

A Critical Evaluation of the Ownership and Responsibilities of Early Childhood Care, Development and Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and Education in Sri Lanka have been considered vital for human development (UNICEF, 2007 cited in Gallardo, 2009). Yet, there is less attention paid to the scrutinised formulation of policies related to this aspect in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, child-related studies conducted in Sri Lanka are limited. This paper aims to contribute to this necessity by conducting a critical evaluation regarding the responsibility of the formulation of ECCD and education policies in Sri Lanka. A qualitative research design was used for this study. Thirteen policy documents related to ECCD and education were critically analysed and interviews were conducted with responsible informants of ECCD and education in order to gather data. The findings exhibited that there was no single designated authority that is responsible for the formulation of policies related to ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, it was noted that the responsibility of ECCD and education-related policy formulation constantly shifted from one authority to another. In addition, it was noted that the responsibility regarding the formulation of policies for different aspects of ECCD and education were delegated to

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different parties. Lack of coordination among these diverse parties had resulted in no clear-cut policies for any of the aspects of ECCD and education. Furthermore, lack of supervision and monitoring had resulted in the non-implementation of the prevalent ECCD and education policies in Sri Lanka. Hence, the requirement for stern and stable ECCD policy formulating and monitoring agents is highlighted in the present study.

Keywords: ECCD, education, ownership, responsibility, policies

Introduction

Sri Lanka has a long history of attempts to provide education for all its citizens. Yet, there has been a limited attention towards Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and education of children who are below the age of 5 years. Even though the concept of formal education originated in the world around the 13th century, the attention to early childhood education and care started later during the 1800s.

Even though ECCD and education are the responsibility of the Children's Secretariat, it appears that many governmental (i.e. NIE, Ministry of Education) and non-governmental organisations (i.e. UNESCO, ARNEC) contribute in developing and maintaining the ECCD in Sri Lanka. These organisations issue different types of policy documents and recommendations for the maintenance and the evaluation of ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. Even though there are policies and regulations available in Sri Lanka regarding ECCD and education, there is no accepted and comprehensive policy targeting early childhood care, development, education and language of the children in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the availability of the policies is limited and there are contradictions in the available policies. Furthermore, there is no identifiable authoritative body which is responsible for ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. Yet, there are implicit policies which are operating in the ECCD centres in Sri Lanka.

This study aims to review the available policy documents from 1986 to 2019 on ECCD and education in Sri Lanka which were

presented by different institutions. Moreover, this study objectifies the ambiguities prevalent in the available policies and attempts to attract the attention of the responsible authorities to this issue. In addition, this study will present a critical evaluation of the delegation of responsibilities regarding ECCD and early childhood education in the country.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Care and Development and Education

Building a solid basis for healthy development in the early years of life is a requirement for better societies around the world (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Early childhood is a critical period in human development. The first few years are considered as a sensitive period in children's cognitive, behavioural, social and physical development (Gowani, 2014). UNESCO defines early childhood as the period from birth to 8 years (UNESCO, 2009 cited in Gallardo, 2009). Knudsen et al. (2006), cited in Elango (2015), argue that antagonistic early childhood environments and experiences create an impact on the human for over a lifetime. Hence, there is a growing necessity and an increasing recognition for early childhood programmes and policies around the world. Boocock (1995) states that, though there is a growing interest for the preschool programmes in the world, preschool facilities and services are not evenly distributed around the world or within countries. He further mentions that "the overall availability and quality of preschool programmes tend to be much higher in rich industrialised nations than in poor developing ones...." (p.95). It is evident that there is an interest among the nations on ECCD even though the developing nations are unable to provide quality early education when compared to the developed ones.

The advancement of early childhood care, development and education depends on the availability of the resources and programmes for children as well as for teachers. As Britto et al. (2011) state, the Conafe preschool programme in Mexico provides rigorous training for teachers who have comparatively low educational qualifications. Simon et al. (2015) state that in Britain,

at least fifty percent of the childcare workforce should be qualified to at least NVQ level 3. Boocock (1995) further positions that French preschool teachers have the same training, same acceptance and salary as French primary school teachers. In contrast, Simon et al. (2015) state that childcare workforce sector is paid low when compared to other occupations in Britain. As Hunzai (2009) affirms, the preschools in Pakistan appoint less academically and professionally qualified teachers because the accepted belief is that teaching younger children is easy and thus, they do not need trained teachers. These findings depict that different countries and nations around the world have different opinions regarding the teachers who teach the young children. As mentioned before, early childhood education is considered as important as formal education. Hence, teachers with similar qualifications and experiences are necessary to teach young children.

