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Non-formal Education in Improving Quality of Life of Underprivileged Children

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE) in improving the quality of the life of underprivileged children in Bangladesh considering their economic, health, environmental issues and life skills. It uses a mixed method approach of research where three NGOs which run NFPE programs were selected purposefully. Data were derived from six NGO officers, nine teachers, ninety students and eighteen guardians by using two sets of questionnaires for NGO officers and teachers, an interview schedule for guardians and 9 focus group discussions with the students. The findings show that there is no income generating program initiated by the organizations for the learners along with education. So, the scope of their income has reduced. But their daily life behavior and skills have improved. Besides, their awareness on health and environmental issues have increased. The findings lead to some recommendations which will give insights to policy makers and professionals engaged in this field.

Keywords: *NFPE, NGO, Life skill, health, income, environment*

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Background and Significance of the Study

Despite every development made by mankind, the quality of life for many city dwellers is still poor and sometimes declining. This is also prevalent among the dwellers of Bangladesh as many people are unable to satisfy their social aspirations, such as education, employment, recreation etc. There are some obstacles like poverty, unemployment, lack of skill, low production etc. which hinder the progress of their quality of life (UNICEF, 2009 & Hossain 2006). To improve the quality of life by removing these problems, education can play a vital role. In this regard, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has emphasized on education which is mentionable to achieve universal primary education (Bhuyan, 2006). The international calls, starting from the Jomtien Conference to Dakar Forum and then the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), also clearly emphasized on the need for universal access to meaningful education (WCEFA, 1990 & Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). Bangladesh became an enthusiastic signatory to the World Conference Education for All (WCEFA) framework at Jomtien, Thailand where the world community strongly backed the goal of "Education for All (EFA)" up at global gatherings (Monzoor, 2008). Besides, the GoB made commitment in the World Education Forum held at Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, towards the achievement of EFA. The Dakar goals covered the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE). As a signatory country, Bangladesh is now committed to attain these targets by 2015 (Burns et al, 2003).

Moreover, in the MDG-II importance has been given to the completion of full cycle of primary education equally for boys and girls. Currently primary education in Bangladesh is undertaking the MDG-II phase where time limit for this goal is 2015 (The World Bank, 2005) and it is a matter of challenge for the country to reach the target within the stipulated time. In line with this roadmap, Bangladesh has already pursued a comprehensive policy in the provision of access to quality education for primary school aged children including girls through numerous interventions (CAMPE, 2003-04). The Compulsory Primary Education Act (passed in the parliament in 1993) says:

No child be deprived of education for lack of teacher, learning materials and adequate space and no child be subject to disparities of access to primary education arising from gender, income, family, cultural or ethnic differences and geographic remoteness (JS-Legislation, 1990:2).

This means there would be no children out of school, but in proportion to the population of Bangladesh, opportunities for formal primary education are very limited though Bangladesh holds one of the largest primary education systems in the world (UNICEF, 2009). So, another mode of education has been developed to assist the formal stream. This supplementary stream of education is called 'Nonformal Primary Education (NFPE)'.

To ensure UPE, NFPE programs initiated in the middle of 1980s are being run in Bangladesh along with formal primary education. NFPE cycle contains three or four year session but completes five year national curriculum determined by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh. NFPE schools locate closer to the doorstep of the poor. Every school has community teacher who knows the learners and closer to them. No school uniform is needed and the children can attend school with the dress that they could afford. NGOs provide basic essentials to learning including the workbooks, pencils etc. So, the learner can get education without any educational expenses (Nath, 2002).

