Step by step towards quality preschools in Sri Lanka
A qualitative study based on preschool teachers’ perceptions

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Degree Project for Preschool Teacher Programme, 15.0 Credits
Preschool teacher programme, 210.0 Credits
Autumn term 2018
Abstract

The aim of this study is to create a better understanding of how preschool teachers in a metropolitan region in Sri Lanka view their opportunities to create quality preschools and also identify factors that affect quality enhancement. Three research questions were created focusing on the preschool teachers’ perceptions of the quality of their preschools, what actions they implement to enhance the quality of preschools and what they consider affects their preschools’ quality. In order to achieve the aim of the study, interviews were conducted with six preschool teachers, all from different preschools. The results show that preschool teachers have an apparent positive attitude towards the quality of their own preschools. The actions they implement in hope of improving quality are staff meetings, where they plan for the future and environmental improvements. Further the results also show that four out of six preschools carry out some part of the Systematic Quality Development Work (SQDW). The factors that the teachers believed influence the quality of preschools included the minimum standards in Sri Lanka, shortcomings in preschool teacher education and expectations.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, quality, preschool teacher, early childhood, ECCD, ECE
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Introduction

On January 1st, 2016 world leaders of 170 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP, 2015a). A document including 17 goals to achieve a sustainable development worldwide. During these 15 years, countries will mobilize effort to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change while ensuring that no one is left behind. Goal 4 contains the area of quality education and the second target declares the following:

*By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.* (UNDP, 2015b).

Research on early childhood development shows the importance of implementing care and pre-primary education for all children world-wide (Yoshikawa et al., 2013; World Bank Group, 2014 & Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). According to Yoshikawa et al. (2013), quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) is verified to be a profitable investment in relation to what it provides. Actually, investments early on generate less costs than later in the life cycle (Blair & Razza, 2007 quoted ed in Yoshikawa et al., 2013:4). One explanation for that is, according to Yoshikawa et al. (2013), that the foundation of the brain structure and future lifelong development potential is laid down in the early years through a process of fine sensitive external influence; therefore, it is vital to take advantage of these significant years. They also clarify the benefits verified by research, for example on long-term, children who receive preschool had positive effect on important societal outcomes such as high school graduation, years of education completed, earnings, reduced crime and teen pregnancy. In a short-term perspective benefits indicates that children who attend preschool, had higher grades when they started school (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). These above-mentioned benefits are thus conditional on the concept of quality. Access to services without attention to quality will not benefit the children’s outcomes in an optimized way (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

Through the Linneas-Palme project we, two preschool teacher students from Sweden, were given the opportunity to study the quality concept within preschools in Sri Lanka, a country that is steadily developing but still contains several shortcomings and development areas. Our main motive for the study is that we want to create an understanding of children’s opportunities in preschools. Are all children given the same opportunities and the same quality in education?

Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to create a better understanding of how six educated preschool teachers in a metropolitan region in Sri Lanka view their opportunities to create a high quality preschool as well as distinguish factors that affect their work to raise their preschool quality.

- How do the educators perceive their own preschool quality?
- Which quality enhancing actions do educators implement in their preschool?
- What factors do educators mean affecting their preschool quality?
Central concepts

There are some concepts that may be important for the reader to have explained in the context of the study. Since care and education do not necessarily have to be integrated in Sri Lanka, they will sometimes be termed differently.

**Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)**

In this study the term ECCD have been used both as a concept for care, development as well as education because, according to the Children’s Secretariat (2018), learning is an integral part of development.

**Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

This term will be used when national documents are strictly referring to education. Later, in the result we will use the term preschool instead since it is a more common phrase.

**ECCD-system**

The political system for childcare, which covers care, development and education in different constellations.

**ECCE-centres**

A term for the different centres that children may be enrolled in under the age of five. ECCD-centres includes both care and education and a centre can choose to provide both or just one of them.
Background

This study has been conducted in Sri Lanka and in order to understand the context better, an explanation of essential elements has been included in the background. First presented, is general knowledge of the country and a description of global agreements they are involved in. Later, descriptions related to ECCD will be presented, such as an overview of the ECCD-system, national documents, standards and preschool teacher education.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island located in the Indian Ocean just southeast of the tip of the Indian subcontinent. It is a medium sized island of approximate 62,000 km2 with a population of approximately 21 million. The population holds a large variety in cultures, religions, ethnicities and spoken languages since it has been colonized by several countries throughout history. Some examples of religions that are represented within the country are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The population consists of Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lanka Moor and some other minor minorities. The languages spoken are Sinhalese and Tamil, and in addition English is often taught in school (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).

The country became an independent republic in 1972; unluckily, it began with many adversities. But despite adversities such as the 26-years-long civil war that ended in 2009, the tsunami in 2004 and the global recession the country has risen and can now, because of a significant economic growth in recent years, be rated as a lower-middle-income country (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014; World Bank Group, 2014). The UNDP (2018) have rated Sri Lanka at the top of all south Asian countries in their report about human development. What they measure is three basic dimensions, a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Global agreements

The year 2000, Sri Lanka signed the Millennium Declaration along with 188 other countries. All the nations committed to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty by setting out eight time-bound targets with a deadline in 2015. One of them was to “achieve universal primary education” and in 2015 99,7 % of the children were enrolled in primary education (United Nations Sri Lanka, 2015). Later on, in September 2015, world leaders met again to discuss new aims to continue the work to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and address the climate changes. Therefore, new goals and targets were negotiated, which officially entered into force on January 1st, 2016 and Sri Lanka was one of the acceding countries. Goal 4 contains the area of “Quality education” and the second target declares that all children regardless of gender should have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (UNDP, 2015a). The country is on the right track; however, there are still gaps with weaknesses in human development. And one gap is about the quality problems in school education (World Bank Group, 2014).

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) in Sri Lanka

To describe what Sri Lanka does within ECCD, this section will contain an overview of the current ECCD-system, national documents, the country’s standard within the ECCD-system and the preschool teacher education. One clarification is that Early Childhood is defined as the period from birth until the age of five by the Children’s secretariat (2018).

Overview of current ECCD-system

The ECCD-system in Sri Lanka today is comprised of several different forms of centres. Children under the age of five can be enrolled in such a centre for a fee, which varies among preschools, before starting the compulsory school that is free of charge. The shape of ECCD-centres is different within the country. A breakdown is that some have included and some have segregated...
education and care. The minority of ECCD-centres are included, where the children can get both education and care during the whole day in one and the same building. However, the teaching is usually limited to a couple of hours in the forenoon. Another division is that education and care are segregated. In that case it is up to the parents to make an active choice of enrolling their children in both a preschool in the forenoon and daycare afterwards, but they may also choose to only enrol their children in daycare, without any teaching part for their child (S. Thilakarathna, personal communication, 19/10, 2018). According to the World Bank Group (2014) 89% of all ECCD-centres are conducted as segregated preschools. Note that it is only children between the ages of 3-5 years who participate in these types of preschools. In daycare children from 0-12 years may attend. The percentage rate of participants in organized learning, one year before the official primary entry age, was in the year 2016 97.7% (Department of Census and Statistics, 2017). A large increase has occurred, from 46% of all 3-5-year olds enrolled in preschools in comparison from data 2009/2010 (World Bank Group, 2014). Of all ECCD-centres around 84% are either private or run by other non-government entities (ibid.).

National documents

Since a few years ago, the preschool has taken a more recognized and significant role in the education chain. Several ministries and institutions are sharing the responsibility of ECCD, for instance the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and the National Child Protection Authority (Children’s secretariat, 2018). The key institution mandated for ECCD is, however, the Children’s Secretariat, that is functioning under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs. To progress, they have conducted a draft for a new National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development, which was published on their webpage during mid 2018 (ibid.). One key object of the policy is to assure that all children in their early childhood are getting the best start in life, by ensuring equal access to quality ECCD-services that promote children’s rights to life, survival and development. To achieve this, five areas of action have been created, and one of them is Early Childhood Education (ECE). The aim within this area is to assure that all children in early childhood have a quality education. Some strategies to achieve this aim are promoting awareness of ECE’s importance for optimal development of the child and the impact of ECE on child development, among decision makers, officials and the public. Also, they want to strengthen relevant national and provincial authorities to ensure the quality of centre-based ECE for social, emotional and cognitive development of children, through implementation of development that is age- and individual appropriate. Another strategy is that they want to facilitate the development of a national curriculum guide as well as encourage and simplify for staff, such as preschool teacher and assistants, to expand their knowledge. Lastly, they want to promote systematic use of valid evaluation techniques to know how to measure children’s learning, development and readiness for school.

