

Chapter 7

Secondary School Teachers' Views on Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs in Regular Classrooms



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Abstract Inclusive education (IE) has widely been recognised as a philosophy to facilitate the goal of Education for All (EFA) worldwide. One important aspect of IE is that it can serve as one of the most pragmatic strategies to respond to student diversity in developing countries (Ainscow and Miles, *Developing inclusive education systems: How can we move policies forward?* Available at http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/COPs/News_documents/2009/0907Beirut/DevelopingInclusive_Education_Systems.pdf, 2009). Bangladesh, as part of the developing world, has undertaken several initiatives including policy reforms, awareness creation and teachers' professional development for addressing inclusivity in regular schools. In particular, in secondary education, the IE initiative is being implemented through government development projects such as Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education (TQI-SEP). Teachers have been trained on various aspects of IE including pedagogical knowledge, curriculum flexibility, and disability and diverse learning needs under TQI-SEP largely since its adoption in 2005. Research, however, has identified the 'pessimistic views' of teachers as one of the major hindrances to IE in secondary education in Bangladesh (Khan, *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices* 6(2):102–118, 2012). In this chapter, our aim is to better understand the factors embedded in the views of secondary teachers regarding the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) in regular classrooms. Based on a semi-structured, one-on-one interview approach, we collected data from 15 purposively chosen teachers from 5 secondary schools in Dhaka city. Following a general inductive thematic analysis procedure, we found that although most of the teachers held favourable views on the inclusion of students with SEN, they seemed to lack the pedagogical knowledge of IE, which resulted in inadequate provision of pragmatic teaching practices. We also

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found a generally sympathetic view rather than a spirit of access and equity in the responses of the majority of the teachers in relation to the need for IE for students with SEN. We discuss the findings in line with other studies as to how secondary education teachers can be better prepared for addressing more in-depth inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Keywords Inclusive education · Teachers' attitudes · Secondary education · Pedagogy · Students with SEN

Introduction

During the past two decades, significant attention has been paid in scholarly research to different approaches to education around the world seeking to ensure that diversity is addressed effectively in regular classrooms. Since our schools are increasingly expected to be more diverse, meeting the demands of students with diverse learning needs has now become obligatory. Accordingly a shift in pedagogical practice from a teacher-controlled ideology to student-centred approaches has been seen as a desirable move in the last two decades. It is, however, a challenge for schools to ensure that every student is academically engaged in classrooms. Research suggests that the role of 'regular' teachers (herein, referring to mainstream teachers not trained in inclusive education) is critical in addressing diversity in the classroom (see Lindsay, 2007; Rouse, 2008). There is no doubt that ensuring justice, equity and quality in education for all learners is an urgent agenda in education systems across the world today.

In essence, the ultimate philosophy of embracing all children in a school is recognised as inclusive education (IE) – the goal of which has been to ensure access, achievement, presence and participation of all students including those from diverse backgrounds (UNESCO, 1994). IE does not only stand for including a group of marginalised students in regular classrooms; rather the broader philosophy is to embrace *all* students within a uniform education system (Ainscow, 2005). It could, however, be argued that the process of inclusion may vary based on the individual needs of different groups of students. In an IE context, research has identified that students with SEN rather than those who are from other underprivileged backgrounds, for example, indigenous or socio-economically disadvantaged groups, are the most vulnerable group (OECD, 2012). Therefore, countries that are at an embryonic stage of implementing IE, such as Bangladesh, need to explore the challenges and strategies to address inclusivity for the vulnerable groups as an initial step towards including all learners.

Research has also suggested that as a vulnerable group, students with SEN are the least favoured by their teachers within the context of IE (Ainscow, Dyson & Weiner, 2013). Although the definition varies across countries, students with SEN generally refer to those who have a disability (OECD, 2012). Hence, this study conceptualises IE as an approach to ensure participation and engagement of students with SEN (i.e. students having a disability) in 'regular' (or 'mainstream' as often described in related literature) classrooms together with their 'regular' peers.

In this chapter, our aim is to analyse the views of a group of secondary education teachers to understand whether or to what extent they hold adequate knowledge, favourable attitudes and skills for addressing inclusivity in regular classrooms within the context of a developing country like Bangladesh where the adoption and practice of IE is still rudimentary. We also aim to explore the concerns and challenges they perceive while practising IE in their classrooms.

In the following section, we present some key issues regarding IE policy and practice in the context of Bangladesh. Next, we describe the methodology used, data analysis and findings and discuss the findings for possible implications.

Inclusive Education: Policy and Practice in Bangladesh

Over the past several decades, disability has generally been conceptualised via a deficit view in Bangladesh. A clear reflection of this view is likely to be prevalent in the general population as well as in governmental policy-making bodies. Accordingly, exclusionary practices were found in Bangladesh in addressing children with disabilities (Zaman & Munir, 1992) and the policies addressing the rights of persons with disabilities were likely to be segregated from mainstream policies (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007). For example, while the education of 'regular' students is solely managed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and/or the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), the educational arrangement for students with SEN has never been a priority of these ministries. Instead, the education of students with SEN is assigned with another ministry – the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), which deals with issues that are more relevant to social marginalisation and those that are considered to need social support.

