Attendance register can be a tool to reduce drop out in primary education

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Abstract
The Primary education in Bangladesh has expanded remarkably since 1990s. The “Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Bangladesh” has recorded enrolment rate 97% by 2013. However, over one-fifth of students do not complete the primary cycle due to dropout. The poor attendance, grade repetition, and poor performance, all of which make them vulnerable to dropping out (Ahmed 2011). This study about a simple innovative action framework contributes reducing dropout which applied in 78 primary schools operates by Friendship (Bangladeshi NGO) in riverine islands. The Action framework to reduce dropouts (AFRD) illustrates the absenteeism tracking, mobilizing parents, connecting services (such as health, sustainable economic development etc.) beyond school, and creativity for quality education. An attendance register has been introduced as part of AFRD for real time recording of presence and actual causes of absence. The teachers has been tracked and validated the reasons for absence through home visits. The study found increased enrollment 90% to 92%, improved attendance from 91% to 97%, and reduced dropouts significantly from 17.5% to 4% over two years’ period. These findings demonstrated the effectiveness of the Action Framework to Reduce Dropouts related to the personal and familial reasons regardless of socio-economic conditions.

Key words: Action framework, absenteeism tracking, mobilizing parents, connecting services and creativity for quality education.

Introduction:

One of the major challenges of Universal Primary Education (UPE) is to reduce the number of children dropping out of school. Children enrollments are greater numbers than before, but drop rates are significant in many countries caused low level of primary school completion. Dropout hampers the completion of the minimum required amount of schooling in Bangladesh. The country has made rapid progress toward many of the Education for All (EFA) goals. Twenty years ago, Bangladesh had some of the world’s largest gender disparities in education. Today, the country has surpassed gender parity in basic education, with more girls attending school than boys. Bangladesh’s achievements in education have been strengthened by leadership, innovative partnerships between government, donors, and nongovernmental organizations. Despite the impressive gains that have been registered, dropout levels remain high and are declining at a very slow pace. According to the Annual Primary School Census 2014 by the Directorate of Primary Education under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education the dropout rate 20.9%. This is a source of serious concern to the government, NGOs, and, above all, parents. There are many factors associated with drop out, some of which are associated with the individual, such as poor health or under-nutrition and lack of children’s school motivation. Others emerge from children’s household situations such as child labor and poverty. School level factors also play a role in increasing pressures to drop out such as teacher’s absenteeism, school location and poor quality educational provision.

The nature of educational provision at the community level (e.g. type of school, level of community support) generates conditions that can ultimately have an impact on the likelihood of children
dropping out from school. Both demand and supply driven factors play a role in the process of school dropout. At the primary level in this means that the drop out fails to reach the final grade 5 (Sattar 1984). Several studies identified three dominant reasons for students drop out, which are relating to family, individual, society and schools (Fiske 1998, Sattar 1984); the socio-economic condition of dropped out students’ family is closely associated with the incidence of drop out. (Sattar 1984). Household poverty, food insecurity, scarcity of water, no electricity, transportation etc. has a major effect on opportunities for learning, with children from the poorest homes far less likely to complete primary education than their wealthy counterparts. Child labor, early marriages are consequence of poverty, is common in both urban and rural areas, and is strongly associated with education disadvantages. The interaction between poverty and climate risk, which is a central feature of the social landscape in Bangladesh, extends into education. Parents often withdraw their children from school as a strategy for coping with natural disasters or economic difficulties. Children in the isolated rural areas of chars (river islands) face acute disadvantages. The five factors: familial, personal, educational, school and community-related factors have been revealed by another study ‘Beyond Dropout: A study on BRAC Primary School 2010’ in Bangladesh and found 6.13% in 681 schools visited. This study shows parents’ education, parents disinterested in schooling, taking care of younger, early marriage, migration, poverty, etc. were identified as dominating factors to induce 54.3% dropout. While personal factors included disinterested to study, difficulties in following text book, involvement in work, illness etc. caused 34.2% drop out in respective working areas. The incidence of drop out varies from country to country even region to region in same country. The immediate challenge for school is to make sure the regular attendance of a child who lives in catchment area and the long term challenge will remain for the government, international stakeholders and development agencies to address the internal displacement or migration and education. In this connection, an Action Framework to Reduce Dropout (AFRD) due to personal and familial factors has been developed and practiced in Friendship schools, which showed significant progress in 78 Friendship Primary Schools (FPS) located in northern nomadic islands and southern coastal areas in Bangladesh.
marginalized communities in Bangladesh. Friendship mainly works in the shifting northern nomadic islands and the southern coastal areas, which due to their remoteness and geographical location lack infrastructural development and are subject to a high frequency of natural calamities. Friendship works for the Char dwellers and disadvantaged communities who have very limited or sometimes no access to public and private service provision such as health care, education, employment opportunities etc. The organization delivers services in six Sectors: Health, Education, Disaster Management and Infrastructure Development, Good Governance, Sustainable Economic Development and Cultural Preservation. Friendship’s holistic needs-based approach to delivering sustainable solutions through these sectors has developed to become a successful integrated model in Bangladesh.

