

Education Watch 2013
NEW VISION OLD CHALLENGES
The State of Pre-primary Education in Bangladesh



Overview



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New Vision Old Challenges

The State of Pre-primary Education in Bangladesh

Overview of the Main Report

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Overview

A. Introduction and Objectives

Global attention and commitment to early childhood development is recent. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 focused on 'guaranteeing the rights of young children' to *survive*, *develop* and be *protected*. Signing of the Convention by 192 countries demonstrates its worldwide acceptance. Encouraging early childhood care and education (ECCE) the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) stated that 'learning begins at birth'. Ten years later the World Education Forum in Dakar 2000 reaffirmed the importance of ECCE in reaching basic educational goals.

In Bangladesh, good attention is also being paid to early childhood development. Inspired by the Dakar Framework of Action and the six EFA goals, the *Bangladesh Education Watch* group decided to devote this year's report on ECCE. The Group recognized that both *care* and *education* are equally important in early years development. Unfortunately, the issue of *care* did not receive as much attention in policy or practice as received for *education*. Pre-primary education (PPE) is now an important part of the government strategy for education. The government has already approved the national curriculum for pre-primary education and has adopted books and materials, operational framework, expansion plan, GO-NGO collaboration guideline for universal PPE, pre-primary service delivery standard and comprehensive ECCD policy. It is likely that a large expansion of the pre-primary education would take place during the next few years. Globally the main rationale for early childhood education has been in its ability to create a 'strong foundation' for better achievements in future life. Evidences of such achievements have already been seen in various studies

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conducted in developed countries. Globally children's participation in pre-primary education has increased by 46.3% between 1999 and 2010. Most of the increases have happened in low income countries as the high income countries already achieved a high rate. Noticeable rise was seen in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Interestingly in Bangladesh, pre-primary education has functioned in different forms for a long time. At least seven such models could be identified. But the scale and rate of increase over time has been slow until 2008. Mixed results were found on its positive impact in so far as future learning achievement was concerned.

The main objective of *Education Watch 2013* is to create a baseline for pre-primary education provision in the country which would allow monitoring of its future progress. An important aim is also to identify gaps in the current provisions which would facilitate formulation of appropriate policies for future development. The main research questions addressed by *Education Watch 2013* are given below:

1. How has pre-primary education evolved in Bangladesh? What is the present national policy for pre-primary education? How was it formulated? What specific roles were played by various government agencies and the civil society organizations in formulating the policy? Is there a need for a change in the policy?
2. What is the current situation of access to pre-primary education? Has access increased over time? What are its socioeconomic determinants? How the different provisions differ in their approaches, inputs and outputs?
3. What facilities exist in the schools where pre-primary education is provided? What curriculum is followed,

textbooks and materials used and who facilitates learning in the schools? What teaching-learning practices exist in pre-primary classrooms and beyond? What are the views of the parents and teachers regarding the provisions?

B. Data and Methodology

Like other *Education Watch* studies, this study collected new data to explore the above research questions related to pre-primary education in Bangladesh. To see the trends of some of the indicators, previous *Education Watch* databases were used as and when required. Both qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques were used. The quantitative part included two surveys using structured questionnaires: pre-primary school survey and household survey. The qualitative investigation was carried out in a small number of schools and included school and classroom observation and focus group discussions with teachers and parents.

Thirty *upazilas/thanas* were selected from all over the country following a systematic random sampling technique. Of the selected *upazilas/thanas*, 13 were fully rural, two fully urban and 15 mixed. A list of all types of schools in the selected *upazilas/thanas* was prepared and the schools providing pre-primary education were identified. Five top types of providers/schools in terms of frequency were considered for the study which included government primary school, registered non-government primary school (henceforth called non-government school), English-medium kindergarten (henceforth called kindergarten), NGO operated *non-formal* and mosque based pre-primary schools.

