ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION POLICIES, POLICY FRAMEWORKS, AND REFORM INITIATIVES IN SRI LANKA:

STRENGTHS, RELEVANCE, AND GAPS IN EDUCATION POLICIES AND POLICYMAKING

Jayantha Balasooriya

CED Sri Lanka
Quality Education For All

Coalition for Educational Development

Analysis of education policies, policy frameworks, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka:

Strengths, relevance, and gaps in education policies and policymaking

Jayantha Balasooriya

Coalition for Educational Development
(CED)

Analysis of Education Policies, Policy Frameworks, and Reform Initiatives in Sri Lanka:
Strengths, relevance, and gaps in education policies and policymaking

© Jayantha Balasooriya (PhD)

October, 2024

ISBN: 978-624-6002-01-5

This 'Analysis of Education Policies, Policy Frameworks, and Reform Initiatives in Sri Lanka: strengths, relevance, and gaps in education policies and policymaking', review the education policies, policy frameworks, proposals, and reform initiatives presented in the last several decades. This study was carried out at the request of the Collation of Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka.

This publication was produced with the financial support of Education Out Loud. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Coalition for Educational Development and do not necessarily reflect the views of funding partners Oxfam Denmark and GPE.

This report is free for circulation, However, all content is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced in any form – other than for the enhancement of knowledge devoid of any pecuniary or commercial gain – without the express written contents of Coalition for Educational Development. – Nevertheless, short experts from the report may be reproduced without authorization on condition that the source is indicated.

Layout and Cover Design by: Nalinda Seneviratne / www.iridiumcreations.com

Printed by: Neo Graphics (Pvt) Ltd

EDUCATIONOUTLOUD
advocacy & social accountability

GPE Transforming Education
globalpartnership.org

Funded by: Education Out Loud

CED Sri Lanka
Quality Education For All

Published by:
Coalition for Educational Development (CED),
No. 17, Dharmapala Place, Rajagiriya, Colombo, Sri Lanka
T: +94 112 887642
www.cedsrilanka.org

Message of the Coalition for Educational Development (CED)

This study on "Analysis of Education Policies, Policy Frameworks, and Reform Initiatives in Sri Lanka: Strengths, relevance, and gaps in education policies and policymaking" has been conducted on behalf of the Coalition for Educational Development (CED) by Dr. Jayantha Balasooriya. We wish to extend our gratitude to Dr. Balasooriya for his invaluable contribution, dedication, and leadership throughout the study process.

CED would like to thank all the experts, and individuals including, the CED board members, Advisory group members, and the staff who were involved in this process in different aspects and responsibilities.

Finally, we would like to thank Global Partners for Education (GPE) – Education Out Loud Project (EOL) for their funding support. We trust this report would be useful in forming the new education policy framework for Sri Lanka and would serve as a comprehensive resource material for the Asia Pacific Region in education policy development.

Coalition for Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge the assistance of the Coalition of Educational Development (CED), Sri Lanka, and other agencies at different levels in conducting the *Analysis of Education Policies, Policy Frameworks, and Reform Initiatives in Sri Lanka: Strengths, relevance, and gaps in education policies and policymaking*. In particular, my thanks go to:

- Dr. Chandana Bandara, Chairman of the CED, Sri Lanka.
- Mr. Kamal Herath, Board Member of the CED, Sri Lanka.
- All participants (members of CSOs, journalists, policymakers, policy analysts, planners, technocrats, university academics, and former policymakers) who participated in KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs who contributed and provided constructive comments and suggestions about the analysis.
- Ms. Ashani Peiris for copy editing and proof-reading.
- Special thanks to Mr. Shantha Kulathunga, National Coordinator of the CED, Sri Lanka, for his impetus, commitment, coordination, support, and collaboration throughout this analysis.

Jayantha Balasooriya

July, 2024

Executive Summary

One of the prime objectives of education is to brand human capital with knowledge, skills, character, citizenship, and an updated mindset with values, ethics, and paradigms. Accordingly, citizens may become leaders, entrepreneurs, employees, scientists, philosophers, and more, depending on their innate capability and will. To achieve such purposes, education policies are fundamental. Education policy refers to the collection of laws or rules that govern the operation of the education system. It seeks to answer questions about the purpose of education, the objectives it is designed to attain (i.e., social, personal, economic, and national), the methods for attaining them, and the tools for measuring their success or failure. Since education affects individuals of all ages, education policy can be categorized into distinct segments or stages within the education sector.

The education sector in Sri Lanka can seem vast and complex to analyse. This analysis executes the review of past education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives across the areas of equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency of education and the major cross-cutting issues, for all levels and types of education within the national context. Additionally, it provides a conceptual framework for education policy analysis and facilitates policy dialogues with national counterparts and development partners. Accordingly, the main aim of this analysis is to critically analyse the national education policies, policy frameworks, and reform initiatives underlying the design and implementation. Further, it assesses critical gaps in policy design, management capacity, and development cooperation and identifies strategic areas for policy development in Sri Lanka.

The research method employed in this analysis was a mainly qualitative approach. A substantial set of primary data and information was collected by reviewing international and context-specific literature and conducting key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth direct interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Overall, this analysis revealed that the education sector in Sri Lanka has formulated more attractive and meaningful policies to improve the quality of education and maintain the standard of educational attainments. In contrast, the analysis further found the need for a clear understanding of 'policy,' 'policy formulation,' and 'policymaking.' Many stakeholders also doubt whether Sri Lanka has a national policy on education. Education policies, frameworks, proposals, and reform initiatives have followed the political/personal model as a political activity rather than the rationalistic model. The reason for this is that education

is mostly demonstrated as a government monopoly, and after 1977, such a monopoly has gradually deviated, and political influences and involvements have become more significant. Generally, politicians and bureaucrats prefer to see tangible outcomes of their interventions during a shorter period when they have power and authority. This is particularly prevalent in matters related to the education sector, given its active engagement with the public and its sensitive nature. The bottom-up approach is trailing behind in many policy matters related to education in Sri Lanka.

Equity is one of the fundamental principles of education policies, fostering access, participation, quality education, and resourcing education. Even though many attempts have been made to lessen gaps, issues and disparities in equity exist in the system, especially, in the disadvantaged areas.

This analysis revealed that many education policies, policy frameworks/ proposals, and reform initiatives demonstrate similar contents and formats, with new policies and initiatives infrequently introduced. Nevertheless, there are no rational justifications for new policies and abundant policies based on findings and recommendations from the analysis of previous policies.

Education should be the foundation of economic development, and vice versa, as economic development significantly contributes to the qualitative and quantitative growth of education. Hence, education and economic policies should be tightened to align with each other's requirements. In Sri Lanka, all education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives have clearly emphasized that they are aimed at addressing the economic demand. However, it was only partially achieved at the expected levels in practice. Due to the gaps between education and the economy, many social, political, and economic issues and crises have emerged in different forms. Many platforms highlight the need to match these two dimensions sustainably and meaningfully, but actions have been slow.

Previous education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives have been noticeably discussed to promote and encourage innovation, invention, and research and development (R&D) in the general education sub-sector. Evidence shows there are trends in paying attention to the emphasis on the importance of the R&D sector, including the promotion of innovations. Students are engaged in many creative innovations and inventions across different disciplines. However, the challenge is that such talents are not developed sustainably, despite the presence of several separate administrative bodies, agencies, and commissions functioning to patronage respective schools and students. However, school teachers and students continue to face hardships in this regard. Nevertheless, no evidence was found that these programmes have been implemented in a systemic, coordinated manner with financial and technical assistance in a

transparent way. Indeed, there is no evidence for establishing linkages between such outcomes of R&D, innovations, and inventions to further/higher education, and finally, contributions to knowledge, wisdom, and the economic growth of the country.

One of the significant prospects of education policies is social development. Generally, social development is reflected through both tangible and intangible outcomes/results. Education is unconditionally instigated to increase both the societal and individual rates of return to improve human life. Moreover, education is the fundamental instrument for life-changing experiences, and its extended impact is cultural changes. Hence, education is considered a tool for cultural transformation for generations to come. Building a disciplinary society requires a visionary education policy for the country. All past education policies, frameworks, and reforms accommodated dimensions of social development and cultural changes. Considering the educational attainments and improvements of such elements, Sri Lankan citizens have acquired significant achievements, but such needs to improve in line with the local and global demand. In the past decades, gender equality has been an issue in the education system in Sri Lanka, particularly concerning access, participation, and survival. At that time, education policies addressed these issues and implemented remedial measures. Nonetheless, while gender parity is currently at a satisfactory level, some issues remain in specific areas.

Efficiency is another crucial dimension of education policies, referring to the production of maximum outputs from the system by utilizing available resources. In the past, all education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reforms included several policy initiatives to improve the system's efficiency. These initiatives involved changes and restructuring in education management and administration, and delegating decision-making powers and authorities to implementation levels. Nonetheless, due to illiquidity and cash-rationing issues and challenges, negative attitudes towards achieving efficiency in the system are yet to be a challenging factor.

Education, policymaking, decision-making, and political factors are interconnected and interplay functions. Such involvements gain constructive benefits and are also cased to have effects. In a democratic society, politicians are mandated to make policies aligned with their political and economic vision and practice. Also, many (party) politicians' perceptions are that they are the architectures of policies. However, practicing party politics and micro-politics negatively affected policymaking and policy implementation. Historical evidence in Sri Lanka reflects many instances where education policies, reforms, or proposals have been a matter of party politics, and a broad national consensus was absent.

Today, education matters are considered a global concern, so there are no boundaries; all education sectors are interconnected. The world of education development is interconnected, and changes are absorbed swiftly. International trends and agreements/charters/conventions between bilateral and multilateral countries and agencies collaboratively work and share experiences in different forms. Further, development partner agencies work closely with individual countries, and their involvement and influence are significant. These backgrounds are substantial in the country's policymaking and formulation process.

Citizenship and civil societies' meaningful involvement in education policymaking is at a low level. This was due to the limited space allocated for the public hearing under the policy formulation process. Such a situation assumes that the representation across the societies is limited and will lead to less contribution and commitment from the societies to sustainable implementation of policies.

Before the official launch of education policies, it is fundamental to have an official endorsement to guarantee policies. This correctly took place in earlier policies. However, later, some policies were implemented without granting legal endorsement, and such are, sometimes challenged. Education laws and acts urgently need to be updated and enacted.

Nonetheless, many fashionable policies were not meaningfully materialized due to several social, economic, political, and other constraints and hindrances. By contrast, some education policies are formulated and implemented in different forms and ways. Implementation of education policies is highly correlated with various external and internal factors, and external influences and involvements are significant. Such practices negatively impacted the implementation of education policies (sustainability), but in some cases, they were considered a positive impact, too. Nonetheless, influential groups are involved even when making decisions on education policies.

Overall, all education policies practiced in the past have directly or indirectly impacted improving the quality and standards of education in Sri Lanka. As a result, indicators related to measuring educational attainments in Sri Lanka are at significant levels compared to other countries with similar socio-economic contexts. The following are the critical challenges of education policymaking in Sri Lanka.

- Less focus on considering education policy/reform as part and parcel of social reform.
- A rush to implement policies/reforms with an expectation of achieving tangible results overnight.

- Less consultation and communication among respective stakeholders at both national and sub-national levels.
- Insufficient attention to allocating required resources adequately and to conducting the financial feasibility of anticipatory education policies.
- Less application and practice on evidence-based (informed) education policies.
- Involvement and influence of party politics and micro-politics in education policy formulation, decision-making, and policy implementation.
- Lack of political will, commitments and lack of champions and leadership.
- Absence of a systemic and sustainable policy monitoring system.

Undoubtedly, the economic, political, cultural, and social dimensions of education and society in Sri Lanka profoundly affect all past and present education policies and initiatives. Some education reforms and policies in Sri Lanka have emerged due to competitiveness-driven reforms (reforms due to shifting demands for skills, commodities, and markets), finance-driven reforms, market forces-driven reforms, and equity-driven reforms (reforms to improve the quality of education and its role as a source of upward social mobility) to increase equality of economic opportunity.

Concerning the education policy perspectives, despite the significant progress achieved in recent decades, the Sri Lankan education system faces several operational issues and challenges, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and social and economic crisis. This analysis demonstrates that the Sri Lankan education system requires urgent policy reform based on a holistic approach to address emerging issues concerning education policy formulation, policymaking, policy implementation, and policy evaluation following a regulatory mechanism. In summary, when formulating education policies authorities need to ensure the fulfillment of factors such as:

i. conducting comprehensive sector diagnosis/review;
ii. developing a clear and long-term vision for the sector and the country;
iii. ensuring wider participation and contribution of respective stakeholders and technocrats;
iv. allocating adequate resources;
v. involving flexible and visionary experts to develop proposals and analysis; and
vi. obtaining wider acceptance of education policy proposals.

Even though the academic, social, and political dialogue is going on in deliberations about the formulation of national policy on education in Sri Lanka, the key challenge is to formulate a sound futuristic vision for the sector and the country. This policy should be accepted by the majority of the stakeholders and counterparts, as well as the citizens of the country and all political parties. Future national policy on education should include early childhood education (ECE), general education, technical and vocational education and training, higher/university education, and R&D coherently. When formulating the policy, strictly follow the policy cycle, and more work on R&D is needed to establish evidence for the proposals. Indeed, there is a need to address the issues and requirements of the education, social, and economic sectors, including employer and labour market demands, health, and other relevant sectors, as applicable. Furthermore, national and international trends must be strongly considered when formulating policies.

Founding policy action on solid and reliable evidence is crucial not only for ensuring that policies are effective and efficient but also for ensuring that they are acceptable and implementable practically. Accordingly, education policies should be evidence-based and must avoid ad-hoc policies. Every policy should be justifiable and reflect the social, national, and system needs. Policymakers need to avoid following the quick-fix approach, and rational approaches must be followed as appropriately. However, education policies cannot be followed by a single approach for policy formulation. It should be a mixed approach that needs to follow in line with the contextual backgrounds. More research and policy dialogues need to be promoted and encouraged. Further, when formulating policies, it is necessary to study the existing policies to check the feasibility and compatibility of the policy proposals practically. The following scenarios are proposed to strengthen education policymaking culture.

Scenario 1: Strengthen and streamline existing policymaking institution (NEC)
Scenario 2: Establish an Independent Council for Education Policy Studies (ICEPS)

One of the options to avoid discrepancies in the existing education policymaking process is to restructure the current policy formulation body -NEC- in line with the recent development in the country. The education sector is concerned with national and sub-national levels (e.g., provincial, zonal, and school). Ex-official representations must be ensured, and a promoted participatory must be approached. Further, education academics in the higher/university education sector need to be assigned to execute education policy-related research and policy evaluation and conduct regular policy communication among stakeholders and citizens.

Based on the findings of this analysis, it is proposed that a centralized ICEPS be established to conduct research and lay the foundation for establishing an R&D culture to promote evidence-based, informed policymaking and planning culture in the education system in Sri Lanka. Further, the history of education policies and their implementation should be reviewed to base the new policies for learning lessons. Education policy should prioritize public education. The policies that contributed to the development of education in the country for many years should not be undermined. Ad-hoc decision-making should be avoided by key stakeholders in policy formulation. Each policy statement or scenario should be developed with a strong rationale. Furthermore, it should know how feasible policy amendments are. ICEPS will also need to deal with matters related to education policy analysis, conducting policy research, policy evaluation and assessment, policy monitoring, and formulation of policies. Additionally, ICEPS needs to be linked with other agencies/councils, both locally and internationally, working on education policies to exchange knowledge and experiences as a knowledge corridor. Further, this council needs to be comprised of professionals and technocrats representing different fields/sectors with a particular focus on expertise in education.

Moreover, there is a timely need to include a dedicated module education policy analysis in degree and postgraduate programmes conducted by universities, various education training institutions, and degree awarding institutions.

When formulating any policy for the education sector, it is fundamental to have a comprehensive policy and policy evaluation on previous policies following the scientific method. Lessons from previous policy practices must be used, and the most corrective options must be recommended.

Education policies must address the real requirements at the ground level, and embedded policies must be encouraged. Many policies are attractive and fashionable but not marketable due to deviations from the clients. Policy formulation steps need to be followed scientifically: Step 1: Sector/system analysis/diagnosis; Step 2: Develop a 'green paper'; Step 3: Develop a 'whitepaper'; Step 4: Develop a 'national policy framework'; Step 5: Formulate a 'national policy on education'. The participatory approach must be applied for policy formulation, consultation, communication, and implementation. Such collaborative efforts will impact the emergence of fewer issues and challenges. Further, such will lead to team accountability and champions for implementing policy initiatives. Policies must consider factors that may limit their feasibility.

Inclusion is the crosscutting theme and broader perspective. In Sri Lanka, there is confusion regarding the definitions of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive'. This analysis found that inclusive education is considered as a matter of students

with special education and differently able students. Beyond that, inclusion should be meaningfully considered in education policy formulation.

The current education world is trending to foster transformation policies rather than maintenance and operational policies. Educational transformation refers to systemic changes in the prevailing educational model. This analysis revealed that in Sri Lanka, many education policies and policy frameworks are given less attention to fostering the system's transformation in an applicable and practical manner.

Policy awareness, including civil society at national and sub-national levels, must be conducted for policy implementation. Further, the roles and responsibilities of citizens and their interventions in policy formulation and implementation must be demarcated. All terms and concepts used in the policy must be clearly defined, and actions need to be translated practically into the ground level to ensure sustainability.

Education policies and reforms should be formulated and implemented in an inter- and intra-sectoral manner. Hence, respective sub-sector coordination needs to be established and strengthened meaningfully. Such practical collaboration will pave the way to achieve policy objectives and goals. Education and economic sectors need to plan and implement in a coordinated manner. There is a need to improve the national economy by strengthening the connection between schooling, employment, productivity, and trade. Furthermore, enhancing the learning outcomes of students in employment-related skills and competencies is necessary. In education quality dimension, attaining more direct control over curriculum content and assessment. Concerning the economics of education, measures must be taken to improve the efficacy of education investments, and community input in education must be increased through more direct involvement in school decision-making and pressure of market choice.

A country may have various policies, plans, and strategies developed by other sectors and supported by many sources. When formulating policies, one must examine the consistency of these policies, identify any conflicting priorities, and check whether there are any duplication and competing demands for resources and implementation capacities.

One of the effects of educational development is that educational organisations, having modeled their goals and strategies on the entrepreneurial business model, are compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of efficiency, accountability, and benefits-driven managerialism. Hence, the politics of education reforms in the twenty-first century reflect this emerging paradigm of standards-driven and outcomes-defined policy change. Some policy analysts have criticized the ubiquitous and excessive nature of standardization in education imposed by the global education development frameworks.

To address issues related to generating high-quality data for users, particularly policymakers, it proposed to establish a systemic and sustainable monitoring system. This system would support policymaking, deviating from guess-based decision-making, and establishing an evidence-based policymaking culture that promotes good governance. This analysis revealed the absence of education policy analysis. Therefore, it is proposed that a series of education policy evaluations of each of the policy proposals/frameworks/ reform initiatives be comprehensively conducted, focusing on the impact of respective initiatives.

***Keywords*:** *Education, Policy, Policy framework, Reforms, Sri Lanka.*

Contents

Message of the Coalition for Educational Development (CED) i
Acknowledgments ii
Executive Summary iii
Contents xii
Tables, Diagrams, Figures, and Appendices xv
Abbreviations and Acronyms xvi

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Introduction and background 1
1.2 Justification and rationale for the analysis 2
1.3 Scope of the analysis 3
1.3.1 Purpose and objectives of the analysis 3
1.3.2 Scope and focus of the analysis 3
1.3.3 Expected outputs and outcomes of the analysis 4
1.3.4 Constraints and limitations 4
1.3.5 Contents of the analysis 4

2. What are and why education policies? 7

2.1 Introduction 7
2.2 Education policies and policymaking 7
2.2.1 What is an education policy? 7
2.2.2 Dimensions of and models for policymaking 8
2.2.3 Basis of origination of policies 10
2.2.4 Education policy cycle 12
2.2.5 Factors need to be considered for the policy formulations: concepts of national development 13
2.2.6 Conceptual framework for policy analysis 14
2.3 Conclusion 16

3. Methodology 17

3.1 Methodology 17
3.2 Data and information analysis and validation 18

4. Education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka: at a glance 19

4.1 Introduction 19

4.2 Education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka: at a glance 19

4.2.1 Free Education Policy (1945) 23

4.2.2 Education changes in the 1950s 25

4.2.3 Education changes in 1960-1961 25

4.2.4 Proposals for reforms in general and technical education (1966-1967) 27

4.2.5 Education Reforms (1972) 28

4.2.6 Changes in education (1977/78) 32

4.2.7 Education Proposals for Reforms (Education Whitepaper - 1981) 33

4.2.8 13th Amendment to the Constitution (1987) 37

4.2.9 General Education Reforms (1997) 38

4.2.10 Envisioning Education for Human Development: Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka (2003) 42

4.2.11 New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka: Context, Issues and Proposals (2009) 44

4.2.12 New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka (2012) 46

4.2.13 Raising the Quality of Education: Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2016) 49

4.2.14 National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2019) and proposed framework for consideration in drafting the general education Bill (Act) 51

4.2.15 Re-emerging Education in Sri Lanka: Transforming the Present System of General Education to a Dynamic and Vibrant Paradigm for 21st Century (2020) 53

4.2.16 Proposal for General Education Reforms (2019-2022) 54

4.2.17 National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) 58

4.2.18 Report of the Select Committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for the expansion of Higher Education Opportunities in Sri Lanka (2023) 66

4.2.19 National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) - Sri Lanka (2023-2033) 68
4.3 Conclusion 75
5. Analysis of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka 77
5.1 Introduction 77
5.2 Origination of policies and policy formulation 78
5.3 Content analysis of education policies, proposals/frameworks 88
5.3.1 Equity and inclusiveness perspectives 94
5.3.2 Education perspectives: quality, relevance, and sustainability 98
5.3.3 Economic perspectives 101
5.3.4 Social development, cultural changes, and gender responsiveness 103
5.3.5 Efficiency perspectives 104
5.4 Politics vs policymaking and policies 109
5.5 International trends, and development partners' involvement/ influences on policymaking and policies 118
5.6 Citizenship and civil societies' involvement in policymaking and policies 125
5.7 Policy legislation 125
5.8 Policy implementation 126
5.9 Success and failures of education policies: issues, challenges, and gaps 127
6. Conclusion and recommendations 131
6.1 Conclusion 131
6.2 Recommendations 136
References 144
Further References 148
Appendices 149

Tables, Diagrams, Figures, and Appendices

Tables:

Table 3.1: Details of KIIs, IDIs and FGDs 17

Table 4.1: Matrix of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka 20

Table 5.1: Summary of backgrounds on the origination and formulation of education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka 85

Table 5.2: Key contents of education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives of education in Sri Lanka 89

Diagrams:

Diagram 2.1: Dimensions of and models for policymaking 8

Diagram 2.2: Conceptual framework for policy analysis 15

Figures:

Figure 2.1: Education policy cycle 12

Appendices:

Appendix 3.1: Stakeholders contribute to the study 149

Abbreviations and Acronyms

2NL	-	Second National Language
ABOE	-	Activity-Based Oral English
ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
CBSL	-	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
CCAs	-	Co-curricular Activities
CDC	-	Curriculum Development Center
CEOs	-	Circuit Education Offices OR Officers
CFS	-	Child-Friendly Schools
CLIL	-	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CoL	-	Commonwealth of Learning
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
DEOs	-	Divisional Education Offices
DfID (UK)	-	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
DGE	-	Director General of Education
DSD	-	Divisional Schools Development
ECCE	-	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	-	Early Childhood Education
EFA	-	Education for All
EKSP	-	Education Knowledge Society Project
EMIS	-	Education Management Information System
EPSI	-	Enhanced Programme for School Improvement
ESDG	-	Education Sector Development Grant
FGDs	-	Focus Group Discussions
GCE AL	-	General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level)
GCE OL	-	General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level)
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GE	-	General Education
GEM Project	-	General Education Modernisation Project
GEP-2	-	General Education Project-2
GoSL	-	Government of Sri Lanka
HE	-	Higher Education
HNCE	-	Higher National Certificate of Education
ICEPS	-	Independent Council for Education Policy Studies
ICT	-	Information Communication Technology
IDIs	-	In-depth Direct Interviews
IS	-	International Schools
ISD	-	Improvement of Schools by Division
KIIs	-	Key Informant Interviews
M&E	-	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDGs	-	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	-	Ministry of Education
MoHE	-	Ministry of Higher Education
MoYAE	-	Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment
NBUCRAM	-	Norm-Based Unit Cost Resource Allocation Mechanism
NCGE	-	National Certificate of General Education
NCoEs	-	National Colleges of Education

NEC	-	National Education Commission
NEPF	-	National Education Policy Framework
NFE	-	Non-formal Education
NIE	-	National Institute of Education
NLCF	-	National Learning Competency Framework
NVQ	-	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OOSC	-	Out-of-schoolchildren
PDoE	-	Provincial Department of Education
PERC	-	Public Expenditure Review Committee
PISA	-	Programme for International Student Assessment
PME	-	Provincial Ministry of Education
PSC	-	Public Service Commission
PSI	-	Programme for School Improvement
R&D	-	Research and Development
SAARC	-	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SBA	-	School-Based Assessment
SBM	-	School-Based Management
SBPTD	-	School-Based Professional Teacher Development
SBTD	-	School-Based Teacher Development
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
SE&IE	-	Special Education and Inclusive Education
SEMP	-	Secondary Education Modernisation Project
SLEAS	-	Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service
SLES	-	Sri Lanka Education Service
SLIATE	-	Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Institute
SLPS	-	Sri Lanka Principals Service
SLQF	-	Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework
SLTES	-	Sri Lanka Teacher Educators Service
SLTS	-	Sri Lanka Teacher Service
SMER,DL&OUs	-	State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion, and Open Universities
STR	-	Student-Teacher Ratio
SWAp	-	Sector-wide Approach
TEC	-	Technical Education Commission
TETDP	-	Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Project
TIMSS	-	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TSEP	-	Transformation School Education Project
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZEOs	-	Zonal Education Offices

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background

'National education policy' is a widely discussed topic in many educational, social, and political forums. Over the past few decades, many political parties, especially during the election periods, have promised the public that, if given the governing power, they will formulate and implement the 'national policy for education in Sri Lanka'. Nonetheless, it should be noted that many governments attempt to formulate national policies, but many of them are not materialized meaningfully, which ensures sustainability, and some are implemented in different forms and ways. Further, it should be noted that most of these education policies and reforms have not been fully implemented in practical terms and are sometimes partly implemented from time to time. However, in some cases, education policies are implemented for a short period, but when a new political party comes to power, the ongoing policy implementation is halted, and new operational policies are introduced. This practice is common and occurs frequently. This is not limited only for government changes but also happens when ministers responsible for education portfolios are replaced, even within the same government. This is unfair to students as they are used as an experimental group. Despite this, the introduction of a national policy for education is at a discussion level in the country.

After the social and economic crises in 2021/2022, policymakers and political authorities recognized the need for a strong national policy for education aligned with the country's contemporary development and to match the international social and economic demands. In 2023, the President of Sri Lanka appointed a cabinet subcommittee to develop a national education policy framework, and it was compiled by an expert committee approved by the cabinet in December 2023. Nowadays, discussions on national education policies are ongoing. Simultaneously, education reform proposals are also being introduced within the system.

Generally, the formulation of national policies often omits many procedural steps. Policies should be formulated based on evidence, and many policies deviate from the evidence-based or informed practices and analysis of previous policies. Further, some gaps can be seen in the policy formulation stages (i.e., policy consultations, stakeholder participation/citizenship engagement, policy communications) and at the policy implementation level.

Considering these backgrounds, this is the time to explore the critical thinking of educationists, education economists, policymakers, planners,

technocrats, and stakeholders, enabling them to contribute or engage in policy formulation. Therefore, it is essential to analyse previous policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives and learn from them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of such events. Such will impact the future development of education to improve the quality and standards of education to match the country's educational, social, and economic demands in line with national and international trends.

1.2 Justification and rationale for the analysis

Given the above context, it is evident that matters related to education policies and policymaking have been given prominence for over a decade at multiple levels in the Sri Lankan education system. However, despite the prominence given to education policies and policymaking concerns, several issues and challenges remain in the system. One of the major challenges is that the formulation of national policy for education does not directly address national demands and global trends in education to fulfil the labour market demands and national requirements.

The government has made national and international commitments to provide quality education despite any circumstances. In order to do so, the government has embarked on reforms to the Sri Lankan education system (including curriculum reforms, education administration and management reforms, and structural changes). These reforms also recognise the importance of quality education, ensuring equity, and systematically improving the efficiency of the system. The current situation in Sri Lanka which is marked by multiple economic, governance, and social crises, also demands fresh thinking and a new outlook for the system. Given the extreme economic hardship faced by all segments of society, education will be critically important and must be conceptualised in ways that are responsive to the new context. Further, the education authorities were concerned about contemporary changes in education, emerging global trends, and their impact on the Sri Lankan education system.

Considering the above, an analysis of Sri Lanka's education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives is timely and appropriate, in line with the ongoing education reform agenda to facilitate more effective implementation of national education policies.

1.3 Scope of the analysis

1.3.1 Purpose and objectives of the analysis

The primary purpose of this analysis is to review/study past and present education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka focusing on equity, quality, relevance, efficiency, and gender responsiveness of education, as well as major cross-cutting issues, across all levels and types of education within the national context. The analysis also provides a conceptual framework for education policy analysis and facilitates engagement in policy dialogues with national counterparts and development partners. Accordingly, the main aim of this analysis is to critically analyse the national education policies, policy frameworks, and reform initiatives underlying the design and implementation.

Further, it assesses critical gaps in policy design, management capacity, and development cooperation and identifies strategic areas for policy development in Sri Lanka. In addition, this study aims to inform policymakers, technocrats, and education planners at national and sub-national levels, as well as any implementation layers in the education system, about the importance of policies and policymaking addressing the contextual demands and needs using scientific techniques. The analysis is expected to identify strengths and gaps in education policies and policymaking in Sri Lanka. It should be noted that this analysis will not be expected to evaluate the impact of past and present education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives.

1.3.2 Scope and focus of the analysis

The scope and focus of the analysis will be guided by the following parameters:

Parameter	Description
Relevance	Assess the equity, quality, relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives concerning the current context and needs, identify the gaps in policies and policymaking, and propose recommendations to inform future policies and policymaking on education in Sri Lanka.
Impact and results	Identify the extent to which education policies are implemented to achieve intended policy objectives, and propose corrective measures.
Recommendations	Minimize gaps in policy formulation, policymaking, and policy implementation.
Compliance	Analyse and guide how policies can be aligned with proposed education, economic, and social demand.

1.3.3 Expected outputs and outcomes of the analysis

The expected outcome of this exercise is to analyse and review past and current education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives to identify gaps in education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives and the policymaking and implementation in Sri Lanka. Further, the analysis intends to present lessons learnt from the policy implementation in the country and discuss potential measures for future policymaking in education. It is also hoped that this analysis will lay the groundwork for formulating future policies aimed at advancing education development.

1.3.4 Constraints and limitations

Several constraints and limitations impacted this analysis/review. One of the major concerns on national education policy is whether Sri Lanka has a policy or not. This issue has sparked debate among academics, educationists, and civil society members. Sri Lanka has had several policy proposals/frameworks, but many of them have not been fully approved legally or officially, and such proposals/frameworks are not fully implemented in the system. However, proposals and initiatives were implemented through official circulars and guidelines issued by the relevant authorities. Such practices and unclear situations affect this analysis/review.

1.3.5 Contents of the analysis

This analysis comprises six chapters.

- Chapter One offers an overview of the analysis. It includes the background, on the analysis of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka. This chapter also covers the purpose and objectives, scope and focus of the analysis, expected outputs and outcomes, constraints and limitations, and the structure of the analysis.

