

ISSN 2072-3334
Development Compilation
Vol. 07. No. 01. June 2012

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE IN THE BANGLADESH CONTEXT

Mohammad Tareque Rahman^{*}
Bishnu Kumar Adhikary^{**}
Mohammed Rashel Uddin^{***}

Abstract : Inclusive education is a complex idea. Still the concept is defined differently in different context with some confusion, contradiction and debate. Along with this it is very challenging for policy makers and educators to define the level of inclusion as the belief is; the more inclusive the setting is the more it is challenged by the diversity and difference. So in this context we will begin the article trying to describe the present context of Bangladeshi education and following that we will identify the complexity of the concept of inclusive education. After that we will explain briefly about the different issues related with inclusive education. The issues have been identified within three broader areas: 'Education for all', 'combating discriminatory attitudes' and 'Building an inclusive society'. After that we will describe the legislative framework of the present education system and identify how far this framework is compatible with the philosophy of inclusive education. Following that we will put some examples of inclusive practice and briefly analyze their suitability for inclusive education in Bangladeshi context.

Introduction

Bangladesh is a land of a 150 million people and considered as one of the poorest country of the world. According to the basic need chronology (Food, Clothing, Shelter, Education and Treatment) education is in the 4th position and food is in the first whereas there are so many people who fail to ensure the 4th and 5th need and struggle with the first three. Though primary education is free but still the schools charge the exam fees three times a year and in many cases the rural poor parents are unable to pay. In maximum cases the parents actually don't waste much of their time to decide whom to let give up school among the children. Mostly, it is the disable child and after that the girl child. The equation is very simple, for the parents; as

the blind son cannot learn much from the school and in future he wouldn't be an earning member of the family so he must quite along with his sister ,because she can take care of her brother at home and do some household task. This is an example which shows that, how the exclusion starts inside the family and within this context, Bangladeshi government along with some prominent NGOs is trying to implement inclusive education.

While the above example represents the maximum rural people's life and perception about inclusion, in that case the question which become very significant is that, what is the government's and the NGO's preparation to implement inclusive education in Bangladesh ? Bangladesh showed a greater interest in education, since her birth in 1971 as 'Peoples Republic of Bangladesh' and enacted the constitution in 1972 and revised in, 2000 (The Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, 2000). The provision for general education helped to conceptualize the aspects of inclusive education. Along with specific and separate education policy initiatives, aspects of inclusion are well prescribed into the constitution (See the appendix-1) which may seems to be a good start from the policy perspective.

Though inclusion is welcomed into the country's highest level legislative framework (constitution) but it is absent in the day-to-day life of the children's family and school. These are the two opposite pictures above of Bangladeshi policy initiatives and social practice, where inclusive education is expected to be implemented. When the country's legislation gives the highest priority for inclusion then the question, 'why inclusion is not practiced inside the family and school?' gives the justification of the article to analyze both the policy initiatives and practice of so called inclusion inside the schools. One assumption for not practicing inclusion inside the school could be that, the schools and the educational leaders may don't have the right concept of inclusive schools so what they are practicing as 'inclusive practice' are not inclusive in reality. On the other hand another assumption could be that though the inclusion is well defined inside the policy papers but there are no active initiatives to implement this into the schools. From the perspectives drawn above it is easy to understand one thing that, Bangladeshi social, legal and educational context for implementing inclusive education is not so easy.

We have borne and brought up in one of the village where we experienced some incidents like parents treat the disabled child as a burden and the school teachers along with the students behave with him/her like an unwanted guest. Moreover one of the writer of this article have worked with two major NGOs which work with the government for implementing inclusive education in their schools. In this essay we will question few traditional concept and assumptions and also analyze the policy statements along with implementation initiatives on the basis of our previous social and working

^{*} Senior Research Associate, Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC.

^{**} Lecturer, Institute of Education and Research, University of Rajshahi.

^{***} Mohammed Rashel Uddin, Material Developer, D.Net (Development Research Network).

experiences along with the traditional theory of inclusion. For example we will question the parameter of inclusion in the Bangladeshi context as it is argued that, "the more inclusive a setting is, the more it is challenged by diversity and difference" (Ballard, 1999, p: 1). This gives an impression that contextualization of the level of inclusion is important for the Bangladeshi education system because of her capacity to face the extent of challenge. In this essay we will present the challenges of policy framework and the implementation initiatives along with the current practice of inclusion to see the compatibility with the concept of inclusive education.

