

Investigating the Role of Non-Formal Education on the Development of Work-Readiness Skills in Urban Youth in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT : This mixed-method study investigated how Non-Formal Education (NFE) contributes to skill development for youth residing in Bangladeshi urban areas. The research aims to assess whether NFE programs successfully accomplish their goals of professional development and personal advancement of the learners. The Research work selected 60 participants through purposive sampling technique from Khulna and Rajshahi city. The data collection consisted of two primary data collection methods such as, questionnaire survey for quantitative data and in-depth-interview for qualitative data. The analysis of quantitative data utilized descriptive statistical procedure and thematic analysis served for the analysis of qualitative data. The research work shows that NFE teaches both vocational techniques along with soft abilities to urban youth who gain enhanced social mobility while finding employment opportunities. The study's findings further demonstrate that it is essential for policy makers to launch swift development of NFE programs that match market requirements to ensure accessible opportunities for deprived groups. The present investigation targets to contribute sustainable urban development endeavors of the government by focusing on youth empowerment.

Keywords- Non-formal education, Skill development, Urban youth, Bangladesh, Workforce empowerment

I. INTRODUCTION

Non-formal education (NFE) has a tremendous role in imparting knowledge and skills to clients especially in areas where formal systems of education has challenges. Bangladesh's urbanization is characterized by rapid youth population growth, most of whom are out of school and unemployed. The nature of the urban environment in places like Dhaka and Chittagong has greatly offered fast track growth of cities but has considerably raised the stakes for skill development for the sustenance of families (Hasan & Jahan, 2023). An illustration of an education system type that can enable urban youth meet the key skill demands includes Non-formal education programs which have features such as flexibility, inclusion and practical training than the conventional formal education. Most of these

programs is usually aimed at vulnerable groups; people are given a chance to improve their employment prospects and play a role in the national economy (Rahman et al., 2022).

The assessment tools within urban Non-formal education (NFE) programs are insufficient to create definite proof regarding the impact of these programs on youth empowerment and economic growth (Chowdhury 2021). The programs encounter multiple obstacles including limited resources together with out-of-date curricula that fails to meet employment requirements. These issues become more problematic because the absence of coordinated policy actions and weak connections between policymakers and implementing bodies together with insufficient government agency and NGO and private entity collaboration. The Sustainable Development Goals are of particular importance in Bangladesh because the country needs to fulfill the requirements of SDG 4 that prioritizes inclusive quality education (United Nations, 2015). The research investigates NFE operational effectiveness in urban settings by analyzing the capabilities and challenges alongside assets which influence its implementation.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

The objective of this research was focusing on examining the credibility of non-formal educational for skill build-up of the urban youth in Bangladesh for safe future employment.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

NFE is now widely recognized, especially for developing skills of marginalized urban youth in developing countries including Bangladesh. In this review we have summarized literature on what NFE contributes to skill acquisition, women's/youth/urban populace economic enhancement. Consequently, Hasan and Jahan (2023) include that through non-formal education, marginalized striving students gain flexible, comprehensive and inclusive forms of learning. In their study, they describe how these programs aim to correct those disparities with respect to vocation, IT, and business skills. They point out that satisfying the requirements of the market still poses a problem in their operations. In line with this assertion, Rahman, Karim, and Sultana (2022) affirm that NFE in urban Bangladesh enhances youth employability, provided that, most of the learning intervention programs are an outstanding issue of sustainability funding sources and evaluation methods. Chowdhury discusses urban education issues and stressed that NFE can prevent Common challenges in education some of the challenges in the education systems. The findings of the study show that NFE programs meet the needs of out of school youth but their extension and incorporation into national frame works are still deficient. On the other hand, Alam & Rahim (2020) employ the component of NFE and explain how female youth in the urban slum area are empowered through the course's financial literacy and readiness for job opportunities. These included the idea that firm initiated and planned interventions could successfully minimize gender differences in skills acquisition.

