

Parental aspirations for children's early childhood education enrolment in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education (ECE) contributes to all young children's cognitive and non-cognitive development. Most developed countries invest in early childhood education to boost human capital development. In countries such as Bangladesh which are impoverished and underdeveloped, the government has not provided enough access, enrollment, and quality early childhood education. Consequently, parents motivate early childhood education, whose financial circumstances alter to enroll children in school. This study examines the parental aspiration that encourages and motivates them to enroll their children in ECE schools. FGDs and KIIs were conducted with the individual respondents using a qualitative case study method. The findings indicate that parental aspirations, anxieties, and socio-economic conditions significantly affect children's enrollment in ECE schools. The probability that a child will be enrolled in an ECE school is heavily influenced by the socio-economic position of parents, social recognition, quality of service, and the school's reputation. This study argued that parental aspiration for children's enrollment and non-enrollment in ECE impede social justice in education for all children. Finally, all the stakeholders should take innovative policy initiatives to ensure institutional justice and equal enrollment opportunities for children aged 3-5.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a priority for all children aged 3 to 5 years to prepare them for elementary school better. Without quality ECE education, most children fall out of primary school. In underdeveloped countries, almost 80% of children do not have access to ECE before starting their basic education in primary school [1]. Due to natural disasters, war, and epidemics, children are not receiving ECE in early childhood. Consequently, they are losing future economic and human potential and are more likely to remain in poverty for the rest of their lives [2]. Countries like Bangladesh have faced several natural disasters in the last couple of years. As a result, many children are not in school in the early years, indicating social threats to society and the community [3].

In Bangladesh, parents with lower socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities in rural areas can hardly afford educational expenses. They cannot assure access for their children to ECE schooling [4]. Usually, the government of low and middle-income countries' strategies for financing ECE habitually cause access barriers to children in schools [5]. By increasing early education funding, governments, stakeholders, donors, and partners might ensure social fairness and reduce the gap between

varied socially stratified families or parenting realities [6]. ECE is not compulsory education in Bangladesh; however, the government only provides pre-primary education for children at age 5 [7].

School fees at ECE schools vary according to location, with school assets and families covering the higher expenditures [8]. Except for government institutions, teacher salaries are low, and there is a trend of rapid teacher turnover [9]. Typically, the government school offers pre-primary education at no cost. Private schools and nonprofit organizations provide education services for a modest fee. In addition, government schools get one-time coordination fees or development funds for each academic year. The government lacks a central governing body prohibiting private schools from charging high tuition prices. Due to a lack of birth registration and household survey data, it is hard to identify the exact number of eligible children who are presently enrolled or will attend school [10]. Nevertheless, it is determined based on the World Bank's projected demographic predictions since there are 1.12 million pre-primary (ages 3-5) children in Bangladesh. Since no nationwide household survey was conducted since 2014, it is impossible to determine the number of children not partaking in ECE.

The concerns of ECE school enrollment result from families organizing their participation to promote fairness and justice in communities for their children; parental economic situations are primarily a result of participating in schools [11]. Parents' participation and school readiness for children's school enrollment correlate with educational attainment, regardless of whether parents send their children to school in early childhood development or later [12]. However, the school environment is strongly regarded as a risk factor for enrolling children due to ECE schools' various socio-economic class compositions [13]. Without government assistance, parents prefer to postpone enrollment in school to examine their investment in early education and its results, according to some studies [14]. Keller further demonstrates that home culture is essential for early school enrollment because parents must notice social reality. Parents cannot ignore social realities when selecting school enrollment [15]. In addition, Valenzuela, Bellei, and Ríos [16] explained school enrollment that, in addition to cultural factors, families also examine the market need for education before enrolling in a school where equality in education is seen among parents. Lastly, Holmstrom, Karp, and Gray [17] demonstrated the justification for school enrollment based on the logic of parents' reality in society for child education.