Beyond the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development, Sri Lanka also has an action plan for the benefit of the country’s children for the years 2016-2020 (Ministry of Women and Child affairs, 2018). The plan outlines the main government interventions in response to the targets and goals set in the Sustainable Developments Goals 2030 such as quality education. The key issues they have identified and acknowledged within the ECCD in Sri Lanka are; i) unsatisfactory conditions and environment of ECCD-centres. ii) lack of educated and trained employees. iii) investments of insufficient amounts. iii) inadequate readiness for learning in children. iiiii) absence of well managed data and information system in the ECCD. In this plan, they not only identify key issues, but also have a detailed plan of what to implement and by whom, as well as budget. As an example of this, they have budgeted 200 million Sri Lankan rupee (LKR) to increase the number of ECCD-centres that fulfil the minimum standards up to 75% in a long-term perspective. This is a way to ensure that access to quality ECCD-services for all children under 5 years will gain access to. The responsible agent for this is assigned to the Children’s Secretariat.
Standards

Early Childhood Education has been a neglected area within education policy formulation in Sri Lanka (National Education Commission, 2004). To create an insight in previous conditions at preschools, a survey conducted in every province of the country in 2004 has been used (ibid.). The survey compared and categorized 42 preschools after their monthly fee into poor, average or good. The results show for example that buildings, space and generally outward appearance is poor in 26-36% of all low-fee preschools and to compare that none of the high-fee preschool was categorized to be poor. Furthermore, more than half of the low fee preschools had a poor access of play material, something that practically all preschool teachers in the low fee preschools expressed that they needed to improve. One additional survey conducted in 1997, shows that one third of the preschools did not have basic play material such as wooden blocks, water and sand play available and even less had access to jigsaw puzzles or dolls. The biggest deficiency was showed in outdoor equipment where over 85% of the preschools lacked equipment with the exception to balls to play with.

Now, in order to ensure quality for every child enrolled in ECCE-centres, the country has set guidelines for minimum standards within ECCD (National Child Protection Authority, 2017). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) can national regulatory frameworks better level up ECCD-centres, by ensuring a minimum quality for all children. Although it has been found that children in low-income conditions have been shown to benefit most from these improvements (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). These guidelines for minimum standards consist of a 21-page long document published by the National Child Protection Authority (2017) and includes areas such as registry of preschools, staff, physical environment, care, learning and play, health and safety, children’s rights and child protection, to name a few. As a consequence of this document, all newly registered ECCE-centres must comply with all the standards stipulated. A survey conducted in 2010 showed that approximately 5,400 preschools out of 12,300 have satisfactory conditions in accordance with the guidelines (Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, 2018).

To explain the content of the Sri Lanka’s minimum standards, some selected areas will briefly be presented below.

Staff - At least two permanent staff members, including at least one woman, must always be on duty. The manager must be at least 30 years old with 5 years of experience and that a woman is more appropriate. The child caregiver ratios should be for children between the ages of 3-5 years at 1:6. However, that does not take into consideration the child care givers’ education. All recruited staff must be under probation for six months, where they should receive evaluation reports for their performance from the manager, that is further on sent to main responsible ministry in the area.

Learning – Provide for children to develop their gross- and fine motor skills, language, cognitive skills, creativity, emotional intelligence and positive social relationships, while learning more spiritual and cultural values. Encourage all children to engage religious practice according to their religion as well as celebrating all religious festivals at the centre to promote a multicultural environment. Listen to, value and respect what children say and observe what they do and plan children’s play, learning and development accordingly. Have a child friendly manner understanding at all times and take children’s opinion into account. Computers/mobile phones/smart phones are not encouraged to use for entertainment purposes or as substitutes for play activities. For a learning purpose, children may use these a maximum of 45 minutes per day.

Physical environment – There should be in a permanent building with a gated facility located in a safe, welcoming and child friendly environment e.g. away from garbage dumps, polluted environments, bars etc. Also, it should be free from hazards including unprotected wells, drop-offs and cliffs, sharp objects and slippery areas. The indoor space should be for 2-7-year-olds approximately 4.4 sq. meters and the environment should not be over-stimulated and
extravagant. There should be an adequate number of toys, equipment and furniture available that are gender appropriate and disability friendly. Usage of lead-based paint on toys is prohibited. The outdoor environment should consist of a clean and safe garden including grassy areas, shady trees and flower beds etc, and provide both shade and sun. All outdoor equipment must be free from rust, splinters and sharp edges (National Child Protection Authority, 2017).

Preschool teacher education

In Sri Lanka, the qualification varies among the preschool teachers. The reason for this is that there are different approaches to obtain an education. For example, some carry out their qualification through universities where they have a one-year minimum education that should be conducted to earn a certificate in Preschool Education. The target group for this education programme is those who conduct their own preschool or for those who intend to and it is also for those who are presently working in preschools. Young mothers who wish to obtain a greater knowledge of correct ways of bringing up their children is also a target group. Afterwards there are opportunities to obtain additional qualifications, such as a one-year Advance Certificates in Preschool Education Programme and after that, a two-year long Diploma in Early Childhood and Primary Education Programme but there are no requirements (The Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014). Another approach to obtain qualification is through the private sector and in Sri Lanka Montessori Education is highly rated. The Modern Montessori International (MMI) is an organization that conducts education with their educational method in Sri Lanka. They have a one-year education for the Certificate of Education in Montessori and two years of education for the degree in Montessori Method of Education (Modern Montessori International, 2018).

A study by the National Education Commission (2016) on the professional development of teachers and teacher education in Sri Lanka, shows that teacher education in Sri Lanka is far behind the developed countries. This is because teachers in developed countries enter the teaching profession after completing a professional degree of postgraduate diploma in education. In Sri Lanka on the other hand, a professional qualification, is not a mandatory requirement for recruiting teachers. One explanation for this is the number of programmes available for providing teacher education and the annual output of qualified teachers are insufficient to meet the demand for teachers. One obvious reason for this is that of the 17 universities in Sri Lanka, only five of them have some kind of educational faculty or department. Moreover, the teacher programmes which are offered by the universities are heavily loaded with educational theory components since the teacher education curricula are based on an old model. According to the study, this component does not match with the needs of the school curricula which leads to the fact that teachers have theoretical knowledge within the university classroom but have little or no opportunities to link that knowledge to the real classroom. An explanation for this might be that Sri Lanka currently does not have a framework of standards for teaching specified by a regulatory body, which controls the teaching profession (ibid.).
Literature review

In this section will literature and previous research be presented, based on what we found relevant in relation to the aim and research questions of the study. It will therefore describe a definition of quality, perception of quality in the education system, why quality in preschool is important for children and elements that are important for achieving quality in preschool.

Definition of quality

The concept of Quality is not easy to define or operationalize, but the American Society for Quality (2018) defined it as “a subjective term that each person or sector has its own definition”. Therefore, it is also charged with a lot of different values and meanings. However, generally the quality concept is mention to possession of good or bad characteristics or attributes. The concept of quality will probably be apprehended and understood differently, depending on the actors and collective in different contexts, since it is dependent on it’s historical, social and cultural background (Vernersson, 2007).

Quality within the education system

To understand the quality concept with a more depth, Vernersson (2007) explains it is a rather of matter to delimit, therefore we will now focus on the concept of quality in preschools. The concept of quality often appears within the education system and in accordance with Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2002) it is usual, since they state that we live in the “quality era” where everything is measured in good or bad quality.

Since the complexity of the concept, it may also within the delimitation be interpreted differently. This is reinforced by Vernersson’s (2007) article containing Swedish teacher’s conception of quality. What he found was three main categories on what quality is according to teachers. These are validated by Haug (2003) and Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson (2016), who have drawn similar conclusions about categorization of quality, but Haug (2003) have one addition that will be discussed later. The categories Vernersson (2007) discovered were named; i) requirements, ii) didactic process and iii) results/outcomes. The requirements consist of the constitutional, organizational and physical conditions or so-called frame factors. A constitutional frame factor includes steering-documents, for instance school law and national curriculum. The organizational frames can be described as the opportunity given by human- and economic resources, such as education and qualification of teacher and the number of children in the group. Further on are buildings, teaching-aids and equipment example of physical frame factors. Again, it is not only the requirements influencing, the teacher’s didactic processes also have an impact. What matters is the teacher’s professional responsibility and acting, for instance, creating interplay and dialogue between teacher and child, considering how space and material are being used and ensuring the child’s possibility to influence his/her learning. The last main category, result/outcome, depends on conceptions regarding the pedagogical goal-fulfilment and their ambitions and effort to want to develop. In other words, have the teachers met the preschool’s goals with the activities, and can they determine whether the child has developed?

Vernersson’s (2007) interpretation about teachers’ opinions on what quality is, was main and distinctly conceived to be goal-attainment. Since, most teachers apprehended it to have a base in the society’s democratically decided steering-documents. This result can be linked with Skolverkets (2012) definition of quality in the education system as a collective term in Sweden. They consider that quality includes how well preschools meet goals within the national curriculum and how they respond to national requirements and guidelines. They also mention that quality is characterized by striving for renewal and continuous improvement, based on current conditions. This together becomes a kind of proof of how well the preschool does, it’s quality, to enable children’s development and learning in accordance with the curriculum goals and how they evaluate them. A minority of the teachers in Vernersson’s (2007) article,
apprehended quality to the satisfaction from the children’s expectations, desires and needs, the concept “customer satisfaction”.

As mentioned earlier, Haug (2003) have one addition in the categorizing of understanding quality in preschool, beyond what is explained by Vernersson (2007). Haug (2003) means that a part of the preschool quality is included in the parent’s satisfaction, and that their desire for the image they have of the preschool is fulfilled. This addition category is nothing neither Vernersson (2007) or Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson (2016) stands behind.

Further on have Vernersson (2007) have separated the teachers envions on what quality is into two perspectives, enumerative and relational. The enumerative perspective shows, that the respondents mention different, more or less isolated properties or quality indicators in the pedagogic work. This perspective shows that quality is conceived as an unclear concept, but despite that, teachers could define example of what quality is. Something that Sheridan (2001) expresses to have a universal quality criteria. The other perspective is the relational aspect of quality and it is apprehended as a subjective and contextually related concept. It appears within the direct personal meeting and in the daily interplay. Sheridan (2001) also mentions the relational perspective and explains it to be inconsistent. Because dialogues between people, such as politicians and other spokesmen, between preschool teachers or children and parents, affect the perception of quality.

