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Primary Teachers' Understanding about Inclusive Education

Md. Saiful Islam¹, Muhammad Salahuddin² & Ahsan Mahmud³

Abstract

To develop inclusive education system in Bangladesh primary level should be prioritized. The main objective of this study was to identify the knowledge and understanding about inclusive education of primary teachers' in Bangladesh. Qualitative research approach had been used to conduct this study. The data was collected from primary teachers and various training manuals. The teachers had been selected from three districts by using purposive sampling strategy. Document analysis and open-ended interview schedule was used as data collection tools. Through thematic analysis, it was found that most of the teachers did not have clear understanding about inclusive education. Inclusive education was not emphasized in the present primary teachers' training manuals. In this regard inclusive education should be emphasized in professional training manuals and also should give importance in practice.

Key words: Inclusive Education, Primary Teacher, Training

Background of the study

Inclusive education is an education system that each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter what their ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age is. The aim of an inclusive education system is to provide all students with the most appropriate learning environments and opportunities for them to achieve their goal. In many developing countries, there are a large number of children with disabilities who are still excluded from formal education (Yu, Su, & Liu, 2011) and mainstream schooling system does not expect to accommodate children with special educational needs (Khan, 2012). Therefore, some children, youth and their families do not feel that they have the same opportunities as their peers. Similar situation is found in Bangladesh also and inclusive education is still at a conceptual stage in this country (UNICEF, 2003).

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From the estimation of the World Health Organization, there may be approximately 3.4 million children and 10.2 million adults with disabilities in Bangladesh (The Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory, 2004). The data shows that 4% of children with disabilities in Bangladesh are currently enrolled in various educational institutions (DPE & CSID, 2002). Among them 55% had physical disabilities, 13% were visually impaired, 12% were hearing and speech impaired, and 10% had intellectual disabilities. Although 74% disabled children are currently not enrolled in any form of formal education but they have keen interest in receiving education. Following this issue the government have taken an initiative to improve this situation and given more emphasis on special education through national education policy 2010.

Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, Guang-xue (2013) mentioned that developing countries are facing some problems to ensure inclusive education at school but the lack of preparedness of teachers to implement this at school is one of the biggest problems. Teachers are playing a good role at class room for confirming inclusive education at school so they must be educated appropriately to meet the needs of all learners and to make effective inclusive practitioners (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011). Regarding this issue at the primary level in Bangladesh, one of the government projects named Primary Education Development Project (PEDP-II) is being implemented. Inclusive education from 2009 and now phase III is running for continuing inclusive education training program at this level. On the other hand, some government and non-government organizations provide inclusive education related training to the primary school teachers. The national academy for primary education (NAPE) and 59 primary teachers training institutes (PTIs) played significant and effective role to provide inclusive education training to primary school teachers.

Primary education is the first stage of formal education system in Bangladesh. Now 4, 82, 884 teachers and 1, 95, 52, 979 students are involved at primary level. That 1, 09, 144 students are disabled who are studied at this level (BANBEIS, 2014). To develop inclusive education system in Bangladesh primary level might be prioritized. To do this training on inclusive education should be emphasized for primary teachers in Bangladesh. The main objective of this paper is to identify the knowledge about inclusive education of primary teachers' in Bangladesh. We also tried to explore what knowledge do primary in-service trained teachers have about Inclusive education and how do primary in-service trained teachers conceptualize inclusive education in Bangladesh. To meet this objectives this paper focused on the research questions-

- how do primary in-service trained teachers conceptualize inclusive education?
- how does the in-service training curriculum emphasize inclusive education?

Review of Literature

The concept inclusive education first came to light as an international perspective at the Salamanca World Conference in 1994 in Spain. Inclusive education is considered as an approach to serve special educational needs children within general education settings.

Generally, we know that Inclusive education is an education system that each student belongs and receives a quality education no matter what their ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age. Academically, Inclusive education is one kind of strategy to ensure education for all students in the same classroom (Rahman & Sutherland, 2012).

For many years 'Inclusive Education' has been used differently in different countries. For example, in United Kingdom the word is used as "inclusive education" and "integrated education". In the United States of America the term has been used as 'mainstreaming' and defined the education of children with disabilities with their non-disabled peers. To define inclusive education some countries also use the term 'integration' but the concept inclusive education is much broader than integration. "Integrated education" generally refers to an approach in which children with disabilities and learning difficulties are placed in a mainstream setting and given help to 'fit in'. (Khan, 2012).

