

Current Status of Bangla Language Skill Acquisition in Pre-Primary Classes in Bangladesh: An Analysis of the Thakurgaon District

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Abstract

This study investigated the current status of Bangla language skill acquisition, key challenges, and opportunities for improvement among pre-primary learners in Thakurgaon District, Bangladesh. A mixed-method approach is employed, integrating qualitative and quantitative data. Data are collected from 12 pre-primary teachers, 12 head teachers, 12 parents, 2 Bangla trainers from Primary Teacher Training Institutes (PTIs), 2 trainers from Upazila Primary Education Training Centres (UPETCs), 2 Upazila Assistant Education Officers, and 2 Bangla language education experts. In addition, Bangla language teaching and learning practices are directly observed in 12 pre-primary classrooms using structured tools, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation checklists.

The findings reveal that pre-primary children demonstrate relatively stronger listening and speaking skills, while reading and writing abilities remain weak and below expected competency levels. Letter recognition and correct pronunciation are identified as major challenges. Contributing factors include inadequate teacher training, shortages of teaching and learning materials, limited parental involvement, and the lack of phonics- and pronunciation-based instructional approaches.

The study identifies opportunities for improvement through enhanced teacher training, expanded play-based learning, adequate learning materials, increased parental awareness, and stronger coordination among schools and families. It recommends prioritizing these interventions to improve Bangla language development at the pre-primary level.

Keywords: Pre-primary education, Bangla language acquisition, Early childhood development

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Pre-primary education plays a critical role as the foundation of a child's learning journey, where essential skills related to language, socialization, emotional development, behavior, and cognition are formed. At this stage, children's holistic development is nurtured, preparing them for successful participation in primary education (Jahurul Islam, 2019). Instruction delivered through the mother tongue is particularly important, as it enhances comprehension, vocabulary development, creative thinking, and children's confidence in classroom participation.

In Bangla language learning, pre-primary children are introduced to four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Evidence suggests that while listening and speaking skills are relatively stronger, reading and writing skills often remain below expected competency levels. Significant gaps are observed in letter recognition, pronunciation, and phonemic awareness. Persistent mispronunciation and improper word usage at this early stage can negatively affect language proficiency and learning

outcomes in higher grades if foundational skills are not adequately developed (Ahmed & Rahman, 2021).

Several challenges hinder effective Bangla language instruction at the pre-primary level. First, inadequate teacher training remains a major concern. Many teachers lack sufficient knowledge of foundational language-teaching techniques and phonics-based approaches, including correct pronunciation of Bangla letters, which leads children to internalize incorrect language forms. Second, shortages of essential teaching and learning materials—such as storybooks, picture cards, word cards, songs, and play-based resources—limit children’s engagement and contribute to passive learning environments. Third, parental involvement is often limited, reducing opportunities for language practice at home and weakening children’s ability to reinforce classroom learning. Fourth, classroom instruction frequently relies on rote-based methods, with insufficient emphasis on play-based and interactive learning, which are critical for early language development.

Despite these challenges, substantial opportunities exist to strengthen Bangla language education at the pre-primary level. Enhancing teacher training, ensuring adequate learning materials, expanding play-based learning activities, and increasing parental awareness can significantly improve children’s language skills. Greater emphasis on phonemic awareness, pronunciation, and vocabulary development can support balanced growth across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Stronger coordination among teachers, parents, and schools can further enrich the learning environment.

This study aims to assess the current status, challenges, and opportunities of Bangla language education in pre-primary schools in Thakurgaon District. Its findings are expected to inform policymakers, teacher trainers, and school administrators and contribute to the development of effective strategies for strengthening mother-tongue-based early childhood education.

2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study primarily focuses on analyzing the current status of Bangla language skills acquisition, instructional practices, and existing challenges in pre-primary classrooms in Thakurgaon District. The study covers 12 schools from two selected upazilas, representing government, non-government, and NGO-operated pre-primary education settings. One pre-primary teacher and one head teacher from each school are included to examine their experiences, perspectives, and the challenges they face in Bangla language instruction.