This research aims to address the gap in the literature on school enrollment by examining family socio-economic expectations for ECE, where household ambitions impact school enrollment because of government assistance for children of all ages. The concerns of parental non-enrollment choices, whether merely economic or social or combined, encourage parents to enroll their children in ECE. In Bangladesh, data indicates that many children do not participate in ECE before 2008, when they begin formal primary school [18]. In contrast, parental socio-economic considerations influence child enrollment in ECE, and parents from lower-income groups seldom purchase learning and playing items for their children [19], [20].

This research contributes to understanding the parental capacity and aspirations for enrollment in early childhood education in Bangladesh. Parental aspirations to enroll their children in ECE schools are mainly determined by their capability to pay direct and indirect tuition fees and societal conditions that encourage them to do so. However, in Bangladesh, institutional factors arise as the most impediment to the ECE enrollment of children in the early years of schooling. Social justice theory prevails in society, but institutional justice impedes social justice in Bangladesh for early childhood education.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Type of study

This qualitative exploratory study employed the case study method. The case study technique does not need behavior control in qualitative research and focuses only on current events [21]. Contemporary events are examined using the case study method, although the researcher's ethics cannot be impacted. The case study depends on various sources and indicators, such as firsthand observation of the phenomenon and interviews with those associated with it in a real-world setting [22].

Multiple data sources, such as document analysis, in-depth interviews, and observations, make the research more trustworthy and consistent, even though case studies and chronicles occasionally overlap [23]. The case study begins with a comprehensive literature evaluation and the development of research questions and objectives. In case studies, prior research facilitates mapping the study design to address the research issues. Nonetheless, case study research must describe a particular occurrence that may not be comparable to other circumstances, contexts, and perspectives.

Croni [24] points out that the case study approach helps the researcher investigate more in-depth to understand and investigate real-life and present social phenomena. Researchers use the case study method when the phenomena and context are not distinguishable within the real-world context. This method helps to explore the core problems of research [25]. Hetherington [26] mentioned that case study research is theoretically challenging, although some researchers think this approach is a soft research method.

2.2. Research design

Table shows the data collection procedure and data sources for this study. The researcher collected data for this study using in-depth questionnaire interviews, document analysis, and observation. The unit of analysis was to focus on both supply-side and demand-side issues to compare and analyze the findings as well as the phenomena and context in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Research design for data collection and sources

Tools	Unit of analysis	Data source	Sample size
In-depth questionnaire interviews	Demand-side	Parents whose children are currently enrolled in the ECE program	34
		Parents whose children are not enrolled in an ECE program	34
	Supply-side	Head teachers	10
		ECE teachers	7
		Other stakeholders	Education officials (ECE), secretary, assistant secretary
Document reviews	Supply-side Stakeholders	ECE and education specialist, researcher, university professor	3
Observations	Stakeholders	Policy review, education law, and regulations	
		Policy drafts, policy documents	
		Home observations	10
		Class observation	17
		School observation	34

2.3. Data collection

This study's data were gathered through interview sessions, observations, and transcription. The interview with the informants gathered information on parental goals for ECE enrollment and the current state of ECE in Bangladesh. Purposive sampling was utilized to collect data to understand the unique phenomena underlying parental participation in ECE enrollment. In addition, the snowball sampling approach was used, which facilitates the usage of difficult-to-reach sample subjects. The current sampling approach includes selecting samples based on prior respondents' ideas and suggestions for this research. Samples chosen based on a particular criterion are tasked with recommending additional potential participants.

