



NATIONAL POLICY ON PRESCHOOL EDUCATION



**NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION
SRI LANKA
2019**



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FOREWORD

At the moment, there is no Government Policy on Preschool Education in Sri Lanka and therefore even the nomenclature of pre-schools widely varies. For example, different terms such as Kindergarten, Preschool, Nursery, Child Development Centre and Montessori are being used. The media of instruction as well as standards also differ from institution to institution.

In this context, it is imperative that a policy on Preschool education is evolved by the National Education Commission which has the Prime-responsibility to formulate policies on all aspects of education under the National Education Act, No. 19 of 1991.

This policy document which has been prepared by consulting all the relevant stake-holders was approved by the Standing Committee on General Education and the National Education Commission prior to its publication.

I profusely thank the team which prepared the document under the expert guidance of Dr. G. B. Gunawardena, Vice Chairman (Policy).

Prof. W. I. Siriweera

Chairman

National Education Commission

17-09-2019.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preschool Education in Sri Lanka has moved without the guidance of a coherently enunciated education policy. The policy developed by the National Education Commission is based on the current research and consultation of all institutions and organizations engaged in preschool education in Sri Lanka. As Preschool Education comes within the context of Early Childhood Care and Development, the National Education Commission worked very closely and jointly with the Children Secretariat and also the Directors in Charge of Preschool Education in all the provinces.

I wish to extend my deep appreciation to all those who contributed towards the formulation of this policy and in particular Chairman, Vice Chairman (Planning), Members of the Commission, General Education Standing Committee and NEC Staff.

I also wish to extend my deep appreciation of the guidance provided by two eminent consultants, Professor Elsie Kotalawala and Dr. Indrani Talagala and the support provided by UNICEF in funding a part of this project.

Dr. G. B. Gunawardena

Vice Chairman (Policy)

National Education Commission

EXTRACTS FROM THE NATIONAL EDUCATION COMMISSION ACT, NO. 19 OF 1991

The National Education Commission and its Functions

- (1) The functions of the Commission shall be -
 - (a) 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 Educational Policy;
 - (b) to review and analyse periodically, the National Educational Policy and Plan or plans in operation and where necessary, to recommend to the President, changes in such Policy, Plan or Plans;
 - (c) to advise the President on any other matter relating to education which may be referred to it by the President, for its advice.

- (2) Without prejudice to the generality of the matters in respect of which recommendations may be made by the Commission under subsection (1), the Commission may make recommendations to the President on the following matters:-
 - (a) the changes in curricula and teaching methods in educational institutions that are necessary to match education to employment, industry and social needs;
 - (b) the adequacy of guidance and counselling to students in educational institutions, to enable them to develop their potential to the full;
 - (c) the measures necessary to strengthen the links between educational institutions and the community;

- (d) the development of educational institutions as resource centres for all round human development in the community;
- (e) the measures necessary to reduce area-wise disparities among schools;
- (f) the measures necessary to enhance the professional standing of teachers and other education service personnel;
- (g) the alternate programmes that could be provided for the benefit of the children leaving primary and secondary schools prematurely, to enable them to develop their potential to the full;
- (h) the changes in curricula necessary to foster the cultural and religious aspirations of students of all communities and religions;
- (i) the legislative changes necessary to give effect to any such recommendations.

The National Education Policy includes the following matters: -

Aims and goals of education; the structure of the educational system-preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary, higher, informal, non-formal, adult, special, professional and religious; the establishment, location and distribution of educational institutions, including methods and criteria for admission of students and recruitment of teachers; the content of education, including medium of instruction, diversification of curricula, text books and learning materials, the place of religious knowledge, observance and practice, assessment and evaluation, the examination system, certificates, diplomas and academic awards and recognition of qualifications; recruitment, placement, disciplinary control and professional growth of education service personnel, including teachers, para-educational personnel, supervisors, and administrators; resources for education, including the mobilization of community participation; and ancillary services, Community participation; and ancillary services for education including mid-day meals, health and dental services, physical education and sports.

The Commission shall consist of the following:-

- (a) the Chairman of the University Grants Commission established by the Universities Act, No. 16 of 1978;
- (b) the Chairman of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission established by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act, No. 20 of 1990.
- (c) a member appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Minister in charge of the subject of Education and Higher Education;
- (d) a member appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Minister in charge of the subject of Finance;
- (e) a member appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Minister in charge of the subject of Provincial Councils;
- (f) ten other members who shall be appointed by the President from among persons who have shown capacity in the fields of Education, Administration or Management or have achieved distinction in any profession. The Chairman, the Vice Chairman (Policy) and the Vice Chairman (Planning) appointed under Section 5 shall work full time for the Commission.