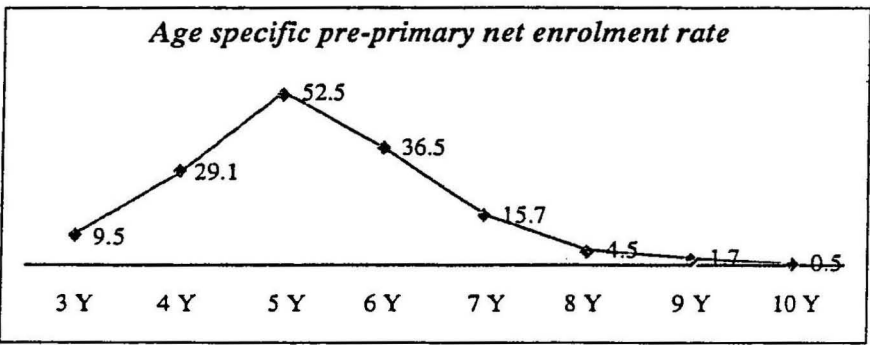
Three hundred schools from each type were randomly selected totalling 1,500. Twelve neighbourhoods from each selected *upazila/thana* and 25 households from each neighbourhood

were selected. Systematic random sampling technique was followed in each selection. Thus the household survey covered 9,000 households. In-depth investigation was carried out in 10 pre-primary schools – two from each of the above five types. These were taken from two of the above 30 *upazilas*. Non-formal category was represented by BRAC schools considering their frequency and scale. The data were collected during May–July 2013.

C. Major Findings

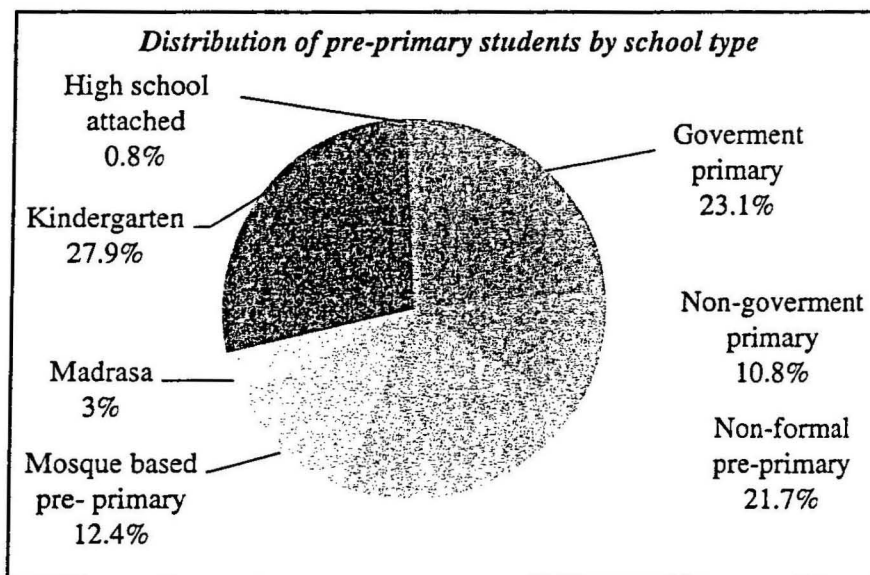
Access to pre-primary education

- The official age for pre-primary education is five years. However, children belonging to a wide range of 3–10 years were found enrolled in pre-primary education. A third of them were of age five, a quarter of age six and about a fifth of age four – comprising 77.6% of total enrolment.
- The gross enrolment ratio at age five was 161.6% which indicates wide variation in age of enrolment. The net enrolment rate was 52.6%. Both the gross and net ratios were higher for urban areas than those of the rural areas. No gender difference was observed. As expected, the socio-economically well-off had higher enrolment rates.