2.4. Data analysis

Transcripts and spoken expressions were utilized to evaluate the data for this investigation. This study used a voice recorder, field notes, and observations. Similarly, deductive procedures were employed to examine the data by categorizing and detecting parallels and contrasts; the planned variable was not clearly stated in the introduction, and open-ended questions were asked. The author assessed theory, topics, respondent characteristics, and coding to evaluate the data for this research. Multiple data sources contributed to this research, including in-depth interviews with parents, interviews with key informants, and observations in schools, classrooms, and homes. Data are processed using the category coding method [27] to interpret parental aspirations, and study conclusions are derived from the resulting themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Parental enrollment choices in early childhood education

According to Sylva's research, parents contemplating enrolling their children in ECE schools believe that children may do well if they have the chance to participate in preschool and in-home education before beginning official primary education [28]. When contemplating enrolling their children in schools, most respondents' parents raised concerns about social issues. Second, the institutional factors for non-enrollment in schools have become apparent. As of the most recent precedent, parents indicated financial obstacles to non-enrollment in ECE schools [29].

Table 2 demonstrates the outcome of parental concerns as parents choose their children's school enrollment. First, about 53% of parents reported social challenges as the primary school enrollment determinant. Parents see societal problems as influencing their children's educational potential. In addition, parents consider their children's enrollment in school while their peers are already enrolled. Lastly, socio-cultural characteristics of the children's peer social groupings, socio-economic status, and gender also impact enrollment in ECE schools, consistent with previous research findings [30], [31]. Second, about 20% of parents consider economic aspects while deciding on enrollment. These parents evaluate their income, school fees, and other expenses, which is backed by the results of Thapa *et al.* [32]. Finally, 26% of parents consider institutional factors such as school availability, school entrance age, and school climate when choosing an ECE school for their children.

Table 2. Parental decisions for enrollment in ECE schools

Parental concern	Apprehension	Respondent (N)	Percentage (%)
Social	The evocative prospect of schooling	36	52.94
	Group enrollment		
	Social pressures		
	Gender issues		
Economic	Social status	18	26.47
	Income of parents		
	School fees		
Institutional	Associate expenditures	14	20.59
	School availability		
	School entry age		
	School environment		

Parents' three main concerns differ based on data analysis from rural and urban areas. Parents who live in cities and those who live in rural regions have other things to consider when determining where to send their children to school. Table 3 shows the opinions of urban parents about sending their kids to school. Even though most schools in Bangladesh, particularly private schools, are not government-approved, 29.4% of parents said they favored the authorized institutions. Instead, parents evaluate schools based on their annual performance relative to schools in other locations. Second, 23.5% of parents commented on the quality of the instructors. In most instances, it was said that parents do not interact with school instructors. Thirdly, 20.6% of parents discussed the school environment since it was evident that urban parents cared much about their children's friends' social backgrounds. Lastly, according to previous research [33], parents in urban regions consider the curriculum, whether their child is qualified to attend school, and the start and finish dates of the school year.

Table 3. Urban parent's consideration for school enrollment

Parental concern	Respondent (N)	Percentage (%)
Recognized available schools	10	29.4
Quality of instruction among the offered services	8	23.5
School atmosphere	7	20.6
Curriculum rigor of a specific institution	5	14.7
Qualifications for school enrollment	3	8.8
School timing	1	3

Table 4 exhibits parental considerations for enrollment rates in rural locations, where social factors are relevant for the 34 rural respondents. First, when the same peer group of parents registered their children in school, nine of the 34 respondents based their ECE school enrollment decisions on social factors. Second, nine parents from rural regions claimed that gender was essential for school enrollment, particularly for females, since they believed that females should attend school as soon as possible. Regarding psychological development, parents in rural regions feel that female reach adulthood before males. Third, seven parents said that the possibility of enrolling their children in school allows them to devote more time to domestic duties. However, this conclusion does not hold for urban parents since urban parents report that they had to spend the whole day at school to enroll their children in school and could not focus on other home duties [34].

Finally, the lower-income group enlists their children at five because they believe their children are unprepared for school. Their parents are so busy working and other income-generating activities that they do not have the time to prepare their children at home. According to the research [35], parents with lesser incomes attempt to justify their enrollment patterns considering their financial conditions.