PREAMBLE

The National Policy on Preschool Education sets a long-term vision for Sri Lanka's preschool sector; considers reforms and developments to the sector within broader social change; clarifies terminology, parameters and components of preschool education in the country; and provides a framework with actionable objectives to enhance access, improve quality, engage with parents and families, be data-driven and manage finances and personnel; and aims to strengthen leadership, governance and coordination structures at national and provincial levels, to ensure that every preschool-aged child thrives and learns in an environment dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

ACRONYMS

CRC	-	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DAP	-	Developmentally Appropriate Practices
ECCD	-	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECDS	-	Early Childhood Development Standards
ECE	-	Early Childhood Education
EFA	-	Education for All
ELAC	-	Early Learning Advisory Committee
EMIS	-	Education Management Information System
NAEYC	-	National Association for the Education of Young Children
NCC	-	National Coordination Committee
NEC	-	National Education Commission
NGO	-	Non-governmental organisation
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Fund

1. INTRODUCTION

The early years of a child’s life are foundational to their lifelong progress. With good health and nutrition, a safe, secure and responsive home environment and opportunities for early learning, children grow, learn and thrive. Leading economists agree that high quality early childhood programmes can be life changing for children; and can generate benefits in better health and education outcomes, lower crime and higher individual earnings when they become adults.

Sri Lanka’s National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) defines early childhood as the period from conception to the age of five.¹ This period is marked by impressive growth in a child’s brain, influenced both by the environment in which children grow up, and the people that surround them. Therefore, the quality of the experiences that children have in their early life is strongly correlated to the development of their brain’s architecture. For that, it is important for children to have appropriate, growth-promoting early experiences, through responsive interactions with caring parents and caregivers, and, as they grow up, with their teachers at a preschool.

Research reveals that children enrolled in at least one year of preschool education or Early Childhood Education (ECE) are more likely to develop the critical skills they need to succeed in school, 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 adulthood.² Moreover, data unequivocally supports the notion that investments in high-quality early childhood services save costly expenditures for compensatory services over time.³ The investment in young children, then, is a powerful contributing factor for cost-effective, child-positive country development. Universal provision of preschool education is often thought to be the base for providing equal opportunities for all children.

For these reasons, multinational organisations have made strong efforts to support the advancement of ECE throughout the world, through the development of major

1 Sri Lanka, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development, *National Early Childhood Care and Development Policy* (Colombo, 2019).

2 United Nations Children’s Fund, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education* (New York, UNICEF, 2019).

3 Jorge Luis García, James J. Heckman, Duncan Ermini Leaf and María José Prados, “Quantifying the Life-Cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program”, NBER Working Paper No. w23479 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, National Bureau of Economic Affairs, 2017).

guideline documents.⁴ Sri Lanka is a party to several key international legal instruments, recommendations, declarations, and frameworks for action supporting education, and is therefore bound to advance their objectives, particularly on children’s right to education, including quality preschool education.

Importantly, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises education as a legal right for every child, on the basis of equal opportunity. Its General Comment No. 1 (2001) explains that the goal of education is to “empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence”, and insists upon the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and reflect the rights and inherent dignity of the child. The CRC’s General Comment No. 7 (2005): Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood interprets the right to education during early childhood as beginning at birth, and closely linked to children’s right to maximum development. It calls on State parties to direct education to the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, without discrimination of any kind. In reaffirming the vision of the World Declaration on Education For All (EFA) ‘to bring the benefits of education to “every citizen in every society”’, the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments adopted by the World Education Forum in 2000, commits to expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, as its first goal. Overall, a country’s progress towards reaching every EFA goal is intrinsically linked to the pace of achieving this goal. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), is also applicable to preschool-aged children, and protects the right to education of persons with disabilities, proclaims the right to inclusive education and prescribes the steps that have to be taken to this end. This article provides not only that children with disabilities should not be discriminated against, but also that they should be able to participate in the general education system. The new global agenda to end all forms of poverty, and the universal blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all, the Sustainable Development Goals of 2016, reaffirm the international communities’ focus on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, through its Goal 4. The Goal’s constituent target 4.2 calls on countries to 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 by 2030.

Furthermore, The Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka declares that the State shall promote with special care the interest of children and youth so as to ensure their full development, physical, mental, moral, religious and social, and to protect them from exploitation and discrimination.

⁴ *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and Right to Education Initiative, Right to education handbook (France, UNESCO, 2019).*

The realisation of these rights and goals enshrined in international and national instruments, immediately or progressively, requires concerted efforts to increase enrolment, improve quality and intelligently fund and manage the preschool sector in Sri Lanka.

1.1 Preschool education policy in the national context

The Children's Secretariat, established in 1979, and now a statutory agency of the ministry for children's affairs, is responsible for ECCD policy and programme formulation, coordination and evaluation. In 2004, it presented the 'National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development' as the first national policy statement focusing on the holistic development of children from conception to five years. The 2019 revision of the National Policy on ECCD recognised the importance of comprehensive and integrated ECD services for young children, and embraced a suite of policy recommendations to improve access to, and quality of, preschool education.