Irrespective of these challenges, it is important to note that Bangladesh has made significant progress in establishing the rights of persons with disabilities. Bangladesh is a signatory of all major international treaties on disability and IE. For example, Bangladesh has signed the declaration of *Education for All* (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990), the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994), the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 2000) and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities-UNCRPD* (UN Enable, 2008) in which it is stipulated that education should be provided to all children within an inclusive approach. In addition, Bangladesh had strong commitment to the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) (United Nations, 2008) and has also promised to achieve the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) which articulate the rights of all children to education through a uniform system. It is noteworthy that the trend of enacting IE policy and legislation in Bangladesh is primarily based upon the above-mentioned international treaties (Malak, Begum, Habib, Banu & Roshid, 2014).

To date, Bangladesh has undertaken a number of policy initiatives to ensure access and equity for all children in education. Indeed, the constitution of Bangladesh (Article 17) clearly describes that the education system should be uniform,

mass-oriented and universal to all children (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs [MoLJPA], 2000). Article 28 of the constitution further articulates the state's stand against any discrimination in education as follows:

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. (MoLJPA, 2000, p. 5)

In addition, IE has been in the agenda of several legislations over the last two decades. For instance, guidelines for IE can be traced in the Compulsory Primary Education Act, 1990, where primary education was declared compulsory and free for all children of the state. IE has also been underpinned by the Bangladesh Persons with Disability Welfare Act, 2001. This Act postulates the requirement to 'create opportunities for free education to all children with disabilities below 18 years of age and provide them with books and equipment free of cost or at low-cost' (Ministry of Social Welfare [MoSW], 2001). This Act was abolished by the 'Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013' (Ministry of Social Welfare [MoSW], 2013), and it comprehensively underpins several aspects regarding children and persons with SEN, including how they are to be defined, their education, healthcare, employment, transport facilities and social security. Indeed, this Act was the first initiative to legitimise the rights of children with SEN within regular education in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh IE was emphasised in the mainstream education policy for the first time in 2010, through the National Education Policy, 2010. This policy calls for every child to have access to education through its main objectives. For example, Objective 7 focuses on 'Eliminating discrimination on grounds of nationality, religion, class and gender; building up an environment that promotes secularism, global-brotherhood, and empathy towards humanity and respect towards human rights' (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2010, p. 1). IE for a range of underprivileged children was recommended in several objectives of the policy document including objectives 22 (socio-economically disadvantaged), 23 (indigenous and ethnic groups) and 24 (children with disabilities) (MoE, 2010). Teacher training was highlighted in this policy as a means of transmitting the spirit of inclusion into regular classrooms in primary and secondary levels of education throughout the country.

Despite the existence of these IE-friendly policy guidelines, the progress of inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms seems to have been sluggish to date. Early literature showed that only 11% of students with SEN had access to formal education in Bangladesh (Directorate of Primary Education [DPE] & Centre for Services and Information on Disability [CSID], 2002). A baseline survey conducted in 2005 revealed that a total of 45,680 children with disabilities were accommodated in primary schools and among them a significant number of students were those with intellectual disabilities (DPE, 2011; PEDP Completion Report, 2011). Based on data recorded in the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) (2012), Fig. 7.1 shows the increasing trend in the numbers of students with SEN in primary education from 2005 to 2012, while Table 7.1 depicts the category of students with SEN enrolled in 2012.