Moreover, Lobman et al. (n.d.) conducted a study on reconstructing teacher education to prepare qualified preschool teachers. They state that, even though there is a high demand for preschool teachers, the wide range of rules and regulations regarding the baseline of education needed to be a preschool teacher (Ackerman, 2004 cited in Lobman et al. (n.d.)) have caused a potential shortage of teachers. In contrast, Boocock (1995) indicates that the average number of learners in a preschool classroom in France is 25 where one teacher is allocated for 25 children.

There are variations among the countries when considering the admissions and the availability of ECCD programmes for children. Boocock (1995) comments that in France and Belgium almost 100% of the children are enrolled in preschool programmes compared with 28% of Spanish and Portuguese children of that age. Yet, only about 50% of the children are enrolled in schools in India and even that 50% do not complete the first year. There is a huge tendency in India for children to drop out from school because of child labour and especially, female children stay at home to take care of their younger siblings (Boocock, 1995). On the contrary, Boocock (1995) affirmed that in Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan most children attend

preschool by the age three. Yet, the preschool programmes focus on molding children according to the academic demands of the school. According to Hunzai (2009), in Pakistan, education is divided into two sectors as public and private. It is revealed that there is a huge difference in the quality of education between the sectors, which has created a lot of problems and issues related to providing quality education to young children. Hunzai (ibid) recommends that the government of Pakistan should focus on a number of basic areas in order to develop the effectiveness and productivity of the early childhood education.

There are many governmental and non-governmental institutions that are interested and have tried to create policies for early childhood care and education. In Britto's (2011) perspective, Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes have become a great interest to policymakers, service providers, and families as they have identified that it is an important aspect in human development. A study on policies on Early Childhood Care and Education and their evolution by Vargas-Barón (2014) states that "National ECCE policies are multisectoral" (p.1) and that they focus on the sectors such as education, health, nutrition, sanitation and protection. She further points out that the six countries in South Asia have formulated or adopted multisectoral ECCE policies. Yet, the researcher has not mentioned the names of the countries which have adopted and formulated these multisectoral policies. The organisations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, ARNEC, The Aga Khan Foundation, the Asian Development Bank and various other international and national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are engaged in developing ECCE in the South Asian Region. Yet, the researcher mentions that there are challenges of implementing ECCE policies in this region. She suggests that a lead ministry should be established and it should engage in the policy planning and coordination with other ECCE ministries.

The early childhood policies in the developed countries display ambiguities since there are no administration and evaluation policies. Pianta, Cox, & Snow (2007) cite a study by Mashburn et al. (2008) on the development of academic, language, and social

skills of 4-year-old children in publicly-supported prekindergarten (pre-K) programs in the USA which state that, policies determine many features of preschool programs in their country. “Who is eligible to attend the preschool, minimum qualifications of teachers, additional services that are available to children and their families, the amount and types of teacher professional development and approaches to monitoring programme and classroom quality” (p.732) are determined by the early childhood care and education policies of the particular country. Yet, the researchers point out that there is “no singular definition for or method of evaluating pre-kindergarten (pre-K) quality” (Lamb, 1998; Phillips & Howes, 1987; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000 cited in Mashburn et al., 2008) (p.733). Though the policies seem to be stern and rigid, there seem to be ambiguities in policies.

The language that should be used in educating young children should also be considered critical as the early years of life are crucial in the development of humans. Most of the policy makers around the world have neglected the aspect of language in the process of formulating of policies for ECCD and education. A study conducted by Owodally (2012) employing a case study approach, reveals that there is a complex language situation in the preschools in Mauritius. The subjects of this particular study use Mauritian Creole as the home language while English is the medium of written instructions at primary schools and French is taught at schools. Hence, the teachers are free to employ one of the above languages in the preschool. The researcher points out that this is due to the lack of a proper policy for language in education for preschools.

Similarly, Beauchamp (2016) conducted a research in New Zealand to study how the minority language children acquire English while attending preschools. The study showed that the teachers lack experience and professional practices in teaching the children who are not first language speakers of English. There is no specific guidance through policies as to how the the children of minority communities should be taught in the preschools.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Ivey (2011) illustrates the language barriers that Hispanic children have to face in schools in the USA. The USA has passed an Act called No Child Left Behind in 2002. This Act states that the curriculum instructions should be provided in English. As there are many languages and cultures that students bring to the classroom, the detachment between school and home of these Hispanic learners deepen more and more. This is mainly due to the inadequacy of the policies of the country which are not inclusive when it comes to minority communities.