The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education and other international human rights treaties prohibit any exclusion from or limitation to educational opportunities on the basis of socially described or perceived differences, such as sex, ethnic origin, language, religion, nationality, social origin, economic condition, ability, etc. The modern concept of Education not only focuses on making schools available to the able students but also to identify the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access opportunities for quality education (UNESCO, 2003).

From the estimation of the World Health Organization, there may be approximately 14 million people with disabilities in Bangladesh. Among them, Children with disabilities and many others who have difficulties in learning are often marginalized within the education system and within society in general. They are placed in separate special schools to pursue their education (UNICEF, 2003). In the recent years Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable progress in access to basic education. Bangladesh has undertaken various measures with regard to Education for All (EFA).

Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) Phase-II, in Bangladesh wanted to change the situation taking different efforts to promote inclusive education practices in primary schools. The program targeted the children with mild impairments, and to improve the school infrastructure by, for instance, building short-distanced ramps. From 2011, under the next phase of PEDP II (known as Programme III), the Government is planning to enrol all school-aged children with disabilities in primary schools. (Sightsavers' Inclusive Education Work in Bangladesh, 2010).

The new education policy-2010 was also focusing on Education for children with disabilities as well as mainstreaming them in our regular education system. The policy further states that special educational materials and textbooks should be available at low or no cost, and highlights the need for curriculum revision and for featuring inclusive and special education and disability issues in teacher training curricula. (Sightsavers' Inclusive Education Work in Bangladesh, 2010).

But still we need a lot to do. In Bangladesh, there are a lot of shortfalls and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Also, the primary level teacher education and training curriculum is undergoing through a process to develop necessary contents related to disabilities and their possible implementation in classroom. Anupam and Ibrahim (2006) report that present teacher preparation programs in Bangladesh cannot make skilled teachers for inclusive classrooms.

From the 'Magic Formula' of inclusive education by Mitchell's (2010), the idea about inclusive education will be clearer. "The formula is: Inclusive education = Vision + Placement + Support + Resources + Leadership + 5As (Acceptance, Access, Adapted Curriculum, Adapted Assessment, Adapted Teaching)".

Mitchell (2010) states, for achieving an inclusive education system there should be a vision at all levels of education in a country; Placement that should be age appropriate and in community/neighborhood schools; Support which must be available for students, families and professionals; Resources (e.g., trained teachers, assistive technologies, infrastructure); appropriate educational leadership that facilitates inclusion; and, the "5As". (Rahman & Sutherland, 2012).

Different studies showed mixed idea about having the concept of inclusive education among the teachers. Khanom(2010) stated that teachers are familiar with the term of inclusive education. But teachers need more training on that handling the student with disability and also C-in-Ed curriculum should review inclusive education (Khanom, 2010). Some other study showed that lack of teachers training is also a barrier of inclusive education in Bangladesh (Rahman & Sutherland, 2012). They also stated that regarding the existing teacher training curriculum, the teacher educators expressed their frustration that the curriculum is not developed enough to support the transformation of school teachers into effective inclusive educators.

According to the teachers' manual of inclusive education provided by the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP, 2010), inclusive education is based on seven principles:

- i) All children have the right to education;
- ii) All children can learn and they learn from one another;
- iii) Every child is different, so instruction should be organized according to their needs;
- iv) Inclusive education is student-centered;
- v) The inclusive approach addresses all aspects of the learning environment;
- vi) Learning is possible only when there is cumulative cooperation among teachers, students, parents or guardians, and society;
- vii) An active participation of all education agencies in society is important for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Thus, inclusive education is a strategy to address educational needs of all children in a systematic way in a regular school classroom. Inclusive education therefore demands a need for teacher educators to support pre-service teachers to develop knowledge and skills in developing classroom environments that support learning for all children.

Methodology

Gay (1996) stated that the nature of the study generally describes the type of the problem to be investigated and the approach of investigation. The study was qualitative in nature based on the research object. Data and evidence were gathered from primary sources following grounded theory approach. Instead of assigning theory directly to the data, grounded theorists consider data driven knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). The participants of the study were the primary teachers who have in-service training. These teachers were selected as key informants to gather information about trained teachers' knowledge, conception and practices on inclusive education. DPEd and C-in-Ed curriculum, manuals or handouts of various trainings received by the participants were also reviewed on inclusive education perspective.