Table 4. Rural parents' consideration for school enrollment

Parental concern	Issues	Respondents (n=34)
Social causes	Similar family status, children are already enrolled in school	9
Future development	The family considers the future of their children	4
Importance of education	Teachers educate parents about child development and encourage them to enroll their children in school	2
Gender issues	Parents are very concerned about gender problems, particularly females' education	9
School environment	Children enjoy a conducive atmosphere for study and play at school	3
Opportunity of schooling	Parents have more time to focus on domestic responsibilities	7

3.2. Parental non-enrollment decisions in early childhood education

Table 5 displays parental reasons for school non-enrollment by area. First, according to the finding, 38.24% of parents do not register their children in school owing to institution-related concerns. Second, socio-economic disadvantages were cited by 50% of parents as the leading reason for not enrolling their children in school in both rural and urban locations. Lastly, 11.76% of parents mentioned economic issues for non-enrollment. Parents who cannot enroll their children in school for financial reasons cite the indirect cost of education. In addition, parents from varied socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds cited societal concerns, injustice, and social inequities as reasons for their children's non-enrollment in rural and urban schools. Similar findings are found in previous studies [36].

Table 5. Principal reasons for ECE school non-enrollment

Parental drawbacks	Causes	Respondent (N)	Respondent (%)
Institutional drawbacks	Refusal of admission	13	38.24
	The school is distant from home		
	A child with school phobia		
Social drawbacks	Large class size	17	50
	Too soon to begin school		
	Security Issues		
	No application of education		
Economic drawbacks	Parents are occupied	4	11.76
	Children (Females) help at home		
	School fees		
	Monetary scarcity		

Figure 1 displays the average class size in rural and metropolitan locations, revealing that public schools offering ECE education have an average of 44 students. Second, 41 pupils are enrolled in madrasa-based schools, the most of any school type. However, only 25 students are registered in schools affiliated with mosques and temples, the option with the lowest enrollment. Parents who do not enroll their children in ECE education often cite class size as another reason they do not enroll their children in school. Parents believe that when class sizes are prominent, instructors in rural and urban regions do not have enough time to focus on every student individually. Similar results were found by Ehrenberg *et al* [37].

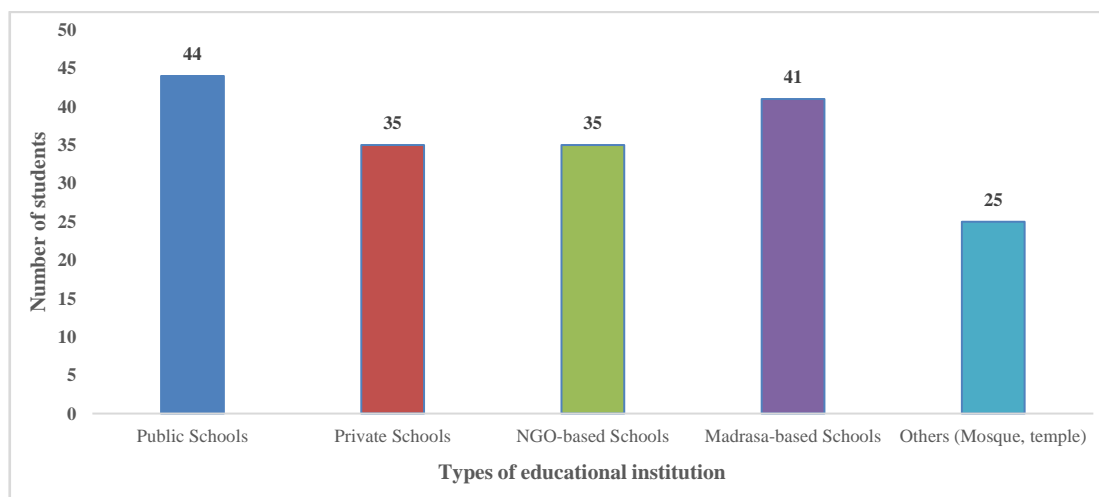


Figure 1. School types and average class size in ECE

In Figure 2, the finding shows parental socio-economic expectations for ECE in rural and urban settings, as 34% of respondents in rural areas indicated concern over non-enrollment. Nevertheless, four parents in urban areas cited societal problems such as 'kid is too young.' Second, eight rural and six urban parents think it is too early for their children to begin school, and therefore, they do not enroll since there is no need for ECE. Third, two rural and five urban respondents do not enroll in ECE due to the distance

