

**PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT PRESCHOOL
TEACHERS REGARDING PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION
AND TRAINING OF BANGLADESH**

by:

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is at this moment declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, Except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Perception of Government Pre-School Teachers Regarding Pre-primary Education and Training in Bangladesh .

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1. The source of the population: Government preschool teachers.
2. Does the study involve (yes, or no)
 - a) Physical risk to the subjects (No)
 - b) Social risk (No)
 - c) Psychological risk to subjects (No)
 - d) Discomfort of subjects (No)
 - e) Invasion of privacy (No)
3. Will subjects be informed about (yes or no)
 - a) Nature and purpose of the study (yes)
 - b) Procedures to be followed (yes)
 - c) Physical risk (N/A)
 - d) Sensitive questions (yes)
 - e) Benefits to be derived (Yes)
 - f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study (yes)
 - g) Confidential handling of data (yes)
 - h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved (N/A)
4. Will Signed verbal consent be required (yes or no)
 - a) From study participants (yes)
 - b) Will precautions be taken to protect the anonymity of subjects? (yes)
5. Check the documents being submitted herewith to the Committee:
 - a) Proposal (yes)
 - b) Consent Form (yes)
 - c) Questionnaire or interview schedule (yes)

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Abstract

The universal development of a child, encompassing physical, language, and social-emotional growth, is closely linked to participation in pre-primary education, which enhances school readiness. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding children along this path. Unfortunately, this sector is overlooked by authorities, resulting in pre-primary education teachers not receiving adequate training. The duration of pre-primary education also significantly impacts a child's development. This qualitative study explored the perception of government teachers regarding pre-primary education and training in Bangladesh where 16 teachers participated in In-depth Interviews. Findings showed that all participants were aware of early learning and child development in the pre-primary age group. They emphasized the importance of a play-based pre-primary curriculum for early learning and acknowledged the relationship between pre-primary education and school readiness. Teachers knew the government's plan for two years pre-primary. They also mentioned that the duration of pre-primary education and the number and quality of teachers' training are related and highlighted the importance of training to ensure learning. However, teachers lack access to quality training, negatively influencing children's learning and development. The study suggests improving capacity-building courses for the teachers of pre-primary schools.

Keywords: Pre-Primary; Teachers; Training; Learning and Development; Perception.

Dedication:

This thesis is dedicated to my daughter Sudeshna Chhoya and son Supratik Aujhar, who inspired me to pursue my MSc. in ECD despite all my difficulties.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| ECD | Early Childhood Development |
| PEDP | Primary Education Development Program |
| ECCD | Early Childhood Care and Development |
| GPS | Government Primary School |
| MoPME | Ministry of Primary and Mass Education |
| MoWCA | Ministry of Women and Children Affairs |
| NCTB | National Curriculum and Textbook Board |
| DPE | Directorate of Primary Education |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children Emergency Fund |
| NGO | Non-Government Organization |

Chapter I: Introduction & Background

Introduction:

Pre-primary education is a significant intervention initiated by the government of Bangladesh under the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). This essential program aims to foster the comprehensive development of young children and serves as the initial gateway to formal schooling within the government's framework. In 2010, Bangladesh's Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) proposed a yearlong pre-primary education program for children aged 5 and above. Before this, the DPE endeavored to provide pre-primary classes in government primary schools, commonly called "Shishu Class" (Baby Class). However, due to the lack of age-appropriate learning materials and limited classrooms, the initiative faced challenges in achieving long-term effectiveness. In response, the government introduced pre-primary education in the Primary Education Development Program-2 (PEDP-2, 2004-2011). More recently, the government of Bangladesh expanded pre-primary education, starting in 2010 under PEDP-3 (2011-2017).

The period from birth to eight years is unequivocally recognized as early childhood (UNESCO, 2006). Research clearly demonstrates that care and education in these formative years equip children with a significant cognitive advantage, foster positive social adjustments during adolescence and beyond, enhance family dynamics and parenting practices in adulthood, and contribute to reducing social inequality throughout life (Ou & Reynolds, 2004). The Dakar Framework (2000) asserts the necessity of both care and education in promoting the holistic growth, development, and learning of young children. Early Childhood Education, or Pre-Primary Education (as termed by DPE), is critical for effectively preparing children for the next level of education (NCTB, 2011).

In 2013, the Government established "The Comprehensive Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development," which the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs adopted to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds, receive the security, dignity, and care they deserve. The Government of Bangladesh prioritizes the education sector to achieve Education for All. It is committed to providing one year of pre-primary education through the regular primary education system. Various national and international NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) facilitate these essential pre-

primary activities, reinforcing the government's dedication to early childhood development.

Rashid and Akkari assessed and elucidated the policy, quality, and impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bangladesh. They pointed out that, more than half of the pre-primary teachers across all types of pre-primary service providers had received some form of teacher training, with 35% specifically trained in pre-primary education [6]. According to the Country Report on Early Childhood Care and Education in Bangladesh, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) formulated a National Pre-primary Education Curriculum, and the teaching-learning program commenced in January 2014. In Bangladesh, there are a total of 649 teachers' training centers, with the government operating 536 of these centers. The government has 1603 trainers in Primary Training Institutes (PTI) and Upazilla Resource Centers to provide teachers' training. NGOs have 226 trainers, and other projects have 35 trainers. NGOs have established a regular supervision system for this training, and supervisors have also undergone training. The government conducts this supervision through Upazilla Education Officers. A total of 68,200 trained teachers are supporting pre-primary education in 88,225 centers. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has trained 40,915 teachers, the Early Learning for Child Development Program (ELCDP) has trained 8,731, and NGOs have trained 23,193 teachers [37].

Since 2014, the government has taken significant steps to improve the quality of education by organizing training programs for PPE (Pre-Primary Education) teachers. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has successfully implemented 15 days of specialized Basic Teacher Training for these educators. The expansion plan for PPE clearly states that this training is vital for enhancing teachers' understanding of early grade teaching and fostering a child-friendly learning environment. However, numerous reports reveal that many trained teachers fail to effectively apply the knowledge gained from their training in the classroom. This shortcoming prevents them from making a meaningful positive impact on children's education.

Preschool teachers are required to possess a bachelor's or undergraduate degree. Upon selection, they must complete a mandatory 15-day "Basic Training Course for Preschool Teachers," where they acquire essential knowledge in joyful teaching methods, children's psychology, and play-based teaching strategies. This training

includes both theoretical and practical elements and is conducted by trainers designated by the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), a government-run institution.

After finishing this training, teachers step into their roles at the pre-primary level. After six months of teaching, they are then enrolled in a 1.5-year Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd) course at the Primary Training Institute (PTI), also overseen by NAPE. The DPEd course entails one year of theoretical studies followed by six months of practical experience. Upon successful completion, teachers are rigorously assessed through various exams and evaluations. The DPEd certificate is conferred by the Institute of Educational Research (IER) at the Faculty of Dhaka University. Importantly, teachers who have already completed a Bachelor of Education (BEd) prior to starting their teaching careers are exempt from the DPEd course.

It is crucial to note that while the 15-day training is designed to equip teachers with vital skills for effectively engaging young learners, the current outcomes demonstrate significant room for improvement.

British Council also arranges professional development training for teachers. Selected teachers from nominated English-medium schools can avail themselves of this opportunity. It basically offers the teachers relevant training on “Learning English Language” in an effective way. British Council also works with the government to train the teachers of government schools under various projects. However, they do not have any special training or program to train preschool teachers.

The DPEd program was implemented in all Primary Teachers Training Institutes (PTIs) in Bangladesh from 2012 to 2017. One of the main aims of the program was to enhance teachers' foundational theoretical and practical knowledge, thereby ensuring that their attitudes and skills reflected professional commitment and competence.

In Bangladesh, a professional degree is not mandatory to have a professional degree to be employed as a teacher. Candidates with certain qualifications/degrees in general education can participate in the job recruitment process. Formulating a national policy for training primary school teachers with input from all relevant parties, including teachers, students, PTI trainers, trainees, NEP, IER, DU, and other educational agencies is essential. The DPEd program should be restructured in alignment with the new

educational policy, curriculum, and textbook evaluation system. Without this measure, Bangladesh's current approach to primary teacher training will continue to disappoint people.

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), in collaboration with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and various non-governmental organizations, has developed a 15-day training manual for primary teachers. This training, rolled out in three phases, aims to enhance teachers' capabilities in managing classrooms and addressing students' diverse needs.

The government of Bangladesh has created 37672 additional posts of assistant teachers, namely PPE teachers, for each Government Primary School (GPS) to implement a quality universalized PPE program (PEDP3). The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) recruited 34,895 assistant teachers and completed 15 days of special basic teacher training during the PEDP3 period (ASPR, 2016). This study will explore pre-primary teachers' perceptions regarding pre-primary education teacher training, including challenges in pre-primary education teacher training, and identify necessary support to enhance teachers' professional skills.