- Chapter Two discusses what education policies are and why they are important, referring to the literature and analysis framework. This includes definitions of education policy, dimensions and models for policymaking, the basis of the origination of policies, the policy cycle, and a conceptual framework for policy analysis.

- Chapter Three presents the methodology adopted for the analysis.

- The analysis in Chapter Four focuses on the past and present education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka. The secondary data is mainly based on documentary analysis as a desk review.

- Chapter Five analyses education policies, frameworks, proposals, and reform initiatives under the following subheadings:

    i. Origination of policies and policy formation.
    ii. Contents of education policies, proposals/frameworks:
        a. Equity and inclusiveness perspectives.
        b. Education perspectives: equity, relevance, and sustainability.
        c. Economic perspectives.
        d. Social development, cultural changes, and gender responsiveness.
        e. Efficiency perspectives.
    iii. Politics vs policymaking and policies.
    iv. International trends and development partners' involvements and influences on policymaking and policies.
    v. Citizenship and civil societies' involvement in education policymaking and policies.
    vi. Policy legislations.
    vii. Policy implementation.
    viii. Success and failures of education policies: issues, challenges and gaps.

- Chapter Six provides the conclusion and recommendations of the analysis.

2. What are and why education policies?

2.1 Introduction

The objective aims to review/study the context-specific literature on education policies, policy proposals/frameworks, and reform initiatives, drawing on policymaking-related literature, including selected international literature. Secondary literature on the subject is utilized primarily because the intention is to identify the policy gaps, strengths, and weaknesses and to propose solutions. At both national and international levels, an extensive body of literature is related to education policies and policy formulation.

2.2 Education policies and policymaking

2.2.1 What is an education policy?

A policy is a broad statement that outlines the government's main goals and priorities. It aligns with the country's constitution and can be sector-wide (i.e., education sector policy) or specific to a sub-sector (e.g., school education, higher education), or a particular issue (e.g., low enrolment rates, the mismatch between education and economy or labour market demand). The policy process is a key element in education planning (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013a) and requires clarification of the concepts of policy and policymaking.

Education policy is 'an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may present directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action, or guide implementation of previous decisions' (Haddad, 1994; Haddad & Demsky, 1995:18). Policymaking is the first step in any planning cycle, and planners must appreciate the dynamics of policy formulation before they can design implementation and evaluation procedures effectively (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:18).

Generally, education policies provide direction for the overall mission and goals (e.g., policy goals: internal efficiency, external efficiency, social equity, education quality, nation-building) of the education system and also provide a framework that guides the planning and administration of the system. It will serve as the foundation or initial stage of the education planning process. Any education

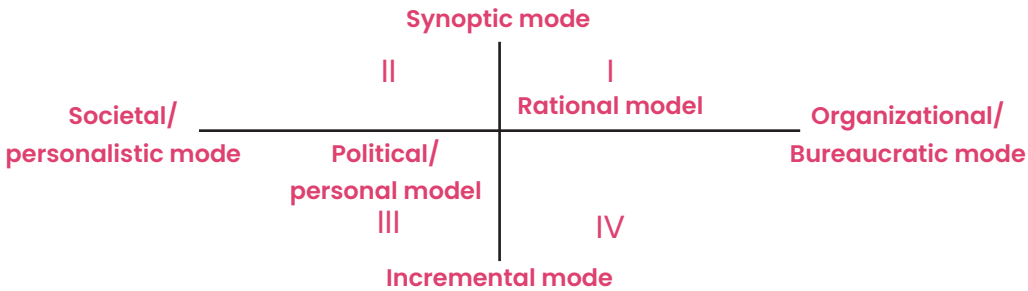
system operates based on educational principles, government policies, and collections of laws/rules that govern the operation of the education system. In other words, education policy refers to the collection of laws or regulations that govern the operation of the education system. It seeks to answer questions about the purpose of education, the objectives (i.e., social, personal, economic, and national) it is designed to attain, the methods for achieving them, and the tools for measuring their success or failure. Education being an activity that impacts people of all ages, education policy may be broken down into policy as different segments/stages of the education sector. Policies are numerous and varied; however, they differ in scope, complexity, decision environment, range of choices, and decision criteria (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:18).

The term 'policymaking' like 'policy' implies competing concepts and assumptions (Haddad, 1994; Haddad & Demsky, 1995:19). Further, policymaking should be preceded by research, evidence-collection, and debates on the identified issue or need, as well as on the proposed vision, options, and means to address such issues or needs (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013a).

2.2.2 Dimensions of and models for policymaking

Key dimensions of policymaking are based on two fundamental questions: who does it? (the actors) and how? (the process) (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:19; Little, 2003:7). According to Haddad & Demsky (1995:19), historically, the actors in policymaking have been considered unitary and rational; more recently, policy analysts have introduced the organisational (public interest) model and the personalistic (self-interest) model. The process element has fluctuated between a synoptic (comprehensive) approach and an incremental approach. Despite following ad-hoc policymaking, the process needs to follow the scientific and accepted method/technique. Dimensions of and models for policymaking are shown in Diagram 2.1.

Diagram 2.1: Dimensions of and models for policymaking



Source: Haddad, (1994); Haddad & Demsky (1995:21).

Rational model: The rational model is a decision-making approach applied to the public arena. It includes two modes: synoptic mode and organisational/ bureaucratic mode.

Synoptic mode: The synoptic method, in its extreme form, entails one single central planning authority for the whole of society, combining economic, political, and social control into one integrated planning process that makes negotiation unnecessary (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:20).

Organisational/Bureaucratic mode: The organisational/bureaucratic mode is decision-making unitary, rational, centrally controlled, completely technical, and value-maximizing.

Political/personal model: The political/personal model essentially consists of three modes: societal/personalistic mode, incremental mode, and ad-hoc mode.

Societal/personalistic mode: The societal/personalistic mode is characterized by decision-making, a political activity, characterized by self-interest, political bargaining, value judgment, and multiple rationalities.

Incremental mode: The political model applies the incremental mode to formulating public policies. Characteristics of incremental mode policymaking rely on interaction, including negotiation, rather than a complete analysis of the situation to develop a blueprint for solving problems (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:20). Policy options are based on highly uncertain and fluid knowledge and respond to a dynamic situation where no 'correct' solution can be found, or technically derived from a diagnosis of the situation. In the ad-hoc mode, no rationale was followed.

In addition, there are two alternative modes to the commonly assumed model of unitary rational policymaker: (i) the organisational process model and (ii) the governmental politics model. Indeed, several models for policymaking have also been proposed, and the garbage-can model and bottom-up policymaking approach are essential to them.

Garbage-Can model: The garbage-can model is also used for policymaking, characterised by varying degrees of rationality and instruments. Lee (1996:52)

highlighted that, like incrementalism, the garbage-can model assumes decision-makers can and usually do operate without clearly defined goals.

Bottom-up policymaking approach: The 'bottom-up policymaking approach' is also one of the best approaches for policymaking. This will deviate from a top-down approach, and the top-down approach generally represents the street-level or front-line groups for policymaking (Lee, 1996).

It reveals that any policy changes are not purely technical but have a mix of socio-political-economic dimensions. For example, when attempting to introduce any changes, modify, or restructure the system, generally, one group supports it, while another group strongly opposes it. Finally, such a situation creates political, social, and economic issues. It should be understood that education is a sensitive area, and every citizen has a concern and connection directly or indirectly to education. Therefore, education policies and policymaking are critical and must follow a balanced approach to implementing changes. Changes or reforms cannot be implemented overnight; they require a reasonable amount of time and a more comprehensive consultation with sound communications among all respective groups.

2.2.3 Basis of origination of policies

When engaging in policymaking, the following key areas or fundamentals are based on the origination of education policies.

Government policy directions: Basically, policies originate/emerge or are initiated considering the development goals of the state/government. Sometimes, if there is a mismatch between current system needs and the existing policies, the state/government initiates to formulate new policies or amend existing policies. Indeed, governments warrant structural changes and reforms, and when existing policies are inadequately covered, new policies must be formulated.

Demand-driven policies: Some policies originated because of social demand and pressures. Sporadically, it may happen due to revolutions or addressing social issues and problems (i.e., youth unrest, and poverty reduction strategies).

Supply-driven policies: Some of the policies originated based on the authorities' suggestions and political interests. Occasionally, such policies may not be demanded by the beneficiaries; however, there may be a different agenda for initiating these policies.

Emerging policies: Addressing unavoidable emerging situations (i.e. disaster management, peace education, and child labour). Some policies originated or emerged to address unavoidable emerging situations such as disaster management, peace education, and child labour.

Operational policies: Running any system requires adopting some operational policies, especially those that may require management and administration of the system. Consequently, authorities use available powers and authorities, and operational policies are formulated and implemented.

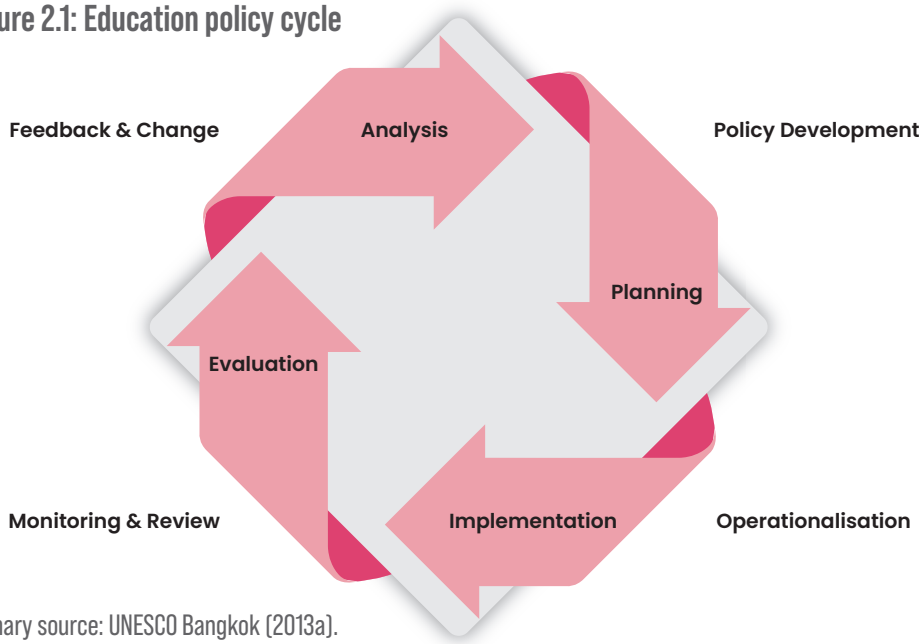
Internationally agreed goals, conventions, charters, agreements, and programmes: Many countries in the world are committed to implementing internationally agreed goals, conventions, charters, agreements, and programmes within the specified periods (i.e., Education For All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Child Charters). To fulfill these commitments, such countries or systems must amend their policies to implement agreed commitments. Accordingly, these commitments become a part of the national policies.

Moreover, some education reforms and policies have emerged/ formulated as competitiveness-driven reforms (reforms due to shifting demands for skills, commodities, and markets), finance-driven reforms, market forces-driven reforms, and equity-driven reforms (reforms to improve the quality of education and its role as a source of upward social mobility) to increase equality of economic opportunity.

2.2.4 Education policy cycle

The typical education policy cycle is a systematic process, and the education policy cycle is outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Education policy cycle



Primary source: UNESCO Bangkok (2013a).

Forming a system/sector vision is required before the start of a policy cycle. For instance, once a political party comes to power, it defines its strategic intent for education.

1. **Analysis/diagnosis:** Once the vision is defined, a policy cycle begins with an analysis/diagnosis of the current situation/system and an agreement on the policy directions to achieve the vision. Policy options are then formulated, cost, and appraised, leading to priority setting and phasing.
2. **Planning**: Based on the policy directions and priorities identified, an implementation strategy is designed, and activities are specified and budgeted. During this step, a series of concrete outputs, targets, actions, and timelines are defined, along with the roles and responsibilities of each involved party, and the required resources. A monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework should also be clearly defined during this step.

3. **Implementation:** Planned and budgeted activities are implemented according to the agreed timeline and responsibilities to achieve the policy targets.
4. **Evaluation:** The activities must be regularly monitored and reviewed, and adjustments must be made when necessary. Various aspects, such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, are evaluated. The evaluation results then provide inputs for informing and improving future policies.

2.2.5 Factors need to be considered for the policy formulations: concepts of national development

Effective policies must be built based on evidence (evidence-based policymaking) and should be politically feasible. Additionally, sound policies should be financially realistic and agreed upon by the government, society, and relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, new policies must be consistent with existing policies, plans, and strategies and balanced development in the system/country must be maintained.

The sound process of policymaking needs to consist of the following steps.

1. Policy consultation (e.g., obtaining suggestions, and opinions)
2. Policy formulation
3. Policy communication (e.g., media campaigns, printed and electronic media programmes, symposiums, public sessions, leaflets/handbills, brochures, and social media)
4. Policy implementation (implementation strategies: e.g., acts, rules and regulations, circulars, Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), agreements, and charters.)
5. M&E system/mechanism (e.g., review sessions, feedback, and steering committee meetings)

When evaluating policy options, desirability, affordability, and feasibility factors need to be considered.

Desirability: Under desirability, the following questions/factors need to be answered/analysed and considered.

- Who would benefit?
- Who might feel threatened?
- How might the potential losers be compensated?
- What would make the option desirable to all stakeholders?
- Compatibility (ideology, targets of economic growth, national development)
- Political development and stability

Affordability: Under affordability, factors such as fiscal cost, social and political cost, and future trends (e.g., economic growth) need to be strictly considered.

Feasibility: Under feasibility, factors such as the availability of human resources, fiscal resources, and sustainability must be considered.

2.2.6 Conceptual framework for policy analysis

The conceptual framework for policy analysis is given in Diagram 2.2 (Page 15).

Although decision-making is a central event in the policy process, it is preceded by analytical and political activities and followed by equally important planning activities. As shown in Diagram 2.2, policy analysis needs to cover the pre-policy decisions and activities, the policy formulation process itself, and post-decision planning activities. The steps for the policy planning are outlined below.

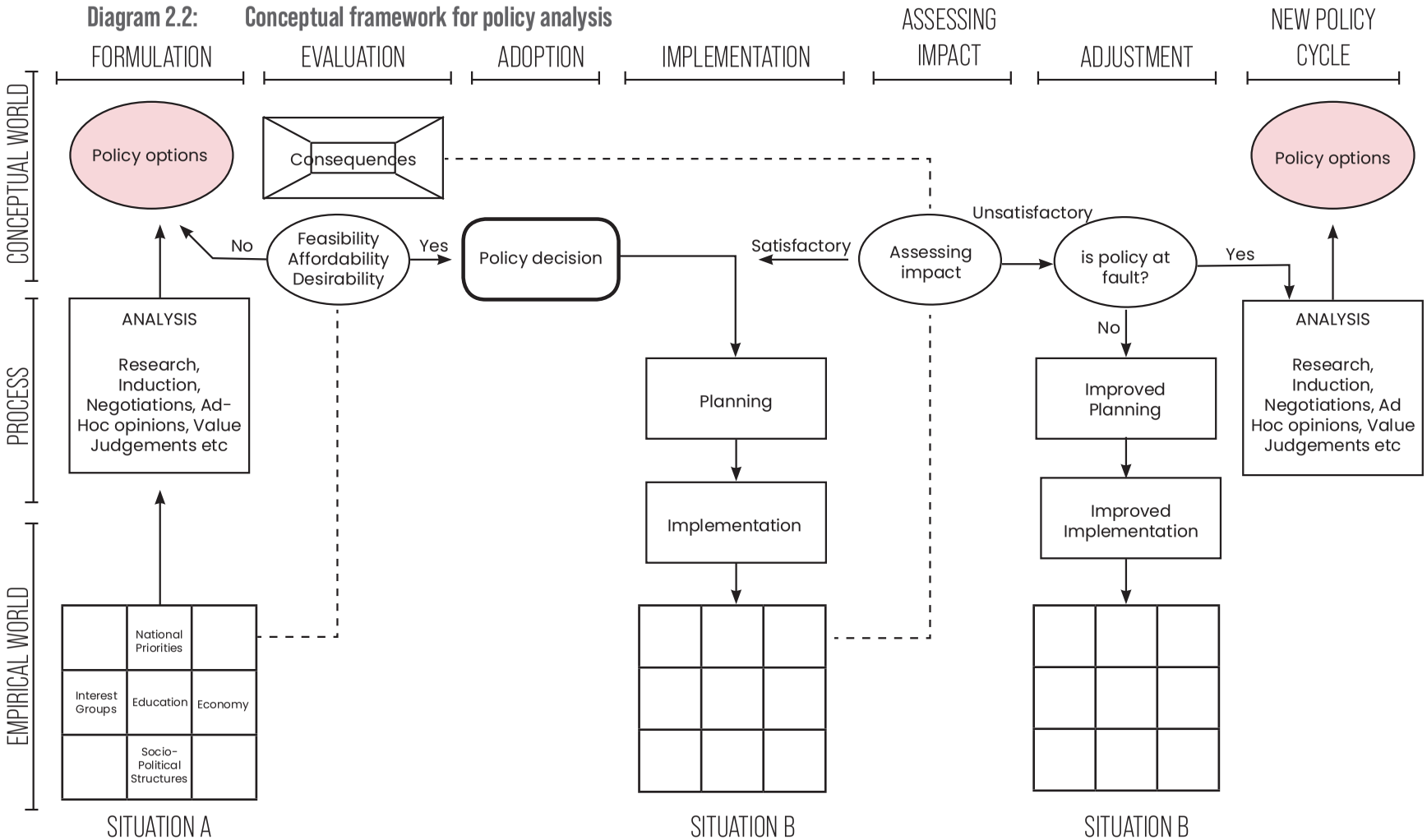
Policy planning:

1. Analysis of the existing situation (country background, geography and demography, economy, society and culture, politics, education sector, dynamics change, national development priorities, development partners involvement, and aid effectiveness) (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013a)
2. The generation of policy options (systemic mode, incremental mode, ad-hoc mode, and importation mode)
3. Evaluation of policy options (desirability, affordability, and feasibility)
4. Making the policy decision
5. Planning of policy implementation

Policy adjustment:

6. Policy impact assessment
7. Subsequent policy cycles (Haddad & Demsky, 1995:24).

Diagram 2.2: Conceptual framework for policy analysis



Source: Haddad, (1994); Haddad & Demsky (1995:26-27).

When analysing education policies, it needs to be considered how they followed the abovementioned steps to formulate the respective policy.

2.3 Conclusion

Any system requires a sound policy with a long-term vision for the nation's sustainable development. Such a policy should not be altered or postponed due to different reasons and matters, but there should be room for amendments, modifications, and adjustments in line with contemporary developments and trends at both national and international levels. Policy and policymaking should be systematically supplemented with each other. Education policies should be beneficiary-oriented, and policymakers need to respond to the social, economic, and contextual demands and requirements meaningfully.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodology

The research method of this analysis mainly employed a qualitative approach, including critical incident technique, group and focus interviews, cognitive mapping, and content analysis (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2002). Accordingly, a substantial set of primary data and information was collected by reviewing the literature (both international level and context-specific literature) and by conducting interviews such as key informant interviews (KIIs), in-depth direct interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Initially, a comprehensive and systematic review of the available literature on education policies in Sri Lanka was conducted. The literature review paid special attention to policy documents, policy proposals/frameworks, and reform initiatives (see: Table 4.1) and also referred to government acts, regulations, circulars, guidelines, education sector development plans, and newspaper and journal articles related to education policies.

Further, five (05) KIIs, six (06) IDIs, and six (06) FGDs with respective officials, counterparts, and stakeholders at national, provincial, and implementation levels, who are directly involved in policymaking were able to gain critical insights into education policies and policymaking. Details of KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs are given in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Details of KIIs, IDIs and FGDs

Ser. No.	Participants	KIIs	IDIs	FGDs	Representation level
1	Policymakers		1		National level
2	Former education policymakers, planners, and technocrats	2	1		National level Sub-national level
3	Policy Analyst		1		National level
4	Academics/Professionals		3		University education level
5	Civil society organisations (CSOs) members	3		6	National level Sub-national level
Total		**5**	**6**	**6**	

Stakeholders for participation in the interviews are selected/identified purposively (see: Appendix 3.1), considering their engagements with education policy matters and contributions to the development of the system. Interviews were conducted openly but followed a given area of concern for the study. These interview methods were used to collect data and information, including the respondents' institutional experiences and practical perceptions on education policies and policymaking in Sri Lanka. Moreover, this method is also used to triangulate and supplement previous policies in Sri Lanka using their professional experiences and institutional memories.

3.2 Data and information analysis and validation

Data and information were analysed manually. The draft report was validated and finalised based on the comments and feedback from wider stakeholders representing national, provincial, and zonal-level institutions, schools, and development partners (see: Appendix 3.1).

4. Education policies, frameworks/ proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka: at a glance

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on general education, key education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives from the last several decades. Evidance shows, many attempts have taken place to implement acts for the education sector. However, this review will mainly focus on reviewing secondary literature on general education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives, with no intention of conducting an in-depth review of education laws and acts. Nonetheless, in some cases, education laws and acts are also referred to as education policy analysis. Moreover, it should be noted that this review will not focus on studying education policies directly corresponding to technical, vocational education, training, and higher (university) education sub-sectors within Sri Lanka's education sector.

4.2 Education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka: at a glance

The education system in Sri Lanka is centrally controlled, financed, and resourced, and it implements a substantial level of education welfare/subsidies. Students follow a national curriculum in most subjects and sit national examinations. Moreover, the provincial education system manages schools under the purview of provincial councils, which is in line with the national policy directives. In contrast, besides government schools, there are non-fee paying and fully-paid private schools and government-subsidized Pirivena[1] education institutions. Another category includes international schools, which offer both local and overseas curriculums and are established on a commercial basis. Nevertheless, as a country, an acceptable national policy for education is fundamental as all

[1] Monastic Colleges dedicated for Buddhist monks and layman students.

children are Sri Lankan citizens, and the constitution of the government ensures the provision of education without any discrimination.

In the process of education policy development in Sri Lanka, various documents (e.g., policies, frameworks/proposals, reform initiatives, and education sector development plans) are produced. To distinguish clearly between them, below is a brief operational description of these policy documents:

- A national education policy establishes the main goals and priorities pursued by the government in matters of education;
- Education policy frameworks/proposals (pending approval);
- Education reform initiatives, and
- Education sector development plans based on the policies mentioned above, frameworks, and reforms.

Since 1945, there have been numerous occasions when respective governments attempted to introduce education policy proposals/frameworks to advance education in line with context-specific needs and demands. These attempts and initiatives are given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Matrix of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms in Sri Lanka

Ser. No.	Author (formulated responsibility)	Year	Title	Education Policy (Approved)	Education Policy Proposals/Framework	Education Reforms/ Changes	Education Acts and Laws
1.1	Government of Ceylon	1945	Free Education Policy	√*			
2.1	Ministry of Education	1950s	Education Changes in 1950s			√**	
2.2	Ministry of Education	1960-1961	Education Changes in 1960-1962			√**	
2.3	Ministry of Education	1966	Proposals for reforms in general and technical education			√**	
2.4	Ministry of Education	1972	Education Reforms			√**	
2.5	Ministry of Education	1977/78	Education Changes in 1977/78			√**	

2.6	Ministry of Education	1981	Education Proposals for Reforms (Education White Paper)			✓**	
2.7	Government of Sri Lanka	1987	13th amendment to the constitution	✓**			
2.8	National Education Commission	1992	The First Report of the National Education Commission, Sessional Paper No. V-1992			✓**	
	National Education Commission	1997	General Education Reforms			✓**	
	Presidential Task Force on General Education, Sri Lanka	1997	General Education Reforms			✓**	
2.9	National Education Commission	2003	Envisioning Education for Human Development: Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka		✓***		
2.10	Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education	2012	New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka		✓***		
2.11	National Education Commission	2016	Raising the Quality of Education: Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka		✓***		
2.12	Ministry of Education	2019	National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka		✓***		
2.13	Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs	2020	Re-emerging Education in Sri Lanka: Transforming the Present System of General Education to a Dynamic and Vibrant Paradigm for 21st Century		✓***		
2.14	Ministry of Education and State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion and Open Universities	2019 - 2022	Education Reforms for General Education			✓**	
2.15	National Education Commission	2022	National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)		✓***		
2.16	Ministry of Education	2022	Proposal for General Education Reforms (2022-2032) A Preliminary Note		✓***		
2.17	Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament	2023	National Education Policy Framework – Sri Lanka (2023-2033)		✓***		

2.18	Select Committee of Parliament of Sri Lanka	2023	Report of the Select Committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for the expansion of Higher Education Opportunities in Sri Lanka		√***		
3.1	Government of Ceylon	1939	Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939 as amended by Ordinance No. 61 of 1939, Ordinance Act No. 3 of 1946, Act No. 26 of 1947, Act No. 5 of 1951, Act No. 37 of 1958, and Act No. 35 of 1973				√*
3.2	Government of Ceylon	1960	Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No. 5 of 1960				√*
3.3	Government of Ceylon	1961	Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961				√*
3.4	Department of Education	1963	Manual of Instructions (Part I & II)				√*
3.5	Government of Ceylon	1968	Public Examinations Act No. 25 of 1968				√*
3.6	Government of Sri Lanka	1979	Pirivena Education Act No. 64 of 1979				√*
3.7	Government of Sri Lanka	1981	Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Act No. 65 of 1981				√*
3.8	Ministry of Education	1983	Education - Draft Bill				√***
3.9	Government of Sri Lanka	1985	National Institute of Education Act No. 28 of 1985				√*
3.10	Government of Sri Lanka	1986	College of Education Act of 1986				√*
3.11	Government of Sri Lanka	1991	National Education Commission Act No. 19 of 1991				√*
3.12	National Committee for Formulating a New Education Act for General Education	2009	New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka				√***
3.13	Government of Sri Lanka	2014	Right to Free Education Bill, 2014				√*
3.14	Ministry of Education	2019	Proposed framework for consideration in drafting the Education Bill (Act)				√***

Note: √* - Approved & implemented. √** - Approved & partly implemented. √*** - Proposals.

As Table 4.1 shows, although there have been many attempts to introduce new education policies for the education system in Sri Lanka, only a few have successfully been implemented into the system. A similar situation can be observed concerning education acts and laws. Nevertheless, many policy proposals and initiatives have been implemented in the system through various

means, leveraging the powers and authorities. The following sub-sections will discuss origination and formulation, content summaries/key areas, and the status and implications of each education policy, framework/proposal, and reform initiative.

4.2.1 Free Education Policy (1945)

Origination and formulation:

The CWW Kannangara Special Committee Reforms introduced the complete package of free education policy in Sri Lanka. From 1931 to 1947, many initiatives took place, and several programmes were implemented that brought about a social revolution in the country. Report of the Special Committee on Education in Ceylon (1940) is the first comprehensive study of the country's education system, and it includes the most significant policy recommendations covering all aspects of general education. The report identified three broad areas: mental development (including physical development, curricular reforms, and personal and public health), culture, and efficiency. Free Education Act was introduced in 1945. The free education policy is the effort that laid the foundation for the emergence of a national system of education, which has made Sri Lanka a model for social development among developing nations that gained independence after the Second World War.

Contents:

Under the free education policy scheme, several radical initiatives have taken place, and selected key initiations are given below. These initiations can be considered a historical landmark in Sri Lankan education history.

- **Introduction of free education:** Provide broad opportunities for children who are eligible to receive an education without any restriction on their gender, ethnicity, or geographical location. Free education from grade 1 of all government and government-assisted schools to public university level. Provide equal opportunities for access to and participation in primary and secondary education.
- Change of the medium of instruction to national languages (mother tongue).
- **Curriculum reforms:** introduction of innovative curricula; introduction of rural education programme (Handessa scheme), link education to the socio-economic life of the community (children actively worked together with the farmers and workers in the community), health education, and aesthetic education.

- **Establishment of Central Schools in rural areas:** Establish central colleges (full-fledged secondary schools) with boarding facilities to provide good quality secondary education.
- The grade 5 primary education scholarship examination was introduced in 1944 to provide opportunities for poor able children to enter English-medium 'central schools' in rural areas.
- Promote and set up vocational and technical education streams in schools.
- New structure of the education system.
- Enactment of Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939[2].
- Assessment system.
- Teacher education (research and experimental-oriented).
- Provide all necessary educational resources (i.e., human, infrastructure, physical, and in-kind) to all schools.
- Introduce education subsidy/welfare programmes to increase access to and participation in education.
- Establish state universities to provide opportunities for higher education.
- Introduce religions education and adult education (Jayasuriya, 1988:21-41; Jayaratne, et. al., 2013:14-15; Wehella & Balasooriya, 2014ab).

Status and implications:

The guiding principles of the Kannangara education policy were the diminishing of privilege in education and the need for equalization of education opportunities for all children in the country. Under the free education policy scheme, the government of Sri Lanka[3] (GoSL) (then Ceylon) is to provide free education, accepting that education is a right of each citizen, and the Sri Lankan constitution ensures everyone the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels (Balasooriya, et. al., 2010:815; Wehella & Balasooriya, 2014ab). Implementing the free education policy is a turning point in the history of social and human capital development in Sri Lanka (Wehella & Balasooriya, 2014ab).

---

[2] Education Ordinance No. 31 was passed in 1939. The Ordinance clarified the division of responsibilities for education between central and local levels. Although many sections of the Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939 appear outdated today, they need to be updated/improved/amended in line with the contemporary development of education. However, this ordinance has survived until 2024 and remains the principal law on education in Sri Lanka.

[3] Before 1972, the government of Sri Lanka was named the government of Ceylon.

4.2.2 Education changes in the 1950s

Origination and formulation:

In the 1950s decade, many political changes occurred in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). Such changes severely impact education and other sectors in the country.

Contents:

In the decade of the 1950s, the quantitative expansion of education in the provision of education is evident. Apart from that, it changed the medium of instruction to national languages, having a political intention.

Status and implications:

Changing the medium of instruction heavily impacted the opening of the education door to rural-level citizens. These changes increased access and participation in education and also paved the way to create avenues for social mobility. Nonetheless, some claim that these changes impacted the expansion of education to the rural level, and some pointed out that language policy was the root cause of ethnic issues in the country.

4.2.3 Education changes in 1960-1961

Origination and formulation:

In the 1960s decade, many political changes occurred in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). Shifting governments affected the country's entire development and economic growth; the education sector is the most prominent social sector affected by such changes.

The government in 1961 appointed a National Education Commission (NEC) (Prof. J. E. Jayasuriya Committee) to examine and review the entire education system and make recommendations for the establishment of a unified national system of education for the country. The commission issued an interim report and, subsequently, the final report.

Contents:

In 1960-1961, the government took action to take over the assisted schools and training colleges (Special Provisions of Act No. 5 of 1960). Accordingly, all assisted schools were brought under the management of the Director of Education unless the proprietor of a grade 1 or grade 2 school opted to run it as a non-fee levying private school. In 1961, by enacting Assisted Schools and

Training Colleges (supplementary provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961, the properties of non-fee levying schools were vested in the government to facilitate the smooth functioning of the schools. The act also prohibited establishing new schools for children aged 5 to 14. Thus, the foundation was laid for the development of a national system of schools in the country.

Jayasuriya committee recommendations covered all aspects of general education, and some of the critical areas are indicated below.

- Compulsory school age: from 6 to 14 years of age.
- Medium of instruction: the medium of instruction for citizens must be Sinhala or Tamil.
- English to be introduced as an optional subject from grade 5.
- School system: a common elementary school for children in grades 1-8 called junior school and four types of senior schools for GCE OL and AL. The types are agriculture, engineering and technology, science and arts, and commerce and humanities.
- Zoning of schools: children in a zone attend the closest basic school in the area and then join a senior school depending on aptitude.
- Content of education: a standard curriculum for the basic school and a differentiated curriculum for the senior schools.
- Work experience attached to a place of work.
- Teaching profession, recruitment, and training.
- Student welfare, health facilities, midday meal.
- Examinations: grade 5 scholarships are to be conducted at grade 8.
- School psychological service.
- Education administration.
- School community relations (Medagama, 2014).

