

CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS FOR CREATING A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND WELCOMING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND PREVENTING SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the current situation of building educational environment, the current situation of school violence in early childhood education institutions in Vietnam; identifies subjective and objective causes of that situation; and identifies favorable and unfavorable conditions. On that basis, the authors propose the following 06 solutions to improve the quality and effectiveness of creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in Vietnam's early childhood education institutions: Review and adjust policies relating to the establishment of a safe, healthy and welcoming educational environment in education institutions; Raise awareness and develop the capacity of administrators, teachers, and staff in early childhood education institutions to create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment; Incorporate and combine content and knowledge about ensuring a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment, as well as the prevention of school violence and gender-based violence, into educational programs; Effectively manage and implement activities to create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in early childhood educational institutions; Improve the conditions of facilities and teaching equipment to ensure safety, health, and welcoming ness; Increase cooperation among schools, families, and the community.

Keywords: Educational environment; safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment; school violence; early childhood educational institutions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study is the product of a state-level scientific project (code: KHGD/16-20.ĐT.015) under the National Science and Technology Program for the period 2016-2020 titled "Creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in early childhood and general education institutions to meet the requirements of a fundamental and comprehensive renovation of Vietnam's education". At the same time, the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences conducted a study on gender-based violence against early childhood children in early childhood institutions with the assistance of Unicef Vietnam. An important component of the research is assessing the current situation of gender-based violence against children in early childhood institutions as a foundation for initially proposing solutions to improve the situation of gender-based violence against early childhood children, with the

goal of creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in early childhood educational institutions.

School violence is a major issue in early childhood education institutions, seriously affecting the quality and effectiveness of child care and education; and the causes can be traced back to a variety of sources. Children in early childhood institutions are victims of the consequences and negative effects of school violence. Preventing and ending school violence is a shared task of many different educational forces (schools, families, and society), with early childhood education institutions regarded as the core and pillars of school violence prevention and cessation. As a result, creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment has been identified as the optimal solution, incorporating the benefits and eliminating the limitations of practical solutions in the spirit of taking the good and the positive to control and attack the bad and the negative, and being sustainable and long-lasting.

2.0 SOME DEFINITIONS

2.1 Educational Environment:

The educational environment can be viewed at various levels and scopes. When considering the structure of the educational environment, the educational ecosystem (Janice Maitland, 2011) is used as the primary reference. Bronfenbrenner's educational ecosystem recognizes the influence of a set of constituent educational environments on a child's holistic development (at the heart) and emphasizes that child development does not occur spontaneously and is only effective when children interact/communicate with constituent educational environments on a regular and extensive basis. The following understanding of the educational environment from Decree 80/2017/NĐ-CP on a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment to prevent school violence is used in this study: The educational environment refers to the physical and mental conditions that influence learners' educational, learning, training, and development activities (Government, 2017).

2.1 Safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment

When reviewing and evaluating the educational environment in educational institutions, the study of research documents reveals that the basic approach is based on Children's Rights, focusing on four basic rights groups: the right to survival, the right to be protected, and the right to develop and participate. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes the cross-cutting viewpoint that "every child is unique" and has an equal right to an education, regardless of level or ability. As a result, it is the school's responsibility to create a learning environment in which every child is cared for and respected. The authors agree that a safe, healthy, and welcoming school education environment is understood as the optimal school cultural environment, where its members are protected and supported, and always feel close to one another, where learners are treated with respect and equality, and where learners have the opportunity to participate, educate, and develop in a comprehensive way (Le Van Anh, 2013).

3.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND WELCOMING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL

INSTITUTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Educators have long been interested in the impact of the environment on the development of human personality in general. The first typical example is the study of Kenloc - USA (1923), Pavlov I.V, Skinno B. F...The authors all came to the conclusion that environmental factors in education not only contribute to the formation and development of human personality but more importantly, that actual environmental factors have stimulated people to be more active and creative (Janice Maitland, 2011).

