lanka are also included in this category.

⁴⁴ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Glossary. (2002). Glossary of Statistical Terms.

⁴⁵ Oxford University Press. Retrieved January 23,2021 from <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/Equality>
Equality Challenge Unit (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/e-and-d-for-academics-factsheet-inclusive-practice.pdf>

⁴⁶ Equality Challenge Unit (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/e-and-d-for-academics-factsheet-inclusive-practice.pdf>

⁴⁷ University of Tasmania. (2018). Teaching and Learning: Inclusive practices. Retrieved July 4,2020, from <https://www.teaching-learning.utas.edu.au/unit-design/inclusive-practices>

⁴⁸ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comments No 7, (2005). Implementing Rights of the Child.

Play-based Learning: Play-based early childhood education is an effective approach that supports children’s overall development through engaging in age-appropriate activities. Instead of relying only on formal instruction, this method encourages children to learn by exploring, experimenting, and interacting with their environment and others. Play based activities facilitate children to develop cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills, including language, creativity, problem-solving, early math concepts, and self-regulation.⁴⁹

School Readiness: School readiness refers to the combination of cognitive, physical, and language skills as well as socio-emotional skills such as managing emotions, following routines, cooperating with peers, and entering the classroom independently from parents that equip a child to transition smoothly into and succeed within a formal classroom environment. These abilities are equally as vital as literacy and numeracy for supporting children's adjustment to school life.⁵⁰ *Transition* and *gaining competencies* are the distinctive features of this concept. The three dimensions of school readiness are; *ready children*, focusing on children’s learning and development, *ready schools*, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school, and advance and promote the learning of all children, and *ready families*, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children’s early learning and development and transition to school. These three dimensions are interlinked⁵¹.

2.2 Policy Proposals and Recommended Strategic Activities

Core Area – ECCE 1: Access, and Equity and Inclusiveness

Policy Context

Numerous studies show that children who participate in high-quality early childhood education programmes have better long-term outcomes than children who do not have these experiences^{52,53}. Despite this evidence on the lifelong benefits of ECCE, nearly half of all pre-primary aged children globally are not enrolled in pre-primary education⁵⁴. As mentioned elsewhere, in Sri Lanka, only 55.6% of children aged 3 to 5 years are enrolled in ECD centres.

⁴⁹UNICEF. (2018). *Learning through play*. UNICEF & LEGO Foundation.

⁵⁰ Ranaweera, Padmini, Why School Readiness Matters, The Daily Morning, April 27, 2026, p. 6

⁵¹ UNICEF. (2012). *School Readiness: a conceptual framework*. Retrieved May01,2026 from <https://resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/sites/resource/files/field/pdf/2020/1/7/School-readiness-a-conceptual-framework-UNICEF.pdf>

⁵² Heckman, J. J. (2017). Early Childhood Education, Quality and Access Payoff. Retrieved March 6,2021, from https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_Moffitt_093016.pdf

⁵³ Philpot, D. (2019). New Research Shows Quality Early Childhood Education Reduces Need for Later Special Education. Retrieved March 2,2021, from <https://theconversation.com/new-research-shows-quality-early-childhood-education-reduces-need-for-later-special-ed-112275>

⁵⁴ Unite Nations Children’s Fund (n.d.) Early Childhood Education: Every Child Deserves Access to Quality Early Childhood Education. Retrieved January 25,2021, from <https://www.unicef.org/education/early-childhood-education>

For children aged 3 years, the national enrolment rate is 23%. The equity issue is more prominent in ECCE enrolment than general education since it is neither compulsory nor provided free of charge. The ECD centre enrolment rates (urban: 67.6%, rural: 47.5%, and estate: 43.9%) presented in the National Census Report is a good example that reflects the issue of equity with regard to the provision of ECCE opportunities.

In this context, this policy framework is formulated to ensure every Sri Lankan child around the age of 3-5 years has equal access to education that will enable him/her to achieve his/ her true potential regardless of wealth, gender, ethnicity, geographical location or social background. Since social equity is an essential component of educational equity, strategic actions in this policy have been formulated focusing on both.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State assumes the responsibility of provision of early childhood care and education with need-based support to all children including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

DP 2: The State considers diversity as an asset, and therefore, the State together with all educators should take the responsibility of identifying and removing barriers to equity and inclusion in early childhood education.

DP 3: The State recognizes the role of the non-State sector in ECCE, and facilitates its participation as a parallel partner.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 1.1: All children around the age of 3 to 5 years should have access to at least a year of affordable early childhood care and education

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministry of Education under the technical advice and guidance of the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD) shall introduce early childhood education enrolment policy to ensure an equitable and inclusive enrolment process which would be implemented through Provincial Administrative Entities of ECCE.
- The MOE in collaboration with NSECD shall facilitate the Provincial Administrative Entities of ECCE (i.e. authorities/units/bureaus/departments) to set up quality ECD centres in unserved and underserved areas and disadvantaged locations.
- The MOE and NSECD together with Provincial Administrative Entities (PAEs) of ECCE shall take steps to enhance parental and community awareness about ECCE activities and healthy parenting practices through outreach campaigns in collaboration with all stakeholders.
- The MOE and NSECD shall provide funds and guidance to PAEs of ECCE to provide mandatory support for children at risk from poverty, disability, violence, disasters, gender biases, institutionalized care, truancy, and children residing with their mothers in prisons to attend ECCE programmes available in their localities.

- The NSECD together with the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to promote public-private partnerships and philanthropic initiatives to expand access to ECCE.
- The Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall take measures to offer concessionary/interest-free loans to non-State providers to establish ECCE centres in unserved and underserved provinces and regions.
- The Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall take steps to introduce incentives such as ‘ECD Vouchers’ for children of economically disadvantaged households to promote access to and enrolment in ECCE.
- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs through the NSECD and the PAEs of ECCE shall provide a system of continuous support to low-resourced ECD centres to expand the access to ECCE, and improve the facilities and resources.

Policy-ECCE 1.2: Early childhood care and education should be inclusive and equitable in order to provide learning opportunities for all children around the age of 3-5 years regardless of their wealth, gender, caste, ethnicity, language, geographical location, social background or disability.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE in collaboration and consultation with the National Education Commission (NEC) and the NSECD, shall establish minimum standards for ECD centres that ensure equity and inclusiveness.
- The Ministry of Education shall issue appropriate directives and guidelines through the NSECD and PAEs of ECCE to all ECCE providers/centres to comply with the principles of equity and inclusion.
- The MOE shall promote and facilitate the use of mother tongue or child’s home language in centre-based learning environments with the reasonable use of other national languages as well as English as the link language as children have the capacity to learn more than one language.
- The MOE and NSECD shall ensure the liaison between the ECCE providers/centres with relevant institutions such as National Child Protection Authority, Family Health Bureau and other relevant health sector institutions, and Social Service Department to create an environment that supports and implement equitable and inclusive education for all children including those who are with special needs.
- The MOE and NSECD together with the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to facilitate the development of technical competencies and professionalism among the ECCE workforce (i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes and etiquette and mannerism of the ECCE workforce) to ensure that diversity in the ECCE setting is respected and barriers to equity and inclusiveness are identified and eliminated. The Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs through NSECD shall provide grants and other funding for ECCE providers/centres that provide services to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable communities.