Status and implications:

The government incorporated most of the Jayasuriya committee recommendations in a whitepaper proposal for the national education system (1964) and obtained the public's views. However, due to changing the government, these proposals were not implemented, and they were kept away.

4.2.4 Proposals for reforms in general and technical education (1966-1967)

Origination and formulation:

The new government came to office in 1965 and stalled previous whitepaper proposals. However, taking into consideration the policy proposals of the NEC report (J. E. Jayasuriya Committee) and the Technical Education Commission (TEC) report (1963), a fresh whitepaper was prepared. The whitepaper was debated in parliament for two days and was presented as a draft bill a year later. However, the bill was defeated in parliament because it was anticipated that access to high-status secondary education among the lower social classes would be limited (Little, 2024:147).

Contents:

This whitepaper proposed several policy proposals, and some of the key proposals are given below.

- Common basic school up to grade 8, and at that stage, a selection test would be held; based on its results, children would be sent to local practical schools, junior technical schools, and senior schools.
- Only students qualified to enter a senior school would have the opportunity to enter university and pursue higher education.

Later, the government was compelled to withdraw the whitepaper, and an amendment was made in 1967. The following were the key proposals.

- Elementary school examination at grade 7 and students to join the senior school and technical college or an institute of fine arts.
- Curriculum development: innovations to the curriculum (based on international trends), teacher training (first in science and mathematics, and later extended to other subject areas)
- Establish a Curriculum Development Centre (CDC).
- Change the structure of education administration: Regional Education Offices were established in 1961.
- Amalgamated the Central Department of Education with the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 1965 and Secretary, MoE became the Director General of Education (DGE).

- Regional Education Offices were upgraded to the level of Departments, and Assistant Directors of Education were promoted to Directors of Education and vested with the powers of a head of a department. The Circuit Education Officers (CEOs) system was introduced, and education divisions increased.

Status and implications:

Free education in Sri Lanka, which commenced in the 1940s, has played a prominent national role in developing nation-building. Underlining drivers of education changes in the 1950s and 1960s promoted state intervention strategies and measures for the country's development. No doubt, it was a timely initiative. Countless individuals across the country have directly benefited from this initiative, enabling them to contribute to the nation's development and global growth as well.

4.2.5 Education Reforms (1972)

Origination and formulation:

The new government came to power in 1970 and started to formulate a new set of education reforms. Accordingly, the education review committee was established in the late 1970s. At that time, a major social issue was the problem of unemployment among youth, especially educated unemployment was extremely high. The mismatch between education and the economy was identified as a major root cause of these issues. Under the five-year development plan, the government paid special attention to addressing these issues. In the meantime, in 1971, a youth insurrection mobilized, indicating the mismatch between education and employment and regional disparities (including education) in the country. Just suppressing the youth revolution, the government sped up the formulation of a new plan for education reforms, and the implementation of these proposals was carried out from January 1972 in line with the government's vision of 'development.' Education was recognised as an investment in the country's human resource development.

Objectives of the 1972 education reforms:

- Provide education in line with the social, cultural, and economic needs of the country.
- Diminish educational disparities.
- Provide equal education opportunities for all.
- Provide quality education.

- Improve knowledge of local and international languages.
- Practice respecting all religions.
- Provide basic knowledge of science and mathematics.
- Create awareness and understanding of living society.
- Provide knowledge and improve skills in aesthetics for all students.
- Create awareness of and improve skills in professional areas (MoE, 1972).

1972 education reforms were aimed to achieve the following main goals:

- Established a disciplinary and ethically behaved society.
- Provided mathematical knowledge.
- Provided knowledge of science.
- Provided social consciousness.
- Provided knowledge of aesthetics.
- Provided knowledge in technical and vocational areas.
- Provided general education.

Contents:

The main components of the 1972 education reforms were as follows.

- **Structural changes in the education system:** The new education structure consisted of five years of primary, four years of junior secondary, and two years of senior secondary. The age of administration to grade one was increased from 5 to six years. In so doing, the child's age at the end of the primary stage remained the same, 11 years. The students sat for the National Certificate of General Education (NCGE) at the end of the junior secondary stage. Those who passed the NCGE would proceed to the senior secondary course and, at the end of two years, were to sit for the Higher National Certificate of Education (HNCE). Selection to universities was based on the HNCE results, but they received orientation before entering universities.

- **Curriculum reforms:** The curricula at different stages were revised to keep up with the students' age levels. The primary curriculum included religion, medium language (Sinhala or Tamil), second language (introduced from Grade 3 onwards), mathematics, physical and aesthetic, creative, and environmental activities. However, in teaching methodology, teachers

were expected to follow an integrated approach through activity-based learning. At the junior secondary stage, there was a standard curriculum consisting of religion, medium language, second language, mathematics, science, social studies, aesthetics, health and physical education, and pre-vocational studies. The changes included replacing physics, chemistry, and biology at GCE OL with integrated science for NCGE, substituting history, geography, and civic with social studies, and introducing pre-vocational subjects in place of technical subjects. The novelty in pre-vocational studies was that learning was related to the occupations in the locality, and students learnt about the background knowledge of the vocation. In addition, the students also learnt about the resources of the country and an elementary practice in geometrical and mechanical drawing. At the collegiate level, the curriculum consisted of core subjects, optional subjects, and project work. The core subjects were: first language (Sinhala/Tamil), second language, elementary statistics and basic principles of management, our cultural heritage and socio-economic environment of Sri Lanka, and basic principles of social science. The optional subjects were organized into four subject streams: science stream, commerce and business studies, social sciences, languages, humanities, and aesthetics. The students were required to learn two subjects from the selected stream.

- **Reforms in education administration:** Up to 1971, the hierarchy of educational administrators included School Inspectors (CEOs), District Inspectors (Education Advisors), Assistant Directors, Deputy Directors, and Directors, forming one category, while the principals of schools and teacher educators constituted another. To allow all these categories of officers to gain experience in various areas of education administration, a combined service designed as the Sri Lanka Education Service (SLES)[4] was established (Medagama, 2014).

Status and implications:

Evidence shows that 1972 education reforms were implemented in the system until 1977. The primary education curriculum is designed not to teach students but to facilitate students learning. Accordingly, primary education is considered the foundation for formal education and aims to improve the skills and abilities of students.

These reforms aligned with the government's economic and development plan following human capital and economic modernisation approach. The

[4] Later, it came to be designated as Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) in 1987.

education outputs fostered the growth and economic sectoral needs and tried to produce skilled labourers who fit into them. Overall, the 1972 education reforms exhibited national identities after the Kannangara reforms. Accordingly, these reforms deviated from the English education system and prioritised establishing the national economic culture and promoting production-based local monetary policy. Moreover, under the 1972 education reforms, English, science, and mathematics subjects were open to all students and were limited to selected social classes in previous decades. The key characteristics of the 1972 education reforms can be described in the following elements.

- Implementation of the core-curriculum.
- Use harmonisation and integration methods for teaching and learning.
- Introduce new subjects on par with the international level, such as new mathematics, social studies, and integration science for the school curriculum.
- Apply psychological theories for school admission of students.
- Use pre-schools and daycare centres for education.
- Introduce activity-based learning through the modernisation of primary education.
- Consider child education commencing in the mother's womb.
- Vocationalisation of school education.
- Diversification and modernisation of university degree programmes in line with the country's needs and requirements on a vocational basis.
- Consideration of regional disparities for university admission and higher education use for the nation's development.
- Ensure equal education opportunities for learning curriculum in all citizens.
- Promote pre-vocational education instead of more theoretical-based education.
- Introduce a financial subsidy scheme for university students.

Despite the positive features of this reform package, it faced significant criticism from political ideologists advocating for liberal and open economic policies. Such political unwillingness has meaningfully impacted the sustainability of these reforms.

4.2.6 Changes in education (1977/78)

Origination and formulation:

Some of the education reform proposals of 1972 were highly criticised in the political election platforms in 1977. In 1977, another political party (United National Party) swept to power and sealed the fate of the 1972 reforms (Little, 2024:94), and immediate changes were introduced to education without serious study.

Key objectives of education changes in 1977/78 are to:

- Develop a parental convention to promote community/parental participation and contribution to school education.
- Establish technical units for school dropouts.
- Develop the self-confidence and personality of students.
- Diminish disparities among schools located in rural and urban areas.
- Establish special departments for fisheries and home-grading for agriculture.
- Use the Education Service Commission for education administration.
- Strengthen non-formal education (NFE).

Contents:

The following initiations were the major education changes in 1977/78.

- The age of admission to grade 1 was reduced to five years.
- The school span was increased to 13 years (6+3+2+2).
- The GCE OL examination was restored with specific changes in subjects (NCGE and HNCE had abundant). Arts, commerce, physics, and bioscience were re-introduced, and four subjects were made compulsory for the GCE AL examination (instead of the core-curriculum introduced under the 1972 reforms).
- Integrated science and social studies continued similarly; pre-vocational studies were given up, and technical subjects were re-introduced.
- More weights were given for teaching English from grade 3 and commenced to teach basic science from grade 4.
- English was introduced as an international language and was compulsory for teaching a second national language (2NL) (Sinhala for Tamil medium students and Tamil for Sinhala medium students).

- One of the most damaging acts was undermining the role of the CDC, which had initiated programmes in curriculum renewal and development of teachers. Some of the key staff of this institution were removed, and new faces were brought in.
- During this period, due to a policy decision taken by the government, assistance for non-fee levying schools was restored, and legal provisions were given by Act No. 8 of 1981.

Status and implications:

Nonetheless, with the changes in the Minister of Education in 1980, the situation improved. Further, the government initiated the development of education reform proposals aligned with the government's vision and policy.

4.2.7 Education Proposals for Reforms (Education Whitepaper - 1981)

Origination and formulation:

In 1979, the government appointed three committees to study and report on general education, technical education, and national apprenticeship training. Respective reports were investigated by several expert groups, and proposals contained in the Whitepaper (Education Proposals for Reforms) were the outcomes of their deliberations (MoE, MoHE & MoYAE, 1981). Further, a committee was also appointed to report on the teaching of religion in schools. Under the whitepaper, the new education system was introduced, consisting of three distinct segments: the school system to provide general education, the university system, and the tertiary education system.

Contents:

The Whitepaper (1981) proposed several education policy initiatives, with the main reform initiatives including:

- The school education (general education) was restructured into (i) five years of primary schooling in grades 1-5; three years of junior secondary schooling in grades 6-8; three years of senior secondary schooling in grades 9-11; and two years of collegiate level in grades 12-13.
- **Curriculum reforms:** The curriculum for primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary education was changed.
    - ◇ *Primary curriculum*: Intended to assist children in adjusting to the transition from home to school and expressing their personality through

activities such as miming, acting, singing, dancing, drawing, and observing nature. It aimed to help children acquire skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic meaningfully while relating to other aspects of the curriculum and environmental activities.

- *Junior secondary stage:* The common curriculum at this stage consisted of 9 subjects: first language, religion, mathematics, English, science, social studies, aesthetics studies, life-skills and health, and physical education. Life-skills replaced the technical subject. In assessment, the concept of continuous assessment was introduced, and a report was to be given at the end of grade 8, incorporating the results of the summative test and continuous assessment.
- *Senior secondary stage:* The objectives of general education continued to receive emphasis at this stage, too, but as the examination to be held at the end of this stage was a terminal examination, the technical subjects would facilitate the transition to the world of work. At the end of the course, the students will sit the GCE OL examination, a national certification examination. First language, mathematics, English, science, and social studies will be tested at the national level and, other subjects at district or cluster level.
- *Collegiate level:* This is a stage of specialization leading to university and tertiary levels. The curriculum comprised core and specialized subjects. The core would be, the cultural heritage and socio-economic environment of Sri Lanka, first language, English, and work experience through community-oriented projects. The specialized subjects were organized into two streams:- science and arts. Students selected three subjects either from one or both streams.

- **Evaluation and assessment reforms:** One of the reform policies was to conduct an examination with certification at the school cluster level at the end of grade 8, enabling early school leavers to obtain a certificate. There was no selection or streaming based on this examination. The span of general education concluded with the GCE examination held at the end of grade 11. Grades 12 and 13 were proposed to be accessible only to those with strong academic aptitude and preparing students for university entrance. This policy reform introduced a continuous assessment system and an examination at the end of grade 8.

- **School clusters:** Introduced a school cluster system to minimize the disparities in schooling facilities within the network of schools and to achieve greater efficiency through rationalization within the system. The

cluster was a group of schools within a cohesive geographical area, with one school identified as a core school of the cluster. The development of clusters was considered as a unified entity, serving the educational needs of the entire area using the resources available to the best advantage.

- **Unitary Schools:** The 1981 education whitepaper also proposed establishing Unitary Schools (mostly larger schools left out from the school clusters). Further, it was suggested to have a Board of Management for every Unitary School.

- **Schools in remote areas:** Schools in isolated areas cannot be grouped among other schools in the cluster. Hence, these schools were treated as separate schools.

- **Private schools:** All private schools had to conform to national policy, and these schools provided education within the framework of national policy. The government assisted teachers in private schools through pre-service and in-service training.

- **Pre-schools:** The government admitted the valuable service rendered by pre-schools and proposed to provide teacher training.

- **Teacher education:** Recruits to the teaching service were given pre-service training before posting to schools and establishing a district teacher service.

- It proposed introducing a university entrance examination and reserving a proportion of places of graduate and post-graduate courses for those in employment.

- It was proposed that professional colleges for those unable to enter the universities be established.

- Proposed establishing a National Education Council to advise the government on all matters related to educational policies.

- Proposed to set up the Education Development Board to keep the policies of the MoE and their implementation under review. The proposed board planned to convene a national convention to provide a forum for the review of educational policies (MoE, MoHE & MoYAE, 1981).

Status and implications:

The 1981 education whitepaper reforms introduced a new outlook covering all education segments in the system. However, when the whitepaper was published, the proposals were heavily criticised by the radical student movements led by the Inter-University Students' Federation, with the support of education communities, civil society organisations (CSOs), and politically backed trade unions. As Medagama (2014) emphasised, these criticisms were of course, politically motivated rather than based on factual grounds. The majority of the education community and the public did not fully embrace these policy proposals and finally, they became a political issue. Due to various revealed and unrevealed factors many of such proposals were not fully implemented as planned.

The proposal regarding the grade structure and organisation of school clusters was implemented, but the school cluster system was abolished later due to objections from various parties. Under the school cluster system, the principal of the core school was entrusted with the role of the head of the cluster. The head principal of the cluster was expected to provide leadership to the principals of other schools in the cluster and share the resources. However, in practice, the principal wielded authority in a dictatorial manner, seizing resources instead of sharing them. This antagonized the principals of other schools. The large popular schools in urban centres were left out of the clusters and were allowed to develop as unitary schools (later designated as national schools). They were supposed to be independent financially, leading to an allegation that free education was being compromised. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the cluster school system was abandoned.

The scheme of a continuous assessment system was also resisted by teacher trade unions, who alleged that it increased the teachers' workload.

Indeed, one of the positive achievements that resulted from the whitepaper proposals was the establishment of the National Institute of Education (NIE) by an Act[5] of Parliament in 1985 (GoSL, 1985). Another positive achievement is the establishment of the National Colleges of Education[6] (NCoEs) for pre-service teacher education (GoSL, 1986).

Education management reforms (1984)

Following the whitepaper proposals of 1981, a compressive study was conducted to study tasks, problems, needs, and role perceptions of education managers

[5] Act No. 28 of 1985 (Establishment of National Institute of Education).

[6] Act of No. 30 of 1986 – Colleges of Education (Establishment of National Colleges of Education).

in 1984. The study also covered the training needs of officers and principals and job responsibilities. The report included detailed proposals on (i) educational planning and school mapping, (ii) educational development, innovation, and research, (iii) educational administration in Sri Lanka, (iv) general principles of management, and (v) financial and personnel management practices (Fernando, 1984a).

Subsequently, proposals were presented in the education management reforms on management for educational development in Sri Lanka in 1984 (Fernando, 1984b). Under the education management reforms (1984), several initiatives were also taken to improve the management and administrative aspects of schools at the national and sub-national levels. Education management reform covered areas on (i) district development programmes, (ii) foundation programme for school development (category 2 and 3 schools; collegiate schools; national schools; supervision of schools), (iii) organisation and management development (school structure; structure and functions of regional director of education/district education offices; education management information system; school clusters), (iv) planning and resource management (school planning; school zoning; district/divisional planning), (iv) personnel management (district management centres; workforce planning; evaluation of personnel (school-level); evaluation of personnel (supra school-level) (Fernando, 1984b).

Further, the school principal's role as the system's first-line manager was recognised, and the move to empower schools commenced. The introduction of school-level planning was another remarkable move. An attempt to establish zonal education offices as academic support centres for schools was experimented with, but it was given up later. By the end of the decade, divisional directors were appointed to oversee the education division.

4.2.8 13th Amendment to the Constitution (1987)

Origination and formulation:

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution was enacted in 1987, and provincial councils were established (GoSL, 1987).

Contents:

- Many of the functions vested in the MoE were devolved to the provinces. According to the nine-schedule List-1 Appendix-III of the amendment, the management of all provincial schools was vested in the respective provincial councils. Most schools came under the provincial councils, and the centre was left with only a few national schools.

- The functions left with the MoE were policy formulation, planning, national curriculum, teacher education, examinations, monitoring and evaluation, and production and distribution of textbooks. The appointment of school principals for 1AB and 1C schools was to be carried out by the MoE on the advice of the Central Public Service Commission (PSC).
- A new provincial education management structure was set up in the provinces, comprising a Provincial Ministry of Education (PME), Provincial Department of Education (PDoE), Zonal Education Offices (ZEOs), and Divisional Education Offices (DEOs).

Status and implications:

When there are many layers in a system, decision-making becomes tardy and affects the efficiency of the system. According to principles of democracy, devolution of power to the periphery is a progressive move, but the functioning of provincial councils since their inception has left much to be desired. Two developments can be perceived prominently due to the devolution of political interference in administration.

Evidence shows that some functions stipulated in the 13th Amendment need to be implemented (e.g., provincial education boards and education development boards). As a result, powers and authorities were not entirely devolved to the periphery, leading to a dual-functioning system.

4.2.9 General Education Reforms (1997)

Origination and formulation:

In 1989, the government appointed a Presidential Commission on Youth to inquire into the causes of youth unrest and insurrection and propose reforms to eradicate the causes of their grievances (Presidential Commission on Youth, 1990). The Presidential Commission on Youth studied and observed the mismatch between education and employment, leading to large-scale joblessness and frustration among school leavers before or after their examinations, irrespective of whether they had passed or failed their examinations (NEC, 1992). Having these backgrounds, in 1991, the government established the National Education Commission (NEC) under the NEC Act, No. 19 of 1991 (GoSL, 1991), and its first report was published in 1992. The report was produced after extensive consultations with various categories of the public and studied education-related issues and problems in the system. Based on the study, the report presented several priorities for reforming the education system in Sri Lanka.

Contents:

Key proposals for actions of the NEC (1992) report are as follows.

- National goals of education
- Curriculum reforms
- Pre-school education
- Teacher education and teacher service
- School administration
- Provincial administration and management
- Education clerical service
- Higher, tertiary, and vocational education
- Plantation sector schools
- Religions education
- National testing and counselling service
- Co-curricular activities (CCAs)
- Mental and physical health
- Activity schools
- Introduction of basic law
- Pupil-texts
- Revision of education law (NEC, 1992).

Based on the NEC (1992) recommendations, in 1997, the NEC presented 'General Education Reforms' and to implement these proposals, the government appointed a Special Presidential Task Force on General Education to execute the education reforms (NEC, 1997; Presidential Task Force on General Education, Sri Lanka, 1997).

Key areas of the 1997 education reforms are briefed below.

1. Expansion of educational opportunities (compulsory education; out-of-schoolchildren (OOSC), alternative education opportunities; quality assurance).
2. Improving the quality of education (pre-school and early-child development; primary education; junior secondary education; senior secondary education (GCE 'O' and 'A' levels); evaluation; English education; guidance and career counselling; CCAs; education for national integrity; vale education; special education; and inputs for improving quality education).

3. Teacher education (planning, coordination, management, and administration of teacher education; training of all un-trained teachers; strengthening infrastructure facilities for the demand for teachers in junior and secondary schools; strengthening role of teacher education universities; establishment of teacher educators' service; training of English teachers; training of technological teachers; provide opportunities for continuous education for teaches).
4. Technical and practical skills of education.
5. Organisations and management of the education system (restructuring of school system based on school mapping; development of senior secondary schools; development of schools located in under-resourced areas; school-based management (SBM); training of school principals; performance appraisal of teachers; strengthening of management structures of the Ministry; strengthening of provincial education administration; teacher establishment matters; resource allocation, legal matters) (NEC, 1997; Presidential Task Force on General Education, Sri Lanka, 1997).

Status and implications:

The Special Presidential Task Force on General Education considered these proposals and prepared an implementation plan. The task force appointed 12 sub-committees to examine various aspects of the proposals, and their recommendations were published in a document titled, 'General Education Reforms - 1997'. The Head of the State (President) declared '1997 as the Year of Education Reforms', and education reforms in 1997 were implemented under the five areas mentioned above. Curriculum reforms were implemented on a pilot basis, and primary education curricula were piloted in schools in the selected district (Gampaha district in Western province). Based on the lessons learnt from the pilot project, the reform expanded into other schools. It is evident that all education reform initiatives and education policies are implemented in the system with wider participation. Nonetheless, some of the policy initiatives were controversial, and such initiatives were not fully implemented (e.g., restructuring of schools, school categorisation, teacher performance appraisal system, and SBM).

Equity dimensions: To ensure the attendance of children during the compulsory span of schooling, i.e., 5-14 years of age, compulsory attendance regulations were enacted, and school attendance committees were established at the Grama Niladari Division level and monitoring committees at the Divisional Secretariat level (GoSL, 1997). Public awareness was raised through the media.

As a result, it had a considerable impact, and a significant number of non-school-going children were admitted to formal schools or NFE centres as well as special education units/centres/schools.

Quality and relevance dimensions: The primary education stage is one of the major reform areas, and the five-year primary education span was divided into three stages: key stage 1: grades 1 and 2, the emphasis was on learning through guided play; key stage 2: grades 3 and 4 learning was through activities and some deskwork; and key stage 3: grade 5 emphasized more on deskwork with activities.

The primary curriculum subjects were first language, mathematics, religion, and environmental activities. Activities in science, creative activities, aesthetics, health, and physical activities were integrated into environmental activities. In addition, activity-based oral English (ABOE) was introduced for communication purposes. The curriculum was also designed to serve as an appropriate foundation for developing competencies identified by the NEC.

The junior secondary stage was increased to 4 years at the secondary level by reducing one year from the senior secondary level. As a result, the junior secondary stage was extended from grades 6 to 9, and the GCE OL course was reduced to two years. Instead of life skills, a new subject, technical and practical skills, was introduced. Continuous assessment was strengthened through school-based assessment (SBA). At GCE OL, there were initially multiple syllabi in science and mathematics, but this was later amended to include two papers at the GCE OL examination. At GCE AL, the number of subjects was reduced from 4 to 3; instead of botany and zoology, biology was introduced, and in place of several syllabi in mathematics, two subjects, combined mathematics and advanced mathematics, were introduced. A pass in the common general paper was made compulsory for university admission. It was also proposed that a technology stream at GCE AL would mainly be a safety net for art students who would enter the world of work.

The other changes proposed were the introduction of SBM, strengthening teacher education, performance appraisal of teachers, and setting of the professional council to regulate the teaching profession. However, these proposals were not implemented in the system due to several obstacles such as opposition political parties highly opposing the introduction of SBM, as they highlighted that this initiative would lead to the privatisation of education and the introduction of education fees. Further, teacher trade unions opposed implementing a performance appraisal system for teachers.

According to the national curriculum policy accepted in 1998, Sri Lanka has an eight-year curriculum cycle, and curriculum modernisation and reforms

occur once every eight years. Accordingly, preparations were made to revise the curriculum, and elaborate arrangements were made to carry out the necessary changes.

The proposed educational changes were slow due to changes in the political and bureaucratic leadership, and some proposals were abandoned.

4.2.10 Envisioning Education for Human Development: Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka (2003)

Origination and formulation:

NEC undertook a major sectoral review on general education in Sri Lanka in 2002, and based on such reviews and deliberations, it presented policy proposals on general education in 2003. The report presented policy proposals in three related areas: (i) educational opportunity, (ii) renewal and relevance of curriculum-related activities, and (iii) efficiency through professionalisation of educational personnel and management.

Contents:

A summary of proposals for a national policy framework on general education in Sri Lanka (2003) is presented below.

1. Educational opportunity - equity and excellence: Under this policy thrust area, the following areas were included as proposals.
    - Compulsory education
    - Grade 5 scholarship examination and bursary scheme
    - Ancillary services
    - School structure and classification
    - School facilities in the conflict-affected areas
    - Medium of instruction - State and State assisted schools
    - Private and international schools
    - Admission policy - schools
    - Admission to universities
    - Early childhood care and development
    - Education for children with disability
    - Non-formal education (NFE)

2. Renewal and relevance of curriculum-related activities: Curriculum renewal, quality, and relevance comprise the following policy proposals.
    - Curriculum structure
    - Learning-teaching process
    - Primary education
    - Promotion of mathematics, science, and IT education at secondary level
    - Social sciences
    - Promotion of English education
    - Junior secondary education (grades 6-9)
    - Senior secondary education (grades 10-11 - GCE OL and grades 12-13 - GCE AL)
    - Orientation to the world of work
    - Counselling and guidance
    - Education technology
    - Textbooks
    - School-based assessment (SBA)
    - Private tuition

3. Efficiency through the professionalisation of educational personnel and management: Policy proposals related to this area were presented through the following aspects.
    - Teacher education
    - Recruitment, deployment, and promotion of teachers and principals
    - Education governance/management
    - Allocation of resources for education
    - Education legislation
    - Acts relating to statutory boards (NEC, 2003)

Status and implications:

Policy proposals of NEC (2003) were not fully implemented as accepted policies in the education system. However, these proposals were used as the source of education sector development plans and by development partners for funding for education, especially to fill the development gaps across the system. It is observed that many of these proposals were continuations of previous policy proposals; however, they were improved and amended according to the then-

current context of the system. This can be acknowledged as a progressive attempt in terms of policy perspectives.

4.2.11 New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka: Context, Issues and Proposals (2009)

Origination and formulation:

The government appointed a 'National Committee for Formulating a New Education Act for General Education', and the report published the title of New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka in 2009. However, this report is similar to the national framework of general education with a sector analysis including contextual analysis of policies, issues, challenges, and proposals.

Contents:

The content of the new education act for general education in Sri Lanka is as follows.

1. Goals and guiding principles

2. Education system - Structure and functions:
   - Central authority
   - Provincial education authorities
   - Statutory bodies
   - School system
   - Compulsory education
   - Pre-school education
   - Inclusive education: education of the disadvantaged
   - Non-formal education (NFE)

3. Education system - Content and functions:
   - Curriculum development: primary and secondary education
   - Learning-teaching process
   - Medium of instruction
   - Assessment and evaluation
   - Textbooks
   - Guidance and counselling
   - Parent and their role in education

- Value education
- Education technology and ICT
- Learning environment and the school facilities
- Private tuition
- Media and child
- National service

4. Education management and leadership:
   - Management of the general education system
   - Management and leadership in schools
   - Education planning process
   - Education management and information system (EMIS)
   - School supervision (evaluation) and facilitation
   - Educational research
   - Performance review and coordination
   - Managing student discipline (student behaviour)

5. Educational personnel - teachers, principals, teacher educators, and Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS) officers:
   - Teacher education/development: initial professional education of teachers, continuing professional education of teachers
   - Code of ethics for teachers
   - Professional development of teacher educators
   - Professional development of SLEAS and Sri Lanka Principal Service (SLPS) officers
   - Service in the education sector: Sri Lanka Teacher Service (SLTS), SLPS, Sri Lanka Teacher Educators Service (SLTES), SLEAS

6. Education standards and quality assurance:
   - Quality assurance
   - Accountability
   - The scope
   - Standards and Quality Assurance Council

7. Resource provision and funding education in Sri Lanka:
   - Source of school revenues

- Disparity and inequalities in the distribution of resources
- Transparency in public spending
- Linkage between investment and outcomes
- Coordination of finance inputs (National Committee for Formulating a New Education Act for General Education, 2009).

Status and implications:

Similar to previous education policy proposals, this framework of the new education act for general education in Sri Lanka (2009) was also not implemented as intended. However, proposals in this framework were also used as sources of education sector development plans, especially to fill the gaps in qualitative and quantitative development across the system. Such can be noted as the positive impact of this exercise.

4.2.12 New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka (2012)

Origination and formulation:

The government appointed a 'Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education' in 2011 to examine and report on suggestions proposed by individuals seeking qualitative development in education, reflecting political beliefs, traditional values, priorities, and the future vision of Sri Lanka. Based on the proposals presented to the Special Parliamentary Advisory Committee, the committee developed 'new educational policies and proposals for general education in Sri Lanka' in 2012. These proposals considered the ideas and suggestions of different parties to prepare an education act in relation to a national education policy.

Contents:

The contents of the proposals for new educational policies and proposals for general education in Sri Lanka (2012) are briefed below.

1. Goals and guiding principles

2. Education system - Structure and functions:
   - Central authority
   - Provincial education authorities
   - Statutory bodies

- School system
- Compulsory education
- Pre-school education
- Inclusive education: education of the disadvantaged
- Non-formal education (NFE)

3. Education system - Content and functions:
   - Curriculum development: primary and secondary education
   - Learning-teaching process
   - Medium of instruction
   - Assessment and evaluation
   - Textbooks
   - Guidance and counselling
   - Parent and their role in education
   - Value education
   - Education technology and ICT
   - Learning environment and the school facilities
   - Private tuition
   - Media and child
   - National service

4. Education management and leadership:
   - Management of the general education system
   - Management and leadership in schools
   - Education planning process
   - Education management and information system (EMIS)
   - School supervision (evaluation) and facilitation
   - Educational research
   - Performance review and coordination
   - Managing student discipline (student behaviour)

5. Educational personnel - teachers, principals, teacher educators, and SLEAS officers:
   - Teacher education
   - Code of ethics for teachers

- Professional development of teacher educators
- Professional development of SLEAS and SLPS officers
- Service in the education sector: SLTS, SLPS, SLTES, SLEAS

6. Education standards and quality assurance:
   - Quality assurance
   - Accountability
   - The scope
   - Standards and Quality Assurance Council

7. Resource provision and funding education in Sri Lanka:
   - Source of school revenues
   - Disparity and inequalities in the distribution of resources
   - Transparency in public spending
   - Linkage between investment and outcomes
   - Coordination of finance inputs

8. Vocational education

9. Pirivena education (Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education, 2012ab).

Status and implications:

These proposals were almost similar to those presented by the NEC in 2009. As usual, these proposals were also not implemented in the system. However, it should be noted that these proposals were discussed at several sittings of the Parliament Advisory Committee meetings. Nonetheless, these proposals were not entirely standard by the government.

4.2.13 Raising the Quality of Education: Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2016)

Origination and formulation:

According to the NEC mandate and following the NEC 2003 policy proposal, the Commission presented proposals for a national policy on general education with the key concept of 'raising the quality of education' in 2016. As the policy document stated, the NEC conducted several policy research on respective areas to prepare these proposals and called on public and stakeholder opinions on education reforms in Sri Lanka.

Contents:

Policy proposals were presented in the following areas.