The National Education Commission Act, No. 19 of 1991, under Article 8 (1), vests the Commission with the responsibility to make recommendations and advice to the President to formulate and declare the National Education Policy.

According to Article 2 (2) of the Act, the National Education Policy includes the aims and goals of education; the structure of the educational system - pre-school, primary, secondary tertiary, higher, informal, non-formal, adult, special, professional and religious; the establishment, location and distribution of educational institutions, including methods and criteria for admission of students and recruitment of teachers; the content of education, including medium of instruction, diversification of curricula, text books and learning materials, the place of religious knowledge, observance and practice, assessment and evaluation, the examination system, certificates, diplomas and academic awards and recognition of qualification; recruitment, placement, disciplinary control and professional growth of education service personnel, including teachers, para-education personnel, supervisors and administrators; resources for education, including the mobilisation of community participation; and ancillary services for education including mid-day meals, health and dental services, physical education and sports.

The Provincial Councils, under the 13th Amendment of 1987 to the Constitution of Sri Lanka, are assigned the responsibility to supervise and manage preschools. To exercise this mandate, Provincial Councils have set up provincial authorities, bureaus, or units for ECD or preschools ("Provincial Regulatory Authorities") guided by provincial statutes.

1.2 Contemporary issues in preschool education in Sri Lanka

1

INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, preschools operate as commercial businesses, or are run as not-for-profit organisations. The government sets standards and regulates the sector. It is not compulsory for children in Sri Lanka to receive one or more years of education at a preschool. Preschool education is not a constituent of the formal education policy and administration system.

There are several types of preschools operating in Sri Lanka, applying different labels such as preschool, kindergarten, nursery school, Montessori or child development centre, etc. Their differences range from the environment in which children learn, to the languages and philosophies that guide that learning.

According to the National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka.⁵:

- There are 19,668 preschools. Of these, 71 per cent are managed by private organisations or individuals, 19.8 per cent are managed by public institutions and local government authorities, such as municipal and urban councils, 6.8 per cent by religious organisations and 3 per cent by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). 88.2 per cent of these preschools charge fees.
- 578,160 children from ages two to five years are enrolled in preschools.
- The enrolment rate of three to five-year-old preschool children in Sri Lanka is 55.6 per cent. 50.3 per cent of those enrolled in this age cohort are boys and 49.7 per cent are girls.
- Enrolment rates by sector illustrate that there is a noticeable disparity among urban (67.6 per cent), rural (47.5 per cent) and estate (43.9 per cent) sectors.
- 59.9 per cent of 28, 449 teachers who work in preschools have passed the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination.
- Even though 83 per cent of teachers have completed a professional training of one year or more, 9.5 per cent of current teachers do not have any such qualification.

⁵ Sri Lanka, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, *National Census of Early Childhood Development Centres in Sri Lanka 2016* (Colombo, 2018).

Despite an overall increase in the number of private and publicly provided student places in preschools, given the fact that most preschools are managed by for-profit private service providers in an environment of limited public investment for provision, oversight, regulation and support, the system is poorly designed to align policies and programmes and coordinate decisions.⁶

This has had a detrimental impact on the ability of preschools in Sri Lanka to produce significant, broad, and lasting improvements in children's learning and development.

Several key challenges persist in the preschool sector related to access, quality and governance.

The main challenge in the preschool sector in Sri Lanka is that many children under five do not go to a preschool. In 2017, just 55.6 per cent of three to five-year-old children attended preschool. Further, age disaggregation shows that only 22.6 per cent of three-year olds and 63.4 per cent of four-year olds (one year before official school entry) attended preschool. Increases in attendance in the last ten years have been marginal, and vary greatly by district. Reasons for low attendance rates in some districts may include the unavailability of preschools near the home, high enrolment and tuition fees, and parents not seeing the benefit of a preschool education for their children and thus not demanding such services. Moreover, there are only very few preschools that cater to children with special needs.

The quality of preschool education in Sri Lanka is a key challenge. The quality of a preschool programme and its setting determines how effective it is in helping children learn and develop. Even though some progress has been made in introducing guidelines and standards, the extent to which quality has increased is uneven or generally low. On a spectrum of minimum essential elements for high quality, preschools at the lower end of the spectrum would not have proper infrastructure facilities, while the preschools at the other extreme ensure children's physical wellbeing, but may not offer age-appropriate and individually-appropriate learning programmes. Sri Lanka has Early Childhood Development Standards (ECDS) for three to five-year olds; an essential starting place for quality. However, their acceptance and application as a resource by teachers, parents and all adults who contribute to children's education is selective. An overarching national curriculum framework that all service providers are required to implement is not available. Sri Lanka has introduced guidelines for preschool settings. However, the lack of a nationally driven and enforced quality control mechanism means that the adoption of such guidelines is selective. This has resulted in a national system failing to meet minimum standards for classroom structure, practices and student

6 United Nations Children's Fund, "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, July 2018.

learning. The preschool education system also lacks systematic methods and expertise for monitoring, evaluating and improving programme quality to inform technical assistance and development.

