Research Article

BARRIERS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: MAKING INCLUSION A REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to identify barriers of inclusive education in Bangladesh context. Inclusive education is an approach of educating students with special educational needs. Under the inclusion model, students with special needs spend most or all of their time with students without disability. The research involves interviewing professionals who worked in the area of promoting inclusive education. After interviewing samples some barriers are identified. Those are-negative social attitudes, lack of teachers training, limited resources, accessibility issue, lack of awareness among people, faulty policy making and problems in administration, institutional power distance and lack of team work. We can work on these barriers to ensure education for all in a true meaning.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive Education, Barriers, Special Education

INTRODUCTION

At the national level, the Government of Bangladesh has also enacted a number of policies to ensure the education of all students including those with disabilities. The key policies include Education Policy 2000, Education Policy 2010 and Persons with Disability Welfare Act 2001. The Education Policy 2010 articulated that in order to establish equity in education for all learners, facilities need to be provided for all children including children with disabilities [1]. However, Bangladesh has made little progress in providing education to students with disabilities in regular schools despite having such policy initiatives [2] [3] [4]. Inclusive education (IE) is a worldwide reform strategy intended to include students with different abilities in mainstream regular schools. School curriculum, teaching methods, organization and resources need to be adapted to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their ability, can successfully participate in the regular classrooms [5]. It has been observed through various international educational researches that the growth of 'Inclusive Education' in the developing world in part reflects the attempt of these countries to promote the social and educational advantages of access to schooling and educational resources, and in part the export of first-world thinking to countries which reinforces dependency (Armstrong, Armstrong, Spandagou, 2011)..To ensure the education for children with disability to make them a part of skilled population of the country it is important to educate them and include them in the mainstream education system. If the barriers are identified then it would help to make the way easier and further actions can be taken.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative research method was carried out to collect data; observation and semi-structured interview. Researchers focused an interview on the topics at hand

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without constraining them to a particular format. This freedom helped interviewers to tailor their questions to the interview context/situation. It was purposeful sampling and 15 professionals were interviewed who are directly involved with programs and research regarding to inclusive education. By reading articles the barriers of inclusive education were determined and the areas were social system, social perception, financial, lack of skill personnel, then based on each area questions were asked to respondent. And all the respondents were asked questions based on it. In the result the common themes from interview responses are identified and explained.

RESULTS

After taking interviews and analyzing the responses we can show it in a table to understand the barriers clearly. Social awareness is important for any change in the society. But in our society misconceptions and prejudices exist among different people. Often mental health issues are thought as contagious and parents try to keep their children safe from special need children. Lack of social acceptance is a great barrier. Parents of children with disabilities sometimes think this child is burden and he/she should be kept in a corner of the house. Next, trained teacher is an essential requirement for any education system. There is lack of trained teacher in inclusive education system too. The mainstream school teachers do not have any proper training to handle special need children and most of the time they are not interested to take training by thinking it is an extra burden two respondents said. Government takes projects but often does not put into service.

Also the student-to-teacher ratio is higher in the lower classes. And giving attention to each and every student becomes impossible for a teacher. Though government has declared that mainstream schools will allow tolerable special need children but schools are not seems to be interested to take such students. These schools do not want to take responsibility of these students. One of the respondents said that after finishing primary level their students are referred to mainstream school but in spite of having required marks mainstream schools do not show interest to admit such students.

Infra structure is not student friendly in many schools. Family members or classmates usually accompany disabled children. Children in wheelchairs face problems as there is no ramp for them. Climbing stairs is not easy without ramps or slopes. Ramps and slopes should be in school to ensure accessibility, especially for wheelchair users. The toilets are not user-friendly. It is difficult for students to go to toilet with wheelchairs and other big equipments they use.

According to respondents inflexible curriculum is a big problem for the special need children. A rigid syllabus is a great barrier of inclusive education. For example- children with dyslexia have difficulty in language courses and he/she can be provided with other activities like vocational course. But in our present education system there is no such opportunity. A welcoming environment for children with disabilities is the most important thing for them. Unfortunately not every classroom is welcoming. Teacher and students are the component of a classroom. If teacher and other students do not welcome a child with disability then it becomes very stressful for the child.