Statement of the Problem

The DPED was launched in all Primary Teachers Training Institutes (PTIs) in Bangladesh “between” 2012-2017. A major goal of the DPED program was to develop basic theoretical and practical knowledge about the teaching profession so that teachers' attitudes and abilities could reflect professional commitment and competencies. However, there are concerns about the quality of training provided by the DPE and its potential impact on teachers' classroom practices. At the pre-primary level, teachers teach students without having much pedagogical training. But the pre-primary period is the most important of a child's entire education. Teaching needs at this level are therefore highly complex and challenging. How can untrained teachers do this job properly? They need to be introduced to various theories of learning and teaching techniques. They need intensive training to achieve the competencies of the right teachers.

By the National Education Policy, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education has established 37672 positions for assistant teachers, specifically for pre-primary

education, in each government primary school in Bangladesh. Between 2012 and 2015, the government recruited new pre-primary teachers who underwent 15 days of specialized training before being appointed and assigned to each government primary school (ASPR, 2015). Ensuring the provision of quality pre-primary and primary education in Bangladesh presents a significant challenge. Despite a primary school enrollment rate of over 97.93%, the dropout rate within the school system exceeds 20.4% (APSC, 2015).

Bangladesh has made significant progress in establishing pre-primary education and enrolling children in pre-primary settings in the early years. Despite various interventions for quality implementation of pre-primary education (PPE), improving its quality remains a daunting challenge. A lack of skilled trained teachers is one of the main issues affecting PPE quality (Islam et al., 2016).

Pre-primary education is important for children's early-age learning to complete this changing world and ensure better communication for young children. It also argued that in government schools in Bangladesh, there is insufficient play-based learning material and teacher specialization training which hinders the provision of lessons properly. Teacher training is essential for the successful implementation of a new curriculum. In Bangladesh, a new curriculum for teaching literacy and numeracy to 4+ and 5+-year-old students was introduced in 2024. The government has initiated some short-term workshops to support this new lesson plan, however, these workshops, which provide only 15 days of basic training, are not adequate for teachers working in pre-primary classrooms.

A specific quantity of subjects has been designated at each level from pre-primary to Grade 12 to develop competency in the ten prescribed learning areas. The pre-primary stage serves as a preparatory phase for children's future learning. During this stage, children will practice learning multiple subjects together in an integrated way instead of learning them separately. An interdisciplinary approach has been adopted to enable learners to acquire core competencies and skills while not increasing the content pressure. Emphasis has been placed on experience-based learning to make the learning effective and enjoyable, allowing for the acquisition of competencies in multiple

subjects through the same learning activities (National Curriculum Framework 2021-Pre-primary to Grade 12, pp. 33-34). As per this framework, curriculum dissemination training has been organized with varying capacities, which is insufficient to fully enhance the teachers' performance.

Purpose of the study

The study aims to gain a better understanding of pre-primary education and teacher training in Bangladesh. It will focus on teachers' perceptions of pre-primary education and the challenges they face related to their training. Pre-primary education (PPE) training helps teachers emphasize child development and play-based learning, highlighting its positive effects on early childhood care and student progress in government primary schools in Bangladesh. Therefore, this research aims to emphasize teachers' understanding of early learning and development, while also examining ways to enhance their skills within the context of Bangladesh, particularly concerning the government's pre-primary initiatives. Improving teachers' training is expected to foster a more enjoyable learning environment in preschools.

Significance and Justification of the Study

The role of pre-primary teachers is crucial in providing high-quality universal pre-primary education. The Bangladesh government has established one of the largest pre-primary and primary education systems globally, with over 17.5 million children enrolled (ASPR, 2016). There has been significant progress in pre-primary education, with the gross enrollment of children in any form of pre-primary education increasing from 23% in 2009 (MTCS, 2009) to 84% in 2016 (Islam et al., 2016).

According to available information, 56.6% of these children are enrolled in GPS and NNPS, while the remaining 43.4% are enrolled in NGO and privately run schools. However, the Education Watch (2013) report revealed that the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) at the age of five was 52.5%. In 2015, there were 1.62 million children enrolled in pre-primary settings in GPS and NNPS, which was more than double the enrollment in the PEDP3 base year of 2010.

The ASPR (2016) indicated that almost 100% of GPS and 91% of NNPS are implementing pre-primary education. In 2015, the total enrollment in pre-primary settings was 2.86 million in educational institutions run by the government, NGOs, and the private sector (ASPR, 2016).

The percentage of Grade-1 students with pre-primary education experiences increased from 50% in 2012 to 96.1% in 2015 (DPE, 2016). To provide quality pre-primary education, teachers need to know basic information on child development, as it helps deal with pre-primary education more effectively. Primary school teachers who have received early childhood teacher training perform better in classroom practices (UNESCO, 2007). Therefore, it is understood that early childhood teacher training contributes to students' comprehensive development (Akhter, 2012).

This study aims to evaluate the training given to pre-primary teachers and its implementation in their classrooms. The research will take a rigorous approach to explore aspects such as teachers' knowledge and skills acquired from basic and other training and the obstacles they encounter when they apply their knowledge and skills in pre-primary classrooms. The findings of this study will help teachers become more aware of their teaching methods and assist teacher trainers in identifying areas for improvement. In other words, the findings will help to identify measures to improve pre-primary education teachers' training to implement the PPE curriculum effectively. Furthermore, there is a lack of research regarding teachers' perceptions of pre-primary education and training in Bangladesh. The research will thus fill the knowledge gap.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the perception of the government preschool teachers about pre-primary education and training in Bangladesh?
2. What is the perception of these teachers about the challenges regarding pre-primary education teachers' training?

Operational Definition:

Pre-Primary Education: This refers to the early stage of education for very young children, aimed at bridging the gap between home and school environments. At this

level, children's motor, socio-emotional, and cognitive development takes place, providing a smooth transition into primary school.

Teachers: In this study, teachers are dedicated educators who support children's achievements in preschool. Their multifaceted role includes imparting knowledge, caring for each child individually and collectively, and acting as caregivers.

Education Training: Pre-primary teacher training assesses teachers and their implementation in classrooms. It takes a rigorous approach to explore aspects such as teachers' knowledge and skills acquired from basic and other training, as well as the obstacles they encounter when applying their knowledge and skills in pre-primary classrooms. Pre-primary teacher training helps identify measures to effectively improve pre-primary education for implementing the PPE Curriculum.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review is organized into several sections. A variety of research articles were examined based on materials found on relevant websites. This review will have both a national and international focus. The sources include international case studies, synthesized information from global sources, and studies conducted by worldwide agencies, all with a particular emphasis on early childhood and primary education, particularly regarding training.

1. Children's Learning and Development of Pre-school Education

Children's early learning and development are largely shaped by parents and teachers. School readiness can support children's initial stages of learning and development (UNICEF, 2012). Developmental psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that children construct knowledge through personal experience, learning independently and driven by innate curiosity. Piaget's theory posits that children's cognitive development progresses in distinct stages, with the Preoperational stage (ages 2-7) being the early childhood phase. In this stage, children begin forming connections between events, though they may not fully grasp cause and effect. Characteristics of the Preoperational stage include animism, artificialism, egocentrism, symbolic functioning, centration, irreversibility, curiosity, and seriating (Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020).

Educators must take the initiative to familiarize themselves with children and actively monitor their progress during both preschool and primary school stages (Kutluca Canbulat & Tuncel, 2012; Yaman, 2010; Güven, 2012; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Erkan, 2011a; Harman & Çelikler, 2012; Özgan & Tekin, 2011). High-quality education in preschool classrooms is critically linked to enhanced cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes for children. Banu (2014) emphasizes that Thao and Boyd (2014) demonstrated that teachers who adopt child-centered beliefs and implement effective pedagogical practices consistently achieve superior learning outcomes for their students. This principle is further endorsed by numerous other scholars (Coleman, 1966; Filters, 2001; Jesper & Rivkin, 2002).

2. Pre-school Education

2.1 Historical Synopsis of Pre-Primary Education

Literature reveals that modern pre-primary education emerged in the 19th century across Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, where it took various forms such as kindergarten or nursery schools (Kamerman, 2006). Early pre-primary programs prioritized not only education but also the health and well-being of children. These services were provided by public, private, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). UNESCO has advocated for free primary and pre-primary education globally (UNESCO, 1961). Kamerman (2006) also noted that the Dakar and Jomtien declarations were pivotal in promoting universal education, with an emphasis on the rights of children to early learning opportunities and legal protections. Rates of pre-primary enrollment differ significantly across regions (Shahjamal & Nath, 2008).

In the United States, the demand for pre-kindergarten programs emerged in the 1980s, spurred by the increasing need for daycare as more mothers joined the workforce. This trend intensified during World War II when women assumed roles in factories as men went to war. Initially, daycares provided safe spaces for children, but over time, these facilities evolved into preschools dedicated to both caregiving and foundational education (Marks, 1943, as cited in Cross, 2008).