A further issue is that preschool teachers and supporting care workers are often poorly-prepared to deliver quality preschool experiences. Entry qualifications for preschool teaching are currently non-specific, and vaguely defined, and do not require tertiary qualifications. Teacher pay is also not at parity with their primary school counterparts, and there is no established pay scale. There is no career path framework for preschool teachers, and no system of professional certification or periodic accreditation. Numerous trainings offered by the government and other development partners for preschool teachers do not always transfer directly into skills, and are not grounded on assessed training needs. The interactions children have with their teacher are the single most important determinant of early childhood education quality. Therefore, raising the quality of preschool teachers and their professional status in society is a prerequisite for a strong preschool education system.

Limited engagement by parents in their children's preschool education is indicative of the broader community not realizing that meeting the learning outcomes of children is a joint responsibility of both parents and teachers. Parents place relatively less value on the intrinsic benefits of a preschool education, viewing preschools as academic preparation centres for children's entry into primary school.⁷ Not all forms of support and advisory services are available to parents, and teachers also do not have the capacities or the resources to meaningfully engage parents in preschool affairs.

Moreover, data and research on the preschool sector in Sri Lanka is hard to come by, and fragmented across many stakeholders and systems, which makes it difficult for the government to use data for policymaking, efficient resource allocation, and effective public service delivery.

Significant vertical and horizontal coordination challenges and leadership capacity gaps exist across child-serving governmental agencies in Sri Lanka. Although efforts are made to strengthen coordination and institutional capacity, practice falls far short of expectations. Furthermore, administrative decentralization of the preschool system, and the lack of role clarity has led to a patchwork of quality frameworks, standards and progress across provinces and, overlapping roles and responsibilities of front-line workers. Adequate and sustained public investment is necessary to enable preschool services to improve and expand. While it is promising that overall public investment in

⁷ Saurav Dev Bhatta, Roshini Mary Ebenezer, and Quynh T. Nguyen, *Laying the Foundation for early childhood education in Sri Lanka: investing early, investing smartly, and investing for all* (Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, 2014).

education is growing in Sri Lanka, public spending for preschools remains extremely low, lagging behind other middle-income and high-income countries.⁸ Reliance on private funding opens the doors for inequities and instability to persist.

A combination of these key challenges has undermined the consistent provision of quality preschool education throughout the country, making it a matter of urgency that a systemic approach to strengthening the preschool sector be undertaken, framed by a national policy.

8 Halil Dundar, Benoît Millot, Michelle Riboud, Mari Shojo, Harsha Aturupane, Sangeeta Goyal, and Dhushyanth Raju, *Sri Lanka education sector assessment: achievements, challenges, and policy options* (Washington, D.C., World Bank Group, 2017).

2. The National Policy on Preschool Education

2.1 Purpose and guiding principles of the national policy

This national policy demonstrates the government's recognition of the importance of preschool education to a child's development, as a right of every child, and as a public good and public responsibility.

With a vision of 'leaving no-one behind', and acknowledging all children as competent learners and as right bearers that grow and learn in holistic contexts, the national policy commits to instituting and strengthening practical, mutually-reinforcing, and bold strategic approaches to provide quality preschool education in Sri Lanka, embracing progressive, universalist approaches for systems development.

Through this national policy, the government creates the conditions to develop and regulate the preschool sector, to ensure that all preschools in the country meet certain quality standards. It will proactively work to make preschool education accessible to all children in Sri Lanka.

The government invites and supports the participation of private service providers in preschool education in Sri Lanka.

This national policy is applicable to all centre-based preschool programmes aimed at children between three and five years of age.

Through the full implementation of the national policy, Sri Lanka will be able to make it possible for many more children to enrol in high-quality preschool programmes and benefit from quality improvements. They would have the competences to be active citizens in democratic and sustainable societies. Government revenue will be saved. Sri Lanka will have an educated and professional preschool education workforce. Importantly, through a better governed preschool system, Sri Lanka will be able to meet its commitment to SDG Target 4.2: By 2030 to 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, reaffirming the centrality of education for reaching all SDGs.