Mapping the issues

We mentioned earlier that it requires conceptualizing inclusive education in the Bangladeshi context, to understand the implementation strategy well. The assumption is, the more it is familiar, the more it is understood by the community people. Almost 17 years ago the Salamanca world conference on Special Needs Education endorsed the idea of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994 cited in Ainscow, 2005). There are some aspects described with clear definition about inclusive education in Salamanca statement to understand inclusive education to its fullest. Conceptualizing those aspects in Bangladeshi context will be our first step for mapping the issues. These key aspects of regular school with an inclusive orientation are: 1. Achieving education for all, 2. Combating discriminatory attitudes, 3. Building inclusive society (Ainscow, 2005).

1. Education for all

Education for all is an international commitment which affirms that all children need to complete primary education (UNESCO, 1990). This 'All' children means children regardless of any discrimination in terms of any sort of disability, children without any special need, street and working children, children from remote and nomadic population, children from religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities and children from other disadvantage or marginalised areas or groups (Miles and Singal, 2010).

From the Bangladeshi perspective the challenge is how to bring all this children with diverse need in to school? This diverse child population consists of working children who are supporting family livelihood, disabled children who are mostly out of school and also ethnic children with all different needs for learning. In some areas there are a number of ethnic minorities live together who are different in terms of language, culture and social norms which make the situation difficult to create access for these diverse group of children. Among these children, a number of them with special needs and again many of them are girls. It is evident that primary education has never been accessed equally by all the diverse group of children in Bangladesh. Like many other developing countries, in Bangladesh children living in rural areas and in urban slums, children from socio-

economically disadvantage areas and children with special needs and ethnic minorities are mostly disadvantaged in terms of access to education (Chowdhury, et al. 2003; Broke and Cammish 1991; Chowdhury et al.1992; Nath et al. 1993; UNICEF 1992; Alam et al. 1997).

These disadvantaged children needs special supports which includes infrastructure, Textbook and other teaching learning materials in different language/format for different with ethnic and special needs children, teacher training, which are quite difficult for a country with severe poverty. Besides, the government along with the NGOs have shown greater success in the increasing the net enrolment rate in primary education, the completion rate remains 60 % since 2000 (World Bank, 2009). This huge dropout (40%) is not expected for EFA as 'Education for all' is the core aspect of inclusive education. Almost 15 % of the total population of children who never enrolled in school and the rate is stagnant since 2005, is still a big challenge to achieve EFA (Education watch repost, 2008). This is also a big challenge to implement Inclusive education because that proportion of children is still excluded from the school.

2. Combating discriminatory attitudes

Teachers are viewed as one of the main elements of implementing any teaching learning strategy and regarding inclusive education it remains the same while the expectation from them increases for such a diverse classroom more than before (Cant, 1994; Haskell, 2000; Whiting and Young, 1995). Among these expectations one of them is a fair attitude towards all the children no matter how they are special. This is because; if the children find discrimination in their teacher's behaviour then naturally they will be inspired to behave the same to their classmates with special needs. Very few research findings are found (Mahboob, 2008) in terms of students' attitude towards their classmates with special needs from the Bangladesh perspective while there is a lack of research findings in terms of teacher's attitude towards inclusive education or children with special needs. Older and experienced teachers foster less positive attitude than their younger colleagues regarding children with disability and inclusion in the main stream school (Cornoldi et al., 1998). It is argued that lack of training about 'how to make an inclusive classroom' and 'the teaching of children with special needs' are the major causes to possess less positive attitude towards inclusion of children with disability in the main stream education system (Clayton, 1996; Menlove, et al., 2001). Regarding the Bangladeshi context there are a significant number of teachers found in their middle age and in the traditional teacher's training, inclusive education is never focused or prioritized.

According to the above discussion it could be assumed that the traditional pedagogic teacher training may not be enough to implement inclusive

education while a holistic behavioural training may require. In terms of students attitude towards their classmates with disability in one research finding (NGO run Non formal school) shows that majority of the students are positive while a few had the disagreement with them (Mahboob, 2008) which seem good while it is assumed that some longitudinal study with some observation may produce a different result. Along with this it is also important to understand the teachers and students attitudes towards the ethnic minorities and disadvantaged children in inclusive education setting, which is still almost an untouched area.