In addition, relevant policy-level and practical insights are gathered from Primary Teacher Training Institutes (PTIs), Upazila Resource Centers (URCs), and Upazila Education Officers. Classroom observations are conducted to assess the effectiveness of Bangla language teaching practices and the level of children’s participation in learning activities.

Although the study is geographically limited to selected areas of Thakurgaon District, its findings and recommendations are expected to contribute to decision-making and planning processes related to pre-primary education at the national level. The study is anticipated to serve as a useful foundation for improving Bangla language skill development in pre-primary education.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3.1. General Objective

To analyze the current status of Bangla language skill acquisition and the existing challenges in pre-primary classrooms in Thakurgaon District.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- To identify the methods and strategies used for teaching Bangla language skills in the pre-primary curriculum.
- To explore the prevailing classroom practices and instructional approaches for teaching Bangla language skills at the pre-primary level.
- To analyze teachers' competencies, their training status, and the challenges they face in Bangla language teaching.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Pre-Primary Education and Its Importance

Pre-primary education is considered the first formal stage of a child's schooling. It generally applies to children aged 3 to 5 years, during which children gain foundational experiences in language, behavior, social skills, and cognitive and physical development. The primary purpose of pre-primary education is to stimulate children's interest in learning, develop their basic linguistic and social skills, and prepare them for primary education. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) have identified pre-primary education as highly important before children enter primary school. They have shown that children who receive pre-primary education demonstrate significantly improved language skills, social behavior, and problem-solving abilities in primary school. In addition, pre-primary education promotes children's independent learning motivation and creativity (WHO, 2018; UNICEF, 2019).

4.2. The Context of Pre-Primary Education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has made notable progress in expanding pre-primary education. According to the National Education Policy 2010, one year of pre-primary education has been made compulsory for children aged 5 years. Various government, non-government, and NGO-run pre-primary centers operate across the country. However, the reality is that nearly half of children aged 3 to 5 years still do not have access to pre-primary education. Student enrollment, regional disparities, and insufficient pre-primary institutions are identified as major challenges (Rahman et al., 2025). Particularly in rural and remote areas, the number of pre-primary centers is limited, resulting in inadequate preparation for primary education.

In government pre-primary schools in Bangladesh, the number of teachers and their training are limited. According to Rahman et al. (2025), approximately 23% of pre-primary teachers have higher degrees, but there is a lack of professional training in pre-primary education. As a result, teachers often fail to apply effective teaching strategies, which hinders the development of foundational language and social skills in children.

4.3. Importance of Bangla Language Education in Pre-Primary

The medium of instruction in pre-primary education in Bangladesh is mainly Bangla. The importance of mother-tongue-based education is immense. Through learning Bangla

at the pre-primary level, children develop their basic language, speaking, and writing skills. According to Ahmad & Rahman (2021), early education in the mother tongue strengthens children's intellectual development, social engagement, and creates a strong foundation for future education. Effective Bangla language education at the pre-primary level plays a crucial role in forming basic concepts, expanding vocabulary, and fostering creative thinking.

However, in reality, Bangla language teaching in pre-primary classrooms often fails to meet the desired standards. Many teachers are unable to present the alphabet, phonics, and correct pronunciation properly. As a result, children learn incorrect pronunciation, which causes language problems in later educational stages. Additionally, the lack of teaching materials, storybooks, and play-based activities reduces children's interest in learning and hinders the development of basic language skills (Kumar, 2020; Spier et al., 2020).

4.4. Existing Challenges in Pre-Primary Bangla Language Education

Among the main challenges in pre-primary education are the lack of teacher training, limited teaching materials, insufficient parental involvement, and the absence of phonics-based and pronunciation-focused teaching strategies. Due to inadequate teacher training, teachers are unable to apply modern and effective teaching methods. According to Rahman et al. (2025), teachers are often untrained in phonics, pronunciation, and alphabet teaching activities. As a result, the quality of children's language learning decreases, and they enter primary school with foundational language problems. The lack of teaching materials is also a major barrier. In pre-primary classrooms, the absence of pictures, storybooks, word cards, songs, and play-based materials prevents children from engaging in effective learning (Chowdhury et al., 2020). In addition, limited parental involvement negatively affects children's language practice. Many parents do not spend time talking or reading stories with their children at home, which limits the development of children's language skills (Rahman et al., 2025).