The clientele of NFPE is the disadvantaged or underprivileged children belonging to primary school age group who are still out of school or have dropped out from the formal primary school. To serve this clientele, NGOs in Bangladesh are heavily involved (Sukontamarn, 2003). At present, more than 1000 NGOs in Bangladesh have different educational programs and about 830 NGOs are providing NFPE (CAMPE, 2006). NFPE has become an important phenomenon in Bangladesh where many international, national and local NGOs are providing education for increasing the income generating programs for the poor and disadvantaged groups (Islam & Mia, 2007). So, to achieve the target of EFA and MDGs in Bangladesh as a developing country, the role of NFPE as a supplementary to formal primary education system is undoubtedly significant. Yet, it is important to know whether the students who completed their primary cycle through NFPE can apply their knowledge and skill in the real life situation because if they really get quality education, they will be self-dependent to improve their quality of life. Keeping these in mind, the present study aims at exploring the role of NFPE in improving the quality of life of underprivileged children of Dhaka city in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are:

- to examine the role of NFPE in improving the economic condition of underprivileged children of Dhaka city in Bangladesh.
- to ascertain the influence of NFPE in the daily life of disadvantaged children.
- to find out NFPE students' improvement in health issues.

- to identify NFPE students' improvement in life skill and environmental issues.

Methodology

This is a mixed approach research with both qualitative and quantitative data. Three NGOs (namely BRAC, DAM and SUROVI) of Bangladesh which have NFPE programs and three NFPE centers from each NGO had been selected purposively to collect data for the study. Number of sample for this study is 123 and they have been selected purposively. For collecting data three different types of instruments have been used and these are questionnaire, semi-structured interview schedule and focus group discussion (FGD). Two sets of questionnaires have been used for the NGO officers and NFPE teachers and a semi-structured interview schedule has been used for the guardians. Besides, 9 FGDs with 10 NFPE students in each group have been conducted to get more insight into data. Data have been represented narratively with some tables and charts. The following table shows the research instruments, respondents, number of sample and sampling procedure at a glance.

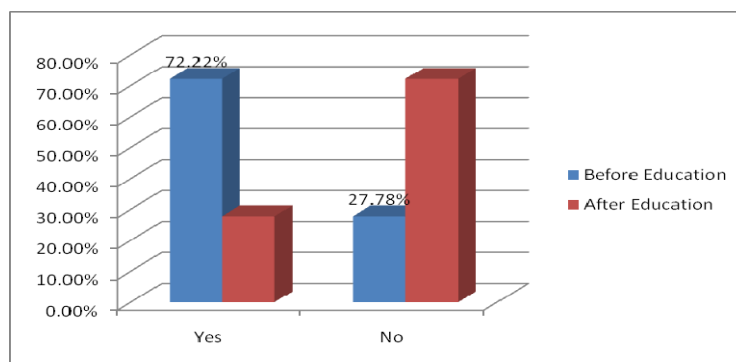
Table 1. Sample and process of Sampling of the Study

Research Instruments	Respondents	Number of Sample	Sampling
Questionnaire	NGO Officers	9 NFPE Teachers (1 from each NFPE centre)	Purposive
	And NFPE Teachers	6 NGO Officers (2 from each NGO)	
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	NFPE Students	90 (10 students in each group)	Purposive
Semi-structured Interview Schedule	Guardians of NFPE Students	18 (2 from each NFPE centre)	Purposive

Source: Field Survey

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Most of the learners of NFPE program were found very poor. Before joining NFPE program, most of the sampled learners were engaged with some income generating activities. The number of students who were engaged with any income generating activities before and after involving NFPE is given as Figure 1.