Friendship intends to provide quality primary education through integrated service delivery system to children who are left out from primary education mainly due to river erosion. It could be mentioned here that Friendship Education Programme (FEP) initiated its function with the objectives that ‘everyone has a right to education (UNESCO 1998) and Education for sustainable development’. Friendship realizes that the risks and opportunities face by Bangladesh call for a paradigm shift that can be embedded in communities through education and learning. The objective of its education programme is to enable the children of the chars and coastal areas of Bangladesh to develop their full potential through quality education, teaching them character building and awareness of their rights and obligations, and also to provide functional literacy for adolescents and adults. The organization through its ‘integrated approach’, demonstrates the role of education as catalyst for building better and more sustainable future.

The key elements of Friendship’s program are:

- Friendship 3-tier healthcare system, comprising of 3 floating hospitals, 337 satellite clinic sessions, 5 static clinics, and 525 Friendship Community Medic-aides, serves 215,000 people every month.
- 5,064 children attend in Friendship primary schools in 78 communities in 2016. In 2015 and 99.8% of the appearing students received A+, A, and A- grades in government curriculum primary school completion exam. The Adult Literacy Program for 8 months is run in 73 outreach centers and 1,460 learners attend in a cycle. Friendship also started secondary education to Grade VI-VII onwards for students in 5 schools since 2015
- Friendship’s Disaster Management teams are active in 83 communities at nine districts of Northern char and Southern coastal zones where 2490 households are getting directly benefit and around 100,000 people are getting benefit indirectly as well. These two approaches are multi-hazard approaches to disaster risk reduction, which aims to guide and empower communities to take charge on issues such as hazard identification & analysis, risk assessment and preparedness. In additions, water-sanitation, 12 cluster village in raised plinth for climate victims, 6 plants for desalination of water and capacity building, emergency response with trained community volunteers etc. are part of routine work.
- Good Governance Program is active in 35 chars hosting 105,000 people to educate and services on legal aid and rights.
- Friendship’s Sustainable Economic Development program supports more than 4,500 beneficiaries by providing skill training and creating employment opportunities through intervention in agriculture and fisherman project and vocational training centers.
- Friendship promote cultural preservation. 11 national and international exhibitions of traditional Bangladeshi boat-building have been arranged with over 400,000 visitors till to date.
Friendship Education program:

1. **Primary Education:** Friendship is currently running 78 primary schools in remote northern nomadic islands and southern coastal belt areas. The schools follow government curricula and supplementary education for pre-primary and grade 1 through grade V.

2. **Secondary Education:** Friendship secondary school project that utilizes the power of solar energy to provide education to Grade VI onwards students in 5 schools since 2015. The main objective is to pilot a model with computer aided learning method, a first of its kind in the char areas in Bangladesh, by which to be able to create opportunity to continue education for the Grade VI students who are unable or face difficulties to go far to regular government secondary schools otherwise. The project is making thousands of hours of educational videos on national curriculum by the quality teachers from renowned schools and screen those videos using solar power in the classrooms with the support of a Facilitator.

3. **Adult Literacy:** Friendship Adult Literacy Program for 8 months is run in 73 outreach centers and 1,460 learners attend in a cycle.

**Characteristics of Friendship Education program:** Aside from the regular government curriculum education, lessons on dignity, code of ethics, environmental education, cleanliness, etc. are taught as part of routine classes. Students are also taught proper English diction through Listen2Learn, a unique way of using recorded lessons by cell phone and sound system. Lessons on governance, code of ethics and dignity have proved to be quite successful in building attitude and personality among the students- who have been found to show higher level of integrity and other values on different occasions.