1. National goals and guiding principles, and proposed structure and legislation to implement policy
2. Curriculum development:
   - Trends in curriculum development
   - Issues in the curriculum development in Sri Lanka
   - Curricular reform proposals and their rationale
   - Policy proposals
3. Early childhood education (ECE):
   - Trends in early childhood education
   - Current issues of early childhood care and education in Sri Lanka
   - Policy proposals
4. Teaching profession:
   - Trends in the teaching profession
   - Issues of the teaching profession in Sri Lanka
   - Policy proposals
5. Student assessment:
   - Trends in assessment practices
   - Policy proposals
6. Quality assurance in education:
   - Trends in quality assurance in education
   - Issues in the present quality assurance system
   - Policy proposals

7. Education planning and management:
    - Trends in education planning and management
    - Issues in education planning and management in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals
8. Learning environment:
    - Trends in the learning environment
    - Issues in the learning environment in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals
9. Investment in education:
    - Issues of investment in education in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals
10. Career guidance in schools:
    - Trends in career guidance
    - Issues of career guidance in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals
11. Medium of instruction, national, second national, international languages:
    - Trends in the medium of instruction
    - Issues of the medium of instruction, national, second-national, and international languages
    - Policy proposals
12. Special education:
    - Trends in special education
    - Issues of special education in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals
13. Non-formal education (NFE):
    - Trends in NFE
    - Issues in NFE in Sri Lanka
    - Policy proposals (NEC, 2016).

Status and implications:

These proposals address contextual issues and trends in 2016. However, these proposals have also not been implemented as accepted policies in the system. It should be noted that some of these proposals were acknowledged in the

education sector development plans, and the development partners considered some proposals for funding for education.

4.2.14 National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2019) and proposed framework for consideration in drafting the general education Bill (Act)

Origination and formulation:

In 2018/2019, the MoE took action to draft a national policy on general education in Sri Lanka and propose a framework for consideration in drafting the general education bill (Act). In formulating this policy and framework, the MoE obtained public opinions and consultation from different stakeholders, counterparts, policymakers, technocrats, and civil society members (MoE, 2019a).

Contents:

National policy on general education in Sri Lanka consisted of the following areas.

1. National goals, the guiding principles, and the principles of state policy on general education in Sri Lanka
2. Right to free education
3. Education administration, management, and leadership
4. National curriculum, testing, and evaluation
5. Professionalism of education service personnel and effective service delivery.
6. Other general education providers:
    - Pirivena education in Sri Lanka
    - Management and supervision of other institutions that provide education for children aged 5 to 18: government approved private schools
    - Management and supervision of other institutions that provide education for children aged 5 to 18: private schools regulated by the government
7. Inclusive education, special education, and lifelong education
8. Education financing, resourcing, investment in education, and education subsidies and welfare programmes

9. Education quality and standards
10. Linkage between general, vocational, tertiary, and higher education, Pirivena education and the world of work
11. Ensuring the development of the full potential of the student towards contributing to the socio-economic development, promoting Sri Lankan identity and global economic achievement

The above areas have discussed and presented contextual status, issues, objectives, policies, and strategies (MoE, 2019a).

The proposed framework (draft) for the General Education Bill (Act) aimed to assist in preparing the draft education bill for the school (general) education sector. This framework also aimed to ensure equity in the quality and relevance of education in keeping with the needs of the 21st century (MoE, 2019b). This framework was developed in the following areas.

1. The objectives and guiding principles of the Bill (Act) and the principles of state policy on education
2. Right to free education
3. Education administration and management:
    - Education governance
        - ◇ National-level governance structure
        - ◇ Centre-province relations
    - Administration of general education
    - Classification of schools:
        - ◇ Preschool education
        - ◇ Primary and secondary education
    - Establishment of schools and matters pertaining to school structure
4. National curriculum and testing and evaluation:
    - National curriculum
    - Medium of instruction in schools (primary education, secondary education, primary and secondary education - common)
    - Testing and evaluation of student's performance
5. Professionalism of education service personnel
6. Other general education providers
7. Special education needs
8. Education financing, resourcing, investment in education, and education subsidies and welfare programmes

9. Quality and standards
10. General (MoE, 2019b).

This framework was generally drafted on a legal basis.

Status and implications:

Both the National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (2019) and the proposed framework (draft) for consideration in drafting the General Education Bill (Act) (2019) have not been implemented in the system. However, many elements of these have been incorporated into education sector development plans as applicable. Nonetheless, it should be noted that both the national policy on general education in Sri Lanka (2019) and the proposed framework (draft) for consideration in drafting the General Education Bill (Act) (2019) were submitted to the Cabinet for seeking their concurrence. However, following the change in government in 2019, these documents remain shelved.

4.2.15 Re-emerging Education in Sri Lanka: Transforming the Present System of General Education to a Dynamic and Vibrant Paradigm for 21st Century (2020)

Origination and formulation:

After the new government came to power in 2019, on March 31, 2020, the President of Sri Lanka appointed a special Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs to develop an action-oriented education policy including, planning and identifying strategies. Accordingly, core groups of experts representing different sectors/sections were appointed, and they worked and completed the task within five months.

Contents:

The report highlighted key issues and guiding principles for general education and included policy proposals in the following areas.

1. Pre-school education
2. Primary education
3. Lower/junior secondary
4. Upper/senior secondary
5. Curriculum development and revision
6. Curriculum development and assessment
7. Testing and assessment systems

8. Textbooks
9. Reading habits and use of the school library
10. Career guidance
11. Different pathways in general education
12. Empowering digital education in Sri Lanka
13. 13 years guaranteed education programme (Vocational stream)
14. Teacher development
15. Principal as the leader
16. Classification of schools
17. Sharing resources between schools
18. Quality assurance and accreditation
19. Improving planning and management of the education system
20. Regularization of private and international schools (international schools, Pirivena education)
21. Non-formal education [Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs (2020:9-78)].

The content of the report on re-emerging education in Sri Lanka (2020) covered the education sector, which is concerned with issues, challenges, and gaps. Indeed, the report proposed several policy recommendations to address the prevailing problems and fill the policy gaps in line with the system's needs and country requirements.

Status and implications:

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that these proposals have been formally implemented. However, in preparing the Cabinet-appointed committee-led National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) (2023-2033) (September 2023), it was documented the report on the re-emerging education in Sri Lanka (2020) was used as one of the primary sources of their proposals.

4.2.16 Proposal for General Education Reforms (2019-2022)

Origination and formulation:

In the meantime, the new government came to office in 2019 and introduced education reforms in line with their election manifesto. Accordingly, a dedicated state ministry for education reforms was set up, namely, the State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion, and Open Universities (SMER,

DL&OUs). While having a separate state ministry responsible for education reforms, MoE, as a cabinet ministry, also had overall responsibility and a leading role in education policy matters. However, there were contradictions between these two ministries about the formulation and implementation of education reform initiatives. No sound coordination was maintained among these agencies to implement national priority programmes.

Contents:

Interventions of the SMER, DL&OUs: SMER, DL&OUs is the lead agency that initiated and implemented education policy reforms (2019-2022), and administrative and management structures were established to facilitate the smooth functioning of portfolio responsibilities. Under these initiatives, policy reforms were introduced.

1. Implement relevant programmes while ensuring a free education policy further.
2. **Curriculum and assessment reforms:** Curriculum reforms are the major reforms that took place from 2019 to 2022. Under this initiative, the following were key initiatives.
    - An authentic learning approach was announced, and steps were taken to introduce the module system instead of school textbooks. Project-based learning was planned to be promoted.
    - In line with the curriculum changes, teaching and learning methodologies and assessment systems were planned to be changed. The revised curriculum was also planned to be introduced on a pilot basis. Curriculum development included conducting teacher training and provision of infrastructure facilities for the school system.
    - A student-centred education system instead of an examination-centred education system was implemented.
3. **Restructuring of the school system:** Restructuring of the school system was another key initiative of the education reform agenda in 2019-2022. Following were the key programmes planned to be implemented under this theme.
    - Increase the number of national schools up to 1,000 island-wide. This initiative was planned to be implemented following a scientific education planning approach and technique (e.g., school rationalization and mapping). However, it was later highly influenced by political and bureaucratic authorities. Under the restructuring

of the school system, it was planned to establish school clusters. However, this initiative was also not articulated at the expected levels. Further, it was planned to develop three (03) schools in each Divisional Secretariat Division with necessary physical and human resources (thereby increasing the number of national schools to 1,000) and introduce a school clusters system enabling the sharing of resources and gaining benefits for the other schools in the same Divisional Secretariat.

- Provide all relevant facilities, including new technologies to schools located in rural areas and provide incentives for the teachers serving in challenging schools to avoid the closure of such rural schools and improve their quality.
- Establishment of 20 full-fledged trilingual national schools on a district basis.

4. **Administrative reforms:** Education administrative and management reforms were aimed at increasing administrative efficiency. Under this initiative, the following were planned.
   - To set up Provincial Education Boards in each province to deal with education matters.
   - To restructure the provincial administration structures.
   - To establish a National Education Council and a closed service for the education sector.
   - To establish a closed service relevant to the education services.
5. **Teacher education:** Restructuring and modernisation of the teacher education systems is one of the flagship programmes in the 2019-2022 education reform agenda. The following initiatives were the key programmes under the teacher education reform initiatives.
   - Improving teacher development and professional development programmes.
   - Establishing a dedicated university for teacher education is the most important initiative.
   - Recruit school-based Teacher Assistants for primary grades.
   - Make legal amendments to the teacher transfer policy.
6. **Digital education:** Promoting digital education is a timely, needy initiative, and several steps were taken to expand digital education on par with international and national trends. Issues are constraints that emerged in relation to the implementation of this initiative as expected.

7. Introduce a new, school-based scientific methodology to select government university students, instead of the prevailing district-based z-score methodology.
8. Launch productive programmes to ensure further schoolchildren's health, nutrition, and protection of schoolchildren (MoE & SMER, DL&OUs, 2019; SMER, DL&OUs, 2021).

Status and implications:

After the implementation commenced, SMER, DL&OUs took action to obtain public opinion and views about the reforms and published an analysis report (SMER, DL&OUs, 2021). Overall, 2019-2022 education reform initiatives were not fully implemented due to government changes. Only curriculum revisions were implemented, but the overall process was much slower. It revealed the absence of financial feasibility. The COVID-19 pandemic and social and economic crises badly affected the implementation of these reform initiatives (e.g., postponing the curriculum pilot programme, and introducing modules). Micro-politics factors are utterly affected by implementing reform initiatives (e.g., 1,000 national schools programme, changing the university admission system, establishing a separate university for teacher education). Indeed, some educationists and education economists highlighted that these initiations were a waste of education investment, time, and human resources.

MoE interventions: Again, after the government changes (due to economic, social, and political crises in 2022), the MoE prepared a report titled: Proposals for General Education Reforms (2022-2032)' (Preliminary note) in August 2022 (MoE, 2022). This report on reform proposals has identified the following eight key problems in Sri Lankan education and their solutions.

Problem	Solution
1. Lack of strong direction of education for meeting national socio-economic challenges of the 21st Century.	1. Education policy reforms.
2. Excessive burden of learning.	2. Curriculum and assessment reforms.
3. Serious gaps in the relevance of education.	3. Curriculum and assessment reforms.
4. Inefficient education administration.	4. Education administration and finance reforms.
5. Serious gaps in education quality & delivery.	5. School development management.
6. Lagging staff and teacher development.	6. Human resource development.
7. Inequity in resource availability.	7. School development management.
8. Need for effective and efficient implementation of reforms.	8. Implementation reforms.

Source: MoE (2022).

Under the solutions, 16 areas of solutions and stakeholder benefits have also been identified.

Status and implications:

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that these proposals have been implemented formally. However, it appears that some suggestions have been taken into account for the education reform initiatives and the restructuring of the education system.

4.2.17 National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030)

Origination and formulation:

Under the direction of the head of the state, the NEC began formulating the National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) - 2020-2030 in October 2020. This was done by considering the government policy on education outlined in the government manifesto and other policy documents prepared by the NEC, Presidential Task Force (2020), and the MoE and also by perusing education sector review reports published recently by international donor and development agencies (NEC, 2022ab). When commencing the formulation of the NEPF (2020-2030), the NEC has appointed a steering committee representing expert groups. The respective expert groups have perused all relevant documents and conducted a series of discussions in person and via zoom. Further, the NEC called public opinions through the newspapers and contacted numerous individuals and organisations to obtain their views[7].

Contents:

The NEC-led NEPF (2020-2030) consists of the following areas and its contents.

Part I: Overview of Sri Lankan economy and national education system and key issues

1. Overview of the Sri Lankan economy
2. Overview of the Sri Lankan education system
3. Performance of the Sri Lankan education system in the national, regional, and global context

[7] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation this process was not fully covered.

Part II: Vision of education, national education goals, and national learning competency framework

1. Vision of education
2. National educational goals
3. National learning competency framework (NLCF)
4. How to use NLCF in curriculum development

Part III: Aims and directive principles of the NEPF

1. Aims of NEPF
2. Guiding principles corresponding to the aims of NEPF
3. Core areas and elements of NEPF
4. Directive principles corresponding to the core areas of NEPF

Part IV: Sub-sector-specific policies and strategic activity frameworks

Part IV - Volume I: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on early childhood care and education (ECCE)

1. Status review
2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities
   - Core area-ECCE 1: Access, equity and inclusiveness
   - Core area-ECCE 2: Holistic development -physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development
   - Core area-ECCE 3: Quality of ECCE - structure, process, and outcomes
   - Core area-ECCE 4: Benchmarking and quality assurance
   - Core area-ECCE 5: Financing of ECCE
   - Core area-ECCE 6: Regulation, governance, and management

Part IV - Volume II: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on general education

1. Status review
   a. Salient features of the general education system
   b. Issues and gaps
      i. Type of education offering and inequalities of science and mathematics, and language education opportunities to students

ii. Teacher education management and quality
iii. Curriculum and content development, and documentation
iv. Duration of school education
v. Monitoring and assessment of student learning
vi. Guidance and counselling service for students
vii. Governance and management
viii. Physical resources, learning environment, and teaching-learning process
ix. Accountability and quality assurance
x. Medium of instruction
xi. Cost and financing of schools in Sri Lanka

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities

Core area-GE 1:	Access, equity, and inclusiveness
Core area-GE 2:	Duration of school education, curriculum design, content, and learning outcomes
Core area-GE 3:	Medium of instruction, teaching process, and assessments
Core area-GE 4:	Learners and learner support, learning environment, and learners' welfare
Core area-GE 5:	Benchmarking and quality assurance
Core area-GE 6:	Personality development
Core area-GE 7:	Civic consciousness and patriotism
Core area-GE 8:	Financing of general education
Core area-GE 9:	Physical resources - teaching facilities and common amenities
Core area-GE 10:	Physical resources - digital infrastructure, connectivity, content, and capacity
Core area-GE 11:	Quality of human resources
Core area-GE 12:	Regulation, governance, and management

Part IV - Volume III: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on higher education

1. Status review

a. Participation, access, and types of educational offerings

- Participation and access

- Student admission to state universities
- Types of educational offerings
- Academic year of Sri Lankan universities

b. Higher education financing and private sector participation

- Public investment
- Cost recovery
- Private sector participation

c. Performance of higher education sector: inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes

- Inputs
- Processes
- Outputs and outcomes of higher education

d. Learning environment, student support services, and student conduct and discipline

- Learning environment
- Counselling and mentoring
- Career guidance and career counselling
- Student life, conduct, and discipline

e. Regulations, governance, and accountability

- State university system
- Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE)
- Non-state higher education institutions

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities

Core area-HE 1:	Access, equity, and inclusiveness
Core area-HE 2:	Academic calendar, curriculum design, content, and learning outcomes
Core area-HE 3:	Teaching-learning process and assessments
Core area-HE 4:	Learners and learner support, learning environment, and learners' welfare
Core area-HE 5:	Benchmarking and quality assurance

Core area-HE 6: Research and innovations, technology transfer, and nurturing of art and culture

Core area-HE 7: Personality development, civic consciousness, patriotism, employability, and entrepreneurial skills

Core area-HE 8: Financing of higher education

Core area-HE 9: Quality of human resources

Core area-HE 10: Quality of physical resources

Core area-HE 11: Regulation, governance, and management

Part IV - Volume IV: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

1. Status review

a. Current organisational structure of the TVET sector

b. Salient features of the TVET sector

c. Current status, issues, and gaps

- Access and enrolment
- Qualification framework, national competency standards and curricular, and industry foresight
- Training institutions and facilities, types of training, and learning environment
- Quality assurance in technical and vocational education and training
- Human resources development and management
- Financing of technical and vocational education and training
- Regulation, governance, and management
- Data and information, and research

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities

Core area-TVET 1: Access and enrolment

Core area-TVET 2: Qualification framework, national competency standards, and curricular

Core area- TVET 3: Training institutions and facilities, learners and learning environment

Core area- TVET 4: Quality assurance in technical and vocational education and training

Core area- TVET 5: Human resources development and management

Core area- TVET 6: Financing of technical and vocational education

Core area- TVET 7: Regulation, governance, and management

Core area- TVET 8: Information management and research

Part IV - Volume V: Policy framework for Pirivena education

1. Status review
   a. Origination and evolution of Pirivena education
   b. Government intervention in Pirivena education before and after independence
   c. Authority and roles of Pirivena Education Act
   d. Governance of Pirivena education
   e. Current situation of the Pirivena education system

2. Formulation of national policy for the establishment of flagship Pirivena education
   Core area 1: Access clearly and lay students for Pirivena education
   Core area 2: Quality education
   Core area 3: Pirivena education, discipline and attitudes
   Core area 4: Human resources development
   Core area 5: Physical resources and financial resources
   Core area 6: Restructuring of Pirivena education system
   Core area 7: Dhasaseela Matha education

Part IV - Volume VI: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on special and inclusive education

1. Status review
   a. Salient features and key issues and gaps
      - Current statistics
      - Early identification services for children at risk
      - Identification and assessment of children with special needs for appropriate placement
      - Learning environment and human and physical resources

- Curriculum, instructions, and assessments
- Financing of special education
- Governance, management, and quality assurance
- Data management and research

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities

Core area-SE&IE 1:	Access for children with SEN to ECCE
Core area-SE&IE 2:	Access for children with SEN to the regular education system
Core area-SE&IE 3:	Learners and learning environment
Core area-SE&IE 4:	Curriculum and teaching-learning process
Core area-SE&IE 5:	Quality of human resources
Core area-SE&IE 6:	Quality of physical resources
Core area-SE&IE 7:	Financing of special education
Core area-SE&IE 8:	Regulation, governance, and management
Core area-SE&IE 9:	Quality assurance in special and inclusive education
Core area-SE&IE 10:	Data management and research on special and inclusive education

Part IV - Volume VII: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on NFE

1. Status review

a. Concept of NFE

b. Salient features of NFE

c. Evolution of NFE in Sri Lanka

d. Types of stakeholders and education providers

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities

Core area-NFE 1:	Regulation, governance, and management
Core area-NFE 2:	Access, and equity and inclusiveness
Core area-NFE 3:	Learners and learning environment
Core area-NFE 4:	Curriculum design, content, and learning outcomes
Core area-NFE 5:	Teaching-learning process, assessment, and quality assurance

Core area-NFE 6: Patriotism, ethnic cohesion, and social harmony
Core area-NFE 7: Quality of human and physical resources
Core area-NFE 8: Financing of NFE

Part IV - Volume VIII: Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities on international school education

1. Status review
   a. Global context
   b. Sri Lankan context
   c. Current statistical and status
   d. Issues and gaps

2. Policy proposals and recommended strategic activities
   Core area-IS 1: Regulation, governance, and management
   Core area-IS 2: Medium of instruction and curriculum
   Core area-IS 3: Learners and learning environment
   Core area-IS 4: Curriculum design, content, and learning outcomes
   Core area-IS 5: Teaching-learning, and assessment
   Core area-IS 6: Human resources
   Core area-IS 7: Physical resources
   Core area-IS 8: Quality assurance and certification
   (NEC, 2022ab).

The NEC-led NEPF (2020-2030) revealed that the framework has covered the entire education sector issues, challenges, and gaps. Indeed, the framework proposed many policy recommendations to address the prevailing problems and fill the policy gaps in line with the system's needs and country requirements. The NEC-led NEPF (2020-2030) defined eight national education goals (NEC, 2022b:19-20) and followed six aims.

Aim 1: An education system that assures universal access to education.
Aim 2: An education system that ensures equity and inclusiveness.
Aim 3: An education system that delivers quality education matching with international benchmarks.

Aim 4: An education system that aims at all-round personality development.

Aim 5: An education system that nurtures national identity and unity in diversity.

Aim 6: An education system with adequate funding, quality physical and human resources, and greater accountability and efficiency (NEC, 2022b:35).

Moreover, the NEC-led NEPF (2020-2030) identified directive principles corresponding to each core area of the national education policy framework (NEC, 2022a; 2022b:41-46).

Status and implications:

Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the respective authorities have accepted this policy framework, and no directions have been given to commence implementation, at least feasible policy proposals. However, when preparing the Cabinet-appointed committee-led NEPF (2023-2033), it was mentioned that this NEC-led NEPF (2020-2030) was used as one of the sources of their proposals.

4.2.18 Report of the Select Committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for the expansion of Higher Education Opportunities in Sri Lanka (2023)

Origination and formulation:

The Parliament of Sri Lanka approved the appointment of a Select Committee to study and make suitable recommendations for the expansion of higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka in December 2022. The committee's mandate is to study higher education, but the report analysed and recommended some initiatives directly related to general education. Hence, this particular analysis also studied this report to some extent. The report of the Select Committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for expanding higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka was issued in 2023. Chapter Two and Chapter Four of the report are allocated for discussion, and present recommendations on primary and secondary education are presented.

Contents:

Concerning preschool education and school education, following recommendations are presented in the select committee report.

1. Early childhood/Nursery education:
    - State policy for early childhood and nursery education.
    - Encourage the private sector to establish and expand institutions for early childhood/nursery education and provide financial support.
    - Adopt an appropriate curriculum based on the age of children.
    - Teacher education and training for early childhood education.
    - Establish a regulatory framework to ensure proper management, necessary infrastructure facilities, teacher qualifications, and a centralized database.

2. Primary and secondary education
    - Establish a national policy to ensure the equality and quality of education (national and provincial schools).
    - Avoiding categorization of schools with identities of ethnicity, language, and religion.
    - Set up a joint committee in each province with responsible stakeholders of the MoE and provincial councils in every zone and establish a cluster school system where the primary schools in charge of education from grades 1 to 7/8 (feeder schools) and secondary schools (Central schools) to take charge of the responsibility of teaching students from grades 7/8 up to GCE AL.
    - Establish a centralized teacher service.
    - Introduce modern education modules and curriculum.
    - Given priority for technology and science.
    - Focus on soft skills (student age-specific).
    - Blended system for assessment (50% SBA and 50% on examination-based).
    - Prepare students to sit for the GCE OL examination at grade 10 and the GCE AL examination at grade 12.
    - Legislation to monitor all private schools.
    - Revamp the existing modules and syllabuses in primary and secondary education considering the modern trends in the field of technology and science.
    - Introduce a standardized curriculum for mandatory subjects in both the state and private schools, without any distinction or difference.
    - Establish a coordination system between the curriculum setters and the examination paper setters to prevent the inclusion of questions that are not covered by the curriculum and syllabuses.

- Subjects of languages interlinked with the subject of literature in the given language.
- Adopt a policy to provide equal opportunities for all students to learn both national languages, while insisting on the importance of the English language.
- Policy for secondary education includes curriculums aimed at promoting and encouraging vocational education and training in the state as well as in private schools.
- Ensure that the students are encouraged in physical and recreational activities with the purpose of building a healthy nation.
- Eliminate the existing unjustified competition among students and gradually detach the students' reliance on private tuition as it is necessary to create an environment where children can pursue their education with a free and peaceful state of mind because this competition leads to many social implications.
- Ensure that the GCE AL results are issued within a reasonable time enabling the students to engage in higher education without wasting their valuable time.
- Enact legislation to register and regulate all private schools known as international schools including their capacity, quality, and standard of education and curriculum and modules (Select Committee of Parliament of Sri Lanka, 2023).

Status and implications:

Even though this Select Committee is directly referred to higher education, however, the recommendations mentioned above are confined to government general education policies. Hence, these proposals are accommodated in the Cabinet appointed sub-committee led NEPF (2023-2033).

4.2.19 National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) - Sri Lanka (2023-2033)

Origination and formulation:

The Cabinet of Sri Lanka appointed a Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the NEPF to the Parliament in 2023. Accordingly, an Expert Officials' Committee was appointed to assist the Cabinet Sub-Committee in drafting a NEPF, and the report was produced in late 2023.

In drafting the NEPF (2023-2033), recommendations from the following specific documents have been referred to.

i. Policy proposals of the Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs (2020).
ii. A new national curriculum framework to transform the school system to meet the requirements of the 21st century, under the proposed education reforms to be introduced from 2024 onwards and amendments related to school system administration.
iii. The national quality assurance and accreditation bill presented by the MoE.
iv. Report of the Public Expenditure Review Committee (PERC) on the education sector by the Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies.
v. Report of the Parliamentary Special Committee to make appropriate recommendations for expanding higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka.
vi. Implementation of the 13 years guaranteed education programme as the advanced level vocational subject stream in schools (2023).
vii. Introducing amendments to syllabuses of religion - subjects of all religions for the formation of a righteous society of children (2023).
viii. Policy for the digital transformation of education (2023).
ix. Increasing the number of national schools to 1,000 by upgrading the selected schools to the level of national schools from the schools currently operative in the school system (2023).
x. Recognition of Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework (SLQF) (2023) (Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament, 2023).

Contents:

NEPF (2023-2033) outlines the existing challenges, the policy goals, objectives, policy principles, and statements. The NEPF aims to revisit the rules of teaching, learning, and credentialing, redefine the actors and institutions in governance, and optimize investments and resources for a suitable transformation of education in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, the NEPF (2023-2033) has presented under the following three policy domains.

1. Teaching, learning, and credentialing: this domain captures changes to the rules, procedures, and processes concerning the same.

2. Governance: this domain captures the enhanced and coordinated framework of actors and institutions.
3. Investment and resources: this domain captures the re-alignment and optimization of financial and other resources (Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament, 2023).

NEPF (2023-2033) also provides a blueprint for drafting the rules, regulations, or legislation needed for the transformation of the education sector in Sri Lanka. Key policy statements of the NEPF (2023-2033) are as follows:

1. Policy statement: Teaching, learning, and credentialing:

Curricular and learning:

- All students demonstrate minimum proficiency in the two national languages (Sinhala and Tamil), the link language (English), numeracy, and digital literacy at the end of primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary stages of education.
- Reviewed and modified the medium of instruction in general education to enable education entirely or partially in the English medium in any school as a priority.
- Provide all students with the opportunity to learn through the curriculum about Sri Lanka's rich history, culture, values, ethics, and religion, and inculcate a Sri Lankan identity and a sense of their place in the world as proud citizens.
- Focus on religious education on making students aware of core aspects of all religions and values in addition to learning, about students' professed religion through a 'religions and values' subject.
- Learning goals: preschool learning, primary and secondary education, and tertiary education.
- Curricular reforms (make content lighter and more meaningful, examination less stressful, and more emphasis on SBA).
- Skills electives will be available at senior secondary level (years 10-11) and skills track at upper secondary (years 12+).
- Progressive teaching and learning approaches (i.e., blended learning, STEAM, mindfulness learning, and other 21st century approaches).

- Each student in all levels of education has the opportunity to be aware of data literacy, AI, and societal impacts and privacy, security, fairness, accountability, and transparency issues in data use, as appropriate for each level, ensuring that students are informed users.
- Each student in all levels of education has the opportunity to inculcate entrepreneurship, financial literacy, volunteerism, and other functional skills and attitudes through curricular or CCAs.
- Areas of global priorities such as environmental protection, sustainable development, climate change adaptation, and risk management are proposed to be integrated into streams of learning.
- National curricula at all levels of education are proposed to be standardized against suitable international benchmarks.
- Standards and curricula in skills development in major sectors of the economy are proposed to be developed by relevant skills councils.

Assessment and progression:

- Four stages of education:
  - Primary (Years: 1-5; Ages: 5-10) # Basic life skills.
  - Junior secondary (Years: 6-9; Ages: 10-14) # Foundation for life.
  - Senior secondary-I -GCE OL- (Years: 10-11; Ages: 14-16) # Foundation for career readiness.
  - Senior secondary-II -GCE AL- (Year: 12+; Ages: 16-18) # Foundation for academic, vocational, and professional life.
- Pre-primary education will prepare the students for the primary stage of education in school.
- Provide all studies for opportunities to complete senior secondary education on time and enter tertiary education or training by age 18:
  - Mandatory school completion certificates in grades 11 and 12+.
  - No delays in moving from year 11 to year 12+ or 12+ to tertiary education.
  - Mandatory minimum proficiency: minimum proficiency in literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy and completion of school-based curricula, co-curricular and extra-curricular assignments are mandatory for receiving a completion certificate.
  - All students will be promoted based on their completion certificates without having to wait for the results of national examinations (GCE 'O' and 'A' levels).

- GCE OL and AL or NVQ qualifications may be obtained for students depending on their further education and training aspirations.
- Results of GCE OL may be used by school boards to allow students to change tracks/streams in GCE AL or admit students from other school board jurisdictions.
- Legally mandated timeframe for national examinations/assessments.
- Students who proceed to senior secondary-II will have the option to follow academic, vocational, or mixed streams and receive a completion certificate at age 18.

- Provide opportunities for students who leave school after senior secondary-I to re-enter further education and training through a senior secondary-II completion certificate equivalent.
- Ensure a more holistic and well-rounded education, with a selection of a combination of subjects in either academic and/or skills track available to all students in secondary education, allowing for multiple pathways of progression along professional or vocational paths.
- Assessments are proposed to be designed to serve the needs of all learners, not just a small percentage who would pursue an academic path.
- Students and their parents/guardians are to be provided with mandatory career guidance regarding tertiary education and career pathways at key stages in their education.
- National assessments are to be standardized against suitable international benchmarks.
- Articulation and transfer between international and local qualifications.
- Rates of retention, completion, and time to complete at education institutions are to be comparable with international standards.
- Inclusive learning approaches are facilitated and supported to benefit students with special needs and in special circumstances.
- Accelerated learning processes are to be introduced to address the needs of higher-achieving students.

Teacher/educator development:

- Learning profession in early childhood, primary, and secondary education will be transformed into a profession of choice by establishing:
  - National teacher certification system.
  - Process to recognise and reward eminent teachers and principals.

- Attractive service credits for serving in disadvantaged or remote communities.
- Evaluation and readjustment of teacher remuneration structure.
- Establish a national council of teachers.

- Continuous training of teachers and educators in all sub-sectors of education (i.e., inclusive approaches, social and emotional development, sustainable development, technology, guidelines, and regulations on the ethical use of data and technology tools).

Partnerships:

- Partnerships with the industry to encourage state or non-state institutions to supplement state support:
  - Teaching and research.
  - New curricula or programmes for sustainable and climate-friendly entrepreneurship, mechanisms for volunteering, and new material for teaching.
  - Competency standards, curricula, and teachers qualified in skills.
  - Internships and apprenticeships in secondary education, higher education, and skills development, offering students hands-on experience in real-world applications.
  - Appropriate models and entities, including companies, centres, and hubs for accessing necessary resources, industry/business practices, and industry personnel as lectures.
- Digital transformation of education.
- International linkages.

2. Policy statement: Governance:

- The Minister of Education is responsible for formulating policies and programmes, monitoring and evaluating (M&E) their implementation, coordinating with provincial authorities to ensure provincial plans are consistent with national policy, standardizing and regulating teacher and other related education services, and facilitating student welfare and safety. Minister of Education must report annually to the Parliament and the public on national education outcomes in terms of access, quality, and relevance, by education sub-sectors, key regulatory or administrative institutions.

- Establish a national advisory committee for education, an expert committee for integrating ICT into education, and a directorate of provincial education authorities to advise the Minister of Education.
- Restructuring of the MoE.
- Establish provincial education boards.
- Roles and functions of NIE.
- Quality assurance and accreditation mechanism.
- All education providers.

3. Policy statement: Investments and resources:
   - Participation of non-state partners, and public-private partnerships.
   - Optimized early childhood education through partnerships.
   - Per-pupil basis financing for primary and secondary education (Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament, 2023).