3. Building inclusive society

Even for the time being if we assume that Bangladesh has a school culture without any discrimination towards the disadvantaged children by all means, it is difficult to assure that, this will sustain when it has social class division and practice of discriminatory attitudes towards disadvantaged people. It is a matter of argument that whether the school will act as an agent for the change of the 'social norms of class division' or the 'social pressure of discrimination' will make school's inclusive culture disruptive. Many studies have reported that, there is a significant influence of individual's socio-economic background on their academic experience and performance (OECD/UNESCO/UIS 2003; Breen & Johnson, 2005). This means that socio economic difference or class difference has significant impact on student's and teacher's attitudes inside the class which is against the moral of Inclusion.

To build an inclusive society it is first one need to understand what is meant by inclusive society? In terms of inclusive school and education there are some justification that describe who will be included and how they will be treated (education for all without any discrimination in terms of access and attitude) when regarding inclusive society same question could be asked with an extension of how the concept of inclusive society is significant with the concept of inclusive education? Booth (1996), Miles and Singal (2010) argued that inclusion basically means participation and no exclusion. From the perspective of inclusion in the school if 'participation' means all children's access and performance in the school then it is essential to find an answer, how 'participation' will be defined in terms of inclusion in the society.

Transition to inclusive education

Bangladesh likely many other countries around the world moves towards inclusion by establishing the right for individuals and the state is very keen to do it by different legislative frame work and policy implementation. Apart from the policy reform it is seen that especially the leading NGOs are trying to implement the philosophy of inclusive education in their schools but fewer initiatives is seen in the government schools. Mahbub, (2008) informs that BRAC (the world's largest NGO) alone operates over 32,000 primary and

20,168 pre-primary schools which are inspired by inclusive philosophy and these schools provide education over 1.5 million children. Apparently it may seem that Bangladesh is in a good position in creating the access but it requires an in-depth analysis from both the policy and practice aspects.

Policy initiatives and legislative framework

In 1997 the national education policy recommended a crucial initiative for inclusive education and that was to do a survey to identify the number of children with special need and their disability types. It recommended various initiatives for example improvised educational materials, specialized teacher training and many more which prove government's true will to implement Inclusive schools but still we neither have any facility specialized for the ethnic minorities or special need children nor any database of total number of children with disabilities and their types (Ahsan, 2006) which represents a lack of apolicy transfer to activity framework". On this issue Hossain, (2010, p. 1266) argue that, there is a need of 'How' of policy, transfer into the action. On the contrary, an alternative explanation might be visible if we see it from a different lens, for example, Bangladesh always welcome NGOs to work with their innovative ideas to raise the access which is a big policy initiative and to some extent this has been proven successful as the government along the NGOs have achieved the a good enrolment rate (93%) to the primary education. According to Riaz, (2008, p. 145): æBangladesh, in a short span of time, managed to raise literacy rates by their innovative policy of 'one room, one teacher' schools. 'One room one teacher' is an approach where one teacher teaches, a single group of children from grade one to five in a single room. Along with this, it is believed that, Bangladesh introduced æPrimary Education Stipend Project" aiming to increase children participation, enrolment and attendance which has an impact on the high net enrolment; though some of its implementing flaws are well identified. Having a significant success of creating access the government is now implementing Primary Education Development Plan, phase-2 to raise the quality of education which seems a realistic policy move.

Practice of Inclusion

Schools are doing well in terms of offering access to children with special needs regardless ethnicity, race, gender, and disability; whereas the challenge is assuring the participation of these children. Mani, (2000) cited in Singal, (2005) argued two different types of inclusion, the 'inclusive climate' and 'real inclusion'. He argued that the teachers majorly know how to behave with the children with disability which he calls inclusive climate (for example calling the disabled children by their name, if the child is absent then saying that everybody in the class missed him etc) where as the attention is needed in terms of participation in the classroom which he calls real inclusion. If all the students regardless of their ethnicity, disability participate into the

teaching-learning effectively then that would be the practice of inclusion which in practice is hardly seen in Bangladeshi context. From the Bangladeshi perspective it also shows the same picture lacking of real inclusion. We visited many primary schools which catered to marginalized and disadvantaged children around the country for various purposes both academic and professional in nature. On many occasions we have found the teachers were not sure about the progress (learning) of disabled children as the teachers could not engage them in the teaching-learning process. They tried to give the impression that, these children (children with special needs) are coming to the school and by chance if they can learn something then that would be a bonus for them. On the other hand the situation for the children from different ethnic minority was almost the similar as they speak their mother tongue and understand Bangla (the state language) very less which is the usual language of instruction from the teacher. As a result with in a very short time after the enrolment these children leave the school finding the classroom less interesting. This is one of the major reasons of drop out for the ethnic children.

