

**Status of BRAC graduates in secondary schools:
An exploratory investigation**

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October 2002

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C O N T E N T S

Table of contents	II
Acknowledgements	III
Abstract	IV
Introduction	1
Objectives of the study	2
Methodology	2
- Research design and strategy	2
- Study area	2
- Sources of data	2
- Sample size and sampling procedure	3
- Data collection techniques and instruments	4
- Field activities and quality control of the data	4
Findings	5
- Status of schooling of the students	5
- Level of attainment	8
- Difficulties faced in secondary school	14
- Reasons for discontinuation	16
Discussions and conclusions	18
Management implication	23
References	24
Appendix	26

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. AMR Chowdhury, former Director Research for allowing me to undertake this study and I also acknowledge his support in various stages of the study. My profound gratitude is extended to Ms. Erum Marium, Programme Head, Dr. Shafiqul Islam, Programme coordinator and other colleagues of BRAC Education Programme for helping in different stages of the study. I owe a lot to the Head Teachers and Assistant Teachers of the concerned secondary schools and teachers of the concerned BRAC schools for their cooperation in collecting data. My sincere thanks and gratitude are also extended to Dr. Imaran Matin, Senior Economist and Samir R Nath, Senior Research Statistician for reviewing the paper. I am also thankful to my colleagues at Education Study Group of Research and Evaluation Division for their valuable suggestions. Finally, I am grateful to Mr. Hasan Shareef Ahmed for editing the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed at examining the status of BRAC graduates in formal secondary schools. Three hundred and twenty BRAC graduates from 20 NFPE schools who were transferred to grade VI in formal schools in 1999 were chosen randomly as programme group. An equal number of non-BRAC students of the same batch from the same secondary schools were chosen randomly as control group. The selected students were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. To assess their level of attainment in secondary schools, marks obtained in the annual examinations in different classes (class VI, VII and VIII) were collected from the concerned schools. Besides, 72 teachers from 8 secondary schools, 6 NFPE teachers, 62 ongoing and 43 dropout students of programme group, 53 ongoing and 21 dropout students of control group were interviewed in-depth. Ninety six guardians of the selected students (55 programme and 41 control groups) and 29 BRAC staff were also interviewed. The study revealed that till June 2002, about 55% of the students of the programme group and 73% of the control group were continuing in secondary schools. The rate of continuation for girls of both the groups was higher than boys. Although, the students of the programme group obtained comparatively lower marks than the control group in the school examination, the differences were not statically significant. Both the groups of students felt difficulties mainly in English and Mathematics and the students of programme group felt difficulties with teaching-learning in formal system. The teaching-learning system, economic crisis, involvement in income earning activities and practice of early marriage were the major impediments for continuing study especially for the former BRAC students. It is concluded that unless schools take the leading responsibility in teaching daily lessons in the classrooms, and BRAC's supports are continued at the secondary level, level of retention and attainment of the BRAC graduates in secondary school may not be at an acceptable level.

INTRODUCTION

BRAC introduced a non-formal primary education (NFPE) programme in 1985 for the children aged 8-10 years. BRAC targets the children of poor and illiterate households who have never been to school or dropped out before completing grade three. The main objective of the programme is to provide basic education to its target children. The course duration of the programme was three years, where the learners would get education equivalent to class III. After their graduation from BRAC schools, most of the children would transfer in class IV in formal primary schools for continuing their study.

The appraisal report of NFPE phase 1 conducted by Cummings, et al. in 1993 alluded a moot question of linking NFPE with formal education system (cited in the NFPE phase 2 report, April 1997). A paper on BRAC education programme reported that although, a good number of NFPE graduates were transferred to class IV in the formal primary schools, a significant number of them dropped out before completing the primary cycle. The low retention rate of BRAC graduates in formal primary schools was found to be higher due to high cost and uninspiring environment. Under the circumstances, and considering the demand for longer school cycle for the society, BRAC launched the current semi-formal primary education programme in 1,000 BRAC schools throughout the country on a pilot basis in 1995. To complete the whole primary cycle in 48 months, BRAC added one more year to its earlier model. The course duration was divided into five unequal time frame i.e. 9 months each for class I and II, 10 months each for classes III, IV and V. The first batch of the learners under this new initiative completed their primary schooling (five grades) from BRAC schools in January 1999. Most graduates of this batch were transferred to grade VI in secondary school in the same year who presently would study in grade IX.

Through internal informal evaluation, the programme seemed to be successful. Thus, the programme has largely been extended in 1997. Although, some studies were undertaken on different aspects of the learners under the extended programme, none of them explored their level of retention and attainment in secondary level.

Objectives of the study

To address the question of BRAC NFPE students' retention and performance at the secondary level, this study aimed to:

- examine level of retention of BRAC graduates in secondary schools,
- assess the level of attainment in the school examinations compared to the non-BRAC students,
- analyse causes of dropout,
- explore difficulties they faced in schooling at the secondary level.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and strategy

This study design was both quantitative and qualitative in nature and followed an experimental strategy.

Study area

Information was gathered from Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Khulna divisions, where fifth grade curriculum was introduced on a pilot basis in 1,000 NFPE schools. Since there were no pilot schools (out of 1,000) in Barishal division, it was not included in this study.

Sources of data

Data were collected from primary sources. The BRAC graduates and the non-BRAC students who enrolled in grade VI in 1999 were the main sources of data. Data related to respondents' households were collected from their guardians, and data related to their attainment were collected from the concerned secondary schools where BRAC graduates were transferred. Besides, to gather some additional information, the guardians of the students, BRAC teachers of the concerned schools, BRAC staff of the concerned TOs and teachers of the concerned secondary schools were interviewed.

