

Universal Pre-Primary Education: A Comparative Study

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Abstract Pre-primary education has become popular strategy to protection drop-out from formal education of children all over the world. Early Childhood Development (ECD) and pre-primary education are widely recognized as having a significant impact on the performance of children in basic education programmes. Pre-primary education would ensure a smooth transition to the primary education and lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Development of a child begins within the family and mostly depends on the parents. Educated parents are able to prepare their child for the smooth entry into formal education but no doubt uneducated parents are unable to do this. To apposite develop of a country education is crying need. So protection drop-out from formal education of child is most necessary for a nation. For this reason pre-primary education is especially important for a nation. In this article we have investigated the role of various governments such as India, Argentina, Nigeria, EU countries etc in pre-primary schooling. Our main objective in this paper is to study, analyze and compare the activities of the government of Bangladesh and NGOs in pre-primary sector with others mentioned above. This paper focuses on the importance of pre-primary schooling in Bangladesh with respect of others developed and underdeveloped countries.

Keywords: Pre-Primary educations, ECD, EFA, MDG.

1. Introduction

In the words of Plato (427 – 348BC) “No man should bring children into the world, who is unwilling to persevere to the end in their nurture and education” [4]. So, education should be universal. But due to various causes education may be not universal yet. One of them is drop-out from formal education. Pre- primary education has become popular strategy to protection drop-out from formal education of children all over the world. It has a strong and positive impact on further learning during the primary level and beyond. Pre-primary education is very important for the development of young children before they enter formal school [9]. It helps in cognitive development of children at the early grades of primary education and it has strong bearing on attendance and participation of children once they enter primary school. Development of a child begins within the family and mostly depends on the parents. Educated parents are able to prepare their child for the smooth entry into formal education. As many of our parents are uneducated, they are unable to prepare their children adequately for school. The lack in school readiness makes it difficult for children to adapt themselves to school and have a tendency to drop out [5]. Pre-primary education is considered to be very important for the child as it is the first step towards entering the world of knowledge as well as a healthy and

purposeful life. This education system helps children become more independent and confident as well as promoting the all round development of the children [17]. Children who have been to pre-primary schools tend to learn more rapidly through an organized curriculum, learning aids and by interacting with other children. The main purpose of pre-primary education is to prepare children physically, emotionally, socially and mentally for formal schooling and to prevent poor performance and early drop out. It also helps older children particularly girls, to attend their schools making them free from responsibility of sibling care [2]. Therefore, early childhood education including pre-primary education is regarded as a necessary area of intervention for the success of primary education. The Government of Bangladesh is strongly committed to achieve Education for All (EFA) within the time-frame set in the Dakar Declaration for EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [5]. Ministry of Primary and Mass Education of Bangladesh suggests that the age group of 3- <6 years issues will be the field of pre-primary education compromising the pre-primary system all over the world. With nursing pre-primary education we would be able to set a national standard for quality pre-primary education throughout the country and develop our children as confident citizens to face the challenges of the 21st century. Pre-primary education has been provided the developmental and educational support to the child in the age range of 3 to <6 years in order to ensure the child's

right to protection, care, survival and preparation for school education through play, enjoyment and introduction to literacy and numeracy, irrespective of the child's physical, mental and social status.

2. Pre-primary Education

Pre-primary education covers all forms of organized and sustained center-based activities: such as pre-schools, kindergartens and day-care centers designed to foster learning, emotional and social development in children. These programmes are generally offered to children from the age of three [15].

2.1. Objectives of Pre-primary Programme

The overall objective of an ECD and Pre-primary education programmes is to enhance child's development potential before his/her stepping into the primary school. The specific objectives would include among others, the following:

- a. To provide all the necessary care and education to young children that will help their development through physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional growth and change with due attention to children of disadvantaged groups, children with special needs and children of ethnic minorities.
- b. To support language development of children through active interaction among with children and creating opportunities for using the skills.
- c. To support parents and other caregivers by providing knowledge and skills necessary to meet children's developmental needs.
- d. To create a congenial and child friendly atmosphere at home, community and places of learning so that children benefit fully from care and learning activities.
- e. To develop and train the trained human resources and support them effectively to carry out their work in early care and education of children.