Bangladesh achieved its independence in 1971. Following this milestone, the first education commission– the Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission– established in 1974, focused on early childhood education, setting four primary goals for pre-primary education. Building on these principles, the government introduced the “National Education Policy 2010,” which advocated for pre-primary education starting at age 5, with plans to extend this to include children aged 4 and above.

Since the late 1990s, various foreign and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Save the Children, BRAC, GSS, Care Bangladesh, Plan International, Action Aid, FIVD, CARITAS, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, and BSS under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), have played a pivotal role in advancing early childhood development (ECD) in Bangladesh.

Recognizing the importance of quality education, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) established a standardized curriculum and educational materials for pre-primary education. In June 2011, the Ministry of Primary and Mass

Education (MoPME) took a significant step by officially endorsing a comprehensive pre-primary curriculum, ensuring a structured foundation for young learners across the country.

BRAC has a proven track record in education, having launched a functional literacy program in the mid-1970s. Demonstrating its commitment to quality education, BRAC opened ten new schools in 1989 and initially charged tuition fees of 5 to 10 taka. However, upon recognizing the negative impact of these fees on enrollment among poor children, BRAC swiftly removed the charges from its policy. In 2001, BRAC secured government approval to establish a pre-primary school on the premises of a government primary school (GPS), further expanding its reach and influence in early education.

2.2 Pre-school education: Bangladesh Context

Educators play a vital role in children's early learning by closely monitoring and understanding their progress throughout preschool and primary school (Kutluca Canbulat & Tuncel, 2012; Yaman, 2010; Güven, 2012; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Erkan, 2011; Harman & Çelikler, 2012; Özgan & Tekin, 2011). Research indicates a strong link between quality preschool education and enhanced cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes in children. Banu (2014) and Thao & Boyd (2014) highlight that experienced teachers with child-centered approaches achieve significantly better outcomes, supported by findings from Coleman (1966), Filters (2001), and Jesper & Rivkin (2002). High-quality training for pre-primary teachers, underpinned by government support, is essential.

In evaluating Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bangladesh, Rashid and Akkari's study reports that over half of pre-primary teachers have received training, with 35% specialized in pre-primary education. According to the Country Report on Early Childhood Care and Education in Bangladesh, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has been developing a national pre-primary curriculum, intended for implementation in January 2014 that will require all teachers to be trained on this curriculum and early childhood development. Teacher qualifications vary: Government-trained teachers typically hold a Secondary School Certificate (SSC), though some possess less, while NGOs often provide refresher training to keep educators updated.

The 2008 operational framework for Pre-Primary Education (PPE) set a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:30, a target that most government schools struggle to meet. Bangladesh has 649 teacher training centers (536 of which are government-managed), employing 1,603 government trainers across Primary Teacher Training Institutes (PTIs) and Upazilla Resource Centers, while NGOs contribute an additional 35 trainers. NGO-supervised training relies on rigorous oversight, while government training supervision falls under Upazilla Education Officers.

To support the 88,225 preschool centers, 68,200 trained teachers are needed. Currently, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has trained 40,915 teachers, with contributions of 8,731 from the Early Learning Childhood Development Project (ELCDP) and 23,193 from NGOs. Since 2014, government-led initiatives have included a comprehensive 15-day foundational training that enhances early-grade teaching methods and fosters child-friendly environments. However, the effective application of this training remains limited, with some teachers struggling to translate these skills into practice, thus impacting the quality of learning outcomes.

The government has set an educational standard for preschool teachers, requiring at least a bachelor's or undergraduate degree. After selection, teachers undergo a "Basic Training Course for Preschool Teachers" that lasts 15 days, where they learn child psychology, joyful teaching methods, and play-based instructional strategies. This training is managed by NAPE, a government body responsible for primary teacher training. Following this initial training, new teachers begin teaching and, after six months, undertake a 1.5-year Diploma in Primary Education (DPED) through PTIs. The DPED course, also managed by NAPE, combines one year of theoretical study with six months of practical application. This intensive program concludes with exams and assessments, and graduates receive a DPED certificate from the Institute of Educational Research (IER) at Dhaka University. Teachers who already hold a Bachelor of Education (BEd) are exempt from the DPED requirement.

2.3 One-year Pre-primary education in Bangladesh:

Since Bangladesh gained independence in 1971, early childhood education has been increasingly recognized as a vital part of the nation's educational landscape. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission initially highlighted its importance, recommending the introduction of early childhood programs across the country. Later,

the Mafizuddin Ahmed Education Commission of 1988 proposed the addition of “baby classes” attached to government primary schools, as well as an increase in kindergarten and nursery school options. Despite these recommendations, neither was fully implemented.

In response to the growing awareness and demand for early education, the government established an education commission led by National Professor Kabir Chowdhury to develop a comprehensive National Education Policy. This commission’s recommendations led to the adoption of the “National Education Policy 2010,” which called for structured pre-primary education: a mandatory one-year pre-primary program for children aged 5+, with plans to eventually include children as young as 4+. As a result, early childhood development (ECD) programs have expanded, with more institutions offering baby classes, nurseries, kindergartens, playgroups, daycare centers, and religious preschools.

However, a significant challenge persists, as many institutions lack age-appropriate curricula, suitable teaching materials, and supportive learning environments essential for young children’s development.

2.4 Government Initiatives:

The Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA), through the Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA), launched an Early Childhood Development (ECD) project from 2001 to 2005 with technical and financial support from UNICEF and Plan Bangladesh. This initiative aimed to empower caregivers to foster safe, nurturing, and developmentally stimulating home environments for young children. The project successfully raised awareness among key stakeholders on the critical importance of early childhood development and care.

Building on the insights gained from this initial project, the Government of Bangladesh extended the program under the name Early Learning for Child Development (ELCD) from 2006 to 2010, placing particular emphasis on establishing early learning centers for young children. During this period, the ELCD project served nearly one million children aged 3-5 and their families in disadvantaged regions, underscoring the growing commitment to early childhood interventions.

The Islamic Foundation, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, also contributes to early childhood education through its "Mosque-Based Child and Mass Literacy Program." This program operates around 20,000 pre-primary centers focused on religious education combined with basic literacy. However, this approach raises concerns regarding its developmental suitability, as the curriculum may not align with widely accepted early childhood principles.

The National Education Policy of 2010 has further reinforced the commitment to early childhood education by mandating the phased introduction of a one-year preschool program for children aged 5-6. This initiative is included in the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP3), which aims to standardize preschool education across Bangladesh. Additionally, since 1994, the Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) has encouraged the inclusion of "baby classes" in government primary schools. While these classes help children adjust to the school environment, they lack a dedicated curriculum or trained staff focused on early childhood development principles.

Another initiative by PMED, the Integrated Non-Formal Education Program (INFEP) from 1991 to 1997, laid foundational work for ECD by developing a curriculum and teaching materials that reached approximately 63,000 children. Meanwhile, various private and non-governmental organizations have also contributed significantly to early childhood education initiatives, helping to address the growing demand for quality early learning across the country.

Bangladesh has achieved independence in 1971. After independence first education commission namely the "Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission" was formed in 1974 which emphasized early childhood education. The commission described four aims for pre-primary education. In continuation with that government announced the "National Education Policy 2010". This policy also recommended pre-primary education for 5+ (years of age) children and suggested gradual expansion of pre-primary education for 4+ (years of age) children.

In Bangladesh, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is decisively provided by the government, NGOs, and private schools. In 2013, the government rolled out "The Comprehensive Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development," endorsed by the

Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. This policy unequivocally aims to nurture children from all backgrounds with security, dignity, and care. The Government of Bangladesh prioritizes the education sector, actively addressing educational, transportation, communication, and economic factors. Progress at the pre-primary education level is advancing steadily, with a clear commitment to delivering one year of pre-primary education as part of the regular primary education system.

The government strategically targets its pre-primary education initiatives at underprivileged and low-income children in urban centers, rural villages, slums, coastal regions, haor areas, tea gardens, brothels, central prisons, madrasahs, maktabas, and remote hill areas of Chottogram. A comprehensive report from 2012 revealed there were 88,225 pre-primary education centers across the nation, with the government operating 60,965 centers (69%), NGOs managing 23,168 centers (26%), and the Early Learning for Child Development Project (ELCSDP) overseeing the remaining 5%.

Numerous local and international NGOs, including Save the Children, BRAC, GSS, Care Bangladesh, Plan International, Action Aid, FIVDB, CARITAS, and Dhaka Ahsania Mission, alongside BSS under the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, have played a pivotal role in enhancing ECD education in Bangladesh since the late 1990s. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has developed a standardized curriculum and teaching materials for pre-primary education, and in June 2011, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) approved a pre-primary curriculum that sets a benchmark for quality education.