The study by Khan et al., 2021 explores the efficiency of PPP in the delivery of NFE pointing out the fact that PPP bolsters resource mobilization and utilization of NFE programs. However, the same study observes that there is no set curriculum in most of the providers which explain poor program achievements. Ahmed & Sultana (2019) studied digital learning tools in NFE and understand that through technology-based learning, youth in urban settings is more interactive and increase accessibility. However, there is one major limitation to digital access, digital divide. A recent work of Banu et al. (2020) investigates the effects of NFE in youth entrepreneurship, pointing out that the former develops an entrepreneurial perspective and offers essential business competencies. But as it is they argue that lack of follow-on support reduces long-term effectiveness of the training sought. In a similar vein, Akter (2018) discusses skill enhancement training and see that despite pp&ccS being able to

deliver the basic employability skills in the short-term limited opportunities are available to replicate such initiatives in the long-term. In Rahman and Hossain (2021), the authors discuss the policies of NFE, arguments for supporting policies and unified strategies for the incorporation of NFE in the national development priorities. Their study suggest that more attention should be paid on the monitoring and evaluation system so as to see the effectiveness of the program. Last, Sarker & Islam for local approaches to Community Driven NFE involve that local efforts normally prove more expressive because they are specific to solve the urban problems. They explore active community participation in the conception and operation of programs.

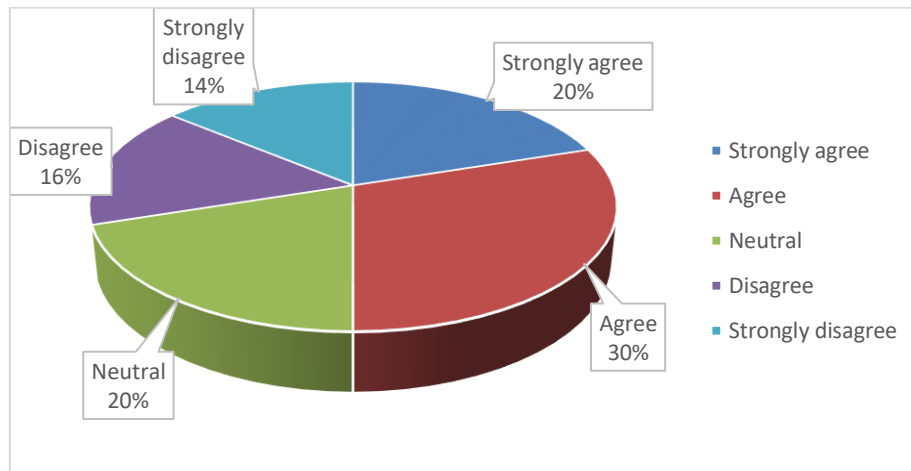
IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

The research design combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate how non-formal education (NFE) helps young urban residents in Bangladesh develop their work readiness skills. Research findings originate from sixty participants chosen through purposive sampling based in Khulna and Rajshahi Divisional cities. The research sample included fifty NFE beneficiaries together with ten instructors. A total of fifty youth participants participated in a self-developed structured questionnaire survey about their training experiences and job searching opportunities. A team of ten instructors took part in-depth-interview session to assess NFE program outcomes as well as prevailing challenges in the field of NFE. As noted earlier A Mixed Method (MM) approach combining the qualitative and quantitative methods was used both for data collection and data analysis in this study. Data collection was guided by themes from the objective of the study. In the present study, the quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using the SPSS; version 20.0 and Microsoft Excel. On the other hand, the qualitative data was analyzed using the process of thematic analysis. The researcher provided the participants with some ideas to inform them about the nature of the present research, to emphasize that their participation would be voluntary, and that they would be free to withdraw at any time. Once they accepted the invitation to participate, the researcher involved the teachers and students in the study.

