



PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN HATHAZARI UPAZILLA, CHATTOGRAM, BANGLADESH: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

This study delves into the landscape of pre-primary education within Hathazari Upazilla, situated in the Chattogram district of Bangladesh. Through a comprehensive analysis, it examines the existing infrastructure, enrollment rates, curriculum implementation, and other related factors influencing the quality of early childhood education. Methodologically, a combination of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and observational techniques was employed to gather data. Findings highlight the challenges within the pre-primary education system, shedding light on areas for improvement and potential intervention for policy decisions and targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the early childhood education experience in Hathazari Upazilla.

Keywords: pre-primary education, infrastructure, teacher training, policy recommendations, quality education

1. Introduction

Pre-primary or early childhood refers to the stage of education for children aged below 6 before their primary education starts. Early childhood education means providing all the support necessary for every child to realize his/her right to survival, to protection, to care and to education that will ensure optimal development from birth to age six (Evans, 2000). This education plays a vital role in laying the groundwork for a child's lifelong journey and overall development. As the first six years of life are highly significant,

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children learn and feel during this time, particularly about themselves, it will be fundamental to the rest of their lives. At this stage, a child develops good relationships with the people around him/her (Tadesse, 2015). Early childhood education is a sensitive period marked by rapid changes in physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. It presents a window of opportunity for the lifetime development of a person (UNESCO, 2010). In a word, pre-primary education is very much essential for a child.

Accordingly, in the context of Hathazari Upazilla, nestled within the vibrant Chattogram District of Bangladesh, the significance of pre-primary education cannot be overstated. As the first formal educational experience for many children, pre-primary education sets the stage for future academic success, social integration and personal growth.

Despite its importance, pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla faces various challenges and complexities that warrant thorough examination and analysis. From inadequate infrastructure to socio-economic barriers hindering access, understanding the current state of pre-primary education is essential for devising effective strategies to improve its quality and inclusivity.

This study seeks to delve into the landscape of pre-primary education within Hathazari Upazilla, offering a comprehensive analysis of its infrastructure, enrollment rates, curriculum implementation and other factors influencing access and quality. By shedding light on the challenges within the pre-primary education system, this study aims to provide valuable insights and recommendations for enriching the early childhood education experience in the region.

Through a combination of quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and observational techniques, this analysis endeavors to capture the nuanced realities of pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla. By doing so, it hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge on early childhood education in Bangladesh, informing policy decisions and guiding interventions aimed at fostering equitable access and quality education for all children in the community.

In the pages that follow, we embark on a journey of exploration and inquiry aiming to uncover the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla. By critically examining these factors, we aspire to pave the way for a brighter and more promising future for the youngest members of our society.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To assess the current state of pre-primary education infrastructure in Hathazari Upazilla, including the availability and adequacy of school facilities.
- To evaluate the implementation of a pre-primary education curriculum, including the alignment with national standards and effectiveness of teaching practices.

- To identify challenges and barriers faced by pre-primary teachers in delivering quality education, including training needs and classroom resources.
- To gather perspectives from parents, teachers and other stakeholders on the strengths and weaknesses of pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla.
- To propose recommendations and interventions for enhancing the quality, inclusivity and effectiveness of pre-primary education in the region.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and observational techniques to analyze pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla comprehensively. The paper is mainly based on primary data. Direct observations of pre-primary classrooms and school facilities of 10 privately-run pre-primary schools have been conducted to assess infrastructure, teaching practices, and overall learning environment. Structured questionnaires have been administered to 50 teachers (5 from each school, including headmasters) and 50 guardians (5 from each school) to gather data on infrastructure, curriculum implementation, evaluation systems, etc. In-depth interviews have been conducted with key stakeholders to explore their perspectives on pre-primary education, including challenges, successes, and recommendations for improvement. Structured observations of 40 pre-primary classrooms (4 from each school) and school facilities were conducted to document physical conditions, teaching methods, teaching materials, students' participation, etc. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics and inferential tests, has been employed to analyze survey responses. Thematic analysis has been used to analyze interview transcripts, identifying key themes and patterns related to challenges and recommendations for pre-primary education. Observational data have been analyzed to assess the quality of pre-primary school facilities, teaching practices, and overall learning environment. All ethical guidelines and standards were taken under consideration throughout the research process.