BRAC has a rich legacy in education, launching a functional literacy program in the mid-1970s. After a successful pilot, BRAC opened 10 new schools in 1989, initially charging a small tuition fee. However, recognizing the high dropout rates among poor children, BRAC promptly eliminated these fees from its policy. In 2001, BRAC secured government permission to establish a pre-primary school on the premises of a government primary school, reinforcing its commitment to accessible education.

The significance of early childhood education has been firmly established since Bangladesh gained its independence in 1971. The Quadrat-e-Khuda Education Commission, the first education commission formed in 1974, acknowledged the crucial

role of early childhood education and advocated for its integration into the educational framework. Additionally, the Mafizuddin Ahmed Education Commission, established in 1988, recommended implementing early childhood education in the form of a baby class linked to government primary schools and encouraged the establishment of kindergartens and nursery schools. Despite these recommendations, full implementation has yet to occur.

The government subsequently formed an education commission, led by Honorable National Professor Kabir Chowdhury, to draft a National Education Policy. Based on the commission's report, the "National Education Policy 2010" was announced, clearly emphasizing the necessity of introducing pre-primary education. It mandates the implementation of a one-year pre-primary program for children aged 5 and older, with plans to expand this provision to include children as young as 4.

As demand and awareness for early childhood education soar, numerous institutions are enhancing their ECD offerings through baby classes, nursery and kindergarten schools, playgroups, daycare centers, and religious preschools. However, it is critical to note that many of these institutions currently lack age-appropriate curricula, adequate teaching materials, and conducive teaching environments. Immediate attention to these gaps is essential for the continued advancement of Early Childhood Education in Bangladesh.

Children's Affairs (MoWCA) like 'Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) launched the ECD project with financial and technical support from UNICEF and Plan Bangladesh During the period 2001-2005 to empower caregivers to create safe, secure, stimulating, and enabling environments in home for age-appropriate nurturing of their children. The project succeeded in raising awareness among the key stakeholders of the importance of early childhood development and care. In response to the lessons learned in the ECD project, the Government of Bangladesh extended the project in the name of Early Learning for Child Development (ELCD) for the period 2006-2010 with a particular Focus on early childhood interventions through the establishment of early learning Centers. The project served about one million 3-5-year-old children and their families in Disadvantaged areas during the project period.

Islamic foundation under ‘The Ministry of Religious Affairs’ operates a project named

‘Mosques-based child and Mass Literacy Program’ where this organization runs about 20,000 pre-primary centers. This center’s main aim is to teach religious issues along with some literacy education. Therefore, how much of this initiative may be defined as developmentally appropriate for the child is a big question. The National Education Policy introduced in 2010 stipulates the gradual introduction of One year of preschool for 5–6-year-olds, which has also been incorporated under the Scope of PEDP3.

In 1994, the Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) issued a circular encouraging government primary schools to organize baby classes. However, there were no provisions for employing full-time teachers or providing a regular curriculum to support these initiatives. Essentially, baby classes are intended to help children acclimate to a school setting rather than to follow child development principles.

Another initiative from PMED was the Integrated Non-formal Education Program (INFEP), which lasted from 1991 to 1997 and included provisions for introducing Early Childhood Development (ECD). A curriculum and teaching materials were developed, facilitating ECD activities for approximately 63000 children during this program.

Additionally, organizations under the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA), such as the Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA), launched an ECD project from 2001 to 2005 with support from UNICEF and Plan Bangladesh. This project aimed to empower caregivers to create safe and stimulating home environments for age-appropriate child nurturing. It successfully raised awareness among key stakeholders about the importance of early childhood development and care.

Based on the lessons learned from this ECD project, the Government of Bangladesh extended the initiative under the name Early Learning for Child Development (ELCD) from 2006 to 2010. This program focused on early childhood interventions through the establishment of early learning centers. Approximately one million children aged 3-5 years and their families in disadvantaged areas benefited from this initiative.

Furthermore, the Islamic Foundation, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, operates the "Mosque-Based Child and Mass Literacy Program," which runs around 20,000 pre-primary centers. These centers aim to teach religious topics alongside basic literacy education, raising significant concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the approach for young children.

The National Education Policy, introduced in 2010, mandates the gradual introduction of one year of preschool education for 5-6-year-olds, which has been included in the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP3). Many private and non-governmental organizations are also contributing to early childhood education efforts in Bangladesh. Bangladesh predominantly holds traditional views about preschool education. In Bangladesh, preschool teachers may view children as active participants in the learning process, utilizing their experiences to build knowledge (Banu, 2014).

To ensure high-quality preschool education in Bangladesh, policymakers, educators, teachers, and parents need to change their perspectives. It is most significantly important for teacher's individualism and styles of teaching to help the child to bring them to the school setting (Momen, 2010). Teachers are the most powerful peace corps of any education system. Among the primary school teachers who have received early childhood teachers training do better in classroom practices (UNESCO, 2007).

In the US, Pianta, et al., (2005), in Raikes, 2015 found that effective teachers hold "child-centered" beliefs that emphasize the child's role in decision-making and de-emphasize obedience and adult control. Banu (2014) reported that educators in Bangladesh who had been in the field longer tended to hold traditional views of the quality of preschool education.

Although the national curriculum is based on personality-oriented pedagogy and focuses on learning through play, that is not the case in many preschool classrooms. As in different countries (Banu, 2014; Yamamoto & Li, 2012) teacher's beliefs and perceptions of quality preschool education differ. In Bangladesh, they found out that preschool teachers still believe in textbook-based techniques and rote learning.

In Bangladesh, the National Education Commission 2003 suggested pre-schooling for the age group of 4 - 5 years to ensure quality education at the primary level; but like other developing countries, here also Early Childhood Care and Education programs

are suffered by teachers with low qualifications. Over the past decade, Bangladesh has experienced an upward shift in focus in early-year education planning.

The Government is showing a strong commitment to early childhood education and positioning itself to continue to make this a priority for the country. Develop new pre-primary training programs that support the quick adoption and practical application of play-based teaching practices by trained and newly recruited teachers; Introduce pedagogical improvements for teacher and head teacher training in preprimary.

The quality of later life is influenced by experiences in early life. Engaging in meaningful activities during childhood can set the stage for positive development in the future (Chowdhury and Choudhury, 2002). Pre-primary education presents common challenges for all countries, including curriculum implementation, availability of teaching materials, teaching methods, assessment techniques, classroom space, outdoor space, teacher training, in-service training, parent-teacher relationships, and parental involvement in management (Dibaba, 2016).

Dibaba (2016) highlighted the acute shortage of skilled and knowledgeable teachers, as well as the lack of effective partnerships between parents and teachers. Common challenges include the distance of pre-primary centers from children's homes, the lack of quality teachers, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate classrooms (Mghasse and William, 2016).

Communication with parents is a critical concern for teachers (Hobjila, 2014). Establishing strong relationships between educators and parents is imperative for fostering children's educational success as well as their social and emotional development. Parents must actively share their child's challenges with teachers, and teachers are responsible for clearly conveying important messages and instructions related to each child. A robust connection among the child, teacher, and parents significantly enhances cognitive and socio-emotional development, resulting in improved performance in both home and school settings, as well as in society at large.

In contrast, inadequate parental-teacher relationships can have detrimental effects on children's futures. The current situation reveals serious issues: pre-primary teachers often lack the necessary skills to manage their classrooms effectively, and their communication capabilities fall short when it comes to engaging with parents and cultivating a positive school environment. The challenges stem from insufficient training, a lack of qualified teachers, and misaligned recruitment standards that do not meet the demands of early childhood education. Additionally, policymakers are failing to give the necessary attention to this crucial sector.

2.5 Pre-school Education: The Global Context

In the United States, the demand for pre-kindergarten education emerged in the 1980s, fueled by the necessity for daycare for young children while their mothers worked in factories. This need became even more pronounced during World War II when men were away at war and women stepped into the workforce. Daycares evolved into preschools, providing not just care but also the foundational educational skills that children require (Marks, 1943, cited in Cross, 2008).

A UK study on preschool education effectiveness demonstrates that the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) directly correlates with the qualifications of the staff, their leadership abilities, experience, training, and depth of understanding regarding child development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). This is vital for cultivating children's critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills, as well as establishing a solid foundation in math, reading, and comprehension (Whitebread, 2011). Playful teaching is one effective strategy in this realm. However, many schools prioritize rigid curriculums over the individual needs of children, resulting in an inadequate 'education delivery agency model' (Young, 2006).

Japan established relevant regulations and educational goals for preschool education as early as 1889, underscoring its commitment to the notion that preschool education is essential for sustainable national development. Similarly, Australia makes substantial investments in early years learning, particularly pre-primary education, which has far-reaching effects on academic success, labor market performance, and socio-economic mobility.