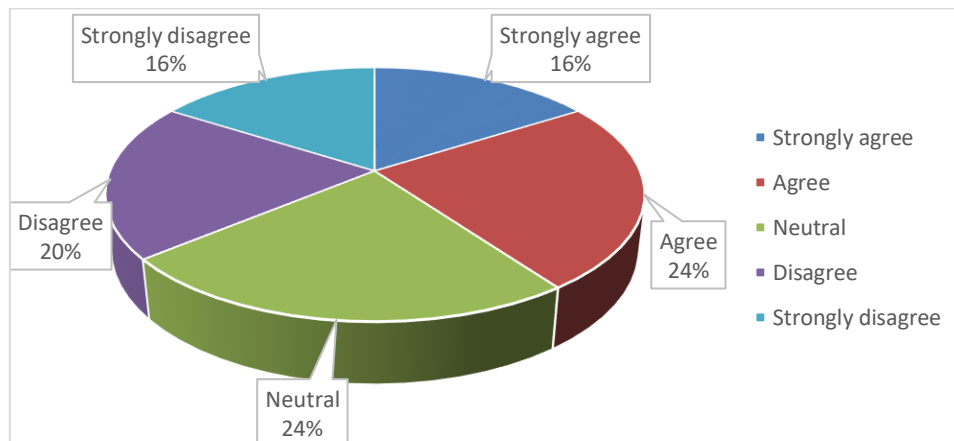
V. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

Findings from Survey Questionnaire

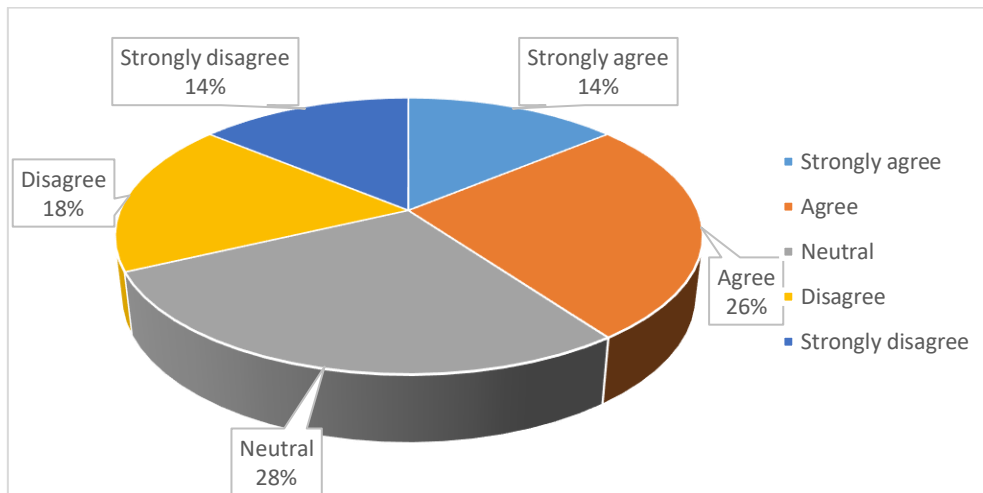
The researchers distributed the survey questionnaire to fifty young adult participants from NFE training centers based in urban Bangladesh. The data collection through survey aimed to understand what participants experienced regarding skill development training and its role in job acquisition. The survey results show how NFE initiatives affect job readiness and what skills these programs teach their beneficiaries through their experiences in urban areas of Bangladesh. The findings have been arranged by significant concepts which were extracted from participant feedback.

Figure 1: Awareness of the non-formal education programs available in the locality.

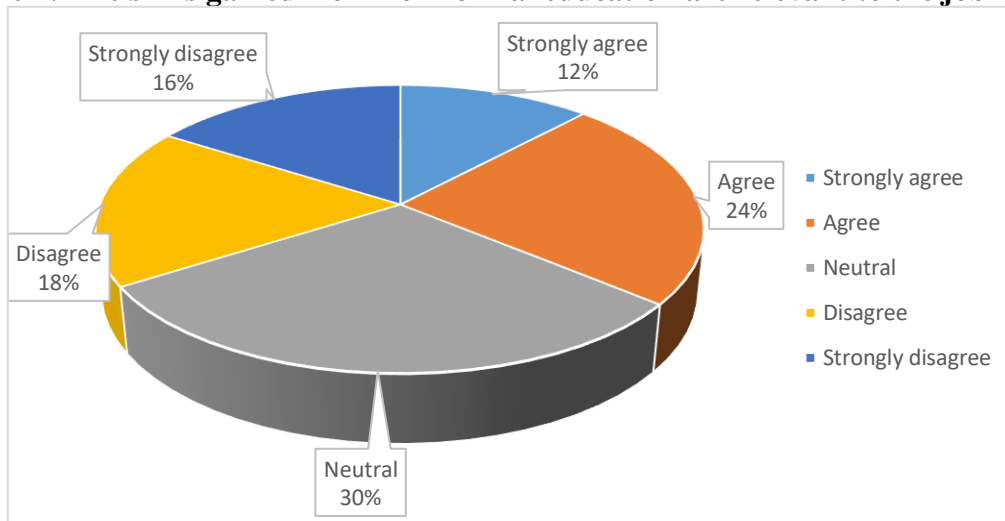
The first statement of the questionnaire claims that the participants are aware of the non-formal education programs available in their community. The data in figure 1 reveals that 50% of the respondents were familiar with the non-formal education programs strongly agree 20% and agree 30%. Nonetheless, 20% were neutral, which was indicative of a lack of knowledge most of the time. The rest 30 % (16% – disagree, 14% – strongly disagree) indicate the need to improve the outreach efforts to ensure that people are aware of the available non-formal education programs in the society.