Source: Education Watch Household Survey, 2013

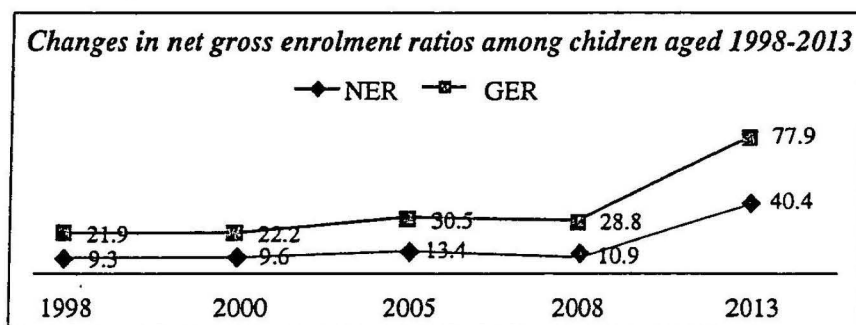
- Kindergartens were at the top of pre-primary education providers where 27.9% of the students admitted. It was followed by the government and NGO operated non-formal schools with 23.1 and 21.7% of the students respectively. Mosque based schools and madrasas received 15.7% of the students. Kindergartens (64.3%) and the government primary schools (19.3%) were the two main providers in urban areas. On the contrary, at least five types of providers could be identified in rural areas. Non-formal schools enrolled 25% of rural students, with BRAC alone claiming 57% of them.



Source: Education Watch Household Survey, 2013

- Majority of the students (72.2%) resided in the same neighbourhoods as the schools, 23.3% in adjacent neighbourhoods and 4.5% came from a further distance. Over 80% of the students of NGO, mosque based, and non-government schools came from the neighbourhoods where the schools were situated.
- A dramatic increase in pre-primary enrolment rate was observed in the post-2008 period. The increase was four

times in net rate and about three times in gross ratio. The increase was uniform for children of both genders and in both urban and rural areas. Unavailability of pre-primary schools close-by and parental unwillingness to admit were the major reasons of non-enrolment in pre-primary education. Many parents preferred late entry in school.



Sources: Education Watch Household Surveys, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2008 and 2013

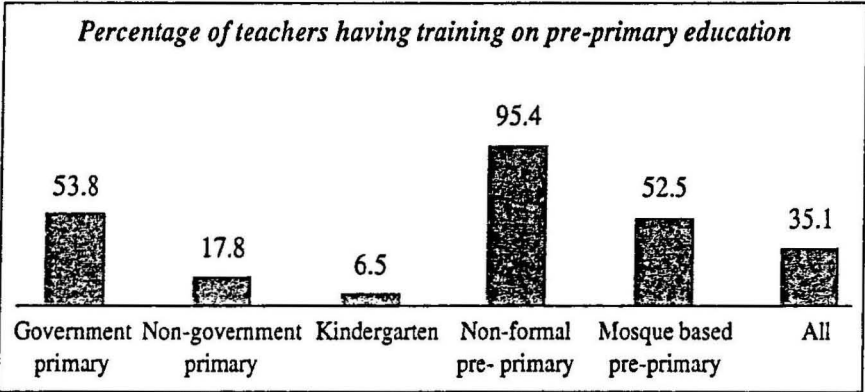
The pre-primary schools

- The first pre-primary class in the study *upazilas* was started as long as a century ago. However, its expansion was very limited until very recently. Of the schools, 11% were established before 2000, a fifth during 2000–2007 and 69% afterwards. Although pre-primary education was very limited in the government and non-government primary schools prior to 2008, over half of the kindergartens, 38.4% of the NGO schools and 30% of the mosque based schools had already established by this time. Nine percent of the NGO schools were located in the campuses of government and non-government primary schools.
- Nearly 15% and 41.3% of the government and non-government primary schools respectively had no separate classroom for pre-primary education. These schools offered pre-primary education along with Grade I in the same classroom, often at the same time. No such case was found in other three types of schools.