The studies mentioned above depict that there are concerns pertaining to ECCD and education in the global context. The following section will present the situation of ECCD and education in Sri Lanka.

Early Childhood Care and Development and Education in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, early childhood is defined as the period of child's life from conception to age five (Ministry of Education, 2008 cited in Gallardo, 2009). Yet, according to Pathirana (2017a), early childhood could be considered as the period from birth to 8 years. Salaswicz & Perry (2010) and UNICEF/UNESCO (2012) cited in Pathirana (2017a) consider that early childhood is a critical and a profound period of human development.

Early Childhood Care and Development and Education in Sri Lanka started with the initiation of a few urban preschools in the 1920s. According to Pathirana (2017a), in 1972, *Sarvodaya*, an NGO involved in community development, carried out preschool activities throughout Sri Lanka. Wijetunge et al. (2003) cited in Pathirana (2017a) states that Lanka *Mahila Samithiya* also had a role to play in the provision of preschool facilities in both rural and urban areas.

While early childhood development is not officially a part of the Sri Lankan general education system, policy makers have recognised the importance of integrating early childhood development into the system (Gallardo, 2009).

Pathirana (2017a) mentions that “the government of Sri Lanka has not been enthusiastic or fervent about shouldering the total responsibility of ECCD” (p.38). She further mentions that the state’s contribution to ECCD is ambiguous and preschools are administered and “more or less carried out” (...) as a small business or charity (p.38). In addition, Pathirana (2017a) concludes that the economic constraints appear to be the barrier limiting the government’s assistance to the ECCD.

A study which presents a profile of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCD) in Sri Lanka by Pathirana (2017b), indicates that only a few preschools follow a child centered, activity-based curricula endorsed by ECCD experts. It further presents that many preschools in Sri Lanka were reported to teach the curricula taught in primary schools.

Herath et al. (2013) focused on the assessment of the quality of childcare centres in the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) area and found out that the quality of care provided by child care centres in the six Medical Officers of Health (MOH) areas of CMC area were mediocre. Furthermore, Gallardo (2009) studied on the peace development through the Sri Lankan early childhood education and provided recommendations on how to orient the early childhood programmes towards peace development. Moreover, this study provides policy recommendations pointing out how the policies should be altered to enhance peace. Pathirana (2012) focused on ensuring harmony and protection in preschool education. Furthermore, Pathirana (2017c) conducted a study on Early Violence Prevention in Sri Lankan Preschools.

Therefore, it is evident that there is a dearth of research in the policies regarding the ownership and responsibilities of ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. Further studies are needed to fill the gap in the education policies related to early childhood education.

Methodology

Denzin & Lincoln (2005), cited in Creswell (2007), state that qualitative researchers use qualitative research design to study

their natural settings. Hence, it is evident that qualitative research designs interpret the results in its own environment rather than the researcher creating or imposing a force in the results. Furthermore, Creswell (ibid) states that qualitative researchers collect data through examining and analysing documents, observing the behaviour of the research sample and interviewing participants.

Similarly, a document analysis and interviews with responsible informants of ECCD and education in Sri Lanka were conducted in attempting to provide a critical reading on the ownership and responsibility of ECCD in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the researcher attempts to bring forth the attention of the responsible authorities on the ambiguities of the present policies regarding ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. The available policy documents related to early childhood care and development, language and education in Sri Lanka were analysed and the findings were coded accordingly. The data collected from the informants were audio recorded and were supported by the researcher's hand-written field notes and other supplementary notes. As the informants used Sinhala in providing information, the data collected through the informants were transcribed and relevant sections from the data were translated into English by the researcher shortly after the meetings had taken place.

As policies are public documents and they should be available to the general public, no special permission was necessary to gather information from them. However, the researcher ensured that the rights of all informants were safe guarded. The researcher received consent and permission from each informant before seeking information. The informed consent of all informants was delivered to the researcher prior to the beginning of this study which also allowed for voluntary participation from all the informants while assuring their privacy and anonymity.

Documents and Textual Analysis

Initially, the identification of the policy documents related to ECCD was conducted through an internet search. Furthermore, the

information gathered through the informants led to the identification of more relevant policy documents.