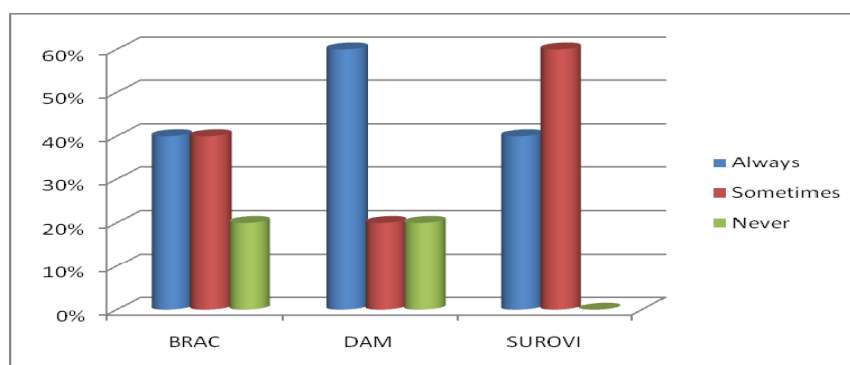


Source: Field Survey

Figure 1. Students' Involvement in Income Generating Activities

In response to the question regarding their children's involvement in income generating activities before joining NFPE, 13 guardians (72.22%) said "Yes", and 5 guardians (27.78%) responded "No". After joining NFPE the number of respondents answered "Yes" was only 5 (72.22%) and "No" 13 (27.78%). Before joining NFPE, many learners of SUROVI schools (a non-formal primary school) would earn some money by preparing handicraft, embroidery etc, though they are not getting enough time to do so at present. The earnings of the learners who are now engaged in both studies and works have decreased compared to their previous income. As reasons, they have mentioned that because of studying they cannot spend enough time for income generating activities. According to all the guardians of NFPE school there is no income generating activities for the learners of NFPE. Students, teachers and NGO officers also have the same opinion.

On the other hand, in response to queries related to hygiene issues, the data found from the study show that all of their students from BRAC, DAM and SUROVI use sanitary latrine to stool. They also use sandals during excretion and wash their hands after using latrine and before meal. More than half respondents (60%) have said that their students use soap for washing hands. 20% respondents of BRAC and 40% respondents of DAM and SUROVI mentioned ash as a mode of washing hands of their learners. But a few respondents of BRAC (20%) have said that their students wash their hands with only water.



Source: Field Survey

Figure 2. Drinking Boiling water

According to the NFPE officers and teachers, for drinking and for daily use their students use water of Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) which is not considered safe (Nahar, et al, 2011). But only 40% respondents of BRAC and SUROVI and 60% respondents of DAM say that their students drink boiled water to remain safe. 40% respondents of BRAC, 20% respondents of DAM and 60% respondents of SUROVI say that their students boil their drinking water but not regularly. On the other hand, a few respondents (20%) of BRAC and DAM say that their students never boil their drinking water. They have mentioned that the unavailability of natural gas as the reason for not boiling water. Few of them, however, use water purifying tablet to purify their drinking water.

During FGDs with the learners, they mentioned that they drink boiled water but most of them did not used to do so before involving in NFPE. Some learners informed that they use purifying tablet to purify water where the availability of fueling is scarce.

Table 2. Students' Daily Behavioral Activities Before and After Joining NFPE

Option	Before Education			After Education		
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never
Using sanitary latrine	18 (100%)	-	-	18 (100%)	-	-
Using sandals at latrine	15 (83.33%)	3 (16.77%)	-	18 (100%)	-	-
Wash hands properly before meal and after using latrine	12 (66.67)	3 (16.77%)	3 (16.77%)	15 (83.33%)	2 (11.11%)	1 (5.56%)
Use safe water for drinking and daily use	13 (72.22%)	5 (27.78%)	-	16 (88.89%)	2 (11.11%)	-

Source: Field Survey

The above data received from the interviews with the guardians about their children's daily behavioral activities show that there is a positive impact of NFPE on all learners' daily behavioral activities. Like the NGO officers and NFPE teachers, similar responses have come from the guardians regarding the use of latrines, washing hands, purifying water and so on. Besides, data received from teachers show that the learners of NFPE cut their nail and clean their dresses regularly, as they are checked every Thursday by their teacher but they were irregular previously in this regard. NGO officers and guardians think that the school and the teachers have played a vital role to bring out these positive changes in their daily behavioral activities.