At last, large-scale studies present that only a minority of programs provide excellent quality and another minority providing poor quality, leading the average preschool programs in the middle range of established measurements (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2002) draws conclusions that quality may also be used as a general tool to create standards within a domain and also to measure it’s by its standards, with a purpose to create order and safety for all parts.

Children’s effects of quality in preschools

Major efforts to estimate whether the economic benefits of quality early childhood education outweigh the cost of providing these educational opportunities points to that they are wise financial investments (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Large international reports such as just mentioned, shows that preschools with a high quality has as well long- as short-term positive effects on children. This especially towards children from disadvantaged conditions and for children in need of special support, but a quality preschool also benefit middle-class children substantially (ibid.). Still children from low-income backgrounds benefits more. According to Vetenskapsrådet (2015) there must be an equivalence between preschools, otherwise it may contribute to segregation and social inequality.

Since the foundation of brain structure is laid down in a child’s early years, enrolment in a preschool program may affect the child in various ways. According to Yoshikawa et al. (2013) there is robust evidence that a year or two of centre-based ECE of a developmentally appropriate program, for three and four-year-olds will improve the child’s early language, literacy and mathematical skills. As well a report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2005) said that:

Children who attend high-quality early childhood programs demonstrate better math and language skills, better cognition and social skills, better interpersonal relationships and better behavioural self-regulation than do children in lower-quality care. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2005 quoted in Brodin & Renblad, 2015:348).

In relation to the above mentioned it indicates that children who received preschool, had higher grades when they started school (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Further, long-term effects show that children who have attended preschool have better outcomes in adolescence and young adulthood, such as high school graduations, years of education completed, earning, reduced teen pregnancy and reduced crime (ibid.).
Decades of evaluation research has been analysed, permitting now with confidence saying preschool programs can have a substantial impact on early learning and development (ibid.). It has been clear that high-quality preschool education contributes to the society to more benefits than the initial costs. What has been shown in recent work, is a positive return on investments for a range of differing preschool programs, from those that are more intensive and expensive to those that require fewer initial investments. This shows that in the end, quality preschool education is a future investment.

**Important elements to achieve high quality**

High quality in preschool is nothing that just emerge. According to research, there are elements that should be implemented to develop and maintain high quality such as the right kind of curriculum and SQDW, which will be explained more below.

**Curriculum**

The purpose of using a curriculum, is that it can reinforce positive impacts on children’s learning since it can for instance ensure a more even quality level across different setting as well giving guidance to staff on how to enhance children’s learning and well-being (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) mention that the designing of curriculums may differ depending on the countries approaches. They have categorized curriculum models into two approaches, academic and comprehensive. An academic approach includes learning as staff-initiated with cognitive goals for school preparation. The second model is a comprehensive approach that is broader in its learning and takes the whole child’s development into account. It is more flexible and can better integrate a social aspect. Arguments have been made that high quality is related to a curriculum in which cognitive and social development are complementary and equally important. As a result, it appears that different curriculums may have different outcomes. They also mention about the added value in individual approach should be consolidated.

Further on, according to Yoshikawa et al. (2013), recent evaluations of curriculums have indicated that the most successful curriculum is characterized by professional development, which often involves coaching at least twice a month, by an expert teacher that shall provide feedback and support in practice. They also mention that it is characterized by an incorporate evaluation of child progress, which is used to inform and individualized guidance. The evaluation should be carried out on several points during the preschool year. The aim is to give the teacher support in monitoring the process of each child and to give opportunities to modify the content and approach in hope of improving the child’s outcome as well as the preschool quality.

In a study made by Brodin and Renblad (2015), Swedish preschool teachers and childcare workers perception of conducting high quality and systematic work, was investigated based on the reversed curriculum for preschool, implemented in 2010 (Skolverket, 2016). The questions in the study were related to the educators’ opinions about the curriculum and if quality could be improved, based on the curriculum in accordance with its intention. Many Swedish educators consider that the revised curriculum has increased their professional status. On the question if the preschool needs a curriculum, a total of 99% responded "totally agree" or "agree quite well". 92% of the educators stated that the curriculum leads to improvements in the activities in preschool, and the study shows that the benefits of a curriculum dominate and few of the educators expressed negative opinions. The educators expressed great faith in the curriculum as well as illustrated the opportunities it provides. About 94% of preschool educators found it useful and that the curriculum goals were in alignment with their ideas and thoughts about children's learning, development and the view of good quality in pedagogical work in preschool. Almost all the participants’ confirmed that “the goals of the curriculum enhance that the work in preschool forms a unity of care, education and learning” (Brodin & Renblad, 2015:352). Of factors that affect quality, 100% of the participants answered that it is the educator’s own attitude that is the
most important factor. The number of children in preschool and the relationship between teachers and children were also considered to be important factors of influence (Brodin & Renblad, 2015).

A conclusion can be drawn that an effective use of the right kind of curricula is important to create a high quality within preschool. However, it also depends on the teachers’ who will transform the curriculum into actions.

Systematic quality development work (SQDW)

According to Skolverket (2012), the preschool quality should continuously and systematically be documented, monitored, evaluated and developed. The purpose of this, is to get a knowledge of how the quality of the preschool can be developed, so that all children are given the best conditions for development and learning. Research by Insulander and Svärdeno Åberg (2017) shows that an increasing number of European countries have establish systems, to ensure the quality and accountability in preschools. In Sweden for instance, have the Education Act (Sverige, 2018) and the National Curriculum (Skolverket, 2016) have set up guidelines for preschools work with a clear responsibility for working systematically with evaluation and quality improvements. Through this, we can see the importance of development work related to how the follow-up and documentation of each child’s experiences and skills in the curriculum objectives can be developed, within the framework of systematic quality work (Håkansson, 2016).

In Insulander and Svärdeno Åbergs’ (2017) study, it appears that the educational policy recognizes SQDW as an approach to develop practice, in a way that will ensure all children an equal education. SQDW is a collective term for continuous pedagogic evaluation of education in Sweden, and it involves municipalities, preschool directors and active teachers within education. Sheridan (2007) describes, based on her article, that evaluation models are often a combination of methodological descriptions, assumptions and recommendations regarding the relation in between the evaluator and those who are evaluated. Some methods are considered appropriate, in the opinion that there is an ambition to engage different characteristics of quality, visualize the pedagogical processes, control an acceptable standard and equality and to improve quality. Other methods are considered only as checklists to meet demands from groups and organizations who have an interest in ensuring minimal standards (ibid.).

In Sweden, is the National Curriculum (Skolverket, 2016) is the starting point for all quality work. The work includes continuously reflecting on the preschool’s assignments. To evaluate the preschool, Pramling Samuelsson and Sheridan (2016) describe a method used in Sweden, which includes continuous and connected steps that focus on long-term development. This is a seven steps method which includes; reflection, planning and implementation, documentation, evaluation, analysing, goal fulfilment and the final step, quality assessment and development. All steps of SQDW should be used as a tool for improving preschool quality, thereby creating good conditions for children’s learning and development (Sheridan, Williams & Sandberg, 2013).

According to the article by Sheridan, Williams and Sandberg (2013), the main focus in SQDW, is on documentation and evaluation. Documentation is often used in everyday situations and evaluation is more closely related to sum up themes, projects and an overview at the end of the year.

Documentation, however, is mainly related to methods that teachers can use to collect detailed information about activities, children, and the work that is done at preschools in everyday situations (ibid.). There is a huge variety of methods that can be used in preschools, to document children’s learning, the teachers own approaches, and the overall quality. Documenting methods may include; photographs, notes made with pen and paper, audio and video recordings, interviews, pedagogical documentation, photographs and log books (Håkansson, 2016; Sheridan, Williams & Sandberg, 2013).

The main focus of preschool documentation is children’s learning processes and interests, in relation to the curriculum’s target areas. According to research by Sheridan, Williams and
Sandberg (2013), teachers believe that documentation of children’s learning and development must be simple and should have focus on the content/situation that is chosen. Teachers should use their competence to evaluate and chose types of documentation, that have relevance to the situation. Then, the teachers can use the results of documentation as a guidance for further proceed the learning process. Research by Håkansson (2016) means, from a child perspective, that documentation helps staff to identify a child’s learning progress. Later the information can be used to discuss and reflect together with the child. Another aspect is that documentation can allow teachers to reflect on the importance of an activity in relation to the child’s development and learning and to identify if the environment need changes.

Evaluation is used to obtain an overall knowledge in relation to a completed project/theme or over the whole preschool term/year. According to Åsén (2015), depending on what to evaluate, you need a clear purpose and know what you want to find out. How to conduct an evaluation can be according to a model or a method. The evaluation process can be described in a five-step work by; defining issues, deciding how the issues should be answered, collecting data and making conclusions and also report and give feedback, results and conclusions to groups which are concerned.