- The MOE in collaboration with NSECD shall take steps to facilitate all the State and non-State training institutions including universities, to train the professional staff of the ECCE centres on the application of screening tests and instruments for detection and identification of children at risk of developmental delays and psycho-social problems to ensure early interventions.
- The MOE in collaboration with NSECD together with the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to promote the ECCE centres to establish and operate parent social networking such as parents' societies/associations in order to ensure equity by helping parents to get to know each other and develop a sense of togetherness.

Core Area – ECCE 2: Holistic Development - Physical, Cognitive and Socio-emotional Development

Policy Context

Holistic development refers to children gaining skills and competence to develop their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic skills⁵⁵. Since development is multi-dimensional and the progress in one dimension affects the other dimensions, early childhood education is expected to adopt a holistic approach to learning. A holistic approach in education means engaging and developing the whole person through education. The holistic approach serves learners of different levels of abilities. It is the fundamental reason why a human being is multi-dimensional, and every human being has conscious and unconscious aspects, rational and irrational aspects⁵⁶. In a holistic approach, teachers facilitate children to become well-rounded adults by focusing equally on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of child development. Integrating psycho-social and interpersonal abilities (life skills) such as self-awareness, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, coping with stress, coping with emotions, and coping with change⁵⁷ helps individuals make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and manage their emotions and behaviours in healthy and productive ways.⁵⁸ In this context, the proposed policy promotes, the ECCE programmes to provide a broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children, individually and collectively to develop their

⁵⁵ Welsh Joint Education Committee. (2019). Health, Wellbeing, Learning and Development: How curriculum areas support the holistic development of children Retrieved November 20,2021, from http://resource.download.wjec.co.uk.s3.amazonaws.com/vtc/2018-19/hsc18-19_3-2/_multi-lang/unit01/09-how-curriculum-areas-support-holistic-development.html

⁵⁶ Varun, A. (2015). Holistic Approach for Early Childhood Education. Retrieved July 2,2021, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297714485_Holistic_Approach_for_Early_Childhood_Education

⁵⁷ Ash, S. (n.d.). The 10 Most Important Life Skills and How to Develop Them Better Humans. Retrieved May 1, 2026 from <https://betterhumans.pub/the-10-most-important-life-skills-and-how-to-develop-them-b1322561309>

⁵⁸ UNICEF (n.d.). KNOWLEDGE BRIEF: BASIC LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM. Retrieved May 1, 2026 from <https://www.unicef.org/azerbaijan/media/1541/file/basic%20life%20skills.pdf>

personalities, talents, and abilities to live a full and satisfying life within society⁵⁹life skill based activities and child safeguard methods need to be improved through this early childhood education as their progress.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State recognizes the value of well-organized early childhood care and education programmes in providing enriching and positive environmental experiences for each and every child that would ensure the holistic development of all children.

DP 2: The State assures the responsibility of setting the regulations and strategic directions for the ECCE sector and prescribing criteria and minimum standards for the establishment and operation of ECCE centres and, safeguarding and protecting children.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 2.1: All early childhood care and education programmes should aim at supporting holistic development in children around the age of 3 to 5 years

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministry of Education to ensure the learning experiences that they provide allow the holistic development of children to achieve maximum potential in growth and development, cognitive skills and understand themselves and others, build positive self-concepts, enjoy relationships with peers and adults.
- The MOE shall prescribe standards for all ECCE providers/centres to ensure the facilities, resources and services offered by them are conducive for the holistic development of children.
- The MOE shall prescribe a ‘Codes of Practice’ for teachers and caregivers of ECCE centres to ensure the provision of learning experiences that are focused on the holistic development of children.
- The MOE and NSECD in working through the PAEs of ECCE shall facilitate ECCE providers/centres by providing financial assistance, materials, and technical guidance to strengthen their centres and programmes.
- The MOE and NSECD together with PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to ensure all ECCE providers/centres should pledge explicitly that all children including the most disadvantaged and vulnerable are unconditionally valued, respected, and loved.
- The MOE and NIE together with NSECD shall facilitate the PAEs of ECCE to provide training manuals and guidelines for teachers and caregivers of ECCE centres to build

⁵⁹The United Nations Human Rights, General Comments No7. The Aims of Education. Article29, (2001) Retrieved June3,2021, from [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/a\)GeneralCommentNo1TheAimsOfEducation\(article29\)\(2001\).asp](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/a)GeneralCommentNo1TheAimsOfEducation(article29)(2001).asp)

positive individualized relationships between teachers and children and teachers and parents.

- The MOE shall issue directives making life skills education mandatory. The MOE and NIE, together with NSECD, shall take steps to integrate life skills education into the curriculum as a core component.
- The NIE and NSECD, in collaboration with MOE, Provincial MOEs, and other related stakeholders, shall organise regular training programmes and workshops for preschool teachers, caregivers, and parents on life skills facilitation.
- The MOE together with the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to develop the capacity of ECCE teachers in supporting parents to adopt positive parenting practices that include positive behavioural support techniques to develop children's self-concept, self-esteem, and parents' capacities to understand and deal appropriately with children's temperament.

Core Area – ECCE 3: Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education – Structure, Processes, and Outcomes

Policy Context

The quality of early childhood care and education programmes is generally assessed by its structural and process features and child outcomes. Structural quality refers to physical and human resources and time. Physical resources include infrastructure facilities and space, health and safety provisions as well teaching-learning materials and curriculum and consumable education material. Human resources address all the human stakeholders: adult-child ratios and group size; staff qualifications; staff wages and working conditions⁶⁰. Process quality refers to the daily experiences of children in ECCE settings. It consists of the social, emotional, physical, and instructional aspects of children's activities and interactions with teachers, peers and material that are considered as a proximal determinant of child development. Structural quality affects the quality of the interactions between staff and children in a dynamic reciprocal process⁶¹. Performance outcome refers to the level of completeness and accuracy of achieving the target programme according to the plan that includes essential steps of regulation, monitoring, and quality assurance, and the achievement in a child's development in areas that are central to healthy development: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; communication skills and general knowledge⁶². However, it should be noted that there is an association among the aspects of

⁶⁰ Bonetti, S., (2018). Structural Elements of Quality Early Years Provision: A Review of the Evidence, Retrieved July 5, 2021, from https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review_EPI.pdf

⁶¹ OECD iLibrary. (2019). Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey 2018 Conceptual Framework, OECD Education Work Papers, No197, Retrieved June 6, 2021 from https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/starting-strong-teaching-and-learning-international-survey-2018-conceptual-framework_106b1c42-en

⁶² McKeown, K., Haase, T., Pratschke, J.(2015). Determinants of child outcomes in a cohort of children in the Free Pre-School Year in Ireland, 2012/2013, *Irish Educational Studies*, 34:3, 245-263.

quality i.e. structural and process features and child outcomes, and it is indeed essential to realize the aims of ECCE.