- In majority of the cases, pre-primary classes were held in the classrooms; however, school verandas, head teachers' offices, roofs of school buildings, stair-rooms or open spaces were used in 10.8% of the cases. Most of the pre-primary classes in the government, non-government, mosque based schools and the kindergartens were held in rooms/places fully made of bricks or a combination of bricks and corrugated iron sheets. On the other hand, most NGO schools were made of corrugated iron sheets and other raw materials.
- Overall condition of 44.1% of the classrooms was fully satisfactory. Untidy floors with dusts and waste papers were found in 56% of the classrooms. About three-quarters of the classrooms in the government schools and the kindergartens and 84.6% of those in the non-government schools were not tidy. Good natural light and airflow was found in over 84% of the classrooms but electric light and fan was available in only a third of them.
- On an average, the government schools had 1.3 teachers for pre-primary, non-government schools had 1.6, kindergartens had four and NGO and mosque based schools had one teacher each. All the teachers of mosque based schools and 94% of those in NGO schools were fully dedicated to pre-primary education. This rate was below 7% in other three types of schools.
- Two-thirds of the pre-primary teachers were females. Percentage of female teachers was highest in the NGO schools (98%) and lowest in the mosque based schools (25.2%). It was about 70% in government schools and kindergartens and 60.9% in non-government schools.
- Government school teachers were at the top in terms of educational qualification. They were followed by those of

kindergartens, non-government and mosque based schools. NGO school teachers were the most disadvantaged in this regard.

- On an average, 56% of the teachers had any kind of teacher training and 35% had training specifically on pre-primary education. Over 95% of the NGO school teachers, 53.8% of those in government, 52.5% of those in mosque based, 17.8% of those in non-government schools and 6.5% of those in the kindergartens were trained in pre-primary education.

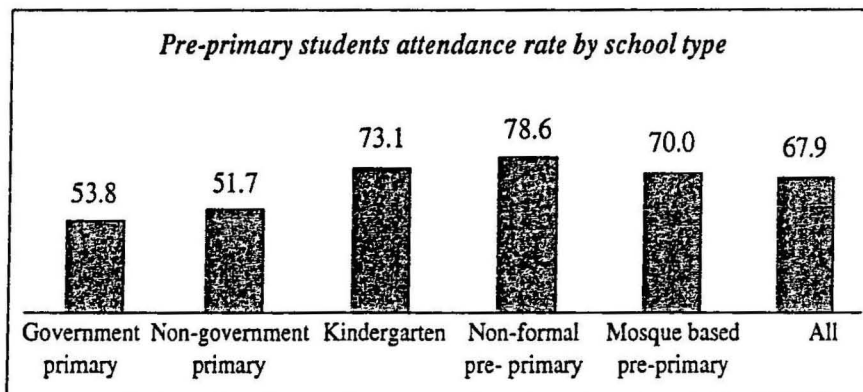


Source: Education Watch Pre-primary School Survey, 2013

- Most of the schools had drinking water facility and 69.5% had sanitary latrines. In majority cases, these were common to all students (pre-primary and primary) which sometimes created difficulty for the pre-primary students considering their age and height. Age and height appropriate drinking water facility was found in 38.3% of the schools and toilet facility in 59% of the schools. First aid box was available in 37.2% of the schools.
- Various kinds of seating arrangement and seats were found in pre-primary classrooms. Students sat in rows in 71% of the classrooms, U-shaped in 10.3%, in small groups in 14.2% and in large groups in 4.5%. They sat on benches in 55.3% of

the classrooms, on mats in 27.5% and on floors in 12.5% of the classrooms. NGO schools students sat in small groups on jute or plastic made mats.

- On an average, 28 students were registered per class. The attendance, on average, was 19 students or 67.9%. The attendance rate was highest in NGO schools (78.6%) and lowest in non-government schools (51.7%). The government schools had 52.5%.