4.5. Opportunities for Improvement

Despite these challenges, opportunities for improvement exist in pre-primary education. First, strengthening teacher training. If teachers receive training in phonics, pronunciation, and play-based teaching methods, they will be able to teach language more effectively. Second, increasing the provision of teaching materials. The use of storybooks, word cards, pictures, songs, and play-based materials can increase children's interest in learning.

Third, raising parental awareness. If parents encourage story reading, conversation, and reading-writing practice at home, children's language skills will improve significantly. Fourth, strengthening coordination among teachers, parents, and schools. When schools, teachers, and parents work together to enrich children's learning environment, it becomes easier to improve the quality of language education (Spier et al., 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2020).

Although positive progress has been observed in pre-primary education and Bangla language teaching in Bangladesh, the lack of teacher training, teaching materials, and parental involvement remains a major challenge. However, these challenges can be overcome to implement child-friendly and effective pre-primary education. By strengthening teacher training, increasing teaching materials, expanding play-based activities, and raising parental awareness, children will be able to acquire basic Bangla language skills at the pre-primary level. Following this approach can lead

to children's success in subsequent education, as well as the development of social skills and creativity.

4.6. Pre-Primary Curriculum for 5+ Children in Bangladesh

In the pre-primary curriculum for children aged 5 years and above, Language and Communication is identified as a separate learning area. The expected learning outcomes include:

- Using various means of language and communication to understand and express ideas in their own way.
- Using the five senses to identify the color, shape, smell, and taste of objects and exchange information accordingly.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

The study adopted a Mixed Method Research Approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. An embedded mixed-method design is applied to ensure the research is comprehensive, contextually relevant, and evidence-based.

5.2. Sampling Strategy

Two upazilas—Thakurgaon Sadar and Haripur—are selected from Thakurgaon District using Simple Random Sampling. From these upazilas, 12 pre-primary schools (6 per upazila) are chosen using Stratified Random Sampling to represent both urban and rural areas. From each school, interviews are conducted with the pre-primary teacher and head teacher, and classroom observations of Bangla language teaching were carried out. Purposive sampling is used to select 12 pre-primary teachers, 12 head teachers, and 12 parents from the selected schools. Additionally, 2 Bangla trainers from the Primary Teacher Training Institute (PTI), 2 trainers from Upazila Primary Education Training Centres (UPETCs), 2 Upazila/Assistant Education Officers, and 2 Bangla language education experts are selected.

5.3. Data Collection Tools

Data are collected using structured questionnaires for teachers and parents, semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with education officers and trainers, in-depth interviews (IDIs) with teachers, experts, and parents, and classroom observation checklists to capture instructional methods and student engagement.

5.4. Data Analysis

Data from 12 pre-primary teachers, 12 head teachers, 12 parents, 2 PTI trainers, 2 URC trainers, 2 education officers, 2 Bangla experts, and 12 classroom observations were analyzed thematically. Main themes included teaching methods and strategies, current status of language skills, challenges and barriers, learning techniques, parental and community roles, teacher capacity, and opportunities for improvement. Findings from questionnaires, interviews, and observations are synthesized under each theme to conclude.

6. DISCUSSION AND KEY FINDINGS

6.1. Methods and Strategies mentioned in the National Curriculum for Children Aged 5+

In the curriculum for children aged 5+, language learning is more structured and comprehensive. At this stage, children progress beyond oral expression to learn the written form of sounds (letters), word formation, simple sentence construction, and basic writing skills. The curriculum includes activities such as letter recognition, forming and pronouncing two- to three-letter words, identifying letters from words, describing pictures using simple sentences, and copying their own names.