Guiding principles

The National Policy on Preschool Education is guided by the following universal principles of child development in the realisation of its goals:

- All children have an inherent right to life, survival and development. Their right to education during early childhood begins at birth, and is intrinsically linked to the right to develop to their full potential.
- Every child should be valued and supported equally. To ensure that they are provided with safe and caring environments, a preschool setting shall be free from any form of discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived ethnicity, language, colour, ancestry, national origin, religion, religious practice, parental status, physical or mental disability, gender, or socio-economic conditions.
- Children are treated equally, but special attention should be given in preschool education to children in greatest need and at greatest risk, so they can fulfil their potential, thus helping break pervasive cycles of poverty and vulnerability.
- Child development is holistic, and consists of interdependent dimensions. Therefore, a holistic, integrated approach that addresses a child's multiple needs should be adopted in preschool education.
- Learning is continuous and cumulative, and children learn through play. Therefore, preschool experiences should be joyful and offered through play-based and child-centred activities that honour the choices of children, and their natural ways of learning.
- Children construct their own knowledge. Their learning depends on the quality of the environment provided to them, and on their engagement in planning, participating and evaluating their own learning.
- All children are capable and competent learners, but each child develops at their own pace. Therefore, learning experiences provided to preschool children should be developmentally (age-wise as well as individually) appropriate.
- Children live within a context where their peers, family, community, culture, events and circumstances influence their learning and development. Therefore, the preschool education workforce should be context-sensitive when organizing and delivering learning experiences.
- Child development and learning is a joint responsibility of parents and teachers. Parents' involvement is essential in supporting their children to learn, grow and feel valued in preschool settings as well as in their home environments.
- Children learn better in their mother tongue or home language. Preschool environments should actively adopt and promote the use of each child's mother tongue or home language to allow for a smooth transition between home and preschool.

2.2 The vision and the mission

2

Vision

Every preschool-aged child thrives and learns in an environment dedicated to ensuring they reach their full potential.

Mission

Promote and facilitate high quality, equitable, accessible and affordable preschool education in Sri Lanka for all preschool-aged children, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, through an effective, responsive, accountable and resource-efficient preschool system.

2.3 Specific objectives

The specific interdependent objectives of the national policy are to:

1. Advance equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for all preschool-aged children to help them achieve their full potential.
2. Facilitate high-quality preschool programmes that promote children's optimal development.
3. Improve the qualifications, training and working conditions of the preschool education workforce.
4. Engage parents, family and community as children's first and most enduring educators.
5. Promote the development and use of data and research to support evidence-based decision making and practice.
6. Improve governance and increase allocation of resources for preschool education.

2

THE NATIONAL POLICY ON PRESCHOOL
EDUCATION

3. Areas for action

The six specific objectives of the national policy are pursued through six areas for action. Each area of action is guided by a policy statement with strategies that contribute to the realisation of the policy objectives.

1. Equitable access to preschool education
2. Quality in preschool education
3. Preschool education workforce development
4. Parental, family and community participation
5. Data, research, evaluation and documentation
6. Governance and financing

3.1 Equitable access to preschool education

Policy 1:

All preschool-aged children in Sri Lanka should be ensured equitable access to an inclusive preschool education.

Strategies

- 3.1.1 Facilitate sustainable infrastructure and accessibility improvements to preschools through improved access to credit, training and advisory services.
- 3.1.2 Encourage national and Provincial Regulatory Authorities to prioritise areas of low preschool enrolment, for provision of physical resources to preschools.
- 3.1.3 Strengthen a network of preschools managed by Provincial Regulatory Authorities, to especially cater to children at risk from poverty, disability, violence, disasters, gender biases, institutionalized care, truancy and children residing with their mothers in prison.

- 3.1.4 Facilitate the introduction of subsidies, on a per child basis, to eligible not-for-profit preschools to enrol children of families receiving or eligible to receive support from social protection schemes.
- 3.1.5 Introduce resources and guidance to facilitate inclusive practices in the preschool setting, enabling the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including children with special needs) to benefit from preschool education.
- 3.1.6 Promote practices to improve preschool classroom diversity, representation and cohesive societies.
- 3.1.7 Set up national standards and guidelines for emergency preparedness and response, to ensure continuity of preschool services during and after emergencies.
- 3.1.8 Promote generation of interest in and support for preschool education among policy makers, public officials, investors, entrepreneurs and the public.

3.2 Quality in preschool education

Policy 2:

All preschool-aged children in Sri Lanka should be ensured high-quality learning opportunities that increase their holistic development and school readiness.

Strategies

- 3.2.1 Promote and facilitate effective educational implementation, using the National Early Childhood Development Standards as the foundational guide for preschool curriculum and practices.
- 3.2.2 Promote the development and implementation of a developmentally appropriate national curriculum framework for preschool education, and support its adoption.
- 3.2.3 Promote the use of mother-tongue based education in preschool environments, with the reasonable use of other languages.
- 3.2.4 Develop, promote and facilitate implementation of regulated national quality standards for preschools (infrastructure and service delivery), to create conditions for high quality practices and environments for learning.