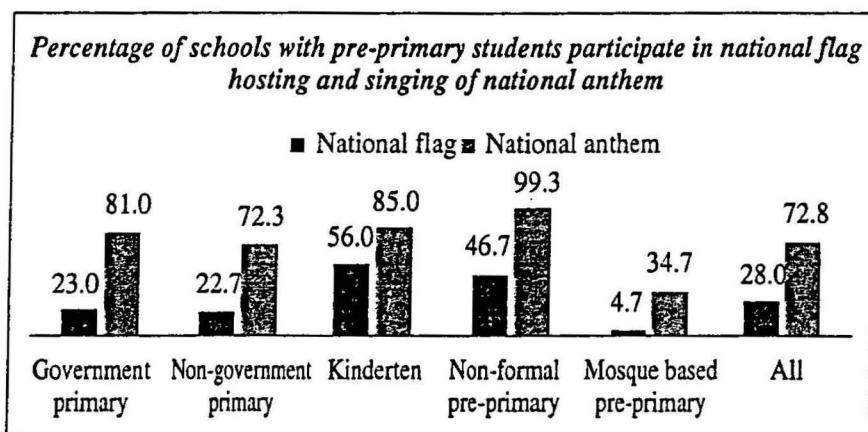
Source: Education Watch Pre-primary School Survey, 2013

Curriculum related issues

- In the absence of any curriculum and fixed textbooks from any central authority the pre-primary education providers used different types of textbooks published by various publishers. Overall, 912 book titles published by 418 publishers were used. Major variations were found in the kindergartens followed by the NGO operated non-formal schools and the non-government schools.
- Not all the schools had adequate educational materials – 53.3% had charts, 35.8% had toys, 34.3% had physical exercise items, 28.5% had drawing items and 11.9% had singing, dancing and drama related items. Thirty-nine

percent of the schools had none. Hoisting of national flag and singing national anthem are important parts of a school's culture and rituals. Students of 72.8% of the schools participated in singing national anthem and 28% in national flag hoisting. Two-thirds of the schools had provision for physical exercise. In each case, NGO schools were ahead of others and the mosque based schools lagged behind.

- Provision of homework was found in 69% of the schools. Eighty-eight percent of the schools had various forms of student assessment starting from classroom assessment to half-yearly and final examinations.
- Substantial school-wise variation was observed in the daily contact time which ranged from 45 minutes to 4.30 hours. Highest variation was observed in the kindergartens and lowest in NGO schools.



Source: Education Watch Pre-primary School Survey, 2013

- When the head teachers were asked to state their opinion on curriculum, teaching materials, physical facilities and teachers' quality based on their own experience, only a third provided opinion on all four issues indicating lack of awareness among the school heads. Shortage of teacher and their training, inadequate physical facility and teaching

materials were mentioned by over a third of the teachers. Only 42.3% gave curriculum related opinions.

Teaching-learning provisions in schools

This part came from qualitative investigation carried out in 10 schools – two each from government, non-government, kindergarten, non-formal and mosque based category. As mentioned earlier BRAC schools represented the non-formal category due to their highest frequency.

- Most of the surveyed pre-primary schools were not well endowed with adequate physical facilities. This included classroom size and availability of other needed spaces. Mosque based schools did not have any specific classrooms and used verandas for teaching. Classrooms, where available, were not learning friendly and sitting arrangement was inappropriate considering age and physical growth of the students. Gender segregated seating arrangement was found in kindergartens and mosque based schools. BRAC schools had better facilities among the observed schools.
- There was no commonality among the schools in terms of curriculum, books used and use of teaching learning materials. Inadequate number of books and no or very few teaching-learning materials were found in government, non-government and mosque based schools. Kindergartens used a variety of books, but lacked teaching-learning materials. BRAC schools had a good number of books for all students along with other learning materials.
- All schools had specific teacher to teach at pre-primary level but not all of them were dedicated for pre-primary. Primary teachers of government and non-government schools taught in pre-primary as additional duty. Kindergarten teachers