The school environment includes the physical environment and the psycho-social environment. The physical environment encompasses all physical factors concerning the location of teaching activities, such as the spatial structure, building blocks, and general conditions of the school, the arrangement and layout of supplies, equipment, facilities, materials in service of teaching, and the workplace of teachers and students in classrooms. According to Kyriacou (1991), "the overarching appearance of a classroom will show students an interest in creating an environment that encourages their learning" (Ta Quoc Tri, 2014).

The psycho-social environment of the classroom, the most important of which are the interrelationships between teachers and students, between students and classmates, and other people who participate in the teaching process, such as students' parents, school staff, and scientists... The importance of the social environment in the learning process is explained by L.S Vygotsky's interaction theory: "Learning awakens so many internal developmental processes that are only possible when the child interacts with people in its environment and cooperates with its friends", (Do Ngoc Khanh, 2014).

According to a study conducted by Helen Patrick et al., children in classrooms with mutual respect between teachers and students have effective learning methods and high confidence in their ability to learn and complete their homework (Timothy C. Clapper, 2010).

4.0 STRUCTURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND WELCOMING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The structure of a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment consists of two components, the physical environment, and the psycho-social environment.

The physical environment is a safe and welcoming physical environment and space: including campus, school gate, school nameplate, fence, garden, walkway, green trees, slogans and posters; Shared building blocks, rooms, and classrooms; Systems of sanitation, electricity, water, fire protection, and other construction works. Teaching equipment, school stationeries, toys in each room and classroom are safe and stimulating development (Pham Minh Hac, 2013).

The mental environment or psychosocial environment is safe, healthy, and welcoming, including Collaboration with families, communities, and stakeholders. The mental environment protects and supports learners, allowing them to feel confident, close, and

attached to one another while demonstrating mutual trust, respect, and love; Learners are encouraged and given opportunities to express themselves, as well as actively participate in educational and training activities, in order to develop their qualities and competencies in a comprehensive way (Pham Minh Hac, 2013).

4.1 Characteristics of a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment

Through the school educational environment, students acquire the cultural values standards of the society set forth as educational goals in order to form and develop personality qualities for learners, such as respect knowledge, respect discipline, living responsibly, respect commitment, self-respect, honesty, compassion, solidarity, tolerance, fairness, cooperation... The educational environment at the school is formalized and developed based on science, practice, and discipline management requirements(Vu Thi Kim Thanh, 2013).

The educational environment is portrayed as rich, diverse, and creative, owing to the fact that, in addition to meeting general regulations, it is also dependent on the specific natural and social conditions of the locality where the school is located, it demonstrates its own identity because it carries the socio-cultural identity of the country, region, ethnicity, locality... The educational environment is a social institution, with the primary and distinguishing interpersonal relationships being those between teachers and students, between colleagues (teacher and teacher), and between friends (student and student). The relationship between students and teachers, teachers and teachers, and students together are "channels" through which each member, particularly students, can absorb cultural values through the mechanism of "learning" or "imitating"; "practice" or "experience" to form new and normative skills, attitudes, beliefs, and values already present in the collective (Do Ngoc Khanh, 2014).

5.0 RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODS

The assessment results presented in this article are research findings that were organized and deployed in three provinces: Thai Nguyen, Nghe An, and Dong Nai, which represent the three regions of North, Central, and South Vietnam, respectively. In this study, the authors used a combination of the following research methods:

Theoretical research entails searching for, collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing secondary data from reports of state management agencies (Ministry of Education and Training; Departments/Divisions of Education) in the context of early childhood education in general, and a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in particular.

Method of actual observation and statistics from Education data on the issue of creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment at preschools in three selected provinces.

Method of surveying the educational environment in early childhood educational institutions using the GGA scale (SEL-oriented early childhood educational institution evaluation scale of the Asia-Pacific region); surveying through questionnaires on the issue of creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment at early childhood educational institutions in three provinces: Thai Nguyen, Nghe An, and Dong Nai. The collected data will be aggregated, cleaned, analyzed, and evaluated.