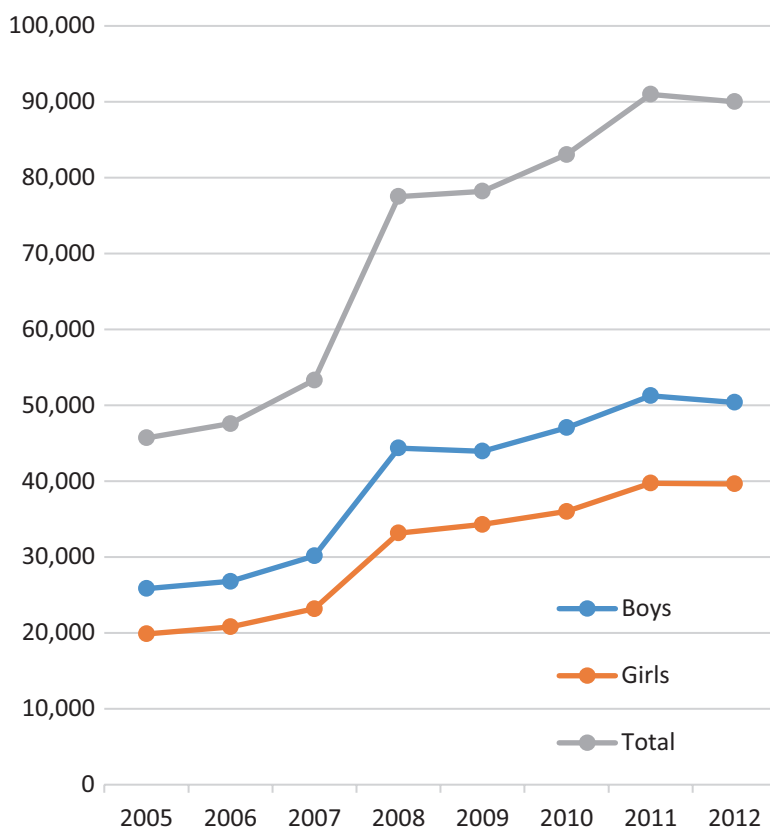


Fig. 7.1 Enrolment of students with special educational needs children (2005–2012)

Table 7.1 Prevalence according to types of students with special needs

Types of students with special needs	Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Grade V	Grand total
Physical impairment	7353	6794	6688	5359	3565	29,759
Vision impairment	2499	2852	2957	2433	1797	12,538
Hearing impairment	1038	1201	1268	1039	756	5302
Problem in speech	5807	5182	4603	3342	2008	20,942
Intellectual disability	6300	5035	4082	2715	1451	19,583
Others	553	432	357	298	230	1870
Total	23,550	21,496	19,955	15,186	9807	89,994

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS, 2012)

It is claimed that the enrolment of children with SEN in primary education increased by 5% each year (DPE, 2010). However when measured against the total number of primary school-aged children, recent data show that the enrolment of students with SEN represents only 0.57% (DPE, 2013). This means that in primary

schools, students with SEN constitute less than 1% of the total enrolment estimation, indicating that a large number of children within this group are out of school as 10% of the total population of Bangladesh is reported to have special needs, the majority of which are school-aged children (World Health Organization, 2006).

Statistics on the enrolment of students with SEN in secondary education are almost non-existent in any relevant sources including BANBEIS, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education and the Ministry of Education. However, there is a pool of research literature that provides information about secondary schooling facilities for students with sensory disabilities – such as visual and hearing impairment. There are 64 government-funded integrated secondary schools for students with vision impairment in 64 districts (Hossain, 2008). A specially trained resource teacher is appointed in each of these integrated schools. While the function of these integrated schools is highly emphasised in government documents, the reality of their functions remains unclear (Malak, 2014), probably because little evidence exists to support that these schools are contributing to the IE reform agenda in secondary education. In fact there are seven government-sponsored special schools for students with hearing impairment which have a capacity to facilitate schooling for 700 students, of which 180 students receive residential facilities. The educational provision of these schools is based upon special education, although they are reported as following the national curriculum for both primary and secondary levels (Hossain, 2008).

In order to facilitate IE in secondary education, an influential government development project called the ‘Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Program (TQI-SEP)’ was launched in 2005. A number of reform activities were undertaken in TQI-SEP to enhance inclusive practice. Examples of the major activities of this project include strengthening school capacity to provide effective learning environment for all children, including children with SEN; an IE awareness raising program for head teachers and members of the school management committee; an awareness raising program for district level officers (District Education Officers, DEO); an IE orientation program for teacher educators from Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and relevant NGO representatives; and professional development programs for secondary in-service teachers.

Despite such training initiatives, TQI-SEP has been criticised as having little impact on training activities on real settings. Studies by Khan (2012) and Rahman and Sutherland (2012) demonstrated that secondary teachers in Bangladesh have shown inadequate understanding and a variety of interpretations of the IE concept. Khan summarises that teachers have unfavourable attitudes towards children with SEN and only a vague understanding of the term ‘inclusion’. An indication regarding IE practice revealed from the study of Rahman and Sutherland was that teachers were less likely to take responsibility for facilitating learning for *all* students including those with SEN. Hence, it is imperative to understand why secondary teachers are reluctant to take the initiative for including students with SEN.

Methodology

To explore the views of secondary education teachers in relation to the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms, a qualitative research methodology was followed for this study involving semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect data from teachers in five purposively selected secondary schools. The schools were non-government-registered secondary schools located in the central part of the capital city, Dhaka. We formulated criteria to select schools for this study – specifically, a school was chosen only if it had at least one student with SEN studying with other regular students, had at least one teacher who had participated in IE training organised by TQI-SEP and had both male and female teachers. Based on these criteria, five schools were selected for this study. The number of teachers from the selected schools ranged from 8 to 15. In fact, the majority of the schools had a total of ten teachers. The average student-teacher ratio in the selected schools was 50:1, which is characteristic of the most secondary schools located in Dhaka city.