Sampling design

Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler (2010) noted that qualitative researchers select their participants by using purposeful sampling. As it was a qualitative research, the study mainly used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants who have key knowledge or information related to the purpose of the study (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010). In this study, teachers who got at least one training on inclusive education or who confirmed that he/she know about inclusive education were selected as key informants. 15 primary school teachers were selected as key informants for this study.

Data collection tools

An open-ended interview schedule was developed for the study. Follow-up questions were asked in order to elicit in-service trained primary teachers' knowledge and probe participants to identify their knowledge, conception and their practices on inclusive education. C-in-Ed manuals, training manuals of various trainings which the teachers received were reviewed and then analysed in inclusive education perspective.

Results

The results from analysed data are presented in two sections. The first section shows the results found from the teachers' interview and the second one is the results found from document analysis.

Results from the teachers' interview:

The study was conducted with the help of in-depth interview of in-service trained primary school teachers. Findings from the teachers were discussed thematically under

six major themes. Themes were grounded from the field data. The themes are as follows- concept about 'Inclusive Education', training on Inclusive Education, concept about inclusion of children, teacher's practices, challenges and way out of the situation. Instead of using the real name of participants coded names were used for ethical consideration. Teachers were given a serial number for their respective district such as La2 stands for teacher no.2 of Lakshmipur district.

Table 1: Coded name for teachers

District	Teachers' Codes
Habigonj	Ha1-Ha5
Chittagong	Ch1-Ch5
Lakshmipur	La1-La5

- *Concept about 'Inclusive Education'*

Participants mentioned that they had idea about Inclusive Education. They also informed that they have got the idea by reading books (5), from training (7), from other people (2) and from other sources (1).

From their point of view Inclusive Education means providing education by enrolling all children such as visually impaired, physically disabled, tribal, children from different religion, area, cluster, cast (*Ha1, Ch3, La2-La5*) with normal students (*Ch2Ch5*) under the same structure, same classroom (*Ha5*), same institution (*Ch1, Ch4*) and same curriculum (*Ch1, Ch2, Ch4*).

One of them stated –

“Give every child formal education within the society. Exclusion of any child for physical, mental, social, emotional, belief, religion, language or any other differences are not acceptable in this kind of education system. Special needs child, labor child, street child, migratory child, ethnic child and vulnerable child, all children have access to the same school.” (*La 1*).

Table 2: Sources of knowledge about IE

Source	Response
From Training	7
From Other people	2
By Reading Books	5
Others	1 (Newspaper)

- *Training on Inclusive Education*

The study shows that teachers had received training on inclusive education. All the training was provided by Upazila Resource Centre (URC) but the duration of the training varied from one to five days. There was no monitoring system found for those training though two of them mentioned that it existed. But they could not mention the type of that monitoring system. All of them had Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) training but no one could mention any manual or session on inclusive education.

One of them said, “*During school visit, investigate whether trainings are practices or not but not specifically for inclusive education (La1).*” It was also noticeable that participants who got training were unable to comment about strength, weaknesses and effectiveness of the training.

Colleagues of three participants in their school had also received training about inclusive education. Their colleagues received seven days Induction training and one of them (Ch3) informed that his colleague received one-day training on Inclusive Education from URC.

- *Concept about Inclusion of children*

From participants’ concept, there were different kinds of special needs children such as physical and mentally disabled (Ha1,Ha3,La1,La2), visually impaired (Ha3,Ch2,La4), habituate with special behaviour (Ha3), low cast children (Ha4), slum children (Ha4Ch1Ch4), special needs children (Ha5,Ch2,Ch5,La1-La5), poor children, street children (Ch1,Ch3), orphan children, weak students, vulnerable and less facilitate children who can be included under Inclusive Education. Detailed teachers’ view are shown in the table below:

Table 3: Children who can be included

Teachers’ Code	Statements
Ha1	Physically and mentally disabled
Ha3	Physically, mentally, visually impaired and habituated to special behavior
Ha4	Low cast children of the society such as Muchi, Water gypsies, fisherman’s child and also who lives in slums
Ha5	children with special needs
Ch1	Slum children, poor children, street children, orphan children
Ch2	visually impaired, problem with talking, tribal, children with special physical need
Ch3	poor children, street children, children from uneducated family and slum children
Ch4	children from very poor families and weak students
Ch5	special needs children, vulnerable children and less facilitate children
La1	Special needs children, labor children, street children, migratory children, ethnic children and vulnerable children
La2	Special needs children, children from poor family, ethnic children and vulnerable children
La3	Physical, mental, social emotional, belief, religion, language or any other difference children
La4	Special needs children, labor children, migratory children, ethnic children and vulnerable children

Participants said that they have such kind of special needs children in their school or catchment area. But they could not mention any number. One of them informed that *"There were 15% excluded children who could be included"* (Ch5) and another one (Ch2) said, *"They have 30 tribal students in his school."*

- *Teachers' Practice*

Teachers notified that they had inclusive children in their school. Teachers informed that they took extra care for these kinds of children. It was found from interview that they gave extra time and effort (Ch2, Ch4, La1, La2), arranged extra classes and suitable sitting arrangement (Ha4, Ch3, Ch4, Ch5, La1), tried to motivate them, tried to reduce discrimination among children (Ha3) and asked the other children to help them (Ch5).

Table 4: Types of extra care

Teachers' Code	Statements
Ha3	to reduce the discrimination among children,
Ha4	In class 5, section Meghna, we have disabled children. We bring them to the first bench. We also have some weak students. We arrange an extra class in a week for them.
Ch1	All the teachers were asked to give emphasis to those children
Ch2	give extra time for them to make them understand the topics
Ch3	arrange special class for them
Ch4	organize all in one side and give extra effort
Ch5	arrange seat in front for them, take extra care, try to motivate them and ask the other children to help them
La1	Try to give extra attention and also get his/her attention, ask easy question during teaching and if he cannot answer then help him/her to understand, give extra care and sometimes give extra time outside the classroom if needed.
La2	Change sitting arrangement if needed, ask other students to behave normally with the weak students.
La3	Try to increase awareness of guardians of physically disabled children, go to their home.
La4	ask good students to help the weak students.

- *Challenges*

Most of them informed that they faced problems while dealing with those kinds of children. They said that they had problems in teaching (Ha3) and the institutes did not have adequate teachers and classroom for inclusive education (Ch1Ch3Ch4). They also stated (like La1), *"Sometimes it's difficult to give remedial within the class hour. It is difficult to make an inclusive environment along without the help of others and the administration."* Another teacher said, *"Special needs children did not respond properly; so we couldn't finish classes in time."*(La2)

Table 5: types of problem

Teachers' Code	Statement
Ha3	have problem in teaching
Ha4	they cannot concentrate and also their guardians are not aware
Ha5	they try to put out of sight themselves
Ch1	not having enough teachers and classroom
Ch3	inadequate teachers and classroom
Ch4	inadequate teachers and classroom
La1	sometimes it's difficult to give remedial within the class hour. it is difficult to make an inclusive environment along without the help of others and the administration.
La2	special needs child did not respond properly. so couldn't finish classes in time.
La3	Guardians are not interested to give their children to school. So, I have to discuss with them often.
La4	Lack of IE trained teachers, lack of appropriate curriculum and teaching aids related to IE, lack of infrastructural facilities.

- *Way out of the situation*

Only six teachers said that they had taken proper initiative to sort out these problems. One of them (*Ch1*) stated, "We are trying to increase the awareness of the guardians by arranging mothers' meeting, parents' meeting with the help of SMC members". And another one stated, "Trying to increase awareness, use of teaching aids in classroom, give emphasis on ensuring 100% enrollment and increasing the quality of teaching learning activities." (*Ha4*)

Findings from Document Review

The key informants for the study were the selected primary teachers who have in-service training. Therefore, the training programs of these teachers were the focus for the document review. The following documents were then reviewed for the study:

- ❖ C-in-Ed manuals
- ❖ Induction training manual
- ❖ Training for the Head teachers
- ❖ Subject base trainings

- *Description of the trainings*

There was no direct subject or pedagogical content on inclusive education in C-in-Ed curriculum. For this study, C-in-Ed curriculum means the 13 subject books of this professional degree.

A seven-day induction training was provided for the newly joined assistant teachers as in-service training. This induction training manual was reviewed for the study. On the very first day of that training, the title of the 4th session was 'Pre-primary education, Inclusive education'. Duration of that session was 45 minutes.