Sample size and sampling procedure

From each of the selected administrative division, one BEP Team Office (TO)¹ was selected purposively where pilot schools were introduced in 1995. The TOs were chosen based on availability of experimental NFPE schools and the schools were chosen based on adequate number of learners enrolled in secondary schools. From each of the selected TO, four course completed schools were chosen purposively. Thus, number of selected BRAC schools stood at $(5 \times 4 = 20)$ 20. From each of the selected school, 16 BRAC graduates who enrolled in grade VI were chosen at random. The sample size for the BRAC graduates was thus 320 $(16 \times 20 = 320)$ (Table 1), which was estimated considering 6% sampling error. The BRAC graduates were chosen as programme group.

An equal number of non-BRAC students (320) of the same batch (who enrolled in grade VI in the same year) were chosen randomly from the concerned secondary schools where BRAC graduates enrolled. Of the selected students, 317 students were finally covered (Table 1). The non-BRAC students were chosen as control group.

In addition, three BEP team offices from the selected areas were chosen purposively to collect qualitative data. From the areas, 72 teachers from 8 secondary schools, 6 NFPE teachers from the selected BRAC schools, 82 ongoing and 43 dropout students of the programme group, 53 ongoing and 21 dropout students of the control group were chosen. Besides, 96 guardians (55 programme and 41 control) of the selected students of both the groups and 29 BRAC staff in were also interviewed. The sample population for qualitative data was chosen purposively. The following Table shows a distribution of sample population by sex.

¹ BEP's field office, from which schools are being operated.

Table 1. Distribution of sample population by sex and category

Student's category	Students		
	Boys	Girls	All
BRAC graduates (programme)	83 (25.9)	237 (74.1)	320 (100.0)
Non-BRAC students (Control)	119 (37.5)	198 (62.5)	317 (100.0)
All	202 (31.7)	435 (68.3)	637 (100.0)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages of the students

Data collection techniques and instruments

The selected students for the quantitative part were interviewed individually using a structured pre-coded questionnaire. The questionnaire contained mainly questions related to socioeconomic background of the students as well as status of their retention in school.

The teachers of the secondary schools, the ongoing students of both the groups, the dropout students of the programme group and the BRAC staff were interviewed in-groups. The teachers of the BRAC schools, the dropout students of the control group and the guardians of the students were interviewed individually.

The in-depth interviews and the group discussions were held using checklists developed for individual groups. To assess level of attainment of the selected students, subject-wise marks that they obtained in different examinations were collected from the concerned secondary schools. The questionnaire contained a format, which was applicable to collect marks of all subjects taught in grades VI, VII and VIII. It should be mentioned here that marks of only annual examinations were gathered.

Field activities and quality control of data

Ten experienced field investigators and 2 field supervisors were recruited to collect information. The field investigators as well as the supervisors were imparted a three-day orientation on the data collection and supervision techniques. Of the training duration, one-day was allocated for field test to provide practical exposure to the data collection techniques.

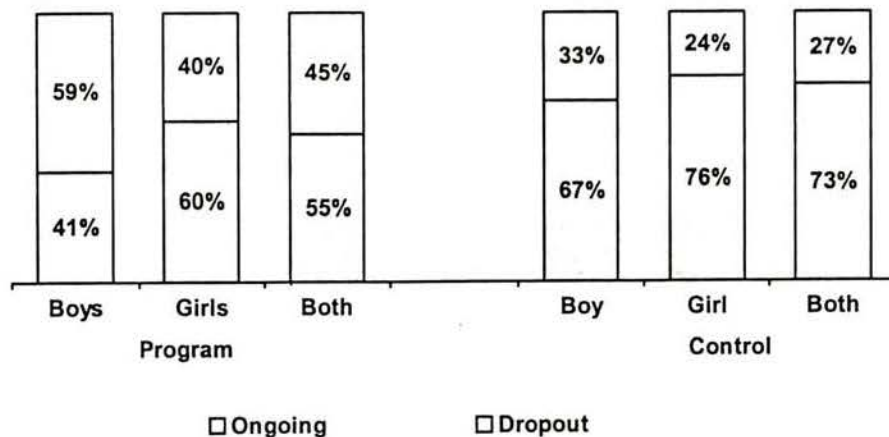
The field investigators conducted the individual interviews and collected marks from the concerned secondary schools. Data were collected in June 2002. However, the supervisors were responsible to assist the field investigators at the field level in collecting data. They were also responsible for re-interviewing at least 10% of the respondents and scrutinized the questionnaires instantly. The researcher himself visited all the selected TOs to meet the field investigator and conducted the group discussion meetings with the selected groups.

FINDINGS

Status of schooling of the students

Figure 1 shows that 41% of boys of the programme group were continuing study in secondary schools, which was lower than the boys of control group (67%). Similarly, 60% of girls of the programme group were continuing study, which also was lower than the girls of the control group (76%).

Figure 1. Level of retention of BRAC graduates in secondary schools



The above figure depicts that the level of retention of both boys and girls was higher for control group than programme group. It means that rate of discontinuation of former BRAC students in secondary schools was higher than non-BRAC students. Inter group analysis by sex reveals that level of retention of girls was higher than boys for both the groups (Table 1 in Appendix). The reasons for such discriminatory results between programme vs. control group can be identified from the following socioeconomic

composition analysis of the sample population. Reasons for discontinuation are discussed later on.

Tables 1–7 in appendix confirm that socioeconomic factors of the households are influential determinants for retention of the children especially in formal schools. Table 1 in appendix covers father's occupation, status of parent's and family education, and household's economic status. The Table shows that fathers of about 19% students of the programme group were engaged in such occupations (10% day labour, 4% Rickshaw/Van driver, 3% skilled labour, 2% handicrafts) that yield very low income. The proportion was only 7% for control group. Although, fathers of about 71% students of the programme group were engaged in farming (44%) , trading (18%) and service (9%), raw data show status was far lower compared to the control group. Data in Appendix (Table 1) further evident that level of father education, mother education and household's year of schooling were far lower for programme group than control group. Similarly, economic condition of the programme group was also downward compared to the control group.