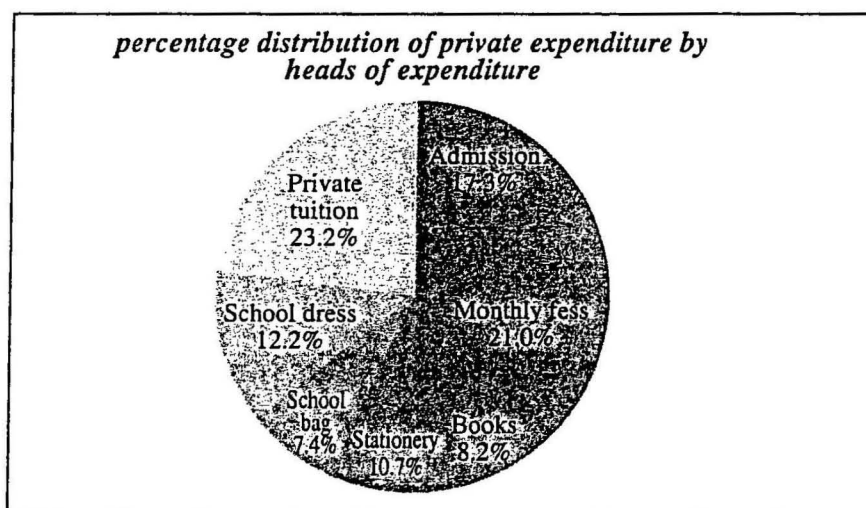
taught in both. Most of the teachers were not qualified for pre-primary education. Little or no training was a major obstacle. They did not know how to deal with children of early age. Teachers of BRAC and mosque based schools were dedicated to only pre-primary and were trained.

- Teaching technique in pre-primary classes was no different than that in primary classes. Games and other fun activities as part of teaching were almost absent. Book-based one way deliberation unfortunately was most popular. In contrast, a joyful learning environment coupled with curricular and co-curricular activities engaging all students were found in BRAC schools.
- Traditional examination system, practiced in upper grades, prevailed at pre-primary level in most of the schools except BRAC. Students' assessment as part of teaching-learning was found in the kindergartens and BRAC schools. Mental and corporal punishment were seen in mosque based schools and kindergartens.
- Supervision and provision of a feedback mechanism for improvement lacked in many cases. Pre-primary classroom visits by their heads in government and non-government schools and the kindergartens was similar to that of the higher grades. Supervisors of mosque based and BRAC schools visited schools regularly and provided feedback.

Private expenditure for education

- Over 87% of the students had to bear private expenditures for pre-primary education. These included stationery (76.1%), school bag (53.3%), books (45%), admission fees (42.4%), school dress (35.7%), tuition fees (30.2%) and private tuition (25.5%).

- On an average, Tk. 1,794 was spent per student during the first six months of 2013. The figure was higher for boys than girls (Tk. 1,939 vs. Tk. 1,650) and much higher for urban students than those in rural areas (Tk. 5,601 vs. Tk. 954). Whereas, the average expenditure was Tk. 14 for the poorest quintile it was Tk. 5,956 for the richest quintile. Compared to NGO schools, students of government schools spent three times as much and Kindergarten 8.8 times more.
- Of the total private expenditure for pre-primary education 23.2% was spent in private tuition, 21% in monthly tuition fees, 17.3% in school admission, 12.2% in school dress, 10.7% in stationery, 8.2% in books, and 7.4% for school bags.