Friendship Education program deliberately recruit below SSC (Secondary School Certificate) candidates from the very own communities as teachers for the schools and train with well-designed 42 days basic training in phases. It has been experienced that it is not possible to retain qualified teachers with higher educational qualification coming from outside the chars. So the respective community people were selected and developed as teachers to continue the educational activities.

**Setting up a school**

Before setting up a school and attempting to resolve access issues, Friendship determines which areas could be eligible. In order to identify the most underserved areas, the education team researches on:

1) Government of Bangladesh (GOB) population data
2) Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) school listing
3) GOB catchment area survey
4) Friendship char records

As next step, Friendship looks at the demand for education in the areas through developing relevant question. The Education Team organizes informal discussions and Focus Group Discussions with community members to explain Friendship schools, identify areas of need and refine the Potential Char Database. Suggestions of potential areas come from community members.
The key issues for village selection include (subject to change in periodic review):

1. Sufficient number of prospective students within the village preferably greater than 30 (1 class)
2. Potential teacher in the same village
3. Space for school building and geographical conditions such as the vulnerability to river erosion should be taken into consideration
4. Proximity to government and NGO schools
5. Community interest in a school and overall education
6. One child from each family for selection of children if number more than available space
7. Friendship will able to offer integrated services

**Unpredictable Environment:**

During the dry season, *char* people suffer from difficulties and inability to harvest due to the environment. The rainy season, extreme flooding covers what few roads the *chars* have, covers fields, and invades houses and service points.

Many students cannot get to school because the water level is too high for them to walk through. Other students have to help their parents protect their homes from floods. Still others have to migrate with their families, either to escape the floods, or because the floods have washed away their homes.

Friendship’s Education Program has configured the school calendar in such a way that accounts for the unpredictable environment. There are several extra days built in, that schools can use to make up for any days that may have been missed due to a natural disaster. That way, instead of a large amount of students missing school and having to catch up on their own, certain school days can be postponed to a more convenient time. Boat is the only transport for staff to visit most of the school locations from Friendship office. During the rainy season or flooding time, boats are provided to transport children and teachers to and from school by Friendship and or community.

**Location of school:**

Children in the *chars* face many challenges in regard to accessing education. Because of their unique and temperamental environment, they are forced to live nomadic and unstable lives, which prevents them from falling into a normal schooling pattern. The issues the mainland students face are completely different from what the *char* students deal with, and therefore cannot be solved in the same way.

Students are unable to attend school in the mainland because they are so isolated. Most *chars* are separated from the mainland by water, and even the river is far from the communities. Students could only get to the mainland by boat, which most families cannot afford. Even if they could afford a boat, children would have to walk for an hour or more to reach the river. *Char* people live as far
inland as possible to avoid the rapid and dangerous erosion that happens often and most times without warning on the edges of the islands. During the rainy season when the chars flood, students would be stranded either at school or at home for many months.

As the lives of char children are extremely mobile and unpredictable, it is essential that the school accommodate them. Friendship schools are designed to be sturdy, but can be broken down easily in a few hours in case of a natural disaster. If the community needs to migrate, they can bring the school with them and set it up in the area they move to. Instructions and training are provided to facilitate the move. This ensures that children are always within close proximity to the school, and it allows for school to be in session more consistently. In order to determine if land is suitable for the construction of a school, it must meet the following conditions:

1) Proximity to community homes  
2) Least threat of erosion  
3) Land above flood line, away from ponds  
4) Easy commute for students

The schools are built on a plinth, an area of land raised above the highest known flood level, to ensure that they can run even during the rainy season. To raise a plinth, Friendship consults with the community and an engineer to determine the exact appropriate height.

**Rationale of the Action Framework to Reduce Dropout (AFRD) and use the Attendance Register as tool:**

Friendship Primary School (FPS) launched in 2005 by the Education Programme. The aim of the programme is to enable vulnerable communities to achieve a level of education that will durably improve their lives and livelihoods and allow them to access effective citizenship. Currently, 5,064 children in 78 primary schools, who would otherwise not have access to any sort of schools, attend Friendship primary schools. The children follow the government curriculum syllabus and also lessons on ethical standards, childrens’ rights, etc. thus preparing them to be better citizens in future. Children from Friendship schools achieve well above average results in national exams.