According to several researchers of the teachers’ views, it is shown that this is an area with room for improvements. Sheridan, William and Sandberg (2013) report that evaluation seems more difficult for most teacher to get a grip on, how and what to evaluate, compared to documentation. Brodin and Renblads’ (2015) research strengthens this, when the result of their study shows that 67 % of the teachers participated, felt like they needed more knowledge about documentation and evaluation of their work. Their research (ibid.) also shows that a majority experienced a need for more knowledge about SQDW in general. That teachers perceive SQDW to be difficult, is something Insulander and Svärdemo Åberg (2017) also mention.

Quality and evaluation are often studied simultaneously (Vernersson, 2007) and evaluation has become one important tool in the process of analysing and improving the quality in preschools’ (Sheridan, 2001). Evaluation has two overall functions, the first being to check that the preschool meets the requirements set. The other is development, where strengths and weaknesses are lifted, and it is evaluated how to strengthen or alternatively correct. These features can be combined with advantage.

In summary, the background shows that Sri Lanka is a country that, despite historical adversities, is placed at the top of all South Asian countries in human development (UNDP, 2018). The country is under development and are one acceding country in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP, 2015a) and works against set goals. One under target is that all children should have access to early childhood development, pre-primary education and education so that they are ready for primary education (ibid.). Since the ECCD-system has been a neglected area historically, this has caused deficiencies that require actions, to achieve the above under target. National documents have been designed to address deficiencies in order to improve and develop.

The literature review explains the quality concept and briefly, it can be reminded that it is a subjective term, which leads it to be charged with different values and meanings. Most often, the term usually possesses an attribute of good or bad. Historical, social and cultural background can affect how the concept is interpreted. How Swedish teachers conceive quality, have Vernerssson (2007) divided into three categories. The first category is requirements, which includes frame factors in various aspects. The second category is didactic process, which focuses on the teacher’s professional responsibility and acting. The third category is the results/outcomes which can be understood by answering the question, have the teachers met the preschool goals and can they determine if the child has developed?

It has shown in international reports that high quality preschools contribute to positive effects for children both in the short- and long term. To create and maintain a high-quality preschool for
all children, the curriculum has an importance as well the implementation of a systematic quality work. To continue will the next section describe the method and procedure in this study.
Methodology

The aim with the study is to create a better understanding of how preschool teachers’ in Sri Lanka perceive and work with quality within their preschools. Therefore, this study has been conducted with a qualitative method. The motive for that choice is that a qualitative method can be used in advantage, exploratively, for example when you know the minimum in the question (Malterud, 2009). Thru interviews with a semi-structural approach has the informants’ opinions been able to be illustrated in this study. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) are interviews based on the experience of the informants’, in an effort to visualize their life and to develop an opinion from it. So, in that way has the informants’ perception on their own preschool quality been presented. It has also made it possible to acquire information of what kind of actions the informants’ implement to increase the quality in their preschool and their opinion on what factors affect their preschool quality. In this study has interview been used to obtain a deep but narrow information in the subject which is one purpose of using interviews, according to Johansson and Svedner (2010).

Selection

The selection has been made through a convenience sampling, based on the informants’ who approved to participate in an interview within the time frame, as wells as fulfilling the aim which has the criteria of educated teachers. Trost (2005) motivates the convenience sampling to be a practical method for getting a strategic selection. Informants have been found randomly both on our own, by visiting preschools in the local area and by searching for preschools on google maps and some of them we contacted through their Facebook page. In total, six informants from different preschools’ in a big city in Sri Lanka have participated and the area where all preschool existed can be delimited to less than six km.

Information about the informants’ is shown below in Table 1. It shows their education and role, management, the preschools fee for each child per month, number of enrolled children and number of qualified and unqualified teachers working. The names are fictional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education &amp; role</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Fee/month LKR</th>
<th>Enrolled children</th>
<th>Teacher Qualified + Unqualified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Preschool Certificate - One year Advance Certificate - Two years Diploma Early Childhood and Primary - One year Active teacher</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2 + 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brita</td>
<td>Modern Montessori International diploma - Two years Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5 + 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carina</td>
<td>Montessori Diploma - Two years Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>Psychology and child language Active teacher</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>17 + 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elin</td>
<td>Diploma course - One year Active teacher</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>10 + 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frida</td>
<td>Degree in early childhood education UCLA Manager</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>31,250</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>26 + 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data collection

Before conducting the interviews, an interview guide was created based on the research questions (Appendix 2). The informants did not get access to the interview guide in advance, in order to get as spontaneous and honest answers as possible. Interviews have been conducted at each preschool under different conditions, some in office environments and some in direct connection with the children’s group, where the informants sometimes got disturbed by children. Each interview took between 20-45 minutes to complete. Mobile audio recording took place during each interview which, according to Bryman (2011), is a good method, to ease the memory during the interview and to not disturb and repeat questions that may arise from just recording. Some support notes have also been taken to include everything that was said during the interview. The material has been transcribed from audio to text. According to Bryman (2011), it is common in qualitative studies to record and print the interviews in order for a detailed analysis to be possible, where the informants’ own choice of words can be captured. The transcribed material landed in a range of 15,000 words.

Analytical method

To be able to present the results in a comprehensive manner, the data has been processed through a thematic content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) in general, it means trying to locate themes or patterns in the existing text mass. A semantic approach has been exercised, meaning the result is what’s been presented from the informants without searching for underlying sentences. The procedure began with reading the summarized transcribed material several times, to get a feel of the whole material. Then opinions and phrases, containing relevant information, related to the research questions were extracted. Also, the surrounding text have been extracted so that the context in the sentence consists. These sentences and phrases are called meaning-bearing units, which were then coded in different colours in the computer and grouped into different categories, which reflect the central parts of the interviews. Finally, themes were created where we summarized the different categories we found in the material. The themes are based on the research questions and got the headings; Perception on the own preschool quality, Quality-enhancing actions and Factors affecting the improvement of preschool quality. Several subthemes were also created within the different themes and got the headings; Learning, Learning environment, The teacher, Staff meetings, Evaluation, Environmental improvements, Standards, The preschool teacher education and approach and Expectations.

Ethical considerations

When the interviews were booked, the purpose of the study was clarified through a physical missive letter that the informants got to keep (Appendix 1). Our intentions with the study were explained both verbally and in writing, to provide a clear understanding of the context. All informants’ who did agree to participate, were given the same information as follows:

The interview will be confidential, and the answers given are anonymous. In the study, it will not be possible to read out who has answered. If the informant refuses to answer a question or for some reason cancel the interview, the informant may do so without giving cause. The interview will be audio recorded to make it easier to remember what was said in the interview. After completion of the study, the transcribed material, the notes written down, and the recorded audio file will be deleted. This interview and the answers from this, will be used for this study only.

By informing about these points, we clarified the four research ethical principles in good research practice: the information-, consent-, confidentiality- and utilization requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011).
After all the interviews were finished and the transcription completed, the names of the interviewees were modified in all quotes that are used in this study. Information that could help to identify them was also modified or removed, such as names of preschools they work at etc.

**Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are two concepts that are important in a quantitative study, to estimate the quality of the study. In qualitative studies, these concepts may also be relevant, however, the issue of validity is not essential because it is about measurement, which is not of primary interest (Bryman, 2011). This is because the interest in qualitative studies often involves changes and not a statistical relationship in which the respondent constantly gives the same answer.

In this study, interviews were conducted by two interviewers in order to better follow up the informants' responses and to develop follow-up questions on the subject. All the interviews have also been audio recorded to be able to reproduce the informants' statements literally. Transcripts of all interviews have then been performed, in order to quote informants in the results. Furthermore, the are the themes created in this study confirmed by both authors, all the above statements are arguments for the validity.

Reliability can be explained by reflecting to what extent the study can be reproduced (Bryman, 2011). Since the interviews have been conducted with an interview guide with semi-structured questions, reliability has been increased because the same interview guide can be used by others to repeat the study and measure the same subject at another time. As a semantic approach has been used, underlying sentences have not been interpreted into the result, which can contribute to a high level of reliability.

**Methodological reflections**

Informants to the study, have been difficult to find since no previous relationship or contacts with anyone in the country have existed. This resulted in a comfort selection, in which we have tried to get informants to interview, in a variety of ways. We both used Google Maps and contacted preschools via their Facebook page as well as local exploration and dropping-by preschools in the local surroundings, to request if an interview could be conducted. Since the selection has taken place through a convenience sample, we have not been able to control the categorizations we initially thought, as will be described below.

When it comes to the selection, the original idea was that all informants should belong to the same category, thus having an equivalent education, being active teachers. Furthermore, that a comparison would take place with a clearer structure, with half governmentally operated preschools and half privately owned, where the fee would also have a more equal distribution of lower vs. higher fees. The outcome of our study could therefore possibly have been different, if we divided the informants' based on preschool fees, as private preschools seem to have an advantage from the economic aspect. The sample of our survey consisted of half active teachers and half of managers, with teacher education as the basis, this since the manager approval was required for an interview to be conducted and that it was those who had time to devote for an interview. Although the selection consisted of both active teachers and managers, we believe that the aim of the study is achieved, since all the informants' have teacher qualifications and are well conversant in their preschools.

The choice of semi-structural interviews was conducted with advantage, mainly based on linguistic considerations. When both interviewers and informants have English as a second language, questions and words in different contexts can easily be misinterpreted. Therefore, when creating the interview guide importance was laid, to which words that should be used, so it would be well understood by the informants. If a qualitative interview had been chosen, further misunderstandings could have arisen, as even minor misunderstandings in the semi-structural form of interview were discovered. Sometimes, the meaning of some words had to be explained and some terms were not seemed to be fully understood. The informants’ answered as well as
they could. But since the interview guide contributed to structure, the starting point was equal to all informants in all interviews.