Some policy documents were found with great difficulty even though these policy documents and recommendations should be available for the general public (this issue will be further addressed in section 04). The researcher located a few of the policy documents through a personal contact. The contacted official who works in a state institution had to use the official networks to obtain these policy documents. A total of 13 policy documents were located on Early Childhood Care and Development and Education. This study focuses on those 13 policies which range from 1986 to 2018.

Informants

This study focused on institutional spaces related to ECCD policy planning and implementation. Therefore, no specific physical setting could be mentioned as particular to the study. However, information was sought by people who are in responsible roles regarding these policies. These informants were administrative personnel at the Children’s Secretariat in Sethsiripaya, Battaramulla, administrative personnel at the ECCD unit in Kandy and two teachers from an early childhood development centre in Kandy.

Findings and Discussion

Policy documents related to ECCD

The researcher identified 13 policy documents related to ECCD for the analysis and they are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Policy documents related to Early Childhood Care and Development, Language and Education

	Policy documents	Year of Issue	Issued By
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A Critical Evaluation of the Ownership and Responsibilities of Early Childhood Care, Development and Education in Sri Lanka

01.	Early Childhood Care and Development in Sri Lanka	1986	Report of the National Committee of Inquiry on the young children
02.	An Action Oriented Strategy towards a National Education	1995	National Education Commission (NEC)
03.	National Policy (1997)/ Reforms in General Education (1997)	1997	National Education Commission (NEC)
04.	Proposals on General Education	2003	National Education Commission (NEC)
05.	National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development	2004	Children's Secretariat
06.	New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka	2005-2010	National Committee for Formulating A New Education Act for General Education
07.	Early Childhood Development Charter no. 03 of 2015	2015	Government
08.	Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Development Centres	2017	Children's Secretariat
09.	Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka	2016	National Institute of Education (NIE)
10.	Minimum Standards for Early Childhood Centres	2016	ECCD unit, Central province
11.	The Country Profile	2018	The Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood

12.	National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development	2018	Children’s Secretariat
13.	Corporate Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development	2019	ECCD unit, Central province

Ownership and responsibility of ECCD

ECCD in Sri Lanka was handled by different sectors and organisations since its initiation in the country. During 80s, ECCD in Sri Lanka was a shared responsibility among many institutions. The first policy document, Early Childhood Care and Development in Sri Lanka (1986), does not specify a unique body as responsible for ECCD in Sri Lanka. Moreover, the policy document confirms that there is no special authority or an institute which is given power of policy making and the provision of ECCD. “There is no precedent in Sri Lanka of a single agency charged with the development of policy for the provision of care and education services for the young children” (p.11). Furthermore, the document states that the past governments were not enthusiastic about the provision of welfare to the young children. This policy document proposes a delegation of responsibilities to the Children’s Centres with the supervision of the local community and Gramodaya Mandalas. Furthermore, it was recommended that there should be National Committees, District Committees and Support Centres for ECCD in Sri Lanka. The District and National level committees would be engaged in planning and management of the ECCD.

Furthermore, this policy document provides a list of government institutes and International and Non-Governmental Organisations (I/NGOs) which facilitated the provision of ECCD in Sri Lanka. It also includes the activities carried out by these institutions. For instance, UNICEF, Janatha Estate Development Board, State Plantation Corporation, Ministry of Social Services, Colombo Municipality, Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction, Ministry of Fisheries, *Sarvodaya*, *Lanka Mahila Samithi* and Mahaweli Authority. In addition, this states that teacher training will be provided by The Open University of Sri

Lanka (OUSL). Henceforth, it is evident that, in the beginning, the responsibility of the ECCD in Sri Lanka was a joint endeavor and no single authoritative body had undertaken its responsibility during this time.