- 3.2.5 Develop a standards-based common indicator framework for Provincial Regulatory Authorities to monitor and supervise providers of preschool services.
- 3.2.6 Develop a national rating system for centre-based preschool education service providers. Services will be assessed against the regulated national and provincial quality standards.
- 3.2.7 Promote and facilitate periodic and systematic application of validated assessment tools based on the National Early Childhood Development Standards, to gauge children’s learning, development, and readiness for schooling.
- 3.2.8 Foster linkages between preschools and primary schools, to support children’s smooth transition to primary school.
- 3.2.9 Promote and facilitate investments in child-friendly public spaces and playgrounds, as catalysts for play-based learning.
- 3.2.10 Make available good educational programming in electronic and print media to preschool-aged children.
- 3.2.11 Introduce regulatory measures to assess suitability of educational material (print and electronic) produced with commercial or non-commercial intent, for preschools and preschool-aged children.

3.3 Preschool education workforce development

Policy 3:

All preschool teachers and personnel involved in the capacity of guiding preschool children should be well-qualified, participate in relevant initial and continuous professional development, and supported by efficient and effective policies, decent working conditions, professional autonomy and career pathways.

Strategies

- 3.3.1 Introduce a system for credentialing preschool teachers, to formally recognise an individual’s qualifications for working with children.
- 3.3.2 Establish compensation and benefits standards for preschool teachers, to value and raise the status of their profession.
- 3.3.3 Develop career pathways that provide a road map for preschool teachers to enter and advance in their careers, through increasing

levels of education, experience, demonstrated competencies, and compensation.

- 3.3.4 Facilitate universities, institutes of higher education, institutes of teacher education and other training providers to design and offer programmes for the preschool education workforce at certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate degree-level.
- 3.3.5 Facilitate universities, institutes of higher education, institutes of teacher education and other training providers to offer merit-based scholarships and need-based assistance for the preschool education workforce, for entry-level and advanced learning on early childhood education and child development.
- 3.3.6 Establish a recognition and reward scheme for exemplary early learning leaders and teachers, as well as centres that have excelled in teaching and learning and in their innovative practices.
- 3.3.7 Establish a process for accreditation of pre-service programmes offered to the preschool education workforce.
- 3.3.8 Strengthen provincial ECD resource centres as labs for training and learning for the preschool education workforce.
- 3.3.9 Introduce an induction and orientation programme for public officials appointed to offices with preschool-related work responsibilities.
- 3.3.10 Promote investments in more coordinated and targeted in-service preschool education workforce development programmes, based on pedagogical coaching and learning from practice.

3

Policy

3.4 Parental, family and community participation

Policy 4:

All families and communities should be active participants and collaborators in children's learning and development during the preschool years, working together to strengthen both pre-primary programmes as well as family practices.

4

Policy

Strategies

- 3.4.1 Promote and facilitate national and provincial public awareness campaigns to shape attitudes, values or behaviour of parents, familial parent surrogates (e.g., grandparents, aunts or uncles) and service providers on ECD and preschool education.

- 3.4.2 Facilitate and strengthen comprehensive national and provincial level family and community engagement programmes, to promote children's learning and development in preschool and home settings.
- 3.4.3 Promote engagement of parents in the pedagogical practices related to inclusivity and diversity in the preschool classroom.
- 3.4.4 Promote preschool development committees as platforms for parents and other primary care givers, to engage in decision making and goal setting of preschool management.

3.5 Data, research, evaluation and documentation

Policy 5:

Policy actions should be based on the best available evidence and support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

Strategies

- 3.5.1. Develop an Education Management Information System (EMIS) for preschools. The EMIS will be centrally hosted and provincially managed. The main purpose of the EMIS would be to improve preschool registration, monitoring, analysis, planning and use of the data for decision making, as well as harmonize procedures, indicators and data across the different provinces.
- 3.5.2. Commission a national census of ECD centres.
- 3.5.3. Establish research grants to support research on learning and development of children and pedagogies to strengthen links between research, policy and practice.
- 3.5.4. Facilitate research and evaluation and their dissemination, to innovate and to improve policy as well as preschool education services and the pedagogical infrastructure.
- 3.5.5. Develop guidance for ethical research involving children, and promote compliance to ensure that risk and harm in research is minimised, and that adequate protection of children is ensured.
- 3.5.6. Set up a Professional Learning Community, curated at the national level, to build a collaborative culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

3.6 Governance and financing of preschool education

Policy 6:

Preschool education in Sri Lanka should be ensured through a cohesive and well-aligned system, with effective and accountable governance, and arrangement of national and provincial government budgets, to equitably meet the needs of children and their educators.