The children aged 5 years are eligible for pre-primary class. FPS enroll maximum 30 children in a class of Pre-primary, Grade 1 to Grade 5 and complete the six-years primary academic calendar. The school welcome migrated primary students anytime of the year to continue education if seats
available. FEP provides pencils, note books and other education materials to all students while text books receive from government. The school building can dismantle in case of emergencies i.e. river erosion, flood and follows children if they migrate from one broken char (island) to another. FEP have dedicated team to be able to work in such remote communities to establish and maintenance schools, logistics support to the school and sudden shifting and re-construction of schools due to natural disaster almost every year. The FPS closely supported and monitored systematically by an experienced programme team. However, the Programme faces challenges with two major issues one is internal displacement for disaster and another is repeated and continuous absenteeism due to personal and familial reason which caused dropout in school. Thus concerned Friendship, to ensure children’s attendance in primary education who lives in school catchment community and the maximum utilization of facilities by reducing drop outs. In this connection, the Action Framework to Reduce Dropout (AFRD) has been developed and practiced to increase attendance, reduce absenteeism which is contributing towards Universal Primary Education. The AFRD contains 4 basic elements, such as- a) Absenteeism Tracking (AT), b) Mobilize parents (MP), c) Connecting Services beyond School (CSBS), and d) Creativity for Quality Education (CQE).

Purpose of the study

Although there has been significant achievement in primary education enrollment over the years in Bangladesh, the primary school completion rate at which it has been occurring is slower than the expectation. The action framework is not to determine the factors effecting dropouts in primary education, rather to explore and examine the actions to address known factors for solving the backdrops of dropouts. Friendship is aware that one of the major causes of students’ drop out due to natural disaster related migration and this is difficult to address by local initiative only. The Action research was applied in this study because it enabled the teacher and supervisors of this project to follow the steps in the spiral hat helped them reflect upon teaching and improve students’ situation. It intended to see if the plan would work well or if any necessary modification or amendment would be needed to improve student's attendance in school further.

The main purpose of this study is: "to examine the effectiveness of the Action Framework to Reduce Dropout (AFRD) in primary schools." These actions are executed to address personal and familial reasons of students in 78 Friendship schools located in char of two northern districts and two southern districts; these are Gaibandha, Kurigram, Patuakhali and Satkhira respectively in Bangladesh.
Specific objectives:
To assess the effectiveness of the Action Framework to:
1. Increase enrollment
2. Improve attendance
3. Reduce drop out of students from school

Methodology:
This is an action research study was school-based and teacher-initiated. This study was done by systematically collecting data from schools’ attendance records and analyzed it in order to come to some conclusions about what future practice should be. It involved a self-reflective cycle of identifying a situation or problem, planning a change, acting and observing the processes and consequences, then re-planning, and so forth. It offers a valuable opportunity for teachers to be involved in the research to collect first-hand information. The continuing students of FPS were the target population of this study. The data were collected from all the 78 FPS in northern and southern areas are Gaibandha, Kurigram, Patuakhali and Satkhira districts of Bangladesh respectively. The programme records including school attendance registers were the main source of data to collect information of enrollment, attendance, drop out, and home visit of teachers and program staff. The continuing students of these schools, teachers and supervisors were instrumental, who provided and verified information about dropped out students.

An attendance register has been introduced for real time recording of presence and the reason of absence of students in the class if any. Class teachers have been using this register for tracking each student and prepares a list of absentees and conducts home visit within three days to validate the reason of absence in person by talking with parent and student. During the visit teacher takes detail notes of the reason, counsel parents and student and facilitate to obtain services like health services. The teacher also monitors the progress. This is a cycle for routine follow up and improvement of quality of school environment to retain students at school. Finally, these data were cleaned and entered into SPSS and analyzed accordingly.

Time period of the study:
This study followed by action was carried out from January 2014 to December, 2015 with a total period of 2 years and data from January 2013 have been used as baseline.

Definition of dropouts:
A dropout can be defined as a child who enrolls in school but fails to complete the relevant level of the education cycle (Dropout Problems in Primary Education – Some Case Studies, UNESCO, 1984). A dropout can also be termed as a pupil who was enrolled in the beginning of the school year and has left before the end of the school year, and was not enrolled elsewhere (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, November 2004). Annual Primary School Census (APSC) in Bangladesh conducted during 2014 by the Directorate of Primary Education defined, dropout rate by grade: Proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade in a given schools year no longer enrolled in the following schools year. The purpose of this to measure the phenomenon of pupils from a cohort leaving schools without completion and its effect on the internal efficiency of educational systems.
In addition, it is one of the key indicators for analysing and projecting pupil flows from grade to grade within the educational cycle.