4. Major Findings

4.1 Infrastructure Disparities

There are significant disparities in the quality and adequacy of pre-primary school infrastructure. Many (70%) schools lack essential facilities for children. 40% of schools have no houses of their own. They have been set up in rented houses. 75% of guardians responded that there are not sufficient seating arrangements for the children in the classrooms. 70% of schools have no waiting rooms for the guardians who have to wait during class hours. 75% of respondents mentioned that there is sound pollution in the schools. 75% of respondents said that there is a shortage of open space and an adequate number of doors and windows in the classrooms, and as a result of this, there is air pollution. 30% of schools were found to have no proper sanitization arrangements, and their toilets are not hygienic and are not suitable for little children. 50% of guardians said

that their children are not safe in the schools. 70% of schools have no playgrounds. Though not sufficient, 50% of schools have indoor game facilities for the children.

4.2 Enrollment Status

Enrollment rates are very low in 80% of schools. Only the parents who are financially sound send their children to the kindergarten schools. Average number of students per class is 25 to 35. 55% of students enroll in schools at the age of 4+. 85% of teachers opined that guardians with low income cannot afford to send their children to pre-primary 'Kindergarten' schools.

4.3 Curriculum Implementation Issues

Inconsistencies were found in the implementation of the pre-primary education curriculum, including disparities in teaching methods, assessment systems, learning materials and adherence to national standards. There is no fixed curriculum and syllabus in the schools. The school authorities design and implement the curriculum and syllabus at their sweet will. 80% of schools evaluate their students through oral and written examinations. In 70% of classes, teachers were found to ask students questions and use other techniques to keep them active in classroom performance. In 30% of the classes, teachers were found only to read the lessons from the textbook, and the students were passive listeners. In 30% of schools, there are not enough suitable teaching materials and equipment for the children. 65% of classes were found to use proper teaching materials, whereas 35% of classes were run only through oral discussion and explanation.

4.4 Teachers Training, Salary and Qualifications

In most (65%) of the classes, proper teaching techniques are not followed. The teachers admitted that they have no training in teaching little children. Almost all the teachers, guardians, and community leaders expressed the view that teachers need training and professional development opportunities to enhance their pedagogical skills and classroom management techniques. It was also known that teachers are not well-paid. The majority (80%) of the teachers are female. As there are no fixed educational qualifications for the teachers, there are teachers with various academic degrees. 70% of teachers have H.S.C. passed, 20% of teachers have bachelor's degrees, and 10% of teachers have master's degrees.

4.5 Community Engagement and Supervisory Activities

Almost all (95%) stakeholders opined that strong community support and involvement in pre-primary education initiatives, including parental engagement in school activities and collaborations with local organizations (especially with Govt. Primary Schools) and leaders, should be ensured. Most (70%) of the schools do not call guardian meetings to exchange views with the guardians. The rest (30%) of the schools arrange teacher-guardian meetings only once a year. Almost all schools have a headmaster and the so-called managing committee, which play key roles in running the schools. They hardly have any accountability. The supervisory activities are not so strong. The status and

professional upliftment of the teachers are neglected. The authority pays no heed to the demand for reasonable salaries and other benefits for the teachers. On the other hand, the school authorities are very much interested in increasing tuition fees for children every year. Tuition fees for 85% of schools are BDT 400 to BDT 1000. The fee is many times higher than that of government-run primary schools. It seems that most of the private pre-primary institutions have been established mainly for business purposes.

5. Discussion

Though the government is trying to expand access to pre-primary education, significant challenges persist all over the country, and Hathazari Upazilla is no exception. Various problems and inconsistencies are there in pre-primary schools, such as limited infrastructure, less use of teaching aids, not following proper teaching methods, teachers having no training, not following fixed and unified textbooks and curriculum and syllabus, unhygienic and unsuitable learning atmosphere, inadequate seating arrangements in the classrooms, less activities for students' active participation in the classes, lack of playgrounds and open space, inadequacy of indoor game facilities, high tuition fees and so on.

To impart better education and stimulate students' eagerness to learn how to use teaching aids is very important. The aids support the execution of teaching strategies and activities. Resources for pre-primary teachers should be provided to enhance their pedagogical skills and curriculum delivery. Meaningful teaching-learning activities depend on subject-related teaching aids (Parveen, 1996). Nevertheless, in running pre-primary classroom activities, teaching aids are hardly used.