Figure 2: Accessibility of Non-formal education programs in the locality.

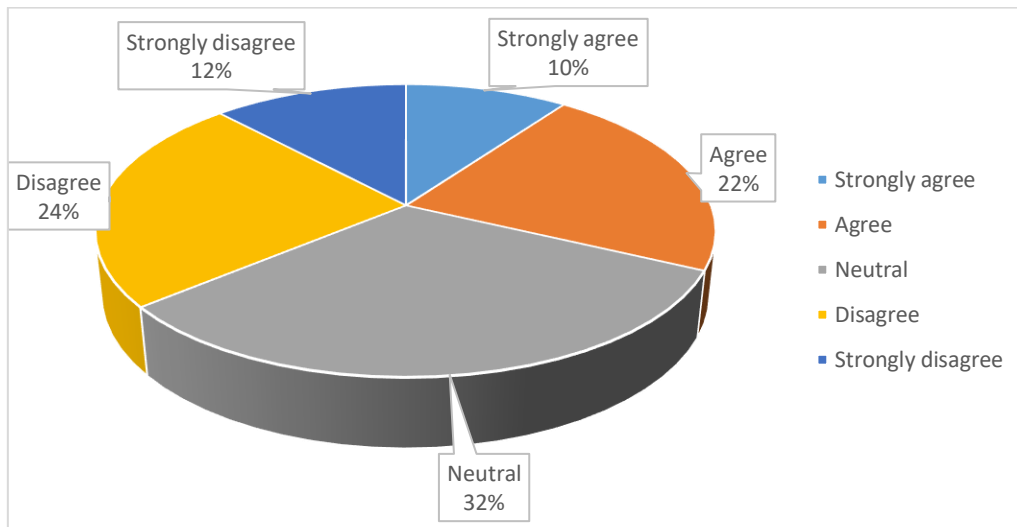
The second statement of the questionnaire claims that Non-formal education programs are easily accessible to youth in the participants' area. The data in Figure 2 shows that 40% of respondents agree stating that non-formal education programs are easily accessible with strong endorsement by 16% and 24% endorsing the statement. However, 36% of the respondents affirmed that they found it difficult to access the programs while 20 percent frowned at it and 16 percent strongly frowned at it. They contend that there were considerable barriers that youth had to overcome to get the information they required. Hence, there is the need to enhance supply and demand of information targeted at the youths in that region.