It is noticeable that some Bangladeshi schools are trying to make their schools more inclusive and to some extent they have created the access for diverse groups of children regardless of their gender, ethnicity or disability. On the contrary the leadership and the teachers of these schools are still not sure, what to do with this diverse group of children, how to meet their learning needs and how to engage them in participation.

Few approaches could be effective especially for the country like Bangladesh, which includes building learning community among the teachers and teachers with parents, welcoming student voices, school to school collaboration or establishing few model inclusive schools. These approaches have been tried for school improvement in minimum resource because these concepts majorly depend on partnership building which allows maximum stakeholders to engage themselves in the development process of inclusive schools (Wenger, 1998).

Conclusion

Though inclusive education is welcomed in the Bangladeshi context in the policy level but in reality very less practice is visible to make schools inclusive for various complications. The barriers are: lack of conceptual understanding of inclusion, large number of children and schools, discriminatory attitudes towards diversity. Along with these negative aspects there are also some positive things, to carry the inclusion process further for example good policy statement, good enrolment rate etc.

As a poor country, Bangladesh might face challenges for rapid changes in its large number of schools, or to take time consuming projects for lack of

resources and also to implement legal commitments to make schools inclusive as the law enforce team has many other emergent issues to solve such as crime and corruption. But it is the people who need to start thinking about inclusion and start acting inclusively, building partnership. The government can inspire the positive examples of inclusion which are scattered among different society and schools. On the other hand rather proposing random and high expected recommendations for the government the researchers, educationist need to talk and show different mechanism about how to influence schools and parents and other stakeholders of the society to work together, make partnership, build collaboration.

Appendix-1: The statements in to the constitution

Article 17: The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of –establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law;

Article 28 (3 & 4) also describe few important aspects regarding combating discrimination:

Article 28 (3)

No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction, or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution.

Article 28 (4)

Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens. (Ministry of Law Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, 2000: 8

Notes and References

1. Ainscow, M. (2005) *Developing inclusive education system: what are the levers for change?* Journal of educational change, 6:109-124
2. Ahsan, T. M (1996) *Inclusive Education Acts and Policies in Some Selected Countries Including Bangladesh: A Review*, Bangladesh Educational Journal, Vol. 5, Number. 1, p. 53-68
3. Alam, Mahmudul, K. Begum, and A. Raihan. (1997) *The Efficiency of Primary Education in Bangladesh*, In: *Getting Started: Universalising Quality Primary Education in Bangladesh*, ed. by A. K. Jalaluddin and A. M. R. Chowdhury, 48–73. Dhaka: University Press..
4. Ballard, K. (1999) *Inclusive education, International voices on Disability and Justice*, (edt), Falmer Press, London