Status and implications:

As stated in the draft of the NEPF (2023-2033), it has proposed a comprehensive and visionary roadmap for transforming the education sector in the country. NEPF outlined the policy principles and statements that will serve as the basis for developing strategies and action plans to achieve quality, equity, and excellence in education. The NEPF document stated that it has aligned with the national development goals and the country's global educational commitments. The draft of the NEPF contains the policy principles for making a transformative change in the education sector, in line with the vision of 'a fully developed Sri Lanka in the year 2048'. The first year of the NEPF (2023-2033) is the development stage, during which, regulations and legislation for each domain are to be completed. The following one to three years is the applying stage, giving actors autonomy to innovate. The four to ten years is the nature stage, focusing on innovations to transform education (Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament, 2023).

These policy proposals were uploaded to the MoE website and made available for public opinion. In the meantime, these proposals were also submitted to the Parliament Sectoral Overside Committee on Education to obtain their opinion and concurrence. Currently, these proposals are under review, and public deliberations are taking place. It should be noted that this framework is highly criticized by education academics, civil society members, and social media groups. They argued that the selected group had developed this framework without consultation of the respective stakeholders, counterparts,

experts, and even NEC (but NEC is the official agency to deal with education policies). Further, these lobby and influential groups claimed that this framework purposely ignored the education fundamentals and principles and challenged free education policy. Finally, this framework proposal will benefit large business groups directly or indirectly through involving education in the country.

4.3 Conclusion

When examining past and present education policies, proposals/frameworks, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka, it is evident that many of the proposals are almost similar to some extent. Many of the proposals have continued for years and, in some cases, can be seen with some modifications to align with the system requirements and contextual demands and trends that existed. However, these proposals have not been fully materialized and acknowledged. Even though education policies or frameworks are presented regularly, it is difficult to see if policy analysis or evaluation took place and if there is an absence of learning lessons from previous policies to facilitate the next policies in the system, which will lead to deviating from the evidence-based/informed policies. Indeed, this review found that most education policies, frameworks, and education reform initiatives originated based on political intentions and have played a lead role in the political authorities. Hence, the political and personal interest model was chiefly used for policy formulation. However, in many occupations, social and economic factors forced the initiation of education policies in Sri Lanka. The primary critical factor is policy implementation. Policy implementation cannot be seen sustainably. Moreover, policy monitoring is another critical area in the education arena in Sri Lanka. The literature on education policies in Sri Lanka needs to be analysed or evaluated to identify the success of education policy implementation and it is their strengths as well as policy gaps.

5. Analysis of education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka

5.1 Introduction

This analysis mainly focuses only on general education and does not review education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives directly corresponding to education sub-sectors such as technical, vocational education, training, and higher education. This analysis followed the steps[8] such as reviewing the background and contexts of national development and its implications for education, identifying achievements, issues, and needs in education, analysing past national education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives, and identifying strengths, and relevance to the system, and gaps in education policies, policymaking/policy formulation and policy implementation. The contents of this analysis are limited to the following elements:

i. Origination of policies and policy formation.
ii. Contents of education policies, proposals/frameworks:
    a. Equity and inclusiveness perspectives.
    b. Education perspectives: equity, relevance, and sustainability.
    c. Economic perspectives.
    d. Social development, cultural changes, and gender responsiveness.
    e. Efficiency perspectives.
iii. Politics vs policymaking and policies.
iv. International trends and development partners' involvements and influences on policymaking and policies.
v. Citizenship and civil societies' involvement in education policymaking and policies.

[8] These steps are similar to UNESCO Bangkok (2023b) proposed to conduct analysis of education policies.

vi. Policy legislations.

vii. Policy implementation.

viii. Success and failures of education policies: issues, challenges and gaps

5.2 Origination of policies and policy formulation

'Education' is a key driver of human capital development, social development, spiritual development of individuals, and economic growth in any country. To achieve these intentions, countries require a sound and practical-oriented visionary national policy on education in a meaningful manner. As already discussed, education policies are formulated based on educational purposes, social demand, economic/labour market demand, political intentions, and bureaucratic requirements. Single or multiple factors conceivably cause the formulation of policies, and it will depend on contextual factors. However, policy formulation involves defining long-term goals, which might extend beyond the medium-term development plan, and selecting major strategies to reach these goals. It is partly founded on the results of the sector analysis. However, it also depends on already existing policies and is further influenced by the overall development policies of the country, international commitments, and the programmes of the political party/parties in power. Policy formulation is, therefore, not a straightforward technical exercise but rather a complex process, which should start with a review/analysis of existing policies and further implies intensive interaction between the policy planning experts/technocrats and the political decision-makers for designing the new policy.

During the last several decades, there has been an ongoing argument among experts and academics on whether Sri Lanka has a national policy on education. Some argue that we do not have a national policy on education, and the system runs based on the education manual and its subsequent amendments, and official circulars and guidelines. In contrast, some experts pointed out that we only have operational policies to run the system. I am on the stand as Sri Lanka has a national policy on education, and several legal cases have confirmed that. Education policy is not only a document, but it may also be 'an explicit or implicit single decision or group of decisions which may set out directives for guiding future decisions, initiate or retard action or guide implementation of previous decisions'. Further, Policy Analyst (IDIs, May 21, 2024) is also strongly opposed to saying Sri Lanka is not having a national policy. Otherwise, the system cannot be run for a long time. But we do accept there are some shortfalls; it is not updated and revised according to the current system requirements, international and national trends and demand, social demand, economic and labour market demand. As per the literature,

the system is managed based on national policies, operational policies, laws, regulations, rules, procedures, and guidelines issued by the respective legally powered/mandated authorities. Indeed, some educationists argue that the system has an approved national policy framework for the education sector, and it is sufficient to run the system.

Moreover, Education Academician (IDIs, June 18, 2024) supposed that before the formulation of education policies, we should know what the policy formulation process in Sri Lanka is, but at the moment, we do not know. Further, an understanding of the following questions is needed.

Are the intended actions publicized by the Head of the State and/or portfolio responsible for education to be considered as 'policies'?; What is the process followed in the formulation of policies?; Was there a group, or is it based on an individual's thinking?; What is the group composition of the policy formulation committee (if a committee was involved)?; What body approves the final policy?

Conceptual errors/Lessons learned: When formulating education policies in any country or system, it is fundamental to follow policy formulation steps coherently. Such steps should be simple and need to follow a systemic approach, such as policy formulation, policy consultation, policy communication, and policy analysis and evaluation. However, it is necessary to study these steps followed by the policymakers when formulating education policies or policy frameworks in Sri Lanka. A few selected examples are discussed in subsequent sections, highlighting how missing parts of the policy cycle represent fundamental errors in the formulation of education policies/policy frameworks in the country.

Education Academician (IDIs, June 18, 2024) suggested that we should understand the role of the NEC in education policymaking and whether the NEC is actively engaged in policy-related matters. Regarding policy formulation, this lack of clarity has significantly affected the formulation of a sound policy for the country. Generally, when the new government comes to power (except on very few occasions), government policies, including education and respective policymaking teams, also change accordingly.

Education changes in the 1950s: One of the major revolutions in the 1950s was the change in the medium of instruction to national languages. This materialized due to political intentions, as the country promoted nationalism among ethnic groups. This radical departure in education paved the way for open education across the country, especially since access to education drastically increased in rural areas. The national language policy had both positive and negative impacts on the country. When studying changes in the 1950s, evidence shows that political support mainly impacted the expansion of qualitative and quantitative development of education.

Education changes in 1960/1961: The 1960s decade was also the extended period of promoting nationalism and socialist ideologists, and government monopoly dominated all sectors, including social and human resource development sectors. As a result, the government took over the assisted schools and teacher training colleges and imposed regulations prohibiting the establishment of new schools for children of schooling age. These steps were in line with the government policy and political vision.

Education changes in 1966/1967: Political changes occurred in the middle of the 1960s-decade, and previous government policies were changed. During these periods, more attention was paid to administrative matters, and there were trends promoting decentralization. Accordingly, the education administration decentralisation (e.g., Bandarawella declaration) system was introduced, and political and bureaucratic involvements were significant.

Overall, from the 1950s to the 1960s, there was no evidence that the general public's involvement in policy matters and knowledge contributed to education development because policy matters and administrative matters were strictly entrusted to the selected elite groups of the country.

1972 education reforms: It should be noted that 1972 education reform proposals were formulated and designed hastily without green paper, whitepaper, public consultations/ wider consultations, and wider deliberations/policy dialogue. Accordingly, the process of policy formulation followed political and bureaucratic directions. As per the literature, 1972 education reforms typically followed the political and bureaucrat model and attempted to find solutions for social issues (i.e., social unrest, unemployment issues, and production-based local economic policy). This reform further follows the human capital and economic modernisation approach to promote government economic and education policies.

Education changes in 1977/78: In 1977, a new political party swept to power. The new government was completely opposed to closed-economic policy and was pro-act in promoting open-economic policy. Accordingly, quasi-market features were embedded into the education sector and initiated to introduce new proposals for education. Education changes were proposed based on their political and economic policies. They significantly increased the power of politicians over the implementation of education policies and operation activities (e.g., student admissions, teacher transfers, infrastructure development, and appointment).

1981 whitepaper: As per the literature, 1981 education whitepaper proposals were formulated by the selected bureaucratic group to fulfil the political intentions (following the political and bureaucratic model). There is no evidence to prove that they followed the proper policy formulation steps, especially hearing the public and stakeholders. Moreover, there were no policy communications among the stakeholders, counterparts, technocrats, and respective clients and beneficiaries. These missing gaps led to disagreement in implementing whitepaper proposals as expected. If beneficiaries understand the anticipatory benefits and advantages of these proposals, they may fully support the implementation of the policy proposals.

1997 education reforms: Positive attempts were made in 1997 education policy reforms. Under the study on youth unrest, the Presidential Commission on Youth conducted massive public hearing sessions covering the entire country (Presidential Commission on Youth, 1990). Moreover, within the preparation of 1st report of the NEC, they also conducted a more comprehensive consultation processes to obtain public opinion. Considering such evidence and social demands, the NEC initiated the formulation of the education policy reforms in 1997. The policy formulation process involved a mix of administrators, educationists, and selected stakeholders.

Based on the NEC proposals, the President appointed a Special Task Force covering key areas of reforms, which developed implementation tools and identified the strategies for implementing education policy reforms like primary education lunch on a phase-out basis for learning the lessons from the pilot programme (cf. Section 4.2.9).

Moreover, some of the education policy proposals in 1997 reforms were also not conducted in wider consultation with the stakeholders (e.g., SBM, and teacher performance evaluation system). Due to the absence of such basic procedures, some initiatives were not implemented in the system at the expected level. This implies that wider participation and contributions are prerequisites for the sustainability of education policy initiatives.

NEPF (2020-2030): The NEPF (2020-2030) report by the NEC (2022) stated that, in formulating the policy proposals, they considered the government's policy on education outlined in the government manifesto, gave due consideration to proposals made in other policy documents prepared by the NEC, the Presidential Task Force, and the MoE, and also reviewed education sector reports published recently by international donor and development agencies (NEC, 2022ab). The NEC has appointed a steering committee representing expert groups when commencing the formulation of NEPF (2020-2030). The respective expert groups

have perused all relevant documents and conducted a series of discussions in person and via Zoom. Further, the NEC called public opinions through the newspapers and contacted numerous individuals and organisations to obtain their views. However, this study found that the contribution of CSOs is lacking. Further, there is no evidence to adequately prove the contributions of other stakeholders, counterparts, educationists/experts, and education economist inputs associated with formulating the NEPF (2020-2030). The Policymaker (IDIs, May 21, 2024) stated that this occurred due to an unexpected situation that existed during the period (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic).

NEPF (2023-2033): The NEPF (2023-2033) has also been prepared by the selected elite group. Developing these imperative policy proposals also follows the political and elite group model. Academics, freelance experts on education, economists of education, CSO members, and social media groups argue that the preparation of NEPF (2023-2033) did not fully consult the respective stakeholders. Even NEC, as an officially assigned policy agency, kept silent in this regard. Further, academics highlighted that the NEPF (2023-2033) ignored the basic principles of education (e.g., equity issues) and did not clear the educational visionary goals of the country. Further, NEPF (2023-2033) has not discussed some context-specific education matters like Pirivena education. Indeed, as several academics argued finally, this framework favours the big business groups, and education will open to them gradually, and such a situation will challenge public education in the country.

Concerning general education, NEPF (2023-2033) proposed establishing the following three regulatory or administrative institutions.

- A National Advisory Committee for Education: composed of distinguished educators with expertise and experience in early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers and published in a Gazette, shall counsel and guide the Minister for Education. This Advisory Committee will replace the current NEC.
- An Expert Committee for the Integration of ICT in Education: consisting of industry experts shall be established to develop and monitor the implementation of the technology integration strategy across all sub-sectors of education and administration.
- A Directorate of Provincial Education Authorities: consisting of provincial representative/s appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers, shall advise the Minister of Education to plan, execute, and evaluate education initiatives and projects at the provincial level.

In addition, Provincial Education Boards, Education Development Boards, and Quality Assurance and Accreditation mechanisms have also been proposed for establishment.

In the meantime, NEPF (2023-2033) was submitted to the Sectoral Oversights Committee on Education, Parliament of Sri Lanka, and had several sessions to discuss the contents of the NEPF with the technical experts. Regarding general education, the committee agreed to 31 policy recommendations out of 41 recommendations to present to the Parliament as the formal submission for approval (Sectoral Oversights Committee on Education, Parliament of Sri Lanka, 2024). Matters related to education reform proposals were also debated in the Parliament on June 5, 2024, to some extent. Meanwhile, policy deliberations are ongoing, and the government has taken steps to implement some programmes, and initiatives (for example, the government initiated the implementation of English medium education, recruitment of teachers for English medium subjects, digital education, the introduction of AI, the establishment of a teacher council, and restructuring of education administrative structures) without the proper approval of the Parliament as well as without legal endorsement for the entire framework (as at June, 2024). Considering current practices, educationists, academics, CSO members, and university students highlighted that the above proposed new regulatory or administrative institutions will probably be appointed members with connections to political parties. If so, it is unlikely they will act as professionals without conflicts of interest. Finally, these committees may work according to the political directives. CSO members and journalists questioned, 'What right does the government have to reform education without citizens' mandate? Education is virtuously interconnected to the public. Hence, citizens' consensus and agreement are fundamental to making educational changes' (FGDs, May 11, 2024). In those scenes, public opinion and contributions are critical for formulating education policies/reforms in the country, but NEPF (2023-2033) is missing in following those procedures systematically. By contrast, other side actors reasoned that the government had been mandated to reform education in line with context-specific and international trends.

Preschool policy: This analysis reveals that the incoherence of policies is another critical area visible in education. The preschool education policy is one example. It is evident that since 2019, the MoE has not succeeded in finalising the preschool education policy, leaving a significant void in the education landscape. The SMER, DL&OUs (2020-2022) had drafted plans for the policy, including several initiatives in 2021. However, these plans are yet to be implemented. This complexity of the situation shows the absence of a cohesive state policy on preschool education. Notably, the terminology and standards associated with preschools vary widely nationwide, leading to disparities in instruction mediums and educational quality.

Quick-fix approach: Overall, when studying the historical education policies and frameworks/proposals, many education policy frameworks/proposals have mostly followed a quick-fix approach rather than following a scientific rationalistic approach. It does not mean all education policy frameworks/proposals are in such line, but many are in that way. For example, some proposals are tabled based on the government agenda, and some in an urgent manner and rush to do it as imperative ones [i.e., Education Reforms (1972); Whitepaper (1981); Re-emerging Education in Sri Lanka (2020); NEPF (2023-2033)].

Gaps between policies and the actual needs of the system: Even though many attractive education policy proposals have been presented in the respective documents, some do not match the context-specific system requirements. Furthermore, some cannot afford it, and the system is not ready to welcome them. When formulating education policies, it is a prerequisite to conduct a feasibility study of the policy implementation. Once the agreement is obtained to implement, strategies need to be developed, including a timeframe, estimated cost, anticipatory targets, outputs, outcomes, and implementation responsibilities. The readiness of the system to implement some initiatives of the NEPF (2023-2033) is challenging (i.e., ICT promotion, digital-based education, AI, and English medium education).

Policy Analysts (IDIs, May 21, 2024) strongly emphasised that it is fundamental to have a long-term holistic vision for the country before formulating education policies. Based on such a vision, policymakers (or think-tankers) must develop a green paper. Then, it is required to call on public opinions and prerequisites to conduct the public-hearing sessions and ensure wider participation. Then, such collection needs to be analysed by the special task force or think tankers. The next step is to develop a whitepaper that needs to be disclosed to the public again and to obtain public consensus. Based on the findings and recommendations of the whitepaper, the task force or think tankers can develop a comprehensive framework for education policy reforms. Once the completion of such formal procedures, they will be able to draft education reform proposals/policies and need to obtain legal endorsement from the respective authorities. Although this process may be time-consuming, it is crucial for ensuring long-term effectiveness and impact. Successful implementation of policies in social sectors needs strong commitment and wider participation (political authorities, bureaucrats, stakeholders, community), resources, transparency of purpose and procedures, and stewardship of the proposals.

A summary of backgrounds on the origination and formulation of education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives is given in Table 5.1

Table 5.1: Summary of backgrounds on the origination and formulation of education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka

Policy/ framework/ reform initiatives	Approach	Sector analysis / diagnosis	Policy analysis	Policy consultation	Policy communication	CSOs involvement	Underlined rationale
1945 - Free education policy	Political, bureaucratic & professional model.	✓	✓	✓	✓	No evidence.	Social demand. Country needs.
1950 - Education changes	Political and bureaucratic model.	No evidence	No	No	No	No evidence.	Government policy. Political intention.
1960/61 - Education changes	Political, bureaucratic & professional model.	✓	No	No	No	No evidence.	Government policy. Political intention.
1966 - Education changes	Political, bureaucratic & professional model.	✓	No	No	No	No evidence.	Government policy. Political intention.
1972 - Education reforms	Political and bureaucratic model.	✓	No	No	No	No	Government policy. Political intention. Social demand.
1977/78 - Education changes	Political and bureaucratic model.	No	No	No	No	No	Government policy. Political intention.
1981 - Education proposals for reforms (Whitepaper)	Political, bureaucratic & professional model.	✓	✓ To some extent.	No	No	No	Government policy. Political intention.
1987 - 13th amendment to the constitution	Political and bureaucratic model.	No	No	No	No	No	Government policy. Political intention.

Policy/ framework/ reform initiatives	Approach	Sector analysis / diagnosis	Policy analysis	Policy consultation	Policy communication	CSOs involvement	Underlined rationale
1997 - Education reforms	Academic, professional experts, & bureaucratic mixed approach.	✓	✓ Moderately	✓	✓	✓	Government policy. Political intention. Social demand.
2003 - Envisioning education for human development: proposals for a national policy framework on general education (NEC)	Academic & professional experts' approach.	✓	✓ Moderately.	✓ To some extent.	✓ To some extent.	No evidence.	As per the NEC mandate.
2009 - New education act for general education in Sri Lanka: context, issues, and proposals (Special Committee)	Academic & professional experts' approach.	✓	✓ Moderately.	✓ To some extent.	✓ To some extent.	Obtained public opinion to some extent.	As per the NEC mandate.
2012 - New educational policies for general education in Sri Lanka (Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education)	Academics, experts & bureaucratic approach.	✓	✓ Moderately.	✓ To some extent.	✓ To some extent.	Obtained public opinion to some extent.	Government directives.
2016 - Raising the quality of education: proposals for a national policy on general education in Sri Lanka (NEC)	Academic approach.	✓	✓ Moderately	✓ To some extent.	✓ To some extent.	✓	As per the NEC mandate.
2019 - National policy on general education in Sri Lanka AND proposed framework for consideration in drafting the general education bill (act) (MoE)	Professional experts' approach.	✓	✓ Moderately	✓ To some extent.	✓ To some extent.	Obtained public opinion to some extent.	Government directives.

Policy/ framework/ reform initiatives	Approach	Sector analysis / diagnosis	Policy analysis	Policy consultation	Policy communication	CSOs involvement	Underlined rationale
2020 - Reemerging education in Sri Lanka: Transforming the present system of general education to a dynamic and vibrant paradigm for 21st century (Presidential Task Force)	Political and elite group model.	✓ To some extent.	✓ Moderately	✓ To some extent.	No	No	Government directives.
2019-2022 - Proposals for general education reforms	Political and elite group model.	✓ To some extent.	✓ Moderately	✓ To some extent.	No	No	Government directives.
2022 - NEPF (2020-2030) (NEC)	Academic & experts' approach.	✓	✓ Moderately	✓ To some extent.	Fair	Obtained public opinion to some extent.	As per the NEC mandate.
2022 - Proposals for general education reforms (2022-2032) (MoE)	Political and elite group model.	✓ To some extent.	No	No	No	No	Government directives.
2023 - Report of the selected committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for the expansion of higher education opportunities in Sri Lanka (Parliament Select Committee)	Political and bureaucratic model.	✓ To some extent.	No	Bureaucratic & stakeholder consultations	No	No	Government directives.
2023 - NEPF (2023-2033) (Cabinet sub-committee)	Political and elite group model.	✓ To some extent.	No	Bureaucratic & stakeholder consultations	No	No	Government directives Political intention.

Inclusion policies: Currently, when formulating education policies, they are promoted to ensure the inclusion of all elements of policies. Inclusion is seen as a universal human right. Inclusion aims to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other needs. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and eliminating discrimination and intolerance (removing barriers). Despite such circumstances, several past and present education policies and policy frameworks in Sri Lanka have proposed numerous proposals to strengthen and promote 'inclusive education'. However, greater attention is needed to enhance inclusion within these education policies. This analysis found unclear definitions of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive.' In Sri Lanka, inclusive education is considered a matter of students with special education and differently able students.

Transformation policies: Another development trend in education policy formulation is promoting transformation education policies. Educational transformation refers to systemic changes in the prevailing educational model. It distinguishes itself from the theories that defend reforms or renovations of some model elements, maintaining the substance of the traditional system process, and its organisation and structure. In Sri Lanka, many education policies and policy frameworks are given less attention to fostering the system's transformation in an applicable and practical manner. However, outcomes of such are lacking.

5.3 Content analysis of education policies, proposals/ frameworks

Reviewing the contents of preceding education policies and frameworks, including education reforms, is very important to understanding the education system in Sri Lanka. The contents of the selected education policies, frameworks, and reforms in Sri Lanka are mapped in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Key contents of education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives of education in Sri Lanka

	Policy domain/Trust areas	1945	1950	1960/61	1966	1972	1977/78	1981	1987	1997 (NEC+PTF)	2003 (NEC)	2009 (NEC)	2012 (NEC)	2016 (NEC)	2019 (MoE)	2020 (PTF)	2019–2022 (SMER)	2020–2030 (NEC)	2022–2030 (MoE)	NEPF 2023–2033
Equity	Free education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Education subsidies/welfare and scholarships/ health and nutrition	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Access and participation:																			
	Rural education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Central Colleges	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Cluster schools	-	-	-	-	-	-	Intro.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	Rev.	-	Rev.	Rev.
	School admission	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	School takeover	-	-	Intro	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	• Equity perspective (demand-side and supply-side) • Welfare education programmes	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Gender responsiveness	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	• Provision of resources • Qualitative expansion	Intro.	Cont. Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Compulsory education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Zoning of schools	-	-	Intro.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
	Adult education/NFE/SE	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Equitable resource allocation	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Pro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.

Note: Intro. = Introduced. **Cont.** = Continuation of previous policies. **Rev.** = Revised and modified. **Pro.** = Proposed. **NS** = Not specified.

	Policy domain/Trust areas	1945	1950	1960/61	1966	1972	1977/78	1981	1987	1997 (NEC+PTF)	2003 (NEC)	2009 (NEC)	2012 (NEC)	2016 (NEC)	2019 (MoE)	2020 (PTF)	2019–2022 (SMER)	2020–2030 (NEC)	2022–2030 (MoE)	NEPF 2023–2033
Quality	Curriculum (Primary and Secondary)	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont. Pro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Pro.	Cont. Pro.	Cont. Pro.
	Mother tongue as a medium of instruction	Intro.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	NS	NS
	• Curriculum development • Primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary • New subjects • World-of-work • Religious education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.
	• Digital education • Blended learning • AI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.
	Classroom teaching methodologies	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.		Cont. Rev.				Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.			
	• Project work • Assignment system					Intro.		Rev.						Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.			Rev.
	Teaching, learning, and credentialing:													Cont.	Cont.	Cont.				Pro.
	English education	Intro.	Cont.	Rev.	Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.
	Pre-schools	Intro.	Rev.					Rev.		Rev.										Rev.
	Assessment and evaluation:																			
	Evaluation at the primary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.		Rev.										Rev.
	Continuous assessment	-						Intro.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
	SBA	-								Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Projects/Assignment	Intro.															Intro.	Pro.	Pro.	Pro.
	Qualifying examination for university entrance	Intro.	Cont.																	Rev.

Note: Intro. = Introduced. **Cont.** = Continuation of previous policies. **Rev.** = Revised and modified. **Pro.** = Proposed. **NS** = Not specified.

	Policy domain/Trust areas	1945	1950	1960/61	1966	1972	1977/78	1981	1987	1997 (NEC+PTF)	2003 (NEC)	2009 (NEC)	2012 (NEC)	2016 (NEC)	2019 (MoE)	2020 (PTF)	2019–2022 (SMER)	2020–2030 (NEC)	2022–2030 (MoE)	NEPF 2023–2033
Quality	Teacher education:																			
	Teacher training	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Teacher service	-								Rev.										
	Teacher development	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Teacher deployment and employment	Intro.					Cont. Rev.	Cont.												
	Supervision, monitoring, inspection	Intro					Rev.													
	Quality assurance	-					Rev.	Rev.		Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Pro.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Pirivena education/Religious education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.	Rev.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	NS
	Private schools	Rev.	Cont.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev	Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Technical and vocational education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Rev.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont. Pro.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	School health/physical education	Intro.				Rev.		Rev.		Rev.										
	CCAs/ECAs	Intro.				Rev.		Rev.		Rev.										

Note: Intro. = Introduced. **Cont.** = Continuation of previous policies. **Rev.** = Revised and modified. **Pro.** = Proposed. **NS** = Not specified.

	Policy domain/Trust areas	1945	1950	1960/61	1966	1972	1977/78	1981	1987	1997 (NEC+PTF)	2003 (NEC)	2009 (NEC)	2012 (NEC)	2016 (NEC)	2019 (MoE)	2020 (PTF)	2019-2022 (SMER)	2020-2030 (NEC)	2022-2030 (MoE)	NEPF 2023-2033
Relevance	• Technical and vocational education • Pre-vocational education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	World-of-work/Internships (attachments)	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Promotion of creativity and innovations	Intro.				Re-Intro.														
	Guidance and counselling, CCAs	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Unified national system of education					Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Open avenues for education	Intro.																		
	Link to the labour market demand	Intro.																		
	Partnerships																			Intro.
	Higher education	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Education law and legal matters	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.	Rev.										

Note: Intro. = Introduced. **Cont.** = Continuation of previous policies. **Rev.** = Revised and modified. **Pro.** = Proposed. **NS** = Not specified.

	Policy domain/Trust areas	1945	1950	1960/61	1966	1972	1977/78	1981	1987	1997 (NEC+PTF)	2003 (NEC)	2009 (NEC)	2012 (NEC)	2016 (NEC)	2019 (MoE)	2020 (PTF)	2019-2022 (SMER)	2020-2030 (NEC)	2022-2030 (MoE)	NEPF 2023-2033
Efficiency	**Governance:**	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	
	Education ordinance	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	• School education cycle/ stages • School admission	Intro.	Cont.	Rev.		Rev.	Rev.													Rev.
	Education administration and management:	Intro.	Cont.		Rev.	Rev.		Rev.	Rev.	Rev.		Pro.					Rev.			Rev.
	Education service	Intro.	Cont.							Rev.										
	School administration and management	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.					Rev.										
	Principals service	Intro.	Cont.																	
	SBM									Intro.										
	School structures/admin-istration:																			
	• New school structures • Structural changes	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.															
	Central Colleges	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Cluster schools	-	-	-	-	-	-	Intro.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS		NS	NS	Rev.		Rev.	Rev.
	Unitary schools	-	-	-	-	-	-	Intro.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS		NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
	National schools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Intro.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.		Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.	Cont.
	Education governance/ administration	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.	Cont. Rev.															Rev.
	Education investment	Intro.	Cont. Rev.																	Rev.
	Community participation	Intro.	Cont.	Cont. Rev.																

Note: Intro. = Introduced. **Cont.** = Continuation of previous policies. **Rev.** = Revised and modified. **Pro.** = Proposed. **NS** = Not specified.

Table 5.2 illustrates that almost all insides are similar in all reform initiatives/ policy frameworks. Distinctive features of contents of previous education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reforms are briefed below.

- Most educational development programmes have originated and laid a foundation based on the 1945 education reform initiatives/free education policy.
- Some initiatives are continued without analysing the consequences of previous policies/initiatives.
- Some are discontinued without acceptable justifications (or without impact evaluation).
- It included new areas/proposals in some policy frameworks (i.e., ICT education, digital education, SBA, and SBM.
- However, it is rare to see an impact evaluation of the implementation of previous education policies (e.g., school structures, curriculum implementation, school management, and teacher education). Even though such evaluations are available (rarely), there is often a lack of communication, sharing, and reporting of such findings of said evaluations. Nevertheless, NEC frequently conducted a series of studies before fabricating their comprehensive education policy frameworks (i.e., NEC, 1997; 2003; 2009; 2022). However, it should be noted that such studies are not widely circulated, and poor deliberations are conducted among the respective groups.

5.3.1 Equity and inclusiveness perspectives

The equity concept is the fundamental principle in education policies. Education economists are concerned with equity in education distribution in terms of both financial and physical resource allocations and outcomes. The equity concept is related to notions of 'fairness' and 'justice' (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985:246; Simkins, 1995; Ladd et al., 1999:9 in Balasooriya, 2004a), and it is a 'goal relating to how resources should be distributed or shared' (Barr, 1987:427 in Lee, 1996:46). Conversely, equity means providing equal opportunities for every child to receive quality education irrespective of race, religion, caste, socio-economic status, and any other social class status. The equity properties have been achieved by the system to a fair degree through expansion in the provision of education. Although some writers have used the term 'equity' with

a similar meaning to 'equality,' Lee (1996:38) states there is no consensus on whether they are identical or different. Equity issues arise concerning needs, and equity is concerned with how the outputs and the cost of producing them are distributed between individuals and groups. Hence, an efficient allocation of resources can be judged as inequitable, depending on one's social preferences (value judgment).

Equity refers to procedural equity and distributional equity. Distributional equity is divided into two elements, such as horizontal equity and vertical equity. In doing so, procedural and distributional equity should be distinguished.

Procedural equity, which refers to the consistent application of agreed rules and regulations, is a dominant criterion for social decisions that is advocated by libertarian or constitutional economists who regard the market process as procedurally equitable (Levačić, 1995:30-31 in Balasooriya, 2004a). Procedural equity refers to common rules, in contrast to determination by administrative discretion.

Distributional equity refers to the distribution of those items that yield welfare to individuals. It can be treated in several ways, and the terminology is often confusing and inconsistent. Distributional equity is the form of equity that most people associate with the concept of social justice. This concept has particular importance in education. Educational attainment is unevenly distributed and is closely associated with the distribution of income and wealth. Distributional equity is divided into two broad categories: input-based and outcome-based. Input-based distributional equity is judged in terms of criteria such as the 'distribution of expenditure per pupil,' 'maximum variance' (placing a limit on the permitted variance in expenditure per pupil), and 'foundation' (a prescribed minimum level of expenditure provided for all pupils) In contrast outcome-based equity is concerned with criteria such as 'minimum attainment' (sufficient resources should be provided to enable all pupils to reach a minimum level of achievement),'full opportunity' (resources should be continuously provided until the marginal gains of all pupils are reduced to zero), 'levelling' (resources should be distributed so that the most disadvantaged are favoured most and variances in achievement are minimized), and 'competition' (resources should be provided for all pupils in proportion to pupils' ability to benefit).

