



Learning Brief on
**Path to Scale: A case of BRAC's
4+ Pre-Primary Education model**

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Context and Background

Following the introduction of education policy 2010, the government began expanding pre-primary education, with the goal of universal access for all five-year-old children. By 2014, significant progress had been made, with a substantial increase in pre-primary enrollment. In 2015, a government census of primary schools found that over 99% of government primary schools were offering pre-primary provision, along with almost 95% of 'newly nationalised' primary schools¹.

It has been more than 10 years that the government has been running 5+ pre-primary classes. Most 5+ pre-primary teachers have completed the government's 15-day Pre-Primary Education (PPE) training. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) has established a monitoring mechanism, providing Directorate of Primary Education officers (DPEO), Thana Education officers (TEOs), and Assistant Thana Education officers (ATEOs) with specific guidelines for overseeing pre-primary classes. Additionally, they are instructed to prioritize monitoring pre-primary education during school visits. The annual Primary School Census indicates that parents are increasingly encouraged to enroll their children in pre-primary education. As of 2021, approximately 2.6 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education.

In 2022, the government piloted a two-year pre-primary education program in 3,000 government primary schools, aiming to extend early childhood development instruction to four-year-old children. Given the context of 5+ pre-primary, the 4+ pre-primary program holds significant potential for government scaling.

BRAC's "Advocacy for Play and Early Learning in Bangladesh" initiative, under Porticus's WCD program, aims to strengthen the capacity of key government stakeholders—including Government Primary School teachers and officials at both national and local levels. The project focuses on integrating play-based pedagogy, mental health support, and assessment methods into the pre-primary curriculum through model demonstrations and training. The primary objective is to equip government teachers and other stakeholders with the necessary skills, ensuring that the knowledge and practice of play-based learning can be effectively sustained if the government adopts the 4+ pre-primary program.

Scope and Objective

This learning brief explores the sustainability of BRAC's current 4+ education model if adopted by the government. It is based on primary data collected from field visits to sixteen Government Primary Schools (GPS) in Gazipur and Rangpur by the Learning Partners (LP). Among these schools, six conduct 4+ pre-primary classes (Playlabs) under BRAC alongside 5+ pre-primary classes under government management. Another six schools operate both 4+ and 5+ classes under government management, while the remaining schools exclusively run 5+ pre-primary classes under government administration.

Path to Scale by Government

Several aspects of this model can be adopted by the government if it decides to scale up the 4+ pre-primary initiatives. However, while adopting, some challenges in the government system have to be taken into consideration:

- **Teachers' capacity building, workload, and motivation:** Currently, newly appointed PPE teachers undergo a 15-day training, which is considered technically sound in terms of training materials. Most teachers assigned to 5+ pre-primary education have received this training.

¹ Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Government of Bangladesh. (2015). Annual Primary School Census 2015. Dhaka: MoPME.

However, during the piloting of the 4+ pre-primary model, not all appointed teachers had received PPE training. Many underwent a six-day training course only provided by BRAC IED.

According to LP's KII analysis, both teachers and local-level government officials highly appreciated the PPE training and BRAC IED's training due to their interactive methods and rich content. Notably, BRAC IED played a significant role in developing the training materials for PPE, ensuring effective knowledge transfer, and enhancing teachers' understanding of play-based pedagogy. Furthermore, BRAC IED's report indicates that teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding play-based learning improved after receiving their training. However, many of the teachers mentioned that the 15-day PPE feels a little rushed compared to the content. Also, it would be great if the training also offered a refresher and feedback session after a certain interval.

However, a key concern remains: Do GPS teachers have the capacity to effectively apply this training? Some of the 4+ pre-primary teachers we interviewed reported feeling overburdened as they are already responsible for managing large student groups in higher-level classes, grading exams, and handling administrative tasks. Adding 4+ pre-primary teaching to their workload feels overwhelming, as it requires high-quality interaction with young children.

Additionally, some teachers expressed frustration over the way their colleagues perceived pre-primary teaching. They reported being labeled as "pre-primary teachers," as if the role required fewer skills, which they found somewhat derogatory—especially since they also teach higher-level classes. This stigma, combined with their heavy workload, discourages teachers from putting in the extra effort needed to engage with young children effectively.

LP's KII analysis also found that teachers lacked the motivation to fully commit to play-based engagement with children. Classroom observations confirmed this, as teachers were often seen raising their voices at 4+ pre-primary students when they played with toys in the classroom.

If the government plans to adopt this model, it will need to address these challenges by either recruiting more pre-primary teachers or redesigning the job descriptions of existing 5+ pre-primary teachers. Given that teachers responsible for higher-level classes are unwilling or unable to take on pre-primary teaching responsibilities, structural adjustments will be necessary to ensure the model's success.