3. Capacity Building

The contribution of teachers to early childhood development is non-negotiable; they are the cornerstone of the educational system (Chong and Lu, 2019). Children often regard their teachers with even greater importance than their parents. Therefore, a robust professional conceptualization of pre-primary teachers is imperative, encompassing essential traits such as humanistic values, academic proficiency, technological skills, and socio-emotional insight (Cheung, Keung, and Tam, 2022). Unfortunately, many teachers are currently deprived of adequate professional training and face significant challenges in classroom management. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is essential to ensure effective teaching and learning. All teachers must receive training to remain current with new ideas and technologies. This training is critical, as it directly boosts their understanding of responsibilities, confidence, skills, and performance. Pre-primary teachers, who work with young and special needs children, require specialized knowledge and skills to navigate contemporary educational trends effectively (Olowe and Olujoba, 2016). It is unacceptable that teacher training for pre-primary educators remains largely neglected in our country.

3.1 Professionalism

Professionalism has been defined by various researchers. Osaki (2007) defines "profession" as a term commonly used to describe different occupations in society. Kelly (1995) suggests that the word "profession" is derived from the Latin word "profession," which signifies an announcement or an oath related to religious beliefs. Professional development is a process aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of individuals (Ramey & Ramey, 2008). In early childhood programming, the focus is on comprehending professional development and its role in promoting the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. An emerging concern involves understanding how teachers' professional development impacts student achievement. While studies have examined the attributes of high-quality professional development and its influence on increasing knowledge and improving classroom practices, it remains unclear whether the knowledge transferred to student outcomes is sustained over time or leads to a change in practice (Garet et al., 2008; Wilson, 2009).

They must be well-prepared and supported through training, which should be a top priority (UNICEF, 2009). The knowledge, skills, and practices of early childhood educators are crucial in preparing children for formal schooling and influencing their learning (Martinez, Beck & Zaslow, 2006). Pianta and Hadden (2008) emphasize the need to go beyond a reliance on the credentials or outcomes of early childhood teacher preparation programs to develop high-quality teachers.

Professional learning takes many forms and often includes in-house or on-site training, online modules, lectures, and group activities (Byington and Tannock, 2011). In classrooms, both teachers and students are the main components of the teaching and learning process (Jin, 2011). According to an OECD report, "teachers' beliefs, practices, and attitudes are crucial for understanding and improving educational processes" (2009).

3.2 In-service teacher training

The term "in-service teacher training" refers to all the activities and training sessions necessary for teachers' quality improvement and professional development (Saiti and Saiti, 2006 as cited in Bayrakci, 2009). It involves a series of planned actions to improve teachers' performance or enhance their ability to implement new programs within their work environment. In-service training is a crucial approach to influencing the professional development of teachers and can have a positive impact on their knowledge and teaching quality (Akhter et al, 2011). Teacher training provides teachers with skills and current pedagogy practices to help them connect with, manage, and educate their students to ensure all students are learning and benefiting.

It is assumed that specific knowledge, skills, and competencies are required for ECCE practitioners. In addition, the behavior of concerned practitioners of ECCE service influences depends on their education and training. Hence the education and training of the staff are important policy issues (OECD, 2006). However, not only the qualification of the teachers impacted on achieving child outcomes but also the ability to create a high-quality pedagogic environment makes the difference (Elliott, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009).

3.3 Teacher Training in Bangladesh context:

Rashid and Akkari provide a clear overview of the policy, quality, and impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bangladesh. Their study reveals that over half of pre-primary teachers from various service providers have received some form of teacher training, with 35% specifically trained in pre-primary education (6). Furthermore, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) is actively developing a National Pre-Primary Education Curriculum and teaching-learning package, which will be implemented starting in January 2014. This initiative underscores the commitment to enhancing early childhood education in the country. Here, it is mentioned that all teachers need to have training on the new Curriculum with childhood development issues. NGOs and Government projects have teachers who have different academic backgrounds. Most of the government-trained teachers are SSC (Secondary School Certificate) Qualified; as it is set as a minimum qualification. Few teachers are also qualifying for below SSC. NGOs usually arrange refresher training for their teachers.

In the operational framework of the Pre-Primary Education (PPE) program established in 2008, the government has clearly stated that the ideal teacher-to-child ratio should be 1:30. This standard is frequently surpassed in most government schools. In Bangladesh, there are 649 teacher training centers, of which 536 are under government operation. The government employs 1,603 trainers at Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) and Upazila Resource Centers, effectively supporting teacher training initiatives. Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide 35 trainers through various projects, and they implement a rigorous supervision system for this training, ensuring that supervisors are well-trained. Government oversight is conducted by Upazila Education Officers. Currently, 68,200 trained teachers are actively supporting pre-primary education in 88,225 centers. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has successfully trained 40,915 teachers, while the ELCDP Project has trained 8,731 and NGOs have trained 23,193 teachers.

Since 2014, the government has taken proactive steps to enhance training for PPE teachers. The DPE has executed a comprehensive 15-day special basic training program specifically for these educators. The expansion plan for PPE emphasizes the substantial impact this training has on teachers' understanding of early grade education and the implementation of child-friendly teaching-learning processes. However, it is evident

from various reports that many trained teachers struggle to effectively apply the knowledge acquired during training in their classrooms, limiting the positive effects on children's educational outcomes.

To ensure quality education, the qualifications for selected preschool teachers must include a bachelor's degree or an equivalent undergraduate degree. Once selected, teachers undergo a rigorous 15-day “Basic Training Course for Preschool Teachers,” where they learn essential joyful teaching methodologies, child psychology, and innovative play-based teaching strategies. This training encompasses both theoretical and practical aspects. Trainers for this course are meticulously chosen by the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), an entity overseen by the government that coordinates all essential training activities for primary educators and trainers.

After completing the 15-day training, newly recruited preschool teachers are fully prepared to commence their roles at the pre-primary level. Following six months of teaching experience, they are required to enroll in a Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd) course at a Primary Training Institute (PTI). This DPEd course spans 1.5 years, consisting of one year of theoretical training followed by six months of practical instruction. Conducted by NAPE, the course culminates in certification awarded by the Institute of Educational Research (IER) at Dhaka University. It is important to note that those who have already obtained a Bachelor of Education degree before entering the teaching profession are exempt from the DPEd requirement. Consequently, preschool teachers are not only equipped to teach at the pre-primary level but also possess the qualifications necessary to teach at the primary level.

Chapter III: Methodology

This section presents a concise overview of the research design used for this study. The chapter is divided into various sections:

2.1 Research approach/ design

The research approach or design was qualitative. A qualitative research approach was chosen because this study was carried out to collect, analyze, and interpret data about government preschool teachers' perceptions regarding pre-primary education and training. Moreover, qualitative research is a type of research where the researcher explores the meanings and insights in a given situation using an inductive process. In this type of research, a wide range of data is collected and analyzed using techniques such as purposive sampling and semi-structured open-ended interviews. The proposed study aims to design an exploratory research to understand teachers' perceptions.

Research Participants:

In this research, research participants were government-primary school teachers. These teachers apply their knowledge and skills to support young children's learning and development. Their experiences and understanding regarding pre-primary education and training would be enormously helpful in getting insights regarding the improvement of the capacity-building sessions.

Research site:

This study was carried out in government pre-primary schools in 1 City Corporation of Dhaka. The school as a site has been chosen to enable teachers to answer questions in natural settings. Dhaka Urban was chosen because teachers who are engaged in the pre-schools in Dhaka Urban may possess an improved understanding regarding pre-primary education and training than the teachers from the Dhaka rural areas. Moreover, Dhaka Urban was chosen according to the convenience of the researcher. All the schools that were selected for the study had at least a few years of experience in implementing pre-primary education. It was also expected that teachers in these schools apply play-based pedagogy to support children's learning and development.

Sampling/Participant Selection Procedure

In this study, sixteen pre-primary teachers from three government pre-primary schools in a city corporation in south Dhaka were purposefully chosen. The schools were selected based on specific criteria discussed earlier to align with the research objectives.

Data collection methods:

I conducted interviews with sixteen participants. The interviews explored information from research participants about their understandings and experiences each interview session took around one to one hour and thirty minutes. A semi-structured interview guideline was used which was designed following the research questions. The interviews were recorded using a mobile recorder. Before starting the interviews, following an informal conversation, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants to make them feel free to share their thoughts. After asking all the questions, the session was wrapped up by thanking every respondent and greeting them goodbye.

Data Analysis:

The technique of thematic analysis was followed for data analysis. To do so, first, the responses from the IDIs were transcribed. After that, the data were read and analyzed to get an initial sense of it. Next, the data were categorized into relevant topics, themes, and specific patterns, following a step-by-step process. Lastly, the findings were interpreted by looking for relevant concepts, and consistent themes. The following steps were taken to analyse data:



Ethical issues

It is important to establish the ethical principles of a study to ensure that the research is conducted under clear conditions. Before commencing the study, an email seeking permission to conduct IDIs was sent to the teachers of the selected schools. The email included all the relevant information about the context, purpose, objectives, inclusion criteria, and researcher's profile. Only those research participants who were willing and

interested to participate in the research were chosen for the study. The privacy of all participants was respected, and no personal details were disclosed publicly. It was discussed that if a participant feels uncomfortable answering a question, that participant may skip the interview. Furthermore, if a participant is unwilling to complete the IDI, the participant's wishes will be respected. To avoid influencing the respondents' answers, the researcher did not disclose any prior connection or relationship with the teachers or schools.