Table 2 depicts that majority students of both the groups (87% of the programme and 92% of the control group) were studying in class IX. The Table also shows that 13% students of the programme and 8% of the control group were repeating in lower classes. The Table indicates that the rate of repetition of the programme group was higher than control group.

Table 2. Proportion of ongoing students by classes they studying

Classes	Programme		Control	
	Number	%	Number	%
Class VII	7	4.0	7	3.0
Class VIII	16	9.1	12	5.2
Class IX	152	86.9	212	91.8
Total	175	100.0	231	100.0

Table 3 shows that the average dropout rates in both the groups were higher in classes VII and VIII compared to other classes, but interestingly, it was far lower in class IX. It

should be mentioned here that the information of the following table for class IX is the finding of six months (January–June 2002). Some students studying in class IX may further dropout in the remaining six months, but it is conceived that the rate will not exceed the rate of other classes. A question may arise, why the rate was higher in classes VII and VIII and why the rate was lower in class IX. It was observed that the finding was not correlated to class VII or VIII, rather being correlated to age and physical condition of the students. Most of the students (both boys and girls) of these classes fell in age group 13–15 years. A significant proportion of rural girls of this age group was found to be married and some of them were engaged in income earning activities (details have been discussed in the next part of this paper). On the other hand, the rate of dropout in class IX was correlated to the classes they studied in. Most parents of the students of class IX thought that within the next one and half year their children would complete the SSC level. It should be mentioned here that the SSC level had a great value to the people in Bangladesh – thus, they determined that their children studying in classes IX or X should continue their study.

Table 3. Distribution of dropout students by dropout classes

Classes	Programme %			Control %		
	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both
Class VI	40.8	15.6	24.1	23.1	21.3	22.1
Class VII	26.5	32.3	30.3	28.2	27.7	27.9
Class VIII	30.6	35.4	33.8	41.0	40.4	40.7
Class IX	2.0	16.7	11.7	7.7	10.6	9.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Number)	(49)	(96)	(141)	(39)	(47)	(86)

Figures in parentheses indicate number of students

Tables 2–7 in appendix show detail association of level of retention of the students by their household's socioeconomic factors; i.e., father's occupation, father's education, mother's education, family's level of education, household's economic status and land size.

A binary regression analysis shows that level of retention of the students at secondary level had positive correlation with some socioeconomic factors of the households, such as

higher amount of land, female sex, average family education, good economic status of the households and having support with home assignments. Amongst the factors, sex, level of average family education, economic status and support at home had significant ($p < 0.001$) influence for continuing study, and higher age group of the children had negative correlation at $p < 0.001$ level (Appendix Table 16).

Level of attainment

The level of attainment of the students at the secondary level was measured through marks that they obtained in the annual examination (classes VI–VIII). Results of the examinations were gathered from the concerned secondary schools. Table 4 shows that in the annual examination of class VI, the control group on average (average of all subjects) obtained 43.3 marks, which was higher than programme group (41.3). The difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). In the annual examination of class VII, the control group obtained 44.8 marks, which was also higher than programme group (42.4). The difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). In the annual examination of class VIII, the control group obtained 46 marks, which was higher than the programme group (44.5). This difference was also not statistically significant ($p = 0.05$).

Inter group analysis of the data shows that girls of the programme group obtained, on average, 42.3 marks which was significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher than boys (37.3). In class VII, the girls obtained 43.4 marks that was also significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than boys (38.5). In class VIII, the girls obtained 45.1 marks that was significantly ($p < 0.10$) higher than boys (41.3). Similarly, girls of the control group obtained higher marks compared to the boys in all the school examinations in all the classes, but the differences were not statistically significant ($p = 0.05$). Table 4 shows a gradual increase of scores towards higher classes for the students of both the groups (programme vs control).

Table 4 further shows, both the boys and girls of the control group obtained higher marks in all the examinations than the boys and girls of the programme group. The levels of significance by sex and groups are shown below the Table.

Table 4. Marks (mean score) obtained by students in annual examinations in different classes by sex

Classes	Programme (score)				Control (score)			
	Boys	Girls	Both	LS	Boys	Girls	Both	LS
Class VI	37.3 (11.2)	42.3 (13.6)	41.3 (13.2)	p < .001	42.9 (14.5)	43.6 (13.2)	43.3 (13.7)	ns
Class VII	38.5 (11.7)	43.4 (14.1)	42.4 (13.8)	p < .05	44.6 (13.6)	44.9 (15.2)	44.8 (14.6)	ns
Class VIII	41.3 (10.0)	45.1 (10.0)	44.5 (10.0)	p < .10	44.4 (11.7)	46.9 (11.3)	46.0 (11.5)	ns

Figures in parentheses indicate standard deviation

ns = not significant at p= 0.05 level

Level of significance (LS):

- Class VI: Programme boys (37.3) vs Control boys (42.9), p<.001
 Programme girls (42.3) vs control 43.6, ns.
 Programme (41.3) vs Control (43.4), ns.
- Class VII: Programme boys (38.5) vs control boys (44.6), p<.001
 Programme girls (43.4) vs control girls (44.9), ns.
 Programme (42.4) vs. Control (44.8), ns.
- Class VIII: Programme boys (41.3) vs control boys (44.4) ns.
 Programme girls (45.1) vs control (46.9), ns.
 Programme (44.5) vs. Control (46.0), ns.

Table 4 indicates that level of attainment of the advantaged group was higher than disadvantaged group. Here, the programme group was disadvantaged than control group in terms of socioeconomic factors and boys students were disadvantaged than girls in terms of government's initiatives and incentives for promoting girls education. The girls in secondary schools were not charged tuition fee rather were paid a modest amount of stipend, which was conditioned to 75% attendance in schools and achievement of 45% of total marks. On the other hand, boys students had to pay tuition fee along with other educational expenditure. The respondents of all the groups informed that girls students spent more time in education than their male counterpart.