- **Infrastructure and play materials:** Currently, the best classroom in the school is allocated to 5+ pre-primary classes. To successfully pilot 4+ pre-primary classes, classrooms of a similar standard are necessary. However, given the existing shortage of space, allocating a dedicated classroom for 4+ pre-primary will be challenging. In many schools where the 4+ pilot is already underway, a double-shift system is being used, meaning the same classroom is shared between 5+ and 4+ pre-primary classes at different times of the day.

Compared to BRAC's play labs, pre-primary classrooms in government schools are often less tidy, and the toys and books provided for play are poorly maintained and require upkeep. The contrast is evident to anyone who visits both BRAC-run and government-run classrooms. If the play lab model is adopted for 4+ pre-primary classes, the classroom setup will need to be distinctly different from that of 5+ pre-primary. This model requires a more artistic and engaging environment, with toys and learning materials placed in various corners of the classroom to enhance play-based learning.

However, schools are already understaffed, and the responsibility of managing classroom decorations and play materials falls entirely on teachers. As previously noted, many teachers feel demotivated when handling pre-primary classes, and the additional burden of maintaining toys and decorations could further discourage them. Field observations indicate that some teachers even hesitate to let children play with toys as they are responsible for tidying up after class, adding to their already heavy workload.

If the 4+ pre-primary is expanded using BRAC's model, proper maintenance of toys and learning materials must be prioritized. Schools should allocate resources for cost-effective toys and books, as well as a small budget for their upkeep. Teachers may be encouraged to embrace play-based learning, understanding that toys are essential for children's socio-emotional development. Additionally, teachers can engage children to tidy up their toys. To ensure the success of this model, teachers involved in pre-primary education may be supported in maintaining a child-friendly learning environment.

- **Parents' Engagement:** One of the key differences between BRAC's pre-primary model (Play Labs) and government-run pre-primary classes is the level of parental engagement. BRAC actively involves parents through material development workshops, parental meetings, and School Management Committee (SMC) meetings. Additionally, each Play Lab includes two mother volunteers selected from the parents of enrolled children. These volunteers provide crucial support to play leaders in managing the large class sizes, typically consisting of 20-25 children.

Young children often need assistance with tasks such as going to the washroom, eating their tiffin, or resolving conflicts over toys. The presence of mother volunteers helps ease these challenges, ensuring a smoother learning environment. This support also prevents play leaders from feeling overwhelmed, allowing them to focus more on engaging the children effectively. Moreover, mothers appreciate seeing their children happy and playful, making the system mutually beneficial.

In contrast, government-run 4+ pre-primary classes, currently being piloted, often feel chaotic, as observed during field visits. Despite having similar class sizes to Play Labs, government teachers struggle to manage the children. As mentioned before, many teachers are not particularly motivated to teach pre-primary students, and the added responsibility of handling young children's numerous small needs further exacerbates their difficulties. In some cases, teachers have been observed to be harsh with children due to the stress of classroom management.

To address these challenges, GPS could consider incorporating one or two mother volunteers to assist teachers, following BRAC's Play Lab model. This would reduce the burden on teachers while also giving parents the opportunity to witness and support their children's learning. Additionally, seeing the positive impact on their children's behavior would encourage parents to send them to school more regularly.

- **Monitoring and supervision:** The DPE has implemented a structured monitoring mechanism, providing DPEOs, TEOs, and ATEOs with clear guidelines for overseeing pre-primary classes. They have also been instructed to prioritize the monitoring of pre-primary education during school visits.

Our interviews indicate that inspectors visit pre-primary classes regularly and conduct thorough observations, assessing classroom conditions, teacher-student interactions, and the overall playfulness of the children. Additionally, teachers have expressed that the current monitoring system is functioning well. The existing monitoring framework is expected to work well when the government scales up the 4+ pre-primary program to ensure its success.

Way Forward

When the government first introduced pre-primary education in 2010, it was met with both enthusiasm and skepticism. Parents were eager to enroll their children, recognizing the value of early education, while teachers struggled to adjust to the new demands. Over time, with structured training and increased awareness, the 5+ pre-primary model became an integral part of the education system. Today, as the

government considers scaling up the 4+ pre-primary initiative, it faces a similar challenge: how to ensure that the model is not just implemented, but also effective and sustainable.

One of the most pressing concerns is teachers' capacity. To address this challenge, the government might consider expanding pre-primary teacher recruitment to reduce the workload on existing staff. In addition, enhancing the 15-day PPE training by incorporating refresher sessions and feedback sessions can be a great value addition to teachers' capacity for play-based learning. The government might also consider following BRAC's model of parental involvement by recruiting mother volunteers to assist teachers in managing young children's needs.

If the government hopes to replicate the success of BRAC's model on a national scale, it must acknowledge these challenges and address them head-on. Teachers need training, but they also need support. Classrooms need materials, but they also need maintenance. Parents need awareness, but they also need a role in their children's education. By integrating these elements into the 4+ pre-primary scale-up, the government can create an early learning system that is not just widespread, but also impactful and sustainable.



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