To provide education, the authorities must resource the entire education system in line with the equity principles. Education authorities need to adhere to procedural and distributional equity principles when resourcing. Distributional equity can be subdivided into horizontal equity (people with similar needs should be treated similarly) and vertical equity (people with special/different needs (that emerged beyond their control) should be treated positively). According to

the principles of horizontal equity, every child has an equal right to obtain equal educational opportunities within the available resources; hence, it requires the equal treatment of equals is required as pupils have similar educational needs and similar rights. Therefore, their educational needs should be met without discrimination. Equity should cover areas such as access to education (the ex-ante aspect), availability of resources for learning, equal performance, and life outcomes (the ex-post aspect). Vertical equity is the 'unequal treatment of unequals'. Applied to education, vertical equity relates to differences in children's specific educational needs. Differences in educational needs can be caused by the external environment (i.e., geographical locations and socio-economic backgrounds). Furthermore, some pupils have different special educational needs (SEN) unrelated to external social factors, e.g., pupils with disabilities or impairments. Vertical equity implies that each child can access an education appropriate to their learning potential and needs (Levačić, 2000:14 in Balasooriya, 2004a).

Having these theoretical and conceptual backgrounds, when studying previous and present education policies and proposals, almost all are dedicated to ensuring equity principles in the education provision. However, when conducting an in-depth analysis, both positive and negative implications were noted, and selected examples are discussed below.

School network: Since the Kannangara era, a network of schools throughout the country has been established where free education is made available. As a result, the country is on the verge of achieving universal primary education, adult literacy, enrolment (both primary and secondary), quality of life of the people, and health status, which is better than most other countries having similar per-capita income and economic growth. In addition to fee-free education, several education subsidies and welfare programmes such as free textbooks, free school uniforms, scholarships, bursaries, midday meals, health insurance, transport subsidies, in-kind education resources, special assistance for disabled children are being implemented to promote and increase access to and participation in primary and secondary education. All education reforms and proposals are recommended to continue the implementation of the free education policy, and all governments are committed to continuing the said policy.

Science education: Since the Kannangara era, the expansion of science education has been one of the major educational attempts. Many education policy frameworks included expanding science education [e.g., education reforms (1972), Whitepaper (1981), education reforms (1997)]. Introducing teaching

science in the mother tongue (Sinhala or Tamil) under the 1972 education reforms and the provision of resources, i.e., infrastructure facilities and human resources, are key initiatives of the system. Nonetheless, the opportunities for studying science streams, especially in GCE AL, are limited to selected locations, and such facilities are also not adequately provided across the country. It does not mean that GCE AL science education should be available in every school. However, the authorities must guarantee that such facilities in terms of access and participation for every qualified and enthusiastic student. Non-availability of opportunities to learn interesting subjects leads to discrimination against marginalized groups, and hence, they are sporadically penalized and violated their educational rights.

Education facilities in disadvantaged areas and the plantation sector: Ensuring access to and participation in primary and secondary education is one of the major components mentioned in all education policy reforms and frameworks (i.e., 1945: rural school education; Central Colleges; 1960-61: compulsory school age; the medium of instruction; 1966: common basic school system; 1981: cluster schools; 1990s: ISD; DSD; Navodya; Isuru schools; 2012: 1,000 secondary and 5,000 primary school development, 2015: NSBS; 2022: 1,000 national schools; and 2023: cluster schools). For that purpose, several measures and strategies are proposed in these frameworks. In particular, proposals related to developing small schools, isolated schools, and schools in the plantation sector are key to many education reform initiatives. However, small schools and schools in the plantation sector are the schools sporadically undermined. Parents of these schools are socially and economically deprived and have no so-called powerful connections with high-powered social, economic, and political connections to demand satisfying their rights. These schools have poor learning facilities, basic facilities, and unattractive learning environments.

Furthermore, many of these schools have teacher shortages and poorly deployed professionally qualified teachers. Parents are struggling with their livelihood, but they are strongly committed to providing education for their children, as they believe education is the only powerful solution for their unsolved problems. They are ambitious, and they have recognised/understood education as a social mobility factor. During the last several decades, the government and many other organisations -both local and international- patronage to improve the quality of education in small schools, yet issues remain due to the absence of a proper mechanism for the sustainability of many initiatives. It raises questions about the efficacy of education investment. In that lens, it is questionable whether the existing education saves for whom in the country.

Inclusive education: Inclusive education is one of the key dimensions of equity perspective. Even though several education policies, policy frameworks, and reforms are referred to the promotion of inclusive education and inclusiveness, accordingly, several proposals have presented and confirmed the need for mainstreaming inclusive education in Sri Lanka [i.e., education reforms (1997); national policy framework (2003); proposals for new education act (2009); education policy proposals (2012); policy proposals (2016); policy proposals (2019); NEPF (2020-2030); and NEPF (2023-2033)]. However, as yet, there is no clear national policy document articulating the definition, key concepts, framework, and scope of inclusive education from preschool to tertiary level, which takes account of international declarations referring to inclusive education (Ekanayake, et. al. 2016 in Aturupane & Little, 2020). The idea of promotion of inclusive education has evolved from the notion that education is a fundamental human right for all children and is in keeping with the aims of education for all (EFA) and the principle that all learners have a right to education irrespective of their characteristics or differences (Aturupane & Little, 2020). In principle, the GoSL has agreed to implement inclusive and special education (for students with SEN) in the education system and provide the required resources. This study revealed more work to be done in mainstreaming and providing inclusive education to ensure vertical equity principles. There is a question of why, even with policies in place, their implementation is lacking. This implies that policy implementation is a critical issue. This may happen due to inadequate time spent deliberately identifying real issues, problems, and challenges in the respective subject during the policy formulation stage.

5.3.2 Education perspectives: quality, relevance, and sustainability

Quality is defined, in general, as fitness for use. In education, what is expected is that the children who pass out of the school system should be able to lead successful lives as citizens in a democratic society. As the success of a student who passes out of school can be gauged only after a long period of time, the process is important. That is why educationists pay great attention to the curriculum. It is the curriculum, the content, and the methodology that shape the future of the child. Education reform is a matter of curricular reforms.

Curriculum reforms: All education reforms, policies, and proposals are deeply concerned with modernisation and modifications of the national curriculum, which aims to improve the quality of education and cater to the labour market demands. According to the national curriculum policy (since 1997), the curriculum needs to be revised every eight years (8-year curriculum cycle).

Under the reforms carried out every time, the 'quick-fix approach' followed changing subjects here and there and introducing new topics/sections in the content without having a visionary change of the entire curriculum. Education philosophers emphasized that learning has to be child/learner-centred and activity-based. Accordingly, education policies and reforms include these, but they are not fully implemented in the system for many reasons. Remarkable changes were the introduction of ICT subjects into the national curriculum. However, the provision of required ICT facilities to the system in line with the adequacy criteria for resourcing still has challenges, and disparities can be seen.

1972 education reforms: There were constructive features in this reform package (e.g., expansion of science education; vocational-oriented curriculum; reduction of the schooling years; increase in government share on education; and plan-based development approach). Additionally, it introduced child-centred learning and activity-based learning. Moreover, in terms of political and national perspectives, in 1972, for the first time since the 19th century, a system of public examining, disconnected from English norms, was introduced in secondary schools with the specific purpose of breaking finally with the colonially inherited pattern of schooling (Little, 2024:77).

Despite such positive features and changes, there were several criticisms about the 1972 education reforms, and the following are essential.

- Curriculum reforms were categorically criticized by some educationists, parents, and politicians pointing to areas such as readiness for the implementation, learning materials, books, academic links with higher education and other countries.

- The reduction of the school span from 12 to 11 years and the raising the admission age to grade 1 to six years were constructed as attempts to prune education expenditure. It was also conjectured that reducing the school span would lead to the non-recognition of Sri Lankan certificates by foreign universities.

- The introduction of pre-vocational studies was interpreted as an attempt to return to feudalism.

- The introduction of reforms in a hurry without adequate public consultation and availability of financial resources were other drawbacks.

1977 education changes: Under the new government in 1977, the school examination system was revised, and some of the curriculum changes of 1972 were retained (e.g., common curriculum for all students up to the end of grade 11). Pre-vocational subjects were abandoned, and later 'life skills' curriculum was introduced.

1981 whitepaper on education: With regard to curriculum and assessment, one of the controversial reform initiatives of 1981 is the inclusion of continuous assessment in the GCE OL examination, specifically the assessment of project works/assignments by teachers at school levels. This can be denoted as one of the steps for devolving powers and authority to the school level from the deviating centralized examination system. Majority of teachers and teacher trade unions categorically criticized this as it was considered an extra burden to their teaching workload, and they highlighted that the authorities were given poor weights to prepare teachers' capacity to materialize the initiative. On the other hand, parents were questioned about the credibility of the assessment as many teachers were biased and favours selected students. Mistrusted teacher-based assessment badly affected the sustainability of the initiative, and radical political groups emphasized that this would pave the way to create discrimination among social classes, especially remote areas generally penalized for education purposes. Nonetheless, this initiative indirectly promoted private tuition, and there were trends to prepare assignments for different subjects and sell such readymade assignments to students. This case expresses the importance of wider consultation and communication and the need for a participatory approach to education reforms/changes. Otherwise, time, cost, and capacity are wasted, and losing students' learning time.

Teacher matters: The teacher is the critical causal factor in improving students' learning outcomes. Hence, the teacher plays a role in improving the quality of education. Recruitment, employment, deployment, and teacher development are vital, and a systematic and sustainable mechanism for these functions is needed regularly. However, these matters are still issues in the system, especially teacher deployment, which is a long-standing issue in remote/disadvantaged areas of the country, and such a situation is challenging the free education policy. Moreover, deploying professionally qualified teachers in the system (especially, in core subjects) remains a significant challenge. Sporadically, students in schools in rural and disadvantaged areas always learn from newly recruited teachers who are not professionally qualified. However, the majority of professionally qualified teachers are serving for long-periods in schools located in urban areas, especially in so-called popular schools (Balasooriya,

2004b). Nonetheless, the constitution assured a need for the availability of professionally qualified teachers in classroom teaching (Appendix III: Education (4), The Constitution of the Democratic Socialistic Republic of Sri Lanka, GoSL, 2023). However, this constitutional guarantee is not meaningfully applied across the system. The absence of a sound and acceptable teacher deployment policy in Sri Lanka paved the way for many influences to be practiced in the system. Background notes on many education reforms, proposals, and policies have been critically discussed, but remedial measures have not taken place.

5.3.3 Economic perspectives

Linkages of labour market: As education is considered an 'engine of social and economic growth', some authors and education economists argued that education should be linked to economic and labour market demands. Finally, such spheres help to address issues related to unemployability, poverty, and economic growth. The 1972 education reform was an attempt to make the curriculum more relevant and develop skills of students suitable to the world of work. The changes were in keeping with sound and practical principles of education. Primary education, in particular, was in keeping with progressive ideas on education. Teachers were given the flexibility to expand the curriculum to meet the needs of the environment. The standard junior secondary level provided a broad general education necessary for every citizen. The senior secondary curriculum has a general component and specialization in subjects a student would wish to pursue in higher education. It catered to the needs of the vast majority of students who failed to enter higher education. A foundation year was proposed for those who would proceed to university to fill any gaps. Overall, 1972 education reforms were based on the socialistic education philosophy and expected long-term education and economic outcomes.

The 'open economic policy,' which was introduced in 1977, is the prime factor that contributed directly to imposing pure-market features into the education system (Wehella & Balasooriya, 2014ab). This has led to high competition in the education system, driven by an examination-targeted system. Further, admission to the grade 1 and grade 5 scholarship examinations are the most competitive points of the school system in Sri Lanka. The matters above have been discussed, and alternative proposals presented in the last several policy proposals, reforms, and agendas [e.g., NEC (2003); NEPF (2023-2033)], but the issue hitherto remains in the system.

According to Balasooriya & Wehella (2014ab), there are visible officials and unofficial sub-systems established in the country due to imposing quasi-market features in education in Sri Lanka. Since 1977, private tuition has functioned as

a lucrative business/industry. As a result of this business, several direct and indirect job opportunities have been created. Nevertheless, from the point of view of parents (especially from poor households), additional investment in their children's education is unaffordable. This issue has been discussed and presented solutions in the last several policy frameworks/proposals and reforms agenda [e.g., NEC (2003); NEC (2009); Parliament Advisory Committee Report (2012); NEPF (2023-2033); Select Committee Report (2023)]. However, the issue remains strongly in the system compared to previous decades.

When analysing education policies in many countries, it is evident that education policy in isolation in any country cannot minimize employability. The problem of employability is not vested in the education sphere. It is a problem for the government/authorities not to make the environment conducive to an enriching and diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Evidence shows that almost all education policies and policy proposals are interlinked with the respective government's political and economic visions. For example, in 1972, education reforms were based on the government's vision of 'development' and followed the national economic policy. Underlined directives of 1977 education changes and 1981 whitepaper proposals were to promote open economic policy. Later, as many countries follow, education policies and proposals are embedded neo-liberalism in education policies [e.g., NEPF (2023-2033)].

Relationships between education policies, research and development (R&D), innovations, and inventions: Many education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives in the past were substantially discussed to promote and encourage innovation and R&D in the general education sub-sector [e.g., Handessa scheme: free education policy (1945); re-organizing subject streams: education changes in 1960-1961; innovations to the curriculum: proposals for reforms in general and technical education (1966-1967); pre-vocational studies: education reforms (1972); technical and practical skills: general education reforms (1997); education technology: national policy framework (2023); education technology: NEC, (2009); education technology, educational research: Special Parliament Advisory Committee (2012); NEPF-NEC (2020-2030); NEPF-Cabinet Sub-committee (2023-2033)]. The evidence mentioned above shows trends in paying attention to the importance of the R&D sector, including the promotion of innovations. Students are engaged in many creative innovations and inventions in different disciplines (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic period, economic and social crisis period (2021-2022); and national and international events.), but the challenge is that such talents are not taken forward sustainably. Several separate administrative bodies, agencies, and commissions function to

patronize respective schools and students. But school teachers and students are facing hardships in this regard. Nevertheless, no evidence was found to have implemented these programmes in a transparent, systemic, coordinated manner with financial and technical assistance. Indeed, there is no evidence for establishing linkages between such outcomes of R&D, innovations, and inventions to further/higher education and, finally, to knowledge contributions as well as contributions to the country's economic growth.

5.3.4 Social development, cultural changes, and gender responsiveness

Social development: Education is an unbeatable factor that contributes to the social development of the societies in the country. Education goals stipulated in all previous education policies, policy proposals/frameworks as well as education reforms [e.g., Education changes (1960-61); Education reforms (1972); NEC (2003); Special Parliament Advisory Committee (2012); Education reforms (2019-2022); MoE - Proposals for general education reforms (2022-2032); NEPF (2020-2030)] are aimed at developing the social skills of students. Undoubtedly, Sri Lankan education practices have greatly contributed to improving students' and citizens' social skills, including socio-emotional learning. Eventually, such improvements impact the overall social development of the country. Generally, social development is intangible, and such impacts are demonstrated through individual and social behaviours, habits, and disciplines.

Cultural changes: Education is an invincible factor leading to cultural transformation aims for future generations. The only purpose of education is to produce skilled labours for the labour markets, but also pave the way to improve individual life-skills. In so doing, there is a need to transform the cultural values, ethics, and social-emotional skills for generations. The historical education practices in Sri Lanka have focused much on promoting cultural values, ethics, and moral education. Later, light attention was paid to these areas.

After the introduction of open economic policy in 1977, people's thinking patterns gradually changed. When mixing concepts and practices linked to liberal economic policy and social liberal economic policy, the education sector is highly affected by such overarching policies. Such situations impact cultural thinking, practices, and transferring from one generation to the next. Education has become more competitive, and more focus is being given to examinations. Students and parents think and act on personal achievements rather than team and social achievements.

Gender responsiveness: In the early decades, Sri Lanka was approaching gender parity in enrolling in primary and secondary education. Currently, concerning gender perspectives, Sri Lanka has achieved gender parity in education (CED, 2024), which can be considered an encouraging achievement. Due to the population growth, the female population is higher than the male [Mid-year Total population ('000): 22,037; Male: 10,670; Female: 11,367 (CBSL, 2023: Real Sector Table 2)]. On the other hand, the existing school education curriculum is more focused on memory, and such a factor has caused higher chances for female cohorts. Recent studies highlighted a trend of boys being behind and showing low performance compared to girls. This is a common feature not only for Sri Lanka but also for other countries in the world. Having these background factors gives women an advantage in education.

Overall, the policy interventions in education in Sri Lanka significantly contributed to maintaining gender parity, social development, and cultural transformation.

5.3.5 Efficiency perspectives

In terms of efficiency, education policies/policy proposals can be discussed in line with the dimensions of internal efficiency (productive efficiency) and external efficiency (allocative efficiency) perspectives.

The internal efficiency of education systems is generally assessed by studying the dynamics of student flows and measuring dropouts, repetition, and the time and resources needed to produce graduates leaving the education system at different levels. Furthermore, measuring the quality of education as educational output or product is another dimension of the internal efficiency of the education system. For that purpose, teacher development (including teacher training), survival, promotion, completion of cycles, and performance level are taken into account to measure the quality of education. Further, teacher deployment (utilization) and resource mobilization are also considered as economic efficiency. SBM, SBPTD, education management, administration, governance, and service delivery are also included under the internal efficiency dimension.

Measuring the external effectiveness of education involves evaluating the quality and relevance of what has been learnt in schools. Indeed, the external efficiency of the education system should be assessed in terms of its contribution to a country's economic and social development. In practice, it has proved difficult to estimate the contribution of education to economic growth. Some measuring indicators are the unemployment rate, income levels, and occupations.

In terms of internal and external efficiency, all education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives have been addressed to improve such areas.

Education reform initiatives (1948-2023): Education reform initiatives introduced from 1948 to 2023 discussed and presented policy initiatives to improve efficiency (e.g., Kannangara reforms: school restructuring; 1960s: school mapping and school rationalization; 1997: school rationalization; 1997: SBM; 2003: SBM; and 2023: administrative reform). Furthermore, to improve the efficiency of education, many education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives have developed several administrative and management policy reform proposals (e.g., 1972 reforms, 1981 whitepaper, 1997 reforms, NEC - NEPF (2020-2030), and NEPF (2023-2033)).

Kannangara reforms: Under the Kannangara reforms, one of the sweeping initiatives is the establishment of central colleges across the country. With the economics of education, this initiative can be considered as a lead factor for improving economic efficiency. The underlined principles of this attempt were to promote the optimum utilization of given education resources (i.e., physical, infrastructure, learning resources, human resources, and in-kind resources) to provide quality education for children. As a result of the functioning of the central colleges in a practical way, the system produced quality human capital for the country and globally. In recent decades, for many reasons, these schools were not treated positively; as a result, in some locations, these schools do not fully function as expected levels.

Further, the Kannangara reforms introduced new management structures that improved the system's management and administration efficiency.

Education changes in 1960-1961: NEC (1961) proposed establishing a unified national general education system in the country. Further, based on the school mapping and rationalization, the school system's zoning was proposed. Restructured education administration structures and promoted community relations for school developments. These initiatives are positive attempts to improve the system and economic efficiency in education; nonetheless, due to the shifting political powers, these initiatives did not survive in the system until gaining a positive impact. In 1961, education administration powers and authorities were delegated to the regional level, enabling them to make location-based decisions to improve the quality of education.

Education changes in 1966-1967: It was proposed to establish a common basic school and practical school system in the country to cater to its requirements. Further, the structures of education administration and powers delegated to the regional levels and national level education management and administration structures were also restructured; accordingly, the regional education system was updated, and a close supervision system was introduced.

Education reforms (1972): 1972 reforms introduced a new structure for the primary and secondary education cycle as one of the efficiency measures to minimize the education years of children. Further, new degree programmes (e.g., Bachelor of Development, BEd for multiple disciplines, Plantation Management, Insurance, Public Finance and Revenues, Valuation, and Public Administration) were introduced for universities in line with the economic development of the country, which led to improved system efficiency.

To strengthen service delivery and governance of education, the government took action to restructure education administration under the 1972 reforms. The ultimate goal of these reforms was to gain maximum outputs from the service delivery.

Changes in education (1977): In 1977, much focus was given to increasing community participation, including parental engagement in education development. For this purpose, MoE prepared and introduced parents' conventions on education, too.

Education proposals for reforms (whitepaper) (1981): The 1981 whitepaper recommended the introduction of a school cluster system primarily aimed at sharing resources (e.g., learning resources, physical and human resources) among the cluster member schools. The ideal purpose of implementing the school cluster system is to improve economic efficiency through better and more efficient management of education investments and school-based resources. However, due to issues related to personal attitudes, logistical matters, and lack of capacity of implementors, this concept was not fully operational in the system.

Education management reforms in 1984 were another milestone in improving system efficiency. Based on the recommendations of zonal mapping exercises, education administration, and management were decentralized under these reforms. However, these proposals did not materialize due to the introduction of power delegation under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution in 1987.

Education changes (1987): The 13th amendment to the constitution in 1987 was an attempt to find a solution to the ethnic problem in the country through devolution of powers. From an efficiency perspective, delegation and devolution of powers are key instruments for improving system efficiency. In the case of Sri Lanka, this has not purely originated as a result of context-specific demand, and this was introduced due to external influences. In contrast to the conceptual background of the power delegation, efficiency-related achievements in education are lacking, and extra education investment is occurring.

General education reforms (1997): With regard to efficiency measures under the general education reforms, several initiatives were introduced, and the following are key: school restructuring and rationalization, SBM initiatives, restructuring and reorganizing national and provincial level education management and administration.

School mapping techniques were followed to restructure the school system, and only a few years later, these restricting processes were implemented; later, they were abandoned due to many reasons, especially political interferences and influences. Such will lead to more complications in the school system (e.g., some schools run for grades 1-8, and some are for grades 1-9).

Concerning the SBM, there were many parties opposed to SBM initiatives; as they pointed out, this would be the first step to privatized school education, and later, education would be marketized. Further, they highlighted that this would create disparities in education, especially in disadvantaged areas that would be penalized. This complicated situation was created due to poor policy communication among the respective stakeholders and disagreement between respective groups. As a result, the original concepts of SBM were undermined.

National framework on general education (2023): 2023 national framework includes proposals on efficiency through the professionalization of education personnel and management, covering areas such as teacher education, recruitment, deployment, and promotion of teachers and principals, education governance/management, allocation of resources for education, education legislations, and acts relating to statutory bodies (NEC, 2023). Further, the said framework also included components on SBM, education administration and management, and coordination of education institutions, as these areas are associated with improving the system efficiency. Some of the abovementioned areas are continuations and some amendments. However, as these proposals were not granted official approval from the respective authorities, the recommended proposals were not materialized in a meaningful manner.

New education Act for general education in Sri Lanka (2009): With regard to efficiency perspective, this framework mainly focuses on matters related to strengthening education management and administrative structures, strengthening transparency in resourcing, and establishing linkages between investment and outcomes. Due to the failure to grant formal approval, these attempts were not materialized.

New educational policies and proposals for general education in Sri Lanka (2012) and proposals for a national policy on general education in Sri Lanka (2016): To improve the management efficiency of education, 2012 and 2016 proposals included components on strengthening education management and leadership, accountability, standards and quality assurance, and resource management. Those elements can be considered factors contributing to increased efficiency in the system, but even though 2012 proposals submitted to the Parliament have not been granted official approval to implement. Hence, the 2012 and 2016 proposals were also the only proposals belonging to the archives.

Proposals for general education reforms (2019-2022): Under the education reforms (2019-2022), school restructuring and administrative reforms are proposed to increase the system efficiency in school education. For this purpose, initial steps were taken but not fully operationalized across the system. School restructuring and an increasing number of national school programme were initiated, investing a significant amount of funds, but such was only named, not fully implemented, and resulted in creating inefficiency due to poor coordination and deviated from scientific policy and planning procedures occurred to political interference and influences, including micro-politics factors.

NEPF (2020-2030): Overall, NEPF (2020-2030) has several sections that propose direct and indirect initiatives (e.g., governance, financing, outcomes, technology, quality and standards, resource management, and administration) relating to improving the efficiency measures in school education. Due to not granting formal approval, these were also another piece of academic work added to the archives.

NEPF (2023-2033): NEPF (2023-2033) also included numerous components to improve system efficiency aiming at the 2028 country vision, especially, under the policy domains on governance, investment, and resources. As these proposals remain under discussion level, results are yet to be observed. Nonetheless, some of the proposals and their contents are criticised by the public and academics.

5.4 Politics vs policymaking and policies

Education itself is an intense political activity; hence, education policy and politics are interconnected functions. Some conception intrinsically informs the task of educating young citizens about what good citizens need to know and do, which itself reflects a political stance (either explicit or implicit). For this reason, politics permeates all facets of education, from policymaking to practice. Every classroom is, to some extent, a microcosm of society, and every teacher negotiates complex power dynamics as they organise and instruct their students.

As mandated, ruling politicians are directly involved in matters related to policymaking and legitimation. Politicians need to obtain experts' knowledge and contributions in line with their broader vision. However, high-level political will is vital for the successful and sustainable implementation of education reforms. Nevertheless, party politics and micro-politics should not be involved in policymaking and policy formulation.

Historical evidence in Sri Lanka reflects many instances where education policies/reforms/proposals have been a matter of party politics. A broad national consensus was never there. Changes have been introduced at the whims and fancies of authorities in control. Policy formulation needs to be heavily debated in public and Parliament. There is no argument; the successful implementation of education policies needs to have extensive political will. Education policies/reforms are largely undertaken by government bureaucrats, school principals, and teachers. Education is a susceptible subject, and everyone is generally interested in it. There is no disagreement that education is the most influential factor for social mobility. Politicians are also happy to involve themselves because there is a massive vote base. After the 1970s, it was recognized that education is much connected to the economy and social factors. Having this acceptance, political factors play a critical role in the education sector, and their involvement is significant.

There have been instances where education policies have changed or amended even with a change in the government or a change in the minister responsible for education portfolio under the same government. That is why the Presidential Commission on Youth (1990) recommended the establishment of an NEC to formulate a national education policy. Nonetheless, even after the establishment of the NEC, education policies/reforms have been perceived as party policies, and the opposition parties have always opposed what the ruling government proposes. Generally, formulation of education policies/reforms and implementation in a hurry to show the achievements before the next election is another drawback in Sri Lanka. Policies/reforms implemented without adequate

preparation are bound to fail. A few examples/instances are discussed below to understand better the real situation we have experienced in the past decades in the education sector in Sri Lanka.

By and large, historical evidence shows politics' involvement in education. After independence in 1948, the process of education policy formulation became gradually embroiled in new tensions between political parties (Little, 2010:5). The mid-1960s, the influences of politicians in the day-to-day implementation and administration of education were therefore largely absent (Little, 2024:150). Subsequently, such interference and influences continued. Furthermore, after instability and youth uprising in the early 1970s, the political economy of education investment began to change. Subsequently, after 1977, political involvement and interference increased significantly.

Curriculum changes: After the independence, there were curriculum reforms on several occasions. Historical evidence shows some instances where political influence or interference took place in curriculum changes in education.

Language policy: In the history of education, we can see more general debates among political parties around language and nationalism (Little, 2010:5), and religious leaders' involvement is also significant in this regard. Accordingly, the Official Languages Act of 1956 was passed. This policy heavily impacted the education sector positively and negatively. Implications of this policy affected several generations and generations to come.

Second national language (2NL): As one of the solutions to the ethnic conflict, the government implemented teaching a 2NL subject in schools. In Sri Lanka, Sinhala for Tamil students and Tamil for Sinhala students are offered as 2NL. However, the system has not successfully implemented this due to practical and operational issues. A shortage of professionally qualified teachers (some 2NL teachers are not capable of teaching the subject properly) is a significant problem. Further, it was observed that ad-hoc teacher deployment, issues related to the distribution of learning resources, and poor implementation of language policy seriously affected the implementation of 2NL. However, it should be noted that some schools are successfully implementing the teaching of 2NL. Regarding pre-service teacher education, 2NL is offered in the NCoEs. In Sri Lanka, 2NL is mandatory not only in schools and teacher education but also for employment in the government sector.

This policy initiation was originated as a progressive policy and implemented through the official circulars, and later, policy proposals accommodated the promotion and improving the quality of 2NL [e.g., Education

reforms (1972); NEPF (2023-2033)]. Policy on teaching 2NL can be considered a policy that emerged as a result of system requirements.

Bilingual education: The introduction of English medium education is widely deliberated in different forums. However, the majority of people prefer the continuation of education in their mother tongue. Those who oppose that view are arguing for the need for English medium education. Considering all factors bilingual education was introduced. Bilingual education in Sri Lanka with a combination of mother tongue plus a few other subjects in the English medium (essentially an English-based or a hybrid medium of instruction) is present in some schools. Bilingual education is limited to select schools, and it is not available across the system due to practical constraints and limitations (i.e., shortage of qualified teachers, scarcity of learning resources, and absence of a sound teacher deployment policy). In some schools, authorities cannot adequately provide the required education and learning facilities for all schools in line with equity principles. From the point of view of the educational rights of students, this violates their educational rights.

This policy initiation was originated because of social demand and implemented through the official circulars, and later, policy proposals accommodated the promotion and improving the quality of bilingual education [e.g., Education reforms (1997); NEC (2003); NEPF (2023-2033)].

Subject changes: When social studies were introduced under the 1972 education policy reforms, it replaced history, geography, and civic subjects. There were very few teachers who were competent in all three subjects. As a result, if a history teacher was entrusted to teach social studies, emphasis was given to history at the expense of geography and civic. Disorganized training without incentives does not motivate teachers to learn new subject areas. The same instance can be seen when introducing biology instead of botany and zoology under the 1997 education policy reforms. The teachers were not competent to teach both subjects. Unless teacher preparation precedes implementation, results are marginal. Parents are susceptible to changes in education. As Medagama (2014) highlighted, changes need to be advocated only if they are essential. Awareness creation and arriving at a consensus are fundamental. Otherwise, education policy reforms would be constructed as attempts by the authorities to experiment with their fanciful ideas by sacrificing the future of the children.

Curriculum streams - technological stream: Introducing some curriculum streams also originated with the influences and interventions of political interest. Since the Kannangara era, the promotion of technical education has been

a prominent area. On different occasions, this initiative came under various names [e.g., Handessa scheme (1945); establishment of Central Colleges (1945); education reforms (1972): pre-vocational subjects; whitepaper proposals (1981): life skills, and NEPF (2023-2033)]. Evidence shows these attempts were not fully successful up to the expected levels.

In 2015, the government initiated the introduction of a technological stream for the GCE AL examination. This stream consisted of biosystem technology, engineering technology, and science for technology (compulsory subjects). In addition, one subject needed to be selected from existing subjects. This initiative was not stated in education policy documents, but it was initiated and implemented through the MoE official circulars. This policy can be denoted as originated as a result of social demand and the system requirements to match the labour market demand at national and international levels.

Furthermore, introducing 13 years of guaranteed education is another initiative that originated through the political direction in 2017. The main objective of this programme was to provide every school child with a continuous education from grades 1 to 13. The programme comprised general subjects, applied subjects (26 vocational-oriented subjects), and institutional-based vocational training. From the students' point of view, this is a good start for the promotion of professional subjects in a market-oriented way. After the government changed in 2019, several implementation constraints affected the 13 years of the guaranteed education programme. When studying this initiative, it was revealed that this programme originated purely as a result of political direction. As a result of political interventions for introducing this scheme challenge, other governments are not given priority for this policy implementation.

Teacher recruitment: Teacher recruitment is the most persuasive factor in operational policies in education. From time to time, teachers have been recruited based on different reasons with the political directives, e.g., volunteer teachers, Janasaviya teachers, youth service teachers, contract-basis teachers, Samurdhi teachers, home-guard teachers, political victimisation teachers, terrorist victim teachers, trainee teachers, GCE AL competitive exam teachers, HND teachers, development officers teachers. Teachers recruited under the abovementioned categories must complete a postgraduate diploma in teaching to become qualified teachers. However, the government teacher recruitment policy is to recruit teachers who are qualified as NCoEs diplomates and university graduates, and these two methods are enough to produce qualified teachers. In practice, many operational issues and constraints emerged in the implementation of teacher recruitment and employment policy in Sri Lanka.