Table 3. Role of NFPE in Changing Students' Behavioral Activities

Statement	Option	BRAC	DAM	SURAVI
Role of NFPE in bringing positive changes in students' attitude	To teach them about their duties and responsibilities	4 (80%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)
	To include value education in every subject as cross cutting issue	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	-
	To use attractive supplementary materials which is helpful for students' sustainable learning	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	2 (40%)
	To supervise regularly	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	4 (80%)

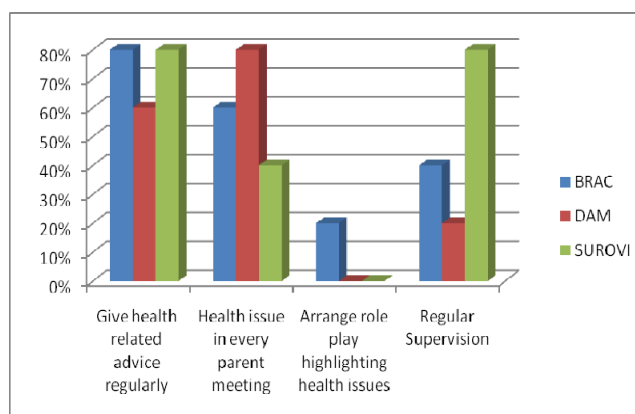
Source: Field Survey

According to the NGO officers and NFPE teachers, they teach their learner about their duties and responsibilities using attractive supplementary material to make their students' learning sustainable. Besides, they emphasize on value education and supervise their daily behavior. All respondents have mentioned that all of their students are aware about their health. Guardians of NFPE students also mentioned about their children's activities which show their awareness in different areas of life. After attending school most of the learners of NFPE from BRAC, DAM and SUROVI put on clean dress, brush teeth and take bath regularly, clean house and yard do not eat uncover meal. They do not do most of the above before joining NFPE. In an attempt to talk about the role of NFPE in increasing health related awareness of the learners, they have mentioned the health related lesson of textbook and regular monitoring of the teachers.

Table 4. Activities which Show Students' Awareness on Health

Statement	Option	BRAC	DAM	SURAVI
Activities of the students which show their awareness on their health	Students cut their nail regularly	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
	Using safe water for drinking and daily use	4 (80%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)
	Wash their hand properly before meal and after using latrine	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	4 (80%)
	Wearing Clean dresses	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
	Not walking on bare foot	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)

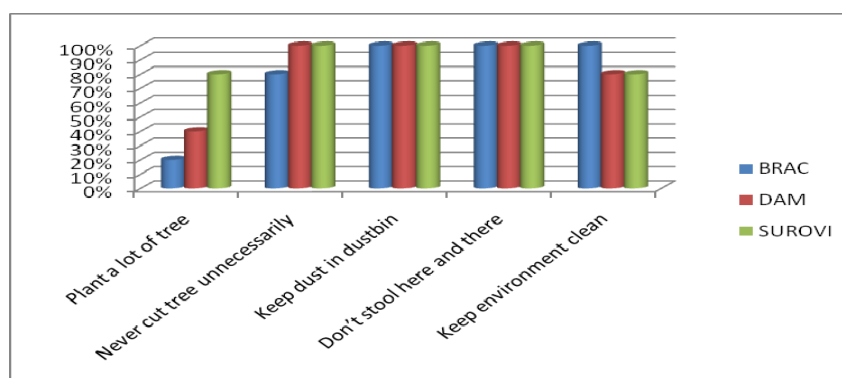
Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

Figure 3. Role of NFPE in Making Learners Aware about Health

In order to improve quality of life, it is really important to make the students aware about their health. This graph represents the initiatives taken by the schools to make their learner aware about their health. To do so all the respondents (NFPE teachers and officials) informed that they give health related advice to their students. Besides, they supervise students regularly and include the health issue in every parent meeting. Some of them (20%) from BRAC have mentioned that they arrange role play highlighting health issue to ensure their students' health awareness.



Source: Field Survey

Figure 4. Activities which Show Learners' Awareness on Environment

The study found that NFPE is also working to make its learners aware about their surroundings. All learners admitted that they have increased environmental awareness after entering school. According to the learners and their guardians, the learners used to put garbage here and there before joining NFPE program. But at present, as the data shown in the table above say, they put garbage in dustbin. They do not stool here and there and they never cut tree unnecessarily. They keep their environment neat and clean. Some of the respondents have mentioned that the learners know about the necessity of tree plantation. According to the NFPE learners, they know the importance of tree plantation for keeping ecological balance, but because of shortage of place in Dhaka city only a few learners can plant trees.