Figure 3: Effectiveness of the Non-formal education programs

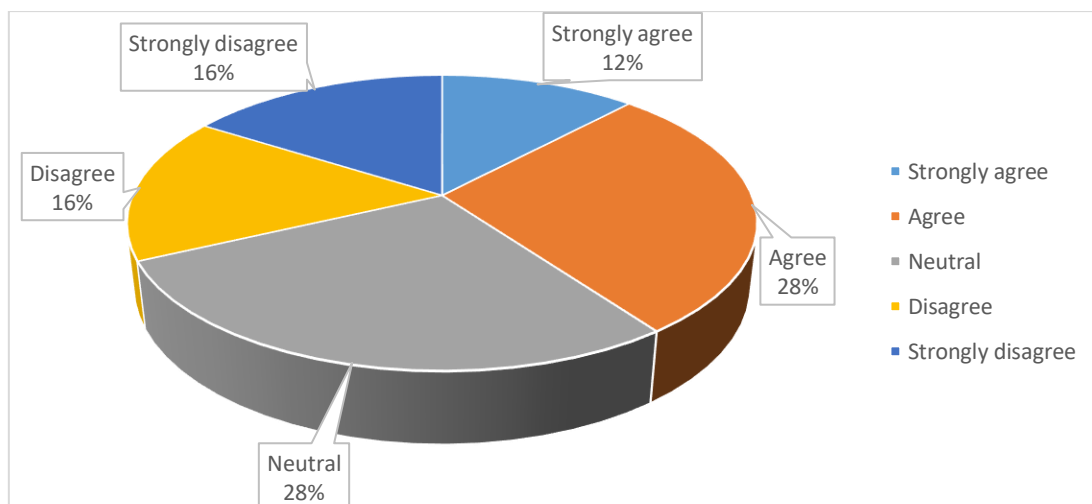
The third statement of the questionnaire claims that Non-formal education programs have effectively helped them develop valuable skills for employment. Figure 3 indicates that 40 percent of the respondents found that through non-formal education programs they acquired employment skills and out of this percentage 14 percent strongly agreed and 26 percent agreed. Nevertheless, 32 % (18 % of them disagree and 14 % strongly disagree) thought that such programs were rather useless. Among still being neutral, 28%, the conclusion is that further improvement should focus on the increase of the program's effectiveness by providing better skills for employment.

Figure 4: The skills gained from non-formal education are relevant to the job market

The fourth statement of the questionnaire claims that the skills they have gained from non-formal education are relevant to the job market in their area. As stated in the context of Figure 4, 36 percent of respondents supported the opinion that the obtained non-formal education skills were applicable to the local employment market (12 percent of respondents strongly agree with it, whereas 24 percent had an agree opinion). However, 34 % of them responded no to the skills being useful where 18% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed.

Figure 5: The quality of non-formal education programs meets expectations.

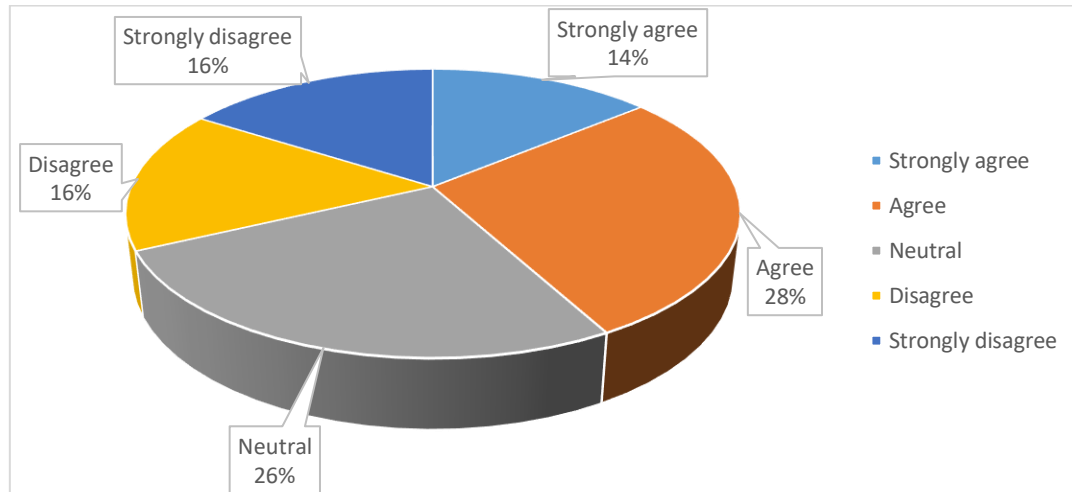
The fifth statement of the questionnaire claims that the quality of non-formal education programs meets the expectations of the youth. The data in Figure 5 shows that 32% (10% of respondents strongly agree whereas 22% agree) were satisfied with the quality of non-formal education programs. Nonetheless, 24% said they disagreed and an additional 12% strongly disagreed that the quality of the products did not meet their expectations. 32% of it was neutral. This implies that efforts should be made to enhance the quality of programs with a view to satisfying the needs of those who make up the remaining 32% of the population.

Figure 6: Non-formal education programs provide adequate support for work skill development.

