

Watch Report

Report No. 32 Research and Evaluation Division, BRAC January 1998

Assessment of basic education: A comparison among BRAC, formal and never schooled children

Abstract: This report aims to compare the level of basic education of the learners of non-formal schools of BRAC, formal schools and never schooled children. Data were collected from five areas where a surveillance system was in operation. A sample of 720 children, equally distributed by study groups and sex, were randomly selected. This study reveals that NFPE graduates were more likely to have better level of basic education compared to their peers in formal schools. None of the never schooled children had basic education. Neither the formal nor the non-formal system could reach the WCEFA goal to achieve an 80% level of basic education.

Introduction

Constructing the concept of basic education from the declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) an initiative was taken to measure the level of basic education of the children in Bangladesh in November 1991. A test instrument and an innovative methodology were also developed in this regard (Chowdhury et al., 1992, 1994). Following the above methodology and instrument numerous studies have been conducted to measure the level of basic education of the children of formal and non-formal schools (Nath et al., 1993, 1994, 1996; Murshid et al., 1994). To compare the basic educational performance of the formal and non-formal schools of BRAC an initiative was taken by Nath in 1996 (Nath, 1997). This

Watch report is to explore the findings of the above comparative study.

Methodology

Definition: Following definition of ~~basic education~~ was used for this study. "Basic education will refer to education intended to develop basic learning needs (i.e., 3R's) as well as some basic life skills necessary for the children to survive, to improve the quality of their lives and to continue learning (Chowdhury et al., 1994, 1992).

The instrument: The instrument has four sections such as life skills/knowledge, reading skills, writing skills, and numeracy skills. Children satisfying the following criteria were considered to have basic education.

- a) answering 'correctly' at least seven of the ten life skills questions;
- b) answering 'correctly' at least three of the four questions from the reading comprehension passage;
- c) 'correctly' communicating a given message through letter written to father or other relative; and
- d) answering 'correctly' at least three of the four mental arithmetic questions.

Sampling:

Data were collected from five rural areas under the surveillance system of *Watch* project. In these areas NFPE has completed at least one cycle. Three groups of children were assessed for the study. These are: graduates of BRAC schools completing three years of NFPE, formal school learners with at least three years of schooling, and never-enrolled children. BRAC learners were graduated during 1995 and 1996 and the age of all the study children were from 10 to 16 years. A sample of 720 children, equally distributed by study groups and sex, were randomly selected (Nath, 1997).

Findings

According to the definition of basic education used in this study and all previous surveys in Bangladesh, 69.2% of the children of BRAC's NFPE satisfied all four criteria of basic education. Among the formal school children, 51.3% satisfied these criteria and none of the never schooled children could satisfy the combined criteria of basic education (Table 1). When the data were

broken down by sex of the children it was observed that boys of both the groups (NFPE and Formal) outperformed their peer girls. Although the difference was slightly greater among the NFPE children, no statistically significant difference was observed between the performance of boys and girls in any of the study groups. As an aggregate level, the children of BRAC's NFPE showed significantly better performance ($p < 0.001$) compared to the children of formal schools. Similar results were observed when data were analysed separately for boys and girls.

Table 1. Percentage of children satisfying basic education criteria by school category and sex

School category	Sex		Both
	Boy	Girl	
1. NFPE	70.8	67.5	69.2
2. Formal	51.7	50.8	51.3
3. Never	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Remarks:</i>			
1 vs. 2	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$

'Partial basic education' was defined as children satisfying at least one of the four criteria, but not all. It was observed that 30.4% of the NFPE children and 45.4% of the formal school children possess the partial basic education skills. This rate was 58.7% among the non-schooled children. Sadly, after passing three years of schooling 0.4% of the non-formal school children and 3.3% of the formal school children could pass none of the four criteria of basic education.

Table 2. Percentage of children satisfying life skills/knowledge criteria by school category and sex

School category	Sex		Both
	Boy	Girl	
1. NFPE	85.8	87.5	86.7
2. Formal	65.8	71.7	68.8
3. Never	13.3	16.7	15.0
<i>Remarks:</i>			
1 vs. 2	p<0.001	p<0.01	p<0.001
1 vs. 3	p<0.001	p<0.001	p<0.001
2 vs. 3	p<0.001	p<0.001	p<0.001

The performance on each of the four assessment criteria for the children from different school categories is presented in the Tables 2 to 5. In each of the four components of basic education, more than 80% of the non-formal school children could pass the minimum level. On the other hand, among the children of formal schools, these rates were less than 70% in life and writing skills and more than 80% in reading and numeracy skills. Only 15% of the never-schooled children satisfied the

Table 3. Percentage of children satisfying reading skills criteria by school category and sex

School category	Sex		Both
	Boy	Girl	
1. NFPE	90.8	85.8	88.3
2. Formal	87.5	80.8	84.2
3. Never	2.5	2.5	2.5
<i>Remarks:</i>			
1 vs. 2	ns	ns	ns
Note: ns = not significant at p<0.05			

criteria of life skills and 57.5% of them satisfied the criteria of numeracy skills. A negligible proportion of these children satisfied the criteria of reading and writing skills, these rates were 2.5% and 1.3% respectively. On average, the children of both formal and non-formal schools showed better performance in numeracy skills followed by reading, writing and life skills. In all the skills criteria the children of BRAC's NFPE showed better performance than those from formal schools. However, these differences were statistically significant (p<0.001) only in life skills

Table 4. Percentage of children satisfying writing skills criteria by school category and sex

School category	Sex		Both
	Boy	Girl	
1. NFPE	81.7	81.7	81.7
2. Formal	67.5	65.8	66.7
3. Never	0.0	2.5	1.3
<i>Remarks:</i>			
1 vs. 2	p<0.01	p<0.01	p<0.001

and writing skills. The girls of all the three school categories outperformed their peer boys only in life skills. In other three components of basic education, girls lag behind the boys. Except the performance of the formal school children in numeracy, no statistically significant gender difference was observed in the data. In numeracy, the boys of formal schools did significantly (p<0.05) better than their peer girls.

Table 5. Percentage of children satisfying numeracy skills criteria by school category and sex

School category	Sex		Both
	Boy	Girl	
1. NFPE	98.3	95.8	97.1
2. Formal	97.5	91.7	94.6
3. Never	60.0	55.0	57.5
<i>Remarks:</i>			
1 vs. 2	ns	ns	ns
1 vs. 3	p<0.001	p<0.001	p<0.001
2 vs. 3	p<0.001	p<0.001	p<0.001

Note: ns = not significant at p<0.05

Conclusion

According to the findings of this study it can be said that after completing similar years of schooling BRAC school graduates showed a significantly higher level of basic educational performance than the children of formal schools. Skill wise analysis showed that NFPE children were better in two areas, life skills and writing. In reading and numeracy both the groups were in the same level. As expected the children who did never went to any type of school had no basic education. However, these children had some life skills and a certain level of numeracy skills. Neither the formal nor the non-formal system could reach the WCEFA goal to achieve an 80% level of basic education.

References

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