Many efforts have been taken to improve the standards and quality of ECCE programmes, particularly by the World Bank-Assisted Early Childhood Development Project established in the Ministry of Women and Child Development and UNICEF. As a progressive measure in this regard, the NSECD has introduced minimum standards for ECD centres⁶³ and national early childhood development standards for children⁶⁴ between 3-5 years. However, there are concerns about the quality of ECCE services as discussed earlier. In terms of process quality and child outcomes, a study conducted by the World Bank in 2014 found that ECD centres perform reasonably well in some teaching-learning activities and processes, related to personal care, hygiene and habit formation of the children, but they are weak in terms of approaches to facilitating the learning of children with special needs, and activities and use of materials for the development of cognitive skills. Therefore, this policy focuses on all three aspects of quality to overcome challenges faced in the present context.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State assumes the responsibility of ensuring all ECCE centres provide safe, well-arranged and well- equipped learning environments that are crucial for early childhood care and education.

DP 2: The State assumes the responsibility of prescribing the developmentally appropriate early childhood curricula and teachers' guides that would ensure the provision of adequate opportunities to explore, experiment, and learn, use age-appropriate technologies and interactive media.

DP 3: All ECCE centres should ensure the adoption of teaching-learning processes that embrace child-centred, play-based methods that promote experiential/authentic learning that enables the children to become active learners in developing their knowledge and skills.

DP 4: All ECCE centres should ensure the adoption of formative assessments of children to provide enriching experiences to the child and parents as well as to the teacher, and such information must be used by teachers to make well informed instructional decisions that support children's learning and development.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 3.1: All ECCE providers should ensure all early childhood care and education settings and learning experiences would promote the holistic development of children and facilitate the smooth transition of children from pre-school to formal school.

⁶³ The Children's Secretariat. (2006). Starting Rights: Standards for Early Childhood Development Centres.

⁶⁴ Children's Secretariat (n.d.) Early Childhood Development Standards for Sri Lankan Children.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE in collaboration with NSECD shall take steps to strengthen its technical capacity to function as the central focal point of the ECCE sector by establishing a Technical Unit consisting of permanent professionally qualified staff to formulate strategies for improving the quality of ECCE provisions and guide the adoption of those strategies by the ECCE providers/centres and monitor the implementation.
- The MOE and NSECD together with the NEC and NIE and experts in ECCE shall take steps to formulate minimum standards (i.e. norms for physical and human resources, age-appropriate teaching-learning resources, and programme/activities) required for establishment and operation of ECCE centres.
- The Ministry of Education shall issue regulations requiring all PAEs to ensure all ECCE providers/centres comply with minimum standards and register their operation under the respective provincial administrative authorities.
- The MOE together with NSECD shall facilitate the PAEs of ECCE to establish and maintain a consolidated ECCE centre registration system for all provinces in Sri Lanka while simultaneously feeding the information to the central database at the MOE.
- The MOE in collaboration with NIE and other stakeholders shall develop and introduce a curriculum framework and teachers' guides prepared in accordance with the NEC prescribed National Learning Competency Framework for ECED programmes.
- The MOE shall take steps to ensure the adoption of NIE prescribed curriculum framework and teachers' guides.
- The Ministry of Education shall issue regulations and standards for the production, publication, and distribution of educational material produced with commercial or non-commercial intent for ECD centres and preschool-aged children.
- The Ministry of Education and the Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs in consultation with the TVEC shall decide the appropriate NVQ Level that would be considered as the minimum qualifications to function as ECCE teaching staff and support staff and issue regulations prescribing the minimum qualifications required for recruitment of teachers and support staff.
- The MOE and NSECD shall regulate and monitor the scope, content, and quality of all professional development programmes on ECCE conducted by training providers.
- The NSECD together with the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to establish ECD Training and Resource Centres in each province and appoint qualified trainers to provide in-service training for the ECD workforce and also conduct parental educational programmes in collaboration with relevant agencies/institutes/centres and NGOs.
- The MOE and NIE together with the PAEs of ECCE shall use the ECD Training and Resource Centres as well as training providers to conduct regular continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for all categories of staff involved in the provision of ECCE services enabling them to update their knowledge, skills, and practices.

- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall take measures to ensure the dignity of the ECD teachers, their job security, and career progress through implementing a suitable institutional mechanism that enables them to secure decent wages and service conditions.
- The MOE shall issue directives to make it mandatory to submit the child's holistic development evaluation report from the preschool when admitting children to the primary school.
- The NSECD, under the technical guidance and supervision of the MOE and NIE, shall prepare a child's holistic development evaluation report template for preschools.
- The NSECD, under the technical guidance and supervision of the MOE and NIE, shall conduct training programmes for preschool teachers on preparing the child's holistic development evaluation report. The NSECD, in collaboration with MOE, shall monitor the implementation of the directives relating to the child's holistic development evaluation report.
- The MOE is encouraged to mandate a maximum age of 60 for preschool teachers and caregivers, ensuring that children receive care and instruction from teachers suited to their needs and maintaining high standards of child-friendly education.

Policy-ECCE 3.2: All early childhood care and education programmes should implement developmentally appropriate, child-centred, play-based pedagogical approaches that promote children's holistic development and their lifelong learning

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE in liaison with the NEC and NIE shall prescribe Codes of Practice and guidelines for ECCE teachers and support staff to ensure that all ECCE settings implement child-centred, play-based developmentally appropriate pedagogies.
- The MOE and the PAEs of ECCE shall implement programmes through Provincial level ECD Training and Resource Centres as well as in liaison with other suitable institutions to develop teacher capacities on the application of pedagogically well-planned methods that promote children's holistic development including their motivation for learning, positive peer relationships, and peer acceptance.
- The MOE and the PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to implement programmes to ensure positive interactions between ECCE teachers and Grade 1 teachers of primary school and ECCE teachers and parent/guardians to conduct school readiness programmes to ensure a smooth transition from preschool to Primary School.

Policy-ECCE 3.3: All early childhood care and education programmes should ensure that child outcomes reflect children’s holistic development and their learning dispositions.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE, NIE and PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to ensure that all ECCE providers/centres adopt the nationally prescribed ECCE curriculum framework and teachers’ guides to ensure the attainment of intended learning outcomes by the children enrolled in their programmes.
- The MOE and the PAEs of ECCE should facilitate ECCE teachers to use developmentally appropriate formative assessments to support children’s holistic development and learning.
- The MOE and NSECD through PAEs of ECCE shall facilitate and promote ECD centres to implement early childhood development standards and assessments that measure child outcomes.
- The MOE and NSECD shall use child outcomes data at the national and provincial levels to inform, evaluate and improve the ECCE system.
- The MOE, NSECD and PAEs of ECCE shall ensure all ECCE providers/centres would provide a document containing curricula followed by the respective ECD centres including the expectations for developmentally appropriate child outcomes to parents and regulatory authorities.