The sixth statement of the questionnaire claims that Non-formal education programs provide adequate support (e.g., mentoring, resources) for skill development. Figure 6 displays the data where 40 percent of responders responded positively (12 percent strongly agree, 28 percent agree) about non-formal education programs support for skill development. However, 32% (16% – a little, 16% – strongly) said that the support they needed was unavailable. That

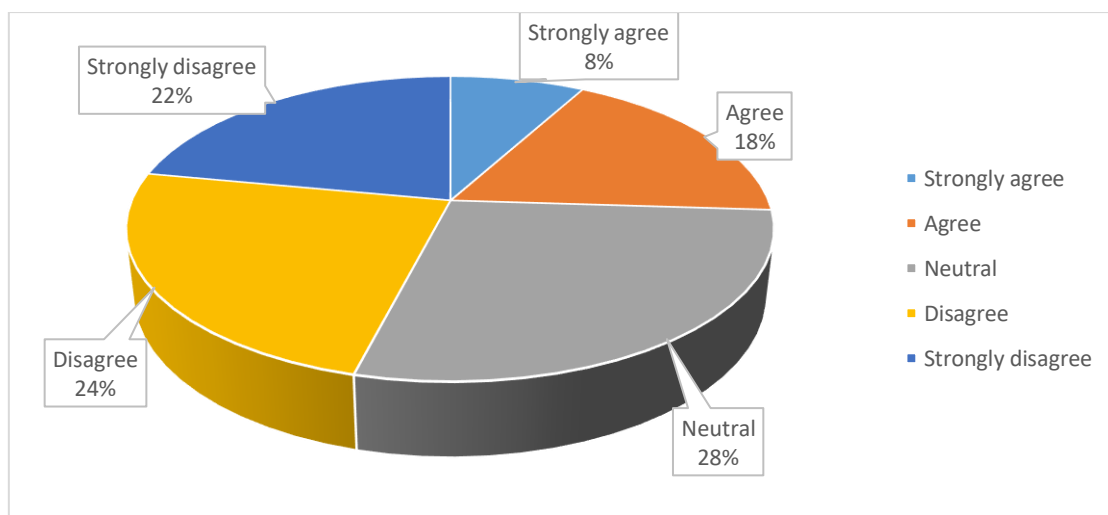
was, 28% neutral, indicating that there is a need to enhance the mentoring and resource available in order to enhance skills.

Figure 7: Non-formal education has helped improve employment opportunities.



The seventh statement of the questionnaire claims Non-formal education has helped improve employment opportunities of the participants. The results concerning the impact of non-formal education on employment opportunities are shown at figure 7, 42%, (14% strongly agree, 28% agree), of the responding students were convinced that their employment opportunities had been enhanced by this kind of education while 32% (16% disagree and 16% strongly disagree) shared the opposite view. Indeed the result 26% replied neutral mean few participants get benefit of the enhanced employment prospect but there is a scope to make non-formal education more effective in this respect.

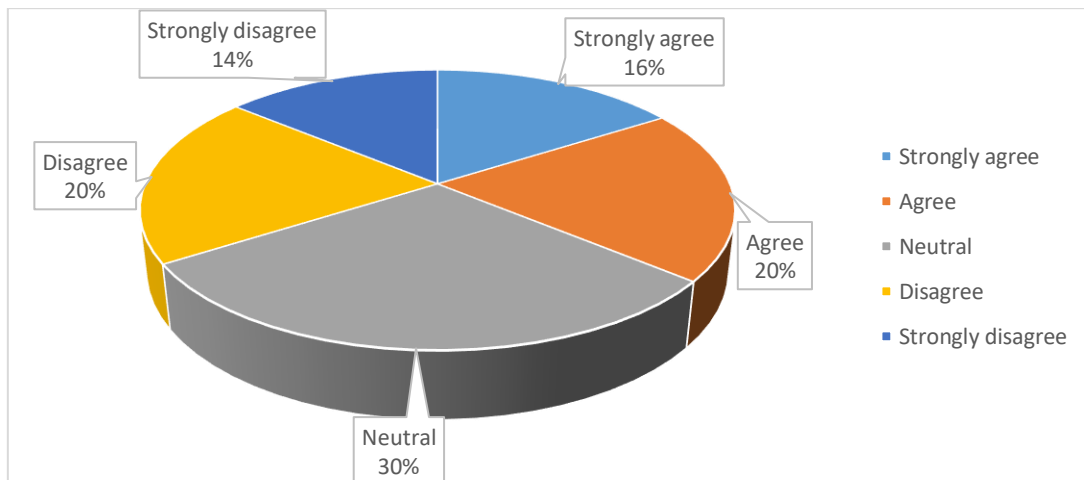
Figure 8: The cost of participating in non-formal education programs is affordable.