Yet, during the 90s, there is a noticeable deviation of the responsibility from the government sector. It states that “since 1945 the country is committed to a policy of free education from Kindergarten to the University” (para. 19). However, this policy document states that NGOs are requested by the Divisional Secretariats to set up pre-schools. Hence, it is evident that the government did not take the responsibility of ECCD programmes during this period. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the provision of “free” education at the kindergarten level happened during this time period (para. 19). The question whether the preschools were solely operated by the NGOs at that time and also which NGO handled the responsibility of preschools and ECCD are unknown. As mentioned in literature, according to Pathirana (2017a), in 1972, *Sarvodaya*, a Non-Government Organisation carried out the preschool activities throughout Sri Lanka. Wijetunge et al. (2003) cited in Pathirana (2017a) state that Lanka *Mahila Samithiya* also had a role to play in the provision of preschool facilities in both rural and urban areas. Yet, in the first policy document (Early Childhood Care and Development in Sri Lanka, 1986), this institution was not mentioned in relation to the provision of ECCD in Sri Lanka. It is not apparent whether only these two NGOs are the ones that shouldered the responsibility of the provision and maintenance of the ECCD facilities up to 1995. In addition, none of the policy documents (after 1995) mentions that these two NGOs or any other specific NGO were responsible for the ECCD in Sri Lanka. Hence, it is possible that those two NGOs eventually withdrew or were forced to withdraw from the responsibility of the provision of ECCD and education in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the very same policy document states that “pre-schools will not be operated by the State. However, the government may provide facilities for training of teachers and regulate them for the maintenance of minimum standards in pre-schools” (para. 46). Yet, the policy document had a clause mentioning that the country is committed to provide free education from the kindergarten.

Hence, it presents a contradiction in the same document, about the responsibility, where at first, the policy document mentions that the government provides free education and later the same policy document mentions that the state does not take the responsibility for early education. There is no clear rationale regarding the handing over of the duties to the NGOs by the government and conducting the training programmes by the government. This policy document does not specify the role of the government regarding the ECCD. The policy document lacks clarity on the government participation in sharing the obligations regarding the ECCD: it simply states that “the government may provide” training. Furthermore, the ground reality of whether the preschool teacher training actually happened is unknown. Moreover, in the previous document it was mentioned that OUSL will provide teacher training. Yet, it is not mentioned here whether the same institution is the responsible party for the provision of teacher training. Furthermore, the NGOs (as mentioned earlier) were requested and provided with the responsibility by the Divisional Secretariats to set up (set up? I also encountered this earlier. Pls consider revising) preschools.

Even though the Children’s Secretariat (under the Women’s Bureau in Sri Lanka) was established in 1978, the NGOs and other governmental institutions were given power to handle ECCD even in the year 1995. It is evident that after more than a decade, the government was not able to take a proper decision regarding the responsibility and the ownership of ECCD. Hence, it is evident that there is a shift in the responsibility of ECCD and education from the government towards a few NGOs. Yet, at present, the status and the recognition given to NGOs, which were authorised figures in 1995 has changed and the NGOs have become only a partner in the ECCD.

The policy document issued in 1997, states that the Presidential Task Force Report in 1997 recommended that ECCD and preschools should be taken separately and the subject of ECCD should be handled by the Children’s Secretariat (Women’s Bureau). Yet, while there is no evidence given as to who undertook the responsibility of preschools, the Children’s Secretariat handled

the ECCD in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, they did not specify any rationale in dividing ECCD and preschools between the Children's Secretariat and the unknown party who handled the education of the children. In addition, what components of childhood come under the term ECCD is not clarified in this document.

This policy document has clearly demonstrated that the rhetoric regarding the ECCD has changed. It is evident that between 1995 and 1997, there is a shift in the governmental policies regarding the responsibilities of the ECCD. The government has identified the importance of considering ECCD as one of their concerns. Yet, there is no rationale provided for this sudden change or the shift of responsibilities.

As the policy document on the Education Reforms (1997) mentions, the Provincial Councils were encouraged to maintain Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centers. These reforms proposed that the Children's Secretariat should collaborate with the Non-formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to promote ECCD. The Children's Secretariat policy makers have identified that Early Childhood Development and preschools are for two different stages of development and emphasised the setting up of preschools mainly for the children in the age group of 3 – 5. They have proposed incentives to Provincial Councils and local authorities to set up and maintain preschools. Therefore, it is evident that the responsibility regarding the preschools (as advised in the earlier policy document that preschools should be taken separately) was delegated and undertaken by the provincial councils. The document also recommends that there should be a legal framework in respect of the quality of preschool staff, facilities and their supervision. In addition, in this document, the involvement of ministries and the collaboration among the ministries was requested to uphold and to develop ECCD.

However, there were few alterations in the responsibility regarding ECCD and education in Sri Lanka during the period from 1997 to 2003.