Participants in this study were 15 secondary education teachers (7 female) who were selected from the 5 identified schools. The teaching experience of the teachers ranged from 5 to 20 years with the majority ($n = 9$) having taught for more than 15 years. A large majority of the teachers ($n = 12$) were qualified at the Master's level, while the others had Bachelor degrees. With regard to professional qualifications, a minority of the teachers ($n = 5$) had received a Master of Education (M Ed) degree, while the others had a 1-year Bachelor of Education (B Ed) degree ($n = 7$) or a 10-month Diploma in Education (Dip-in-Ed) certificate ($n = 3$). Of 15 teachers, 5 had participated in IE training, which consisted of a 7-day continuous professional development program (CPD) organised by TQI-SEP, 3 had participated in a day-long workshop on IE and the other 7 had not had any training related to IE.

Participants for this study were selected after conducting a short meeting with the principal and teachers of each of the selected schools. The first three teachers of each school, who agreed to participate in the study after going through the consent form and explanatory statements, were selected as final participants for this study. An interview protocol was developed as a guide for conducting the interviews. Following are a few of sample questions included in the interview protocol:

- a. How would you respond to the recently adopted pedagogical reform regarding inclusive education?
- b. How do you consider the inclusion of students with special educational needs in your classrooms?
- c. How would you comment about the existing arrangements of your school to implement inclusive education?

Interviews were conducted in participants' native language, Bangla, and were audiotaped with their permission.

Interview data were transcribed into Bangla verbatim. In order to maintain trustworthiness in this research, we considered *member checks* (Shenton, 2004) as a suitable strategy to allow the participants to read and comment on the transcripts of interviews in which they had participated. An inductive approach using a thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the interview data.

Results

This study investigated secondary education teachers' views on the inclusion of students with special education needs (SEN) in regular classrooms. Six themes which emerged from analysing the data were teachers' knowledge of IE and disability, attitudes towards students with SEN, adaptations for students with SEN, expected support from stakeholders, challenges to implementing IE and efficacy and professional development. The following section presents a detailed analysis of these identified themes under each of which relevant statements of the participants are added with the intention to describe the individual themes in greater depth.

Knowledge of Inclusive Education and Disability

'Inclusive education' as a term was familiar to all the teachers interviewed, although conceptual variations were seen to exist between participants who received training on IE and those who did not. Generally, the participants described IE as a system of education that includes 'all types of students' in the same classroom. Participants further elaborated the notion of 'all types', where most ($n = 10$) of them referred to students with different socio-economic status and intellectual abilities. While the majority of the participants ($n = 10$) described 'socio-economic status' as students' various socio-economic backgrounds including solvent, extremely poor and socially marginalised families, their narrative of 'intellectual abilities' was limited to students' good and poor academic performances only. Students' special education needs or disability was not emphasised as the basis for potential groups for IE. The following statement reflects how reluctant a teacher was to consider the inclusion of students with SEN:

IE is such a system where children from higher class, middle class and lower class family as well as good students, bad students all stay in the same classroom... Students with disabilities can also participate there.

Like this participant, several others ($n = 4$) who did not receive IE training indicated students with SEN were at the bottom of their list of students who they thought could participate in regular classrooms. For this one of them explained that students with SEN would be deprived of getting special care if placed in regular classrooms.

'They learn things differently. They will need more support. Do we have that? A special school might be a good solution'. It should be noted, however, that even though these participants seemed to be reluctant with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN, they all appeared to have sympathy for them.

Trained teachers, however, had a relatively broader understanding of IE, in which students with SEN were accorded more emphasis. For example, a teacher who had received training on IE a year earlier noted:

My understanding is that every child has a learning ability. No doubt students with disability can be taught in a regular classroom... All you need to do is give extra attention, that's it. Children coming from an ethnic background or from a lower class are very easy, I mean you can accommodate them easily, but kids with disability are different. That's why extra attention is needed.

Another participant who had participated in a day-long workshop on IE stated that he used to think that the goal of IE was to bring all the curricular aspects of the mediums of education—English and Bengali—together. However, his understanding changed over time and he started acknowledging that different children might have different abilities within the same system of education.

When participants were asked about disability, they mostly explained it as a condition, which hampered the 'normal living' of a person. According to most ($n = 8$) of them, students with disabilities cannot behave like 'regular' students, and they lag behind others in many ways. Most of the teachers also knew about different types of disabilities—for instance, visual and hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability—although a few of them were not familiar with the correct terms for such conditions. Further, several participants ($n = 5$) showed a very positive view towards students with disabilities. One participant explained:

There is a student in my school who is hard of hearing and also cannot speak. We try to teach her using different signs. Recently her mother bought her something like a microphone. Now she can hear us. Her happiness after hearing is beyond imagination. She has developed much better than before.

It is evident from this statement that this particular teacher participant had little knowledge about assistive technologies for students with disabilities as she failed to recognise that the student was using a hearing aid.