The eighth statement of the questionnaire claims the cost of participating in non-formal education programs is affordable for them. The percentages of the data used to construct Figure 8 show that 8% of the respondents strongly agree and 18% agree with the statement that the cost of non-formal education is affordable, while 24% disagree with the

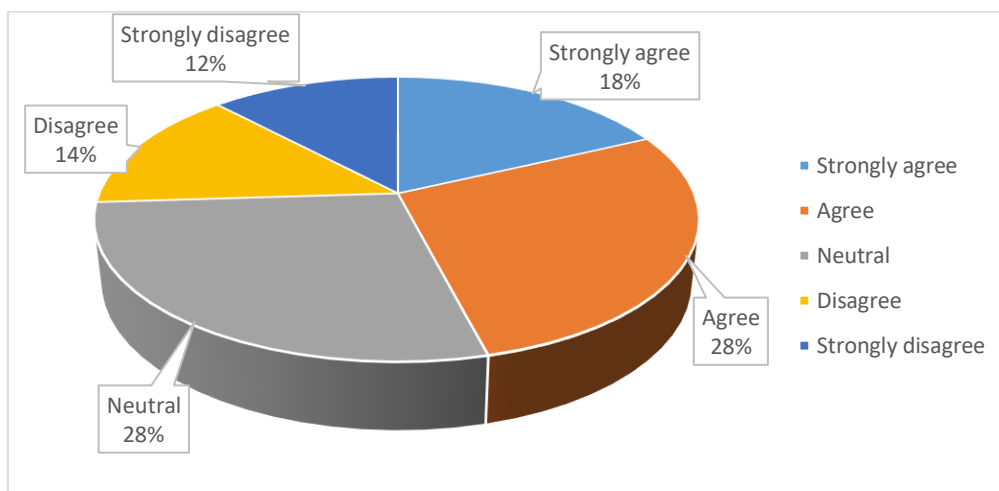
statement arguing that non-formal education is unaffordable and 22% strongly disagree. Out of this, 28% were neutral, which means that for majority, cost could be a limiting factor when it comes to accessibility to such programs thus the need for cheaper alternatives.

Figure 9: Financial barrier, time constraints, lack of information prevent from participating in non-formal education programs.



The ninth statement of the questionnaire claims that the participants face significant barriers (e.g., financial, time constraints, lack of information) that prevent them from participating in non-formal education programs. The data in Figure 9: Meanwhile, “I have a lot of difficulties (financial, time-related, lack of information) to participate in non-formal education programs” with 36% of respondents identified that they had significant barriers, while 34% of the respondents claimed that they did not have significant barriers. It was 30% neutral showing that factors like cost, time or unavailable information prevents many from participating.

Figure 10: Eagerness to participate in non-formal education programs in the future if the opportunity arises.



The tenth statement of the questionnaire claims that they are likely to participate in non-formal education programs in the future if the opportunity arises. The data in Figure 10

reveals that 46% (18 % strongly agree and 28% agree) of the respondents will participate in non-formal education programs in the future. However, 26 % (14 % disagree, 12 % strongly disagree) were unwilling ones and 28 % were not inclined to be involved. This implies that there is need to enhance the efforts of getting the future generation to participate in such programs.

