

Inclusive Practice and Barriers in the Primary Education of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Inclusive practice in education is important to ensure social justice in the society and at school to achieve the outcomes with introducing diversity needs of all children. Inclusive Education is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers and discrimination to learning. The purpose of the article is to highlight the inclusive practice with its features and barriers for investigating inclusive practice in Bangladesh primary education and way out for how this practice can become more inclusive in system. The article is developed through review of literature, study reports and official documents. In Bangladesh primary education system, inclusive practice is introduced by following the national education policy 2010 directions with adopting the conditions of international agreements which is reflected in the objective and the component of the programme document. Bangladesh government clearly circulated the vision of primary education in its goal and objectives with including values for Inclusive Education and playing a tremendous role for creating a sense of community, establishing collaboration, ensuring access, and enhancing capacity to ensure it. Many more barriers are identified generally and also on the Bangladeshi primary education system, especially on the issue of children's presence, acceptance, participation and achievement. The central based formulated policy and directions; inadequate infrastructure; old-fashioned pedagogy and rigid curriculum; poor mind set of stakeholders are indicate environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers of inclusive practice in Bangladesh. Educational leaders' clear understanding on inclusive education, policy reforms and professional development initiatives are important for more inclusive.

Key words: Inclusive, Practice, Primary Education, Barriers

I. Introduction

Inclusive systems impart quality education for all children and can be helpful in changing discriminatory attitudes by respecting the diverse needs of them equally in society and school. Inclusion is an abstruse and multidimensional concept (McAuliffe, 2018), broadly concerned with diversity in terms of individual's rights and curriculum affirmation (Bearne and Kennedy, 2014). It is a process to ensure learners achievement by overcoming obstacles on attendance and participation (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive practice (IP) is essential in educational institutes especially to ensure equal access of all children; to accept and understand their capabilities, geniuses, personalities, and expectations; to create an environment to participate in the learning process; to achieve the competencies forward to the goal. The argument of the essay is to consider what constitutes IP and how this practice can become more inclusive in any education system. The scope of the essay is (i) to highlight the concept and importance of IP in meeting the needs of all children; (ii) to identify legal provisions or framework which are helpful for the educational stakeholders to ensure IP in education system; (iii) to discuss the barriers with focusing the features of IP in context of Bangladesh primary education; finally (iv) recommendations for leading effective IP in the primary education system of Bangladesh in considering present status and limitations.

II. The Concept and Importance of IP in Education

Inclusive practice, as an approach, is concerned with actions and activities in schools (Florian, 2009). It focuses on creating truly inclusive learning environments according to children's need to gain access the learning activities (Knowles, 2018). Through this approach, learning activities are considered for all children and they are encouraged to participate in shared learning to achieve the outcomes (Booth and Ainscow, 2011). As a result, Inclusive education (IE) makes an effective use of school's resources and helps to ensure different and diverse students learning in the same classroom.

Inclusive education (IE) comes from the idea of social justice and demands all people have human rights without any discrimination. Social justice is reflected in social formation encouraging an equal, liberal and respectable relationship with different phenomena (Benjamin and Emejulu, 2012). By following the inclusive idea, educators are modifying the strategies to ensure IP in schools (Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). Obviously it is an obligation for a democratic society for inclusive schooling (Gasa, 2018). The concept of social justice allows IP in education and facilities to the educators and practitioners to remove the physical, mental or structural barriers to achieve the goal of school.

III. Legal Framework and Policy Related to IP

The worldwide journey towards IE began in 1948 with the United Nation Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) and with the universal declaration of human rights to Education For All- EFA (UN, 2007 cited in Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). In recent days, children are included from diverse backgrounds to formal education is a global tendency to make sure educational rights of them (UNESCO, 2009). In this regard, the central message is “every learner matters and matters equally” which focuses the individual rights of all children in education system (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). Moreover, Booth and Ainscow (2011) suggest some necessary guideline to include all children in school by accumulating inclusive values, showing equality, assisting individual to think and rising participation opportunity in the pedagogy of school functions. The legal framework of the UNCRC and the EFA goals are help to take any nation to ensure inclusion practice in education culture with building collaboration from central level to school community by mitigating all types of discrimination barriers.