Table 5. Role of NFPE in Making Learners Aware about Environment

Statement	Option	BRAC	DAM	SUROVI
Role of NFPE in bringing positive change in students' attitude	Include environmental issue in every subject/course through cross cutting approach	4 (80%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)
	Emphasize on environmental issues	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	-
	Discuss the importance of tree plantation	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	2 (40%)
	Motivate to plant trees	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	4 (80%)
	Discuss the bad impact of environment pollution	2 (40%)	4 (80%)	3 (60%)

Source: Field Survey

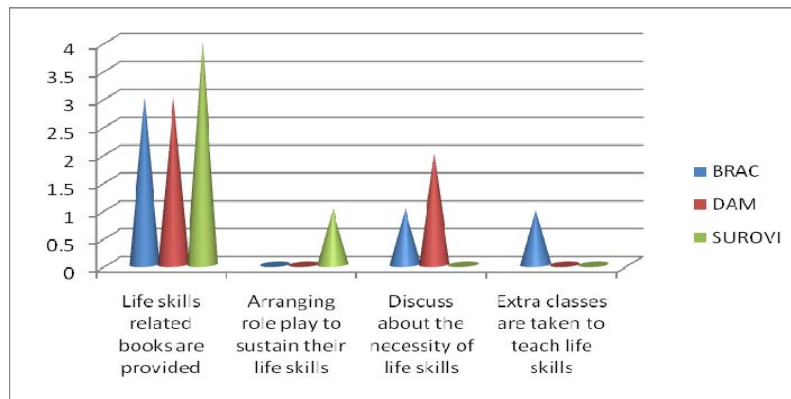
Data from above table represent the initiatives taken by the schools to make their learners aware of environmental issues. To do so the respondents informed that they include environmental issues in every subject through cross curricular approach. Besides, they discuss with their learners about necessity of tree plantation and motivate them to plant trees. They also discuss about the danger of environment pollution and inspire their student to be enthusiastic in preserving environment.

This is the evidence of students' activities which shows the improvement of their life skills. According to the respondents of BRAC, DAM and SUROVI, their learners can express themselves by writing and they have comprehended enough in reading. They can help their parent to keep the daily accounts of their family. Guardians also expressed the same opinion. They mentioned that their students follow the traffic signal to walk in the road. They are aware enough in using electricity and gas stove. They are also aware about their rights.

Table 6. Activities which Show Students' Life Skill Improvement

Statement	Option	BRAC	DAM	SUROVI
Activities of the students which show their awareness on their health	Can express themselves by writing and comprehend by reading	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
	Can keep daily accounts	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
	Can follow traffic signal	4 (80%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)
	Can make saline	4 (80%)	2 (20%)	3 (60%)
	Aware to use electricity and gas stove properly	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	4 (80%)
	Aware about own right	4 (80%)	3 (60%)	2 (20%)

Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

Figure 5. Role of NFPE in Improving Learners' Life Skill

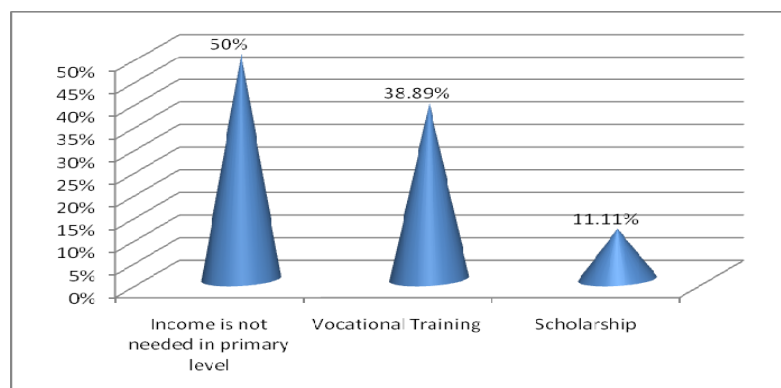
According to the respondents of BRAC, DAM and SUROVI NFPE schools play a vital role in improving of their students' life skills. Schools provide life skill related books and arrange extra classes to improve it. Sometimes they arrange role play to make sustain students' life skill. In addition, the learners believe that they can express their feelings by writing, can keep daily calculation, can take primary treatment and at the time of diarrhoea they can drink saline making by their own. Though they learn some of these life skills from parents and elders but they learn most of these from schools.