The above objectives encompass the development needs of children from birth to transition into primary school. Pre-school or pre-primary education forms an integral part of this continuum and should be planned and implemented taking into account the links and the cumulative process of development [5].

3. Methodology

This study is naturally a comparative analysis. Data used in this study are collected basically from the secondary sources. Primary data are also collected through personal interview method conducting the person who is supposed to have knowledge about the matter. Secondary data has been collected from various sources including websites, newspapers, various published and unpublished article about pre-primary education etc. Direct interview and hand on working with the Government and non Government pre-primary sector has been conducted to gather necessary data and information.

The study will be a comparable study based on the collected data and information.

3.1. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the strategy to develop the pre-primary education in Bangladesh. A set of objective that will govern this study is stated bellow:

1. To examine the current status of pre-primary education in Bangladesh
2. To examine the current status of pre-primary education in the other countries.
3. To evaluate the strategy of different countries to develop their pre-primary education system.
4. To evaluate the strategy of developing policy in pre-primary education of our country.
5. To provide policy recommendations to achieve effective position of our pre-primary education.

4. Pre-primary Education in Bangladesh

Education for All (EFA1990 and 2000) and The Millennium Development Goals (2000) are two remarkable commitments of United Nation (UN) which are already supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). These documents emphasize both the rights of children and the obligations of the state, society and the international community. The Government of Bangladesh is a signatory to all of the above international documents. These international pledges have been followed up at the national level through policies and programmes formulated by the government [5]. The National Children's Policy (1994), The Poverty Reduction Strategy (2005-08), National Programme of Action for Children (2004-09) and the Second National Programme of Action for Education For All (2005-09) are the key documents of the nation which have provided ideas and indicated directions for the pre-primary education.

Currently there are 'Baby Classes' in 26,300 primary schools under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). In addition the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are operating Pre-primary classes under development projects. Besides, many private kindergarten schools and more than 150 NGOs are operating pre-primary education throughout the country. The current target of Bangladesh Government is to provide pre-school education to all children aged 5 to below 6 years. But the long-term vision in the pre-primary education includes ensuring access to pre-school programmes for all the children of 3 - <6 years [5].

Table 1. Estimated Division wise Population (2001), 5-6 year Old Children in Bangladesh and Requirements for Centers .

Division t	Population	Children	Centers
Barisal	8,153,960	146,165	5,847

Chittagong	24,119,660	432,359	17,294
Dhaka	38,987,140	698,868	27,955
Khulna	14,604,900	261,802	10,472
Rajshahi	30,088,740	539,359	21,574
Sylhet	7,896,720	141,553	5,662
Total	123,851,120	2,220,106	88,804

Source: Population Census 2001 in Bangladesh.

Table 1 shows that the most required babies center is at Dhaka division and the less is at Sylhet according to the population density. The Government estimated average 25 children attend a pre-primary center. As a result 88,804 centers have to need to provide pre-school education to all children aged 5 to below 6 years.

Table 2. Division wise Pre-Primary Centers Run by Three NGO's and UNICEF Funded Projects.

Division	UNICEF	Plan Banglad	Save the	BRAC-BEP	Total
Barisal	6	-	360	282	648
Chittagong	2,278	20	336	2,472	5,106
Dhaka	116	119	360	5,932	6,527
Khulna	44	39	360	2,478	2,921
Rajshahi	35	197	320	8,175	8,727
Sylhet	4	-	360	887	1,251
Total	2,483	375	2,096	20,226	25,180

Source: Operational Framework for Pre-primary education March 2008.