Validity and Reliability:

In qualitative research validity means the appropriateness of tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). Tools are prepared based on research questions. The tool was verified by an ECD expert and checked by field test in a nearby school. Researchers asked some same queries in different ways to cross-check the answers. Data are reviewed by different themes and issues. The findings are detailed and all issues are discussed and associated with different literatures. The study recommended some important opinions and ensured trustworthiness.

Limitations of the study:

This study was conducted for a master's thesis as the fulfillment of an MSc in ECD. This research has some limitations as follows-

- Only one city area was covered.
- It was not possible to choose teachers from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- I wanted to explore teachers' practice by following observation method. I have developed an observation guideline as well prior to data collection. However, due to the anti-discriminatory quota movement, government pre-primary schools were closed and when the classes were reopened, it took time to settle down. Therefore, it was not possible to observed classrooms and thus to explore practice.

Chapter IV: Results and Discussion

Results:

The data collected through interviews with teachers revealed findings about their perception of pre-primary education and teacher training for government school settings. The collected data was analyzed thematically, and the themes and sub-themes emerged under scrutiny. The chapter begins with a description of the participants' demographic details and then presents themes with sub-themes.

Teachers' Demographic Information:

Teacher's demographic profiles are examined based on their age, sex, location, and experience in teaching. The age range of the teachers of the study was 28-45 years. Sixteen teachers participated in IDIs. Ten teachers were taken from Bangabhaban Government Primary School, Bangabhaban, Dhaka, four teachers from Nilkhet Government Primary School, Kataban, Nilkhet, Dhaka, and two from Arambag Government Primary School. Both male and female dedicated teachers for pre-primary were found in the study areas. Six teachers had experience of 4 years, four had the experience of 6 years, and two had experience of 7 years. Moreover, four teachers were senior teachers who had 18 years of experience in teaching.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

| Study tools | Teachers |
|-------------|--|
| IDI | Total: 16 Female: 10 Male: 6 Age range: 28-48 years' Experience: 6-18 years |

Findings are analyzed following themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1: Teachers' Perception Regarding Pre-primary Education and Training

Sub-theme 1: Teachers' understanding related to early learning and child development

All the teachers who responded are aware of early learning and child development, particularly at the pre-primary level. They have expressed that early education is very significant for the holistic development of children. Teachers also inform that children should learn to control their impulses, share, take turns, compromise, and express emotions, sit attentively, and behave appropriately in the classroom. Regarding early learning and development, one teacher said,

The early learning and child development path in pre-primary education involves children playing with peers and learning rhymes, literacy, and numeracy through play. They also mimic the behavior and attitudes of teachers or caregivers (IDI#1, August 19, 2024).

Besides emphasizing early learning and development, teachers discovered that children who complete pre-primary are more knowledgeable and socio-emotionally advanced than those directly enrolled in grade one. It is because the pre-primary intervention enables teachers to introduce useful content and apply a range of skills as well as socio-emotional interventions useful for children's holistic development. As a result, teachers now expect parents to enroll their children in pre-primary schools. As a teacher stated,

We expect parents to enroll their children in the pre-primary level, after which they will be automatically promoted to grade one. This will make it easier for us to teach them and provide socio-emotional intervention (IDI#2, August 19, 2024).

Sub-theme 2: Play-based pre-primary curriculum for early learning

All the teachers agree that the play-based approach is very helpful to implement teaching-learning activities at the pre-primary level. They also state that a play-based curriculum supports children to develop physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. However, teachers are not sufficiently ready to merge with these activities due to their lack of professional training. One teacher described her learning and lack of proper training in the following way.

Existing play-based curriculum is very effective for teaching and learning activities at the pre-primary level. This curriculum is suitable for children aged 5-6. However, without proper training, it will not be effective (IDI#3, August 19, 2024)

However, another teacher described the requirement for revision of the play-based curriculum and training.

A little bit of revision is needed to make the curriculum suitable for 5-6-year-old children, and it should be play-based and content-based textbooks. Concurrently, dedicated teacher training is required to execute this process (IDI#4, August 19, 2024).

Teachers also agreed that children's development is essential at this stage (pre-primary). According to them, the home environment alone is not sufficient for ensuring their development. Modern teaching techniques such as play-based learning can attract children towards school and engage them in activities supporting children's development.

Sub-theme 3: Teachers' readiness as well as children's school readiness

"School readiness" refers to the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development needed for a child before starting school. All respondents acknowledge the linkage between school readiness and pre-primary classes. According to teachers, all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and caregivers want their children to control their impulses, share, take turns, compromise, express emotions, sit and listen in the classroom, and behave appropriately. Simultaneously, teacher's readiness is required to start preschool and manage their classes. One teacher stated,

The pre-primary level indeed helps children prepare for their future cognitive, social, and emotional learning. Children learn behaviors, conversation skills, and how to interact with other children, which will help them to perform well in primary grades. In this regard, accelerating these learnings teacher's training is a main concern (IDI#5, 19 August 2024).

Most of the teachers emphasized the need for pre-primary for a smooth transition at the primary level. One teacher expresses his thoughts in the following way:

If children are admitted directly into primary grades, it can be very challenging for them to adjust to the classroom environment with their peers and teachers. Therefore, I recommend enrolling every child in pre-primary school for the betterment of their education. This level is very helpful for children in preparing them for school (IDI# 6, August 19, 2024).

Sub-theme 4: Knowledge of the ideal age to start pre-schools

Most teachers described children's ideal age to start pre-primary schooling. They felt that children should be sent to pre-primary school at the age of 4 years. They realized this younger age was the perfect time to shape children's behavior. One stated that

“As the government two years of pre-primary education, I think it will be more effective and vibrant for the primary students (5 & 6) to keep up their continuous learning. At this age, we can shape the children according to our expectations” (IDI# 7, 28 August 2024).

All the teachers knew that the government was planning for two years pre-primary. Most of the teachers said 4+ years is the perfect age for sending children in the pre-primary section. One teacher stated, *“The decision will benefit the next generation, giving students more time to prepare. It is needed to ensure that teachers are well-trained”* (IDI# 8, 28 August 2024).

After getting the news the upcoming pre-primary is about two years which will be available in the same school, teachers feel that children will improve their concentration and will learn diversity. It will raise team spirit, build flexibility, and boost confidence that will lead the children to be lifelong learners. One teacher stated the curriculum and training as:

“Following the curriculum, pre-primary teacher training is designed to develop teachers' quality, teaching-learning methods, classroom management, maintain special needs children, and focus on children's language and numeracy competency” (IDI#9, 28 August 2024).

Sub-theme 5: Duration of pre-primary education and its relation to the number and quality of teachers' training

The majority of the respondents stated that the ideal duration for pre-primary education should be 2 years, provided that children are ready to enter grade one after six years. They emphasized that the pre-primary stage is fundamental for childhood development. They pointed out that at the age of four, children begin to learn various skills such as physical movement, running, jumping, sharing, and playing in groups. They suggested that addressing these matters would be possible if pre-primary teachers receive more training to enhance their capacity to effectively manage both the classroom and the school playground. As a result, children in pre-primary education will be more active and engaged to do good communication with teachers for teaching learning activities and also help them in socio-emotional development in the future. Then they will fit for grade one when they are six years old. One teacher mentioned,

Pre-primary education is suitable for toddlers because young children cannot handle too much pressure in their learning at that age. Therefore, it is important to enhance the quality of teacher training in various aspects. Without this, it will be difficult to achieve the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (IDI# 10, 28 August, 24).

Maximum teachers expressed their opinions and emphasized in this regard. They felt the importance of pre-primary for the children. Among them, one teacher explained his opinion this way-

If more teachers' training can ensure, that children will get the opportunity to learn essential behavioral needs and the needs for expected numeracy and literacy at the pre-primary level then it will help for the children to smooth the transition to primary grade. It will also be helpful for the teachers to teach the children who complete two years of pre-primary level (IDI# 11, August 19, 2024).

One teacher uttered her feelings that the ideal duration of pre-primary should be three years and should be started from 3+ years of age because children start learning from the beginning of their childhood. This is the perfect time to intervene with them for behavioral learning. And, it is easy to make a bridge with primary students to exhilarate their learning. She stated that:

The longer the duration of pre-primary education may lead to better results for children in the future. In the first year, they will play at the school or center and interact with their peers. In the second year, they will learn rhymes, literacy, and numeracy through play and observe the behavioral attitudes of teachers or caregivers. In the third year, indoor and outdoor play will continue, and they will also be taught letters, words, numbers, counting, and a second language. However, achieving these goals will depend on the quality of teacher training that could be ensured, children need to help dedicatedly engaging class teachers (IDI# 12, August 28, 2024).