Method of interviewing subjects, directly and indirectly, related to the issue of creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in three provinces (including leading experts in the field of Early Childhood Education, educational administrators of the Ministry of Education and Training; Departments/Divisions of Education and Training, and preschools). The interview was made up of open-ended questions.

Delphi method: The authors used this method to consult leading experts in the field of Early Childhood Education, educational administrators of the Ministry of Education and Training; Departments/Divisions of Education and Training, and preschools.

Descriptive statistics method (calculate percentage) combined with inferential statistics and other research methods.

6.0 RESULTS OF THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE CURRENT SITUATION OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTIONS

6.1 Results of the assessment of the educational environment using the GGA scale

Table 1: Assessment of the educational environment in early childhood institutions using the GGA scale in the three surveyed provinces

No.	Aspects and contents	Average score/early childhood institutions in the provinces			Average/base score
		Thai Nguyen	Nghe An	Dong Nai	
I	Physical environment	2.8	2.2	2.7	2.6
II	Educational program and pedagogy	2.8	2.7	2.8	2.8
III	Educator and child care staff	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.3
IV.	Collaboration with family and the community	2.6	2.5	2.8	2.6
V	Children with special needs (Children with disabilities, defects, diseases, risks ... causing retardation, or talents, geniuses...)				
	Not rated because early childhood institutions do not have this service				

Note: Average score/index divided by levels: less than 1.80 points: Poor; from 1.81 to 2.60: Weak; from 2.61 to 3.40: Medium; from 3.41 to 4.20: Good; from 4.21 to 5.00: Very good

As a result, with the exception of children with special needs (which cannot be assessed because this service is not available), the remaining areas are rated as medium. Whereas

teachers (administrators, early childhood teachers, and child care staff have the highest average score, the physical environment and coordination with family and the community have the lowest. Thai Nguyen and Dong Nai have the same average scores in four areas and are higher than Nghe An.

6.2 Assessment of the educational environment's safety, health, and welcomingness in early childhood institutions

The results of the assessment through the questionnaire for administrators and teachers show that

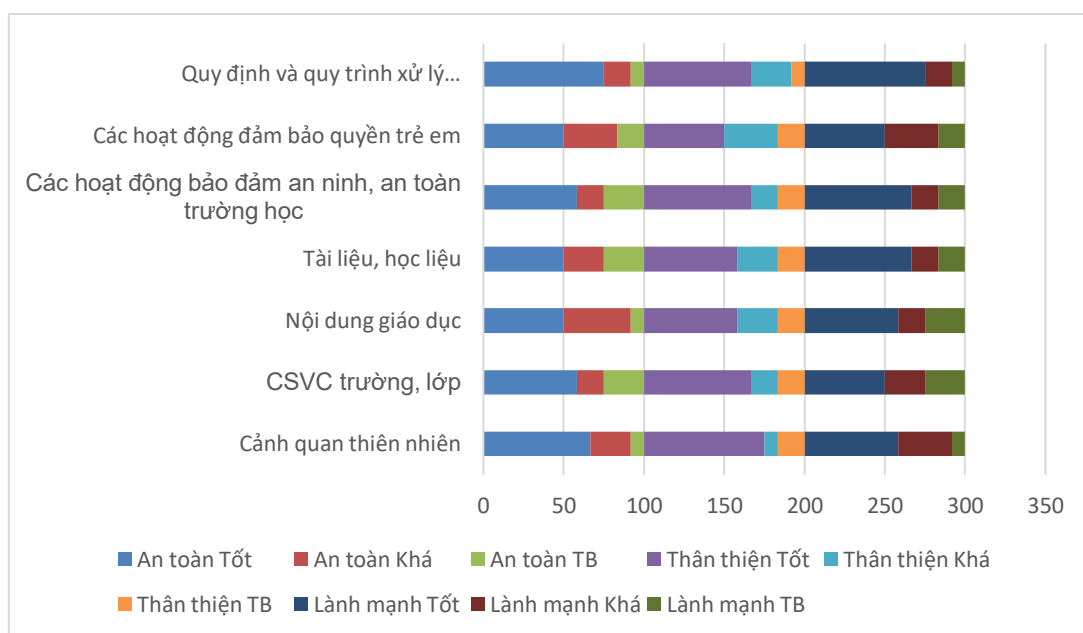


Chart 1. General comments on the educational environment's safety, health, and welcomingness in early childhood institutions.