Bangladesh has reformed several policy and strategies to disseminate inclusive education from the very beginning of independence in 1971. According to the constitution, especially on the Article 17 and 28, the country emphasised on compulsory primary education for all school aged children in 1990 without showing any discrimination. In formulating the Act of compulsory education the term was not introduced but the National Education Commission report of 1997 recognised inclusive education and suggested to include the underprivileged children in the system (MoE, 1997 cited in Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). Meantime, Bangladesh has signed in the above convention and declaration along with the Salamanca Statement and Framework in 1994 related to special needs education, the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 and another convention related to rights of persons with disabilities in 2006 (Malak et al., 2014). After that, Bangladesh National Education Policy (NEP) 2010 embraced the idea of inclusion and directed to include all of children one behind on gender, colour, ethnic, social or regional diversity for ensuring quality education for all (MoE, 2010). It is to say that, the mentioned policies and frameworks have given the mandate and support to the educators and practitioners to practise IE to reduce inequalities and unfairness in children’s outcomes.

IV. Inclusive Practice in Bangladesh Primary Education

Inclusive practice is addressed in primary education of Bangladesh by following the national education policy directions with adopting the conditions of international agreements. Moreover, the country developed a working definition of inclusive education in 2001 as:

Inclusive Education is an approach to improve the education system by limiting and removing barriers to learning and acknowledging individual children’s needs and potential. The goal of this approach is to make a significant impact on the educational opportunities of those: who attend school but who for different reasons do not achieve adequately and those who are not attending school but who could attend if families, communities, schools and education systems were more responsive to their requirements (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006, p. 6 cited in Ahsan, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012).

The Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP3) of Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) described primary education aim to ensure the “quality education for all our children” and specific objective is “to establish an efficient, inclusive and equitable primary education system delivering effective and relevant child-friendly learning to all Bangladesh’s children from pre-primary through Grade-five primary” (DPE, 2015, p. iii). A crucial component of the programme is “Participation and Disparities”, related to universal access, participation and the reduction of disparities (DPE, 2017). Under the above component more input level initiatives are designed i.e. national education plan on gender and inclusive education; pre-primary education policy; stipend project; school feeding; second chance education; inclusive strategy; communication strategy; better school infrastructure for ensuring outcomes and outputs (DPE, 2015). As designed by the report, the PEDP3 also working for with its other components: recruiting teachers and ensuring Teacher Education and Development (TED) including Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers; revising and developing curriculum and instructions; introducing each child learns (ECL) initiatives with following the differentiate process of learning; and creating environment through ICT in education to minimise the discrimination at school and classrooms (DPE, 2015).

V. Barriers to Inclusive Practice

Barriers to IP is occurred from policy level to school level activities especially in the issues related to curriculum and instructions, teacher education and training, language and communication, social and regional disparity, ethnicity and language, physical and mental situation. According to Allan (2013), contradictory decisions and practice by following the unclear policies, inadequate resource and supports, misconception of community and avoiding tendency to beneficiaries and concern of children's parents are mostly found as IP barriers. All the barriers are categorised and detailed out in McAuliffe (2018) as environmental; structural; and attitudinal. As argues by her: (i) environmental barriers are considering the variety of school community perspectives, resources and the curriculum contents; (ii) structural barriers are arising from authority plan and strategy in terms of actual practises in settings with different culture oriented personnel; (iii) attitudinal barriers are appearing from personal different opinions based on language and religion beliefs, misunderstanding about the children and misconception about pedagogy and learning process.