The views of the participants make it clear that although the terms 'disability' and 'IE', were familiar to them, many related factors embedded in IE were not yet widely understood to most of them. In addition, a few of the participants seem to believe that without getting adequate sympathy from teachers, inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms would be a challenging task. All these issues are indicators of the limited knowledge of participants about IE and disability, which is ultimately constraining the teachers' ability in taking proper measures in the classroom to make it inclusive for students with different abilities and needs. Moreover, as teachers themselves lack proper knowledge, naturally the dissemination of appropriate information to change the perception of society at large will take a lot of time.

Attitudes Towards Students with SEN

Most of the participants ($n = 10$) were optimistic about the idea of including students with SEN in their classrooms. As the selection criteria of this study demanded experienced participants, we found all teachers of the five schools had some experience of teaching such students in their classrooms. In their responses most of them seemed very confident and mentioned that they provided necessary support to students with SEN while teaching in the classroom. However, many of them were unsure about the *ability* of students with SEN. They tended to think that extra support and care would be essential for including students with SEN in regular classrooms. For example, one of the teachers stated:

There is a boy in grade IX who has problem in both of his legs. He cannot walk straight. He also lacks intelligence. Before the last terminal examination, I hinted most of the questions to him indirectly before the examination so that he could pass. And he did quite well in the exam.

This statement is evidence of a teacher's empathy and support towards a student with physical disability whom he had assumed to be a student with 'low intelligence' but yet made efforts to help him to do well in the examination. This indicates that even if teachers had possessed limited knowledge about disability and inclusion, while dealing with students with disabilities directly, a certain level of commitment and engagement developed inside them, which demonstrated through their classroom behaviours and practices.

Another teacher explained that she firmly believed that as per the nation's constitution, education indeed was a basic right for all students, including those with SEN. However, a small number ($n = 3$) of teachers thought that good results should not be expected from them. However these teachers also believed that if students with SEN had suitable learning environments in the classrooms, they would have a higher chance of passing the examination. One of the teachers went to the extent of suggesting certain modifications in the schools to accommodate students with SEN:

I don't have any problem in including students with SEN. But in the context of our country there are lots of difficulties. Therefore I think at first we need to concentrate on the infrastructure. There is a ramp at the downstairs of our school. Many more changes like that need to be made.

It is clear from this statement that the teachers were aware of challenges that existed in the present infrastructure of schools and they are willing to make changes and welcome students with SEN in regular classrooms in ways that would ensure a suitable environment for them in the true spirit of IE.

Further, some teachers ($n = 5$) believed that inclusion was not good for students with severe disabilities. They preferred to send such students to separate schools. One of these teachers explained the 'problem' of inclusion in this way:

It is a matter of reputation of a school... I feel there will be a problem regarding results. Every institution wants to achieve 100% pass. But when students with disabilities will take part in the examination from a school, there will be a risk.

It can be said that although teachers generally had sympathy for students with SEN, they were still concerned with several practical issues which they thought could pose challenges for their schools and compromise the quality of education they provided as well as the matter of social recognition and social acceptance. Teachers were apprehensive as to whether or not the inclusion of students with SEN had the potential to jeopardise the academic results and reputation of their schools. This issue also revealed the possibility of other challenges such as receiving less government funding and more parental pressure for not performing up to expectation.

Participants' response suggested that there were many factors involved in shaping teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN such as a disability-friendly infrastructure, direct involvement of teachers with students with SEN and reduced pressure for academic achievement all of which might help teachers change their attitude towards these students.

Adaptations for Students with SEN

Teachers in this study tended to believe that certain necessary adaptations need to be considered for including children with SEN in regular classrooms. They affirmed that adaptations were necessary in several areas including teaching materials, textbooks, the assessment system, teaching planning and technological support. Surprisingly, most of the participants ($n = 10$) seemed to have had little knowledge about instructional materials and appeared to be uncertain with regard to the term 'technological support'. However, some teachers ($n = 6$) had reservations regarding the teaching materials they normally used in the classroom. They thought these materials were neither 'appropriate' nor 'adequate' for an inclusive classroom. They explained that it would be helpful for the students if they had the scope to use 'extra' teaching materials that were attractive, colourful, vivid and realistic. Besides, most of the participants also believed that major adaptation was required for textbook contents. One participant explained as follows:

It would be better if the load of textbooks could be minimised. Only the essential contents should be included and all others can be eliminated and this would reduce the load.

Several participants ($N = 8$) suggested using 'more colourful' pictures in the textbooks and making the cover of the book more attractive and interesting with 'easier' contents for students with SEN. A few participants ($n = 4$) also highlighted the need for Braille books.