between their homes and schools. Fourth, parents in rural and urban regions do not enroll their children in ECE due to social and security concerns; however, this explanation is more prevalent among urban parents, with ten parents citing this. In addition, the data coding demonstrates that economic factors are not the primary cause of non-enrollment since most of the reasons are sociological, which is supported by previous research [38], [39].

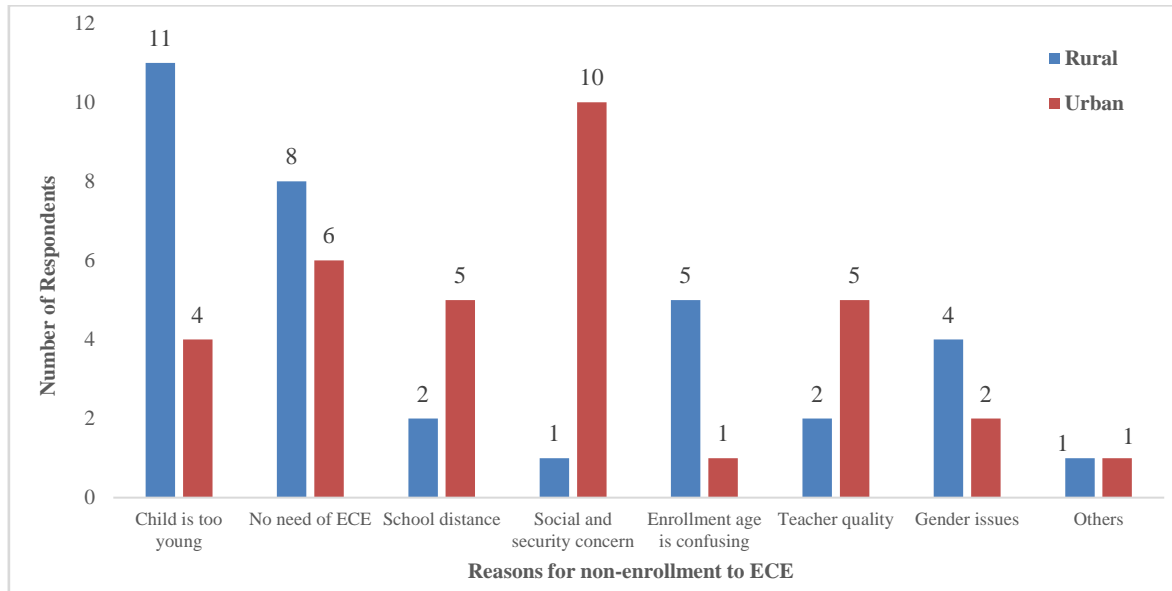


Figure 2. Parental aspirations for non-enrollment

Table 6 explains the effects of demand and supply paradoxes on school enrollment in rural and urban settings. First, the in-depth interviews with school instructors and the coded data indicate that age-appropriate school supply is inadequate across areas. It was evident from field research that children ranging from 3 to 6 years old participate in the same class. As a result, the school environment is unfavorable for pupils, particularly in urban private schools. Thirdly, public school instructors have stronger educational credentials than teachers in private schools, which was also found by Ballou and Podgursky [40].