Core Area – ECCE 4: Benchmarking and Quality Assurance

Policy Context

Research proves that children exposed to rich simulative experiences in early childhood perform better in school and in life as adults. This has prompted many countries to introduce quality assurance mechanisms for early childhood education envisaging higher quality outcomes for children. In developed countries, authorities have been established to inspect/review and certify the quality of services provided by early childhood education and care centres. To maintain the quality ECD centres should be regularly and systematically evaluated through monitoring, documenting, and analysing curriculum implementation and the child’s learning and development⁶⁵.

Furthermore, regular inspections and certification would ensure the quality of education provided by different institutions. However, such mechanisms to monitor, maintain and enhance the quality of early childhood care and education are yet to be initiated in Sri Lanka.

⁶⁵ Taguma, M., Litjens, I., and Makowiecki, K. (2013). Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: SWEDEN.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State is committed to ensuring quality and standards of ECE provisions by institutionalizing the concept of quality and quality culture in ECCE centres through a nationally prescribed quality assurance and accreditation framework (i.e. criteria, elements, standards and best practices)

DP 2: All ECCE providers/centres and programmes should be subjected to national quality assurance and accreditation process.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 4.1: A national quality assurance and accreditation system matching with international benchmarks should be in place to guide, review and certify/accredit all ECCE programmes.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE in collaboration with the NSECD shall formulate a quality assurance framework that includes criteria and elements, best practices, and standards covering all aspects of ECCE to promote the standards and quality of ECCE service provisions across all provinces and all ECCE centres.
- The Ministry of Education shall establish a National Quality Assurance Council (NQAC) in compliance with national regulations to administer the quality assurance and accreditation programme through the NSECD and PAEs of ECCE.
- The MOE and NSECD shall facilitate the PAEs of ECCE to establish Provincial Quality Assurance Units (PQAUs) in respective provinces to liaise with NQAC in implementing the quality assurance and accreditation programme.
- The MOE and NSECD together with PAEs of ECCE in liaison with NQAC and the PQAUs shall promote all the ECCE centres to establish an internal quality assurance system within their centres, and implement programmes in compliance with the guidelines of NQAC.
- The PQAUs in liaison with the NQAC shall conduct periodical reviews (external review) of the quality of the ECD centres and the services provided to them.
- The MOE and NSECD in liaison with NQAC shall promote a quality and quality culture within the centres managed by government institutions, higher education institutions, private sector institutions, NGOs and religious organizations and facilitate the NQAC to conduct periodical reviews of the quality of the ECCE centres established and operated in their respective institutions.

- The MOE, NIE, and NSECD shall promote research on ECCE by providing grants and conducting regular research, conferences, and publications in collaboration with NEC and other relevant institutions to strengthen the links among policy, research and future changes.
- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of the MOE shall ensure develops and maintains an Education Management Information System (EMIS) for the ECCE sector. The EMIS shall be centrally hosted and provincially managed. The main purpose of the EMIS would be to improve preschool registration, monitoring, analyses, planning, and use of the data for decision making, as well as to harmonize procedures, indicators and data across the different provinces.

Core Area- ECCE 5: Financing of Early Childhood Care and Education

Policy Context

Investing in early childhood care and education is considered an investment that brings social and economic benefits to a country. Research reveals that investments in high-quality early childhood services save costly expenditures for compensatory services over time⁶⁶. Therefore, the investment in young children is a powerful contributing factor for cost-effective, child-positive country development. Regrettably, the public expenditure on early childhood education is relatively small in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, a vast majority (around 70%) of ECD centres are managed by private individuals or non-governmental organizations. At present, the government through the World Bank-assisted ECD Project supports both private and public centres equally by investing in upgrading early childhood development centres and quality improvements. However, the World Bank feels that differences in the country's geography and other sub regional factors present unique challenges for investment and require nuanced reforms and investments⁶⁷.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State considers education as a public good and ensures the provision of adequate public investment to ensure equity and quality of early childhood care and education.

DP 2: The State recognizes the benefits that the ECCE sector could accrue from public-private partnerships.

⁶⁶ García, J.L, Heckman, J.J, Leaf, D.E, and Prados, M.J. (2017). "Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program", NBER Working Paper No. w23479, National Bureau of Economic Affairs.

⁶⁷ World Bank. (2019). Sri Lanka Human Capital Development: Realizing the Promise and Potential of Human Capital.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 5.1: Adequate equitable and sustainable funding should be ensured for early childhood care and education.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and the Provincial Ministries of Education shall take steps to Increase public investments/budgetary allocations to promote equitable access and enhance the quality of ECCE provisions.
- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and the Provincial Ministries of Education through the NSECD and PAEs of ECCE shall take steps to promote investments by development partners (Local and International NGOs and Private sector) in the ECCE sector.
- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of the subject of Child Affairs shall take necessary steps to introduce tax incentives to encourage private investment in ECCE especially for the investment projects that are aimed to serve in unserved and underserved areas and for most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs through the NSECD and Provincial Ministries of Education through the PAEs of ECCE shall promote the non-State sector to establish and operate affordable early childhood development centres in unserved and underserved areas.
- The Ministries of Education, and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs, and Provincial Ministries of Education through the PAEs of ECCE shall finance scholarships for the ECCE workforce and for those who wish to join the ECCE workforce to acquire necessary pre-service qualifications.

Core Area-ECCE 6: Regulation, and Governance and Management

Policy Context

The ECCE sector in Sri Lanka is very diverse as in many countries. It is diverse with regard to service delivery and methods implemented. There are different agents (public-private and voluntary organizations etc.) active in the field of ECCE, and different methods (Montessori, preschool, etc.) are implemented in the teaching-learning processes.

This has made regulating ECCE services a challenging task for many countries. Nevertheless, countries have taken many measures to maintain the quality of ECCE through effective governance. For example, the Council of the Australian Government (COAG) which is the apex intergovernmental forum in Australia has introduced a ‘National Early Childhood

Development Strategy ‘to ensure that by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and the nation⁶⁸. In Sweden, the National Education Act which came into force in the year 2010 supports the educational system through guidelines, recommendations and suggestions for implementation.

The National Agency for Inspection (NAI) monitors the equality and high quality of the educational system. Sweden has introduced a maximum fee policy that makes preschool education affordable to many⁶⁹. Sri Lanka also needs to be ensured through a cohesive policy and a well-aligned system, with effective and accountable governance, to equitably meet the needs of all preschool-aged children, their parents, educators and other stakeholders.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State ensures the enactment of the legal framework for the ECCE sector to guarantee the rights of every preschool-aged child to have the access to quality early childhood education and regulate the ECCE sector.

DP 2: The State recognizes the need for having an appropriate governance and management structure with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of central and provincial authorities and agencies.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 6.1: Legal and regulatory framework, cohesive policy and a well-aligned system, with effective and accountable governance and management, shall be ensured for early childhood care and education.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall take necessary steps to enact appropriate legislation and establish an institutional and regulatory framework for the ECCE sector to empower the State agencies to prescribe and enforce necessary regulations to ensure the equity and inclusiveness, and quality of the early childhood care and education system. The proposed institutional and regulatory framework for the ECCE sector is detailed in Section 3.
- The Ministries of Education and in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall take steps to strengthen the PAEs of ECCE to oversee the governance, management and coordination, and quality assurance process of ECCE.