Free school uniforms: Initiatives to provide free school uniforms for all students were purely a political decision taken by the President of the country. This is the one of the subsidiary programmes ensuring free education, especially benefits for disadvantaged groups. However, the decision to provide school uniforms for all schoolchildren with effect from 1993 was made without knowing its financial commitments. Further, this happened when the NEC was functioning, but they never consulted for taking this policy decision. From the point of view of the poorest household view, this is a good decision, but from the educational economist's point of view, this leads to a burden on the education budget. As there are no selections of students to receive these uniforms, irrespective of students' parents' income level, every child is entitled to get this subsidy. It may cause a waste of education investment. Hence, it urges a restructuring of the education subsidy programmes but needs to ensure that needy children are not left from enjoying these facilities.

School textbooks: Provision of free textbooks for all children in grades 1-11 in government schools, government-assisted schools, and Piriven is another flagship programme impacted to ensure free education policy. This was originated for assistance to needy students, but later, this was extended to all students without having a financial feasibility of the implementation. However, this subsidy programme has been mainstreamed, and everyone expects to receive this facility. As there are no selections of students to receive free school textbooks, despite parents' income level, every child is entitled to enjoy this subsidy. Some education economists pointed out that irrational subsidy programmes in education cause waste of education investment. Hence, it urges restructuring the education subsidy programmes but needs to ensure that needy children are not left from enjoying these facilities.

Suraksha student health insurance: Under the theme of 'protect forever the children of the nation', the 'Suraksha' student health insurance scheme was implemented by the government on a budget proposal for 2017 to ensure the safety of children (MoE, 2018). This initiative directly corresponded to guaranteeing a free education policy. However, this has originated without stakeholder consultations and conducting financial feasibility. Demand for the introduction of this programme did not arise from the school community but originated through the government side. After the government changed in 2019, this scheme faced several constraints to sustain itself as planned. Especially during the period faced with the economic crisis, the continuation of the programme in a client-oriented manner was challenging. This is one of the best examples showing that sustainable education policies are fundamental to having a joint

agreement. This story says that some policies have emerged based on political intentions, and such initiatives face difficulties in implementing.

Free sanitary napkins for school girls: In June 2024 the government initiated provid to free sanitary napkins for school girls. From the point of view of the poorest households, this initiation is a considerable relief for household expenditure on the education of their children. However, overall, this initiation involves heavy costs and will face financial constraints, especially during the economic crisis. This welfare-related initiative is considered a political decision and needs to continue this at any cost.

Midday meals/a glass of milk/shoes: Providing midday meals, a glass of milk, and a pair of shoes are other steps related to ensuring a free education policy. These subsidy programmes are initiated under the direction of political authorities in different years. However, it is evident that the midday meal programme was implemented in schools in the 1960s, but this programme was implemented in selected schools. Originally this programme was patronaged by an international organisation committed to improving the nutrition status of schoolchildren.

Resourcing education: In the decade of the 1960s, education received approximately 5 per cent of the GDP and 15 per cent of the total government expenditure. However, after 1977, it declined to about 2 per cent of the GDP and 8 per cent of the total government expenditure. In 2022, it was about 1.98 per cent; in 2023, it is 1.6 per cent (CBSL, 2023) of the GDP. Having these circumstances, citizens, including academics and educationists, are demanding to increase the education expenditure up to the OECD average (i.e., 6 per cent of GDP). However, when analysing education expenditure, it can be seen that educational wastage and underutilisation of given budgets in given fiscal years. This situation led to the status of efficiency of the education system. This study revealed that there is no firm policy decision taken to allocate the education budget for the implementation level following a scientific basis in a sustainable way.

Evaluation: Testing and evaluation (examinations) are two of the major areas of education, and every concerned party is widely deliberate in this regard. In the education policy arena in Sri Lanka, several incidents have shown how political influences and interference occurred in changing the evaluation system, and a few examples are given below.

1972 education reform: Late in 1970, the Education Review Committee was established to report on the restructuring of the education system, and in 1971 the report was published. This reform was initiated to reform the curriculum to be vocationalised. Accordingly, the assessment system also changed, and the GCE OL and AL examinations were replaced by the NCGE and HNCE examinations, respectively. As mentioned earlier, these proposals were formulated without the consultation from the public, including educationalists and respective stakeholders sufficiently. This assessment system survived for a few years until 1977. This can be denoted as the failure to follow proper steps of policy formulation, and any proposal will not be sustained further. Such a situation badly affected students, and the respective student cohorts were used as experiments.

1977 education changes: During the election campaign, the then-lead opposition party highly criticised 1972 education reform, especially, vocational education, assessment system, and grade span. Under the 1977 education changes, the assessment system was also discontinued, and NCGE and HNCE examinations were replaced by the GCE OL and GCE AL examinations, respectively. These incoherent practices emphasised the absence of national policy on education in the country. On the other hand, introducing any policy needs to have strong evidence to justify the initiation. Otherwise, it will not systematically survive in the system.

1981 whitepaper proposals: The new government came to power in 1977 and presented a new policy for education in the form of the 1981 whitepaper. As learned, the whitepaper (1981) was prepared by a selected group of bureaucrats, and poor policy consultation was evident. The whitepaper policy proposal introduced a continuous assessment system. This was the more controversial reform proposed by the 1981 whitepaper (Little, 2010:14), and it was highly criticised and opposed by teachers, parents, and opposition political parties. This assessment system was abandoned in the late 1980s and early 1990s due to poor support from the school levels and respective parties. This implies that sustaining the implementation of any policy requires strong support from the ground levels and implementors.

Structural matters of schools: Concerning school structures, many instances can be seen in the strong influence of political directives. Selected examples are briefed below.

- As per the government's policy decision, in 1961, the government took over the private schools under the control of the government. Accordingly, the establishment of new private schools was barred. The decision was taken into consideration of the country's situation and government policies. The then government took action to take over the main commercial hubs (e.g., schools, petroleum, naval, aviation, and plantations). In line with such directions, taking over schools was one of them.

- Under the 1981 whitepaper proposals, the government proposed to establish school clusters aiming to share resources, both human and physical. This policy was recommended by the selected elite group with less consultation of stakeholders. However, this policy initiation was not successful at the expected level.

- In the early 1990s, the government introduced a special school development programme, called Improvement of Schools by Division (ISD), targeting the development of selected junior and senior secondary schools. It was planned to develop these schools as centres of excellence in each division, providing high-quality education to children in rural disadvantaged areas. In 1994, a new political party came to power, and this programme was interrupted.

- The new government initiated a new programme, the Divisional Schools Development (DSD) programme, with similar objectives to the ISD project.

- Later, the DSD programme was implemented, named 'Navoddya school development programme,' aimed to develop schools with full resources as a solution to urbanization and high competition in popular urban areas schools.

- Then, the government tried to implement 'Isuru school development programme' with the financial assistance of an ADB-funded project.

- Again, the government implemented 1,000 secondary schools and 5,000 feeder primary school development programme.

- Next, the government implemented the 'Nearest School is the Best School' project. Despite the concept of the project, this was highly focused on the infrastructure development of schools.

- Under the education reforms of 2019-2022, the government implemented an increasing number of national schools, up to 1,000 national schools, and a trilingual school development programme under the government

manifesto. Within these initiatives, cluster schools were promoted with some amendments to the 1981 whitepaper proposed cluster school system. Increasing the number of national schools up to 1,000 national school schools is an utter failure, and time and money were wasted significantly. Further, the trilingual school development project was also unsuccessful.

- Under the NEPF (2023-2033), the government also proposed establishing a school cluster system.

When studying the above-mentioned school structure matters related to operational policies, many of them were initiated with political intentions. When implementing these programmes, party politics were highly influenced and intervention was made. Hence, none of the programmes were fully successful as per the original policy intentions. Further, these initiatives did not answer the real problems and issues in the system of education. Even though a number of operational policies are implemented in the education system, social issues and school-related problems remain in the system. Such implied the wrong decision of the policies related to school strictures. These programmes were heavily cost involved, and time and resources were spent. However, the analysis revealed no comprehensive impact evaluation of these programmes before designing the new one.

Laptop computers for students: Providing free tablet computers for teachers and students of GCE AL is one of the major budget proposals for 2017. This welfare-oriented initiative originated from the government side and is not evident in conducting a wider consultation of education stakeholders and conducting financial feasibility for the sustainability of the programme. This is one of major programmes that faced a number of operational constraints to implement the programme. Accordingly, several measures were taken, and the programme was amended on several occasions. The lesson that can be learnt from this policy initiation is that before the introduction of any policy, it needs to have wider coverage in different aspects such as financial feasibility, implementation feasibility, operational capacity, commitment, and other supportive services.

As experienced, political will is an obligatory factor in sustainably formulating and implementing citizen-friendly education policies/reforms. However, it is needed to avoid unnecessary party-political influences in the formulation and implementation of education policies. Currently, around four million students are learning in schools, and approximately 250,000 teachers are serving in government schools. In addition, teacher educators, school principals, and officers are also employed in the system. Directly and indirectly,

parents are also connected with education. In that sense, a significant number of school communities are interlinked with the education system. In the view of political aspects, this is considered a good vote base that helps to win the election. Under these circumstances, obviously, the political role in education emerged.

5.5 International trends, and development partners' involvement/influences on policymaking and policies

International trends:

Education is a global subject, and there are no boundaries where all education sectors are interconnected. When formulating education policies and reforms, international trends, agreements, charters, and conventions are associated and corresponded to them. Accordingly, it may be observed that some education policies are borrowed and lent from developed and/or newly industrialized countries. These practices can be considered as following a dependency theory. This is common to the Sri Lankan education system, and key areas are discussed below.

Education for All (EFA): World Education Conferences held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 were landmark events in the international education community's efforts to promote EFA. Further, the education for all framework of action (1990) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) are related to working towards the achievement of EFA targets and goals. Access to and completion of free and compulsory primary education, and improving all aspects of education (Little, 2003:9) are key components of EFA. Sri Lanka is a committed country to implementing EFA for education development as a key policy priority included in the education sector development plans and education policies.

Based on EFA goals, education reforms/frameworks in Sri Lanka (e.g., NEC education policy frameworks) have prioritized education, especially primary education, and emphasis on universal primary education, teaching profession in primary education, management of education, and resource provision.

Millenium Development Goals (MDGs): Followed by EFA, MDGs were introduced in 2002, and many countries, including Sri Lanka, agreed to plan and work to achieve the agreed targets and goals within the given period. Based on MDGs, Sri Lankan education sector development plans and education policies aligned with such goals and targets (e.g., NEC education policy frameworks).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Followed by MDGs, SDGs were submitted and pro-act to achieve the agreed goals and targets from 2015 (Incheon declaration - 2015). Development plans, budgets, and policies in Sri Lanka are realigned to achieve SDGs and targets within the agreed period. The references are given in respective documents (e.g., NEC education policy frameworks, and annual budget estimates).

Commonwealth: As a member of the Commonwealth family, Sri Lanka has committed to working together with other member countries to achieve agreed targets (e.g., Nadi declaration, 2018; Commonwealth of Learning -CoL-). Based on such statements, it is evident that the education sector development plans and policies were readjusted as applicable.

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Ensuring regional cooperation, Sri Lanka is committed to jointly working to achieve regional targets to improve the quality of education. Based on regional agreement, several measures were taken, and respective components and elements (i.e., teacher development, human resource development, knowledge sharing, and scholarships) were included in the education sector development plans and education policies as applicable.

Bilateral and multilateral agreements: Sri Lanka has signed several bilateral and multilateral agreements to improve the quality of education in the country. To execute such contracts, the education authorities are required to identify strategies and operational mechanisms. Such progressive mechanisms were later embodied into the education sector development plans and policies as applicable. However, the sustainability of some such programmes is still challenging for the system.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990): The declaration of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is included in the Sri Lankan operational policies (e.g., Right to Free Education Bill - 2014). The education policies have ensured such rights (e.g., Education policy frameworks of NEC). Further, education policy frameworks adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26.1), which states that 'everyone has the right to education' and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13.1), which recognizes 'the right of everyone to education.'

Measuring learning outcomes of students: Generally, many education systems have a mechanism for measuring achievement levels; many of them are selection-basis (e.g., grade 5 scholarship examination, GCE OL, GCE AL examinations in Sri Lanka). In the 2000s, there were international trends in measuring learning outcomes, especially in primary and junior secondary grades. With this intention, world education organisations and development partners agreed to promote and provide assistance to conduct national, regional, and international assessments (e.g., TIMMS, PISA). Since 2003, Sri Lanka has been conducting national assessments in grades 4 and 8 to measure learning outcomes in selected subjects. Since 2005, in the education sector, development plans have included components on improving students' learning outcomes, and findings of national assessments are used for the development purposes of education. Further, national education policy frameworks/proposals have also paid attention to this area, and a positive trend can be seen (ref. Education policy frameworks/proposals of NEC; NEPF (2020-2030).

Development partners' involvement/influences on policymaking and policies:

In the recent past, development partners' involvement/influence on policymaking and education policies can be seen. Especially after the 1990s, the education sector received considerable donor assistance/foreign funds through donations, credits, commercial loans, and technical assistance to quality development and infrastructure development as well as human resource development in education. Some of the key interventions (selected) for education policies and policymaking are discussed below briefly.

Primary education: introduce ABOE (1997): Under the education reforms in 1997, ABOE was introduced for primary education with the recommendation of NEC. This programme had the advantage of getting foreign assistance through the DfID (UK) under the formulation of a Master Plan for Primary Education and Primary Mathematics Project. Under these projects, the government received technical and financial support to execute the programme. As a result of such intervention, ABOE practices are included in education sector development plans and education policy frameworks too (e.g., Education policy frameworks/proposals of NEC).

Sector-wide approach (SWAp) for education planning (2004/2005): In 2004, development partner agencies were interested in implementing some of the recommendations of the NEC. MoE agreed to formulate an education sector development framework and programme with the assistance of the World Bank. SWAp is a planning technique to develop sector plans by following top-down and bottom-up approaches. However, some donors (e.g., ADB) did not

join the SWAp, and as a result, ADB continued to follow the project mode. After 2005, the development and implementation of education sector development plans SWAp was chiefly used. This approach was practically used due to the development partners' intervention, and it can be considered as a positive impact of such intervention. However, this analysis revealed that the SWAp is not fully implemented in the education system, and such a situation can be highlighted as a shortcoming of the intervention.

OOSC: The World Bank-funded Education Sector Development Grant (ESDG) Project was implemented during 2006-2010. Under the ESDG, several indicators agreed with the government to achieve, and OOSC was one of them. Even though compulsory education regulations have existed in the system since 1997, there were some implementation coverts. With the ESDG intervention, the OOSC programme was revamped and reactivated. Later, education sector development plans in all levels of education and education policies were given priority to the continuation of the OOSC programme through mainstreaming.

Programme for School Improvement (PSI)/Enhanced Programme for School Improvement (EPSI): NEC in its policy frameworks [NEC (1997; 2003; 2012; 2016)], Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2012) report, and MoE in its policy papers (2019, 2020) promotes SBM in line with the economic efficiency principles. However, due to several reasons, this was not properly articulated. Having such government policy directives, several World Bank-funded projects and programmes (i.e., ESDG, Transformation of School Education Project (TSEP), General Education Modernisation (GEM) Project) promoted to introduce, implement, and strengthen the SBM through devolving decision-making powers and authorities to school levels. As a result of paying prominence to these initiatives, since 2005, all education sector development plans and education policy frameworks (e.g., NEC, 2003; 2012; 2016) included SBM/PSI/EPSI as applicable. This programme has been mainstreamed but needs further meaningful development.

School-Based Teacher Development (SBTD)/School-Based Professional Teacher Development (SBPTD): SBTP/SBPTD is the most popular and cost-effective in-house teacher training programme mode. World Bank-funded TSEP and GEM Project have given priority to the expansion of this programme. As a result of development partners' interest, this initiation now become mainstream. Since 2012, all education sector development plans and education policy frameworks (ref. NEC, 2003, 2012, 2016) have included the SBTD/SBPTD component as applicable. However, this programme needs to be further improved in line with the recent education development in a meaningful way.

ICT: Promoting ICT in education and ICT for education is the most popular in the education system. However, this initiation has a heavy cost involved. The MoE formulated an ICT policy in education and took actions to expand ICT education across the system. ADB-funded and World Bank-funded projects are financially and technically supported. ICT education is a major component in education sector development plans and is included in the education policy framework (ref. NEC, 2003, 2012, 2016).

School libraries: World Bank-funded General Education Project-2 (GEP-2) included a component on promoting reading habits and the development of school library facilities. Due to this involvement of the development partner, school libraries become one of the key areas and developed norms for providing human and infrastructure facilities. The development of school libraries has been a major component of education sector development plans, and the development of school libraries has been included in education policy frameworks on many occasions [ref. NEC reports; Re-emerging education (2020)].

Bilingual education: The current bilingual education policy originates in a MoE circular issued in 2001. NEC policy framework of 2003 has justified the need to implement bilingual education. However, the implementation process was slow. The World Bank-funded TSEP included a component on bilingual education with measuring indicators aligning with targets, and education sector development plans also accommodated such components. Accordingly, TESP provided financial and technical assistance in developing the content and language intergrade learning (CLIL) framework. It shows that development partners' interventions are key to expediting the programme [ref: NEC (2003); NEPF (2023-2033)]. However, sustainability is the main challenge after the termination of such interventions.

Restructuring and rationalisation of schools: NEC 1997 education reforms proposed to restructure and rationalize schools. Based on such policy proposal, MoE, in collaboration with the provincial education, conducts and implements school restructuring and rationalization exercises. It observed that the required financial assistance was provided through the World Bank-funded GPE-2. Even though this initiative emerged as an education policy initiative, at the end of the GEP-2 implementation, attention was lost. The system went back to normal, and the impact of the intervention was not much.

Teacher deployment: One of the longstanding issues in the education system is teacher deployment. In the 1990s, teacher recruitment, employment, deployment, and development were critical to the system. In the 1990s, several measures were taken to the development of teacher education (e.g., the establishment of SLTS, expansion of NCoEs, teacher development/capacity development/further education opportunities). The World Bank-funded Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Project (TETDP) was implemented in line with the government priorities. During the project period, provincial and national education authorities strongly committed to implementing a teacher deployment plan focusing on minimizing teacher shortages, especially in disadvantaged areas. After the termination of the project, the teacher deployment plan was not systematically implemented across the system.

Norm-based unit cost resource allocation mechanism (NBUCRAM) and quality inputs: Disparities in resourcing education are longstanding issues in Sri Lanka. During the last several decades, this issue has been widely discussed at different forums, but practical solutions have taken place slowly. On the other hand, a very insignificant portion of the recurrent budget was spent on quality development, and a large sum of money was spent on different purposes. Considering these backgrounds, World Bank-funded GEP-2 included two components for school financing and quality inputs. Under these two components, a formula (called NBUCRAM) was developed for the school-based budget. However, this mechanism was implemented a few years during the project period, and later, it was given up due to financial illiquidity issues, especially at provincial levels. Nonetheless, policy frameworks of NEC (2003; 2006; 2016; 2022ab), Special Parliament Advisory Committee (2012), MoE (2019a), Presidential Task Force (2020), and NEPF (2023-2033) emphasized the need for a scientific rationale-based method for allocating the education budget.

Isuru schools: As discussed earlier, school structural developments were in line with the government policy directives. With the financial and technical assistance of the ADB-funded Secondary Education Modernisation Project (SEMP) and Education Knowledge Society Project (EKSP) funded for implementing the Isuru Schools development project in each Divisional Secretariat Divisions in all provinces. However, there are sustainability issues, and this project is also unable to address the ground-level problem in the system (cf. Section 5.4).

Child-friendly schools (CFS): Under the primary education development, UNICEF initiated the implementation of CFS in the education system in Sri Lanka. All provinces and national-level education agencies stand for implementing

the CFS programme. The UNICEF provided technical expertise and financial support where necessary and developed a framework of actions. As a result of these interventions, education sector development plans, context-specific development plans, and education policy frameworks included the component on CFS under the improvement of primary education [ref. NEC, (2003; 2009; 2016; 2022ab); Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2012); MoE (2019ab)].

Social cohesion and peace education: The promotion of social cohesion and peace education is the most sensitive and needy area considering the diversified society in Sri Lanka. UNICEF and GIZ are prominent agencies that provide technical and financial support promoting social cohesion and peace education in Sri Lanka. Further, in line with the international development agenda, the World Bank, ADB, and other bilateral and multilateral agencies are also patronaged to implement projects and programmes related to social cohesion and peace education. Accordingly, education sector development plans and other context-specific development plans, as well as these subjects, are incorporated into the education reform proposals in line with the government vision [ref: all policy frameworks of NEC: national goals; NEC (2022ab); Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2012); MoE (2019ab); NEPF (2023-2033)].

Separate budget line for primary education: According to international commitments, primary education has been given prominence attention. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a DfID-UK-assisted primary education development project pro-acted to create a separate budget programme for primary education. As a result of this lobby by development partners, separate budget programme for primary education at national and provincial levels have existed, but later, this disappeared.

Concluding this sub-section, this analysis revealed that the development partners' involvement and interventions were focused on policy implementation. However, some initiatives are included in education policies and development programmes. Even though advanced proposals were made, the main challenge is the meaningful sustainability of such.

5.6 Citizenship and civil societies' involvement in policymaking and policies

Following a meaningful participatory approach and conducting wider consultation with respective stakeholders and counterparts in education is a prerequisite for education policy formulation. Such involvement will open room for the voices of different social groups, and such opportunity will impact the sustainability and for less implementation constraints of policies. This analysis revealed that education policy formulation is rarely conducted through public consultation and has limited room for public voices. However, on some occasions, the respective policymaking agency has collected public opinions and hearings for the public. As per the perception of members of CSOs: on very few occasions representing CSOs, CED submitted policy proposals for the formulation of policy frameworks (e.g., NEC (2012; 2018); MoE (2019) Education Policy Framework), but no contribution to other proceedings (FGDs, CSOs, May 11, 2024). Further, they argued that without a mandate from the public to the government, they have no ethical right to formulate policies (FGDs, CSOs, May 11, 2024). Indeed, this analysis also noted some unclear areas for civil citizens (e.g., the absence of a clear definition of inclusive education). This may happen due to poor communication of policies. Moreover, this analysis found less meaningful citizen participation and contribution to education policy development. Civil society should critique and be perceptive through the formulation of education policies in a practical way.

5.7 Policy legislation

Policy legislation is a straightforward requirement for the confirmation and guarantee of policies. When analysing previous policies (cf. Table 4.1), early decades policies, education manuals, acts, and laws are officially approved and legal approval granted. However, late education policy frameworks and drafted education laws and acts have not been granted legal approval before implementing such frameworks, laws, and regulations. However, many initiatives have been implemented through official circulars and guidelines issued by the respective authorities to ensure legal coverage.

According to the current practice, NEC is the responsible agency for policy matters, but they do not have the power to grant legal approval of policies. Education policies, acts, and regulations should be passed by the Parliament, and circulars and manuals can be issued by the respective authorities. NEPF

(2023-2033) proposed to establish a regulatory or administrative institution called the National Advisory Committee for Education, replacing NEC. However, the constitution of the proposed committee is not clear. If party-politics lead officials are appointed, it will be an issue regarding the independence of the committee, and such will affect the implementation of policy proposals in the country in line with the national requirements.

5.8 Policy implementation

Policy implementation is the process by which governments put policies into effect. General policy implementation is a translation of plans into practice. Here, some policy proposals are implemented following a top-down approach, and some are following a bottom-up approach. Realities in policy implementation are related to different factors such as: rooted in so many causes, technical difficulties, size of the target group, the extent of behavioural changes, changes in social conditions, changes in economic conditions, availability of new technology, and political circumstances.

When studying the historical efforts of policy implementation, especially after the mid-1960s, political influence or interference can be seen, even for day-to-day operations of education, e.g., school admission, teacher recruitment, teacher transfers, and infrastructure development of schools. These issues are critically discussed, and policy solutions have been presented in several education policy frameworks [i.e., NEC (1997; 2003; 2022), NEPF (2020-2030); NEPF (2023-2033)] however, issues are yet to remain.

Policy communication is another critical requirement for sustainable policy implementation. The benefits and advantages of any policies need to be communicated among respective stakeholders and beneficiaries, and they need to have a complete understanding of the policies. For this purpose, the participatory approach is the best strategy to follow in policy formulation and policy implementation. Moreover, the need for policies and implementation mechanisms should be transparent. For the policy implementation, it is necessary to build ownership and stewardship. To better implementation policies, a champion to achieve targets during the given period is needed; Policy analysts (IDIs, May 21, 2024) said that if they have not followed the policy formulation, party politics and bureaucrats' influences intervene. There is a need for a national vision for the country; without a national vision, any country cannot develop implementable policies. Further, policymakers (IDIs, May 21, 2024) empathized that in Sri Lanka, gaps remain in the policymaking and policy implementation stages. Such gaps need to be minimized and diminished gradually for the better implementation of policies. On the other hand, according to existing

legal provisions, policymaking agencies have no power to monitor the policies. However, they can do the policy evaluation.

5.9 Success and failures of education policies: issues, challenges, and gaps

As lessons learnt from national and international experiences, several factors contribute to the success of education policy implementation. Every government that was in power in Sri Lanka attempted to reform the education system and took several initiatives. Such attempts positively impacted the success of education policies in Sri Lanka. Selected outputs and outcomes and overall system acquisition contributed by the education policies and initiatives, directly and indirectly, are summarized as follows.

- Crude birth rate (2023) - 11.2 per 1,000 persons
- Crude death rate (2023) - 8.2 per 1,000 persons
- Infant mortality rate (2019) - 7.4 per 1,000 live births (revised)
- Human development index (2023) - 0.780
- Rank among 193 countries - 78
- Expectation life of birth - 75.5 years
- Literacy rate (2021): average: 93.3%; male: 94.3%, female: 92.3% (CBSL, 2023)
- Adult literacy: 1950 - 65%, 1960 - 72%, 1971 - 87%, 1991 - 87%, 2002 - 91%, 2011 - 91%, 2021 - 92% (Little, 2024:27)
- The system has succeeded to a great extent in providing educational facilities, including human resources, physical resources, infrastructure facilities, financial resources, and in-kind resources. A widespread network of schools is functioning across the country. The area covered by government schools is sq. km 6.5 (2022) (CBSL, 2023).
- Indeed, Sri Lanka has one of the best student-teacher ratios (STR) compared to any other country, developing or developed, or industrialized. STR (numbers) 1: 16.8 (2022) (CBSL, 2023).
- Regarding attainments and achievements in terms of equity, quality, relevance, and efficiency dimensions, Sri Lankan education is recorded as a high standard. Age-specific enrolment rate (grades 1-9): 90.6% (2022);

Primary net enrolment rate 85.1% (2022); Progression to university from GCE AL: eligible for university admission: 63.3%; Admission as a percentage of eligible (2021): 25.2%; government expenditure on education: 1.6% of GDP (general and higher education) (2023) (CBSL, 2023).

- Further, from an educational perspective, when measuring achievements in terms of internal and external efficiency dimensions, achievements are at a remarkable level.

Despite such a significant contribution to human capital development, there are some issues, challenges, and constraints caused by failures in the implementation of education policy. Selected key issues, challenges, and constraints are discussed below so that we can think and act on future education policy matters.

Mismatch: One of the key issues is the system's output to fulfill the local and global emerging labour market demands. Therefore, the quality dimension of education is very much relevant.

Education policy/reform should be part and parcel of social reform: Education must be planned and implemented within the larger framework of socio-economic change. Education policies/reforms cannot substitute for socio-economic change in the country.

Policies/reforms cannot be implemented overnight: Successful implementation of education policies/reforms needs a reasonable time, and such initiatives cannot be implemented during a shorter period. It requires deliberation among different social groups, and wider participation is fundamental.

Need to provide resources and facilities: Resources mean financial, human, physical, infrastructure, in-kind, and time. Such resources are needed adequately for the meaningful, sound implementation of education policies/reforms.

Wider participation (national, sub-national, and grassroots) is a prime factor: Generally, education policies/reform are initiated at the central/national level. The centre needed to provide the required resources and leadership as well as technical guidance as the champion of the initiatives. However, the centre/national level cannot formulate and implement such policies/reforms in isolation. Hence, it warrants wider participation in all strata of education. Further,

formulating education policies/reforms requires strong policy consultation with respective stakeholders and interest parties.

Evidence-based (informed) education policies: Education policies/reforms generally originate based on different purposes. However, any policies/reforms should emerge through the system requirements based on the evidence. For these purposes, more research and sector diagnosis are needed to formulate smart and implementable education policies/reforms.

Nonetheless, all education policies/reforms are not as successful as expected. Several factors caused the failures of education policies/reforms.

Lack of policy consultation: Without evidence and following ad-hoc practices, education policies are not meaningful. Further, education policies should be maintained transparently and should not have any hidden agendas for the policies. Therefore, they need to have a policy consultation with all respective groups and provide opportunities for them to open their voices. Accordingly, consultation is a must condition for sustainable policies. Different stakeholder groups should be consulted. Identify all segments of stakeholders: academics of universities and officials engaged in education management and administration, practitioners such as teachers, school principals, artists, community workers, students (i.e., GCE 'O' and 'A' level; university and higher education institutions, and parents), industry personnel, trade unions, NGOs and INGOs, researchers, political parties, and the general public. These consultations should be considered and accommodated in policymaking in a transparent process (Education Academician, IDIs, June 18, 2024).

Lack of/poor policy communication: Poor policy communication is a leading factor causing the failure of education policies. For example, education whitepaper proposals (1981) were not disclosed to the public, and there was no policy communication. The same situation can be seen in the introduction of school boards in 1992. These two examples show the importance of policy communication. An outside example from the education sector is the introduction of a pension scheme for private-sector employers. This example also shows how poor communication harms the society and the country.

Issues related to policies and party politics /contradictions of politicians and policymakers: As discussed earlier, politicians are involved in policymaking as mandated. However, party-politics and micro-politics involvements and interferences badly affected the sustainable implementation of education

policies (e.g., school restructuring, school-level development, school admission, and teacher transfers).

Lack of/poor political commitment: Lack or poor political commitment will directly negatively affect the implementation of education policies. Political commitment and endorsement need to be done constructively with a future vision.

Lack of champions: Lack of champions and poor leadership directly impact the failures of education policies. Successful education policies are run by committed and dedicated staff with sound theoretical and context-specific practical knowledge.

Lack of community involvement: As discussed, education is a very sensitive and community-oriented subject. Hence, community involvement and contribution are much needed for sound implementation, and the absence of such commitment and involvement directly impacts the failure of education policies.

Absence of a systematic and sustainable monitoring system: Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) hope to generate good quality data for the users, particularly policymakers. Mostly, EMIS is short-lived; however, they never manage to reach a systematic and sustainable level. This is often due to a lack of clear planning and understanding regarding what is feasible given the context. Poor planning and subsequent EMIS failure cause disappointment and frustration among decision-makers and planners. Above all, it leads to guess-based decision-making and, therefore, leads to bad governance.

Based on the findings of this analysis, several lessons can be learnt. In conclusion, key findings of the analysis of education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives are presented in the next chapter under the conclusion section.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The education system is vital in achieving sustainable development and strengthening social, cultural, spiritual, historical, and integral holistic development. It often lays the foundation of anyone's life. According to the international literature, there is robust evidence about the economic benefits of education, and other benefits, including social development, gender equality, democracy, social cohesion, and personal growth. Parents, students, and the school community in Sri Lanka are highly concerned about children's education, and parents are ready to invest all their resources in their children's education. Culture in Sri Lanka is highly education-oriented rather than consumption- and entertainment-oriented. Recognition of these multifaceted benefits requires a sound visionary policy for the education sector.