Table 5 shows that the students of programme group obtained lower marks in all subjects in all the school examinations (class VI, VII and VIII) compared to the control group. In the annual examination in class VI, although, the control group obtained higher marks in all the subjects compared to the programme group, the difference was statistically

significant at $p < 0.05$ level only for Mathematics. In the annual examination in class VII, the difference was significant in four subjects, i.e. Bangla 1st paper ($p < 0.05$), Bangla 2nd paper ($p < 0.10$), mathematics ($p < 0.001$) and general science ($p < 0.05$). In the examination in class VIII, the difference was significant ($p < 0.05$) in English 2nd paper.

As the reasons for such a discriminatory result of the BRAC graduates at the secondary level (Table 4-5), some major shortcomings of the BRAC Education Programme (BEP) may be considered. The concerned BRAC staff in some areas informed that due to experimental schools (pilot schools) they could not prepare the students adequately to transfer to the secondary level. They also informed that before introducing grades IV and V in BRAC schools, the BRAC teachers would teach up to third grade. Moreover, majority of them had lower level of education². The teachers could not be trained effectively in building up their teaching capacity to teach up to grade IV and V lack of adequate time and scope. In this regard, the teachers in secondary schools opined that it might be difficult for the teachers in BRAC schools in teaching English and mathematics of grades IV and V particularly who had lower level education. They commented that majority of the former BRAC students were weak in English and mathematics. The BRAC staff told that due to consolidation of the programme (from grade I to V in four years), it was difficult for the BRAC teachers to complete the cycle properly. They further noticed that there was a major gap between these two systems (non-formal vs formal) in curriculum, teaching-learning techniques and school environment. Details of other major reasons are discussed in the discussion part of this paper.

Finally, most of the informants of all the groups commented that as the BRAC graduates were from poor and illiterate families, they did not get any kind of assistance from home that they required in preparing home assignments. However, the BRAC staff affirmed that the quality deficiency of the BRAC school students would not exist from the next batches. Some teachers in secondary schools also expressed a similar view. They told that class performance of the former BRAC students who enrolled in secondary schools

² BEP presently recruits minimum SSC pass teachers.

in the last two years (session 2001 and 2001) seemed to be better than those who enrolled in 1999 session.

Attempt was also made to examine the level of attainment of BRAC graduate in other areas related to their schooling. In this regard, the teachers of the selected secondary schools informed that the former BRAC students were more punctual, obedient and smart as compared to the children who came from formal primary schools. The teachers also informed that the former BRAC students showed extra ordinary performance in cultural activities.

Table 5. Marks (mean score) obtained by pupils in different academic grades by different subjects they are taught

Groups of students	Marks obtained by students in different subjects									
	Bnagla 1st paper	Bangla 2nd paper	English 1st paper	Eng. 2nd paper	Math	Social science	General science	Agri. science	Religious studies	All
Class VI										
Programme	43.2	42.5	37.1	36.0	36.0	42.2	41.2	46.2	46.9	41.3
Control	45.2	44.2	39.1	37.6	39.8	44.1	43.2	48.7	48.4	43.4
Significance	ns	ns	ns	ns	p<.05	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Grade VII										
Programme	43.8	43.1	38.0	39.5	35.1	44.0	42.7	48.1	47.5	42.4
Control	46.4	45.7	40.3	41.3	40.2	45.3	45.5	49.3	49.6	44.8
Significance	p <.05	p<.10	ns	ns	p<.001	ns	p<.05	ns	ns	ns
Grade VIII										
Programme	48.5	46.0	37.3	38.2	38.9	45.9	44.4	48.9	51.7	44.5
Control	50.4	47.7	39.9	41.4	39.0	47.2	46.3	49.6	52.1	46.0
Significance	ns	ns	ns	p<.05	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

Table 6 shows that 40-50% of the students of both the groups (programme vs. control) fall in score-band 45–59, which was higher than other score-bands.

Table 6. Proportion of students by score-band achieved in different examinations

Score band	Programme %			Control %		
	VI (278)	VII (228)	VIII (166)	VI (290)	VII (263)	VIII (224)
< 33	27.0	27.2	13.3	23.4	23.2	15.2
33 – 44	14.4	16.7	31.3	18.6	17.5	25.4
45 – 59	57.8	48.6	49.4	49.3	47.2	48.6
60 – 74	0.4	7.5	6.0	8.3	10.6	9.8
75 +	0.4	-	-	0.4	1.5	1.0
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Figures in parentheses indicate numbers of students

In this connection, an attempt was made to explore whether there was any association of attainment of the students with their socioeconomic factors. Tables (8-13) in appendix show detail association between attainment of the students with their socioeconomic factors. The tables show socioeconomic factors of the households were the influential determinants for level of attainment of the children formal system.

A regression analysis (Binary) shows that level of attainment of the students in secondary level had positive correlation with some socioeconomic factors, such as higher amount of land size, higher level of average family education and female sex (Appendix Table 17).

Table 7 shows that less than 1% of the programme group (320) appeared in scholarship examination in class V, which increased to 3.4% in class VIII. On the other side, about 13% students of the control group (317) appeared in scholarship examination in class V, which decreased to 10.4% in class VIII.

Table 7. Number of students appeared in scholarship examination by class

Classes	Programme (320)		Control (317)	
	No	%	No	%
Class V	2	0.6	41	12.9
Class VIII	11	3.4	33	10.4
Total	13	4.1	61	19.2

Of the 13 students of the programme group those who appeared in scholarship examination in class V and VIII, 7.7% got scholarship, which was higher than the control group (3.3%) (Table 8).

Table 8. Proportion of students got scholarship by classes they appeared

Status of getting scholarship	Programme		Control	
	No	%	No	%
Got	1	7.7	2	3.3
Did not get	12	92.3	59	96.7
All	13	100.0	61	100.0

Difficulties faced in secondary school

Attempt was made to explore what difficulties the students faced in secondary schools related to their study. Table 9 shows that the majority students of both the groups faced difficulties mainly in three subjects, i.e. mathematics (79% of the programme and 83% of the control group), English 2nd paper (64% of the programme and 53% of the control group), and English 1st paper (40% of the programme group and 37% of the control group). They added that often they could not prepare their home assignments especially in these subjects without someone's help.