An addition that we have noted in hindsight, is that supplementary questions regarding their curriculum would be rewarding to develop results and analysis on this issue. As well could observations create a complementary image to the result and analysis. Because then, an aspect of differences between the informants’ preschools could be exposed.

All interviews were conducted under varying conditions, both regarding the physical environment and the linguistic ability of the informants. It was therefore a good choice, to audio record the interviews using a mobile phone. Even though the environment had an effect on the quality of the audio recordings, and that linguistic ability varied, the recordings contributed to a better understanding of the informants’ views and thoughts. Furthermore, the audio recording was being used to transcribe all interviews to facilitate the analysis process, as themes are more easily found in text format (Bryman, 2011). The audio recordings contributed to the fact, that we did not need to take notes of everything that was said by the informants’, only support notes were being made. Using only notes as tools, can have disadvantages, Bryman (ibid.) says. As it takes too much time to take notes on everything that’s being said in the interviews, and it is difficult to perceive the answers as a whole, we did not implement it as an approach.
Results

In this section, the results from the conducted interviews will be presented. The interviews have been processed and divided into themes, to be able to present the core of the content, based on the research questions of the study.

Perception of the own preschool quality

The informants’ perceptions of the quality of their own preschool will be presented in this section. The result showed an apparent positive view on their own preschool quality, as most informants had many positive aspects to lift within their preschool but had very few or no negative aspects to share. The results are divided into three subthemes; Learning, Learning environment and The teacher, which contains the central parts of the informants’ views.

Learning

Within the subtheme learning, the informants’ mentioned the curriculum, theme work, multiculturalism, activities and book work as important aspects for their preschool quality.

All informants mentioned that they had a curriculum as a foundation for their preschool, but the informants’ do not follow the same curriculum. For example, Brita and Carina used a curriculum based on Montessori pedagogy, were they mean that the child itself strives for development. Frida had created her own curriculum, which main focus is that learning should be created through play: “Into the learning through play curriculum we introduce letters and numbers, math and all that, but it’s all done through hands on fun activities”. The majority of the informants’ mentioned the importance of working with a curriculum. Furthermore, they expressed with a positive attitude, that the design of the content is determined individually or together in the work teams, depending on the preschool organization.

It is apparent from the result that five out of six informants work, in a positive sense, with themes as a working method. Brita mentioned what their work with themes looks like: "We follow a theme every week, and according to the theme, say like we study animals today, all the kids will be taken to the zoo that week”. The themes at the other preschools were usually conducted for one to two months at a time with different topics, except for the preschools’ own traditions such as Christmas, Deepavali and Sinhalese and Tamil New Year. Frida said: “We celebrate all cultures, all religions all nationalities because we are multicultural”. Learning about multiculturalism is another central part that half of the informants’ value highly and they say it is a positive thing with their preschool. A child group that contains a variety of ethnicities, makes the preschool create a community where one does not make a difference in people, and create a greater understanding of the lives and background of others, which is considered a positive outcome, Carina expressed.

What and the amount of activities carried out at preschools, was also an area that half of the informants’ mentioned regarding their experience of their preschool quality. Being able to offer activity programs in a great variety was a factor to their high quality. Activities like Zumba, Yoga, Puppet shows, Storyboard, Music and Poems were organized at Diana’s preschool. Brita told that their preschool also offers many different types of activities that other preschools don’t offer. Being able to offer children activities in addition to traditional learning was valued as having a higher quality of preschool. Anna mentioned this as a negative aspect, that her workplace lacked these activities for the children who are enrolled in her preschool.

Furthermore, regarding the children’s learning, was the concept of "bookwork" was constantly mentioned by the informants’, which was considered to be of importance to the quality of their preschool. This is a type of method, where the children through work in an individual workbook will acquire knowledge of letters, numbers, shapes and colours etc. and practice their writing skills. Through the interviews it appeared that this kind of learning is highly valued in the Sri Lankan society. Frida said: “we are very academic in Sri Lanka, you know they believe children have to learn letters and number”. All participating informants said that they use this method,
but with different approaches and with different types of implementation. Anna included the concept in her preschool because of demand from parents, as they want their children to have the required knowledge when applying to primary school. Brita and Frida had a critical approach to “bookwork” and therefore they implemented the method in their own way. Frida had created her own workbooks. Brita told, because their education is: “more practical, so we just don’t give a book to a child. -Write. We get them to learn and write the letters in sand, and then we get them to [...] And then we get them a pen and then they learn to write”. Carina explained that education is a must, but the children should not only work with their books. Because they are children, they also must play and learn other things as well.

Learning environment

The informants had mostly positive views of their preschools’ quality but the aspect where negative opinions were brought up was regarding the learning environment. It was primarily two informants, which both worked at preschools that was governmentally operated, that told about their experienced trouble, regarding the facilities they teach in. Elin explained that the space is too small and that: “we can’t teach very well now”. Anna thought that the teacher environment was okay. She meant that she could teach well, but she also described her awareness about higher standard within other preschools’ learning environments. An interpretation of that, is that she was quite satisfied, but at the same time she was not completely satisfied. The four other preschools had created their own individual standards which they referred to being “international standards” and therefore are outside the country’s own requirements. They were very satisfied with their quality in their own learning environment. Brita said:

We have got above the standards. We are very very in particular though because in Sri Lanka, as you know we are a third world country... and the standards are very very low so that’s why we started this with international standards. - Brita

The teacher

Within this section, the informants’ stated opinions related to the teacher such as education and qualification and the teacher’s approach.

In preschools, there are qualified teachers and other employees, the informants entitle them as; Supporters, Nannies, Trainees and Assistant teachers. The level of education and qualification varies greatly among the informants’, who all classified themselves as qualified teachers. The majority of the preschools consider themselves having qualified teachers but, according to Frida, some of her employees only have a three months diploma and are considered qualified. Anna on the other hand have a total of four years of education, divided in three courses, from a Sri Lankan University and she is the informant with the longest education. The own preschools determine what education level they require for their employees. Brita and Carina who work with a Montessori pedagogy, said that most of the employees in their workplaces have education in MMI (Modern Montessori International) or AMI (Association Montessori International) which is a two-year education. Elin tells about her education, she has a one-year diploma course at a Sri Lankan University and the other teachers at her preschool had similar educations as her. Diana had received education in psychology and law. She is saying that she is trying to share her knowledge with the other teachers: “I’m doing my best to influence some of the teachers [...] to you know like to make the classrooms, to arrange the classrooms”. She believes that the teachers should be open and give the children a good experience in the classroom. Furthermore, she said that: “all teachers are qualified teachers”. Frida, who both works as a teacher and is the manager of the preschool, had her education in America, she has a Degree in early Childhood Education at UCLA. She expressed herself, about her own employees:

Most of the teachers, some of them are trainees and are going to be in rolling, but most of them only have a diploma, that takes from 3 months course, 6 months to 1 year. To be very honest, I’m not that strict about it, because what they learn from the courses that are here, is this much. I train them myself on the job training as well as every week they have
training sessions and then every term they have, I have speakers coming in and as well I train them myself. - Frida

The variation in education and qualification is consequently very large, but regardless of this, they all shared the same view, that all are classified preschool teachers’, and qualified for the profession they perform. The teacher’s approach also turned out to be an important piece of the puzzle in children’s learning and in the informants’ views of quality in their preschools. Almost all the informants’, talked about quality in relation to the teacher’s passion for children and for the profession as a whole, as well as the importance of having good relationships between educators and children. Letting the children have their own freedom and “not to force” the children’s learning, was an important aspect expressed by both Anna and Frida. Children should learn through their own curiosity and through joy and play. Brita’s opinion was: “Number one thing has to be, you’ll have to love the child more than anything.” In addition, it was found that both Elin and Frida mentioned the importance of “love and caring” for the children. If you’re not passionate about children and passionate about your work, you may not be the right person for the profession. Diana and Elin shared the view of understanding the children based on their cognitive level. They looked at interaction and interplay between children and teachers as important aspects of their preschool contexts.

Quality-enhancing actions

The result of the interviews showed that the preschools carried out a number of different actions, that could contribute to increased preschool quality. These subthemes are explained under the headings; Staff meetings, Evaluations and Environmental improvements.

Staff meetings

All informants’ who participated in the study described that they had staff meetings. The preschools’ meetings were conducted differently depending on their purpose. It varied from daily-, monthly- to quarterly- and annual meetings. However, the most common was to have monthly meetings, which all the informants mentioned, except one. The content of the meetings varied a bit more between the informants’ statements. Brita who had daily meetings for the staff mentioned that they contained information about the day’s agenda as well as presenting ideas and discussing how to conduct different activities. These teachers used a collegial way of working, where they presented their ideas and further discussed the way to go for the day. Planning the future was another clear purpose that three of the informants’ clarified, being the reason for their staff meetings. Usually the meetings also included future topics of the themes and their content. Elin said: “we have staff meetings with principal and other teacher and we discuss how to our future plans”. Anna told that at her preschool, they have staff meetings once a month to discuss preschool matters, like how to take care of the children and the main criteria’s. She also mentioned, that the expectations and requests from parents, meaning how the preschool can meet their wishes regarding their children, was a part of their staff meeting content. For example, the preschool has satisfied the wishes of parents through practising letters: “I’m doing some letters, because parents ask me” but she did also clarify that she will not force the child to do this, because it really goes against the preschool’s principles. This was a way to ensure that parents think that the preschool is of high quality.

