
Socio-cultural Determinants Affecting Early Childhood Care and Education Policy in the Estate Community of Sri Lanka

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Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been an instrumental frontline strategy for both social development and poverty reduction. Given that the facilitation for childcare and education alongside its outcomes follow a social gradient, differences in the socio-cultural and economic situation may translate into inequalities in overall child wellbeing. It is thus taken for granted that culture and values are required to be at the centre for policies on ECCE to become well implemented and outcomes are achieved at local levels. This qualitative study thus inquires how sociocultural determinants affect early childhood care and education in the estate sector of Sri Lanka. The grounded theory analysis indicates that the impact of the socio-cultural environment on which the ECCE policies are implemented is twofold: as an ideational system and adaptive system through which policies are shaped either by relatively stable cultural characteristics or intent participation of community members with cultural dynamics. Established inequalities and persistent multidimensional disadvantaged position seem to disrupt the effective ECCE policy implementation, moreover. Besides, institutionalized cultural capital is both challenging and encouraging for early childhood care and education. It sometimes can inhibit mainstreaming on child care and education, as it is less likely to prioritize child wellbeing over other concerns such as conserving subculture-identity. The unique multidimensional administrative system (Government, Plantation Companies, Community) with conflicting responsibilities in the estate community is another determinant that prevents effective ECCE policy implementation. Overall, this study highlights that the success of ECCE policies at local levels follow a social gradient, and neglecting sociocultural determinants in implementing such policies may further the existing inequalities while jeopardizing the child wellbeing.

Keywords: Childcare, Child education, Early childhood, Sociocultural determinants, Social development