Strategies

- 3.6.1 Facilitate introducing a 'Preschool Education Act', to ensure that all children in Sri Lanka have access to high-quality preschool education.
- 3.6.2 Transform the Children's Secretariat into the Department of Early Childhood Development, as a statutory institution under the ministry for children's affairs, with the mandate for national leadership for ECD and ECE.
- 3.6.3 Promote uniformity in the functions, staffing, resourcing, and rules and regulations of the Provincial Regulatory Authorities.
- 3.6.4 Strengthen and streamline the practice of the constitutionally-derived national policy development responsibility of national institutions, as well as ensuring that the supervision of management of all preschools is the responsibility of the provincial councils.
- 3.6.5 Set up national and provincial mechanisms to oversee quality assurance processes for preschool education.
- 3.6.6 Strengthen the institutional and individual capacities of the national and Provincial Regulatory Authorities, by investing more in the professional development of their cadre.
- 3.6.7 Promote multisectoral planning between national and provincial levels and among provinces, and ensure efficiency, coordination, and alignment across programming and financing streams.
- 3.6.8 Foster partnerships with, and facilitate advisory services from, entities of the United Nations system, multilateral development banks, private sector industry, accredited international and local NGOs, academia and civil society organisations.

- 3.6.9 Recognise the importance of education as a public good, and support and encourage the role of private service provision, subject to effective government oversight and regulation.
- 3.6.10 Prioritise and significantly increase consistent domestic funding for early childhood education.
- 3.6.11 Adopt ‘progressive universalism’ principles for distribution to, and use of, ECD/ ECE financing by Provincial Regulatory Authorities.
- 3.6.12 Focus financing on improving quality and assuring equity in the preschool system.
- 3.6.13 Invest across sectors of education, health, nutrition, child protection, water and sanitation and social protection.
- 3.6.14 Facilitate the complementary role of private financing in preschool education.

4. Policy implementation framework

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POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
FRAMEWORK

The central ministry for children’s affairs shall administer the implementation of the National Policy on Preschool Education. The ministry shall be afforded the requisite authority, and provided with adequate resources to fulfil this mandate.

This national policy shall be considered as a contributory thematic policy to the National Policy on ECCD. At the national level, the National Coordination Committee on ECCD (NCC) shall oversee its implementation.

Accordingly, the NCC shall set-up an Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC) to advise, guide and support the central ministry for children’s affairs in administering the implementation of the national policy, in its spirit and intent.

The ELAC shall comprise of the following *ex officio* members:

- ◆ Secretary of the ministry for children’s affairs (to function as Chairperson);
- ◆ Director of the Children’s Secretariat (to function as Secretary);
- ◆ Chairperson of the National Education Commission, or an executive-level representative appointed by the Chairperson;
- ◆ Chairperson of the Finance Commission, or an executive-level representative appointed by the Chairperson;
- ◆ Executive-level representatives appointed by the Secretaries to the Ministries in charge of the subject for:
 - Education;
 - Finance;
 - Health;
 - Social services; and
 - Provincial Councils

- ◆ Directors of Provincial Regulatory Authorities/ Bureau/Units or, relevant executive-level representatives appointed by the Chief Secretaries to the provinces;
- ◆ Director General of the Department of National Planning or a relevant executive-level representative appointed by the Director General; and
- ◆ Director General of the Plantation Human Development Trust or a relevant executive-level representative appointed by the Director General.

The Children’s Secretariat shall function as the Secretariat of the ELAC.

As appropriate, the ELAC shall solicit services and technical expertise from sector experts or constitute working committees to guide the implementation of the National Policy.

The complete mandate of the ELAC shall be established through a Terms of Reference approved by the NCC.

The ELAC shall develop a sector plan for preschool education, to implement the National Policy. The Sector Plan shall identify the lead implementation agency and contributing agencies for all the strategies listed in this National Policy, a timeline for their implementation, an investment plan, and expected results and key indicators of progress, baselines and targets. This Sector Plan shall be reviewed at regular intervals, and updated.

Since observable differences exist in relation to exercising of duties and responsibilities of the Provincial Regulatory Authorities, the National Policy recommends all provinces to adopt common institutional structures, and identical standards, regulatory provisions and systems for monitoring, guided by the shared vision of this National Policy.

This National Policy also acknowledges and encourages the potentiality of Provincial Regulatory Authorities to innovate and improve, and commit to supporting the scale-up of provincially developed new technologies and approaches of preschool education supervision and management.

In the implementation of the national policy, the Provincial Regulatory Authorities shall:

- ◆ Develop time-bound provincial implementation plans aligned to the Sector Plan;
- ◆ Appoint technical committees at the provincial level, as required, to provide advisory services and direction to implement the provincial implementation plan;

- ◆ Include a representative from the ministry of the central government in charge of child affairs in any coordination committee established at the provincial level, to guide the implementation of the provincial implementation plan; and
- ◆ Report back to the NCC through the ELAC on decisions taken, and status with regard to the implementation of the National Policy, through the provincial implementation plans.

Annexures

Annex 1: Glossary of terms and definitions

Child

The Children and Young Persons Ordinance defines a person less than 18 years of age as a child in Sri Lanka.

Child-centred⁹

Child-centred approaches consider each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interest as the foundation for the development of the educational program in an education and care service.