⁶⁸ The Council of Australian Government. (2009). Investing in Early Years-A National Early Childhood Development Strategy.

⁶⁹ Schreyer, I. & Oberhuemer, P. (2017). Sweden-Key Contextual Data.

- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of MOE shall facilitate PAEs of ECCE to set up Provincial Coordinating and Monitoring Committees on ECCE to monitor ECCE institutions, training programmes, workforce, financing services, etc. in their respective provinces.
- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of the MOE and in collaboration with PAEs of ECCE shall promote multisectoral planning between national and provincial level agencies and among provinces to ensure efficiency, coordination, and alignment across programmes.
- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of MOE shall prescribe appropriate regulations and codes of practice to all ECCE providers/centres to ensure they explicitly commit to provide respectful and responsive care and ensure the safety and security of children and refrain and prevent any form of exploitation within as well as outside the ECD centres.
- The Ministries of Education and the in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs shall mandate ECCE centres to obtain an explicit pledge on the commitment of teachers and other staff for respectful and responsive care and the safety and security of children and refrain and prevent any form of exploitation within as well as outside the ECD centres.
- The Ministries of education, in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and Provincial Ministries of Education through the PAEs of ECCE shall mandate all ECCE centres to obtain an explicit pledge from parents to commit to respectful and responsive care and safety and security of children and refrain and prevent any form of exploitation within as well as outside the ECD centres.
- The Ministries of education, in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and Provincial Ministries of Education through the PAEs of ECCE shall ensure that all ECCE centres refrain from propagating any form of extremist ideas, antisocial attitudes or behaviours that lead to ethnic or religious disharmony and have detrimental effects on peace and harmony of the society.
- The Ministries of education, in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and Provincial Ministries of Education through the PAEs of ECCE shall facilitate the establishment of national-level Ethical Review Committees (ERC) at the NEC and make mandatory for any research group/donor-funded project teams to obtain prior approval from the ERC of the NEC to ensure that children in ECCE centres are not exploited in research and/or development activities.

Core Area-ECCE 7: Parents, Family, and Community Involvement

Policy Context

In Sri Lanka, the importance of parental, family, and community involvement in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is recognized as a key factor in enhancing the quality and accessibility of early education. The responsibility of early childhood education should not be limited to the state. The active participation of parents, caregivers, Local Government Authorities, health sector professionals (such as public health doctors, public Health Inspectors,

midwives, and nurses), Grama Niladari, and other stakeholders in creating a supportive and enriching learning environment is vital. Parental and community engagement is important in achieving the goals of universal access to quality early childhood education, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State recognises parents and community are key stakeholders in Early Childhood Care and Education and promotes their collaboration in supporting children’s learning at home and in the community.

DP 2: The State pledges to foster partnerships between the government and non-government entities in strengthening parent and community engagement in ECCE.

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 7.1: A culture where an active parental and community engagement in Early Childhood Education should be encouraged to ensuring they are empowered to support their children’s development at home and in the community.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The MOE in collaboration with NSECD, the universities, higher education institutions and non-government organisations shall develop curricula and tools; and deliver training programs for parents and caregivers that equip them with the skills and knowledge to actively support their children’s education, including understanding early childhood development, child-centred teaching approaches, and non-formal education methods.
- The NSECD with the support of community based organisations shall set up local forums and committees where parents, caregivers, and community members can actively engage in identifying needs, planning interventions, and monitoring the progress of ECCE programs in their areas.

Policy-ECCE 7.2: A system should be set up to ensure the access to information and resources for the parents and communities.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of MOE shall ensure parents and communities, particularly in underserved areas; have access to information regarding the importance of early childhood education, child development, and available support services.
- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of MOE and Provincial Ministries of Education through PAEs shall develop and distribute educational materials to guide parents in supporting their child’s learning at home, with a focus on developing literacy, numeracy, and social–emotional skills.

Core Area-ECCE 8: Data, Research, and Evaluation

Policy Context

Collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data improves the quality, access, and inclusivity of ECCE. By strengthening national data collection and research systems, the government aims to monitor ECCE progress, identify gaps, and inform policy decisions that align with both national and international goals for education. Data collection on children's learning outcomes, programme effectiveness, and resource allocation is critical to understand the impact of ECCE services, particularly in underserved areas.

A systematic monitoring and evaluation is required to track the implementation of ECCE programmes and ensure the alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Directive Principles

DP 1: The State recognises the need of strengthening data collection systems to ensure comprehensive and transparent data availability that can inform evidence-based policy decisions, programme design, and resource distribution.

DP 2: The State promotes for systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement of ECCE programmes and services, as well as to ensure they meet the developmental needs of all children, particularly in underserved communities

Policies and Strategies

Policy-ECCE 8.1: Evidenced based policy decisions, programme designing, and resource distribution should be recognised for the development of ECCE.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Provincial Ministries of Education should establish a national data collection system that covers children's learning outcomes, programme effectiveness, student enrolments and resource allocation. This system should ensure the inclusivity and equity in data relating to the subject-matters covered.
- The NSECD under the technical advice and guidance of the Ministry of Education should establish and maintain a database on ECCE and take timely steps to update the database (at least in every five years) ensuring accurate and up-to-date information for operational efficiency of ECCE programmes and services.
- The Ministry of Education and NSECD in collaboration with the Provincial Ministries of Education should build data and research capacity of educators and administrators at