The dropout calculation method of this study was, proportion of students from a cohort enrolled in a given grade in a given schools’ year no longer enrolled in the following schools’ year.

Friendship’s experience on applying AFRD in Education program at Char (nomadic island) areas in Bangladesh-

The three major rivers in Bangladesh, the Padma, the Meghna, and the Ganges and Brahmaputra, constantly change course with the rainy seasons. The rivers’ unpredictable nature causes flooding and river bank erosion in many areas of Bangladesh. When the riverbanks erode and their sediment is shifted, the large sand banks, otherwise known as chars, are affected. New chars can easily and suddenly emerge from a flood, and existing ones can just as spontaneously disappear.

Despite the chars’ unpredictability, many people still settle on them, mostly because they have no where else to go in an already crowded country. These people are among the poorest and most isolated in the world, living in such a dangerous place. Because their land is always shifting, the char inhabitants are faced with the task of moving frequently, uprooting their lives and livelihoods several times in a lifetime. They are isolate from the rest of the mainland by rivers and other chars, and therefore do not have access to many of their rights as citizens, one of which is education.

The Government of Bangladesh provides free and compulsory education for the entire country, but yet to have specific and significant education policy that include context specific provisions for char students. The systems set up for rural students in Bangladesh will likely have difficulty being
successful in the chars. There are some government and NGO schools in or near the chars, but they often become increasingly difficult for students to access. They are permanent structures, originally built within a char community, which is helpful to the community at that time. However, the ground on the char will gradually erode, and as the community is forced to keep moving away from the edges of the char, the permanent school building becomes increasingly more difficult to access. It is also possible that the school is eventually washed away with a flood or eroding ground, leaving its students without a school. They then face the same original problems they had in regard to access, leaving them with very limited or no options for education.

**Action Framework to reduce dropout (AFRD):**

- **Absenteeism tracking (AT):**
  This is obvious that repeated and continuous absenteeism without accountability and follow up leads to dropout. Friendship as part of Action Framework has implemented a thorough attendance tracking process. Instead of just marking a student “present” or “absent” in the attendance record; if a student is absent, the teacher will inquire as to why the student is absent. As example, the attendance records ‘P’ for present but not ‘A’ for ‘absent’ rather mention actual cause like ‘S’ for sick, ‘T’ for travelling, ‘W’ for work and ‘O’ for other; which enabled proper follow up of absenteeism.

  Some initiatives are:
  - Birthday Celebrations

  Students’ birthdays are celebrated in each of the Friendship Primary Schools. At the beginning of every year, teachers make a list of the students’ birthdays and keep record in attendance register.

a) **Action framework: Step:1-Absenteeism tracking (AT):**

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Some initiatives are:

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Students’ birthdays are celebrated in each of the Friendship Primary Schools. At the beginning of every year, teachers make a list of the students’ birthdays and keep record in attendance register.
On their birthday, students are celebrated with the best wishes from their classmates and teachers. This gives children something to look forward to, and another reason to attend and enjoy school.

- Teachers stay near school

Friendship recruits only potential teachers who live in the same community where the school is located, thus eliminating the problem of teachers’ unreliable transportation from the mainland and ensure retention. The local teachers are also more invested in the community, and provide a more genuine care and education to their students. As mentioned, all teachers are below SSC (Secondary School Certificate) for primary school and train with well-designed 42 days basic training in phases. About 72.22% of the teachers hired are women, who were recruited systematically from the community.

b) Action framework: Step 2-Mobilizing parents (MP):

- Celebrating First Day of School

The first day of school is one of the most important days of a child’s life, so Friendship makes it special on the first day of academic year in January every year. The teachers are trained in fun activities and games to engage the children on their first day of the year, which allows students to relax and create encouraging bonds with their peers and teachers.

The parents, School Managing Committee (SMC) members and other community members are all invited on the first day to welcome children & inspire them. The parents & community members appreciate the effort as they feel a shared responsibility to bring children to school. The children also appreciate the support from the community, and feel encouraged to regularly attend school.

- Children keep parents updated
The school inspire children to educate their parents & spread what they've learned in class each day to their families and friends. Friendship encourages children to practice what they’ve learned in class outside of school. Whether eaching their parents to wash their hands regularly, or practicing English with their friends. Students’ such engagement will ultimately benefit their communities.