This analysis found many promising and beneficiary-oriented policies, proposals, frameworks, and reform initiatives on education formulated in the past. Few of them were granted approval officially, and the majority of them are not fully accepted and implemented sustainably. The formulation of any policies requires substantial cost, as well as significant time and work hours. It is unclear whether the authorities are empowered to initiate the policies/proposals as they often remain silent when it comes to final approval. It is a puzzle why the authorities are not interested in making a pure attempt to formulate and finalize national education policies scientifically. The true answer remains undisclosed to the public and the stakeholders.

Origination and formulation of education policies: Overall, this analysis revealed that the education sector in Sri Lanka has formulated more attractive and meaningful policies aimed at improving the quality of education to maintain the standard of educational attainments. Indeed, the analysis also found the absence of a clear understanding of 'policy,' 'policy formulation,' and 'policymaking.' Further, many stakeholders also doubt whether Sri Lanka has a national policy on education. Further, many of the officials involved in the policy matters have no idea what the policy formulation process in Sri Lanka is, and at the moment, many do not know. However, policymakers should know the process followed in the formulation of policies. Also in ambiguity on policies are the intended actions publicized by the Head of the State and/or cabinet portfolio responsible for education to be considered as 'policies.' In other words, policy

means proposals and viewpoints of selected groups or individuals. Sometimes, the group composition of the policy formulation committee (if the committee is involved) is unclear which body approves the final policy for the country.

When analysing the policy formulation process/function, many education policies, frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives have followed the political/personal model as a political activity rather than the rationalistic model. The reason for that is education is mostly demonstrated as being government-dominated. Since the 1960s, and especially after 1977, such domination gradually deviated, and political influences and involvements are taking place at a significant level. Commonly, politicians and bureaucrats prefer to highlight tangible outcomes of so-called interventions during a shorter period when they have power and authority. This is especially common in education sector matters, as the education sector is lively and engaged with the public as a very sensitive area. In contrast, historical and cultural evidence shows that conventional Sri Lankan people are waiting for guidance and directions from the top to follow. The bottom-up approach is poorly applied in many matters (e.g., the contribution of school level and zonal level stakeholders are at a poor level).

Inclusion of policies: Inclusion is the crosscutting theme and broader perspective. In Sri Lanka there is a puzzle on the definitions of 'inclusion' and 'inclusive'. This analysis found that inclusive education is considered a matter of students with special education and differently able students in Sri Lanka. Beyond that, it should be considered for inclusion practices in education policy formulation in a meaningful manner.

Transformation policies: The current education world is trending to foster transformation policies rather than maintenance and operational policies. Educational transformation refers to systemic changes in the prevailing educational model. This analysis revealed that in Sri Lanka, many education policies and policy frameworks are given less attention to fostering the system's transformation in an applicable and practical manner.

Contents of education policies and proposals/frameworks:

Equity and inclusiveness perspectives: Equity is one of the fundamental principles of education policies. This principle mainly refers to aspects of access, participation, quality education, and resourcing education. Regarding

resourcing education, the equity principle refers to two ranges: procedural and distributional equity. Distributional equity is divided into two parts: horizontal and vertical equity. All past education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives in Sri Lanka are firstly acknowledged to ensure equity principles. As leant, equity cannot be achieved by a hundred percent because it is a utopian situation. However, authorities can do it to minimize gaps in respective aspects. Even though many attempts have been made to lessen such gaps, issues, and disparities exist in the system, especially in disadvantaged areas. Hence, education policies need to address the issues related to equity in respective dimensions.

Education perspectives:- equity, relevance, and sustainability: When analysing past education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives, it was revealed that many demonstrate similar contents and formats. Infrequently, new policies and initiatives can be seen. However, there are no rational justifications for new policies and given-up policies based on findings and recommendations of analysis of previous policies.

Economic perspectives: Education should be the foundation of economic development and vice versa; economic development significantly contributes to the qualitative and quantitative growth of education. Hence, education and economic policies should be tightened with each other's requirements. In Sri Lanka, all education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reform initiatives have mentioned that they are aimed to cater to the economic demand. However, it was not fully achieved at the expected levels in practice. Due to the gaps between education and the economy, many social, political, and economic issues and crises have emerged in different forms. Many platforms highlight the need to match these two dimensions sustainably and meaningfully, but actions are yet to be unhurried.

Relationships between education policies, R&D, innovations, and inventions: Many previous education policies, frameworks, and reform initiatives have been noticeably discussed to promote and encourage innovation and R&D in the general education sub-sector. Evidence shows there are trends in paying attention to the importance of the R&D sector, including the promotion of innovations. Students are engaged in many creative innovations and inventions in different disciplines, but the challenge is that such talents are not taken forward sustainably. There are several separate administrative bodies, agencies, and commissions functioning to patronage respective schools and students. But school teachers and students are facing hardships in this regard.

Nevertheless, no evidence was found to have implemented these programmes in a transparent, systemic, coordinated manner with financial and technical assistance. Indeed, there is no evidence for establishing linkages between such outcomes of R&D, innovations, and inventions to further/higher education and, finally, to knowledge contributions as well as contributions to the country's economic growth.

Social development, cultural changes, and gender responsiveness: One of the significant prospects of the education policies is social development. Generally, social development is reflected through tangible and intangible outcomes. Education is unconditionally instigated to increase the social rate of returns and private rate of returns to improve human life and uplift living shapes. Moreover, education is the fundamental instrument for life-changing change, and its extended impact is cultural change. Hence, education is considered a tool for cultural transformation for future generations. Building a disciplinary society, requires a visionary education policy for the country. All past education policies, frameworks, and reforms accommodated dimensions of social development and cultural changes. Considering the educational attainments and improvements of such elements, the Sri Lankan citizens acquired significant achievements, but such needs to improve in line with the national and global demands. In the past decades, gender equality has been an issue in the education system in Sri Lanka, especially in terms of access, participation, and survival. At that time, education policies addressed these issues and took remedial measures. Nonetheless, currently, gender parity is at a satisfactory level, but in some specific locations, some problems remain.

Efficiency perspectives: Economic efficiency is another key dimension of education policies, referring to the production of maximum outputs from the system utilizing given resources. In the past, all education policies, policy frameworks/proposals, and reforms included several policy initiatives to improve the economic and procedural efficiency of the system through restructuring of governance and service delivery, education management and administrative structures, and delegating decision-making powers and authorities to implementation levels. Nonetheless, due to illiquidity and cash-rationing issues and constraints, negative attitudes towards achieving efficiency in the system are yet to be a challenging factor.

Politics vs policymaking and policies: In many countries, education, policymaking, decision-making, and political factors are interconnected and harmonized functions. Such involvements gain positive benefits and also

cause adverse effects. In a democratic society, politicians are mandated to make policies in line with their political and economic vision and practice. Also, many (party) politicians' perceptions are that they are the architectures of policies. However, practicing party politics and micro-politics negatively affects policymaking and policy implementation. Historical evidence in Sri Lanka reflects many instances where education policies/reforms/proposals have been a matter of party politics and a broad national consensus was absent.

International trends and development partners' involvements/influences on policymaking and policies: Today, education matters are considered a global concern. Hence, there are no boundaries, and all sectors are interconnected. The world of education development is interrelated, and changes are absorbed swiftly. International trends and agreements/charters/conventions between bilateral and multilateral countries and agencies collaboratively work and share experiences in different forms. Furthermore, development partner agencies work closely with individual countries, and their involvement and influence are significant. Such backgrounds are involved in and influence the country's policymaking and formulation.

Citizenship and civil societies' involvement in education policymaking and policies: Citizenship and civil societies' meaningful involvement in education policymaking is at a poor level. This happened due to limited spaces allocated for the public hearing under the policy formulation process. Such a situation assumes that the representation across the societies is limited and will lead to less contribution and commitment from the societies to implement policies sustainably.

Policy legislations: Before the official launch of education policies, it is fundamental to have an official endorsement to guarantee policies. This correctly took place in earlier policies. However, later, some policies were implemented without enacting legal endorsement, and such are, in some cases, challenged. Education laws and acts urgently need to be updated and enacted.

Policy implementation: Nonetheless, although many fashionable policies were formulated, they have not fully materialized due to several social, economic, political, and other constraints and hindrances. By contrast, some education policies are formulated and implemented in different forms and ways. Implementation of education policies is highly correlated with various external and internal factors, and external influences and involvements are significant. Such practices negatively impacted the implementation of education policies,

but in some cases considered a positive impact too (i.e., political and bureaucrats support the need to run the programmes in a sustainable way, e.g., staffing, financial allocations, and resource mobilization). Nonetheless, influential groups are involved even when making decisions on education policies.

Success and failures of education policies: issues, challenges, and gaps: Overall, all education policies practiced in the past have impacted directly or indirectly to improve the quality and standards of education in Sri Lanka. As a result, indicators related to measuring educational attainments in Sri Lanka are at significant levels compared to other countries with similar socio-economic contexts, indicators. The following are the key challenges of education policymaking in Sri Lanka.

- Less focus on considering education policy/reform as part of social reform.
- Hurry to implement policies/reforms and try to achieve tangible results overnight.
- Less consultation and less communication among respective stakeholders at national and sub-national levels.
- Less attention to allocating required resources adequately and less attention paid to conducting financial feasibility of anticipatory education policies.
- Less application and practices on evidence-based (informed) education policies.
- Involvements and influences of party politics and micro-politics in education policy formulation, decision-making, and policy implementation.
- Lack of political will and commitments and lack of champions and leadership.
- Absence of systemic and sustainable policy monitoring system.

6.2 Recommendations

Concerning the education policy perspectives, despite the significant progress achieved in recent decades, the Sri Lankan education system faces several operational issues and challenges, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and social and economic crisis.

This analysis demonstrates that the Sri Lankan education system requires urgent policy reform based on a holistic rationalistic approach to address

emerging issues concerning education policy formulation, policymaking, policy implementation, and policy evaluation following a regulatory mechanism. In summary, when formulating education policies, authorities need to ensure the fulfilment of factors such as:

i. conducting comprehensive sector diagnosis/review;
ii. developing a clear and long-term vision for the sector and the country;
iii. ensuring wider participation and contribution of respective stakeholders and technocrats;
iv. allocating adequate resources;
v. should be flexible and visionary experts to develop proposals and analysis; and
vi. ensure the obtaining wider acceptance of education policy proposals.

Policy formulation: Even though academic, social, and political dialogue are deliberations taking place about the formulation of national policy on education in Sri Lanka, the key challenge is to formulate a sound futuristic vision for the sector and the country. This policy should be accepted by most of the stakeholders and counterparts as well as the citizens of the country and all political parties. Future national policy on education should include ECE, general education, technical and vocational education and training, higher education (university education), and research and development (R&D) coherently. When formulating the policy, it is needed to strictly follow the policy cycle and need more work on R&D to establish evidence for the proposals. Indeed, need to address the issues and needs of the education sector, social sector, and economic sector, including employer demand and labour market demand, health sector, and other relevant sectors, as applicable. Furthermore, national and international trends must be strongly considered when formulating policies. Based on such backgrounds, draft policy documents should be negotiated with representative samples of stakeholders.

When formulating education policies, context-specific factors (e.g., historical factors, social and value education, and cultural) need to be strongly considered. Further, the contribution of trade unions, professional associations, CSOs, and education sector stakeholders is fundamental to building ownership of education policies.

Establish an R&D culture to promote evidence-based policymaking: relationships between education policies, R&D, innovations, and inventions: Founding policy action on solid and reliable evidence is crucial not only for ensuring that policies are effective and efficient but also for ensuring that

they are acceptable and implementable at the practical level. Accordingly, education policies should be evidence-based and must avoid ad-hoc policies. Every policy should be justifiable and reflect the social and country needs, and system needs. Policymakers need to prevent following the quick-fix approach, and rational approaches need to follow as appropriately. However, education policies cannot be followed by a single approach for policy formulation. It should be a mixed approach that needs to follow in line with the contextual backgrounds. More research and policy dialogues need to be promoted and encouraged. Further, formulating policies requires studying the existing policies to check the feasibility and compatibility of the policy proposals practically. The following scenarios are proposed to strengthen education policymaking culture.

Scenario 1: Strengthen and streamline existing policymaking institution (NEC)
Scenario 2: Establish an Independent Council for Education Policy Studies (ICEPS)

Scenario 1: *Strengthen and streamline existing policymaking institution (NEC)*: One of the options to avoid differences in the existing education policymaking process is to restructure the current policy formulation body -NEC- in line with the recent development in the country. The education sector, at both the national level (e.g., MoE, NIE, other national-level agencies) and sub-national level (e.g., provincial, zonal, and school levels), requires ex-officio representations to ensure and promote a participatory approach. Further, education academics in the higher/university education sector must be assigned to execute education policy-related research and policy evaluation and conduct regular policy communication among stakeholders and citizens (Education Academician, IDIs, July 8, 2024).

Scenario 2: *Establish an ICEPS:* Based on the findings of this analysis, it is proposed to establish a centralized ICEPS to execute research and to lay the foundation for establishing an R&D culture to promote evidence-based informed policymaking and planning culture in the education system. Further, the history of education policies and their implementation should be reviewed to base the new policies for learning lessons. Education policy should prioritize public education. The policies that contributed to the development of education in the country for many years should not be undermined. Ad-hoc decision-making should be avoided by critical stakeholders in policy formulation. A strong rationale should be based on developing each policy statement/scenario. Additionally, there should be a clear understanding of how policy amendments can be made.

Furthermore, ICEPS will need to deal with matters related to education policy analysis, conducting policy research, policy evaluation and assessment,

policy monitoring, and formulation of policies. ICEPS also needs to be linked with the other respective agencies/councils, locally and internationally, that work in education policies to exchange knowledge and experiences as a knowledge corridor. Moreover, this council needs to be comprised of professionals and technocrats representing different fields/sectors with particular reference to expertise in the field of education.

Further, it is necessary to promptly include a dedicated module education policy analysis in university degree programmes (especially in education discipline related degrees and postgraduate programmes) and other postgraduate degree programmes conducted by various education training institutions and postgraduate degree awarding institutions.

Policy analysis and policy evaluation: When formulating any policy for the education sector, it is fundamental to have a comprehensive policy and policy evaluation on previous policies following the scientific method. Lessons from the previous policy practices should be carefully considered, and most corrective options need to be recommended. Promoting evidence-based policymaking and thoroughly reviewing research is essential. Extensive research has been done in the field of education. A mechanism should be developed to collate and review the state-of-the-art research in the process of policymaking. For this purpose, it requires to decide a policy reviewing cycle (e.g., conducting regular policy monitoring by annum or bi-annually for two years and conducting policy evaluation at the end of three years or five years) (Academician/Economist, IDIs, July 8, 2024).

Harmonisation of policies and ground-level requirements: Education policies need to address the real requirements at the ground level, and embedded policies must be encouraged. Many policies are attractive and fashionable but not marketable because they do not align with the needs of their intended beneficiaries.

Policy process: When formulating education policies, the following steps need to be followed scientifically.

Step 1: Sector/system analysis/diagnosis:

- Carry out a comprehensive sector analysis/diagnosis covering all sectors, sub-sectors, and segments (i.e., economy, society and culture, politics, national development priorities, development partner coordination, aid effectiveness, and other factors).

- More comprehensive consultation and adequate time for public voices/ hearings (including civil societies, stakeholders, and counterparts).
- Review the national development context and its implications for education.
- Identify achievements, challenges, issues, and needs in education.
- Analyse past and present national education policies, strategies and plans, and government actions taken to assess how they address the identified challenges, issues, and needs.
- Sector analysis/diagnosis needs to be executed by the expert team/think tank representing different sectors/groups.

Step 2: Develop a 'green paper':

- Based on the results/findings of the sector diagnosis, the need to prepare a 'green paper' by the experts representing different segments of the society and the economy (need to establish an expert group/think tank to deal with matters on green paper).
- The green paper to be open to the public to obtain their opinion and concurrence.
- Government-side consultations also to be obtained.

Step 3: Develop a 'whitepaper':

- To study the said green paper need to appoint a task force/think-tank and based on their recommendations, develop a 'whitepaper'.
- The whitepaper to be open to the public and obtain further observations, comments, and feedback.

Step 4: Develop a 'national policy framework':

- Simultaneously appoint another task force/think-tank think tank /experts to identify the system/society/county requirements, focusing on a long-term vision to achieve different aspects.
- Develop a 'national policy framework' based on the whitepaper analysis done by the experts/think-tank/task force.

Step 5: Formulate a 'national policy on education':

- Formulate 'national policies' based on the said framework.

- Review and evaluate national policies regularly and update or amend in line with contemporary development (if required).
- A national education policy needs to establish the main goals and priorities pursued by the government in matters of education -at the sector and sub-sector levels- concerning specific aspects such as access, quality, and teachers or to a given issue or need.
    - A strategy specifies how the policy goals are to be achieved.
    - A plan defines the targets, activities to be implemented, and the timeline, responsibilities, and resources needed to realise the policy and strategy.

The participatory approach needs to be used for policy formulation, consultation, communication, and implementation. Such collaborative effort will impact the emergence of fewer issues and challenges. Further, such will lead to improved team accountability and champions for implementing policy initiatives. Policies must consider factors that may limit their feasibility, such as the following:

- Are there sufficient institutional capacity and human resources to implement the policy?
- Are the management structures appropriate?
- Are there sufficient financial resources to achieve the policy goal?

In summary, to be effective policies, must be:

- Built on evidence;
- Politically feasible;
- Financially realistic; and
- Agreed to by the government and relevant stakeholders

The policy goals of general education and higher education should be demarcated. The links between curriculum policy, teacher education policy, and education financing policies should be formulated in consultation with the relevant expert groups/ think tankers to determine priorities and compromises, and action planning for policy implementation should also be framed with such groups. Indeed, it is necessary to know the duration of a policy cycle, the monitoring mechanism of the implementation of policies, and the consequences if policies are abandoned.

Policy implementation: Policy awareness, including civil society at national and sub-national levels, must be conducted for policy implementation. Further, the roles and responsibilities of citizens and their interventions in formulation and policy implementation need to be demarcated. All terms and concepts used in the policy must be clearly defined, and actions need to be translated into the ground level practically, ensuring sustainability.

Inter- and intra-sectoral linkages: Education policies and reforms should be formulated and implemented in an inter- and intra-sectoral manner. Hence, respective sub-sector coordination needs to be established and strengthened meaningfully. Such practical collaboration will pave the way to achieve policy objectives and goals.

Education and economic sectors need to plan and implement in a coordinated manner. Here, it is necessary to improve national economics by tightening the connection between schooling, employment, productivity, and trade. Furthermore, the learning outcomes of students in employment-related skills and competencies need to be enhanced. In the education quality dimension, there is a need to attain more direct control over curriculum content and assessment. Concerning the economics of education, measures should be taken to improve the efficacy of education investments, and there should be an increase in community input to education through more direct involvement in school decision-making and market choice pressures.

Consistency among different policies, plans, and strategies: A country may have various policies, plans, and strategies developed by other sectors and supported by many sources. When formulating policies, one must examine the consistency of these policies, identify any conflicting priorities, and check whether there are any duplications and competing demands for resources and implementation capacities.

Promote standards-driven and outcomes-defined policy changes: One of the effects of education development is that educational organisations, having modelled their goals and strategies on the entrepreneurial business model, are compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of efficiency, accountability, and benefits-driven managerialism. Hence, the politics of education reforms in the twenty-first century reflect this emerging paradigm of standards-driven and outcomes-defined policy change. Some policy analysts have criticized the ubiquitous and excessive nature of standardization in education imposed by the global education development frameworks.

Establishment of a systematic and sustainable monitoring system: To address the issues related to generating good quality data for the users, particularly policymakers, proposed to establish a systemic and sustainable monitoring system to support policymaking to deviate from guess-based decision-making and to establish an evidence-based policymaking culture which leads to establishing good governance.

Further research: As this analysis revealed the poor/absence of an education policy analysis, it is proposed to conduct a series of education policy evaluations for each of the policy proposals/frameworks/reform initiatives comprehensively focusing on the impact of respective initiatives.

References

Aturupane, H. & Little, A.W. (2020) General Education in Sri Lanka in ***Handbook of Education Systems in South Asia,*** Global Education Systems, Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.

Balasooriya, B.M.J. (2004a) ***An Evaluation of the impact of school-based resource management and formula funding of schools in Sri Lanka,*** UK: Institute of Education, University of London

Balasooriya, B.M.J. (2004b) ***Teacher deployment in*** Sri Lanka: ***An audit***, Battaramulla: Policy Planning and Performance Review Division, Ministry of Education

Balasooriya, B.M.J., Wehella, M.M., & Wijeratne, S.U. (2010) Sri Lanka, in P. Peterson, E. Baker & B. McGaw (Eds.), ***International Encyclopedia of Education***, Vol. 5, pp. 813-825, Oxford, UK: Elsevier

Cabinet Sub-Committee to prepare and submit the National Education Policy Framework to the Parliament (2023) ***National Education Policy Framework - Sri Lanka (2023-2033)***, September 2023, Colombo

Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2023) ***Annual Economic Review - 2023,*** Colombo: CBSL

Coalition for Education Development (2024) ***National Education Policy Framework (2023): Civil Society Observations,*** Colombo: CED (Unpublished)

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Lowe, A. (2002) ***Management Research, An Introduction***, 2nd Edition, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Fernando, N. (1984a) ***Many Voices Many Needs,*** August, 1984, Sri Lanka: Planning and Management Development Division, Ministry of Education

Fernando, N. (Eds.) (1984b) ***Management for Educational Development in Sri Lanka,*** September, 1984, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education

Government of Ceylon (1939) ***Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939 as amended by Ordinance No. 61 of 1939, Ordinance Act No. 3 of 1946, Act No. 26 of 1947, Act No. 5 of 1951, Act No. 37 of 1958, and Act No. 35 of 1973***

Government of Ceylon (1960) ***Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act No. 5 of 1960***

Government of Ceylon (1961) ***Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act No. 8 of 1961***

Government of Sri Lanka (1981) ***Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Act No. 65 of 1981***

Government of Sri Lanka (1985) ***National Institute of Education Act No. 28 of 1985***, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Government of Sri Lanka (1986) ***College of Education Act No. 30 of 1986,*** Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Government of Sri Lanka (1987) ***13th amendment to the constitution,*** Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Government of Sri Lanka (1991) ***National Education Commission Act No. 19 of 1991***, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Government of Sri Lanka (1997) ***Extra Ordinary Gazette***, November 25, 1997, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Government of Sri Lanka (2023) ***The Constitution of the Democratic Socialistic Republic of Sri Lanka,*** As amended up to 31st October 2023, Published by the Parliament Secretariat, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Haddad, W. (1994) ***The Dynamics of Education Policymaking: Case studies of Burkina Faso, Jordan, Peru and Thailand,*** Washington DC: World Bank.

Haddad, W.D. & Demsky, T. (1995) ***Education Policy-planning process: an applied framework,*** Fundamentals of Educational Planning - 51, Paris: IIEP

Jayaratne, S.M.G., Wijeratne, S.U., Medagama, R.S., Wehella, M.M., & Balasooriya, Jayantha (2013) ***Education First: Sri Lanka***, Battaramulla, Sri Lanka: Policy and Planning Branch, Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka

Jayasuriya, J.E. (1988) Decentralization of education: Contribution of Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara, in National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka (Eds.) ***Reforming Education Unfinished Task***, pp. 21-44, Maharagama, Sri Lanka: NIE

Lee, Tim (1996) ***The Search for Equity: The funding of additional educational needs under*** LMS, England: Avebury

Little, A. W. (2024) ***Development, Education and Learning in Sri Lanka: An international research journey***. London: UCL Press

Little, A.W. (2003) ***Education for All: Policy and Planning, Lessons from Sri Lanka,*** Researching the Issues -46, UK: DFID

Little, A.W. (2010) ***The Politics, Policies and Progress of Basic Education in Sri Lanka,*** Research Monograph No. 38, CREATE, UK: University of Sussex

Medagama, R.S. (2014) ***A Review of Educational Reforms in the post-Kannangara Era,*** 25th Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara Memorial Lecture, October 13, 2014, Maharagama: Department of Research and Development, National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka

Ministry of Education & State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion and Open Universities (2019) ***Education Reforms for General Education (2019 – 2022)***, Unpublished, Battaramulla: MoE & SMER,DL&OUs

Ministry of Education (1972***) New Way (Nawamaga) on Education***, Colombo: Ministry of Education

Ministry of Education (2018) ***Learning: Education promises become a reality,*** Battaramulla: MoE

Ministry of Education (2019a) *National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka,* October 2019, Battaramulla: MoE

Ministry of Education (2019b) *Proposed framework (draft) for consideration in drafting the General Education Bill (Act)*, September 2019, Battaramulla: MoE

Ministry of Education (2022) *Proposal for General Education Reforms (2022-2032) A Preliminary Note*, Unpublished, www.moe.gov.lk Battaramulla: MoE

Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education & Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment (1981) *Education Proposals for Reforms (Education White Paper), General, University and Tertiary (Vocational, Technical and Professional)*, Colombo: State Printing Corporation

National Audit Office (2019) *Formulation and Implementation of the National Education Policies*, Assignment No. EDU/B/NEC/PER/2019/1, Unpublished, Retrieved from: http://www.auditorgeneral.gov.lk/web/images/special_report/National-Education-Policies/English.pdf

National Committee for Formulating a New Education Act for General Education (2009) *New Education Act for General Education in Sri Lanka, Context, issues and proposals*, Colombo: State Printing Corporation

National Education Commission (1992) *The First Report of the National Education Commission, Sessional Paper No. V-1992*, Colombo: Department of Government Printing, Sri Lanka

National Education Commission (1997) *General Education Reforms*, Colombo: NEC

National Education Commission (2003) *Envisioning Education for Human Development: Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka,* Colombo: NEC

National Education Commission (2016) *Raising the Quality of Education: Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka*, Nugegoda: NEC

National Education Commission (2022a) *National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) - Nurturing a Society of Productive, Caring, and Patriotic Citizens, Full text*, June 2022, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

National Education Commission (2022b) *National Education Policy Framework (2020-2030) - Nurturing a Society of Productive, Caring, and Patriotic Citizens* - Extended Summary, June 2022, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Presidential Commission on Youth (1990) *Report of the Presidential Commission on Youth*, Sessional Paper No. 1 - 1990, Printed on the Order of the Government, March 1990, Colombo: Department of Government Printing

Presidential Task Force on General Education, Sri Lanka (1997) ***General Education Reforms***, Colombo: The Pacific Press Pvt. Ltd.

Presidential Task Force on Sri Lanka's Education Affairs (2020) ***Re-emerging Education in Sri Lanka: Transforming the Present System of General Education to a Dynamic and Vibrant Paradigm for 21st Century***, Volume II Core-groups reports, July 2020

Sectoral Oversight Committee on Education, Parliament of Sri Lanka (2024) ***Report of the Sectoral Oversight Committee on Education National Education Policy Framework - Sri Lanka (2023-2033) on Thursday 09th May 2024***, Battaramulla: Parliament of Sri Lanka

Select Committee of Parliament of Sri Lanka (2023) ***Report of the Select Committee of Parliament to make suitable recommendations for the expansion of Higher Education Opportunities in Sri Lanka***, Battaramulla: The Parliament of Sri Lanka

Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2012a) ***New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka***, Based on the proposals presented to the Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education, Colombo: Department of Government Press

Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education (2012b) ***New Educational Policies and Proposals for General Education in Sri Lanka (Edited Copy)***, Based on the proposals presented to the Special Parliament Advisory Committee of Education, Colombo: Department of Government Press

State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion and Open Universities (2021) ***Analysis of Education Reforms Proposals submitted on the Digital Platform***, www.moe.gov.lk, Battaramulla: SMER,DL&OUs

UNESCO Bangkok (2013a) ***UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programming, Volume 1, Education Policy Analysis,*** Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

UNESCO Bangkok (2013b) ***UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programming, Volume 2, Education Policy Analysis,*** Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

Wehella, M.M. & Balasooriya, B.M.J. (2014a) Free education policy and its challenges: Sri Lanka, in ***Commonwealth Education Partnerships 2014/15***, pp. 55-58, UK: Commonwealth Secretariat

Wehella, M.M. & Balasooriya, B.M.J. (2014b) Unseen Features: Challenges for Free Education Policy in Sri Lanka in ***Journal of Comparative Education***, November 2014, pp. 91-124, Issue No. 77, Taiwan: Chinese Taipei Comparative Education Society

Further References

Ariyadasa, K. D. (1976) *Management of educational reforms in Sri Lanka,* Experiments and innovations in education No. 25, An International Bureau of Education, Paris: UNESCO

Department of Education (1963) *Manual of Instructions (Part I & II)*

Government of Ceylon (1945) *Free Education Policy*

Government of Ceylon (1968) *Public Examinations Act No. 25 of 1968*

Government of Sri Lanka (1979) *Pirivena Education Act No. 64 of 1979*

Government of Sri Lanka (2014) *Right to Free Education Bill*, 2014

Henry, M. (2001) *Policy approaches to educational disadvantage and equity in Australian schooling*, Paris: IIEP

Levacic, R. & Glatter, R. (2001) *'Really Good Ideas'? Developing Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice in Educational Leadership and Management, Educational Management and Administration*

Ministry of Education (1983) *Education – Draft Bill*

Wehella, M. M. & Balasooriya, Jayantha (2019) *Education Strategic Planning*, Authors publication [Sinhala]

Appendices

Appendix 3.1: Stakeholders contribute to the study

KIIs:

1. Mrs. Jayani Prishangika, Director of Education (Policy and Planning), MoE
2. Mr. Sidath Vipularathne, Former Zonal Director of Education, Kothmale
3. Dr. Chandana Bandara, Chairman, CED - Sri Lanka
4. Mr. Shantha Kulathunge, National Coordinator, CED - Sri Lanka
5. Mr. Kamal Herath, Board Member, CED - Sri Lanka and Save the Children - Sri Lanka

IDIs:

1. Mr. S. Ranugge, Former Sri Lanka Administrative Service Officer/Policy Analyst
2. Mrs. Pathmini Ranaweera, Chairperson, NEC
3. Dr. Upali Sedara, Former State Secretary, State Ministry of Education Reforms, Distance Learning Promotion and Open Universities, Former Policymaker
4. Prof. Manjula Vidanapathirana, Former Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo
5. Dr. Prabath Ekanayake, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya
6. Prof. Ananda Jayawickrama, Professor in Economics, Department of Economics and Statistics, Former Director, Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya

FGDs:

1. Mr. Ananda Jayathilake, Journalist
2. Mr. Jayasiri Jayasekra, Journalist
3. Mr. Kamal Herath, Save the Children
4. Ms. Rangani Lakmali, University of Kelaniya
5. Dr. Chandana Bandara, CED - Sri Lanka
6. Mr. Shantha Kulathunge, CED - Sri Lanka

Coalition for Educational Development (CED) - Sri Lanka

CED, Sri Lanka is a consortium of organizations involved in the education sector at national, provincial, and local levels in Sri Lanka. CED has an island-wide membership network encompassing 60 organisations actively engaged in the field. Since its inception in 2004, CED has been involved in promoting civil society participation in formulating and implementing policies related to education in Sri Lanka. CED is committed to steering civil society participation as a vital part of achieving goals and targets of education for all (EFA), millennium development goals (MDGs), and sustainable development goals (SDGs) declarations. In order to achieve this objective CED working in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Provincial Ministries of Education , Sustainable Development Council and other segments of society such as media, academia, parents associations and professional bodies.

This study report has been furnished with the funding support from Global Partners for Education (GPE) under the Education Out Loud project (EOL). CED believes that the findings and recommendations of this study will be useful to form effective, relevant policies to ensure inclusive and quality education for Sri Lanka.

CED Sri Lanka
Quality Education For All

Coalition for Educational Development
No.17, Dharmapala Place, Rajagiriya,
Colombo, Sri Lanka
Phone: 112 887642
E-mail: cedsrilanka@yahoo.com
Web: www.cedsrilanka.org

ISBN: 978-624-6002-01-5