All participants agreed that the assessment system should offer flexibility for students with SEN. Most of the participants ($n = 12$) suggested oral tests rather than written tests for such students. They also argued that extra time should be provided to these students if a written test was offered. One of the respondents expressed her wish to learn sign language to assess the students in 'their own way'. Another participant suggested:

Students with SEN become very enthusiastic when we assess them. If we can encourage them even if by giving a chalk, they become very happy and try to pay more concentration to their studies. Considering the type of disability, a separate assessment system should definitely be made for them.

Most of the participants ($n = 11$) agreed that they should bring modifications to their teaching plans if students with SEN are included in regular classrooms. They mentioned managing proper seating arrangements for students with SEN in the front row, engaging them in group activities with 'good students', keeping in mind the number and level of such students while teaching and restructuring the teaching-learning method. Most of the participants ($n = 9$) further felt the need for various forms of technological support such as audio recorders, television, computers, multimedia projectors, etc. which they believed would greatly enhance the learning experiences of students with SEN. This is in line with the findings of Becta's (2003) ICT research, which suggests that ICT can support inclusion by unlocking the hidden potentials of students with SEN and also by helping teachers in tailoring tasks to suit individual students' abilities and skills.

Expected Support from Stakeholders

When the participants were asked about their expectations from stakeholders, they explained the type of support they expected from parents, the school management committee, the special education teacher and the head teacher. Several participants ($n = 8$) described the role of the parents of children with SEN as crucial. According to them, more support is needed from parents than teachers. They expected the parents to communicate with the teachers on a regular basis regarding their children's progress. Some other participants also mentioned the need for additional support from children without disabilities and their parents:

I can see that parents of children without disabilities are very much impatient. A few years back, we admitted a student with disability. She didn't do very well but didn't fail either. She used to salivate often... Mothers of her classmates came up with complaints to me and requested me to change their daughters' seat. I don't understand why they don't think that the girl could have been her own daughter. These parents need to be more supportive.

Several others had similar expectations of the school management committee (SMC), believing that it should hold positive attitudes towards students with SEN; in particular, they stated that the SMC should not be discriminatory while considering the admission of such students to their schools. According to them, SMC members can motivate both teachers and parents most effectively, provide technological support and make the school environment barrier-free for students with SEN:

SMC members are the parents of a school. They must have a well-thought attitude and they should take important steps for proper classroom management. Like other children, children with SEN can also come to school – they should hold this attitude.

All the participants from the five schools admitted that the head teachers of their respective schools are encouraging towards these students and they had received help from them whenever required. The participants also voiced their expectation of getting more support from the head teacher with several issues including managing extra time for teachers to let them help students with SEN, counselling parents of children with and without SEN and monitoring overall management. One of the participants emphasised the role of the head teacher in this regard as he/she was the coordinator of SMC members, teachers, parents and students. The participant said, 'he must monitor all the issues regarding students with SEN continuously and create more facilities according to their needs'.

Most of the participants also demanded the support of a special education teacher. For example, one of the participants explained,

To be honest, we are not experts in managing students with disabilities. Special education teachers possess a lot more experience than us and they understand the psychology of these children. We should receive training from them in dealing with SEN students.

The statements above suggest that the teachers had an understanding of the type of support they needed from stakeholders to manage students with SEN in regular classrooms. They were also aware of the fact that besides the above-mentioned support from parents, SMC members and head teachers, they also needed to receive proper training from special educators to understand the requirements of students with SEN better. This also indicates that collaborative support and the engagement of all the stakeholders might make the inclusion of students with SEN more effective in regular classrooms.

Barriers to Implementing IE

It appeared from interview data that the peer group of students with SEN was unlikely to accept them in the same classroom after they had enrolled. Many teachers ($n = 8$) experienced these students teasing and making fun of students with SEN. Some participants ($n = 4$) noticed that if they paid more attention to students with SEN, other students often became irritated. However, these participants also mentioned that they had received affirmative responses from peers when they tried to make them understand the condition and needs of students with SEN.

Most of the participants highlighted time constraints, the overwhelming load of the syllabus, lack of resources and technological support, an improper environment and the workload of teachers as barriers to implementing IE for students with SEN. A few of them suggested major curriculum and textbook reform. One of the participants explained:

There are lots of students in a classroom – sometimes more than 75. We get only 35 minutes for one class. That's why I cannot do anything special for those students with SEN even if I wanted to. The environment is also not suitable for such students.

In sum, teachers were indeed aware of the challenges they faced while including students with SEN in regular classrooms. Although they mostly mentioned peer group challenges and challenges related to curriculum and textbooks, they were aware of other challenges as well. This brings back the hope that if the challenges could be mitigated, it would be easier to include students with SEN in regular classrooms in Bangladeshi classrooms.

Efficacy and Professional Development

Participant teachers of this study discussed at length their confidence in teaching students with SEN in regular classrooms and the type of professional development they felt would be necessary for that. A few of the participants ($n = 3$) who had received training on IE confirmed that they were confident in teaching students with SEN in regular classrooms:

I have full confidence in myself. Maybe students with SEN will not get an A+ like other students. But they will get an A or B grade. At least I will be satisfied that I have helped them reach their goals.

