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Quality Education with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) No. 4: Teacher Perceptions in Sri Lanka

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Background: Quality education is central to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all. In Sri Lanka, there is a growing policy emphasis on knowledge-based education that fosters critical thinking and creativity rather than rote memorisation. Understanding teachers' perceptions of this educational shift is essential, as teachers play a pivotal role in translating policy into classroom practice.

Objective: To explore teachers' perceptions of implementing knowledge-based education aligned with SDG 4 in Sri Lankan senior high schools and to identify perceived barriers and recommendations for effective integration.

Methods: A qualitative study design was employed in selected senior high schools across urban and semi-urban areas in Sri Lanka. The study population consisted of high school teachers, with a purposive sample of 25 participants (52.0% female; mean teaching experience 12.3 years). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, and thematically analysed using NVivo software.

Results: A majority of teachers (84.0%) supported the shift towards critical thinking and project-based learning, citing increased student engagement. However, 68.0% highlighted unequal student access to digital tools as a major barrier, and 72.0% noted gaps in digital literacy. Most teachers (80.0%) expressed concern that current assessment practices remain focused on memorisation rather than evaluating analytical skills. Teachers identified strong leadership and continuous professional development as essential supports for successful implementation. Teachers are generally positive toward knowledge-based education but recognise systemic challenges, including access disparities and outdated assessment methods.

Conclusion: Targeted investments in teacher training, educational infrastructure, and assessment reform are recommended to advance SDG 4 objectives and improve equity and quality in Sri Lankan education.

Keywords: Curriculum, Equity, Teachers