The data shown in the following table and chart represents the suggestions on what initiatives should be taken to increase learners' income. Here most of the respondents (80%) of BRAC, about a half of the respondents (40%) of DAM and majority of the respondents (60%) from SUROVI suggested to give micro-credit to learners' parents. 60% respondents of BRAC and 80% respondents of DAM and SUROVI recommended to arrange some vocational trainings for the learners. Hence all respondents (100%) of BRAC and a large number of respondents from DAM and SUROVI give their opinion to help the learners to get further education. Over one third respondents (40%) of BRAC and a few respondents (20%) of DAM suggested to establish a training centre in every upazilla. Few respondents (20%) from BRAC and SUROVI suggested to give their NFPE students computer training.

Table No. 7: Suggested Initiatives Taken to Increase Students' Income

Question	Option	BRAC	DAM	SURAVI
What initiatives should be taken to increase students' income?	provide micro-credit to their parents	4 (80%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)
	provide vocational training	3 (60%)	4 (80%)	4 (80%)
	make training centre in every upazilla	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	-
	help them to get further education	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	4 (80%)
	provide computer training	1 (20%)	-	1 (20%)

Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

Figure 6: Guardians' Opinion about Increasing Learners' Income

On the other hand, as the above bar graph shows, half of the guardians (50%) mentioned that in their early age, they should not involve in earning. But more than one third guardians (38.89%) have suggested arranging some vocational trainings for the learners along with education. A few guardians (11.11%) recommended to provide scholarship on the basis of their academic result.

Table 8. Initiative To Be Taken to Improving Learners' Quality of Life

Question	Option	BRAC	DAM	SURAVI
What initiative should be taken in improving learners' quality of life?	To provide support to get admission in formal secondary school	5(100%)	5(100%)	5(100%)
	To give them support to get further education free of cost	2 (40%)	2(40%)	3(60%)
	To provide them learning material for further education	3(60%)	4 (80%)	2(40%)
	To give them scholarship according to their academic performance	2(40%)	3(60%)	-
	To arrange some vocational training as they can earn some money beside study to support their family	4(80%)	2(40%)	3(60%)
	To supervise them so that they can't go to dogs	1 (20%)	-	-

Source: Field Survey

For ensuring quality of life of NFPE learners there are some suggestions from officers and teachers of those NGOs about the initiatives that should be taken. All the respondents of BRAC, DAM and SUROVI have mentioned that the organization should help the learners of NFPE to get admitted into the formal high school and ensure their further education. Learning materials for further education should be provided and scholarship based on their academic performance should be offered. Besides, they have suggested for arranging some vocational education so that they can earn money besides education to support their family. Guardians also made similar recommendations. Few respondents (20%) of BRAC recommended to supervise the learners so that they do not get spoiled after completing NFPE cycle. Some respondents think that, supervision and monitoring system of the organizations should be stronger and authorities should emphasize on that.

The guardians of the students of NFPE claimed that some initiatives should be taken by the authority of the NGOs. They want to see their children as a first class citizen of the country. For that they want to continue their child's education. So the guardians hope that the school will help their children to get admitted to the formal school. If the children get opportunity to get further education and provided with learning material free of cost they will bring welfare for the nation.

On the other hand, from the group discussion with the learners it has been possible to know their career plan. Most of them want to get admission into the formal high school after completing NFPE cycle. Now-a-days it is not necessary to make them understand about the importance of education. Everyone wants to establish himself as a first class citizen by having higher education. For that the learners hope to get the support from the school authority to admit into high school, deduct tuition fees, free learning materials and scholarship on their academic performance. Some learners believe that they need vocational training by which they can provide economic support for their family beside their study.