It is evident from the statement above that the teachers had the inner will to work with students with SEN and helped them reach a certain level, which also indicates teachers' positive attitudes towards these students. However, this also indicates teachers' focus on academic achievements only, rather than thinking of other forms of development for students with SEN.

Yet another participant who had received training in IE mentioned that he would be able to teach students with SEN only if he could get 'proper facilities' from the school. He said,

A proper environment and teaching aids should be supplied. I don't have any training to handle such students, so I also have many weaknesses. But I will try my best.

It is clear from this statement that the participants lacked pedagogical knowledge of teaching students with SEN, which gave rise to the demand to receive practical training from special educators. It can also be said that if the teachers were to get the required support for teaching students with SEN, possibly they would develop a feeling of confidence. Teachers were also sincere enough to talk about their weaknesses, which needed to be identified in order to provide support accordingly. All the participants emphasised the importance of training for IE, especially for managing students with SEN in regular classrooms:

I have taken several subject-oriented training courses. After getting new training I feel that I have learnt something new. Continuous training should be given to teachers according to the need. Issues related to IE came up as a topic in a 14-day training. Only one class was taken on this issue. We haven't got any separate training. But it is needed.

It is evident from the above statements of the participants that training is one of the most important variables in making teachers feel confident in teaching students with

SEN, where a huge gap still exists. Whatever knowledge teachers currently possess on IE is the result of very minimal initiatives taken so far. This shows the urgent need for government initiatives, priorities and budgetary decisions for the successful inclusion of children with SEN in regular classrooms.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to understand the viewpoints of secondary education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms. Our analysis revealed that the majority of the participating teachers had favourable attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN in their classrooms. It is, however, noteworthy that a common message from their positive feelings was that these emerged from sympathy rather than a spirit of access and equity. One of the possible explanations of the sympathetic attitude of teachers could be linked with their belief system about persons with disabilities, which might have been developed from years of experience within the context of Bangladesh where disability has widely been treated as a 'charitable' issue (Siska & Habib, 2013).

Misconceptions and superstitions, as well as widespread discrimination about disability, can also be found in every setting in Bangladesh including home, school and playground (Kibria, 2005; Miles & Hossain, 1999; Zaman & Munir, 1992). Little evidence of acknowledgement exists to support the rights of people with disabilities to be able to live equally with others in the society. Instead they were more likely to be labelled as 'deficient', someone who needs 'help' from other people in the society (Munir & Zaman, 2009; Zaman & Munir, 1992). Accordingly, whatever measures have been taken by the government of Bangladesh to support children or persons with disabilities remained excluded from the government's mainstream policy agendas (National Forum of Organisations Working with Disability [NFOWD], 2009).

As a result, as stated earlier, despite increased attention on the inclusion of students with SEN in the National Education Policy (2010), all education-related activities (for instance, funding for students with SEN) are still controlled by the Ministry of Social Welfare rather than the Ministry of Education. Traditionally, the Ministry of Social Welfare deals with issues that are more relevant to social marginalisation, and redressing this needs social support. Perhaps due to such contextual aspects, the teachers might have perceived educational arrangements for students with SEN as a welfare matter rather a rights-based issue. It is, therefore, important for individuals involved in policy-making bodies in both the Ministry of Primary Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare to make all required adjustments for a 'responsibility shift' in order to establish the rights to education of students with SEN. Inevitably, such a central level initiative may bring enormous benefits in shaping teachers' belief systems more positively towards the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms.

Several other factors might be involved in the attitudes of the teachers of this study. Consistent with previous studies conducted in the context of Bangladesh (see Khan, 2012; Rahman & Sutherland, 2012), the present study revealed that teachers had limited knowledge of IE and students with SEN. Khan (2012) argued that because of their limited pedagogical knowledge of IE, teachers were confused and uncertain about the idea of inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms in Bangladesh. Possibly Khan's argument is even more pertinent for the teachers of this study, who might have felt themselves less confident in dealing with issues related to students with SEN, which in turn, may have negatively influenced their intention towards the inclusion of these students in regular classrooms.

It is evident from the well-known theory of planned behaviour that an individual's intention to perform a task is closely linked with how confident they are to carry out such a task (Ajzen, 2011). An appropriately designed professional development program is thereby warranted for secondary education teachers. The positive effects of training on teachers' attitudes and efficacy have been extensively recorded in the contemporary literature (e.g. Loreman, 2014; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013; Sharma, Shaukat & Furlonger, 2015) indicating that teacher training is extremely important for promoting IE in regular classrooms.