VI. Inclusive Practice Barriers in Bangladesh

Some barriers are identified in IP in Bangladesh, found in different studies and reports, related to the environmental, structural and attitudinal barriers. The physical environment of schools and accessibility in classrooms or toilets are not user-friendly and moderate for the children with disabilities (Malek et al., 2014). Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) acknowledges it-self that, "primary schools too open consist of teachers with old-fashioned pedagogy, a lack of academic guidance and supervision, and a rigid curriculum", found as structural barriers (DPE, 2015, p.56). Lack of social acceptance including misconceptions and prejudices exist among different people (Kawser et al., 2016), in often slanging and teasing to students with disabilities by others (Mullick et al., 2012), and teachers' avoiding tendency in classroom with a misunderstanding about the learning ability of them (Malak et al., 2014) are attitudinal barriers for carrying out IE. Moreover, central based formulated policy and directions especially to make decisions in devising and carrying out initiatives including to identify resources, develop and conduct professional development activities is found another barrier to IP (Mullick et al., 2012).

VII. The Features of IP and Status of Bangladesh Primary Education

The features and characteristics of IP are important to know by the education stakeholders for enhancing their knowledge and experience to implement IE effectively. Because, presence in school is not enough, children should be embraced by the staff and created environment to active involvement in school and classroom activities to achieve the outcomes (Farrell, 2004), which show the Villa and Thousand's conceptual framework (presence, acceptance, participation, and achievement) of IP. Villa and Thousand (2012) are addressed a dozen of essential features of IP, which are: a sense of community; visionary leadership; high standards; collaborative partnerships; changing roles and responsibilities; array of services; partnership with parents; flexible learning environments; tactics based on research; forms of accountability; access; continuing professional development. The mentioned characteristics of IP are rarely found in Bangladesh primary education system and in documents of its. Among the 12 IP characteristics, some of them are describing in the easy with a short description, informing the existing status in Bangladesh primary education and identifying problems are found in different sources.

A sense of community: It derives to "everyone belongs- everyone is accepted and is supported by peers and the adults in the school" (Villa and Thousand, 2012, p. 113). From the very beginning of Bangladesh primary education the School Management Committee (SMC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Ward, and Union committees are formed to lead, manage, execute and supervise the school functions to make it excellence, though in and everywhere these are not well functioned (DPE, 2016). Just one decade before in Bangladeshi Primary education, the School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) is functioned where teachers, community leaders, parents, and students are involved in decision making and carrying out the planned activities (DPE, 2015). But negative view of parents and neighbours discourage the system for providing support to inclusive schooling (Mullick et al., 2012).

Visionary leadership: There is a little provision for visionary leadership to develop in Bangladeshi primary schools in accordance with the vision and values of PEDP3. According to the report DPE (2016), DPE has made lofty aspirations and dreams; articulated worthy goals amidst daunting challenges of a centralised system. Though any of leadership type is officially declared in Bangladesh primary education system, its central-led cascade leadership practice typically related to transformational leadership, which is a sense refer to visionary leadership.

Collaboration partnerships and partnership with parents: Among the list of characteristics collaboration partnerships and partnership with parents encourage students and staff to support each other with such tactics as peer learning, buddy systems, group teaching, and other cooperative engagements (Villa and Thousand, 2012). Collaborative partnerships are just built up in Bangladesh primary education system through introducing "lesson study" model through an emphasis on Teachers Support Network (TSN) initiative and with the process teachers

are shared their preparation and lesson plans; and mentoring feedback (DPE, 2011). This initiative shows team teaching and co-teaching but in the system, there are limited provisions for co-operative learning and teacher-student assistance

Strategy based on research: Another one tactic based on research also remarkable for selecting differentiated instructions, authentic assessment of student performance, reciprocal teaching, multiple intelligence theory, social skills training, positive behavioural supports, and technology-assisted instruction that have emerged from the latest research is applied in inclusive schools (Villa and Thousand, 2012). In Bangladesh primary education, with a longitudinal study ECL is introducing as flagship as pilot initiatives of the PEDP3 to ensure each child's learning through implementing differentiate approach in classrooms (DPE, 2015). It means that, research affords help to teachers' IP that will enable schools to become more inclusive (Allan, 2013).