The Proposals on General Education issued in 2003 provide a recommendation that “the National Policy that is being formulated by the Ministry of Social Welfare should be followed by the preparation of a Plan of Action to be implemented in collaboration with, for instance, the Ministries of Education and Health and Provincial Administrations” (para. 35). No alliance among the ministries was evident when undertaking the responsibility of ECCD in maintaining and following the regulations and policies. Hence, this policy document provides such a recommendation imagining that it may support in enhancing the ECCD in Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, it recommends that “all Day Care Centres and Pre-schools should be registered with the Children’s Secretariat” (para.36). This is a contradictory stance as reflected in all the documents issued before this. This is the first instance that the registering of the ECCD programmes and centres come into the discussion and into the policy. It is evident that the policy has been altered within a time period of less than ten years.

This policy document brings more authoritative figures into the discussion of their responsibility. The National Institute of Education (NIE) is recommended as the agency which should collaborate with the Children’s Secretariat in developing flexible guidelines for activities and materials to be used in preschools to achieve desirable outcomes identified to meet child development needs. In addition, this policy document confirms that there is no collaboration among the institutes and ministries which are responsible in ECCD in creating, developing, maintaining and following the regulations and policies and it recommends that the collaboration and assistance are vital in developing ECCD in Sri Lanka. The policy document further recommends that “the state should prescribe minimum standards for space, physical facilities, equipment and qualifications of teachers” (para. 37) and it recommends that there should be minimum standards for the ECCD in Sri Lanka. Hence, it is evident that a legal framework was not yet been set up even though it was proposed earlier in 1997. Furthermore, it could be concluded that the regulations for the maintenance of the ECCD was inadequate at this time.

Even though, National Policy (1997)/Reforms in General Education (1997) mentions that the Provincial Councils were encouraged to maintain ECCD centers, this policy document states that “all Day Care Centres and Pre-schools should be registered with the Children’s Secretariat” (para. 36). Hence it presents a contradiction among the policy decisions.

Early Childhood Development Charter No. 03 of 2015 was issued by the Central Province in effect to the power devolved to them by the 13th amendment to the Constitution. According to the Children’s Secretariat, each Provincial Council should have a similar Charter. Most importantly, this is the only charter that was available for the general public and could be downloaded via the internet. When considering the other Provincial Councils, Western Province confirmed that they do not have such a Charter when contacted. Hence, the mechanism of the operation, regulation and supervision of the preschools, ECCD centres and Day Care centres in this province is not known. Furthermore, it is against the ECCD policies of Sri Lanka. The researcher was able to find Charters of few other provinces such as Southern, Uva and Wayamba. These Charters empower the Provincial Councils to register the ECCD centres under them. This clearly demarcates the shifting of the responsibilities of the ECCD and education towards the Provincial Councils as the registering procedure was earlier the responsibility of the Children’s Secretariat.

Even though the Provincial Councils were given power on registration, the researcher found out that there are ECCD centres operating without registering them under their respective Provincial Council. Hence, it is still evident that the ownership and responsibility is vague as there is no clause in this Charter as to what legal actions will be followed if the ECCD centres are not registered. Moreover, there is no institution which is given the power to supervise the ECCD centres in the country. Hence, the general public who starts ECCD centres in Sri Lanka would not see the necessity of registering the preschool or the ECCD centres. Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2016) state that the responsibility of Sri Lanka’s “overall” childhood development has been delegated to the Ministry of Child

Development and Women's Affairs, and health and nutrition to the Ministry of Health while the Ministry of Social Services is responsible for disadvantaged groups. This shows the shift in the responsibility even though this policy document does not specify the kind of responsibility delegated to the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs. Furthermore, the registering procedure is still the responsibility of the Provincial Councils. Therefore, it is evident that the "overall childhood development" (p.37) is not actually under this Ministry as some responsibilities are delegated to Provincial Councils and several other ministries. A divergence of the responsibilities regarding ECCD in Sri Lanka is depicted in the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development 2004 and 2017. These two documents present one of the most significant findings about the ownership and the responsibility of ECCD. They have mentioned about ECCD Coordination Committees that operate at the national level, provincial level, district level, divisional level and village level. The constitution in each Coordination Committee is different from one another. For instance, the National Coordination Committee (NCC) consists of 10 members including the (i) Secretary of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, (ii) Director of the Children's Secretariat, (iii) an executive level officer appointed from the ministries such as Health, Social Services, Policy Planning and Economic affairs, Local government and Provincial Councils, Justice/Law and Order, Home Affairs and Disaster Management, (iv) Director of Family Health Bureau or a responsible officer appointed by the Director, (v) Commissioner of the Department of Probation and Child Care or a responsible officer appointed by the Commissioner, (vi) Chairperson of the Child Protection Authority or a responsible officer appointed by the Chairperson, (vii) Heads of Provincial entities established in the provinces for ECCD/Preschool education or a relevant executive level officer appointed by the Provincial Secretary, (viii) Director General of the Plantation Human Development Trust or a relevant officer appointed by the Director General, (ix) two members to represent NGOs/INGOs/UN agencies and private sector organisation who offer ECCD services and (x) two experts in the field of ECCD who possess academic qualifications as well as research experience in the field of ECCD while the Provincial Coordination Committee