The teaching-learning approach at this level integrates practice, demonstration, role-play, storytelling, and play-based activities, which gradually prepare children for reading and writing. Using workbooks, children engage in pattern drawing, letter tracing, and copying exercises, which also develop their fine motor skills. Assessment remains child-friendly and continuous, using observation, question-and-answer sessions, and checklists to monitor progress.

This stage continues to emphasize sensory-based learning, enabling children to express feelings and describe experiences linguistically. As a result, the curriculum for 5+ children ensures a natural and continuous transition from oral language development toward foundational literacy.

6.2. Current Status of Bangla Language Skills

Based on classroom observations and the analysis of teachers' and parents' information, it was found that children's listening and speaking skills are relatively advanced, while reading and writing skills remain limited. Although most children recognize letters, they face difficulties in correct pronunciation. While children are competent in oral communication, their performance in reading and writing does not meet the expected level.

A pre-primary teacher commented:

"The children in our class have good speaking skills; they can engage in basic conversations. However, when it comes to writing and reading, many make mistakes. Especially the pronunciation of 'ঢ' and 'ঞ' is not correct for many."

A head teacher said:

"Children enjoy listening to stories and want to narrate stories themselves. But when asked to identify different letters of the alphabet, they can say yes/no, yet many become shaky or make mistakes when writing."

Parents' observations showed a similar pattern. One parent said:

"My son speaks Bangla well, but he reads very slowly and makes mistakes when opening a book."

Overall, these findings indicate that while children's oral skills are strong, there is a significant gap in written language acquisition, requiring specific interventions and support. Analysis of classroom observation data reveals that children's language skills can be categorized into four major components. In listening skills, about 85% of children can easily understand teacher instructions. In speaking skills, around 75% of children can form basic sentences and participate in general conversation. The greatest deficiency is observed in reading. Many children cannot read at all, while some can recognize a few letters and patterns. According to the Bangladeshi curriculum, pre-primary students are not expected to read fully at this stage. In writing skills, the second-highest deficiency is noted; only 25% of children can write some letters. Overall, despite

better listening and speaking skills, reading and writing abilities are still insufficient and require focused attention and support.

6.3. Teaching Methods and Strategies

Based on classroom observations and teacher interviews in Thakurgaon District, most teachers use various creative and enjoyable methods to maintain children's interest and attention. Particularly, songs, rhymes, and storytelling techniques are most frequently used. These approaches stimulate children's interest in language and help improve their listening and speaking skills.

A teacher mentioned:

“When we tell stories, children listen attentively, but when it comes to teaching writing, many lose interest.”

This indicates that play-based and narrative activities are effective for language learning, but additional emphasis is needed to develop reading and writing skills. Although there is a tendency to use pictures, cards, models, and other supportive materials, the shortage of resources and limited facilities in many schools remain significant barriers. Some teachers try to make the class attractive by using self-made cards or charts, but most schools still rely on textbook-based or teacher-centered teaching methods. Consequently, children's creativity, questioning attitude, and practical language skills are hindered.

Moreover, due to lack of training and time constraints, many teachers are unable to regularly apply new teaching techniques despite their willingness. Overall, play-based learning, songs, rhymes, and storytelling positively influence children's language acquisition. However, to ensure effective language education, teacher training, provision of teaching materials, and extensive implementation of child-centered approaches are necessary.

6.4. Existing Challenges and Barriers

The analysis identified several major challenges:

6.4.1. Lack of Teacher Training

Almost all teachers admitted that they have not received adequate training. One teacher said:

“We have received primary training, but we have not been trained specifically in phonics, pronunciation, and play-based strategies for pre-primary children.”

A PTI trainer commented:

“Many teachers do not know how to teach the correct pronunciation of basic Bangla letters like vowels and consonants. Our training is often theoretical.”

6.4.2. Limited Teaching Materials

Classroom observations and interviews in Thakurgaon District indicate that the shortage of teaching materials is a major challenge in Bangla language education. Most classrooms lack sufficient storybooks, word cards, pictures, alphabet charts, puzzles, or play-based materials. These materials are essential to enhance children's interest, attention, and understanding, yet they are scarce in schools.