For special need children some special learning materials are required. Many of the educational toys and learning aids are needed to facilitate Special Needs children. To increase their adaptability makes them perfect for inclusive teaching at any level. Special Needs learning materials include speech and language development, social and emotional skills, motor skills, sensory awareness, tactile awareness, visual discrimination, core skills and professional resources. In the mainstream schools these resources are not available to facilitate special need children and it makes the inclusion difficult and impossible. Respondents were unsatisfied with policy makers. They said that policy maker say that they will ensure the admission of the special need children and 'Education for All'. But in reality they do very little for these children. They do not change or modify their faulty policy according to the respondents. In the policy for inclusive education there are no spaces for resource teachers and resource rooms. Another self contradictory law according to three respondents is that in the policy it is stated that the special need children must be tolerable and will not be cause of disturbance in the class but, respondents said, we cannot expect 100 per cent etiquette or disturbance free class from special need children. They deviate from average and they will not act as average students. Some respondents said that bureaucratic vision is responsible for improper implement of inclusive education. Personnel in the administration have not enough knowledge about special need or inclusive education according to respondents. The national policy of combined special education policy- 2009 is still not completely implemented. Several meetings have been arranged but respondents said those were not successful in a true meaning. With changing government previous policies are changed and sometimes it stops previous half done works and start again from the beginning with new changes. The leaders of NGOs also do the same sometimes.

Respondents identified institutional power distance as another barrier which created problems in their professional life as well. To gain power over an institution and secure own position some people want privatization and some want government owned institutes for inclusive education. Team work is the magical power which can change a simple phenomenon. In implementing a program in to practice team work is very important. Policy makers, professionals like psychologists and educators, administration, national organizations etc. are significant members of this team. But for internal contradictions, misconception and misunderstandings are the obstacles in team effort. For the lack of team work often policies for inclusive education do not see the light of implementation. Since education of children with disabilities requires comprehensive and strategic involvement and coordination among ministries, departments, NGOs and others catering to disability, an inter-agency coordination structure should be developed to facilitate responses to the special needs of children with disabilities. Unfortunately according to respondents there is a lack of professional networking. During interview dissatisfaction among professionals was

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seen. Some respondents were angry about the overall situation and specially some of them were annoyed with higher authority.

Some of the respondents were upset about their salary in comparison to their work loads.

Table 1: . Barriers Identified by Respondents

Outcomes	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15
Lack of social awareness and awareness of parents	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher- student ratio		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
less interest of mainstream schools	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y			Y	Y	Y
Accessibility		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Inflexible curriculum	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Classroom environment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
lack of instruments and learning materials	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	
Lack of teachers training	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
problems in administration and institutional power distance		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Faulty policy making and legal implementation	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Lack of team work and Professional networking	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Limited Resource	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

DISCUSSION

After analyzing the current phenomena of barriers of inclusive education some recommendations are proposed. This recommendation in on the basis of respondents' suggestions and researchers own insights. Currently, the education of children with disabilities is the concern of the Ministry of Social Affairs. For this reason, it is difficult to mainstream the program. Education for children with disabilities needs to be addressed by the Ministry of Education. Instead of separate education policies for children with disabilities and for children without disabilities, there should be one education policy for all children. As education of children with disabilities requires comprehensive and strategic involvement and coordination among ministries, departments, NGOs and others catering to disability, an inter-agency coordination structure should be developed to facilitate responses to the special needs of children with disabilities. Accessibility to school should be improved by making minor modifications to the physical structure of schools like- buildings ramps, accessible toilets, wide doorways, more space in classrooms, etc. Issues related to disability should be included in the school curriculum so that negative attitudes towards people with disabilities can be mitigated. There is also a need to customize curriculum (textbooks) in inclusive schools so that they are able to address the diverse learning needs of a heterogeneous group in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

We can work on these barriers to include students and establish the fundamental right of education for all students. Therefore, this study can be used as a baseline study for further research and actions for effective inclusive education system.

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