5. Brock, C., and N. K. Cammish, (1991) *Factors Affecting Participation in Education in Six Developing Countries*. London: Overseas Development Administration.
6. Breen, R., & Jonsson, J. O. (2005). *Inequality of opportunity in comparative perspective: Recent research on educational attainment and social mobility*. Annual Review of Sociology, 31, 223–243
7. Booth, T. 1996. A Perspective on Inclusion from England. Cambridge Journal of Education, 26, 1, 87-99.
8. Chowdhury, A. Mushtaque R., Samir R. Nath, and M. Mohsin. 1992. *Assessment of Basic Competencies*. Dhaka: BRAC
9. Chowdhury, M., Nath, S., Chowdhury, R. (2003) *Equity gains in Bangladesh Primary Education*, International Review of Education, 49(6): 601–619.
10. Cant, H. (1994). Inclusive education: The Alberta Experience. *Practising Administrator*, 16(3), 38-41.
11. Cornoldi, C., Terreni, A., Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1998). Teacher Attitudes in Italy after Twenty Years of Inclusion. *Remedial and Special Education*, 19(6), 350-356
12. Clayton, M. (1996). Clearing the way for inclusion: A response to Thorley, Hotchkis and Martin. *Special Education Perspectives*, 5(2), 39-44
13. Educations watch report, 2008. State of Primary Education in Bangladesh: Progress made, challenges remained, Campaign for popular education, Bangladesh.
14. Forlin, P. & Forlin, C. (1998). Constitutional and legislative framework for inclusive education in australia. *Australian Journal of Education*, 42 (2), 1-10.
15. Haskell, D. H. (2000). Building bridges between science and special education. *Electronic Journal of Science Education*, 4(3)
16. Hossain, N. (2010) School Exclusion as Social Exclusion: the Practices and Effects of a Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for the Poor in Bangladesh, *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 7, 1264–1282,
17. Miles, S. and Singal, N. (2010) The Education for All and the inclusive education debate: conflict, contradiction or opportunity? *International Journal of inclusive Education*, 14: 1, 11–15
18. Mahboob, T. (2008) Inclusive education at a BRAC school: perspective from the children, NASEN, Journal compilation, Black well publishing, Oxford, UK.
19. Menlove, R. R., Hudson, P. J., & Suter, D. (2001). A field of IEP dreams: Increasing general education teacher participation in the IEP development process. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(5), 28-33.
20. Nath, Samir R., M. Mohsin, and A. M. R. Chowdhury (1993) *Assessment of Basic Competencies in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: BRAC.
21. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2003). *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow: Further results from PISA 2000*. Paris: OECD.
22. Riaz, I. (2008) *Schools for change: A perspective on school improvement in Pakistan*, **Improving Schools**, SAGE Publications, Volume 11 Number 2 July 2008 143–156.
23. The Ministry of Law Justice & Parliamentary Affairs, (2000). *The constitution of the people's republic of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: BG Press.

24. UNESCO. (1990) World Declaration on Education For All, Jomtien, Thailand. UNESCO
25. UNESCO (1994) The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education Paris: UNESCO.
26. UNICEF. 1992. *Assessment of Basic Competencies of Children: A Status Report*. Dhaka: UNICEF
27. World Bank (2009). *Education at a Glance: Bangladesh*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
28. Whiting, M., & Young, J. (1995). *Integration: Social justice for teachers*. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference., Hobart, Tasmania.
29. Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Inclusive education: A complex concept

Inclusive education has become one of the most important priorities to discuss in policy and reform initiatives for both developing and developed countries of the world and recognised as a "Global Agenda". In some literature it is said that Inclusive education is basically the next development of special education (Ballard, 1999; Campbell, 2002; Lindsay, 2002; Stainback and Stainback, 1992) however in recent years the term has seen more broadly than just merely for a group of children who have some special needs (UNESCO, 2001; Miles and Singal, 2010). Booth and Ainscow (1998) suggested that, in inclusive education, an emphasis on children with special needs has always given by the researchers because most of their background is special education. But they also remind the idea of inclusion just cannot refer to some students only and not others. Miles & Singal (2010) gave more emphasis on diversity and relationship building and in impact level she defined inclusion (more system focused) as a separate phenomena then integration (more child focused). Bangladeshi educationists has misjudged the concept of inclusion and focused on special need children only. Along with this, the schools didn't even included different bodies for making school inclusive whereas according to the Salamanca Statement (1994) emphasis is given to the participation of parents, communities, and other organizations to build up an inclusive society. In this context it is important to see how Bangladeshi policies has encompassed the idea of inclusion and to what extent the change is expected?

30. Booth, T and Ainscow, M. (1998) 'From them to us: Setting up the study' in Booth, T. And Ainscow, M. (Eds) *From them to us: An international Study of Inclusion in Education*, London, Routledge, pp. 1-20
31. Campbell, C. (2002) *Developing Inclusive Schooling, perspectives, policies and practices* (edt), Institute of Education, University of London.
32. Lindsay, G. (2002) *Inclusive education : a critical perspective*, The Gulliford Lecture, Centre for Educational Development and Research Appraisal, University of Warwick.
33. Stainback, S. and Satinback, W. (1992) *School as inclusive communities in controversial issues confronting special education: Divergent perspective* (edt), Boston: Allyn and Becon.
34. UNESCO. (2001) *The Open File on Inclusive Education*. Paris: UNESCO.