A head teacher commented:

“Our school has only a few pictures and letter cards for children. Therefore, we often create creative materials ourselves.”

This indicates that teachers try to develop materials despite limited resources, but sustaining these efforts consistently and with quality is challenging due to lack of time, funds, and training. The lack of teaching materials not only affects teachers' activities

but also negatively impacts children's learning pace and interest. When classrooms are not visually engaging, children lose attention quickly and become disengaged. In many cases, the responsibility for supplying materials is not clearly defined, so maintenance and renewal of materials remain irregular.

Overall, providing suitable and diverse teaching materials is essential for improving children's Bangla language skills. The limitation can be overcome by increasing locally-made materials, including material development in teacher training, and ensuring regular budget allocation.

6.4.3. Limited Parental Engagement

Although parents play a vital role in language development, parental engagement in pre-primary schools in Thakurgaon District is comparatively limited. Most parents do not actively participate in their children's learning outside school. Interviews with parents revealed that many do not know how to support language practice at home or create a learning environment. One parent said, "I want my child to learn Bangla well, but due to being busy, I cannot practice with him daily."

This indicates that while parents are interested, time constraints and lack of knowledge prevent them from being effectively involved. Especially in low-income families, daily life pressures and lack of educational awareness hinder children's learning progress. A teacher noted: "When parents do not study with their children, the learning pace slows down."

This shows that parental involvement directly influences children's motivation and continuity in learning. Without effective coordination between school and family, maintaining consistency in language development becomes difficult.

Limited parental engagement is caused by lack of awareness, time constraints, family responsibilities, and insufficient understanding of the importance of early education. Therefore, school-level awareness programs such as parent meetings, home learning guidance, and regular communication are needed to strengthen parental involvement.

6.4.4. Lack of Effective Phonics and Pronunciation-Based Teaching Strategies

Classroom observations and teacher interviews reveal that the absence of effective strategies for teaching phonics and pronunciation is a major challenge. Most teachers struggle to teach correct pronunciation of letters such as 'ঢ়', 'ঞ', and 'ঝ'. Children are eager to learn correct pronunciation, but teachers often do not know effective methods for teaching the sounds of each letter.

A pre-primary teacher stated: "Children want to pronounce correctly, but we don't know the exact techniques to teach the sounds of each letter."

This indicates that although teachers are enthusiastic, lack of training and skills prevents them from implementing phonics-based teaching effectively. Consequently, children learn incorrect pronunciation, which creates obstacles in later stages of education.

Classroom observations also show that many children can recognize letters and pronounce some simple words, but struggle with correct sound application. The root causes are lack of training, insufficient teaching materials, and the absence of a consistent methodology.

To address this, specific strategies, charts, word cards, and practice games are essential for teaching phonics and pronunciation. Including phonics-based teaching methods in teacher training can significantly support children's oral and listening skills. Proper implementation will help children master basic Bangla letters and words naturally, forming a strong foundation for their future education.

6.5. Learning Methods and Strategies

Classroom observations indicate that several effective learning methods are used in pre-primary education. The first method is the use of songs and rhymes. Through songs and rhymes, children can easily remember words, pronunciation, and the alphabet. The rhythm and melody make learning more attractive and help maintain children's attention.

The second method is storytelling. Through teacher-led storytelling or dialogue, children's listening and comprehension skills improve. Stories enhance imagination and understanding of language. Children learn new words and sentence formation through characters, events, and dialogues.

The third method is the use of visuals. Pictures, cards, and visual materials are used to teach the alphabet, words, and basic concepts. Visual learning strengthens children's cognitive understanding and helps them retain new words and sentences quickly.

The fourth method is the use of textbooks. Most pre-primary schools use government or private textbooks. However, overreliance on textbooks may reduce children's interest in learning.

A pre-primary teacher commented:

"Children learn stories and songs very well. But when it comes to writing or reading, their interest decreases."