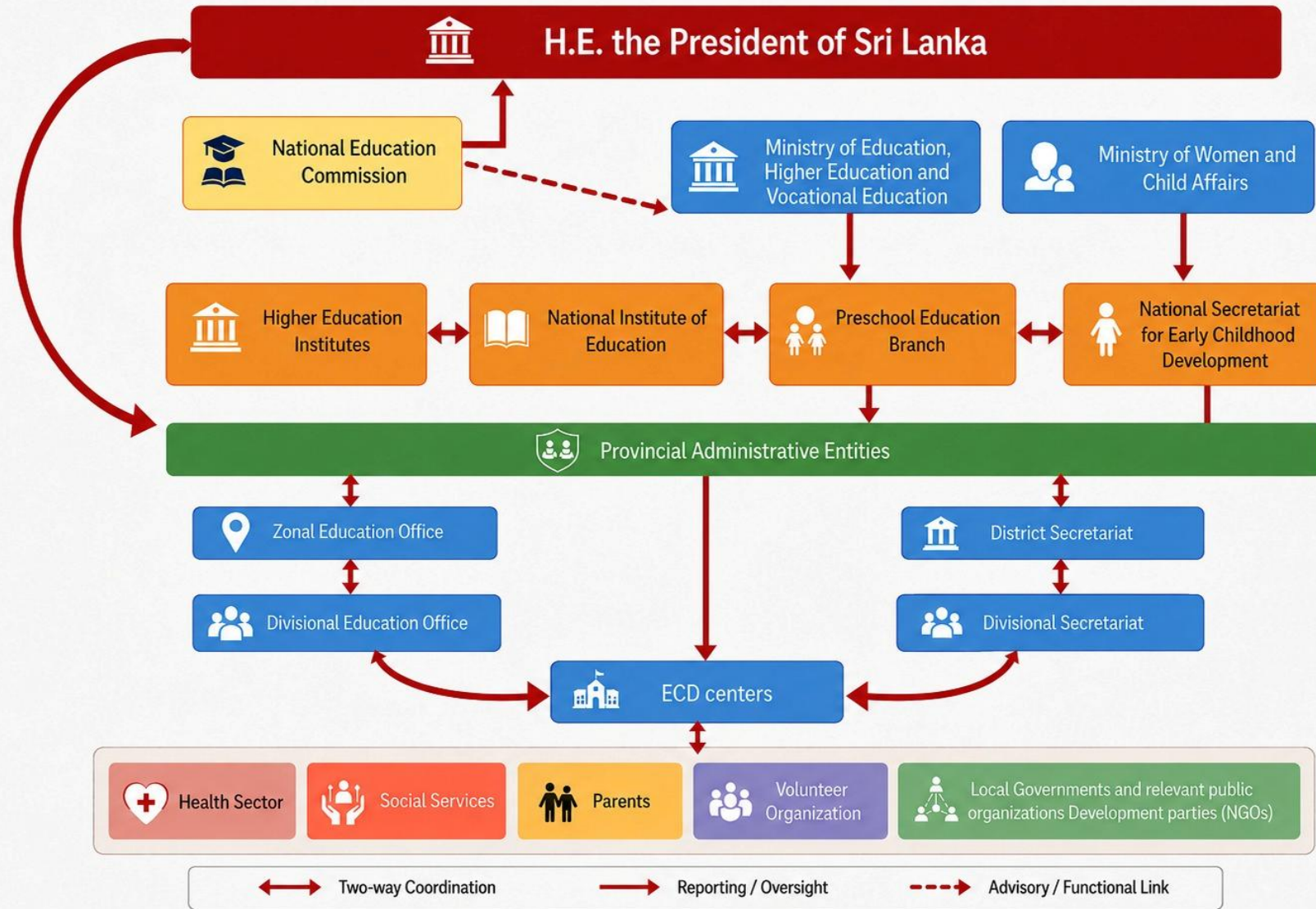
national and provincial levels on ECCE programmes and services. The Ministry of Education and NSECD in collaboration with the Provincial Ministries of Education should incorporate research and evaluation findings to revise ongoing policy and programmes as well as to ensure and upgrade the quality of ECCE

Policy-ECCE 8.2: A systematic mechanism of continuous monitoring and evaluation should be implemented to assess the effectiveness, inclusivity, and quality of ECCE programmes and services.

Recommended Strategic Activities

- The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Provincial Ministries of Education should establish frameworks for ensuring the transparency and accountability of data collection, analysis, and research processes.

Proposed institutional and regulatory framework for the ECCE sector -



PRESCHOOL UNIT OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, HIGHER EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The primary function of the Preschool Unit is to guide the formulation of policies and regulation, reforms and projects activities, promote compliance of key stakeholders with such policies and regulation and also facilitate the implementation reforms and projects launched while monitoring the ECCE services of the entire country through the process of the regular review.

1. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall be the authoritative body to initiate the processes of review of policy documents prepared by the NEC and endorse them as a national policy.
2. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall guide the NSECD in liaison with the NIE to prepare curricula and instructional material and teachers' guides for ECD teachers and teacher training centres. Such curricula shall be evaluated by the Preschool Unit and endorsed as national guides.
3. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall develop minimum standards for ECD centres, teacher training centres, and ECD material producers and establish a method of registration and monitoring at the provincial and national levels.
4. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall facilitate the development of a system and procedure for quality assurance and accreditation of ECCE centres by the NEC and facilitate the implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation process through the National Quality Assurance Council (NQAC) established at the NEC and Provincial Quality Assurance Units (PQAUs) at the provincial level.
5. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall advice and monitor the implementation of approved policies and strategies, curricula, and quality assurance and accreditation process through the NSECD through a process of regular review.
6. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall facilitate NSECD to ensure progressive development of the ECCE sector by offering continuous professional development programmes for ECCE staff, promoting innovations and education research, establishing a process of self-evaluation, and monitoring of ECD centres at national and provincial levels.
7. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall facilitate the NSECD to develop parents' education material in collaboration with the NIE and relevant health sector agencies, and disseminate them at national and provincial levels in collaboration with Provincial Administrative Entities of ECCE (PAEs of ECCE) and the health sector agencies.
8. The Preschool Unit - MOE shall also entertain communication with grassroot-level stakeholders that include parents, teachers, community leaders, volunteer organizations

and responsible officers and listen to their opinions, grievances and suggestion, and take such inputs into consideration in proposing modifications for existing programmes, and designing new interventions/programmes.

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (NSECD)

The NSECD serves as the operational arm of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs shall function as the central focal point and catalytic unit of the ECCE sector of the country.

1. The NSECD shall function as the coordinating agency in the process of evaluation of policy documents drafted by the NEC.
2. The NSECD shall collaborate and coordinate with the NIE in the process of ECE curriculum development and teachers' guide preparation, and shall also liaise with the NIE in the design and conduct of pre-service and in-service training programmes for preschool teachers.
3. The NSECD shall collaborate with the NIE and NEC and Provincial Administrative Entities in charge of ECCE (PAEs of ECCE) in the development of minimum standards for ECCE centres, ECE teacher training centres and programmes, and ECD material production and submit them to the Preschool Unit for review and approval.
4. The NSECD shall collaborate with the NEC to develop a quality assurance and accreditation framework (i.e. criteria, elements, best practices and standards) for the quality assurance and accreditation process of ECCE centres and ECCE teacher training centres, and facilitate the implementation of the quality assurance and accreditation system by the Provincial Quality Assurance Units (PQAUs) under the guidance of the National Quality Assurance Council (NQAC) of the NEC.
5. The NSECD shall promote the implementation of the approved policy and strategies, curricula, and quality assurance and accreditation mechanism through its network of ECCE officers in liaison with the PAEs of ECCE, and shall regularly report to Preschool Unit the progress of implementation of approved projects and programmes.
6. The NSECD shall liaise with the Provincial Administrative Entities of ECCE in implementing nationally prescribed regulations, standards and guidelines, policies and strategies, curricula, and instructional guides.
7. The NSECD shall develop strategic activity plans and programmes to ensure equity in the provision of programmes for continuous professional development of ECCE teachers of the entire country by coordinating with the national level training institutions while promoting and supporting provincial/regional level CPD activities

8. The NSECD in liaison with NEC and NIE shall promote research and innovations, and shall organize regular national-level research conferences in liaison with NEC, NIE and universities.
9. The NSECD shall liaise with the NIE and Ministry of Health in the development of parents' education material, and disseminate them at the national and provincial levels in collaboration with the PAEs of ECCE and the health sector agencies.

PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITIES ON ECCE

The Provincial administrative entities shall function as the authority in regulating all ECCE activities in the respective provinces in compliance and synchrony with national policies and guidelines. It shall take the responsibility of designing and promoting development activities and monitoring the progressive development of ECCE activities in their respective provinces. Provincial authorities are also required to contribute to the development of national policies and strategies.

1. The Provincial Administrative Entity (PAE) established for ECCE in each province shall be responsible for regulating, promoting and monitoring all ECCE activities.
2. The Head of the PAE of ECCE in the respective province should ensure the compliance of ECCE centres, teacher training centres and ECCE material production with the nationally prescribed curricula, regulations, standards, and guidelines.
3. The Head of the PAE of ECCE in the respective province shall ensure all the ECCE centres register their operations with the provincial authorities, and the process of registration shall be made through a process of simultaneous registration at the provincial and national levels.
4. The PAEs of ECCE shall liaise with the NSECD and collaborate very closely with provincial-level health, social service and child protection authorities in dealing with all matters related to the ECCE sector.
5. The PAEs of ECCE shall share information on registration, quality assurance assessments and all other activities with NSECD and participate in regular progress reviews at the central level.
6. The NSECD through PAEs of ECCE of respective provinces shall establish Provincial Quality Assurance Units (PQAUs) in respective provinces by adopting the NEC-prescribed quality assurance and accreditation system and accompanying guidelines.
7. Provincial Quality Assurance Unit (PQAU) of each province shall conduct quality assurance and accreditation of ECCE centres under the guidance and assistance from the National Quality Assurance Council (NQAC) of the NEC.

8. The PAEs of ECCE shall facilitate provincial-level teacher training centres to conduct progressively evolving CPD programmes and education research activities in the respective provinces. They should harness opportunities to engage in national-level programmes for CPD provided and education research conducted by the NSECD, NIE, NEC, and higher education institutes.
9. The PAEs of ECCE shall implement parent education programmes at the provincial level in liaison with the ECCE centres.

DISTRICT SECRETARIATE

1. District Secretariats shall support the MWCA in the implementation of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) policy at district level by facilitating coordination, supervision, and operational support for ECCD programmes, including preschool education, within their respective districts.
2. Officers appointed by the MWCA and stationed within District Secretariats shall function as district-level coordinators for ECCD programmes. They shall work in close collaboration with Provincial Administrative Entities (PAEs) and other relevant provincial regulatory bodies to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, and coordination of ECCD activities.
3. District Secretariats shall establish the mechanism for reporting all matters related to preschool education and ECCD implementation to the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD). All such reports shall also be formally shared with the respective provincial regulatory bodies in accordance with established reporting lines and administrative procedures.

DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT

1. Divisional Secretariats (DS Divisions) shall support the implementation of ECCD initiatives at the local level by facilitating coordination and collaboration among the Preschool Education Unit (PEU), National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD), provincial regulatory bodies, and relevant government, non-governmental, and community stakeholders, in accordance with national policies and guidelines.
2. ECD officers and assistants stationed within Divisional Secretariats shall be responsible for implementing assigned duties related early childhood care and education as directed

by the NSECD and provincial regulatory bodies. They shall ensure effective operational support for ECCD activities within their respective divisions.

3. ECD officers shall report directly to the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Development (NSECD) on all matters relating to ECCD implementation and divisional responsibilities. In addition, when coordinating with provincial regulatory bodies, they shall submit detailed reports to the NSECD while simultaneously providing copies to the respective provincial authorities in accordance with established reporting procedures.

STAKEHOLDERS AT GRASSROOT-LEVEL

1. Officers in the health sector, social services, and local administrative authorities (Grama Seva Niladhari/Police) as well as parents, and volunteer organizations shall cooperate and collaborate in the implementation of the ECCE policy at the grassroot-level.
2. The PAEs of ECCE shall liaise with divisional-level health, social service and child protection authorities working of the respective provinces at the grassroot-level and shall collaborate with the NSECD in dealing with all matters related to the ECCE sector.
3. Parents and other stakeholders at the ground-level should be empowered to engage in ECCE activities and report their grievances and submit their suggestions to PAEs of ECCE, NSECD, and the Ministry in-charge of the subject of Child Affairs and Ministry of Education.
4. Parents should be provided with a handbook by the respective ECCE centres that contains the philosophy of ECCE, centre calendar and the curriculum adopted.
5. All ECCE centres are expected to provide parent the education material produced and issued by the NSECD to the parents, and they, the parents in turn are expected to abide by the prescribed guidelines.