When comparing the results of the assessment of the educational environment using the GGA scale to the results of the assessment using the questionnaire for principals and the reports of administrators at all levels, there is a clear difference: administrators at all levels mostly rate it as very good and good, while the GGA scale only rates it as average. The physical environment (natural landscape, facilities) is rated higher by administrators, while educational content, learning materials, and activities of children's rights assurance are rated lower. The educational program and pedagogy (Program, content, pedagogy, use of tools, materials, learning materials, and assessment of children's development), on the other hand, are rated higher than the physical environment on the GGA scale. Actual observations show that administrators and teachers continue to face numerous challenges in developing and implementing activities to protect children's rights in early childhood institutions, particularly for children with special educational needs.

Actual observations and surveys of teachers and parents show that early childhood education in educational institutions is not truly safe, healthy, and welcoming for children, and there is

evidence that violence against early childhood children and gender-based violence still exist, namely:

Some children also displayed signs of being uncomfortable, unhappy, and even crying at school, as well as a lack of confidence and a lower likelihood of participating in activities, as a result of: insufficient sleep time in comparison to the needs of a growing body (reported by 36.1% of teachers); lack of integration when attending groups and classes (reported by 69.5% of teachers); shyness (reported by 44.4% of teachers);

Children's physiological needs are not being met: Children are still forced to eat all of their meals - 62.2% of teachers agreed that "by all means, make the children eat at the proper time and complete the meal according to the prescribed portion and regime"; 27.3% of teachers agreed that they had not performed daily physical hygiene for children on a regular basis; 6% of teachers frequently do not have enough time or handling skills, so children are prohibited from using the restroom during operating hours. When children are unable to control their personal hygiene, 14.5% of teachers criticize and punish them. With children with high motor needs, 49.4% of teachers used measures to limit their movement, such as facing the wall, forcing them to hug the teacher's legs, or sitting next to the teacher.

Children face discrimination based on their ethnicity or behavior. Some children are ridiculed by other children when there is a difference: dress, hair, personality, deformity, ethnicity, family situation, etc. (reported by 16.6% of teachers). Some children are given nicknames based on their differences (gender, shape, disability, etc.) (reported by 20.6% of teachers); 28.3% of teachers agreed that "teachers and parents must take measures to prevent children from contracting and making friends with children who talk nonsense/argue/fight"; 8.9% of teachers agreed that "teachers and parents must take measures to prevent children from contracting and making friends with children whose relatives are delinquent, mentally ill or socially ill";

Many children are distracted and neglected in the classroom - 46.1% of teachers agreed that they had difficulty supervising, ensuring safety, and meeting the needs of all children in the class on a regular basis. 6.6% of teachers agreed that they did not have time to be close to children, meet their needs, or exchange feelings with them.

Children's achievements are frequently compared to those of other children - 6.7% of teachers agreed that "frequently comparing achievements among children will help children strive for higher achievements"; 17.2% of teachers allowed other children to make fun of the one who was making mistakes.

In terms of development, boys and girls are not treated equally - 54.4% of teachers agreed that "boys and girls should be educated differently from an early age to form different gender orientations."

Teachers instill prejudice in children - 10.5% of teachers admitted to instilling prejudice in naive students; 76.7% of teachers reported that when something unusual occurred, the teacher and the entire class immediately thought about which child or group of children was responsible. 45% of teachers confirmed that there were children who the teacher and friends always trusted to assign work or play with.