Another teacher stated, *"From the starting of pre-primary classes, teachers face a lot of difficulties to manage children should be one year because the children of this age level may not take the load of teaching-learning activities"* (IDI# 13, August 28, 2024)

Sub-theme 6: Teachers' expectations about learning from the pre-primary level and the importance of training to ensure learning

Teachers all expect different types of learning to happen in children at the pre-primary level. Most teachers aim for their students to develop a love for school. In pre-primary, children will learn both Bangla and English letters, numbers, and how to greet. This approach is expected to be beneficial for the students. One of the teachers who is also a parent as well describes her expectations and the importance of teachers' training to ensure learning:

I hope my child and other children will learn how to talk nicely with others in school and the home. I am satisfied with the teacher that she taught general greetings to my child, like good morning, salam, thank you, goodbye, namaskar, sorry, and many more things for general conversation. My child now practicing such little words. Teachers need to be prepared with the necessary skills and techniques by receiving professional training to support children as they learn these basic words (IDI# 14, August 28, 2024).

Theme 2: Teachers' perception regarding challenges related to teachers' training

Sub-theme 1: Teachers' lack of quality training inspirations children's learning and development negatively

All teachers expect their students to communicate effectively from a young age. They also hope that the children will learn to behave well, share, and care for others. Unfortunately, pre-primary teachers often lack specific training in language development and psychology. Consequently, students demonstrate a lack of skills including social-emotional skills. One teacher who is the father of a child expressed his sadness about students' lack of social-emotional skills.

My daughter cannot share her toy with others, I always told her to share toys and tiffin with others but she did not. I think this is alarming for her future, now I expect the teachers to rectify this behavior in the school environment so that she will make herself social and emotional (IDI # 15, August 28, 2024).

Most teachers aim to include subjects such as fine arts, drawing, and music in their class schedules. They organize a class party every month, where children can take part in drawing, music, or dancing competitions. The main focus is to create a joyful and positive environment for the children, so no awards or grades are given for these activities. Additionally, teachers

hope that the government will extend the class duration to cover the morning to afternoon and that the school will provide food for the children. Various types of learning experiences are expected to take place at the pre-primary level, and teachers should be well-trained to carry them out. However, teachers are not getting specific training to manage children by engaging with them emotionally or physically.

The teachers found many problems and they tried to remove the problems but some problems went beyond their capacity. One teacher said: *“In my class, some children cry continuously, I tried to make them happy by giving them toys but sometimes they throw them to other children. This is a regular phenomenon for the initial 2/3 months”* (IDI#16, August 28, 2024). Most of the teachers agreed with the same problem they faced.

Sub-theme 2: Teachers lack basic/in-service training

All the teachers agreed that it is impossible to improve pre-primary education without proper teacher training, which is essential for the overall development of children. They also emphasized the need for basic training for pre-primary teachers. This training will help teachers understand the children, their parents, and their fellow educators. As a result, children will benefit from guided education and support from their teachers. They will also engage in more physical activity, play with their peers, and learn rhymes, letters, and words more effectively.

All the teachers agreed on a common issue, that is in-service training. They felt training is needed to facilitate classes for children. As it is a new batch with younger children, new training is required to continue with them. When children move from pre-primary to class one at 6, they should be ready for transition. Serious pedagogical and psychological training including handling special needs children is necessary for teachers. One teacher mentioned this way-

Sometimes we face difficulty in controlling special needs children, so we need special training to handle special children” (FGD#17, August 28, 2024). A newly appointed teacher expressed the need for basic training and curriculum dissemination to align with teaching-learning activities (IDI# 18, August 28, 2024).

Discussion:

In this section, the findings from the research are analyzed with references.

Theme 1: Teachers' Perception Regarding Pre-primary Education and Training

Sub-theme 1: Teachers' understanding related to early learning and child development

All respondents agreed about the importance and needs of early learning. Teachers thought that early learning helps children to express and control emotions, share things with others, draw attention to the task, and be attentive listeners. Teachers also believe that pre-primary schools are the vehicle of early learning. This is supported by the research that states that children's physical, mental intellectual, linguistic, and socio-emotional development is boosted by ECEC (Early Childhood Care and Education) programs (Maundeni, 2013). Respondent agreed that the pre-primary level is very important for the holistic development of children because this early year is the best time for laying the foundation. Teacher's emphasis on the learning of the children in their early years and said pre-primary schools are the only platform for the ultimate early years learning. Research done by Cheung and Ostrosky (2023) ensured that the learning from early years in preschools mainly engagement in motor activities plays a vital role in developing different skills like physical, cognitive, and social-emotional skills of children. It was also suggested by the World Health Organization, that "Preschoolers should be engaged at least 3 hours in physical activities and the screen time on smartphone, TV, laptop etc, should not be more than an hour" (WHO, 2019). Research also suggests that a favorable environment leads children to learn new things automatically (Herlina, Kristiawan, and Anggraini, 2021; Plumb & Kautz, 2015; Akter, 2012).

Sub-theme 2: Play-based pre-primary curriculum for early learning

This study revealed the need for a play-based curriculum for young children's holistic development. Learning through play is emphasized by all teachers. Teachers also suggested that the existing curriculum for 5+ pre-primary should be a bit revised to fit with the 4+ children and it must be more play-based, after that, they will be sifted for grade one when the age of 6.

Lev Vygotsky, who is considered the initiator of the socio-cultural viewpoint on intellectual growth through play emphasized learning through interaction and play. (Vygotsky, 1978). Play-based learning is mostly practiced in Japan. Preschool teachers in Japan encourage children to be involved in the play according to their interests. Teachers update their play

pedagogy by their understanding, choices, and findings based on practical learning. They set up a play-based learning environment instead of giving force to children to read books.

At the beginning of the 21st century, policymakers and parents put more pressure on children's academic learning instead of play. Children are busy with academic activities from dawn to dusk. Children take extra tuition in the afternoon instead of playing in the ground which becomes harmful to their physical and mental health (Alam, 2022). Alam also found the reasons behind this problem are ignorance of parents, lack of trained teachers, lack of governance, insufficient play materials, and lack of facilities in preschools.

This study found the need for a play-based curriculum and the implementation of the curriculum in pre-primary schools because the home environment alone is not sufficient for the holistic development of children. A healthy environment is required to establish a Communication Bridge between teachers and parents otherwise, children will not benefit from this system.

Sub-theme 3: Teacher's Readiness as well as School Readiness

“School readiness” refers to the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development needed for a child before starting school. Simultaneously, teacher's readiness is required to start preschool and manage their classes. All stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and caregivers, want their children to control their impulses, share, take turns, compromise, express emotion, sit and listen in the classroom, and behave appropriately. Research shows that children learn all the necessary things for school readiness from pre-primary school. School readiness is required for all children to avoid the emotional complexity of the school and classroom. Children's immediate environment including parents, families, neighbors, relatives, and pre-school are the main components for school readiness. Children need little prior knowledge and skills for a smooth transition in primary grades (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004, cited in Pekdogan and Akgul, 2016). Pekdogan and Akgul (2016) in their research in Turkey also found that the children who did not enroll in a pre-primary level like a nursery school or kindergarten, their primary schooling became more difficult than the children who came through pre-primary school. The classroom is not just a space for academic learning, but also a social setting where children learn social skills such as friendship, teamwork, and proper conduct. It is the teacher's responsibility to make the learning environment fun and enjoyable for young children to engage them (Lee, 2006).

In this study, all teachers agreed that the children learn gross and fine motor skills and develop cognitive, physical, and emotional areas at the pre-primary level which helps them to get ready for their primary grade. Teachers also united in the idea of school readiness and also agreed that children learn letters, words, conversation, behavior, and mixing with other children which are pre-requisite for a primary grade. Teachers are asking for modern training so that they can provide their highest effort to accelerate the learning process. Building decent and qualitative citizens requires professional and well-trained teachers.

Sub-theme 4: Knowledge of the ideal age to start pre-schools

The government of Bangladesh introduced pre-primary education in the Primary Education Development Program-2 (PEDP-2; 2004-2011). More recently, the government extended pre-primary education from 2010 under PEDP-3 (2011-2017), implementing significant interventions to scale up pre-primary education with minimum quality standards for universal coverage in Bangladesh. According to the government's decision to introduce two years of pre-primary, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education took important paces to make the initiative successful. 3,214 schools were selected for piloting. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board prepared a play-based curriculum including teaching-learning materials.

As the teachers are government employees besides doing their job in the government primary schools, they know about the government's preparation for pre-primary. For the fruitful implementation of two years of pre-primary, a good partnership of all stakeholders is mandatory. The development includes preparing a favorable environment and learning strategies (Visnjic, 2021).