Overall, songs, rhymes, stories, and visuals encourage children's learning. However, to increase interest in writing and reading, more effective strategies and supportive materials are needed.

6.6. Role of Parents and Community

Parents can play a significant role in children's language learning. However, in reality, most parents do not regularly engage in language practice with their children. One parent said: "I want my child to learn Bangla, but I cannot give time daily due to my busy schedule."

A URC trainer commented:

"Parental involvement is essential to increase children's learning pace. At home, storytelling, word games, and reading-writing practice must be promoted."

6.7. Teacher Training and Capacity

Assessment of teachers' basic competencies shows that they are able to teach speaking and listening skills, but they cannot apply effective strategies for reading and writing. Although most teachers have received training, it is often theoretical. A teacher commented: "We received training, but we were not taught practical methods for children."

A PTI trainer said:

"Special training is essential to create effective teachers in pre-primary education. Theoretical training alone is not sufficient."

6.8. Opportunities for Improvement

The analysis reveals several opportunities for improvement in pre-primary Bangla language education:

- **Strengthening teacher training:** Providing training on phonics, pronunciation, and play-based teaching methods.

- **Increasing teaching materials:** Providing storybooks, word cards, pictures, songs, and play-based materials.
- **Expanding play-based activities:** To maintain children’s interest and simplify learning processes.
- **Enhancing parental awareness:** Encouraging parents to engage in conversations, storytelling, and reading-writing practice at home.
- **Strengthening teacher-parent-school coordination:** Close coordination will enhance children’s learning pace.

A head teacher said:

“If we can involve parents and use sufficient play-based materials and storybooks, children’s interest in learning will increase significantly.”

An expert commented:

“Active participation of teachers, parents, and the community is essential to ensure basic language skills in pre-primary education.”

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is evident that teachers’ competence, teaching approaches, and family support play crucial roles in children’s language development. Considering these, the following recommendations are proposed:

7.1. Strengthening Teacher Training

Regular, quality, and practical training programs for pre-primary teachers should be strengthened. Training should emphasize language development stages, psychological aspects of early childhood language learning, storytelling, rhymes, use of visual materials, and child-centered teaching strategies. Teachers should also be trained in methods to ensure active classroom participation and simple, practical language assessment techniques.

7.2. Expansion of Play-Based Teaching Activities

As the study indicates, play-based activities effectively support children’s Bangla language development. Therefore, the use of songs, rhymes, storytelling, role play, group games, and creative activities should be expanded in pre-primary classrooms. Schools should be provided with suitable toys, language materials, and visual aids, and teachers should be guided to include play-based activities in lesson plans.

7.3. Enhancing Parental Awareness

Although family involvement is crucial, many parents lack awareness. Therefore, schools and local authorities should organize parent meetings, awareness workshops, and provide simple guidance materials to raise parental awareness. Parents should be encouraged to talk with children, tell stories, show books, and create language-friendly environments at home.

7.4. Improving Supportive Teaching Materials and Environment

A language-friendly classroom environment should be created. Adequate books, pictures, charts, and letter/word materials should be provided, and classrooms should be made child-friendly. Such environments will naturally increase children’s interest and capability in learning Bangla.

7.5. Strengthening Policy Implementation and Monitoring

To improve Bangla language skills in pre-primary education, regular monitoring and supervision of policy implementation are necessary. Education administration at the upazila and district levels should monitor teacher training, teaching methods, and classroom activities to improve the overall quality of pre-primary education.

8. CONCLUSION

Findings show that the current status of Bangla language education in pre-primary schools of Thakurgaon District is not satisfactory. Children's speaking and listening skills are comparatively better, but their reading and writing skills are weak. The main barriers include lack of teacher training, limited teaching materials, low parental involvement, and the absence of effective phonics and pronunciation-based strategies. However, significant improvement is possible through strengthening teacher training, ensuring adequate teaching materials, increasing play-based activities, raising parental awareness, and enhancing coordination among teachers, parents, and schools. These findings provide important guidance for policy formulation, teacher training design, and program development in pre-primary Bangla language education.

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