Table 2 shows that BRAC-BEP is doing at pre-primary school with 20,226 centers through Bangladesh which is the large figure than all other NGOs. UNICEF funded project is running with 2,483 centers which is implemented by Bangladesh Shishu Academy in collaboration with Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, City Corporation, Save the Children USA with 2,096 centers and Plan Bangladesh with 375 centers. Besides, the estimated number of kindergartens is 18,000-20,000 (Eighteen to twenty thousand) all over Bangladesh which are run privately. But district-wise data is not available (Source: Mr. Nuruzzaman Kayes, Secretary General of Kindergarten Association).

Table 3. Division wise services school and students in baby class through Bangladesh.

Division	School	Students
Barisal	5,251	180,255
Chittagong	5,044	237,637
Dhaka	5,665	208,253
Khulna	4,613	165,805
Rajshahi	4,904	205,677
Sylhet	822	31,768
Total	26,299	1,101,395

Source: PEDP-II Survey – 2005

In the above, the Table 3 shows the division wise information of the students and the schools of baby class within Government primary school, Registered non-Government primary school (NGPS), Non-registered NGPS, Ebtadaee Madrasa, Kindergarten, NGOs, Community, Attached to high Madrasa and attached to

high School all over the Bangladesh. These institutions serve their schooling in baby class of 1,101,395 students with 26,299 centers throughout Bangladesh. The NGOs and kindergartens are doing positive role in pre-primary school but not adequate.

4.1. The strategy of pre-primary education in Bangladesh

In recent period Bangladesh faced various problem, one of them is to overcome universal pre-primary schooling. In spite of several problems Bangladesh has been trying to develop pre-primary sector. For this reason in March 2008 the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education of Bangladesh run a programme through a Operational Framework for Pre-primary Education. The framework has been taken some strategy to develop pre-primary education such as creating building or centers, supervising and monitoring those centers, providing teachers in pre-primary sectors etc. The recommendation of the framework is the centre will be set up either in a primary school or in a separate house having at least 250 square feet space for 20-30 children. Ideally it should be located inside or adjacent to existing primary schools. This arrangement will facilitate interaction between pre-primary teachers and primary school teachers and thus transition (enrolment) of 100% children from pre-primary schools to primary schools, in disadvantaged areas where existing primary schools may not be available close to children's home, the location of pre-primary center may be in a suitable place agreed by the community [5]. The another recommendation is every center will be managed by a separate 7-9 members. The formation of the Center Management Committee (CMC) for pre-primary education centers will be as follows:

- i. Head teachers of the concerned primary school or nearby primary school /Chairman.
- ii. Representative from implementing NGOs/Member selected two members (one male and one female) from SMC /Member.
- iii. Two representatives from the parents/Caregivers (at least one member would be female) /Member.
- iv. Teacher of the pre-primary education center /Member Secretary. The committee may co-opt two additional members.

The framework also recommends to improving pre-primary education to supervision and monitoring the centers. Supervision and monitoring mechanism and procedure will be developed cooperatively with the service-providing NGOs. The service-providers will take a major responsibility for supervision and support to the pre-schools. Supervision objectives and focus and monitoring tools and methods will be determined collaboratively under the sponsorship of the central pre-primary unit at DPE. The upazila education office and the upazila resource center will be involved in the supervision and monitoring process, without overburdening them and taking full cognizance of their primary education responsibility. Training and staff development of the personnel involved in supervision and monitoring will be undertaken by the service providing organizations

following guidelines developed collaboratively with them [5].

4.2. Pre-Primary Education in India

The National policy on Education 1986 [6] and its Plan of Action [7] have placed massive importance on pre-school in India. The Ministry of Women and Child Development deals with pre-primary education. The Government of India launched the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme in 1975. The Department of Women and Child Development has been implementing the scheme which seeks to provide health care facilities, supplementary nutritional support and to improve children's communication and cognitive skills as a preparation for entry into primary school. Initially the programme started as a project in some States but presently it covers many rural and tribal areas along with some urban pockets targeting mainly underprivileged children.