Evaluations

Some of the informants’ showed uncertainty about the concept of evaluation. During the interviews, however, it showed that almost all the informants’ conducted some kind of evaluation. Carina was one of those who showed this insecurity, but still she mentioned in the interview that they conduct weekly meetings among the staff, where they review what they have been doing during the week, what needs to be changed and which improvements can be made. Making evaluations on the children was mentioned being done at two of the six preschools that participated in this study. Frida was the clearest in understanding the meaning of the concept and she also implemented clear and formal actions for this. She told that the teachers at her
preschool, daily observed and brought documentation about the children. This to be able to evaluate each individual child in the next step, based on the preschools’ own portfolio. The content of the portfolio valued if the child had achieved a certain development in, for example cognitive development, language development, social development, mathematics, science, physical development, etc. Frida had even created own standards, on which developments that are normative in different age groups. “Twice a year we have evaluations, proper child evaluations, where we/I sit with the parents and we discuss all the areas with the teacher present” Frida said. Diana expressed that they also did a kind of evaluation of the children, but compared to Frida’s method, not as structured. She told that teachers observed the children and wrote reports every month. They were made individually by each of the teachers. The observations were further discussed with the parents and strategies were dealt with, to improve the child’s future. Diana was very clear that the observations were conducted with the purpose of “evaluating how the children do, in order to improve it next time”. Furthermore, she stated that the observations are also very important for children, whom they discovered are in need of support, to be able to respond to their needs. Anna told about another kind of evaluation that was done at her preschool. Once a week, a supervisor comes and observes and discusses with the teachers, about how changes can be implemented at their preschool. What is decided between the supervisor and the teachers’ is documented in a logbook. Anna mentioned that they did not evaluate the children.

Environmental improvements

The informants’ mentioned different types of improvements regarding their environment. "All the facilities are evaluated by the Administration Buildings", Anna said. She told that, based on their wishes for improvement, they come and evaluate the preschool. If they consider that the preschool is within the Sri Lankan government's standards, which she tells is often the case, the desire for improvements is denied by the administration. Elin talked about the lack of space to teach: “We have to improve facilities [...] Some classes are too small, they haven’t any space to play”. By raising these issues to the board, they have now chosen to build a new building because of the informed facility problems.

Frida emphasized the importance of the environment, where their indoor environment is changed often, according to the needs and interests of the children. She also has designed her own furniture such as tables, where the teacher can be closer and more accessible to the children in different activities. They also had an extra table next to a planned activity, which was, as Frida called it “a free choice table”, where the children could choose to sit if they did not want to participate in the given activity. Diana also talks about the importance of having a good play- and education area. Since the preschool she works at opened in year 2015, major changes have occurred in both the indoor- and outdoor environment. She expressed herself about their environment:

The play area for the kids, was not like this at all before, so now it has improved, we change a lot. Like with the toys, the kids could use more area, child friendly of course, now they enjoying the play station, that is something very positive. - Diana

Brita and Carina expressed several times during the interviews, that an important aspect for them, is to have a secure and safe environment for the children. Brita emphasized the importance of good hygiene, and at her preschool, they implement weekly pest controls where they get rid of mosquitoes, rats and lizards. They also disinfect the preschool 4-5 times per day. Brita said: "It’s very difficult in Sri Lanka, to keep it clean and hygienic.". Carina said, in order to have a safe preschool for the children, the entire building has been secured by plugging out the electrical outlet in the building. It is important that “It's no harm, it doesn’t give any hazards to the child.”
Factors affecting the improvement of preschool quality

Based on the informants’ statements, have subthemes with the heading; Standards, The preschool education and approach, and lastly, Expectations been created to show their opinion on what is affecting the improvement of preschool quality.

Standards

The standards were mentioned as an obstacle in the quality work of most of the informants’, either at their own preschool or that the informants that had created their own standard, made comments about other preschools that follow the minimum standards.

The Sri Lankan standards regarding the facilities, is classified as low-grade and the preschools that are governmental or the ones not having sufficient money resources, must adapt their preschools accordingly to that. Anna, whose preschool is run by the government, said that although she would like to change the structure of the premises to improve the preschool, it is not possible because of “it’s not up to us... the administration grant is responsible that building”.

With that, Anna meant that the standard is achieved within the country’s guidelines, even though she knows it could be improved. Four informants told that, at their preschool they have created their own standards regarding the facilities, considering that the Sri Lankan minimum standards are too low. Another aspect Frida mentioned was about her experiences and thoughts of registering her preschool. She explained that the minimum standards consist of a teacher / child ratio of 1:20, which she considers to be too low. In such an application, she believes that understanding of the child’s age, stage of development and psychology is not taken into account in teaching and the risk is that “they put everybody in one box”.

The preschool teacher’s education and approach

Another area that was raised as a factor affecting the improvement of preschool quality, is the country’s current preschool teacher education. One factor that has been affecting, according to Elin, is lack of knowledge in her preschool teacher profession when expressed that she wanted “methods to teach”. This is something that Frida strengthens, by telling that an increase in the quality of preschool teacher education is crucial, “[...] because what they learn from the courses that are here, is this much”. She continues telling that the general perception of a preschool teacher’s profession, is not considered a serious job and the profession lack professionalism. Common reactions she meets when she pronounces her profession is “ugh... you’re just a Montessori teacher” which indicates that the preschool teacher profession carries a low status in the society.

Lastly, Diana and Frida’s thoughts that are mentioned below, can be linked to the educated preschool teacher, when they both argued that a professional preschool teacher must have a will and an approach to change the preschool towards the better. The preschool teachers at Diana’s preschool “are really open about it, of changes” as well as the management. Frida’s personal view is that she wants to develop and therefore challenge herself to raise quality. For instance, even though she is a qualified preschool teacher, she reads new research and acquires new knowledge and believes that: “quality for me is, that okay, I did this but if there is another way I can do it better, we’ll change.”.

Expectations

Expectations on preschools are another aspect that affects the possibility of raising preschool quality, according to Frida. She told us that the school’s expectations for the children are ridiculous. To be admitted to a larger school, which is considered to be better, interviews are conducted where the children’s results are being showed, especially their handwriting. She said: “I can’t write like that - it’s Beautiful! And maybe that’s all that the child can do”. These expectations are absurd in her opinion, as it is the opposes of her view of children’s learning, where she sees the process as a more important part than the outcome. The “[...] expectations are just ridiculous because intelligence has nothing to do with handwriting, otherwise all the
"doctors would have and all the scientist would have the best, you know", Frida phrased. Because of the school expectations, Frida explained that it causes panic among parents at her preschool. Parents want their children's best, to access the best education, and to get it, is results that are consistent with the school's expectations are required.

To summarize the results, it is shown that most informants perceive their preschool quality with a positive view, since almost only positive aspects are apparent. The few negative aspects informants mentioned included the standards within the learning environments. According to the informants were some quality enhancing actions done at their preschools, such as staff meetings, environmental improvements and evaluations. Regarding evaluations, an uncertainty appeared in some of the informants. Only one informant describe how they did evaluations as a part in conducting a complete SQDW. Of all the informants' in the study it was shown that four out of six completed at least on part in SQDW. Factors affecting the quality of preschool have, according to the results, showed to be the Sri Lankan standard since it is too low. In addition, informants considered that pre-school teacher education affects the quality as it contributed to shortcomings in preschools the preschool teacher's profession. Lastly, were expectations an aspect mentioned affecting the quality in preschools. The preschool has expectations from parents, who created these expectations from the school's expectations of children's expected knowledge.
Analysis

In this section, the result will be analysed in relation to the background regarding the country and previous research and literature.

Similarities in perception of preschool quality

All informants’ perceptions of their own preschools’ quality could be described as positive, with just a fraction of negative aspects mentioned, even though the preschools differed in several aspects, for instance in the number of enrolled children, number of staff and their education, curriculum and facility. This can be linked to the quality concept defined by the American Society for Quality (2018), that quality is a subjective term that the individual has its own definition for. But the concept of quality is also contextual and may be dependent on the historical, social and cultural backgrounds of the individuals. So, if placing the preschool’s quality in relation to the country’s economy and history, it does not seem unlikely that the informants’ expressed positive perception of their preschool quality, since overall improvements in the country have taken place in recent years (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014; World Bank Group, 2014). The National Education Commission (2004) recognize that historically, preschools have been a neglected area in education policy formulation. But presently, their value has increased, and efforts are being made through several institutions, including introducing minimum standards in ECCE-centre by the National Child Authority (2017), a new National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development by the Children’s secretariat (2018) and an action plan for development for the years 2016-2020, by the Ministry of Women and Child affairs (2018).