- Parents meeting

Education is so important to all children, and shows indisputable results later in life. However, many char parents are unaware or confused of its benefits. When parents are explain that education enables their children to learn, and perform, and ultimately be more successful in life. A parent meeting is another mechanism of Friendship Education Programme to ensure betterment of education which is held monthly. 850 parents meeting was held in 2015 in 78 schools which mainly focused in discussion on how to ensure children's attendance, study at home, supports from the parent's side and different parental issues. The meeting emphasis on students’ absence in school, support to reduce drop out, stopping early marriage, child labour, migration, and contemporary issues raised.

- Adult Education:

When the Primary School Program was started, the community, especially maximum number of mothers of the school going children, felt the urgency to be literate and in accordance Friendship felt the need for a basic literacy initiative targeted to and customized for the adults. Friendship Adult Literacy Program was introduced as a part of the existing Friendship Primary School Program initiated in 2007 in northern chars and southern coastal area of Bangladesh. The program is currently being implemented through 73 adult literacy centres where we have one teacher and 20 learners for each centre in total of 73 teachers and 1446 learners in running batch of 2016.

The selection of adolescents and adults takes place from those areas where education or other program is running, to make them skillful after completion of literacy program. Once the learners complete the education at the adult literacy centers, the project link them with Friendship vocational training centers (weaving, tailoring, and embroidery) or other government and NGO run programs so that they can earn their own livelihood. The Adult Education Project is increasing char dwellers’ literacy and awareness, and encouraging them to send their children to school.

c) Action framework: Step:3-Connecting services beyond school (CSBS):

Dropout does not occur through a single factor; it is a composition of several factors. Parents with lower socio-economic status sometimes use the gender of their children to decide who gets more education so that children can give benefit in the future; in these circumstances male children eventually get more priority compare to female children. Besides Female usually experience less opportunities especially in productivity in the labour market and earn less compared to males which discourage parents from continuing the education of their daughters. Some school level factors, social security etc. affect the increase in dropout rate of girls. Some initiatives have been taken to connect children or parents with the services may help to resolve the problem. A brief as follows:

- Home Visits

Home visit has been proved again as one of the most effective methods of ensuring good attendance and decreasing dropouts. If a student is absent from class, the teacher will visit the absent student’s home within 3 days to encourage him or her to come back to school. If the child is sick, the teacher
will support for treatment in nearby health services and later will work with him or her to help catch up on missed material. If the child was travelling or working, the teacher explains to both student and parents why it is more important to get an education than to work or travel with parents. If needed sometimes the Project Supervisor or Project Manager do follow up visit.

The teacher reports to the supervisor if needed, who reports to the Project Officer, and eventually even the Project Manager is accountable for each student’s attendance. The community’s investment in students' education encourages parents to send their children to school on a regular basis. In addition, there are many other initiatives taken to attract and retain children at school.

Primary education is a complex multi-dimensional system. Sustained improvements in quality requires inter-organizational synergy involving families, school, community and government. Besides existing socio-economic efforts and perceptions, this simple tracking works significantly. By combining local and national intervention brings together monitoring, quality and capacity into a common endeavor to solve a critical problem.

d) Action framework: Step:4-Creativity for quality education (CQE):

- Joyful Learning Environment

Friendship schools do not follow the wrote-memorization style of learning that most conventional school does. Friendship’s focus on a “joyful” learning environment and incorporate several teaching methods into their lessons so the children will enjoy their schooling. Various teaching aids are used during the lesson, including boards, posters, children’s own drawings, wall magazine, music, and English audio recordings. The classroom is decorated with Code of Ethics posters, maps, a calendar, and children’s drawings and name tags.
• **Listen2Learn**

The Listen2Learn programme is designed to help students with their fluid pronunciation of the English language. All of the text from their school books is recorded by a native English speaker on a mobile phone. Cell phones and small speakers are then distributed to the teachers at each school. The teacher is provided with instructions on how to operate the phone and speakers. Teachers play the recording in class, while the students follow along in their textbooks. After the recording is played, students may be asked to read aloud to practice their pronunciation. The recordings also contain songs, short stories, and other more “fun” material to encourage students to learn English.

• **Portable School Library**

Friendship Education Programme established School Libraries in primary schools. All students from Classes I – V are allowed to borrow books from their library, as long as they return them within 15 days of checking the books out. Library books are chosen through a rigorous selection process.