(PCC) consists of the Chief Secretary of the Province, Head of the establishment instituted for monitoring and supervision of ECCD/Preschool education in the Province, a responsible officer from the Provincial Ministry of Health/Director, Provincial Health Services, an executive level officer from the Provincial Ministry of Education/Provincial Director of Education, Provincial Commissioner of Probation and Child Care, Provincial Director, Social Services, Commissioner of the Local Government, An executive level officer from the Police Department, a representative from the Plantation Human Development Trust, a staff officer from the Children's Secretariat, ECD Officers/Assistants of the relevant districts and three members appointed by the Chief Minister of the Province to represent NGOs and Private sector organizations involved in ECCD. This lengthy syntax needs a revisit—the ten members are unrecognizable in this maize)

Furthermore, there are differences in the composition of these committees in the years 2004 and 2017. For instance, there were two chairpersons in the NCC 2004: secretaries of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health, Nutrients and the Uva Wellassa Development. Yet, in the 2017 NCC, there was only one chairperson, Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. There are differences noted in the other members as well.

When considering the NCC and the constitution of the NCC 2017, the selection is not clearly mentioned. The 9th member category of the NCC is mentioned as “two members to represent NGOs/INGOs/UN agencies and private sector organization who offer ECCD services” (p.20). Yet, it is not clearly mentioned whether there are two members to represent each category (NGOs/INGOs/UN) or there are two members to represent every organisation.

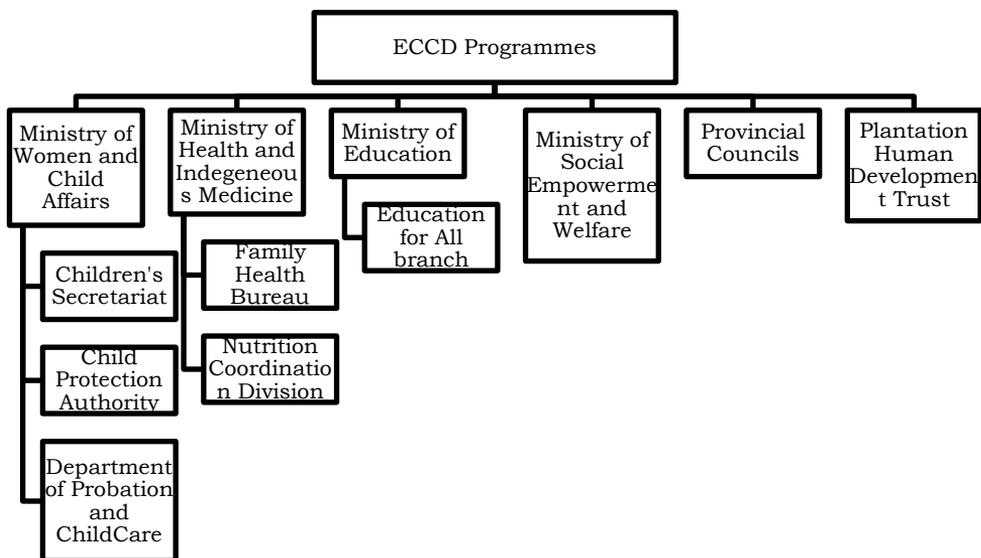
Furthermore, the 10th member category in the NCC on ECCD, is vague. The 10th category states that “two experts in the field of ECCD who possess academic qualifications as well as research in the field of ECCD” (p. 20). The criteria in appointing these experts

and the person responsible in appointing this category is not mentioned in the policy.