Despite a subjective view on quality similarities have been found among the informants’, and the result in this study may be linked to Vernersson’s (2007) study about teacher’s perceptions of quality. Requirements is the first category that is mentioned, that involves the constitutional, organizational and physical conditions. The informants in our study raise requirements, in the term of following a curriculum. For example, Brita and Carina used a curriculum based on Montessori pedagogy and Frida had created her own curriculum. Most of the informants’ mentioned the importance of working with a curriculum and considered it as a good example they share about their preschool quality. In Brodin and Renblads’ (2015) study, almost all educators answered positively, that the preschool needs a curriculum and that it leads to improvements within the activities, something that the preschools’ in this study seems to be aware of, since they implement a curriculum. The minimum standards implemented by the National Child Protection Authority (2017) in Sri Lanka shall provide overall guidelines in learning, however, the design of the curriculum seems to be decided at each preschool, accordingly to the informants’ in this study. The using of a curriculum have different purposes, it can reinforce positive impacts on children’s learning since it can ensure a more even quality level across different settings and also give guidance to staff how to enhance children’s learning and well-being (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). In relation to this it seems like the informants’ uses curriculums in a way of guidance in their work. The intention of ensuring a more even quality level across different settings is not being assured because the informants’ preschools have their own curriculums which leads to more to unequal conditions.

In addition, the informants’ expressed the importance of good facilities, from the perspective of high quality. On this point the informants had negative views, including Elin who expressed that the space is too small and "we can not teach very well now". Four out of six preschools explain that they had created their own individual standards because of the country’s low national standards. This shows that Vernersson (2007) and the informants’ share the same view, that requirements are an important aspect when viewing it from a quality perspective.

The importance of education is something that the informants emphasizes. The majority of the preschools consider themselves having qualified teachers. Frida, who both work as a teacher and is the owner of one the preschools mention: "I train them myself on the job training [...]". This she does in order to have staff, who can live up to her expected quality.
Vernersson (2007) mentions didactic process as another category of quality. This is something that the informants’ hint about being important as well, for example five out of six informants’ mention working in themes, being a positive working method. In this category, it also shows that half of the informants are aware of the importance of having a good attitude towards the multicultural. The informants’ valued a community where you don’t make a difference in people. It was also important to create an understanding of the lives and backgrounds of others. In addition, all the informants’ highlighted the importance of the teacher’s attitude, to have passion within the work and the importance of creating good relationships between teachers and children.

Regarding the category result and outcome, Vernersson (2007) talks about goal-fulfilment. The concept of “bookwork” was, according to the informants’, considered to be of a positive importance to their preschool quality. “Bookwork” is a kind of learning that seems highly valued in the Sri Lankan society because of the purpose, that the children should have the required knowledge to apply to good schools. One reason for that, Frida explained: “We are very academic in Sri Lanka, you know they believe children have to learn letters and number”.

Incomplete Systematic Quality Development Work (SQDW)

Only one of the preschools’ in our study proved to carry out a complete SQDW, including steps like reflection, documentation, evaluation, analysing and development, which Insulander and Svärđemo Åberg (2017) emphasize is a good approach to develop the preschool and that will ensure all children an equal education.

According to Sheridan, Williams and Sandberg (2013), the main focus in systematic quality work is on documentation and evaluation, which four out of six preschools told that they did at least either one or the other. What is being evaluated at the different preschools, can be divided into two different categories - children evaluations and preschool/facility evaluations. Frida, whose preschool who implemented a complete SQDW, told that: “Twice a year we have evaluations, proper child evaluations, where we/I sit with the parents and we discuss all the areas with the teacher present.” Prior to these evaluations, Frida says that the teachers daily observed and brought documentations about the children to be able to evaluate each individual child. Pramling Samuelsson and Sheridan (2016) highlights the importance of implementing all steps of systematic quality work in order to create good conditions for children's learning and development, which seems to be the case at Frida’s preschool. Further, she explains that the documented observations were then discussed with the parents, and strategies were dealt with, in order to improve the children’s future development. One of the other informants’, Diana, also mentions that they evaluate children. She was very clear that their observations made on children, were conducted with the purpose of “evaluating how the children do, in order to improve it next time”, which also are considered as important steps in SQDW.

One of the informants’, Carina, talks about their evaluation work at her preschool, but at the same time, she shows an uncertainty about the concept of evaluation. Carina mentioned that they conducted weekly meetings among the staff, where they reviewed what they had been doing during the week, what needed to be changed and which improvements could be made. Åsén (2015) mentions the importance of having a clear purpose in what to evaluate, which Carina did not seem to have, because she was not able to specify exactly what was being evaluated and how they did it in the practice. Anna told that at her preschool, they got help by a supervisor, who through observations and discussion with the teachers, recommended changes and improvements. What was discussed, was documented in a logbook at the preschool. Through this kind of documentation, referring to Håkansson (2016), the teachers can reflect on the child’s development and learning and also identify if something in the environment can be changed or improved. Sheridan (2007) mentions that some documentation methods are considered more appropriate, depending on which ambition you have and what you want to visualize, control or improve. It shows that most of the informants’, document and evaluate in some way, but not got the overall picture of SQDW. Brodin and Renblad (2015) mention the lack of knowledge many
teachers are experiencing, especially about documentation and evaluation, which probably is the same experience by the teachers in Sri Lanka. Lack of knowledge in SQDW makes it very hard to implement and to do it properly.

One of the informants tells that one purpose of their staff meetings is to evaluate, based on the parent’s expectations. Haug (2003) mentions an addition, in the categorizing of understanding quality in preschool, where he means that a part of preschool quality, is included in the parents' satisfaction, and that their desire for the preschool is being met. Anna told that at her preschool, they have staff meetings once a month to discuss preschool matters, and also the expectations and requests from parents, how the preschool can meet their wishes regarding their children, which can be connected to Haug’s (2003) arguments concerning the category service quality.

In summary, it appears that four out of six preschools implement some part in the systemic quality work. How systematically they do it or to what extent, does not appear in the results in our study. It also does not appear in the results if they have a clear purpose in their quality work. Two out of six preschools did not mention any kind of work with evaluation. On the other hand, the informants’ mention their preschool's future plans, but did not seem to take into account what had been done before.

Factors affecting the improvement of preschool quality

Two factors the informants’ mentioned affecting their preschool quality is the country’s standards and the preschool teacher education which are analysed below.

Low and unequal standards

Factors that the informants’ mention as a problem affecting the possibility to create a high preschool quality is first of all the country's standards. It is showed in the result that a majority of the informants’ mention this as an aspect. According to the Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) is the purpose of minimum standards within ECCD to ensure that a minimum of quality is ensured for all children but based on the informants’ statements, they can be interpreted too low. Anna who works at a preschool run by the government tells that she would like to improve the facility to create a better school environment but continue with “it’s not up to us... the administration grant is responsible that building”. By this she opines that higher-level administrative determines the preschool quality, by not changing anything as long as it is within the minimum standards. Elin on the other hand said: "We have to improve facilities [...] Some classes are too small, they haven’t any space to play" and this had been raised to the management and they built a new building to teach in. This could be understood by the National Plan of Action for Children in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Women and Child affairs, 2018) implemented for the years 2016-2020 with specified interventions and budgets. One action is, to in a long term increase the number of ECCD-centres that fulfil minimum standards up to 75%. By the given examples of Anna and Elin, the cause may be that Elin’s preschool didn’t fulfil the minimum standards and where therefore prioritized.

A difference in preschools’ standards can be distinguished between those who are operated by the government and private ones. The two preschools’ that were governmentally operated were also the two who had the most negative opinions about the environment of their preschool that affected the quality of the preschools’. It indicates that they have few opportunities to influence, as long as they are within the minimum standards. The other four preschools were private and did not complain about their standards. Brita expressed herself like this:

We have got above the standards. We are very very in particular though because in Sri Lanka, as you know we are a third world country... and the standards are very very low so that’s why we started this with international standards. - Brita

Thus, it shows that privately-operated preschools have other conditions than the governmentally operated. An explanation for this may be related to preschool fees. In a review it can be discerned that private preschools have more than threefold in fees compared to governmental,
which generates a larger budget within private preschools. So, it appears from this, that the standards within preschools is an economic issue. And what is influencing the governmentally operated preschools are its background. Years of neglect are now being improved and taken care of by the Ministry of Women and Child affairs et. al., but everything has got its price and prioritization is needed.

Deficient preschool teacher education

The second factor mentioned by two informants’, as a problem in creating a high quality of preschool, is about preschool teacher education. The preschool teacher’s education and skills are linked to the quality concept (Haug, 2003; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2016; Vernersson, 2007). It has been presented in the National Educational Commission (2016) that Sri Lankan teacher education has shortcomings in the form of insufficient educational opportunities at university level, as only five out of 17 universities offer teacher education. Furthermore, are these programs are heavily loaded with educational theory component, which contribute to the fact that graduated teachers have a lot of theory but have little or no ability to link it to practice. Frida expressed this about the experience of the country’s teacher education: “what they learn from the courses that are here, is this much” which she means is little and she thinks that higher demands should be made. Educating for preschool teacher has a minimum of one year (The Open University of Sri Lanka, 2014) and what it provides for knowledge and skills can be questioned, when Elin, who has the mentioned education, expressed that she wanted “method to teach”. This may indicate a deficiency within the education. In addition, has the country to low proportion of output of qualified teachers to meet the demand of teachers, which means that a professional qualification is not mandatory for recruiting a teacher.