Table 9. Subjects they felt difficult in secondary schools

Subjects they felt difficult	Programme (320)		Control (317)	
	No	%	No	%
No difficulties	11	3.4	3	1.0
Bangla 1st paper	-	-	4	1.3
Bangla 2nd paper	2	0.6	1	0.3
English 1st paper	129	40.3	118	37.2
English 2nd paper	205	64.1	167	52.7
Mathematics	254	79.4	262	82.7
General science	7	2.2	8	2.5
Social science	33	10.3	61	19.2
Agricultural science	-	-	2	0.6
Religious study	-	-	1	0.3

Multiple responses considered

The children especially of the poor and illiterate families (both programme and control group) faced problems in preparing their home assignments in Mathematics and English. It was realised that the existing teaching-learning system in formal system did not favour the children of this group. The children especially the BRAC graduates informed that the teaching-learning system in high school was different from BRAC school – thus they often could not learn their lessons from classroom rather they were given home assignments to prepare lessons for the next classes. The non-BRAC students having similar background expressed a similar view. They told that they did not get help either by their parents or private tutor. As they were children of illiterate and poor families, they were deprived from such facilities. Majority of them opined that if someone supported them in preparing home assignments, they would perform better in the classroom and school examinations. In this regard the teachers of the selected secondary schools expressed that it was not possible for them to give individual attention to all students in such a large size classroom. The teachers in secondary schools informed that rate of enrollment in secondary schools in recent years had increased dramatically, but physical infrastructure of the schools remains same in most of the schools. Thus, with lack of classrooms and teachers, the students could not be divided into several sections.

Reasons for discontinuation

Table 10 depicts that the reasons for dropout were more or less similar for both the programme and control groups but were not similar for boys and girls. Individual interviews reveal that more than half (51.0%) of the boys of programme group left schools due to economic crisis, followed by involvement in income earning activities (42%) and less interest to go to school (20.4%). Similarly, amongst the boys of control group, 38.5% had less interest to go to schools, followed by involvement in income earning activities (33.3%) and economic crisis (28.2%). On the other hand, amongst the girls, 47% of the programme and more than 70% of the control group discontinued their study due to marriage. Some 37.5% girls of the programme group and 19.2% girls of the control group left schools due to economic crisis. The Table also shows that some 17% girls of the programme group had less interest to attend schools, which was higher than the girls of control group (4.3%). Table 10 gives a distribution of discontinued students by causes for their discontinuation.

Table 10. Proportion of students by reasons for dropout

Reasons for dropout	Programme %		Control %	
	Boys (49)	Girls (96)	Boys (39)	Girls (47)
Marriage	-	46.9 (45)	-	70.2 (33)
Economic crisis	51.0 (25)	37.5 (36)	28.2 (11)	19.2 (9)
Involvement in income earning activities	41.8 (20)	4.2 (4)	33.3 (13)	14.9 (7)
Failure in school examination	-	-	5.1 (2)	-
Had to work in family	4.1 (2)	8.3 (8)	-	-
Physical illness			5.1 (2)	-
Less interest for attending to school	20.4 (10)	16.7 (16)	38.5 (15)	4.3 (2)
Unwillingness of parents	2.0 (1)	4.2 (4)	2.6 (1)	6.4 (3)
Lack of security	-	2.1 (2)	-	-

Multiple responses considered. Figures in parentheses indicate numbers of students.

Table 10 indicates that higher proportion of the girls discontinued their study due to marriage, while higher proportion of the boys discontinued due to poverty. The Table in Appendix 3 confirms that the rate of discontinuation of programme group was much higher amongst the children whose fathers were engaged in such income earning activities which had very low income, i.e. labour (64.5%), skilled labour (60.0%), rickshaw/van driver (58.3%) and handicraft (80.0%). On the other hand, the rate of discontinuation of the children of control group with similar background was lower. It was also found that the rate of discontinuation was higher amongst the children who came from families whose economic status was categorise as 'deficit (61.3% programme and 48.1% control group) (Table 6 in Appendix). The reason may lie for the above findings that the former BRAC students could not cope with the teaching-learning techniques in formal system. The rate of discontinuation of both the group was also higher amongst the children who came from the families, which had lower level of household educational background (Tables in Appendix 3, 4 and 5). The findings further confirm that economic status and educational background of respective households were the strong determinants for higher level retention in secondary schools.

The above findings, however, were further justified through probing with all the group of respondents, which confirmed that household's economic crisis was one of the major reasons for such a high rate of discontinuation. Majority of the selected students (both dropouts and ongoing) mentioned that their guardians were not in position to afford high cost of education. Although, girl's education was free and they were given a modest amount of stipend (Tk. 300 in grade VI, Tk. 360 in grade VII and Tk. 420 in grade VIII), they needed more money for meeting the educational expenditures such as session fee, books, examination fees, school dress, shoes, educational materials, etc. It was realised through a rough estimate that a student required minimum Tk, 2,300 to complete class VI. The amount gradually increased in the higher classes. Although, the girl students were given stipend which was far lower than that they required for bearing educational expenses in different classes. Some guardians added that at the beginning of each session they had to pay major portion of total cost of education but the stipend is given twice a

year, i.e., 50% in the middle of each session and the remaining 50% at the end of the year. So, the amount was unbearable for the poor families.