In India, pre-school education is provided by private schools and government ICDS (*Anganwadi*) centers. In addition, there are some ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) centers running under SSA (Sarva Siksha Abhiyan) and some pre-schools are attached to government as well as private schools. According to the estimate given by the Seventh All India Education Survey (NCERT, 2005), there are 493,700 pre-primary institutions in India, out of which 456,994 are in rural areas. These schools serve 26.453 million children of which 12.829 million are girls [2]. The percentage of enrolment in primary schools with pre-primary facilities is low. It was 10% in 2007-08 compared to 7.7% in 2004-05. The highest percentage of pre-primary enrolment in primary schools is in Madhya Pradesh (19.6%) and the lowest of 5.0% in Bihar [11].

Table 4. The area wise pre-primary institution in India

Total Institution	Rural area	Urban area	Children (Million)	Girls (Million)	Boys (Million)
493,700	456,994	36,706	26.453	12.829	13.624

Source: Create India Policy Brief 1

Above the Table 4 shows that more pre-primary institution are servicing at rural area. It means the Government of India put emphasis on rural and underprivileged children who are deferring from various public facilities. It's another meaning that most illiterate and unconscious parents live in rural area.

4.3. Pre-Primary Education in Argentina

Argentina is a developing country. But perhaps they are more advanced in pre-primary school all over the developing countries in the world. Pre-primary education became compulsory in 1993 in Argentina [1]. The public school system in Argentina provides 3 years of pre-primary education covering ages 3 through 5. Pre-primary classes are almost always physically and administratively attached to primary schools. They typically operate two shifts (morning and afternoon) each for three and a half hours a day, five days a week over the 9 month school

year. According to Ministry of Education (1993), pre-primary education was intended to achieve two goals [14]:

1. Enhance educational achievements accomplished at home and develop new age appropriate competences.
2. Early access to knowledge and skills that improve performance in the first years of primary education.

In order to achieve these goals, the curriculum was explicitly designed to develop:

- a) communication skills,
- b) personal autonomy and behavioral skills,
- c) social skills,
- d) logical and mathematical skills and
- e) emotional skills [14].

Though pre-primary education is compulsory in Argentina but there are not enough physical spaces in pre-primary classrooms to accommodate everyone immediately, the law allowed the Government to phase in implementation over time [10]. To implement the law the government began a massive public school construction from 1993 to 1999 where the National Government financed the construction of 3,531 rooms. On average, each room was 45 square meters constructed at an average cost of \$15,000 pesos. Given an average class size of 25 students and 2 pre-primary shifts (i.e., 50 new places per room constructed), the construction programme created approximately 176,550 pre-school places [13]. We refer readers [13] and [14] for more information regarding this issue. To create new class rooms government of Argentina is trying to solve the problem of accommodation.

4.4. Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country, which is endowed with many languages as there are different ethnic groups who use the languages. Possibly there are more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with a conservative estimate of four hundred languages [12]. So called Nigeria is a "nation of nations". The country consists of several ethnic groups with unrelated languages. Most often, the pupils have acquired the mother-tongue through the informal educational system before they start primary schooling and they use the languages simultaneously in communication. It is universal truth that a child acquires his first language involuntarily and most unconsciously from random exposure first to his parents and second to his community, even if no attempt is made to teach him [4]. In order to ensure a smooth transition from home to school, the National Policy on Education stipulates the use of indigenous Languages of the child's environment in the pre-primary and early primary education. The pre-primary level, as described by the National Policy on Education is that stage aged three to five years which prepares the child for primary school [16]. It has clearly outlined some objectives for pre-primary level which are as follows:

- i. Effecting a smooth transition from home to the school
- ii. Preparing the child for the primary level of education
- iii. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work, on the farm, in the market places, offices etc.

iv. Inculcating social norms. Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic, music activities, etc.

v. Teaching numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc

vi. Teaching habits especially good habits.

To achieve these goals, government's strategies for implementation of the pre-primary education programme are as follows:

i. Encouragement of private efforts in provision of pre-primary education

ii. Provision of training programmes for teacher's specialization in Early-Childhood Education.

iii. Ensuring the use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction in pre-primary schools.

iv. Developments of the orthography of many Nigeria languages

v. Production of textbooks in Nigerian languages

vi. Ensuring the use of play approach in teaching at the pre-primary school level

vii. Regulation and control of operation of pre-primary schools.