Continuing professional development: CPD is important for enabling staff on regular job responsibilities and also for imparting new knowledge and skills to mitigate the organisation goal (Villa and Thousand, 2012). The CPD provisions for teachers are very much focused on the primary education system and it is designed within a sub-component- TED under the component- Teaching and Learning (DPE, 2015). At each Upazila (sub-district) level Upazila Resource Centre (URC) is functioned to execute the CPD of teachers through training (e.g., subject-based training, IE, pre-primary, leadership and academic supervision, curriculum dissemination training etc.) and academic support to ensure quality primary education. Besides the URC conducted training, at sub-cluster level (5-6 schools) all teachers are getting need-based sub-cluster training at schools cyclically (DPE, 2011). But little understanding on inclusive policies and limited continuous professional development among the practitioners and classroom teachers (Malak et al., 2014) make insufficient preparation to teach the children with difficulties at school and classrooms (Das, 2013) are major barriers to implement IE.

VIII. Recommendations

Some general and specific suggestions are stated here to remove the barriers of IP in Bangladeshi primary education system forward to move more inclusion.

- Entrance to school should be developed with creating an accessible physical environment e.g., buildings, ramps, toilets and more space in classrooms (Kawser et al., 2016).
- The organisational leaders at school, Upazila, district, regional and central level must form a vision with a mutual plan and expand stakeholders' skills and confidence to solve the problems for introducing differentiate learning (Villa and Thousand, 2012).
- To realise the importance of IE school, community should be empowered and it would be enhanced them in active engagements to school functions (Ahmed and Mullick, 2014).
- At school level resource mobilisation and effective implementation of IE is important, so empowerment is needed for the school leaders to support school better (Ahmed and Mullick, 2014).
- For successful implementation of IP at school it is need to participate of educational stakeholders and leaders especially in decision making process (Ahmed and Mullick, 2014).
- Issues of disability should be incorporated with the curriculum for mitigating the negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and need to customise curriculum and learning materials to address the diverse learning needs of the children (Kawser et al., 2016).
- Teacher education programmes should be enhanced to help teachers to enhance ability to overcome the barriers of inclusion with future directions (Allan, 2013).

Conclusion

Inclusion is a set of values and practises which recognise the wide range of human diversity as naturally occurring and as a resource to be valued in the classroom. Inclusive practice in education is important to ensure social justice in the society as well as at school to achieve the outcomes with introducing diversity needs of all children. Bangladesh faces meticulous confront to educate its people for creating a develop society and nation along with constraints of extreme population (160 million) density (962 persons/sq. km), poverty, illiteracy and limited natural resources (Howes, 2006 cited in Haque, 2013). The country is in challenging position to ensure quality education for all children including carrying out IE (Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). Many more barriers are identified generally and also in Bangladeshi primary education system, especially on the issue of children's presence, acceptance, participation, and achievement which shows the ladder and framework of IP.

Though Bangladesh government clearly circulated the vision of primary education in its goal and objectives with including values for IE, some features of IP e.g., changing roles and responsibilities; array of services; partnership with parents; flexible learning environments, tactics based on research and forms of accountability is mostly absent in system visually. But the country is playing a tremendous role for creating a sense of community, establishing collaboration, ensuring access, and enhancing CPD to overcome the all kinds of barriers related to IP. Furthermore, as a signatory country Bangladesh likes to reforms strategy through policy frameworks to address social inequality along with the values of inclusive education by following the UNESCO guideline 2009 prepared because of 2008 International Conference on Education (Ahsan and Mullick, 2013). In

the end, as guided by social justice and relation between the individual and society for creating chances for personal enterprise and social rights, policy should be reformed and developed to build excellent human resources for carrying out inclusive education to ensure the quality primary education in success.

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