Transfer of students from non-formal to formal, especially at secondary level, was another most important factor for such a rate of retention of the BRAC graduates in secondary schools. It seemed to be difficult for some BRAC graduates to cope with the new environment in terms of class size, teaching-learning and examination system, etc. Some 20% boys and 17% girls of the programme group dropped out due to unwillingness to go to school.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Since 1985, BRAC has been operating non-formal education programme. The aim of the programme is to provide basic education to the children of disadvantaged families. Till 1995, the course duration was three years. After their graduation from these schools, the students normally would transfer to formal primary schools in grade IV (Verma et al. 1996). In 1995, BRAC introduced grades IV and V in its 1,000 schools on a pilot basis, and the course duration was extended to four years. After completion of the course (in 1999), most of the graduates were transferred to secondary school in grade VI. In the survey year (2002), the students of this group would study in grade IX. This study aimed at exploring their level of retention and attainment in secondary schools, causes of their dropout, and difficulties faced at secondary level.

The study revealed that during January 1999 to June 2002, about 55% students of the programme and 73% students of the control group were continuing their study in secondary schools. The rate of continuation of girls (60% of the programme and 76% of the control group) of both the groups was higher than boys (41% of the programme and 67% of the control group). The findings indicate that the rate of discontinuation of the programme group was higher than the control group, and the rate of discontinuation of boys was higher than girls. It was also found that the trend of discontinuation gradually increased towards higher classes. Results about level of attainment of the students

showed that the programme group obtained comparatively lower scores than the control group in all subjects in all examinations. The students felt difficulties mainly in English and Mathematics and with teaching-learning system in formal system.

The findings of this study raise some questions that need to be discussed - why the rate of discontinuation of the programme group was higher than the control group; why the rate of discontinuation of boys was higher than girls, and reasons for such discontinuations, why they faced difficulties at secondary level, and finally how these predicaments can be minimised.

The findings in the text, however, indicate that level of retention and attainment of the children of socioeconomically backward families, in terms of economic status, literacy, household's land holding and profession was lower than the children of well-off families. A study noted that the under-privileged parents of the children suffer from extreme poverty. Thus, they even cannot adequately feed their children and hence the question of providing education does not arise at all (Begum, 1992). Since BRAC enrolls the children of disadvantaged as well as illiterate families, the former BRAC students faced some sort of problems while they were transferred in formal system.

Due to economic crisis, guardians of an extent of students could not afford the unbearable expenditure. A study done in 1992 reported that after one or two years of transfer in formal schools, when the high school curriculum starts, a student required a sum of Tk. 600 (approx.) for admission fee, session fee, books, school uniform, other educational materials, etc. The amount was difficult to pay for many of the parents of the ex-NFPE students (Khan, 1992). The expenditure has ever increased in arithmetical order in the last decade. It was accounted through a rough estimate that a student required minimum Tk. 2,300 to complete grade VI, which increased with higher classes.

The girls at secondary level especially in rural areas are not charged tuition fee, rather they get a modest amount of monthly stipend (Tk. 300 in a year for class VI, Tk. 360 in class VII, Tk. 420 in class VIII). This payment of stipend did not produce a satisfactory

result. It can be noted here that the amount is lower than that they have to pay for their education. The amount is paid in two equal installments: 50% in the middle and the remaining half at the end of session, but they had to pay a large amount of money for admission fee, session fee, books and school dress in the beginning of each session. The girls often do not get the amount in cash, rather it is deducted against different fees charged by school authority. In spite of this, it is thought that the initiative in favour of girls is an epoch-making step that has a positive effect in increasing their retention and attainment at the secondary level. On the other hand, the boys do not get stipend, rather they pay monthly tuition fee³ along with all educational expenditures that de-motivates for boys schooling.

Besides, lack of awareness of the guardians, lack of social security especially of the girls, and social customs also seemed to be determinants of schooling. Thus, practices of early marriage and involvement in income generating activities were found as additional common reasons for discontinuation, especially of the children of poor families. These findings seemed to be associated with increased trend of discontinuation with higher classes and thus, children of higher age group.

Although poor socioeconomic factors were responsible for such a backward status of the students in formal schools, it does not mean that these factors alone were responsible for such deteriorated results, rather some school-related factors were also associated. One of the major factors was the teaching-learning system in formal school that does not favour the children of the poor, illiterate and even of the little educated families. Besides, lack of adequate physical facilities (lack of classroom, lack of teachers, etc.), the school authority can not manage schools that could create a favourable environment for the children of this group. Thus, the children in formal schools (located especially at rural level), can not learn from classroom, rather they are given home assignments. Consequently, they require extensive assistance in preparing their home assignments especially in English and mathematics. This is because, rote-learning is generally used in formal schools as the

³ The amount of monthly tuition fee is even high, i. e., Tk. 60 for class VI, Tk. 70 for class VII and Tk. 80 for class VIII.

teaching-learning method and books are deemed to be the only sources of knowledge and intellect (Plan International, 1999). Due to poverty and illiteracy or lower level of education, the parents either can not help their children with home assignments or can not provide high cost of private tutor. Since, the illiterate and poor parents could not provide necessary supports to their children, they could not continue further schooling (Khan 1995).

Besides, Khan (1995) reported that when the BRAC graduates were transferred to formal schools they faced difficulties with systemic difference between non-formal and formal system - which gave them a psychological shock. The following Table shows the major differences between the two types of schools.

Table 11. Systemic differences between non-formal and formal school

Non-formal schools	Formal schools
Regular supervision and motivation	Irregular supervision and no motivation
Teachers-student ratio is low	Teacher-student ratio is high
Schools are close to home	School may be far from home
Have no formal examination	Have formal examination
Have no physical punishment	Have physical punishment
Have extra curricular activities	Have no extra curricular activities
Have community participation	Have no community participation
School hour is flexible	School hour is fixed
Cost free education	High cost of education
Students are neighbours	Students from other villages
School dress is not compulsory	School dress is compulsory
Little home assignment	Heavy home assignment

Sources: Khan, 1992

Some educationist noted, while a student move from elementary school to middle/junior school and ultimately to high school they are confronted with:

- increased size (both in terms of the physical size of the campus and the number of students in a classroom) (Roderick, 1993);
- increased heterogeneity of the student population (in terms of racial, ethnic, and social class diversity) (Roderick, 1993);
- increased departmentalisation and tracking (Bryk & Thum, 1989);

- a greater emphasis on “rules and behaviour” with less tolerance for misbehaviour (Scott et al., 1995);
- a greater emphasis on relative ability and competition (in contrast with effort and improvement) (Schuakar, 1998); and
- less personal relations with teachers (Mizelle, 1995, Wells, 1996).