This study found the expected age of sending children in pre-primary school is 4 + years. Teachers are sensible about the benefits of pre-primary education. They thought pre-primary education was needed for the holistic development of every single child. The duration of pre-primary became important to teachers as well. It is derived from the study that the ideal duration should be 2 years. Like Bangladesh pre-primary section is attached to a primary school in Argentina and they have 3 years duration for the pre-primary level covering children of 3 to 5 years of age (Haque et al., 2013). Different types of pre-primary schooling are available in India and the duration is varied but the age limit of children enrolled in the pre-primary level is from 3 to 6 years (Raja, Banumathi & Thangam, 2011). All teachers realized the importance of pre-primary level in Bangladesh. Toddlers should spend more than one year to make the

foundation stronger. The higher duration may result healthier in physical, language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development for the children.

Sub-theme 5: Teachers' expectations about learning from the pre-primary level and the importance of training to ensure learning

Research demonstrates that the preschool age range is a critical sensitive period for learning. The pre-primary level is an essential preparation phase for future academic success, essentially acting as a “waiting room” for school. During this stage, children unequivocally develop vital skills, values, norms, and forms of socialization while actively participating as co-creators of their development (Visnjic, 2021).

UNICEF (2021) reinforces this in their discussion paper on Child Rights Education for Children Aged 0-6 Years, stating that "children aged 3-6 years are sensitive and receptive; at this stage, they love to learn new things." Moreover, research consistently shows that children who start learning a second language early outperform those who begin later in adolescence (Hu, 2016). The impact of the pre-primary stage on learners' social development and socio-emotional skills is undeniable (Parikh, 2021).

Typically, children acquire listening and speaking skills first, followed by reading and writing (even though the specific order for reading and writing may differ). Language teachers must understand that effective language instruction begins with listening and speaking, with reading and writing introduced later. To tackle these challenges successfully, teachers must receive comprehensive training from the appropriate authorities.

Teacher training is essential for enhancing the professional knowledge and skills of practitioners. Effective training significantly boosts employee productivity, elevates morale, and enhances motivation. Moreover, it is crucial for newly recruited staff to quickly become familiar with the program and learn how to navigate it successfully. To ensure optimal outcomes, training must be impactful.

Recognizing the urgent need for quality education, the government of Bangladesh has established a robust 15-day intensive training program specifically for newly recruited pre-primary teachers. This program is meticulously designed to enhance their knowledge and skills in pre-primary education. It not only delivers essential information but also provides clear, actionable guidance on how to excel as pre-primary teachers and connect meaningfully with young learners. This study decisively evaluates the effectiveness of this training program (Jewel, DPE).

Theme 2: Teachers' perception regarding challenges related to teachers' training

Sub-theme 1: Teachers' lack of quality training influences children's learning and development negatively

Teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is needed to do smooth teaching-learning activities. All teachers need training to update them with new ideas and technologies. Training directly helps to increase the understanding of the responsibilities, confidence, skills, risk management, and controlling capacity arising in any unexpected situation.

The expansion plan (2012) mentioned that pre-primary training has a great influence on the early grade teaching and child-friendly learning-teaching processes. Consequently, the government is very willing to implement PPE training for the teachers working in PPE. Since 2014 the government of Bangladesh has started providing training to the PPE teachers. It originated from different reports that though the teachers have received training on PPE the quality of their PPE classes has not complied with the satisfactory level of standard mentioned in the expansion plan. As a result, the effectiveness of the PPE training for the teacher needs to be evaluated (Effectiveness training-4).

Conclusion

Training plays a vital role in enhancing the expertise and abilities of professionals in the education sector, leading to enhanced productivity, morale, and motivation among employees. Most notably, it assists recruits in getting to know the program and guides them on how to manage it. Nevertheless, the training must be efficient for optimal training outcomes. In light of this, the government of Bangladesh has established a 15-day rigorous training course for recently employed pre-primary teachers to enhance their understanding and abilities in pre-primary education. This training is structured to not just impart new knowledge but also to address the aspects of transitioning into a pre-primary teacher role and managing young students. Teachers' perception regarding pre-primary education and training programs is the focus of this study. The study shows that teachers value pre-primary education and training but there is a lack of access to quality basic/in-service training for teachers. Such lack of training can influence the quality of preschool and the learning and development of children of this age.

Training for teachers is important because training can encourage educators to reconsider their perspectives on young children and their teaching and learning methodologies. Well-prepared teachers play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment within schools for children; thus, appropriate training is both necessary and mandatory. Achieving a desired level of engagement and fostering high-quality child development depends significantly on quality and appropriate teacher training. To ensure a quality teaching and learning process in every classroom, the government has been offering capacity-building training for pre-primary teachers. This study found that while the training has proven effective in many respects, there are areas that require further development.

Recommendations:

The findings of this study shed light on the perception of government preschool teachers regarding pre-primary education and training to support children aged 5-6 years in Bangladesh. These findings would be beneficial for implementers. Based on these results, the following recommendations are being suggested.

- Teachers should receive regular training on new teaching ideas and techniques to ensure continuous professional development.
- Once educators begin their teaching careers, they are indebted to participate in continuous professional development courses to improve their teaching knowledge and skills. These courses cover teaching methodologies, techniques, classroom management, and other important pedagogical topics. Professional training includes in-service and off-site training, seminars, workshops, discussions, conferences, online distance learning courses, peer learning, webinars, and expert consultations. With enhanced knowledge, skills, and confidence, teachers can implement innovative and engaging teaching methods in the classroom.
- Newly hired preschool teachers should undergo a short, basic training program focused on young children to help them better understand their students. The training should cover arts, crafts, music, and physical education. The NAPE (National Academy for Primary Education) and NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) can develop the training program, while the DPE (Directorate of Primary Education) can oversee its implementation.
- Before conducting classes as a regular preschool teacher, a newly appointed teacher needs to join for an Internship with an experienced or expert educator/senior teacher. It will help fresh teachers to gain practical experiences and understand the scenario of the junior classes.
- A motivational program is needed to enhance teachers' mental strength, enabling them to effectively manage their classrooms and students. Teachers can share their perspectives with colleagues from different schools.
- Develop a comprehensive training plan and provide continuous professional development training for pre-primary teachers. After that, regular refresher training can be provided to the teachers within a specific interval so that they can get opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. From the beginning DPE is the sole body responsible for teachers'

capacity development, hence, this body can think of developing the process.

- In harmony with the findings, it is suggested that pre-primary teachers' training needs to be facilitated by qualified specialists and academicians. DPE can come forward to involve the specialist to facilitate the training.
- It is suggested that the existing 15-day training package for the PPE teachers needs to be revised to make it more hands-on. NAPE along with NCTB and DPE can work together to revise the training package.
- Visiting pre-primary teachers, supervisors and other officials at the field and central level can arrange views exchange exposure meetings. It will simplify the best practices in pre-primary education. DPE as the solitary responsible body can think of enterprise the above.
- DPE can think of spreading the results from this study among the PPE officials so that they can start thinking of revising the process for improving PPE in Bangladesh.
- To reflect upon their classroom experiences and learning a monthly or monthly reflection session for the teachers can be arranged. The administrative body at the District level can think of arranging such kind of forum for the PPE teachers.

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Appendix:

IDI Guideline for Teachers

Name:

Age:

School Name and Location:

Sex:

Experience:

1. What is your understanding about the ideal age to start pre-school?
2. What is your understanding about the role of pre-primary education on children's learning and child development?
3. How would you describe the usefulness of pre-primary curriculum?
4. What is your understanding about the duration of pre-primary education? How do number and quality of teachers' training relate to the duration of pre-primary education?
5. How do you describe the importance of teachers' training in relation to ensuring children's learning?
6. What are the challenges regarding pre-primary education teachers' training?

Consent From

Title of the Thesis Proposal: Perception of Government Pre-school Teachers regarding Pre-primary Education and Training of Bangladesh.

Researcher: Moss Nazma Akther

Purpose of the research

I am conducting this research as a part of my Master's Degree requirement from the Institute of Educational Development (IED) - BRAC University. This research aims to explore government pre-primary teachers' perception regarding pre-primary education and training of Bangladesh.

Expectation from you

If you agree, you will be expected to share your perception, views, and thoughts on the above-stated aspect. The interview may take 60 to 90 minutes, depending on your response.

Risks and benefits

There is no risk to you for participating in this study; directly or indirectly teachers, parents, children, and policymakers may be benefited in the future.

Privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality

All information collected from you will remain strictly confidential. I would be happy to answer any of your queries about the study and you are welcome to contact me.

Future use of information

Some of the information collected from this study may be kept for future use. However, in such cases, information and data supplied to other researchers, will not conflict with or violate the maintenance of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of information identifying participants in any way.

Right not to participate and withdraw

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you are the sole authority to decide for and against your participation in this study. Refusal to take part in the study will involve no penalty.

If you agree to my proposal to participate in my study, please indicate that by putting your signature in the specified space below.

Name of the research participant:

Name of the Researcher:

Signature of the research participant:

Signature of the Researcher:

Thank you very much for your cooperation. For any further query, you may contact me at
<nazmahistory@yahoo.com>