When considering the Ministries that represent the NCC on ECCD, it is different to the responsible ministries mentioned in the beginning of the policy document. The responsible ministries, as mentioned in the policy document are, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare, and Plantation and Human Development Trust. A member representing the Ministry of Policy Planning and Economic Affairs, Justice/Law and Order and a member representing the Ministry of Disaster Management are included in the NCC. Yet, these three ministries are not considered in the category of responsible ministries. This depicts that Ministry of Women and Child Affairs which created this policy document did not identify the responsible ministries precisely. It shows that Ministry of Women and Child Affairs was also in a dilemma when assigning the duties to the responsible authorities.

This policy document presents the Ministries responsible in ECCD and it is depicted in Figure 1 below. It shows that the duties and ownership of ECCD is divided among diverse parties. It is created according to the information gathered through the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development 2004 and 2017 as well as through the informants.

Figure 1. Ownership and the Responsibility of ECCD in Sri Lanka



According to the informant at the Children’s Secretariat, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, which is one of the responsible parties, has given power and the responsibility to the Children’s Secretariat to create a child who is strong in mental and physical aspects. At the same time, the Ministry has given the responsibility of coordinating the ECCD programmes in Sri Lanka to the Children’s Secretariat.

The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare and Plantation and Human Development Trust are responsible for the ECCD programs in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the Provincial Councils also play a crucial role in these programs. According to the interview conducted with responsible personnel in Children’s Secretariat, Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine has the responsibility of the pre-natal stage and the post-natal of the children. They pay attention to health and nutrition. The Children’s Secretariat and the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine are involved in providing early stimulation and care to children. The branches such as the Family Health Bureau of the Ministry of Health, are the centres which facilitate this objective.

Even though it is mentioned as the Ministry of Health in National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development 2017, the original name of the above Ministry is Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine. The issue arises as to why the Policy document has changed the original name of the Ministry. It could be assumed that the Ministry component of Indigenous Medicine has no responsibility for the ECCD programmes in Sri Lanka and hence they did an alteration in the name of this Ministry. The Ministry of Social Empowerment, Welfare and Kandyan Heritage has the responsibility of handling the children with disabilities.

According to an informant in the Children's Secretariat, OUSL conducts teacher training programmes related to ECCD. Furthermore, it has a Day Care Centre and a Resource Centre related to ECCD. Hence, it is evident that this institute holds a certain responsibility in ECCD in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, private partners such as Hemas and People's Leasing Cooperation together with the Children's Secretariat conduct CSR projects on building preschools and developing preschool infrastructure respectively.

NGOs which took the leadership role in ECCD during the early decades are presently dealing with the Children's Secretariat in maintaining the ECCD programmes in Sri Lanka. NGOs such as Plan Sri Lanka, Unicef, World Vision, Save the Children and Child Fund are responsible in the above-mentioned activities.

Figure 1 and the descriptions above elucidate that there are complications in deciding the ministries responsible in ECCD and their responsibilities. With the changes in the governments and the changes in the ministries, it is oblivious whether the duties related to each ministry is subjugated to change or whether they are handed over to more new ministries. If the governments do not pay attention to these ministries and their ECCD related duties, the ECCD of the country would deteriorate. When considering the policies related to ECCD, it is essential that ECCD policies should be immune to the radical shifts in politics in the county.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the shift in the responsibilities and ownership

regarding ECCD is as follows. Initially, ECCD was a responsibility of the NGOs even though the Children's Secretariat was established in the 1970s. Then, both the State and I/NGOs handled the responsibility. Later, the government decided to divide ECCD and preschools into two categories and the first category was the responsibility of the Children's Secretariat meanwhile the responsibility of the latter is unknown. Later, the Provincial Councils were encouraged to maintain the preschools. At present, the Provincial Councils have more power and the responsibility regarding preschools with the 13th amendment to the Constitution. Yet, it is evident that ECCD's overall responsibility is now diverged and different facets of early childhood and education are handled by different institutions. For instance, childhood health is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the involvement of different other institutions and NGOs also could be seen. (i.e. NIE, OUSL).

It was evident through the findings that the ownership and the responsibility of the ECCD is unstable. The authorities and institutions that have the ownership and the responsibility of the ECCD often changed. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no specific government or private institute which can be named as responsible regarding the ownership of ECCD.

The ECCD in Sri Lanka is in a stage where no authority considers it to be a crucial aspect in society. Henceforth, at least a responsible institution should be established for ECCD in Sri Lanka. The attention of the Sri Lankan government is crucial for the development and maintenance of ECCD and education.

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