One finding that is of particular interest is that despite having IE training, many teachers in this study appeared to have inadequate attitudes and understandings regarding IE for students with SEN. A clear sense of hesitation was predominantly conveyed by the teachers in their views about the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms. This is perhaps an indication that the training they had received from TQI-SEP might have been ineffective in shaping their attitudes towards students with SEN. However, since there are no data regarding the effectiveness of TQI-SEP training, it is hard to provide clear evidence for such a claim. A large-scale study is therefore warranted to determine whether or to what extent the IE training offered by TQI-SEP impacts on secondary teachers' knowledge, attitudes and efficacy regarding the inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms.

As mentioned earlier, the government of Bangladesh has been striving to promote and encourage IE in secondary education through the TQI-SEP project since 2005. One of the specific focuses of this project was to equip in-service secondary teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills of IE to facilitate the enhancement of effective instruction for all students. To achieve this goal, all teachers of grades 6–10 from both government and private secondary schools were targeted to be involved in professional development programs (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2008). However, like this study, it is argued that more professional development activities are needed to enable secondary teachers to address diversity in their classrooms (Khan, 2012; Malak et al., 2014; Rahman & Sutherland, 2011). Appropriately designed IE professional development programs have also been suggested by some previous studies to promote better inclusive practices in Bangladesh (e.g. see Ahsan, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012; Malak, 2013a; Tasnuba & Tsokova, 2015).

Findings of this study also indicate that even if the teachers are in favour of including students with SEN, they are concerned about certain IE issues such as the inflexible assessment system, high workload, inadequate instructional materials,

large class and lack of support from stakeholders. These findings are consistent with several previous studies (e.g. see Ahmmed, Sharma & Deppeler, 2012; Ahsan et al., 2012; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Malak, 2013a; Mullick, Deppeler, & Sharma, 2012). The assessment procedure of the education system of Bangladesh is still fully examination-based, and there is little scope to make the assessment flexible for students with SEN. In addition, Bangladeshi teachers have to deal with large class sizes and the workload of teachers is very high. It is also evident that parents of regular students themselves impede the inclusion of students with SEN (Malak, 2013b; Mullick et al., 2012). Taking all these challenges into consideration, it is understandable why teachers, despite their best intentions, may not in reality support students with SEN being included in their regular classrooms.

The teachers of this study expected supportive attitudes from parents, SMC members and the school principal. Over 98% of the secondary schools in Bangladesh are non-government (MoE, 2006), and the principal along with the SMC of the school plays vital roles in the decision-making process regarding school improvement. Therefore, the attitudes of SMC and the school principal are important in addressing inclusivity in secondary education. It is, however, evident that the roles of the school principal and SMC members often obstruct IE initiatives (Ahmmed et al., 2012; Malak & Khanam, 2011; Mullick et al., 2012), suggesting that school support, including parents, the SMC and the principal, is significantly related to the attitudes of teachers towards including students with SEN in their classrooms.

Several teachers in this study mentioned special teachers' support for practising IE. It is worth noting that in the school culture of Bangladesh, the provision of paraprofessional and support teachers does not exist and is impractical. Despite the class size usually being extremely large, there is little scope to have a co-taught inclusive classroom in regular schools. This indicates that the success of inclusion of students with SEN in the context of Bangladesh depends greatly on the 'regular' teachers' attitudes, knowledge and skills, rather than provisions made to facilitate inclusion, including availability of resources or even legislative obligations.

Concluding Remarks

Research shows that policy changes and legislative recognition facilitate the adoption of the discourse of inclusion in developing countries, although very limited actions are taken to build the necessary institutional capacities and to translate these into school and classroom practices (Ahsan & Burnip, 2007; Armstrong & Sahoo, 2011). It must be remembered that IE is not just a new educational term gaining enormous currency in today's world; it is a shift from one set of beliefs to another (Argyropoulos & Nikolaraizi, 2009) which needs the collaborative concentration of educationists, practitioners, researchers and policy-makers for its sustainable development. Practitioners, in this regard, have a great role to play since it is their insider perspectives that can inform the practical challenges and solutions for the development of IE.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for substantial efforts to bring about changes in practitioners' own skills and pedagogical knowledge and thus changes in culture, rules and practices which can support the development of IE. This study thereby has implications for teacher training for professionals, teacher educators at university level and teacher trainers of Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). It is time to rethink the role they have to play for preparing pre- and in-service teachers to address inclusivity for all learners within the framework of IE.

The classrooms of the twenty-first century are expected to be a safer place for both students and teachers, where ensuring social justice underpins teaching-learning activities. It is therefore, our collective responsibility to make teachers aware of the changed scenario in order to ensure that each student is equally welcome, academically engaged and proactively learning in the classroom. In this regard, besides research done by educationists, there is huge scope for practitioners to delve themselves deeper into action research (see Chowdhury, this volume for more on action research in Bangladesh) to identify the problems and solutions from the practical ground where they work for the greater development of practitioners themselves, students and broadly the society as a whole.

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