Children are abused inside and outside of school - 12.2% of teachers agreed that “reprimanding and punishing children is also an effective educational measure”; 5% of teachers reported that there were times when older children or adults from other locations entered the group or class and the teacher did not notice or detect them in time; 13.3% of teachers believe that their only responsibility is to protect children within groups and classes; 14.4% teachers did not intervene when one child was bullied by another child or a different group of children on a regular basis; Children are victims of domestic violence, but despite knowing this, 11.1% of teachers refuse to intervene because they believe that “each family has its own way of caring for and educating children; if the child behaves inappropriately, parents can blame, scold, and hit the child. Teachers and others should refrain from interfering.”

Children still have to witness adult-on-adult violent acts - 8.9% of teachers believe that witnessing or experiencing violent acts will have no long-term impact on a child's personality development.

Children are still abused and sexually abused by adults (hugs, kisses, caresses, touches the child's private area), by other children (actions/games that imitate the bodily sexual behaviors of other children) - 5.6% of teachers believe that such expressions are not concerning (of which 13.3% of teachers in Dong Nai).

6.3 The number of early childhood cases of unsafety and child abuse handled by all levels:

According to the results reported by three provinces: In terms of accidents and injuries, there were 24 children (Dong Nai) in 2015-2016, 20 children (Dong Nai) in 2016-2017, and 21 children (Dong Nai, Nghe An) in 2017-2018, with one child abused by her/his teacher. These accidents primarily occurred among groups of children attending private schools and groups of children attending independent private schools in industrial zones (Thai Nguyen Department of Education and Training, Nghe An, Dong Nai, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Inadequate awareness of children's rights and inadequate responders to ensure children's rights in early childhood education institutions, as well as a lack of awareness of the forms and manifestations, objects, causes, and harms of violence against children, are the root causes of gender-based violence against children. Some teachers still have gender-based prejudices and stereotypes; lack of knowledge and skills to ensure safety and prevent gender-based violence; lack of ability to observe and comprehend the characteristics and risk factors of child abuse in order to develop an effective child prevention/protection plan; have no idea how to use positive discipline in the classroom.

6.4 Difficulties in implementing and creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment to prevent school violence at early childhood educational institutions

In addition to advantages such as the direction of the management levels (promulgation of documents directing the implementation, additional support for equipment status, facility conditions, inspection and supervision of the implementation); and parental and community support in the care and education of early childhood children, early childhood educational institutions still face challenges in creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment and preventing school violence: The management and direction of non-public

early childhood educational institutions in the area continue to have many shortcomings, and the situation of violence against children has not been thoroughly controlled; The main source of funding is spending on capital construction, there is a lack of consistent funding to invest in building an educational environment in early childhood educational institutions. There is no department in every school that supports, counsels, and provides psychological support to teachers, parents, and students. Traffic is inconvenient at some schools in highland, remote, and extremely difficult areas and the mountainous terrain complicates and delays investment and delivery of materials for construction, repair, and creation of environmental landscapes. Due to limited physical facilities, cramped classrooms, a large number of children, and insufficient hygiene standards for utensils, water, and discharge systems, many early childhood educational institutions do not have separate toilets for boys and girls, making it difficult to monitor and prevent the risk of gender-based violence; and there are no references to support teachers in terms of gender education for early childhood children... (Thai Nguyen Department of Education and Training, Nghe An, Dong Nai, 2016, 2017, 2018).

7.0 SOLUTIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTIONS TO CREATE A SAFE, HEALTHY, AND WELCOMING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND TO PREVENT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

According to reports from the Department of Education and Training, education divisions, and participating preschools, 100% of respondents highly valued the authors' solutions in terms of necessity and feasibility appropriate to local characteristics, which include:

Solution 1: Review and adjust policies related to creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in educational institutions, the most important of which is the publication of a system of evaluation standards and criteria for a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in early childhood educational institutions.

Solution 2: Raise awareness and develop the capacity of administrators, teachers, and staff in early childhood education institutions to create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment.

Solution 3: Integrate and combine curriculum content and knowledge about ensuring a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment, as well as the prevention of school violence and gender-based violence.

Solution 4: Effectively manage and implement activities in early childhood education institutions to create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment, with a focus on capacity-building activities for administrators, teachers, and staff.

