

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND PREPAREDNESS OF CHILDREN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE ESTATE SECTOR OF SRI LANKA

Samitha Udayanga
Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of
Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
senithsrisami@gmail.com

Fostering an enabling environment for quality early childhood education is one of the targets stipulated in the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development with the promise that children in their early years are prepared for their life long journey. Nevertheless, studies show that a large number of children in disadvantaged communities in South Asia are not developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being so that they are not ready for formal primary education. Sri Lanka has introduced a comprehensive policy for early childhood care and education, and there seems to be significant progress in urban and rural sectors of the country. However, the estate sector encounters a large number of implementation issues that hinder the creation of an enabling environment for early childhood education. Since access to early childhood education has been slow and inequitable as previous studies demonstrate, children in the estate sector are disproportionately excluded from care and education in their early years. This research has strived to understand the existing state of early childhood education in the estate sector of Sri Lanka and examine the relationship between early childhood education and community preparedness for education in early childhood. Life-world analytical ethnography was employed as the methodology. Five estates were selected as cases in which twenty seven participants were selected as sample through the purposive sampling method according to the data saturation principle. This study revealed that the biggest hindrance to quality early childhood education in the estate sector is unpreparedness of children for pre-primary education because learners in their early childhood are not supported by the surrounding environment. Bonded labour is one of the causes that deprive children of depriving interest toward education. Moreover, children often set their life-goals in line with everyday experiences, so that when no productive experiences are encountered, children cannot set their purpose of life properly. Less resilient-age appropriate social relationships is another determinant that diverges children from their early childhood education. Exposure to violence and neglect during early childhood are some other factors that have a negative life-long impact. Early childhood education in Sri Lanka has taken a prominent place in the welfare policy of the country, though some implementation issues were met in the estate sector compared to urban and rural sectors owing to unpreparedness of the learners and less community support. It is thus recommended to pay careful attention to structural factors that hinder early childhood education when implementing policies at local levels.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Estate Sector, Life Experiences, Structural Determinants, Welfare Policy