• **Self-Attendance**

This program was incorporated into Friendship’s Education Program to teach children accountability for their own attendance. On the first day of school, each child draws a picture on one side of a piece of paper. He then brings the paper to the teacher, who asks the child’s name. The teacher repeats the child’s name loudly so the entire class is introduced to him, which boosts his self-confidence. The teacher then writes the child’s name on the back of the paper, explaining what each character means. This inspires a curiosity in the children to learn how to read and write their names and other words.

The children place their name tags in a holder by the door. Every day the children come to school, they must find their picture in the holder and turn it around so the name faces outward. When they leave for the day, they turn their tag again so the picture faces outward. This small daily task instills a sense of responsibility in the students and an accountability to come to school every day on time to take their own attendance.

• **Clean School Clean Home**

The Clean School Clean Home programme teaches students the importance of keeping themselves and their environment clean, and encourages them to teach their family the same values at home. The objective of this programme is to teach students that cleanliness and good hygiene is not just
something they do at school, but rather it is a way of life. If students keep their schools and their houses clean, the result will be a clean community.

Tools used to Broaden Learning Horizons

- Maps

Maps are used to further the concept of putting learning in context, and to spark students’ curiosity about the world they live in. Students learn important basic information about map reading, such as the cardinal directions, how to use a scale, and how to read a legend. They also learn about the area, population, bordering countries, climate, rivers, ports, and districts of Bangladesh. When students are learning about a certain district in Bangladesh or a country, the teacher show them where it is on the map. Students can see where the district is in relation to their own district, and in relation to Bangladesh as a whole. By looking at a map in relation to their lessons, students will begin to understand their role as a citizen of their char, their district, their country, their continent, and their world.

- Posters

Classrooms are filled with helpful posters to remind children of certain basic concepts. There are posters with the numbers and letters in Bangla and English, posters with animals, fruits, fish, etc. The posters contain things that relate to students’ everyday lives, so the students feel inspired to learn about them. The students are constantly learning from the posters; even if their minds occasionally wander during the lesson, they have no choice but to look at the educational posters that cover the walls of the classroom.

- Games, Sports, Music and Art Competitions

Children play sports, do art as part of their education. This breaks up the day and incorporates physical exercise into their routines. Students participate in several music & art competitions throughout the year. For example, in June of 2016, the students in Friendship schools celebrated World Environment Day. They had an art competition in which they were instructed to draw their ideal world or dream land. They also arranged a drama about protecting the environment in which the students acted. The play focused on how a bird, a man, and the environment were each affected by the lack of adequate trees in their environment.

Capacity building:

Friendship trains its teachers and staff intensively to ensure that students learn more effectively if they experience something themselves, rather than having a teacher tell them about it. Therefore, the teaching-learning process is activity-based, which allows children to discover knowledge first-hand. The interactive teaching method is applied to Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Environmental Science and English.

Teachers attend follow-up trainings once a month. These trainings are facilitated by Field Office staff and provide the teachers with the opportunity to ask questions on how to give better lessons. Supervisors check to make sure teachers are following their lesson plans, and help teachers make lessons plans for the next month. Teachers identify any potentially difficult topics in next month’s lesson and practice them with their peers and supervisors. During these sessions, teachers discuss their concerns and cover up-coming topics. They have the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers and brainstorm ways to teach the new lessons.

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Monitoring Progress

- Internal Supervision: The Project Managers, supervisors followed an observation check list to school visit and complete the form while they are there. They then discuss their findings and feedback with the teachers related to the action framework implementation.
- External Observation: The teachers provide a visitor’s book to the observer for comments. Then the teacher and all other education members review the comments and discuss the visitor’s findings.
- School Visit by School Managing Committee (SMC): The SMC conducts weekly visits to assess the school and classroom conditions related to the action framework. They record their comments in a Monthly School Based Report and discuss their observations with the teachers.
- Report Preparation and Review: The progress of the action framework is reviewed monthly and quarterly by the teachers and supervisors and share with parents. They also prepare monthly, quarterly, and annual program reports.

Meetings

- Monthly team meeting: The monthly team exchanged views, raised difficulties and shared experiences towards progress and planned for next month.
- SMC Meeting: The schools set the monthly meeting to inform SMC members about the progress. The Field Office staff conducts the meetings and includes any spontaneous issues that may arise.
- Bi-Monthly Parents Meeting

The teachers set the meeting for parents to motivate and explain that the students need extra care and attention. The Field Office staff conducts the meeting, records the minutes, and ensures that members sign the attendance and the chairman signs the minutes to follow up.