Simmons and Blyth (1987) argued that these systemic transitions represent movement “primary-type” to “secondary-type” environments. Considering the above, Galton and Morrison noted, *“most pupils exhibit a degree of anxiety, perhaps better characterised as apprehension, because it is anxiety tinged with excitement, at the prospect of moving to a large school. These anxieties center around the size of school, the kind of reception they will be given by their older peers uncertainties about being able to cope with the work and with the new teachers and the changed style of teaching”* (Galton, M. and Morrison, I., 2000)

From the above discussions it can be suggested that the mode of operational strategy of the formal schools need to be reorganised that may help retain the children especially of the disadvantaged families. To implement the suggestion, the present physical facilities of the secondary schools in terms of number of classroom, number of teachers, class size, community involvement, teaching-learning method, etc., may need to be reorganised that will require major investment in formal education sector in secondary level.

Finally, it can be concluded that unless the students can learn their lessons from classroom, the level of retention and attainment of the BRAC graduates in secondary school may not retain at acceptable level. To ensure this, major investment in secondary education is needed by the government or school authority especially to increase physical facilities of the schools. At the same time careful attention should be given by BRAC to make the students more eligible to be transferred the graduates at the secondary level and continued assistance especially for the children of hard-core poor.

Management implication

For BRAC

1. Higher educated teachers (at least SSC) in NFPE schools need to be recruited, and their teaching capacity should be developed through more comprehensive training so that they can teach in grades IV and V.
2. Learning contents in NFPE curriculum (if needed, especially in grades IV and V) may need to be reviewed keeping similarities with next grades.
3. Preliminary exposure about formal system may be given to the NFPE students prior to transfer in grade VI through visiting secondary schools.
4. Economic assistance (if any) may be given especially to the children of hardcore poor families, in which they can meet the educational expenses at secondary level.
5. An assistance programme (in form of coaching) may be developed through which the BRAC graduates can be given necessary private coaching in preparing home assignments especially in English and mathematics.

For school authority and government

1. Investment in the formal education sector should be increased to improve physical facilities of the schools (more classrooms, more trained teachers). It will help in reducing class size - thus, will ensure teaching-learning more effective.
2. Teachers' teaching capacity should be increased through intensive training.
3. Community involvement should be ensured.
4. Proper management, supervision and monitoring systems should be implemented.

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Appendix

Table 1. Socioeconomic composition of the sample population

Socioeconomic indicators	Programme (320)	Control (317)
<u>Father occupation</u>		
Farmer	43.8 %	38.8 %
Trader	17.8 %	28.4 %
Service holder	9.1 %	13.2 %
School Teacher	-	2.5 %
Foreign job	5.3 %	4.4 %
Skilled labour	3.1 %	1.0 %
Rickshaw/van driver	3.8 %	1.0 %
Handicrafts	1.6 %	1.6 %
Day labour	9.7 %	3.2 %
Others (Doctor, Pollli doctor, unemployed, vendor, retired, etc.)	5.9%	6.3 %
<u>Father's education</u>		
No schooling	55.0 %	34.7 %
Average education (Year)	2.6	4.7
<u>Mother's education</u>		
No schooling	66.9 %	50.2 %
Average education (year)	1.4	2.8
<u>Household's mean year of schooling (year)</u>	4.2	5.3
<u>Arable land (mean)</u>	66.4 dec.	126.3 dec.
<u>Percentage of landless</u>	41.3 %	21.1%
<u>Economic condition</u>		
Surplus	20.6 %	38.8%
Balance	42.2 %	36.3%
Deficit	37.2%	24.9%

Figures in parentheses indicate number

Table 2. Proportion of students by status of schooling by sex

Status of schooling	Programme %			Control %		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Ongoing	41.0	59.5	54.7	67.2	76.3	72.9
Dropout	59.0	40.5	45.3	32.8	23.7	27.1
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Number)	(83)	(237)	(320)	(119)	(198)	(317)

Figures in parentheses indicate number of students

Table 3. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by father's occupation

Father's occupation	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
Farmer	55.7 (78)	44.3 (62)	61.8 (76)	38.2 (47)
Trader	49.1 (28)	50.9 (29)	73.3 (66)	26.7 (24)
Service holder	82.8 (24)	17.2 (5)	90.5 (38)	9.5 (4)
Teacher	-	-	100.0 (8)	-
Foreign job	76.5 (13)	23.5 (4)	85.7 (12)	14.3 (2)
Skilled labour	40.0 (4)	60.0 (6)	66.7 (2)	33.3 (1)
Rick shaw/ Van driver	41.7 (5)	58.3 (7)	100.0 (2)	-
Handicrafts	20.0 (1)	80.0 (4)	100.0 (5)	-
Labour	35.5 (11)	64.5 (20)	60.0 (6)	40.0 (4)
Others*	57.9 (11)	42.1 (8)	80.0 (16)	20.0 (4)
(Number)	(175)	(145)	(231)	(86)

Others include; Doctor, Polli doctor, unemployed, vendor, retired, etc

Table 4. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by father's year of schooling

Father's education (year)	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
Nil	44.3	55.7	60.0	40.0
1 - 5 year	59.8	40.2	69.8	30.2
6 - 10 year	79.6	20.4	83.8	16.2
11 & above	75.0	25.0	100.0	-
Total	54.7	45.3	72.9	27.1
(Number)	(175)	(145)	(231)	(86)

Table 5. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by mother's year of schooling