This study also reviewed a training manual provided by Access and Inclusive Education cell and TST-4, Policy and Operation Division, Directorate of Primary Education. Title of that training was 'District Level Awareness Workshop on Inclusive Education'. This training was given to head teachers of primary schools. The study had head teachers as key informants who got this training.

Various subject-based trainings were also provided for the assistant teachers which were also reviewed for the study on inclusive education perspective.

- *Content on Inclusive Education*

All the subject books of C-in-Ed course were reviewed carefully and no direct pedagogical content on inclusive education was found. These books were written long ago when inclusive education was not a major issue in Bangladesh.

According to the induction training manual, in Bangladesh implementation of inclusive education was started under Primary Education Development Project-2 at 2009. Learning outcomes of the session were-

- ❖ Can say about what Pre-primary Education and Inclusive Education mean.
- ❖ Can say the aims and objectives of Pre-primary Education and Inclusive Education.

This session of induction training manual had the following contents-

- ❖ Definition and introduction of inclusive education
- ❖ Characteristics of inclusive education

This training manual gives a definition of inclusive education as-

"Inclusive Education means providing institutional education for all children within their society. Inclusive education is a process which ensures 'Education for All' by eliminating barriers for learning and acquiring knowledge according to the needs and prospects of each child."

Discussion and recommendations

This study aims to explore how in-service trained primary school teachers conceptualize inclusive education in Bangladesh. The study is limited to only three (3) districts and sample is not representative. So, the findings of this paper may not be generalizable for the whole country and future researchers should be careful on using this findings as general scenario of Bangladesh.

The result drawn from the study showed that primary school teachers had ideas about inclusive education to some extent. If someone's point of view about inclusive education was including mentally and physically disabled children in the formal education then other points of views were to include slum/ poor/ vulnerable/ orphan or weak students. Johora & Ahsan (2015) stated that mainstream primary schools headteachers in Bangladesh seem to have a fragmented concept about inclusive education. Similarly, this study found that both the assistant teachers and headteachers have fragmented idea about inclusive education. But combining their ideas in a single concept it was found that inclusive education means including all children irrespective of their physical, mental or socio-economic condition in the mainstreaming classroom. The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education-1960 and other international human rights treaties support their concept. The induction training manual also noted that inclusive education should include all children within the society in the institutional education. The main source of knowledge about inclusive education was training, specially the induction training. Though the Diploma in Primary Education (DPed) program and some other training on inclusive education has recently been introduced, the participants selected for the study did not receive those trainings yet. Trainings received by the participants only focus on giving idea and concept about inclusive education.

Participants concept on inclusive education was verified when they identified children who should be included under inclusive education. Here also teachers gave fragmented idea. No one gave the complete list of included children in inclusive education. A tool kit prepared by UNESCO for Asia Pacific region identified the children who should be included in formal education. All kinds of children were identified by the participants collectively but not individually.

Teachers also identified that there were children excluded from formal education who should be included. There were children with special needs in mainstream schools who needs special care too. Teachers were trying to reduce discrimination among children to make a child friendly inclusive classroom by giving extra time and effort, taking extra class and rearranging sitting. Teachers' practices for inclusive education were limited to this kind of efforts. Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler and Guang-xue (2013) mentioned that lack of teachers' preparedness is one of the biggest problems in implementing inclusive education. This study also found the similar result. The documents that were analysed in this study also did not emphasize practices in the classrooms. Because of this lack of preparedness teachers faced problems while dealing with those kinds of children. They declared that it is difficult for them to give remedial help or to make a classroom child friendly. Participants tried to overcome this situation by arranging mothers' meeting, parents' meeting to increase the awareness. Thus it sometimes helps to include children in mainstream school who are excluded. But they did not get any instruction on how to make inclusive environment in a classroom. Training manuals did not give any guideline for practice in the classroom.

It is now very much important to provide policy and guideline on how to make an inclusive classroom in various training programs. The study also recommends that there should be a flexible and appropriate curriculum for inclusive education. Professional degree for primary teachers needs to include and emphasize inclusive education. An 18-month professional diploma course named DPED is already being introduced which focuses individual learning, differentiated learning. It also has an individual section emphasised on inclusive education. Now it needs in-depth qualitative research on how much it addresses inclusive education and its practice in classroom and also the effectiveness of this course on inclusive education perspective.

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