Gaps and alignments of the policy proposals on ECCE

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
ECCE1 Access, and Equity and Inclusiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all children, regardless of background or ability, have access to quality, affordable early ECCE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lack of targeted, concrete measures to address systemic barriers to ECCE access, including transportation, distance, and financial constraints. 	<p>Assess Existing Barriers</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct surveys or focus groups with families to identify the most pressing barriers to ECCE access (transportation, cost, distance, etc.). Map out areas where ECCE services are scarce and where transportation options are limited. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand ECCE centres in underserved areas, especially rural or low-income neighbourhoods. Create a mobile ECCE unit that travels to remote areas, providing services to children directly in their communities. Train ECCE staff in inclusivity, diversity, and disability awareness to ensure all children, regardless of background or need, can access and benefit from the programs. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish long-term, sustainable funding mechanisms for ECCE programs (such as a national-level initiative) to ensure ongoing financial support.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce community-led ECCE solutions that can address specific local needs, such as after-school programs or parent-child programs, to ensure flexibility and adaptability in rural or underserved areas.
ECCE2 Holistic Development- Physical, Cognitive, and Socio-emotional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of ECCE includes not only academic skills, but also social -emotional, cognitive (Language, Intelligence, Problem solving, creativity, logical thinking, perception memory etc.), and physical development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear guidelines or implementation measures for interdisciplinary curricula or teacher professional development focused on holistic approaches. 	<p>Stakeholder Consultations and Needs Assessment</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct Stakeholder Consultations and Needs Assessment to identify areas where holistic development is already being integrated and where there is a lack of focus on certain developmental domains Develop simple, age-appropriate learning modules that incorporate all aspects of child development and test them with teachers in real classrooms. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop clear, evidence-based guidelines for integrating holistic development into ECCE curricula. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement National Standards for Holistic Development Engage parents and communities through workshops and resources to help them support their children's physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development at home basis.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
<p>ECCE3 Quality of Early Childhood Care and Education-Structure, Processes and Outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes quality by promoting child-centred, play-based approaches and the smooth transition to formal schooling. • Advocates for ensuring that the outcomes of ECCE programs reflect children’s holistic development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of a concrete mechanism to improve teacher quality, including recruitment, training, and remuneration. • No mention of professional development programs, or improving the social recognition and status of preschool teachers. 	<p>Teacher capacity development (separate teacher CPD)</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct short, focused workshops on specific areas such as play-based learning, child psychology, and inclusive education. • Offer online CPD courses in core areas. • Initiate mentorship programmes with experienced teachers. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop District-level CPD centres and a digital platform for CPD • Partner with universities and non-government agencies to offer specialized teacher training programmes <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a national framework for CPD based on global good practices. • Develop an accreditation system for CPD courses to ensure quality and relevance. <p>ECCD officers’ career development</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct short-term professional development workshops for ECCD officers on specific topics such as monitoring and evaluation, child safeguarding, and inclusive education.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design an online platform for ECCD officers to access resources and training materials. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create platforms for ECCD officers to exchange good practices and discuss challenges with their peers. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear career development pathway for ECCD officers based on experience, training, and performance. • Implement a national mentorship programme.
<p>ECCE4 Benchmarking and Quality Assurance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the importance of international standards in evaluating ECCE programs and setting benchmarks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lack of a comprehensive approach to assessing and improving the quality of ECCE services on a national level. • No clear mechanism for ensuring the uniformity of quality across all providers. • Absence of a monitoring and evaluation system to assess the implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum and play-based teaching methods. 	<p>Curriculum and Pedagogy</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update existing curricula to ensure alignment with modern educational standards and inclusive practices. • Train teachers on implementing the updated curriculum and pedagogy methods. • Promote the use of teaching aids, play materials, and resources to support the implementation of the curriculum. • Make sure teachers develop and follow well-structured daily plans that align with developmentally appropriate practices.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
			<p>Mid-term measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piloting of new curriculum models in select districts/schools. • Train teachers on implementing the new curriculum with a focus on inquiry-based learning and problem-solving. • Encourage schools to adopt innovative pedagogies that focus on holistic child development. <p>Long-term measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a flexible, child-centred, and inclusive national curriculum that includes play-based and activity oriented learning, critical thinking, and social-emotional development. • Update the curriculum based on research and global good practices to cater to evolving societal and educational needs. • Implement the child to child approach to improve ECCD establish connection with adult children in formal schools to encounter a smooth transition from preschool to primary education <p>Monitoring and supervision</p> <p>Short-term measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase monitoring visits with a clear purpose and outcomes.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train existing ECCD officers on the standardized assessment tools and guidelines. • Set up a system for reporting and addressing immediate concerns in ECCE centres. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an advanced training for the existing group of supervisors and ECCD officers for more effective monitoring visits, providing better feedback and support to ECCE centres. • Introduce online monitoring platforms allowing real-time reporting and data sharing. • Introduce a reward system for high-performing centres. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a comprehensive national monitoring system that ensures the continuous evaluation of ECCE centres, with regular reporting and accountability measures. • Develop a national database for tracking and monitoring outcomes.
ECCE5 Financing of Early Childhood Care and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasises adequate and equitable funding for ECCE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacking clear strategies to ensure fair resource distribution and targeted investments in underserved areas. e.g., strengthening government regulation, coordination, and oversight 	<p>Conduct a Financial Needs Assessment</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a detailed assessment to identify gaps in ECCE funding, including the distribution of existing funding, recognising underserved regions, and types of resources needed

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
		mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create guidelines outlining how resources should be distributed to ECCE centres <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen financial mechanisms through partnerships with international donors, local NGOs, and community organizations <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a National ECCE Financing Framework that ensures sustainable and equitable financing for ECCE
ECCE6 Regulation, and Governance and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizes on effective, accountable systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks clear mechanisms for enforcement and specific national standards to ensure compliance and accountability. • Fails to provide detailed roles for various stakeholders (government, private sector, local communities, etc.) in service provision. • Does not outline responsibilities for different aspects (e.g., curriculum design, teacher training, monitoring). • Lacks clear legal requirements for 	<p>Establishment of Standards (Certification)</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a set of basic quality standards for ECCE centres and provide clear guidelines/ SOP for centres to follow. • Train administrators and teachers on certification requirements. • Conduct initial inspections and assessments of existing ECCE centres to assess current adherence to standards. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch pilot certification programmes in select districts to test the standards and certification process. • Establish incentives for ECCE centres to obtain certification. e.g., professional development opportunities and government recognition.

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
		<p>stakeholders to adhere to quality standards and other ECCE regulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a comprehensive database to track and monitor certification status and compliance. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a national certification system for all ECCE centres, ensuring they meet minimum standards for quality care and education, and inclusiveness. • Develop an independent regulatory agency to audit all ECCE centres. <p>Set up standards</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an audit of existing ECCE centres to assess current adherence to minimum standards. • Review and update the existing national guidelines for ECCE. • Provide resources and training to help ECCE centres meet baseline standards for facilities and teaching. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a pilot test of the new standards in especially in rural areas/underserved communities, to identify challenges and improve the process. • Train ECCE centres' administrators on the new standards. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive national framework for

Core Area	Alignments	Gaps	Recommended Strategic activities
			<p>ECCE standards prescribing minimum standards for infrastructure, safety, and child care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a mechanism to monitor and enforce these standards to ensure consistency and fairness across all provinces.
<p>Recommended policy area 1: Parental and community involvement (Community health sector-MOH officials, local service authorities ,GS and police.)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fails to provide strategies for engaging parents in their children's development and education. e.g., parent-teacher interactions, community outreach, or parental education programs. 	<p>Parental Awareness (play based activities)</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct awareness campaigns for parents on the benefits of play-based learning through electronic and digital media channels. • Organize parent-teacher meetings and workshops to discuss the importance of play-based activities in child development. • Provide parents with easy-to-follow guides on how to promote play at home. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train teachers to effectively engage with parents and provide them with strategies to support their children's learning through play at home. • Create online practical tools for parents to incorporate play into daily activities. • Distribute parental awareness booklets. <p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate parental educational programmes to the national ECCE framework.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make parental involvement a component of the curriculum, requiring ECCE centres to promote and monitor parental participation.
<p>Recommended policy area 2: Data, research, and evaluation</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strategy for continuous improvement through data, research, and evaluation to support quality in policy and practice. 	<p>A Centralized ECCE Database for informed policy and practices</p> <p><i>Short-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key ECCE indicators (e.g., enrolment, teacher qualifications, facility standards etc.). • Undertake a quick assessment of the quality of ECCE programs and facilities, enrolments, and resources and update the existing data (collected in 2016) for national mapping of the data on ECCE programmes and services. • Equip educators and administrators on basic data collection, entry, and reporting techniques. <p><i>Mid-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an integrated, inclusive, user-friendly national database on ECCE. • Develop a periodical reporting system for continuous maintaining of the database. • Disseminate research and evaluation findings with stakeholders on periodical basis

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			<p><i>Long-term measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate research and evaluation findings for ongoing policy and programme revisions • Line up local ECCE data with international standards. • Establish sustainable funding mechanism in using public-private partnership for ongoing ECCE research and evaluation.