Proper teaching methods help students understand the subject matter and form a clear conception. These methods play an important role in students' learning achievement (Li, 2009). All the methods serve different capacities of motivating students (Anderson, 2006). Nevertheless, in classroom practices, teachers mostly use only lecture methods. They do not go for diverse teaching methods. Teacher-centered methods are mostly used in the classroom.

Students' active participation in classroom activities is one of the major factors for students' better learning. Active classroom participation actually does facilitate student learning and problem-solving (Murray, 1991). However, unfortunately, in the pre-primary school's classes are run in a traditional manner where students' active participation is hardly emphasized.

Thus, our pre-primary schools are beset with various problems. All these inconsistencies and problems interrupt the smooth and successful learning of the students and the achievement of targeted goals in the Upazilla.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Infrastructure Improvement

Infrastructural development of pre-primary schools should be ensured. Rented houses are not suitable for establishing schools most of the time. It should be ensured that all pre-primary schools have a sufficient number of spacious and well-ventilated classrooms with proper seating arrangements, playgrounds, indoor game facilities, sanitary facilities, waiting rooms for the guardians and safe learning environments.

6.2 Enrollment Promotion

Awareness campaigns should be launched to highlight the importance of early childhood education and encourage parents to enroll their children in pre-primary schools. Tuition fees should be rational and fixed.

6.3 Curriculum Enhancement

Standardized guidelines should be developed for pre-primary curriculum implementation, including age-appropriate teaching methods, learning materials, students' active participation and assessment strategies. Teachers should use diverse teaching methods and different teaching aids during the classes. Professional development opportunities and resources for pre-primary teachers should be provided to enhance their pedagogical skills and curriculum delivery. The NCTB should formulate a national curriculum and syllabus for privately run pre-primary education as it does for government primary schools.

6.4 Qualifications and Economic Support for the Teachers

The government should control the education and professional qualifications and salary structure for pre-primary teachers. Besides, other financial facilities should be provided to them like that of government primary schools.

6.5 Teacher Training Support

Regular training workshops and mentorship programs should be conducted for pre-primary teachers to improve their instructional practices, classroom management skills, and understanding of child development. Adequate resources and support systems should be ensured to help teachers effectively implement inclusive practices and cater to diverse student needs.

6.6 Community Engagement and Supervision

Partnerships should be fostered between pre-primary schools, parents and community stakeholders to create a supportive learning environment for children. Community events, guardian meetings and parent workshops should be organized to encourage active involvement in pre-primary education and strengthen the bond between school and the community. The trend of fulfilling undue business purposes by school authorities

should be strongly supervised. A legal authority must control the pre-primary education level in Bangladesh.

6.7 Policy Reformation

Policy reforms are recommended at the local and national levels to prioritize early childhood education findings, infrastructure development and teacher training activities.

7. Limitations

The study may face limitations such as sample size constraints, potential bias in self-reported data and challenges in generalizing findings beyond the study population.

Time and resource constraints may limit the scope of the research and depth of analysis in certain areas.

Socio-economic barriers such as household income level, parental education level, geographic location, etc., have not been taken into consideration in the study.

The study only focuses on privately-run pre-primary schools, and not the government-run ones, in Hatahazari Upazilla.

8. Conclusion

It can be concluded that this study highlights the critical importance of addressing the challenges facing pre-primary education in Hathazari Upazilla, Chattogram District. Through a comprehensive analysis of infrastructure, enrollment rates, and curriculum implementation, it becomes evident that concerted efforts are needed to improve the quality and inclusivity of early childhood education in the region.

While there are existing challenges, such as limited infrastructure, low enrollment rates, untrained teachers and inconsistent curriculum or syllabus, there are also opportunities for improvement through targeted interventions and policy support.

Recommendations put forth in this study, including infrastructure enhancement, community engagement, teacher training, curriculum enhancement, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, inclusive practices and policy advocacy, will offer pathways for addressing these challenges and fostering positive change.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards creating a more equitable, inclusive, and effective pre-primary education system in Hathazari Upazilla. Such efforts not only benefit the current generation of children but also lay the foundation for future success and contribute to the overall development of the community and nation as a whole. Ultimately, investing in early childhood education is an investment in the future prosperity and well-being of Hathazari Upazilla and its residents.

Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s)

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