Findings from Interview

The interviews Largely showed that the awareness of NFE programs was low due to lack of publicity and too little information passed to and from Learning institutions' and social networks. Issues of access including costs, distance, time and social factors especially gender emphasized the need for interventionist policies such as low cost, distance education especially online courses and mobile training units. The strengths identified during the study included computer literacy together with communications skills and entrepreneurship training but participants emphasized that vocational training does not properly align with market needs and requested stronger technical and vocational education. Program quality varied between satisfactory and unsatisfactory status but instructional staff received high praise from participants although they noted inadequate learning materials along with inadequate infrastructure and support facilities which demanded investment in resources and infrastructure. Another theme that was evident was cost which came out strongly as a problem saw many families complaining of the high costs of attending programs putting forward that there should be scholarships and felling that there should be opportunities or free programs in the community. While few of them sais that NFE made moderate changes in employment status among them, they pointed out the absence of follow – up services such as job placements and internships. Recommendations for improvement of future participation have regard to the organization of better flexible working hours, more contemporary curricula, and improved promotional strategies. These results are consistent with surveys and contribute to the understanding of views about the possibility of improving skills and employment opportunities of urban youths in Bangladesh through NFE programs as long as existing barriers to awareness, access, cost, and market relevance are eliminated by a politically informed and adequately funded approach.

VI. DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

These research findings help understand how non-formal education (NFE) supports skill development among the youth populations located in urban areas of Bangladesh. This research presents distinct findings in the field by using survey and interview results alongside current literature. Through analysis various important issues merged with opportunities which show specific areas both need quick policy measures and direct practical interventions. The main problem facing NFE programs within the target youth group arises from their insufficient knowledge about NFE initiatives and their limited program accessibility. A survey revealed that half of people in the demographic group were not informed about NFE programs while the same number indicated insufficient access to nearby programs. Research by Hasan and Jahan (2023) supports the discovery of inadequate advertising alongside high expenses and cultural obstacles that stop women from accessing NFE educational opportunities. To succeed awareness campaigns together with community outreach programs need to be implemented as essential steps. The best-designed programs become ineffective when there is not enough visibility for attracting their target audience.

The study provides significant data about how NFE programs are received by participants. Though 40% of NFE program participants received benefit from skill

development education through their courses, 34% of participants rated the curriculum as inappropriate for meeting typical employment market requirements. This split points to a critical gap between skill training and employability outcomes. Students gave high praise to digital literacy classes but demanded coursework that better matched the current labor market demands according to Chowdhury (2021). The results show that NFE curricula need constant revision with industry demands and employer consultation instead of using fixed program designs. The study established program quality along with resource adequacy as enduring issues. Twenty-six percent of the studied participants indicated dissatisfaction because they experienced limited training facilities with inadequate infrastructure that cost too much money. Alam and Rahim (2020) joined many other experts who demanded stronger policy changes to enhance NFE training quality. These findings stress that programs need increased financial investment for both expansion work and better training environment quality improvements and modern equipment delivery along with subsidy programs for marginalized groups.

The employment rate remains drastically low for program completers of NFE training. Real-world employability suffers from the absence of formal attachment programs which include both internships and apprenticeships in NFE programs. Research evidence shows that training centers need direct connections to private business environments for sustainable employment to develop because mere skill training fails to produce job prospects. The study data requires the following set of proposals. To enhance participation in NFE programs the first necessary step involves awareness initiatives that specifically reach underprivileged groups and minority populations. Program visibility will expand by using local media networks and community leaders together with digital platforms. The educational program requires continuous updates to suit present-day workforce needs with information from businesses and academics as well as graduating students. The achievement of enhanced outcomes together with increased access requires substantial financial support to build up infrastructure and deliver affordable training at quality levels across all programs. Educational programs for National Formal Education need job placement services and internships along with career counseling to guide trainees from education toward employment opportunities.

Community involvement together with innovation needs to be promoted as essential elements of NFE programs. Program implementation benefits significantly when local communities become involved in design decisions because the training content adapts better to urban zone requirements. Effective NFE programs become achievable through partnerships between public and private entities together with mobile learning platforms and multiple decentralized training sites. These efficient targeted interventions will help close identified gaps in order to boost non-formal education program success while supporting sustainable urban development and youth empowerment in Bangladesh.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses how non-formal education (NFE) can impact youth employment in the urban areas for the country; Bangladesh. However, due to poor awareness, access to health facilities, expensive health care, and lack of input/output match to market constraints, the effort is not effective all the times. Based on matching of the NFE programs with market needs and its equal distribution NFE can play a vital role in youths' education therefore eventual sustainable urban development.

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