Solution 5. Improve the facilities and teaching equipment to ensure safety, health, and welcomingness.

Solution 6. Strengthen cooperation between schools, families, and the community.

8.0 COMMENTS

In comparison to previous research findings on the issue of school violence, the research team believes that the situation of school violence in early childhood has significantly

improved for a variety of reasons. However, despite numerous efforts from many sides (state management agencies, preschools, early childhood teachers and families, parents), school violence continues to occur. In such cases, a comprehensive solution for creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming environment in early childhood educational institutions should be proposed. The research team believes that this proposal will integrate the synergistic and unidirectional strength of the forces involved in early childhood education, such as state management agencies, preschools, early childhood teachers, and families, who can repel and eliminate the school violence that is currently occurring in Vietnam's preschools.

8.1 limitations and directions for further research:

The research team was only able to conduct surveys and investigate the current situation of school violence in three provinces representing Vietnam's three regions due to subjective and objective reasons. This scope is insufficient and does not adequately represent cities and mountainous provinces with a high proportion of ethnic minorities and the poor. Furthermore, the research team only looked at the current situation of the educational environment and school violence, and did not look into other issues that may have an impact on the creation of a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in early childhood educational institutions. In terms of research methods, the authors have not used many other complementary methods, the descriptive statistics are sketchy and there is no data set on creating a safe, healthy and welcoming environment in early childhood educational institutions.

In the future, it is possible to conduct research with a survey sample on the current situation of creating a safe, healthy and welcoming environment in large early childhood educational institutions in different areas; to research and evaluate the impact of various factors (e.g. policy and legal systems) on the quality and effectiveness of creating a safe, healthy and welcoming environment in early childhood educational institutions.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Basically, early childhood educational institutions in the provinces of Nghe An, Thai Nguyen, and Dong Nai have created a safe, healthy, and welcoming environment, and the school campus has greatly improved over the previous year. Administrators and teachers have been concerned about ensuring the safety of children when they go to school, but there are still issues that need to be addressed in the care and education of children at educational institutions as well as at home, such as perspectives on how to care for and educate children to create a safe, healthy and welcoming educational environment for children; Identifying and preventing violence and abuse; issues of gender equality and gender safety. During the implementation process, educational institutions continue to face difficulties and barriers that must be removed by the education sector's management and related ministries and agencies. Creating a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in every school should be closely linked to the educational environment of Family and Society.

9.1 Policy implications

For the Government, other ministries, and branches: An interdisciplinary coordination regulation should be implemented in order to manage and create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment; Investing in preschool facilities in underserved areas

should be done with caution; Invest in funds to purchase preschool supplies, toys, and teaching equipment. Ensure that early childhood education institutions have an adequate number of teachers and staff in accordance with regulations. The Ministry of Education and Training continues to coordinate with the Ministry of Home Affairs to submit to the Government for approval the sufficient and timely number of payrolls (contracts) in accordance with Circular No. 06/2015/TTLT-BGDĐT-BNV dated March 16, 2015, regarding regulations on the list of job position frameworks and norms on the number of people working in public early childhood education institutions.

For the Ministry of Education & Training: Advise on mechanisms and policies to meet the development needs of early childhood teachers; Obtain specific guidelines and policies on prevention of school violence and gender-based violence in early childhood institutions. In particular, policies should focus on removing obstacles to teachers' professional activities, such as minimizing overload in early childhood education institutions to assist teachers in reducing workload and pressure so teachers have time and health to care for children, creating and maintaining a safe, healthy, and welcoming environment as much as possible; reducing working hours, improving knowledge, improving professional qualifications, and increasing income to reduce redundancy.

For local government: Implement inter-sectoral coordination regulations to create a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment in the locality. Local governments are involved in the creation of a safe living environment as well as the prevention of school violence and gender-based violence. There should be good coordination between schools and localities in terms of propagating, mobilizing, monitoring, intervening timely, and strictly dealing with those who commit acts of violence and gender violence against children, teachers, and school staff, as well as those who cause disruption, disorder, and compromise school security.

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