In summary, it shows that factors like the low minimum standards and the shortcomings in teacher education contribute to difficulties in creating a high quality. In relation to Vernersson’s (2007) study, the requirements, didactic process and outcome/outcomes are important for the quality. The low standards and teacher education affect all aspects of these, such as the fact that facilities are not being improved for the better as long as it’s within the minimum standards, which affects the requirements. The fact that it is not mandatory with teacher training for employment and that teacher training has shortcomings, affects all aspects mentioned by Vernersson (2007). The result of this is that the staff has insufficient or lack of knowledge in exercising the profession. The didactic process is primarily in the danger zone and thereby it affects the results/outcome.
Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this study has been to create a better understanding of how educated preschool teachers view their opportunities to create a quality preschool and also to identify factors that influence the possibilities for this. In this section, significant parts of the research questions results will be discussed.

Preschool quality – A question of interpretation

Based on the results of the study, a positive view can be noticed in the informants’ perceptions of their quality in preschools. This despite major differences from an economic aspect, education and the preschools framework factors, the positive view of their quality is mutual to all preschools. According to Vernersson (2007), the quality concept may contain different values and meanings. Therefore, we want to show that it can be interpreted in different ways based on the view of quality and what you choose to compare it with. If we start with a comparison within the country, you can place it in relation to the country’s background. When the country has a history of a recently completed 26-year-long civil war among other things (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014; World Bank Group, 2014), our interpretation is based on that and in relation to the survey by the National Education Commission (2004), that the country’s preschools have previously been of even lower quality than today. Since the country has grown from a low-income country to a low-middle-income country in recent years, it could, in our view, be a contributing factor to the informants’ positivity. Furthermore, major differences have been observed in the preschools of the study, especially within the requirements (Vernersson, 2007), of us who view the preschools as an independent part. The apparent difference we have noticed, is the learning environment with its physical content in the form of materials available in the informants’ preschools, both indoors and outdoors. Despite this, the result of the study does not show such dissident opinions about their own preschool quality since apparent positive views is shown by the informants on their own preschools quality. If we further compare the quality of the preschools in this study, based on our subjective view, we believe that the quality, with all respect, can be significantly increased in the majority of preschools in Sri Lanka. This is because we compare it to our background and experience within the Swedish preschool context. Based on these arguments, it is clear that the quality concept is difficult to interpret and can imply differences depending on who interprets it. Our conclusion is that, because the quality concept can be interpreted so differently, it needs something to relate to, something that can support the measurement of quality, to know what to measure and perhaps also reference levels.

Quality-enhancing actions under progress

Quality work within ECCD-centres is something that is implemented both nationally and at each individual preschool. The minimum standards (National Child Protection Authority, 2017) is a part that the nation has contributed to, which on one hand was perceived negatively by the majority of the informants’ in the study, as they are too low in their opinion. But on the other hand, we mean that it contributes to requirements, which means that preschools’ which are under the standards must improve to the right level. All newly registered preschools have the requirements of the minimum standards (ibid.), which in the long run will raise the standards. According to the background, the nation has evaluated the ECCE-system and analysed which implementations that need to be done and also made a budget for both short- and long-term goals (Children’s Secretariat, 2018; Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, 2018). The aim is to raise the quality, to achieve the target “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education” (UNDP, 2015a) founded by 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, at the individual preschools in the study, four out of six performed some part of SQDW, which we consider to be positive, as this could contribute to an enhanced quality in preschools. Our experience from a Swedish context, is that SQDW is an important part to be implemented at all preschools, as it is stated in the curriculum for preschools’. The purpose of SQDW is to obtain
knowledge about the quality of the preschool and how it further can be developed, so that all children are given the best conditions for development and learning (Skolverket, 2012). However, research shows that educators in preschool experience difficulties in implementing and carry out this work (Brodin & Renblad, 2015; Insulander & Svärdemo Åberg, 2017; Sheridan, William & Sandberg, 2013). We believe, this is also the case with the informants’ in this study, that the lack of sufficient methods as well as the knowledge of why it should be implemented is missing. However, we can see a positive attitude among most of the informants’, wanting to develop their preschools to make a change for the children. One conclusion we draw against this background, is that the nation is well aware of the quality issues and of what actions that are necessary to implement. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011), it can be seen as an important part as national regulatory framework better can level up, by implementing different overall decisions than individuals can do. On the other hand, it is unclear how well informed and involved staff in preschools are in this work. This is something that could be further investigated, as preschool staff are those who will implement the changes and can make crucial differences in quality, in preschools today.

**Absence of national curriculum affect opportunities for equal preschool quality**

The country has several deficiencies that affect the quality of preschool, to work towards achieving the overall goal quality education and underlying target that comprises that all children should have access to quality early childhood development, pre-primary and primary education, so that they will be ready for primary school (UNDP, 2015a).

One of the deficiencies is the country's lack of a national curriculum. However, in mid-2018 a draft of a new National Policy (Children's Secretariat, 2018) was published, where one of the strategies is to promote the development of a national curriculum. Working towards a curriculum is significant, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011), with the aim of strengthening positive effects on children's learning that can ensure a more even level of quality. The purpose is also to provide staff guidance on how to support the children in their learning. The informants’ mention that they work towards a curriculum in their work, however, they are individually designed at all preschools in the study. According to our interpretation, this contributes to the fact that the level of quality is regulated only within the individual preschool, which in turn, results in unequal quality at preschools across the country.

Brodin and Renblad (2015) raise in their research, Swedish preschool teachers’ perceptions that the curriculum has raised the status of their profession. Frida, one of the informants’ in the study, mentioned the preschool teacher’s low status in society, which we can link to the low demands on competence necessary for the profession. Currently, the preschool teacher education system and the competence requirements to be a preschool teacher appear to have a low basis, according the background and it is also verified in the results. We critically question the knowledge that these preschool teachers can receive during a year, which is the only requirement posed to entitle themselves as qualified preschool teachers. What competence have been received, to further generate good conditions for children's learning? Based on our experience, the teaching profession status in Sweden has been raised, not only from a social perspective, but also from the preschool teachers view of their own profession. This only in recent years, when the revised curriculum for preschool was introduced in 2010, which clarified the preschool teacher's responsibilities and assignments. Our conclusion is that a national curriculum could provide many aspects of positive influence for the country's preschools, both because of the fact that it can clearly guide the preschool teachers in their work and that it also can lift the preschool teachers’ own views and the importance of their work. This in turn, can generate good conditions for the teachers, to create high quality preschools. Another aspect is that a national curriculum can be a decisive factor in regulating the quality of all preschools, to create more equal relationships between preschools, because all preschools have the same steering document as a basis.
Final conclusions

The aim of the study is to create a better understanding of how six educated preschool teachers’ view their opportunities to create a quality preschool and distinguish factors that affect their work to raise their preschools quality. Based on the results, a better understanding has been created about the preschool teachers’ own perceptions of preschool quality and what they do to raise the quality. The teachers’ show a positive view of their preschool quality and commitment to their assignments. However, it turns out that quality can be interpreted differently and should therefore have a clearer framework in order to create equality between preschools. Furthermore, preschool teachers implement elements such as parts of SQDW, which could contribute to a high quality. However, the lack of knowledge and methods seems to ensure that these implementations do not get the best conditions for developing quality in preschool. Factors that affect quality work in preschool are another part of the aim with the study and based on the result and background, deficiencies have been discovered. One conclusion can be drawn to the fact that there are overall deficiencies within the ECCD-system that affects, which the country must change in order to create equal quality among all preschools. It is a long-term work the country has in front of it, which has just begun. Therefore, our final question is, will Sri Lanka succeed in improving preschool quality by 2030, so that the Sustainable Development goal of ensuring that all children have access to a preschool of quality is achieved?
References


Appendix 1: Missive letter

Ayubowan!

We are two students from Umeå University in Sweden who do an exchange at the University of Colombo for 12 weeks. In January 2019 we will graduate as a preschool teacher at Umeå University.

The reason we contacted you is that we are interested in hearing your opinions and thoughts. We conduct a study and the purpose of our study is to gain an understanding of how preschool teachers look at quality in their preschool and find out about factors that affect it. In total, we will conduct 6-8 interviews at various preschools in Colombo.

For your information:

You may choose to cancel the interview at any time and choose to refrain from answering a question without justifying why.

Your identity is anonymous in the study and you will not be able to discern the individual’s answers. During the interview recording will be made. However, it will only be used for our purpose at work and then deleted.

When the study is complete it will be published on a Swedish website for student essays.

The interview is preferably conducted between 22-26 October. We adapt to your possibilities. The interview takes approximately 30 minutes.

Please notify us if you can participate in our study.

If any questions occur, e-mail us.

Anna Sundin xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@hotmail.se
Angelica Engdahl xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@hotmail.com
Appendix 2: Interview guide

• How long have you worked here and what education do you have?
• Number of employees and their education?
• Number of children and age in the group?
• Cost of child / month?
• Management? (private, organization, government?)
• How is the pre-school funded?

• What do you think of, when you hear the word quality?
• Can you tell me about your preschool.
  - What do you think is good?
  - What do you want to improve?
  -What could be better / is bad / are you unhappy with?
• Do you do something to improve your preschool?
  - What? How are you doing?
  - Continuity?
• Do you use any kind of evaluation / development tool / method to improve your preschools quality?
  - How do you use it? Continuity
• Do you feel that you can influence the content and activities of your pre-school?
  - How?
• Do you feel that you can influence the structure of your preschool?
  Such as facilities and control documents, child composition.
• Is there anything you would like to change in order to improve the quality of the preschool?
  - What obstacles/difficulties affects?
• If you were to start your own preschool, what would be the most important for you?