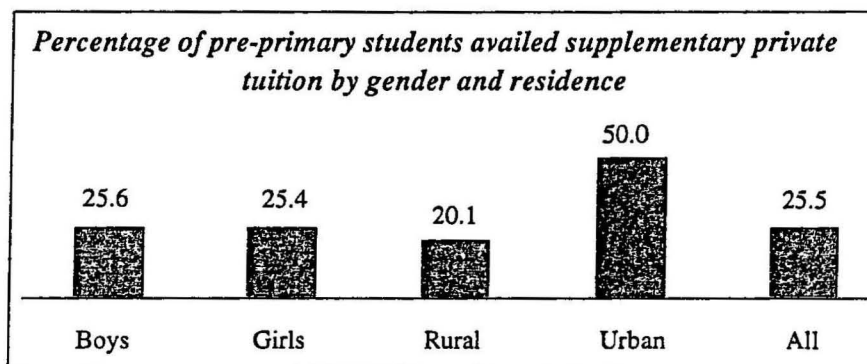


Source: Education Watch Household Survey, 2013

- Private expenditure for schooling significantly increased with increase in parental education. Students from the households with surplus food security status had much higher expenditure than those from the households with deficit or breakeven food security status.

Supplementary private tuition

- A quarter of the pre-primary students received private tuition during the first six months of 2013. Although there was no gender difference, a fifth of the rural students availed private tuition compared to a half of the urban students.
- The incidence of private tuition was much higher among the students of kindergartens and high schools (over 50%) but much lower among those in NGO operated and mosque based schools (<10%).



Source: Education Watch Household Survey, 2013

- Students who availed private tuition, on an average, spent Tk. 1,622 during the first six months of the year. In other words, average monthly expenditure for private tuition was Tk. 270 per student. This was slightly higher for the boys than the girls. Urban students spent 2.8 times higher than rural students.
- Average monthly expenditure for private tuition was Tk. 100–150 for the students of government, non-government, non-formal and mosque based schools and over Tk. 350 for those of the kindergartens.

- Parents irrespective of educational status had no or little time to oversee children's educational up-keeping. Some parents chose private tutor as a strategy to better *control*, as they said, their 'naughty' children. Some thought that it would help their children compete well.

D. Key Messages from the Study

Following are the key messages generated from the findings of this and other studies.

- *Good start with major policy directions:* Unlike many other initiatives, pre-primary education already has a number of policy directions which may be helpful in its proper implementation if followed appropriately. These include curriculum, books and materials, operational framework, expansion plan, GO-NGO collaboration guideline for universal PPE, pre-primary service delivery standard, and comprehensive ECCD policy.
- *Commendable increase in access in recent years:* Access to pre-primary education has increased hugely during the past five years compared to any other previous period. Such an increase was observed across the board. Although there was no difference in access in terms of gender or residence (urban/rural) huge variations were seen by *upazilas*. Children's access to pre-primary education was positively correlated to parental education and household economic status.
- *Many children are still out-of-school:* Although the enrolment rate has gone up in recent years, a huge number of children of pre-primary age were still out of the network of education. The number may as high as 1.5 million among children aged five years across the country and 3.8 million if the children of age four years were added.

- *Pluralism in provision:* Many different categories of pre-primary education persisted in terms of curriculum, books and other materials used, load of books, contact hour, course duration and so on. Pre-primary education in government and non-government primary schools was mostly similar which was far different than what was provided in the kindergartens. Kindergarten students were over-loaded by books, homework and examinations. Non-formal schools of the NGOs and mosque based schools of Islamic Foundation provided two different types of education.
- *Unprepared educational institutions:* Majority of the schools, in general, were not adequately prepared to provide pre-primary education. The schools lacked physical facilities, learning materials, child-friendly classrooms, joyful teaching-learning environment, trained teachers, and so on. In most cases, pre-primary and primary classrooms could not be differentiated in terms of teachers' behaviour, classroom activities, homework provision, and student assessment. Outdoor activities, plays and fun were seldomly organized.
- *Parents not impressed with current provision:* A portion of the parents were not prepared to send their children to schools at such a young age. Their understanding was that children of age 5–6 years should not be loaded with studies rather they should be engaged in play and fun. Unfortunately the schools failed to demonstrate that pre-primary education is nothing but learning through play and fun.
- *Private expenditure persists:* Parents had to bear private expenditure for pre-primary education. Admission fee, monthly tuition fee and expenditure for private tuition were the three major cost components comprising over 60% of

total expenditures. Private expenditure varied in urban and rural areas and by school type. It is also positively correlated to parental education and household economic status.