Perhaps the condition of pre-primary level of Nigeria is very poor among our study. Though their objectives and implementations strategy is good looking but the Government of Nigeria only performs a supervisory and regulatory role. Because of Government has no direct investment in the pre-primary level. So the owners charge high fees. These can only be afforded by a few privileged parents, which are very crucial in the educational development of a child [8].

4.5. Pre-Primary educations in EU

Immigration has been and will continue to be a main feature of European societies and may be this is the main problem to universally pre-primary access in EU. Migrated people may be qualified or non-qualified. Their

socio-economic statuses are not parallel with native people. There is evidence that universal access to high quality pre-primary education can be particularly important for reducing inequalities. Various factors create saloon the universal access of children to pre-primary education such as the educational attainment of parents, the difference between the language spoken at home and the language of instruction at school, and the socio-economic status of parents. It is renowned that parental education is therefore important for children's educational performance. Parents can read to young children and help them with homework. In five EU countries — Spain, Ireland, Italy, Malta and Portugal — about 40% or more of fathers of children aged 3 to 6 years obtained only lower secondary education or less. The other major challenges facing European education and training systems is to compensate for any differences in pupils' backgrounds which could place certain groups at a disadvantage [3]. In spite the various difficulties some EU countries have been made them universal access in pre-primary school to unravel all troubles such as France, Italy and Belgium.

EU is trying to develop their education and training system. So, their public and private investment in education is most high. Denmark, Sweden and Cyprus allocate nearly 7% of their GDP into public investment in education. These are the highest levels in the EU and among the highest in the world. Japan (3.5%) and the US (4.8%) trail the EU (5%) on public investment. However, they both have much higher levels of private investment in education than any Member State. Although private investment in education is increasing in the EU, it is only significant in four Member States (the United Kingdom, Germany, Cyprus and Slovakia). For these, it reaches up to 17%, still well behind Japan and Australia (25%), the United States (30%) and Korea (40%) [3].

Table 5. Best performing countries in pre-primary sector and investment status in education in EU and other first countries.

	Best performing countries in the EU			EU	USA	Japan
Participation in pre-school education	Participation of 4-year-olds in pre-primary education, 2006 (in %)					
	France 100	Italy 100	Belgium 100	94.8	58.2	94.8
Investment in education and training	Public spending on education as a % of GDP, 2005					
	Denmark 8.28	Sweden 6.97	Cyprus 6.92	5.03	4.85	3.52

Source: DG Education and Culture.

In the above the Table 5 shows that in pre-primary education France, Italy and Belgium are cent percent successful. Japan covered 94.8 percent. Rest of the EU countries are 86.8 percent and the USA covered only 58.2 percent which is the lowest level. In public investment on education the highest position is Denmark and the lowest is Japan.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Through the above study it can be concluded that pre-primary schooling is most important for universal education not only Bangladesh but also all over the world. Most probably in developing countries Argentina's

position is the best and the lowest is Nigeria and in developed countries France, Italy and Belgium have achieved top position and the lowest position is USA in pre-primary education sector in our study. To develop pre-primary education sector each country have been taken several programme or strategy with respect of their native problems. Bangladesh has taken some strategy to develop pre-primary education sector. As a developing country Bangladesh is facing more problems such as political, social, environmental, transport & communicational and overall economical. We can't able to implement the taken strategy perfectly anywhere mainly due to the shortage of finance and also for corruptions. So to implementation the strategy in developing pre-primary education in Bangladesh we propose the following recommendations:

1. Establishment of a national coordination committee under the auspices of MoPME, including in it members from all the important stakeholders.
2. Organizing coordination bodies at the district and upazila level.
3. For expansion and improvement of preprimary education strategies should be flexible.
4. Government should ensure political stability in the country.
5. Above all, anti-corruption activities should be increased for a fruitful result from pre-primary education sector.

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Statement of Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests.

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