Mother's year of schooling (year)	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
Nil	49.1	50.9	64.2	35.8
1 - 5 year	62.2	37.8	73.5	26.5
6 - 10 year	86.7	13.3	96.2	3.8
11 & above	100.0	-	100.0	-
Total (Number)	54.7 (175)	45.3 (145)	72.9 (231)	27.1 (86)

Table 6. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by family's mean year of schooling

Family's year of schooling	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
1 - 4 years	40.5	59.5	45.7	54.3
5 - 7 years	60.4	39.6	74.5	25.5
8 and above years	82.9	17.1	91.1	8.9
All (Number)	54.7 (175)	45.3 (145)	72.9 (231)	27.1 (86)

Table 7. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by household's economic status

Economic status	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
Surplus (Good)	80.3	19.7	79.7	20.3
Balance (Moderate)	56.3	43.7	80.0	20.0
Deficit (Poor)	38.7	61.3	51.9	48.1
All (Number)	54.7 (175)	45.3 (145)	72.9 (231)	27.1 (86)

Table 8. Proportion of students by status of schooling and by household's land size

Land size	Programme %		Control %	
	Ongoing	Dropout	Ongoing	Dropout
Nil	43.2	56.8	79.1	20.9
1 – 100 decimal	59.1	40.9	60.8	39.2
100 – 199 decimal	68.9	31.1	82.0	18.0
200 & above	67.9	32.1	81.3	18.8
All	54.7	45.3	72.9	27.1
(Number)	(175)	(145)	(231)	(86)

Table 9. Score⁴ (mean) obtained by students in different classes by father's occupation

Father's occupation	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Farmer	42.4	43.2	45.9	44.3	45.7	45.3
Trader	42.6	45.3	45.5	41.4	42.4	45.7
Service holder	41.1	41.6	40.9	41.9	43.4	46.1
Teacher	-	-	-	50.9	62.1	54.7
Foreign job	46.5	47.8	43.0	51.9	56.6	49.5
Skilled labour	44.1	37.0	50.0	42.0	43.0	47.0
Rickshaw/ Van driver	31.9	29.6	35.3	-	26.0	31.0
Handicrafts	52.0	53.7	41.5	38.6	30.8	38.5
Labour	32.4	36.8	43.1	34.7	34.7	38.0
Others*	40.1	38.4	46.8	44.6	47.4	48.9
All	41.3	42.4	44.5	43.4	44.8	46..0
(Number)	(278)	(228)	(166)	(290)	(263)	(224)

⁴ Mean score of all subjects obtained by students in annual examinations in the classes (VI-VIII)

Table 10. Score (mean) obtained by students in different classes by father's year of schooling

Father's year of schooling	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Nil	39.5	41.1	43.0	41.7	42.1	46.0
1-5 years	42.0	42.7	45.6	44.6	45.1	44.8
6 - 10 years	43.8	44.2	45.3	43.0	45.4	46.6
11 & above	49.8	46.0	51.8	48.0	52.6	46.9
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 11. Score (mean) obtained by students in different classes by mother's year of schooling

Mother's year of schooling	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Nil	40.5	40.1	43.4	43.2	44.8	46.0
1-5 years	42.6	45.1	46.3	44.1	42.7	43.5
6 - 10 years	42.4	44.5	45.9	42.0	48.0	49.0
11 & above	59.0	50.0	-	50.0	60.3	58.3
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 12. Score (mean) obtained by students in different classes by household's year of schooling

Household's mean year of schooling	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
1-4 years	39.7	40.5	42.6	38.7	40.2	42.9
5 - 10 years	41.4	42.5	44.6	44.0	44.5	46.2
11 & above	45.5	46.3	48.3	45.5	48.0	46.8
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 13. Score (mean) obtained by students in different classes by household's year of schooling

Household's economic status	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Surplus	40.0	42.6	44.3	45.2	46.0	48.2
Balance	40.2	41.8	44.3	42.8	44.2	45.8
Deficit	43.3	42.9	45.0	41.1	43.6	41.3
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 14. Score (mean) obtained by students in different classes by household's land size

Household's land size	BRAC graduates			Non-BRAC students		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Nil	41.1	41.9	42.2	37.8	39.3	42.7
1 - 99 decimal	41.3	41.8	45.2	43.2	45.1	45.5
100 – 199 decimal	41.1	43.3	45.9	44.3	45.1	48.2
200 & above	41.9	44.8	46.9	48.2	49.1	47.7
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 15. Score obtained by the students by status of support they received from private tutor

Status of support of private tutor	Programme			Control		
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Got support	41.3	42.9	44.1	43.9	44.7	46.2
Did not get support	41.3	41.6	45.2	42.0	45.0	45.2
Total (Number)	41.3 (278)	42.4 (228)	44.5 (166)	43.4 (290)	44.8 (263)	46.0 (224)

Table 16. Score (mean) obtained by girls students in different classes by type of school they studied

Type of School	Programme				Control	
	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII	Grade VI	Grade VII	Grade VIII
Coeducation	42.3	43.5	45.1	43.2	44.1	46.1
Girls school	43.1	42.1	45.1	46.1	51.1	50.2
Significance	ns	ns	ns	ns	p<.05	ns

Table 17. Regression analysis by socioeconomic factors and level of retention

Variables	Exp. (B)	Significance	Standard error
Age	.3610	.0000	.2043
Land size	1.1932	.4757	.2477
Sex	1.8296	.0646	.2133
Average family education	2.4460	.0003	.2463
Economic condition	1.7910	.0071	.2164
Support of private tutor	5.7737	.0000	.2077

Table 18. Regression analysis by socioeconomic factors by score in the annual examination

Variables	Exp. (B)	Significance	Standard error
Age	.8467	.4550	.2228
Land size	1.7692	.0197	.2447
Sex	1.7528	.0241	.2498
Average family education	1.3710	.1761	.2333
Economic condition	.7974	.4147	.2775
Support of private tutor	.6348	.0800	.2596