Table 6. Supply and demand paradoxes for school non-enrollment

Supply-side aspects	Demand side aspects
Age-appropriate insufficient supply of classrooms and teachers	School fees, especially private schools
School environment	Indirect costs (i.e., transportation, meals)
Inadequate support for special needs	The opportunity cost of parents (i.e., middle-and lower-income groups)
Teachers with low quality	The low perceived value of education
Curriculum and pedagogy	Costly attendance (direct and indirect)

According to the field research data, school fees are a concern in urban areas, mainly for parents with middle-class incomes. They claimed that direct and indirect school costs contributed to non-enrollment, with indirect school expenses being more complex than direct school fees. In response to the poor perceived value of education, numerous parents said they never attended ECE. Based on their experience, they would wish to enroll their children in the first grade of primary school. Furthermore, they said that they are preparing their children at home. Finally, middle- and low-income parents do not enroll their children in school since they are engaged in income-generating activities in rural and urban locations. They noted that enrolling their children in school would require them to spend the whole day bringing them to and from school. In other research by Murnane and Reardon [41], it is reported that this propensity is especially prevalent among urban parents.

Table 7 expresses that parental desires for non-enrollment in schools are due to direct and indirect education costs in rural and urban locations. The interviews with school instructors and parents indicate that parents are responsible for covering their children’s active and passive school-related expenditures in rural

and urban areas. The table demonstrates that indirect costs are much more than direct costs. Parents in metropolitan regions expressed worry over non-education-related expenses, such as enrollment payment and a contribution to the school building fund for non-enrollment. In research done by Deininger [42], the result is supported.

Table 7. Issues of direct and indirect expenses for non-enrollment

Expenditure	School expenses	Uniforms, school equipment, and supplies	Other expenses
Education (directly related)	Enrollment fees	Uniforms and sports equipment	Living fees
	PTA contributions	Textbooks (mandatory)	School meal fees
	Examination fees	Exercise books	Transportation
	Certification fees	Writing materials	Extra courses
Education (not related)	Donation for enrollment	Additional textbooks	Extra-curricular activities (Class party)
	Contribution to the school construction fund	Non-school books	Private tutoring and house-Tutor expenses
		School supplies	
		Learning materials	

In addition to education costs, most parents raised the issue of private tutoring in rural and urban regions; for instance, improved school performance is complex without private tutoring. Similar findings were found in previous research [43]. Children cannot complete their schoolwork without the assistance of a private tutor since most schools provide homework. Consequently, parents do not enroll in schools, particularly in the urban area, due to these private tutoring inclinations. According to some parents, they were indirectly influencing parents to send their children to private school instructors for private tutoring. According to the interviews and data analysis, parental awareness development for children did not improve compared to the other peer group among the three groups of parents who had previously sent their children to school. Even within the group of children who are not enrolled in school, they are ready for school but remain out of school due to social implications.

4. CONCLUSION

Among the three socio-economic classes, it is evident that parents enroll their children in schools based on their socio-economic status. In rural locations, parents are most interested in learning which social classes are enrolling at the school where they want to enroll their children. Parents in urban regions appear to be less concerned about school quality or education quality and more concerned about the socio-economic category of parents represented in each school. The research indicates that parents choose and enroll their children in ECE schools based on socio-economic factors. Parents do not consider education quality to significantly influence enrolling in most situations, although social factors have an important role. Most parents base their school selection and enrollment decisions on social networks, school visits, and conversations with teachers. However, some parents, particularly in remote regions, believe the headteachers to be key enrolling factors.

Most rural and urban principals are often retired from public schools. The parents in the remote areas believe that retiring principals are critical in providing ECE education for children. A small percentage of parents in this survey do not enroll their children in private rather than public schools due to school distance. Regardless of the quality of education delivered to children, school distance seems to be a significant element in ECE for parents' school choice goals. In rural locations, parental social ambitions influence school selection because parents consider sending their children far from home inappropriate since they are occupied with other household responsibilities. They can better supervise their youngsters at a local school. These results generally reflect the parental desires and considerations in admitting their children to ECE schools. Further research needs to be done to determine the underlying factors that motivate parental school choice for early childhood education.

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