Major Findings and Discussion

- The higher costs and lower expected gains from education lead to lower rate of return for a poor family's investment in a child's education in comparison to other families (Lee, 2002). As a result, the poor are more likely to drop out during the early years of schooling.
- A major number of students of NFPE were engaged with some income generating activities before involving in NFPE. But after getting admitted into NFPE schools they cannot spare enough time to earn. Besides, there is no income generating program initiated by the NGOs for NFPE learners alongside education. As a result, the scope of their income has reduced. For this reason, many of them are unwilling to participate in this educational program.
- As a result of receiving education NFPE learners' daily behavior has changed positively. They have become aware of their health and sanitation like cutting their nails regularly, wearing clean dresses, using safe water for drinking and daily usage. These show that their health consciousness is increasing day by day, which proves the improvement of their quality of life.
- After receiving education through NFPE the learners are much aware about their surroundings. All of them keep garbage in the dustbin and never stool here and there. Most of them keep the environment clean and

never cut tree unnecessarily. Some of them plant trees though most of them cannot do this for lack of space in the city. But all of them are aware about the necessity of plantation to preserve environment.

- Getting involved in NFPE program, life skill of the learners has improved. Now they are able to help their parents to keep the daily accounts and by writing letter if needed. Nath, et al. (1999) also found similar findings in their study where BRAC children did significantly better in life skills and writing than their peers in formal schools. The students of NFPE can make saline and follow traffic rules to cross the road. They are much aware of the use of electricity and gas stove which is very important for city dwellers.
- After receiving education the learners of NFPE are conscious enough about their responsibilities and their rights as a citizen of the country. So it is hoped that, they will play significant role for the nation rather than remaining as burden.

Recommendations

- The schools should provide some occupational skills and trainings during or at the end of their NFPE cycle so that learners can develop themselves economically and these should be carefully designed.
- Teachers must have trainings as well as they need to understand the students' psychology to identify the needs and lackings of students.
- Teachers must have good motivating capacity to inspire the students in order to improve their learning. Besides, relevant and attractive supplementary materials should be used to make lessons attractive.
- NGO authority should give emphasis on school monitoring and supervision to achieve the goal of the program through finding out the problems and solving those, because, without strong monitoring and supervision, the program may fail to achieve its goal.
- The schools can award those students who follow the rules of health and live neat and clean properly. It will be a good motivation for the learners to take care of their health and abide by the rules of health.
- The learners of NFPE realize the necessity of education for leading a better life. So they want to continue their education. Most of them cannot get admitted into the secondary school for poverty. So the organisations should support and supervise their students closely to get admission into the formal secondary school after completing NFPE cycle.
- To make students' learning sustainable which can be applied later in their practical life, hygienic and sound environment is very important. So the environment of NGO schools should be improved more.
- In addition to providing education to students, NGOs should make an attempt in order to increase awareness and motivate guardians, so that the students can continue their studies and be able to improve their quality of life.
- In Bangladesh, majority of NFPE schools are run in very congested classrooms (from researcher's classroom observation) where natural light and air cannot enter. This kind of classroom is not favourable for learning. So the authority should increase the physical facilities of the classroom to support better learning.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is generally known for its high population density, high population growth rate, endemic poverty and high rate of adult illiteracy. For the inflexible character of formal education, a vast number of people remain illiterate. The magnitude of the EFA challenges implies that, in addition to ensuring primary schooling, more efforts are needed to develop literacy and nonformal education so as to reach those children, youths and adults who are unreached by the formal system. In Bangladesh, NFPE is working as a supplementary to formal primary education system to achieve the target of EFA and MDGs. From the findings of the study, it is clear that there is no income generating program for the NFPE students except education initiated by the organizations. From this point of view during the period of receiving NFPE students' economic condition deteriorate, although in future, lesson received from NFPE will help them increase their income and improve their economic condition. Findings of the study expose that NFPE is significantly instrumental in improving the students' health awareness and in making them conscious about their environment. As a result of receiving education, daily behavioral activities of the students have changed positively. So it is evident that NFPE has a good impact on the learners' quality of life.

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