- *Private tuition prevalent:* A quarter of pre-primary students had private tutor. Expenditure on private tuition accounted for the highest portion (23.2%) of private expenditures.

E. Policy Recommendations

Findings and the main messages of the *Education Watch 2013* study on the state of pre-primary education in Bangladesh raise the following policy issues.

1. The recent rise in pre-primary enrolment is a welcome development but we should not be complacent about it. Number of children still out of such education is staggering. The challenge is to bring those children into the reach of pre-primary education irrespective of children's backgrounds. Upazilas having lower rate of enrolment demand immediate and special attention. It is clear that under the given circumstances the government alone would not be able to bring all the out-of-school children to school.
2. Dedicated classrooms and teachers with specialized and appropriate training, provision of educational materials and increased supervision and feedback mechanism may help improve their present situation in terms of preparing them for quality education. This is particularly true for government and non-governmental schools since they would have to play greater role in providing pre-primary education in future. Teachers need to understand the difference between education at pre-primary and primary levels. Teaching-learning cultures of the kindergartens need to be changed to make it more child-friendly. More non-formal

schools may be promoted in the catchment areas of formal schools as a stop-gap measure.

3. Considering trained teachers as vital for pre-primary education it is important to create more facilities for teacher training. This can be done by introducing separate courses in the existing Primary Teachers' Training Institutes (PTI). NGOs having such facilities may also be utilized. Universities can be encouraged to launch specialized training and research programmes on pre-primary education including strengthening those who already have such activities.
4. In line with the present provision of primary education, pre-primary education should be confined to the children below age six. This would also help completing primary education timely. In order to ensure this, campaigns of various forms should be considered, which, at the school level, can include school-catchment area based survey and meeting with the parents of children aged 4–5 years. National and district level campaigns through different media such as radio, television, newspapers, mobile phones, bill boards, internet as well as folk media like popular theatre may be utilized. Some of these are already being used in some places; however, these need to be strengthened throughout the country for quick uptake. The civil society should be effectively used in this.
5. Provision of pre-primary education should, in principle, be the principal responsibility of the state. On behalf of the state, the Directorate of Primary Education, the government's lead authority to implement primary education, should play the key role in this regard. The Upazila Education Offices should play the coordinating role at the upazila level. This includes decentralization of authority at the upazila level and making

them accountable for access, equity and quality of education in their respective upazilas. However, given the current limitations, the government should encourage other actors including NGOs and private sector for this.

6. It is important to ensure that all pre-primary education providers maintain and adhere to the pre-primary service delivery standard which has already been adopted by the government. Rigorous scrutiny of all centres/schools is essential which can be done by increasing capacity of Upazila Education Offices. This should be followed by feedback to the respective providers and allowing time to improve standard at an expected level.
7. The spirit of National Education Policy 2010 should be kept in mind in spreading pre-primary education in the country which urges one-year pre-primary education for the children of age five for the time being and later be extended to the children of age four. Other policy guidelines such as the pre-primary operational framework, expansion plan, GO-NGO collaboration guideline, pre-primary service delivery standard and comprehensive ECCD policy needs to be implemented with adequate responsibility, financial allocation, and taking all current providers on board. It would not be possible to ensure all children's access to pre-primary education without collective effort of all concerned.
8. Pre-primary education should be made an essential and integral part of compulsory education. The Act of 1990 made only primary education compulsory which is again limited to Grade V. Actually, in line with the present education policy, education from pre-primary to Grade VIII should be made compulsory. Moreover, the present Act is faulty as there is scope for the heads of the educational institutions to refuse admission without showing any reason; especially the

physically and mentally challenged could be subjected to discriminations due to this. It is necessary to amend the Act towards broadening its scope to include pre-primary and Grades VI-VIII and vesting greater role, responsibility and authority to the Upazila Education Offices and local governments.

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