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## Preschool education in sri lanka

info@nie.edu.lk +94 117 601 601 Study Objectives The report aims to examine the state of early childhood education in Sri Lanka, assess the policy framework for delivering ECE, and suggest future policy options. It serves multiple purposes by drawing on international literature to justify investment in ECE, providing an overview of the current policy framework and delivery system, conducting a situation analysis of ECE provision, and presenting policy options based on its findings. A committee was formed to review and refine the report, with recommendations expected from their meeting on 11.12.2020. Sri Lankan kids have limited access to quality education due to inadequate preschool teacher training. Only 39% of preschool teachers received proper training, hindering children's development. Organizations like ChildFund Sri Lanka aim to bridge this gap by implementing programs that focus on early childhood development. The Eat, Play, Love initiative enhances health, nutrition, and learning experiences for kids. Additionally, groups such as SOS Children's Villages strive to ensure every child grows up in a stable family environment, providing support for both the child and their family. The Sri Lankan Children Foundation also works tirelessly to uplift underprivileged children's lives by renovating schools, supplying educational materials, and addressing issues caused by natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami. These organizations, along with others, are making significant contributions towards creating a brighter future for Sri Lanka's youth. The literacy rate in Sri Lanka is currently at a high of 93%, thanks to the country's free and mandatory education system for all children up to the ninth grade. However, there are still areas where child education can be improved. Organizations like ChildFund Sri Lanka, SOS Children's Villages, and the Sri Lankan Children Foundation (SLCF) are working hard to make a difference. ChildFund Sri Lanka is one such organization that focuses on implementing programs for "child protection, humanitarian assistance, early childhood development, education, and youth empowerment." Unfortunately, preschool education in Sri Lanka has some issues - only 39% of preschool teachers have received professional training. ChildFund Sri Lanka's Eat, Play, Love program aims to improve health, nutrition, and learning experiences for young children. SOS Children's Villages is another organization that works towards ensuring all children in Sri Lanka grow up in a caring environment with financial security. They estimate that 15,000 kids are living without parental care and 14,000 are not in school due to financial struggles. After 41 years of service, SOS Children's Villages have positively impacted over 17,000 lives of youth and secured the financial stability for around 4,000 children. The Sri Lankan Children Foundation (SLCF) also plays a crucial role in improving life chances for underprivileged kids in Sri Lanka. They aim to help orphans and those affected by epidemics, poverty, and natural disasters like the 2004 tsunami. In 2021, SLCF successfully implemented a program that renovated a school's playground, washroom, and provided educational materials to respond to the COVID-19 lockdown. These organizations, including ChildFund Sri Lanka, SOS Children's Villages, and SLCF, are making significant contributions towards ensuring children in Sri Lanka have access to quality education, which is essential for building a brighter future. In Sri Lanka, there are 12,353 Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers catering to the needs of young children (MCDWA, 2010). The preschool day typically spans between 7:30 AM and 11:45 AM, with the educational qualifications of teachers playing a significant role in shaping the quality of ECCD experiences for Sri Lankan children. Research suggests that NGOs and INGOs can contribute to improving the quality of ECCD services by providing training opportunities for preschool teachers, establishing compliant institutions, and offering scholarships (MCDWA, 2006). However, several challenges impede the provision of high-quality ECCD services in Sri Lanka. These include resource constraints, limitations in learning indicators, gaps in teacher training and competencies, inadequate remuneration and prestige for preschool teachers, and a lack of state sector involvement. Minister of Education Susil Premajayantha emphasizes the importance of early childhood education, highlighting that it is being made compulsory for children aged four years. The government plans to provide assistance for families who cannot afford to pay for ECCD services. Moreover, schools facing closure can operate ECCD centers in their premises, thereby addressing the issue of school closures. In an effort to standardize pre-school education in line with international standards, Minister Premajayantha advocates a change in attitude from viewing preschool as just another educational institution before formal schooling. He also underscores the significance of implementing a school nutrition program that will see a considerable increase in the number of students receiving midday meals by 2024. The education minister emphasized the importance of alleviating the weighty burden of students' school bags by allowing them to keep their textbooks at school and commute freely. This initiative aims to foster a stimulating atmosphere for teachers and students to flourish in their educational pursuits, he said. The minister also stressed the need for caution when comparing this free education system with those that charge fees. Representatives from various organizations including the Ministries of Education and Health, Secretaries, Directors, Principals, World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Food Program, and 'Save the Children' attended this event.

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