Developmentally appropriate practice¹⁰

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are the result of intentional decisions that early childhood educators and other professionals make to promote the optimal development and learning of each and every child served. These decisions are grouped in five broad categories: 1) creating a caring, equitable community of learners; 2) establishing respectful, reciprocal partnerships with families and communities; 3) observing, documenting and assessing children's development and learning; 4) teaching to enhance each child's development and learning; and 5) planning and implementing an engaging curriculum to meet meaningful goals.

Enabling environments¹¹

Enabling environments in the early years offer stimulating resources, relevant to all the children's cultures and communities, rich learning opportunities through play and playful teaching, and support for children to take risks and explore.

⁹ Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, *Guide to the National Quality Framework* (Sydney, 2018).

¹⁰ National Association for the Education of Young Children, "NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: 2019", Washington, D.C., 2019.

¹¹ *Early Education, Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)* (London, 2012).

Equitable access

Equitable access is the ability of every preschool-aged child in Sri Lanka to receive a preschool education, regardless of their situation.

High-quality preschool programmes

A high-quality preschool programme provides a safe and nurturing environment while promoting the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of children. Such programmes are rated on process - interactions, activities, materials, learning opportunities, and health and safety routines - and structure - the size of each group of children, the adult-child ratio, and the education and training of the teachers and staff.

Holistic development¹²

In a holistic approach to a child's development, attention is paid to children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, as well as cognitive aspects of learning.

Most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 7 (2005): Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, 'most vulnerable children' include girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children belonging to indigenous or minority groups, children from migrant families, children who are orphaned, or lack parental care for other reasons, children living in institutions, children living with mothers in prison, refugee and asylum-seeking children, children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, and children of alcohol- or drug-addicted parents.

'Disadvantaged children' are those whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at a preschool.

Preschool-aged children

Children between ages three and five are considered as preschool-aged children in Sri Lanka.

¹² Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Education and Training, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (2009).

Preschool education or Early Childhood Education¹³

Preschool education or early childhood education provides learning and educational activities with a holistic approach to support children's early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce children to organized instruction outside of the family context, to develop some of the skills needed for academic readiness, and to prepare them for entry into primary education.

Preschool education workforce

The preschool education workforce constitutes of preschool teachers, teacher assistants, public officials of national and provincial authorities/ bureaus / units for ECD/preschools and public officials of the child-serving agencies at the national and provincial levels.

Progressive universalism¹⁴

Progressive universalism means expanding provision of quality education for everyone, while prioritising the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. It provides a guiding principle to inform spending decisions, recognizing the scarcity of public funding.

Annex 2: Drafting of the National Policy on Preschool Education Policy

This policy document was prepared by the National Education Commission with the help of a six-member drafting committee. Whose names are given below.

Dr. G.B. Gunawardena	Vice Chairman (Policy), National Education Commission
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Dr. Indrani Talagala	Former Head, Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Open University of Sri Lanka
Ms. Nayana Senaratne	Director, Children's Secretariat, Ministry of Women & Children's Affairs and Dry Zone Development

¹³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Glossary. Available at <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary> (accessed on 10 July 2019).

¹⁴ The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, *The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World* (2016).

Mr. Rasika Somaweera Education Officer, UNICEF Sri Lanka

Ms. Achala Damayanthi Programme Officer (Policy Research), National Education Commission

Policy drafting committee consultations

The NEC drafted the National Policy based on ideas and recommendations collated through a collaborative process of desk research, sectoral focus-group discussions and national consultations with a broadly representative reference group of sector experts, researchers, ECD practitioners, government officials, administrators and officials from UN agencies and international and national NGOs.

The following is a listing of institutions and organisations, whose functionaries or officials the policy drafting committee met and interacted with during the drafting of the National Policy.

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Women & Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development
- Children's Secretariat
- Department of National Planning
- Open University of Sri Lanka
- National Institute of Education
- Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission
- Provincial Regulatory Authorities
- Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement
- National Children's Education Foundation
- Plantation Human Development Trust
- Representatives from schools, preschools and teacher training providers
- Members of the International Schools of Sri Lanka
- Plan International Sri Lanka
- Save the Children
- UNICEF Sri Lanka
- World Vision Lanka
- Experts in the Field of Preschool Education

Annex 3: Members of the National Education Commission

Emeritus Professor W. I. Siriweera, Chairman	Professor M. A. Nuhuman
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Professor Dayantha Wijeyesekera	Ms. Nayana Nathavitharana
Professor R. U. Halwatura	Ms. V. B. P. K. Weerasinghe
Professor K. Kandasamy	Ms. H. G. Apsara Caldera Secretary of the Commission

Annex 4: Members of the Standing Committee on General Education of the National Education Commission

Dr. G. B. Gunawardena (Chairman)	Dr. S. B. Ekanayaka
Emeritus Professor W. I. Siriweera	Dr. (Ms.) Jayanthi Gunasekera
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Professor Husain Ismail	Mr. S. Kuruppuarachchi
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