Results and discussion:
The results of this study reflects the vision of Friendship to strengthen marginalized communities and empower people to reach their full potential through a needs-based, integrated development approach. Its clearly shows the results how integrated approach can contribute in bringing progress. The ‘Friendship Education Model’ very much innovative and context specific.

The findings show significant progress in key areas of primary education including enrolment, attendance, drop out are presented below.

Graph-1: Enrollment in Friendship Primary School

Graph-1 shows, the persistent increase in annual student enrollment against the expectation was 90.47% in 2013 to 92.79% in 2015. This progress has been achieved due to the community engagement, convenient location of school, availability of exceptionally trained teachers, context specific learning opportunity, results in primary education completion public exam, and supply of education materials.
Parents motivation and efficient school management helped to achieve increasing trend in enrolment despite varying socio-economic status and encountered various environmental disaster.

Graph-2: School Attendance

The graph illustrates the increasing trend of attendance at school over times. The possible reason for impressive results due to intensive monitoring using attendance register and creativity in quality education. These improvement proves that the measures have taken to increase the attendance
from 91.6% with to 96.8% during 2013 to 2015 worked well. This is to be noted that the girls’ attendance for the same period were also remarkable are 91.8% in 2013, 95.8% in 2014 and 97.2% in 2015. The code of ethics, rights of children, self-attendance made children responsible and disciplined. Besides, joyful learning like using map, clean school clean home and creativity in quality education like listen2learn, preparing wall magazine made children enthusiastic to be in school.

Graph-3: Dropouts from school

This graph shows dramatic fall in dropout rate of students from primary school. Systematic review of attendance registers and tracking of each absentee by the teachers might have contributed significantly to reduce dropout rate 17.5% (759) to 4% (219) during the year 2013 to 2015; out of this girls were 51.25% in 2013, 50.85% in 2014 and girls 48.40% in 2015. This progress might have possible for absenteeism tracking, parents’ involvement and connecting with other services.

Graph-4: Reasons of dropout

The pie chart shows the reasons of dropout from primary school. This has been revealed that the major proportion, i.e, 93% of the students drops out as they were displaced or migrated to other chars, 4% dropout was due to early marriage while 2% dropout due to income generation.
This is quite obvious that personal and familial reasons can be reduced through this action framework while national initiative has to deal with respective stakeholder for the children drop out due to internal displacement or and migrating.

This graph a clear reflection while home visit increased then dropout decreased.
Limitations of the study:

This study was focused on the impact of the ‘Action Framework to reduce dropout’ in selective primary schools of Friendship. It was limited to exploratory purposes and as such it focuses on how attendance can be increased by reducing dropouts in primary schools. It is hoped that further studies would do more investigations covering detail elements of the issues related to dropouts. The samples of the current study cover only Friendship schools as the actions are taken there. Future studies may need to take these features in to account because such measures improve the empirical generalizability of results and the representativeness of samples. The AFRD contributes significantly for the results of this study and there might be other influences beyond the Framework. During the study period there were flood, river erosion, cold wave and other social aspects by which teachers encountered difficulties to reach students for close follow up and tracking.

Conclusion

Friendship believes that education is an integral part to ending poverty in that it gives people the tools to self-sustain and create a better standard of living for themselves with hope and dignity. In school, children learn the value of their ideas and knowledge. They feel a sense of responsibility to educate their families and friends on history, culture, rights, proper hygiene, and useful language skills. They become empowered to improve life for themselves and their families, thus do so. In this way, education is integrated into lifting people out of poverty, sustaining development and raising their standard of living. This study reveals that though several inter-related social, economic, school, cultural and climate factors affect school dropout outcome regardless of the gender of the students, among some particular personal and familial factors can be addressed within existing scope. The parents and the community are also likely to be more aware and concerned about the attendance, absenteeism and dropouts, demand better performance from school, and provide necessary support to the students, family and school for this purpose. Most importantly, in respect of policy and strategy options for quality with equity in primary education, this paper indicates what is possible to be achieved from intensive follow up, engaging parents, partnership building of government education authorities and nongovernment and community organisations for creative learning, when backed up by intensive monitoring and support, some additional investment in resources and efforts for quality enhancement. The attendance tracking is contributing in reducing dropout rate among the students of Friendship Education Program, which can be replicated in other char and riverine areas to ensure primary education with less dropouts and more retentions. Finally, by implementing action framework to reduce dropouts brings together school, parents, community and government into a common endeavor to address this critical problem.

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